

Thomas Peele and Mary Ellen Ryder

# Belief Spaces and the Resistant Writer: Queer Space in the Contact Zone

*ABSTRACT: In this essay we offer a method of textual analysis that we call the identification of belief spaces. The concept of belief spaces is adapted from work in linguistics on mental spaces. Belief spaces are represented in a student's text by phrases such as "I think that" or "for many people today." In the first example, the belief space represented is the writer's; this is signaled by her inclusion of the pronoun "I." In the second example, the belief space represented is that of "many people"; whether the writer belongs to the belief space or not is unclear. We contend that one of the problems in student essays is ambiguity; the reader can't be sure what the writer is trying to convey. Further, we argue that one way to reduce ambiguity in student essays is to teach students how to identify the belief spaces in their texts. We use the concept of belief spaces to discuss an ambiguous essay written by a student on the subject of gay men. We also provide a copy of the assignment that we use to teach the concept of belief spaces to basic writing students so that they can use this method as a tool for revision.*

## The Identification of Belief Spaces

In this essay, we present a method of textual analysis, adapted from linguistics and stylistics, that we will call the identification of belief spaces (we define belief spaces and their context in linguistics in the following section). Using this method, we examine two essays that were written for a basic writing class. We describe how we taught this method, how students responded, and what the results were. We want to ruin the suspense: the student who we thought would most benefit from this strategy did not use it in his revision. However, we were able to use this approach to talk about this student's writing in ways that weren't directly confrontational. We found this useful since, in our opinion, the student was resisting our clearly left-leaning, liberal views on the subject of gay men. While we didn't agree with what we thought the student was saying, we also didn't want to force him to write a paper that we could approve of. Instead, we wanted to point out *why* it was hard to understand what he was getting at. In this way, we hoped to teach him, and, subsequently, other students, where, in his text,

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meaning is obscured by his treatment of multiple belief spaces.

When we ask students to examine their belief spaces, we're not suggesting that this is a technique that will help them think through their ideas. Rather, what we're hoping to do is provide a means for textual analysis that allows students and teachers to talk about certain kinds of ambiguity and vagueness in student essays. We're suggesting that one cause of ambiguity, particularly in papers that are analytical rather than personal, is a disorganized proliferation of belief spaces. In other words, students put together a lot of sentences that include language such as "Some people think that" and "In society today." Over reliance on this kind of language—language that places the information in others' belief spaces—produces a text in which it is very difficult to know what the writer thinks. The "identification of belief spaces" exercise helps students identify why a reader might not know what the writer thinks; it's a way for the writer to identify when she might be stringing together what several other people think without ever specifically including her own opinion, or, as it is conceptualized in this exercise, her own belief space.

### **What Is a Belief Space?**

Our use of belief spaces is adapted from a more extensive model: Gilles Fauconnier's work on mental spaces. Fauconnier is a linguist who became interested in accounting for the resolution of apparent contradictions in sentences like "In that picture, the green-eyed girl has brown eyes." (Note that without the opening phrase "in that picture," this sentence would be contradictory, while with the phrase, it is not.) Having shown that the explanations provided by theories in logic were insufficient to account for the data, Fauconnier created the notion of mental spaces which allow information to be assigned to different spaces while also permitting the description of something in one space to be used to refer to something in another. So, in the example given above, the writer is saying that the girl who has green eyes in reality (or at least in the belief space of the writer) is represented in the picture space as having brown eyes. Typical spaces include physical representations such as pictures, movies, and books, and cognitive representations such as dreams, beliefs, and memories.

The types of ambiguity resolution made possible by the mental spaces model struck us as particularly helpful in dealing with some ambiguities often found in student papers, so we adapted a small portion of the model, the part dealing with belief spaces, for use as a revision strategy. For the purpose of this essay, we define a belief space as a textual space created by a writer that marks the contents of that space as belonging to someone's set of beliefs. The belief spaces that the writers create can be (1) clearly attributed to the writer, (2) clearly attrib-

uted to someone or something else, or (3) ambiguous as to whose beliefs they reflect. In the last two instances, the reader cannot determine whether or not the writer believes the information given in the space.

There are two basic ways to indicate belief spaces. One is to make an unqualified statement, such as "Tuition at this school is too high." By not attributing this belief to anyone in particular, the writer shows not only that she believes this statement to be true, but also that she expects all her readers to feel the same. In other words, she feels that the situation expressed in the statement is part of "reality," things accepted by everyone as unequivocally true. The second method is to overtly mark a statement as belonging to a particular person or group's belief space, as in "In my opinion, tuition at this school is too high" or "Students at this school believe that tuition here is too high." By attributing information to specific people's belief spaces, the writer is expressing some uncertainty as to whether the belief will be shared by readers who are not among the people described.

In limiting the people to whom a belief space is attributed, a writer also runs the risk of leaving her own stance unclear. Obviously, if a statement includes such phrases as "in my opinion" or "I believe that," the reader will know that the writer's beliefs are being expressed. However, if the belief space set up belongs to someone else, the writer's beliefs will not be nearly as clear. For example, if the belief space is assigned to a vaguely defined group, as in statements like "In today's society, people feel that moral values are no longer respected," the reader will not know whether or not the writer feels herself to be a member of this group. And even when the belief space is attributed to someone specific, as in "The president believes that the present policy is effective," the reader will not know whether or not the writer's belief space includes this information as well. Thus, unless the writer makes an unqualified statement, or a statement clearly marked as belonging to her belief space, the reader will not be able to determine the writer's beliefs.

There is another potential source for ambiguity in how belief spaces are expressed in an essay. A writer rarely marks a belief space more than once, even though the information belonging to the belief space may extend through a number of different sentences. Indeed, a repetition of the belief space involved would be considered redundant. Thus, in a text such as "In my opinion, tuition at this university is too high. Most students here are paying their own way and they shouldn't have to spend so much just to get an education," readers would assume that the information in the second sentence is also a part of the writer's belief space, and would think that the addition of "I think" to the beginning of the second sentence was unnecessary. However, writers are not always consistent in maintaining the same space in these subsequent sentences. For example, in a text such as "Many people

believe that university tuition is too high. This is stupid," it is likely that the second sentence belongs to the writer's belief space, even though it is not marked as such. In a text such as "In the view of society, this rock star is quite outrageous. He is really cool," it is hard to say whether the second sentence is in society's belief space, in the writer's belief space, or both.

Conceptualizing the student's essay as a series of competing belief spaces can help instructors and students identify specific phrases and clauses that leave the reader confused about the relationship between what the writer is thinking, the writer's expressed belief space, and other belief spaces in the text. We argue that composition instructors who teach students to examine and categorize their textual belief spaces will:

- identify multiple sites in the text from which to provide feedback to students on their essays; each of these sites will fit into the conceptual framework of a textual belief space, thereby allowing students the opportunity to perform the same type of analysis repeatedly;
- help students identify specific locations – textual evidence of belief spaces – where the meaning of their essays becomes ambiguous;
- provide students with specific, belief-space related reasons for that ambiguity;
- suggest to students two rhetorical constructions that will help diminish the ambiguity of their essays: the first person singular and the unqualified claim; and
- demonstrate to students how through analysis of textual belief spaces they can move from producing ambiguous, "academic-sounding" essays to essays in which their views are clear.

### **Teaching Belief Spaces**

We teach students to locate belief spaces using the exercise attached as Appendix A. Appendix B is a chart demonstrating that most of the students understood the strategy after two thirty-minute sessions presented over the course of two weeks. To present this strategy, we ask students to look for particular phrases and clauses in samples that we've provided. In this case, we worked with sentences from Kerry's essay (both students whose work is quoted in this article signed forms giving us permission to use their writing anonymously for research designed to "contribute to our general knowledge of the composing process of college students"; the names "Kerry" and "Jan" are pseudonyms). We developed and used this strategy for the first time in the fall of 2002, and we offered it as we would offer other tools of textual analysis – as an exercise to perform on student essays in order to test for clarity. Students were not required to use the strategy al-

though we did discuss the results with them after the initial training session. There was no test later in the term to determine whether or not they recalled this strategy.

### **The Contact Zone Essay**

We asked students to write in response to Mary Louise Pratt's "Arts of the Contact Zone." As Pratt writes, the term "contact zone" refers to "social spaces 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 as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (607). In our classroom, we use a skit from Nelly's popular CD *Nellyville* to demonstrate an example of a social space where cultures meet. In this skit, a black man goes into a music store to buy *Nellyville* (the CD on which the skit is recorded; a postmodern moment if there ever was one). He must deal with a white clerk. We listen to the clip, then talk about how the various cultures are represented by means of language and attitude:

- [Cedric:] Yo yo yo yo, my man, yo  
[Clerk:] Yea, what can I help you with?  
[Cedric:] Hey c'mon man you gotta say you got me on dis one, Look. . .  
[Clerk:] What do ya need, what do ya need?  
[Cedric:] You got da new Nelly? You got dat in? The Nellyville, you got dat right?  
[Clerk:] What is that rap or something?  
[Cedric:] Wha?  
[Clerk:] I think we jus sold out of it man.  
[Cedric:] SOLD OUT?! C'mon bro dis da fourth, fifth, store I've been to today, they all sold out!  
[Clerk:] We're all sold out bro.  
[Cedric:] C'mon man you gotta help a brotha out, man I'm in a [Clerk interrupts: (Hey man!)] desperate sitation herre playa!  
[Clerk:] I'd love to help you my brotha!  
[Cedric:] I got a nice lil sexy lil thing waitin on me at da crib, and all she wanna hear is Nelly, I'm tryin to get it through your smell.  
[Clerk:] I hear ya, [Cedric interrupts: (wha?)] I hear ya, you gotta get the mood goin, ya know. . .?  
[Cedric:] (laughin) Yea, dats what I'm tryin to do pimp juice!  
[Clerk:] PIMP JUICE?!  
[Cedric:] Look man, let me . . . , can you download it for me? sumthin?  
[Clerk:] No man, we can't do that here, sorry!

[Cedric:] Mp3? You can't . . . ?  
 [Clerk:] No, we can't, we can't Mp3, sorry!  
 [Cedric:] Let me take one of your listenin machines or sumthin, and I'll bring it back to you tomorrow.  
 [Clerk:] Ya fuckin crazy? My boss would kill me man!  
 [Cedric:] Look man, jus check in da back, do whateva you gotta do.  
 [Clerk:] Hold on, let me see what I can do for ya bro. Let me see . . .  
 [Clerk:] Man this is the last one I got.  
 [Cedric:] For real? Aight! Cool wait . . .  
 [Clerk:] It's the clean version, that's all I got, I found the clean version for ya!  
 [Cedric:] It's da clean version?  
 [Clerk:] Nelly, ya know the new one, Nellyville.  
 [Cedric:] It said there's NO cussin on it? NONE?  
 [Clerk:] Ya want it?  
 [Cedric:] Dat's all you got?  
 [Clerk:] It's hip-hop!  
 [Cedric:] (sigh)] Damn aight, aight give me dat man. I jus got ta make it happen right now, I jus gotta . . .  
 [Clerk:] Alright, Alright but hurry up we got people waitin in line here, they've been waitin for a long time.  
 [Cedric:] Yea, go ahead and giva it to me.  
 [Clerk:] Good luck dawg!

Most students enjoy this demonstration because even though it's funny, it presents a culture clash that many of them have experienced themselves—coming into contact with another cultural group and finding it difficult to understand and make oneself understood. A student who chose this text to analyze for their "Contact Zone" paper might focus on the way the representative of the dominant, white culture appropriates the language of the subordinate, black culture without having any grasp of that language.

The assignment included in *Ways of Reading* (Bartholomae & Petrosky) asks students to conduct their "own local inventory of writing from the contact zone. . . . Once you have completed your inventory, choose a document you would like to work with and present it carefully and in detail" (620-21). A student might choose to discuss a document such as the one presented above, or they might choose to present a document in which a subordinate culture either represents itself to or is represented by the dominant culture. For example, the subject of the other paper that we discuss in this essay is the lobbying document written by PFLAG—Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. This is a good example of a document from a contact zone be-

cause it specifically talks about how a subordinate group should represent itself to a dominant group. In addition, this assignment provides a context in which students will have to demonstrate their own belief spaces as well as those represented in the texts that they analyze. If students fail to clearly delineate between what they believe and what others believe, they run the risk of being unclear. In fact, although almost any text will show some use of belief spaces, an assignment such as this one is sure to elicit at least two and probably more belief spaces, making a belief space analysis especially useful to students and their professors during the revision process.

The assignment successfully provoked students to write about many significant areas of cultural conflict. The eighteen students who completed it wrote about a number of different conflicts – for example, the conflict between black and white cultures in America, homelessness, anti-Semitism, and the Arab-Jewish conflict. Other students in the class wrote about the conflict between environmentalists and ranchers, between American Indians and whites, between independent cowboys and corporate ranching, and between straight and gay culture. In choosing to write about these areas of cultural conflict, students were demonstrating some of the critical thinking that we hoped to see. By choosing textual representations produced either by the marginalized group itself or by a mainstream group representing a marginalized group, students had identified rhetorical features of a text that were significant to them. Students engaged in a subject that interested them, chose a document that was relevant to them in ways that an instructor could not anticipate, and clearly presented a number of belief spaces before providing their analysis.

Four of the eighteen students who completed this assignment wrote about the contact zone that exists between lesbian/gay and straight culture.<sup>1</sup> We find this significant for two reasons. First, this strikes us as an inordinately high percentage of student papers on this subject. In teaching this class using more or less the same curriculum for the past ten years, Tom has previously seen only one or two papers on this subject. While the reasons for the number of papers on this subject remain obscure, we want to focus on the second point of significance, which is that, with one exception, these essays were the most ambiguous with respect to the belief spaces that they represent. In other words, the writers of these essays, who addressed one of the most socially charged subjects in the class, were also the writers who had the most difficulty delineating between their belief spaces and the belief spaces of others.<sup>2</sup> Our theory about the reason for this is that students who choose to write about an area of cultural transition, in this case the relative acceptability of lesbian and gay cultures to mainstream society, are in a very difficult rhetorical position.<sup>3</sup> The students in this study wanted, they claimed in conversation, to be pro-tolerance. The

essays themselves, however, reveal an at-best ambiguous stance with regard to tolerance. This ambiguity can be identified for students by pointing out their belief spaces. Through analysis of two of the essays — the one unambiguously antiheteronormative text and one of the most ambiguous heteronormative texts — we will demonstrate how, through the identification and analysis of belief spaces, we were able to determine a way to begin talking to students about these essays. We use the term “heteronormative” to indicate a belief system in which heterosexuality is not only a statistical norm (which it is) but also a cultural norm, the transparent form of sexuality against which all other forms of sexuality are implicitly and explicitly measured. “Antiheteronormative” suggests resistance to this belief system without suggesting a new hierarchy. (For a more complete discussion, see Warner.)

### Jan’s Essay

Jan’s essay, the full text of which is included as Appendix C, is unambiguously antiheteronormative. The belief spaces she describes — hers and others’ — are clearly marked and present a consistent perception of the issues. Jan’s essay begins as follows:

The year 2002 has been a year of politics and campaigns with each candidate, regardless of party affiliation, invoking the family values mantra. The candidates use this to appeal to the common concerns of the common voter.

This language clearly represents the writer’s belief space. With these unqualified claims, Jan is merely reporting recent events. She does not write, for example, that “Some people think the candidates use this appeal to appeal to . . . the common voter.” Had she used that language, she would be presenting the belief space of “some people.” In contrast, in the next sentence, for example, Jan introduces another belief space. She writes:

On the surface this seems to be an apolitical issue but the reality is that it is a powder keg of explosive issues rolled into one catch phrase.

With the phrase “on the surface,” Jan indicates the existence of another belief space, a space in which others, but clearly not she, believe that the phrase “family values” is innocuous. Then, with the phrase “but the reality,” Jan returns us to her belief space, to what she thinks, and expects others to think, is true.

Partly as the result of her clear delineation of these belief spaces,



Jan is able to demonstrate critical thinking later in her essay. She pits her beliefs against those of various others, then situates her examination of the language of a particular text (the PFLAG Tool Kit for a Family Lobby Day) within the space created by the conflict between these two belief spaces. Jan interprets the language of the PFLAG document, then provides evidence of critical thinking, writing that

The statistics in the Tool Kit help put the reality of family composition into perspective. Debunking the misconceptions about these families is the primary method of communication advocated for the lobbyist interested in affecting change at the legislative level. . . . The message that all families deserve respect and representation is the driving force behind the Tool Kit.

Having described the ways that these two cultures come into conflict with one another, Jan then interprets the language of the Tool Kit and tells us her understanding of how that language operates. Throughout the essay, Jan systematically contrasts her belief space with others' belief spaces in order to draw conclusions about how, in her view, the term "family values" is used by others to misrepresent reality as she sees it. Such clear analysis should be one of the main goals of the basic writing classroom.

### Kerry's Essay

**"Faggot! Talking about I fabricated my past he's just mad I won't ejaculate in his ass."**

This epigraph, a line from Eminem's song "Marshall Mathers" on the *Marshall Mathers LP*, was used by Kerry to open both drafts of his essay, which are included in Appendix D. The drama of the already highly offensive line was heightened by the way the essay was delivered: electronically. This means that when Tom opened the student's essay, this line, in bold face, 14 point font, seemed not to be so much announcing the title of the paper as addressing him directly—for a moment, he thought he was receiving hate mail from the student. Eminem's rap lyrics, this student claims, qualify as written artifacts from the contact zone because they are manifestations of the efforts of marginalized people (rappers) to represent themselves to mainstream culture.

The student's assessment of the lyrics to this particular song as representative of writing from the contact zone is questionable; the song is mainly a rant against a variety of people and entities who irritate Eminem—his mother, N'Sync, the Backstreet Boys, Britney Spears, the Insane Clown Posse, and various unnamed relatives. Furthermore, the student's essay, a putative inquiry into whether or not Eminem (or

Slim, as the writer refers to him) is “sending the right message to society,” doesn’t respond to the assignment. From the outset, the student’s conceptualization of the communities he wishes to discuss—is it rappers or is it gay men and lesbians?—is unclear.

In this context, the difficulty that Kerry will have in presenting his opinion on the subject is clear. First, the subject of his essay is fuzzy; and second, the belief spaces he constructs in his text not only almost entirely bypass his own views but also are disorganized. An analysis of the belief spaces in this text makes it clear why his essay is at best ambiguous with regard to its heteronormative stance: he rarely presents his own belief space. When he does, that belief space is generally heteronormative rather than antiheteronormative. For example, while the quotes around the text of the epigraph clearly place the text outside Kerry’s belief space, the placement of text and the fact that it was in bold face and in large font both suggest an endorsement of Eminem’s lyric rather than a disagreement with it. Kerry’s essay, like Jan’s, begins with an unqualified claim: “These are just a few words from the notorious rap artist Eminem’s, song title ‘Marshall Mathers,’ whose recent album went triple platinum.” In this sentence, Kerry provides a statement of fact, a part of “reality” that exists within his belief space—Kerry clearly believes this sentence is going to be uncontroversial. In the next sentence, however, Kerry presents another’s belief space: “But in the eyes of the public, Slim Shady’s vicious metaphors and descriptive lyrics are none the least offensive to the gay community.” In this sentence, the belief space clearly belongs not to Kerry but the public, and the offensiveness, even in the public’s view, is only to the gay community. Though Kerry may very well be a part of one of these groups, in these sentences he stands outside these belief spaces. It’s impossible to tell how he himself feels about Eminem’s lyrics. Then, Kerry refers us to other belief spaces: “Several songs have created lots of controversy within the hip-hop nation and society.” In this sentence, again, the controversy lies elsewhere, and again we cannot unambiguously place Kerry in either of these belief spaces. Kerry’s lack of awareness of the belief spaces he is describing results in a chaotic arrangement of his evidence.

In the next sentence, however, Kerry performs the move that Jan demonstrated above, moving us from his belief space into another’s belief space: “In many ways this rising star has blessed us with his many talents, providing us with his [breathhtaking] lyrics, but is Slim sending the right message to society?” In this sentence, the initial clause and the participial phrase, being unqualified, both almost certainly refer to Kerry’s belief space. Here, based on the evidence of how he situates himself in his belief space, Kerry clearly feels as though he, as a part of “us,” has been blessed with Eminem’s many talents, and that he, Kerry, has been provided with breathtaking lyrics. Kerry’s position in this

belief space demonstrates a kind of happiness about Eminem's influence, a happiness that conflicts with his stated intentions for this essay. After the conjunction, however, Kerry moves us into another belief space: society. In this clause, Kerry effectively removes himself from the critique; his concern is with whether or not Eminem is sending the right message to society. Because it's unclear whether or not Kerry includes himself in society, the reader is left with the impression that Kerry does not worry about whether or not he is receiving the right message. This is not to argue, of course, that phrases such as "to society" should be banned. Clearly, it's necessary for students to provide a number of belief spaces if they plan to analyze texts and incorporate that analysis into their own essays. What Kerry has done, however, is to consistently assign the problems of offense and concern to other belief spaces, which suggests to the reader that Kerry is not troubled by Eminem's lyrics. The remainder of Kerry's essay continues in the same way — Kerry rarely commits himself to any particular belief space, and when he does, he places himself in a heteronormative belief space, a belief space that conflicts with the belief space he claimed in conversation to inhabit.

The revised version of Kerry's essay contains another striking example of his heteronormative belief space. In this draft, he writes that Eminem's recent album "has two skits with a man named 'Ken Kaniff' who really is Eminem in disguise. 'Hey [there] cock boy? Who is this Chris? No it's Ken Kaniff from Connecticut, you want me to melt in your ass not in your hand Eminem. Yo Chris fuck you flaming [faggot]. These skits were very offensive to a lot of people.'" Again, Kerry provides us with no information about where he stands in relation to this lyric, but instead assigns the offensiveness to the belief space of "a lot of people." Furthermore, Kerry fails to end the quote; Eminem's language bleeds directly into his own, suggesting not only error but also confusion about his own belief space.

Kerry's motivations are a mystery to us. He appears, though, to be using ambiguously marked belief spaces in order to defuse a controversial subject. What he thinks we may never know. We believe, however, that this essay and others like it — those in which the writer claims to be advocating for a particular progressive cause but actually seems to be working against it — might be an example of one of the ways that students resist us. If Kerry opposes gay rights, his rhetorical situation makes it very difficult for him to say so. Rather, Kerry seems to be invoking academic language to make it appear as though he supports gay rights when in fact he never makes his own views clear. In this way, he might still be able to keep a clear conscience without taking a confrontational stance with his teacher. This kind of resistance, if it is indeed resistance, is worthy of attention. If it is resistance, Kerry is attempting a particularly complex rhetorical task, an attempt that

should be respected. If nothing else, he's trying to use writing to resist what seems to him to be an oppressive regime—in this case, his composition teacher. As in the contact zone described in the assignment, Kerry is appropriating the language of the oppressor to undermine the oppressor: telling him what he wants to hear while keeping what he thinks obscure.

Confronting this student provoked denial; he claimed that he meant the essay to be pro-gay, and there was nothing else to say. While this may well be true, the text suggests otherwise. We explained to Kerry in conference the difficulties with his text, and we used the text to demonstrate the strategy of identifying belief spaces. Kerry failed to clarify the belief spaces in his revised essay. Instead, he added about a page of new text, including the excerpt discussed above. Kerry ends his second draft with an anecdote about Eminem performing alongside Elton John, who praised the rap star as “a wonderful artist.” The essay concludes: “So not all people are offended by Eminem music because they understand that's exactly what it is, as far as his lyrics what he's rapping about discriminating against the gay community I believe its wrong but so are a lot of things in this country that we deal with.” Thus, even in the revision, Kerry continues to present conflicting belief spaces. Even the claim “I believe it's wrong” is undermined by “but so are a lot of things.” Kerry seems to be determined to oppose the instructor without ever confronting him.

The identification of belief spaces has some obvious drawbacks. In particular, students and instructors might have difficulty in understanding the belief spaces represented in a well-written essay such as the one provided by Jan. However, this pedagogical approach is designed to be used when the essay looks like Kerry's—when the writer's belief space is under-represented. In such cases, the essay is frequently academic in tone, but fails to say anything meaningful. As the table in Appendix B illustrates, students can use this strategy to identify the problem; students can point to specific areas of the text where the writer might think about revising his essay. In this way, students develop confidence as editors and as writers. In addition, they have access to one more revision strategy.

Instructors can use the identification of belief spaces as an exercise when they are confronted with problematic papers such as Kerry's. Composition teachers frequently think and talk about the relationship between language and power; we urge our students to learn to write well so that they can, among other things, resist oppression. If we are following Foucault, we say that discourse constructs reality to a greater or lesser degree, and that discourse can be used to resist and possibly change racist, sexist, heteronormative, and other epistemologies. But what do we do when students resist us? When they view us as members of an oppressive regime? Helping students to identify their belief

spaces allows us to talk about controversial view points with which we might strongly disagree without silencing the student; it allows us to examine language from an apparently neutral position. With this approach, we might be able to avoid shutting down students who express opinions with which we disagree. If students are prevented from expressing views that instructors find offensive, we run the risk of never learning what they think and of teaching them to write only what they know we want to hear.

## Notes

1. We use the term “lesbian/gay” even though in most of these student essays the default term is “gay.” The term “gay” appeared most prominently, even when the writers were implicitly discussing, in addition to gay men, lesbians, transvestites, and transsexuals (one writer confused transsexuals and transvestites). In these texts, “gay” appears to take the role of the universal signifier “him” and suggests the need for further discussion in composition classes of the ways that male-identified language comes to represent entire groups of diversely gendered people.
2. In our academic setting, the majority of students in the basic writing classroom share an Anglo-Saxon heritage. Issues of race tend to be less charged than issues of sexual orientation; many students believe that there is no racial hierarchy in Idaho.
3. **The writers are grateful to Gail Shuck for pointing out the relationship between a high level of controversy and a high level of belief space ambiguity.**

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## APPENDIX A

### Belief Spaces Revisited

Now that you've had an opportunity to play around with the concept of belief spaces, I'd like for you to try the exercise again. Here are some more instructions for how to find belief spaces:

**The Writer's Belief Space** is marked in two ways:

- The first, most obvious way is if I say something specific in my sentence:

*"I believe there are twenty people in this class."*

- The second, less obvious way is if I use an *unqualified claim* or a *declarative sentence*. An example of this would be the sentence *"There are twenty students in this class."* This is in my belief space because I haven't assigned it to someone else's belief space.

**Another's Belief Space** is marked by specific language.

- So, if I revised the example above to *"Some people think that there are twenty students in this class,"* then I've successfully assigned this idea to a belief space that belongs to "some people."

- Or, if I write the sentence *"That there are twenty students in this class is of concern to some people,"* I have again successfully assigned this idea to the belief space of "some people."

### My Belief Space and Another's Belief Space

Of course, it's also possible to provide two or more belief spaces in one sentence. In the sentence, *"I think that twenty people in a class is too many, but some people think it's not enough,"* I have provided my belief space "I think" and another's belief space, "some people."

### Coding System

I'd like for you to try the exercise again, using the same coding system. At the beginning of the sentence:

- Put the number **1** if you think that the sentence reflects the writer's belief.

- Put the number **2** if you think that the sentence reflects someone else's belief that the writer is merely reporting.

- Put the number **3** if you can't tell whose belief is given in the sentence.

- If more than one belief space is given in the sentence, put the appropriate number near the place that the belief space changes.

## APPENDIX B

### Students Grasp This Strategy Easily

Using the instructions reproduced in Appendix A, students were asked to identify the belief spaces in Kerry's text. As you might expect, there was some discrepancy in the coding. However, as the following table illustrates, the vast majority of the twenty students surveyed were able to identify the belief spaces represented in the text, and, more importantly, were able to correctly assess the difficulty: that Kerry had not sufficiently presented his own views. His failure to present his own opinions rendered the essay unsatisfactorily vague. (When more than half the students agreed on the designated belief space, the percentage is printed in bold type.)

Sentence	Writer's Belief Space	Other's Belief Space	Ambiguous Belief Space
Eminem has not only offended the gay community, but has tampered along the lines with religion.	10%	<b>90%</b>	
In recent [S]ource magazines there have been several complaints about him abusing his freedom of speech.		<b>100%</b>	
There also has been lots of controversy that has build up in the hip-hop nation because of his lyrics.		<b>95%</b>	5%
He purposely talks about other rap artist[s] to enlighten his music.	<b>100%</b>		
Those that even speak out against him are targets to be talked about.	<b>70%</b>	25%	5%
Many often wonder does he rap in such a manner because that's what [sells] or is he really displaying his feeling for others around him.	10%	<b>90%</b>	
In many people[']s eyes Eminem is doing nothing wrong by exercising his right to produce music in which he feels is suitable to his audience, if people are not mature enough to realize that its just music they shouldn't be [allowed] to purchase it.		45%	<b>55%*</b>
Since [our] technology is so good in this day [and] age a lot of his music isn't purchased inside music stores, but downloaded off the internet.	<b>75%</b>	10%	15%
This makes a lot of rap artist aggravated because it not only takes away from their profits, but also rids the music of its purity.	10%	<b>90%</b>	

\*Ten of the eleven students who coded this sentence "ambiguous" correctly identified this sentence as run-on and coded both sentences correctly.

## APPENDIX C

### Jan's Essay: Second Draft

#### FAMILY VALUES

The year 2002 has been a year of politics and campaigns with each candidate, regardless of party affiliation, invoking the "family values" mantra. The candidates use this to appeal to the common concerns of the common voter. On the surface this seems to be an apolitical issue but the reality is that it is a powder keg of explosive issues rolled into one catch phrase. Defining "family values" is even a challenge to most but legislators are constantly trying to convince the American public that they know what's best for the preservation of these nebulous standards. There is one group that seems to be caught in the cross fire about who and what constitutes a family. This group is gay and lesbian parents and their children.

There is a huge, commonly held misconception that all families fit into the idealized form of Mother, Father and the children and that families that do not fit into this model are in some way inferior or defective in their composition. Children from these families must live in a culture that tells them that their families are "wrong". The children can't help but infer that they must be "wrong" as well. They are the victims in the struggle between the mainstream heterosexual culture and the not so mainstream homosexual culture. This is a contact zone that is filled with strong emotion and self-righteousness from both sides.

With each side fighting the other for existence, the families with children are caught in the middle of the fight and for the most part forgotten. These families represent both sides of the contact zone simultaneously, one side as gay citizens fighting for recognition and respect, and the other side as parents fighting for the health and happiness of their families. There are numerous organizations that are dedicated to the cause of the family and the preservation of its integrity. There are however, very few dedicated to preserving the rights of the alternative family, specifically families that include gay or lesbian parents. Three organizations have joined forces to create a handbook on how to lobby for these families.

A Tool Kit for a Family Lobby Day is sponsored by Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbian and Gays (PFLAG), Children of Lesbian and Gays Everywhere (COLAGE) and the Family Pride Coalition. It outlines step by step ways to present relevant issues to mainstream legislators. These organizations feel that it is "imperative that our families communicate honestly and more frequently with our elected representatives. No matter where a policy maker stands on issues that affect our lives, our families and our loved ones, we can and must build relationships with those officials to give our issues real names and faces.



We need to do it for ourselves and for the larger GLBT movement.”

The “Tool Kit” provides statistical data to remedy the misconceptions that plague the GLBT community in regards to family structure. The facts contained in the “Tool Kit” help change the commonly held assumption that all families look a certain way. Single parents, racial minority parents and adoptive parents combined with GLBT parents are a growing and important group that gets ignored when the politicians speak of “family values”. The statistics help put the reality of family composition into perspective. Debunking the misconceptions about these families is the primary method of communication advocated for the lobbyist interested in affecting change at the legislative level.

The message that all families deserve respect and representation is the driving force behind the “Tool Kit”. The fact that one in five gay or lesbian households has at least one child in residence and that there are 3.9 million estimated sons and daughters, under the age of nineteen, with gay or lesbian parents is a sobering statistic that is brought into focus by the “Tool Kit”. These facts bring to the forefront the reality that not all families are in the “ideal” form but yet should enjoy the same reverence given to the more traditional model. This “Tool Kit” provides all the ammunition necessary to combat the ignorance that is so pervasive in the political arena. It gives the who, what, when, where and how in the cause of promoting equality in the area of Family Rights as they relate to the GLBT community. It is a thorough and detailed account of issues and solutions that should and could be addressed. Great importance is placed in the furtherance of education for the mainstream to rid it of the negative stereotypes and mythological assumptions that hinder the progress of Family Rights everywhere.

The commonalities parents face are the issues that all legislators can relate to. The safety of our schools and workplaces and the rights of children to grow up free of discrimination are concerns that are common to all. The “Tool Kit” shows the lobbyist for the GLBT community how to merge these commonalities with the Gay Rights agenda to create the most effect. This could be a powerful tool in the struggle against discrimination when presented in a calm, rational and organized manner.

## APPENDIX D

### Kerry's Essay: First Draft

#### Contact Zone

**"Faggot! Talking about I fabricated my past he's just mad I won't ejaculate in his ass."**

These are just a few words from the notorious rap artist Eminem, song titled Marshall Mathers whose recent album went triple platinum. But in the eyes of the public, Slim Shady vicious metaphors and descriptive lyrics are none the least offensive to the gay community. Several songs have created lots of controversy within the hip-hop nation and in society. In many ways this rising star has blessed us with his many talents, providing us with his breathe taking lyrics, but is Slim sending the right message to society.

Eminem is a role model for many young teenagers in today society. A lot of people are concerned with the fact that America praises Slim Shady for discriminating against the homosexual community. Teenagers worship Slim Shady so much that they sometimes make the mistake of confusing his lyrics with reality. Trying to imitate his lifestyle and feel closer to Slim some go out and commit antigay hate crimes towards others. In result the homosexual community has rallied outside of records stores releasing his albums trying to convince others not to purchase his music.

Eminem has not only offended the gay community, but has tamped along the lines with religion. In recent *source* magazines there have been several complaints about him abusing his freedom of speech. There also has been lots of controversy that has build up in the hip-hop nation because of his lyrics. He purposely talks about other rap artist to enlighten his music. Those that even speak out against him are targets to be talked about. Many often wonder does he rap in such a manner because that's what sales or is he really displaying his feeling for others around him.

In many peoples eyes Eminem is doing nothing wrong by exercising his right to produce music in which he feels is suitable to his audience, if people are not mature enough to realize that its just music they shouldn't be aloud to purchase it. Since are technology is so good in this day in age a lot of his music isn't purchased inside music stores, but downloaded off the internet. This makes a lot of rap artist aggravated because it not only takes away from their profits, but also rids the music of its purity.

## Kerry's Essay: Second Draft

### Contact Zone

**"Faggot! Talking about I fabricated my past he's just mad I won't ejaculate in his ass."**

These are just a few words from the notorious rap artist Eminem, song titled "Marshall Mathers" whose recent album went triple platinum. But in the eyes of the public, Slim Shady vicious metaphors and descriptive lyrics are none the least offensive to the gay community. Several songs have created lots of controversy within the hip-hop nation and in society. In many ways this rising star has blessed us with his many talents, providing us with his breathe taking lyrics, but is Slim sending the right message to society?

Eminem is a role model for many young teenagers in today society. A lot of people are concerned with the fact that America praises Slim Shady for discriminating against the homosexual community. Teenagers worship Slim Shady so much that they sometimes make the mistake of confusing his lyrics with reality. Trying to imitate his lifestyle and feel closer to Slim some go out and commit antigay hate crimes towards others. In result the homosexual community has rallied outside of records stores releasing his albums trying to convince others not to purchase his music.

Eminem has not only offended the gay community, but has tamped along the lines with religion. In recent source magazines there have been several complaints about him abusing his freedom of speech. There also has been lots of controversy that has build up in the hip-hop nation because of his lyrics. He purposely talks about other rap artist to enlighten his music. Those that even speak out against him are targets to be talked about. Many often wonder does he rap in such a manner because that's what sales or is he really displaying his feeling for others around him.

In many peoples eyes Eminem is doing nothing wrong by exercising his right to produce music in which he feels is suitable to his audience, if people are not mature enough to realize that its just music they shouldn't be aloud to purchase it. Since are technology is so good in this day in age a lot of his music isn't purchased inside music stores, but downloaded off the internet. Slim Shady has several songs in which he talks about the homosexual community, on his recent album he has two skits with a man named "Ken Kaniff" who really is Eminem in disguise. "Hey their cock boy? Who is this Chris? No it's Ken Kaniff from Connecticut, you want me to melt in your ass not in your hand Eminem. Yo Chris fuck you flaming fagot". These skits were very offensive to a lot of people because their was no signficence to the al-

bum, they were just installed to humor his audience and make fun of the gay community. Eminem also has a skit with Ken Kaniff where he's giving this guy a blowjob, making all kinds of vulgar sounds which wasn't pleasant. People often wonder what Eminem has against the homosexual community, when confronted about in interviews he's says "Its just music, you don't like don't buy the shit dummies".

Not to long ago at the MTV music source awards Eminem performed one of his hit songs with Elton John who is gay and at the end of their performance Elton John gave Eminem a hug and there was this big situation about Slim involved with Elton. They also interviewed Elton after the awards and he had nothing but, positive feedback. "Eminem is a wonderful artist and I love his music, keep the good work up". So not all people are offended by Eminem music because they understand that's exactly what it is, as far as his lyrics what he's rapping about discriminating against the gay community I believe its wrong but so are a lot of things in this country that we deal with.