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An Examination of the Patterns of Gendered Communication Styles in the First-Year Composition Class Blog

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THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PATTERNS OF GENDERED COMMUNICATION STYLES
IN THE FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION CLASS BLOG

By

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I dedicate this to my family and devoted friends: my mother, whose love, encouragement, and patience guided me through every obstacle; my dad, whose unwavering faith in me ensured my confidence; and my brother, whose admirable character and much-needed witticisms inspired me every day. To Joan Hurston, for reminding me “what an incredible future” I have to look forward to. And to Amy Zimmet Osborne, Bailey Hurston, Mary Kazor, and Meagan Surrency, whose loyal friendship provided constant love and laughter.

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ABSTRACT

In 1992, Susan Herring investigated the claim that computer-mediated discussion groups affect participation in electronic discourse spaces. She analyzed the participation patterns of messages from the LINGUIST listserv and found that the conversation was dominated by men. Her aim was “to determine whether gender-based differences were present in the language employed by the participants” (3). “Feeling intimidated” ranked as the highest reason for non-participation for both males (51.6%) and females (61.9%). The members responded that they were intimidated by the adversarial rhetoric present on the listserv.

In her discourse analysis, Herring identifies three different styles of communication: adversarial, attenuated, and unmarked or neutral. Herring’s analysis shows that all but one of the women regularly employed the attenuated personal style and that the adversarial style was employed predominantly by men, “especially those male participants who dominated the discussion in terms of frequency and length of contribution” (8). As a result of the men’s adversarial writing style, the tone of the discussion was overwhelmingly adversarial, which affected how women participated in the discussion.

Herring’s analysis is evidence that the assumed, idealistic logic associated with the egalitarianism narrative of computer-mediated discussion spaces requires more critical attention to the consequences.

Since some composition teachers are inclined to use a class blog, I want to determine if the gender issues that presented a concern almost twenty years ago in Herring’s study are still relevant, and if so, what this might mean for the teaching of composition. The purpose of my research, therefore, is to determine if the gendered discourse patterns that Herring identified are replicated today in the class blog as explored through a classroom case study.

I use Herring’s study as a framework for my own research. During the Fall 2009 semester, I set up a fifteen week study. I conducted the study with an ENC1102 first-year composition course, approved through FSU’s IRB process. At the beginning of the semester, I created a class blog where all students had equal access to post their responses and comment on their peers’ posts. Each student was asked to complete a survey at the end of the semester. In addition to analyzing the answers to the survey, I also conducted a discourse analysis of three of the blog posts. In my analysis of the blog posts and responses, I employ the same coding scheme established by Herring in her study. In each of the students’ posts and comments, I identify key

features of the “adversarial style” including strong assertions; imperative forms of verbs; impersonal, presupposed truths; exclusive first person plural pronouns; rhetorical questions; sarcasm; self-promotion; and representation of opponent’s view as ridiculous (7). In addition, I also look for the key characteristics of the “attenuated/personal style”: attenuated assertions; hedges and qualifiers; exhortations phrased as suggestions; speaker’s feelings/experiences; inclusive first person plural pronouns; questions as a means to elicit a response; and apologies (7). Similar to Herring, I use both quantitative data from the discourse analysis and the students’ survey responses to report my findings and investigate the results.

The results of my research paint a portrait of the gendered communication styles in a first-year composition classroom. This study’s implications affect the assumptions and expectations of composition teachers, the field of study on gender and discourse, and those who advocate using a blog in the composition classroom.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This investigation originated with Susan Herring's 1992 study "Gender and Participation in Computer-Mediated Linguistic Discourse." In short, she concluded that computer-mediated discussion spaces affect, and limit, member participation because they can seemingly favor adversarial rhetoric—a communication style more likely associated with men. Her findings motivated me to think about how electronic discussion spaces affect gender and participation in a more specific context: the first-year composition classroom. I was also curious as to how Herring's findings applied to computer-mediated discussions that occurred in a different space: the class blog. Based on the research I have conducted regarding blogging and its success as a tool to promote effective communication skills, I am inclined to use a class blog in my first-year composition classes. Therefore, I want to determine if the gender issues that presented a concern almost twenty years ago in Herring's study are still relevant and what this might mean for the teaching of composition. The purpose of my research is to determine if the gendered discourse patterns that Herring identified are replicated today in the class blog as explored through a classroom case study. Using Herring's study as a catalyst for further investigation, I examine if these patterns of gendered communication styles identified by Herring in 1992 still exist today in a relabeled but similar discourse space.

In this chapter, I introduce Herring's 1992 study and report the conclusions she made. Next, I review the Democratization Claim and show how Herring's study challenges its underlying assumptions regarding the inherent egalitarian nature of computer-mediated discussion spaces. Then, I discuss how blogs might be an option for FYC teachers who aim to offer an electronic democratic discussion space for their students, and in invoking an electronic democratic discussion space, what I refer to is an open, hospitable space that invites multiple types of discourses instead of favoring one particular type of discourse. A democratic discourse space supports communication from all participants regardless of gender, race, class, ethnicity, or socio-economic status. After that, I briefly discuss Deborah Tannen's claims about our argumentative culture in order to provide one way of understanding why adversarial rhetoric was

such a prevalent factor in Herring's study. Finally, I introduce my class and outline the investigation I pursued as a result of Herring's motivation.

Herring and the Hope of CMC

Herring's Research

In 1992, Herring, in "Gender and Participation in Computer-Mediated Linguistic Discourse," investigated the claim that computer-mediated discussion groups affect the participation of women. She analyzed the participation patterns of 71 messages from the LINGUIST listserv between February 2 and April 20, 1991. The conversation, Herring found, was dominated by men. Out of 1,800 subscribers, 36 percent were women. But in their conversation, marked by the above dates, 30 men and only 5 women participated. Moreover, men contributed 53 times and women contributed only 18, and of these, 13 were by 1 woman. Men's responses averaged 424 words while women's averaged half of that, 216.5 words. Furthermore, men contributed a total of 22,472 words and women contributed a total of 3,897 words, 2,926 of which were contributed by one woman. Herring asks, "Why didn't more women contribute?" (2). She hypothesizes four different reasons which she attributes to "stereotypes of gender-based behavior" (3):

1. Women were less interested than men in topic(s).
2. Women were too busy (e.g. with teaching and/or family) to participate.
3. Women were inhibited from participating due to inexperience with/fear of computer communication technology.
4. Women were intimidated by the tone of the debate.

Herring's research methods included both a survey of participants and a discourse analysis of the 71 messages "to determine whether gender-based differences were present in the language employed by the participants" (3). In the survey, Herring asked, "If you did not contribute, explain as fully as you can why not" (3), and then she listed the four different hypotheses as options. "Feeling intimidated" ranked as the highest reason for non-participation for both males (51.6%) and females (61.9%). Although both men and women found the debate on the listserv interesting, a majority were dissuaded from participating. Herring highlights the response of a specific participant:

A male graduate student vividly connects intimidation, having nothing to say, and the dangers of participation: “I am very interested in the topic, but was a little intimidated because of both my relative lack of experience in linguistics, and how participants seems to relish ripping each other’s lungs out at any opening. (6)

After reviewing the participants’ survey answers, Herring aimed to find out what caused the non-participants to feel intimidated. In her discourse analysis, Herring identifies three different styles of communication: (1) adversarial, (2) attenuated, and (3) unmarked or neutral. The adversarial style is marked by eight specific characteristics:

- strong assertions; absolute and exceptionless adverbials
- imperative forms of verbs
- impersonal, presupposed truths
- exclusive first person plural pronouns
- rhetorical questions
- sarcasm
- self-promotion
- representation of opponent’s view as ridiculous

The attenuated/personal style is marked by six characteristics:

- attenuated assertions; hedges and qualifiers
- exhortations phrased as suggestions
- speaker’s feelings/experiences
- inclusive first person plural pronouns
- questions as a means to elicit a response
- apologies

Herring describes the “unmarked or neutral style” as exhibiting a “relative lack of either adversarial or attenuated/personal features” (7).

Herring’s analysis shows that all but one of the women regularly employed the attenuated personal style and that the adversarial style was employed predominantly by men, “especially those male participants who dominated the discussion in terms of frequency and length of contributions” (8). The single female (the same one responsible for the majority of the female participation), Herring notes, does not rely on the attenuated/personal style because she is “an older, well-established scholar whose professional successes lead her to employ a more confident

discourse style” (7). As a result of the men’s adversarial writing style and their frequent and lengthy contributions, the tone of the discussion was overwhelmingly adversarial, which affected how women (and some men) participated in the discussion. Although some men recognized the adversarial tone of the conversation, women recognized it and responded negatively to it.

Herring refers to one non-participant female’s reaction:

I was terribly turned off by this exchange, which went on forever, I nearly dropped myself from the list of subscribers. [...] Most of the participants—many of them people who should know better—sounded pompous, aggressive, and arrogant, interested in self-aggrandizement and not in the development or discussion of ideas. (10)

Herring concludes that “while both men and women respond negatively to adversarial discourse [...], women respond differently on the basis of their negative reactions, producing less adversarial discourse and participating less in adversarial exchanges altogether” (1).

Herring’s research is significant because it exposes the disconnect between the purpose of the discussion space and the actual product. The purpose of this listserv was to provide an open forum for discussion that allowed all participants to contribute their point of view freely; however, as a result of the adversarial tone of the discussion created by a group of male participants, some members were discouraged to participate, which undermines the goal of the listserv. Herring’s analysis is evidence that the assumed, idealistic logic associated with the Democratization Claim of computer-mediated communication (CMC) technology requires more critical attention to the consequences.

A Review of the Democratization Claim

Herring describes the Democratization Claim as “the belief that [CMC] is inherently more democratic than other communication media” (“Gender and Democratization” 1). Susan Romano examines the idealistic assumptions of the Democratization Claim, or as she refers to it, the Egalitarianism Narrative, in her *Computers and Composition* article, “The Egalitarianism Narrative: Whose Story? Whose Yardstick?”. She questions if egalitarianism is a direct result of networked classroom environments:

One ubiquitous claim for the interactive, networked classroom is that networking technology markedly facilitates liberation from traditional institutional learning

disablers such as the proscenium classroom, the presentational mode, and academic language. The electronic alternative facilitates a redistribution of control over language and knowledge via temporal and spatial reconfigurations and via idiom itself. Not only do students in general benefit from this reconfiguration; those students most effectively silenced by the traditional learning format—those we call marginalized—stand to gain the most. (5)

This claim makes three assumptions: (1) traditional institutional learning settings are unfavorable, (2) the power relinquished by the teacher is directly distributed equally amongst the students, and (3) given the opportunity, marginalized students will automatically participate. Through her research, Romano finds that just because a network provides marginalized students an opportunity to participate does not necessarily mean that they will take the opportunity (10). As a result, Romano questions how *egalitarianism* is defined and on whose terms.

Before we accept as true this claim of egalitarianism, Romano suggests, we must first question the underlying assumptions. The erasure of dominant discourse patterns is not inevitable with the introduction of computer-mediated discussion spaces. According to Romano, “New technology cannot entirely dismantle old habits. [...] The cavalier equation of ‘decentered/networked’ and ‘egalitarian’ results in a failure to acknowledge the strength and pervasiveness of dominant discourse spoken both by students and by instructors” (21). If technology purportedly eliminates those factors that inhibit democratic communication exchange—socio-economic cues, for instance—then computer-mediated discussion should, idealistically, allow for the dialogue to focus on the content of the messages, not the form.

Some researchers are contesting this notion saying that although users are seemingly anonymous as a result of the technology, there are other cues that divulge certain aspects of the users’ identity such as gender, culture, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. Susan Herring concludes in her 1993 study that specific rhetorical and linguistic devices disclose a user’s gender. In addition, Romano uses her students as a specific example: “[F]or all the anonymity that real-time conferencing affords, many Hispanics are marked from the first day by their log-on names, a marking which suggests an ethnic attachment that may or may not exist and that indeed reifies and generalizes the student in my eyes as well as in the eyes of other students. They have no choice; they are marked” (11).

Although the egalitarianism narrative sounds hopeful in its approach and objective, I question if its underlying premises apply to the first-year composition (FYC) class blog. This narrative purports to offer an electronic space that supports communication from all participants, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, etc., as a result of the “faceless technology.” Just because research contends that technology can support such communication does not necessarily mean that communication actually takes place in this way. Herring’s study challenges the Democratization Claim showing that the listserv is not a democratic space because it favors one type of style: adversarial rhetoric. A democratic discourse space does not privilege one type of discourse. If a space is democratic, then it allows for multiple discourse styles. If the space is undemocratic, then it privileges one type of discourse and disregards others—other discourse styles that might be associated with or marked by gender, race, class, etc.

Blogs as an Option

Blogging as a 21st-Century Phenomenon

Some composition instructors choose to employ blogs as a discussion space for their students. However, beyond the walls of the classroom, there is an interconnected network of blogs: the *blogosphere*. The public engages with the blogosphere by creating their own blogs, posting blogs, and linking their blogs to websites and other blogs. In *We’ve Got Blog*, Rebecca Blood describes the blogosphere’s “relentless communicators” and “skilled searchers” and explains these bloggers’ “desire to share the things they found” (ix). Bloggers’ topics of choice are unlimited. Blogs showcase anything from an argumentative disagreement of a media’s portrayal of news, an irate rant of a bad day, or even an emotional reflection of inner thoughts and feelings. In Blood’s opinion, “It is captivating to see the biases, interests, and judgments of an individual reveal themselves so clearly” (xii). Blogs display photos, links to photos, quotes, links to quotes from the media, links to quotes of other bloggers, and links to every and all kinds of websites. The options seem limitless. Regardless, however, of all of the interactive features—pings and trackbacks and RSS feeds and clouds and categories and blogrolls—there is one key component to blogs: writing.

According to Diane Penrod, author of *Using Blogs to Enhance Literacy*, “Blogging is changing the way people view writing, the writing process, and the finished product” (48). As a result, the traditional definition of literacy—the ability to read and write—is being challenged.

“Writing for blogs,” Penrod explains, “requires users to maintain a special sort of literacy, different than what is taught in the classroom” (19). She explicates further:

Literate bloggers are aware of how to best select, evaluate, and manipulate information for an audience, as well as which media (sounds, fonts, color, images, or graphics) to choose in order to highlight important data. [...] They have to determine whether the audience better understands the content presented as written text, as a visual image, as a sound, or as a link to an off-site article, essay, or text. (20)

This practice reflects a student’s ability to evaluate the blogging genre’s rhetorical situation. In order to respond effectively to this rhetorical situation and participate in blogging, students must acquire this new literacy. *Blogging America’s* author Aaron Barlow labels this new literacy as *netracy*: “[T]he ability to negotiate the Internet with relative ease and skill” (20). He describes netracy as “a new set of skills that do not replace literacy, but that will be increasingly necessary as more and more human activities acquire Web-connected aspects” (Barlow xi). Although some students begin acquiring this new literacy before they even enter college, others might need additional motivation and guidance. Therefore, some composition instructors believe it their obligation to introduce students to this new literacy and encourage their participation in it. Barlow asserts that blogs “will not replace more traditional texts” (17); however, “the job of the teacher [...] may be more to keep students aware that different conventions apply in different situations than to stifle the use of one convention in favor of another” (14). Barlow’s assertion prompted me to think more critically about the communication among students in my own class, specifically, what happens when this conversation takes place in a computer-mediated discussion space where students are forced to communicate by writing. I have experimented with integrating blogging into the first-year composition classroom in order to learn how to invite all students to participate in this new type of discourse space.

Blogging in the First-Year Composition Class

During an introductory six-week teacher training session, new FSU graduate teaching assistants (TAs) are taught to encourage their students to participate—to participate in class, in workshops, in group discussions, and in their exploration of their own writing process. Upon entering the classroom, new TAs quickly learn that some students are just not comfortable

participating in in-class discussions. These students might prefer to participate in an environment where they have time to formulate their thoughts and organize their approach without the threat of denouncement or interruption from peers. CMC technologies such as a listserv or a Blackboard discussion board might seem more appealing. Speaking in class, regardless of the circumstances, is an invitation for opposition. Answering a question, stating an opinion, or analyzing a situation provides commentary for others to dispute. This idea of dispute—of disagreement—disturbs, even frightens, some students. For one student, this conversation might seem like a friendly exchange of viewpoints; however, for another, it might sound like a hostile attack. This misunderstanding is usually associated with the difference of communication patterns between men and women. In *The Argument Culture*, Deborah Tannen speaks to this concern:

If ritual opposition appeals to more men than women, it is not surprising that public discourse tends to be oppositional—in other words, to follow a pattern that is more commonly associated with men in our culture. The very act of talking in public is an activity that for a very long time was the exclusive domain of men, closed to women. (201)

This explains why some students might be dissuaded from participating in an in-class discussion. If class discussion “tends to be oppositional,” females, according to Tannen’s assertion, might feel hesitant to participate or they might not even feel authorized because of the ingrained, dominant social norm. Tannen also notes the conflicting behaviors of men and women in relation to disagreements: “These different patterns—the girls’ inclination to hide their conflict, the boys to make it into a kind of performance—might explain why many middle-class girls are reluctant to talk in front of others—for example, in school—and why many adult women find it hard to speak up in a meeting” (203).¹

The Role of Adversarial Communication in Our Culture

Although Tannen addresses the issues of adversarial communication in face-to-face settings, her observations provide some connection to what might be happening in electronic discourse and how face-to-face interactions might be carried over into electronic settings. In *The Argument Culture*, she calls attention to our culture and how it exists in a state that relies on argumentative approaches to handle situations and conduct communication. In our attempt to

make knowledge, solve problems, and challenge ideas, our culture employs clearly identifiable traits of combative argumentation:

One of the dangers of the habitual use of adversarial rhetoric is a kind of verbal inflation—a rhetorical boy who cried wolf: The legitimate, necessary denunciation is muted, even lost, in the general cacophony of oppositional shouting. What I question is using opposition to accomplish *every* goal, even those that do not require fighting but might also (or better) be accomplished by other means, such as exploring, expanding, discussing, investigating, and the exchanging of ideas suggested by the word ‘dialogue.’ (8)

She contends that our culture habitually relies on war metaphors in order to describe situations and conversations, and, as a result, this description leads to two rivaling sides, two opponents, two points of view. Describing a situation or conversation as having only two antipodal viewpoints limits the acknowledgement of other, additional logic, or even understanding. However, this is how our culture seeks truth—through opposition. An “agonistic approach,” as Tannen refers to it, thrives off of hostile confrontation and aggressive competition. And “[t]his is how language works,” she claims. “It invisibly molds our way of thinking about people, actions, and the world around us. Military metaphors train us to think about—and see—everything in terms of fighting, conflict, and war. This perspective then limits our imaginations when we consider what we can do about situations we would like to understand or change” (14). Tannen claims that a “culture of critique” has emerged as a result of this warfare mentality: “In the argument culture, criticism, attack, or opposition are the predominant if not the only ways of responding to people or ideas” (7). This argumentation is comparable to criticizing, and in academia, Tannen asserts, is rewarded and accepted as critical thinking—and it has been for years: agonistic is a more serious form of dialectic: “Approaching situations like warriors in battle leads to the assumption that intellectual inquiry, too, is a game of attack, counterattack, and self-defense” (19). If what Tannen says is accurate, then writing instructors might think about introducing new metaphors into classes. Taking a cue from Tannen, I think it is necessary to consider this from an approach that allows for multiple options, where students are introduced to different styles, practices, and techniques that allow them to recognize the appropriate rhetoric of certain situations. This is important because, as composition teachers, we are preparing students for the academy, where multiple forms of discourse prevail.

If our students, whose educational roots grew from our argument culture, are learning that adversarial communication is recognized as the favored approach to communication, what, then, is our job as writing teachers? Do we continue to favor this adversarial rhetoric, or do we attempt to change it? Furthermore, are FYC class blogs favoring this kind of adversarial rhetoric Tannen defines? If writing teachers are introducing class blogs into their curriculum as a way to foster an egalitarian forum for communication—a forum that is a hospitable space that allows for students to feel comfortable participating—is this new space truly allowing for a democratic discourse space, or do class blogs merely replicate “existing societal norms” that reinforce gender-based hierarchies? (Blair and Takayoshi 6)

Thus, if a TA aims to structure a classroom that invites both men and women to participate without hesitation or fear, it would follow an egalitarian arrangement. Designing a classroom that allows for a democratic exchange of dialogue among all students is motivating. Some research has suggested that electronic discussion spaces could offer this type of egalitarian environment. What if, as writing teachers, we could offer a space supported by technology that promoted both male and female students to participate in a conversation where they could share knowledge and gain insight? Does a space like this exist? If a networked classroom can offer a forum for marginalized voices to speak more freely, then this could provide a possible solution to the problem of marginalized voices.

FYC teachers are increasingly incorporating blogs and blogging into their pedagogy, and, as a result, are introducing their students to a contemporary genre and guiding them through the practice of writing for a public space. As Charles Lowe and Terra Williams explain in their article “Moving to the Public: Weblogs in the Writing Classroom,” “[U]sing weblogs in our classrooms has been more effective for at least some of our students because it has increased participation: our quieter students who typically don’t participate in face-to-face discussions are participating in weblog discussions.” Through the interaction of blogging, teachers engage their students with the fundamental theories of writing and offer them an environment to experiment with, explore, and discover writing processes, research methods, and effective communication. According to the egalitarianism narrative that Romano disputes, blogs, based on their affordances, should provide a democratic forum for communication that allows for and encourages all voices to speak. The first tenet of the narrative suggests that computers, as a result of their inherent features, automatically provide a democratic communication space.

Marginalized voices are given an opportunity to speak because, purportedly, the forum is open to all for participation. Blogs fit nicely into this categorization. The second tenet claims that computer-mediated discussion spaces disrupt traditional power structures favored by university settings because the computer erases socio-economic cues. Again, a blog matches the criteria. The last tenet states that as a result of anonymity, a computer-mediated discussion space supports egalitarianism. If a blogger is identified as *kpt31284*, there is no immediate connection or association to gender, race, ethnicity, etc.; therefore, again, the blog fits. Based on these conditions set forth by the narrative, a blog should provide an egalitarian discussion space. However, I am skeptical. Like Romano, I am not quick to assent.

Research Question

In her study, Herring noted that women's voices were silenced in one type of CMC space. If this claim applies to blogs as well, as I aim to find out, then as a teacher I need to pay attention to the advice advocated by Blair and Takayoshi: "The multilayered, complex nature of women's relationships to technology suggests the importance of considering carefully the ways we respond to and shape environments that support our students' development" (9). By implementing a class blog, I am shaping an environment that should support my students' development, and if the discourse that occurs on a blog is limiting the opportunities for the female students to speak, then I need to reevaluate my pedagogical approaches. If writing teachers are aiming to provide a CMC space that allows for democratic participation, we must think critically about how these new CMC spaces, specifically blogs, are supporting our students' development. Does the discussion on a class blog show the discourse patterns that Herring found? In other words, does a class blog, as a space, privilege adversarial rhetoric that discourages some students from participating? The results of my research paint a portrait of the gendered communication styles favored in a FYC classroom. This study's findings describe the interactions of this class and can potentially raise questions about the use of blogs in FYC classes more generally.

Design of Study

This study takes place within the context of an ENC1102 class, an FYC course at Florida State University entitled "Freshman Writing and Research." This class, which emphasizes

different approaches to research and writing about research, is the second-semester counterpart to ENC1101, “Freshman Composition and Rhetoric.” In my study, I employ two empirical approaches: (1) text analysis and (2) questionnaire/survey. During the Fall 2009 semester, I set up a fifteen week study, which was approved through FSU’s IRB process. There was a maximum of eighteen available student participants; fifteen consented. At the beginning of the semester, I created a class blog where all students had equal access to post their responses and comment on their peers’ posts. Throughout the semester, I posted a total of nine prompts which focused on the content of the class including, but not limited to, invention activities, responses to class readings, and reactions to current events. For the eighth blog prompt, students created their own prompt. The students had the option to respond to the prompt or generate their own direction. Each student was instructed to compose a 300 to 500 word response to the prompt in addition to providing a 100 to 200 word comment on two of their peers’ posts. Therefore, the students needed to read their peers’ posts and then select two of them that they would like to comment on.

Participation on the class blog was part of the students’ grades. There was a total of 1,200 points available to students for the semester. Blogging represented 15 percent of their final grade, which equaled 180 points. Since there were 10 assigned blogs, each blog was worth 18 points. Ten points were earned for the student’s initial response to the blog and both peer response posts were worth 4 points each.

I analyzed three blog posts in addition to the students’ responses to a survey. In my analysis of the text, I employed the same coding scheme established by Herring in her study. In each of the students’ posts and comments, I identified key features of the “adversarial style” including strong assertions; imperative forms of verbs; impersonal, presupposed truths; exclusive first person plural pronouns; rhetorical questions; sarcasm; self-promotion; and representation of opponent’s view as ridiculous. In addition, I also looked for the key characteristics of the “attenuated/personal style”: attenuated assertions; hedges and qualifiers; exhortations phrased as suggestions; speaker’s feelings/experiences; inclusive first person plural pronouns; questions as a means to elicit a response; and apologies.

Although the listserv and the class blog both fit Herring’s definition of a computer-mediated discussion group: “[I]ndividual participants contribut[ing] electronically to an on-going

public exchange of information and ideas within a field of common interest” (“Gender and Participation” 1), there are five differences between Herring’s study and this investigation:

1. Herring’s study analyzes a listserv. This investigation looks at an FYC class blog. They are both electronic discussion spaces, both the different technologies offer different affordances.
2. Contributors on the listserv, although they might have known some of the other members, did not have to meet face-to-face in a classroom setting; the students in this investigation met both online and in face-to-face settings. The class blog was set up as an outside-of-class activity, but the students still saw each other (and had to face each other) in the classroom three days a week.
3. The listserv focused on a specific theme but did not have regulated prompts. The class blog, on the other hand, was structured around ten specific prompts provided by the instructor.
4. Participation of listserv members was not mandated. In contrast, the class blog was an obligatory activity of the class. The students’ grades reflected their participation effort.
5. Regarding identification, each listserv message was signed with an electronic signature that identified the contributor by name which could usually be identified by gender, according to Herring. The students created screen names for their identities. Some chose to use part of their names, which identified who they were and their gender, for example, “Colleen.” Others substituted their names, such as “D. Gibson.”

In the following chapters, Chapter Two reviews the previous research that converges at the intersection of gender, technology, and communication. Chapter Three outlines the methodology used in the collection of the data and provides both raw data and an analysis of the data. Chapters Four interprets the data reported in Chapter Three and provides a discourse analysis of the selected blogs and connects the results to the students’ questionnaire responses. Finally, in the conclusion, this thesis raises new research questions and speaks to the implications of what this study might mean for the future FYC classroom.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the research relevant to my investigation that converges at the intersection of gender, technology, and communication. This point of convergence offers a lens for looking at my own study and research. Each of these three research areas is affected by each other in multiple ways, which directly implicates writing teachers' pedagogies. The aim of this literature review is to highlight the initial research that privileged the Democratization Claim, to show the subsequent counterarguments against this claim, and then to discuss further research that puts forth a call to action for writing teachers to think more critically about how and why they incorporate Web 2.0 technologies into composition classrooms. Using Susan Herring's 1992 study as a focal point, I document the research that prompted her study in addition to connecting to the subsequent research that followed her investigation.

When networked computers were first introduced into the composition classroom, some teachers thought that the networked capabilities of the system would offer an opportunity for those students who did not participate in class, for one reason or another, to communicate—to speak. Some teachers automatically assumed that since technology purportedly offered a democratic space, that the technology did in fact *produce* this space—a space that provided a hospitable place for communication, not a space that privileged one particular type of discourse from one particular kind of student. However, as both Susan Herring and Susan Romano point out, the technology does not always provide the expected egalitarian forum. Regardless of intent, some discourse spaces are not democratic; they are not egalitarian. Put differently, they privilege one type of discourse over another. For example, a discourse space that de facto requires contributors to use agnostic response styles in order to participate—in order “to be heard”—is not democratic.

The introduction of networked computers into the composition classroom prompted theories of egalitarianism: the “Egalitarian Narrative” described by Romano and the “Democratization Claim” outlined by Herring (“Gender and Democracy”) credit networked computer technology as automatically providing appealing alternatives to traditional classrooms—alternatives that purport to encourage democratic discussion spaces that invite

marginalized groups to participate. This subsequent research indicates that these narratives and claims carry with them inherent assumptions that some neglect to question fully. Technology purports to offer an unmitigated space for all voices to be heard; however, in some situations, it's unclear what is really happening. These supposed egalitarian spaces could in fact be reinforcing the dominant cultural norms just in another medium.

Technology

In Cynthia Selfe's 1990 article "Technology in the English Classroom: Computers through the Lens of Feminist Theory," she projects a hopeful attitude that suggests networked computer technology invites increased participation in a writing-intensive classroom because the environment offers a more egalitarian discussion space than traditional academic forums. By relying on liberal feminism as her framework, she aims to construct "an alternative, theoretically based vision of computer technology" (120) which purports to offer three beneficial results:

1. Inviting more people into active discussions of texts and into conversations about these texts (123).
2. Encouraging more active and more egalitarian participation within academic conversations based on reading and writing (124).
3. Broadening notions of authorship, readership, interpretation, and privilege in connection with texts (128).

Her ultimate goal is to "question the status quo" in academia that favors certain things such as competitive individual work over collaborative group work, power over weakness, men over women, science over the humanities, and tradition over change (120). Selfe proposes that a networked computer classroom could, in theory, provide a democratic environment for students:

Technology, in this vision, can help our profession provide wider and more egalitarian access to reading and writing communities via computer networks, ensure our students increasingly active and collaborative engagements with discourse and text, and broaden our traditional notions of unnegotiated, one-way power relationships between writers and readers. (120)

She continues to make the claim that supports the assumption that computer technology can engender egalitarianism:

Within reading- and writing-intensive classrooms, computer networks, computer conferences, and computer-based text production can help us demarginalize those individuals who have been excluded from our discussions by more traditional approaches to the teaching of literacy. Such systems can, in a feminist sense, invite more people into active engagements with, and conversations about, texts and encourage them to participate in different, and perhaps more egalitarian, ways than might be possible using more traditional media. (122)

She uses the phrases “can help us” and “can invite” that suggest the potential for computer technology to allow for these intended outcomes; however, some have taken these suggestions as fact and have failed to question the assumptions associated with this claim. Selfe also affirms that “computer networks encourage increased participation and exchange” (123). Using as evidence Michael Spitzer’s research presented in his 1986 chapter “Writing Style in Computer Conferences,” Selfe explains that computer communication, in contrast to face-to-face communication, removes social/hierarchical cues that disclose identifiers associated with gender, race, and/or appearance (125). The absence of these cues, therefore, allows for a more egalitarian discussion space which limits domination. However, this research is challenged by Herring’s 1992 study.

The underlying impetus for my research originated with Susan Herring’s 1992 study “Gender and Participation in Computer-Mediated Linguistic Discourse” where she investigates the claim that computer-mediated discussion groups affect the participation of women. As indicated in Chapter One, Herring determined that some listserv members did not participate because they felt intimidated as a result of the adversarial writing style of a group of participants. The non-participants, who were mostly women, responded negatively to the adversarial rhetoric on the listserv, and, therefore, they did not participate. This is problematic because Herring’s findings refute the Democratization Claim which suggests that CMC provides an egalitarian space for communication. Herring’s research identifies the need to examine CMC discussion spaces more closely in order to determine if they do in fact provide what they purport.

With her findings, Herring demonstrates that Selfe’s original claims about the democratizing potential of a CMC space are inaccurate for this particular listserv. Selfe contends that “computer networks can make it possible for individual writers and readers who have been prevented from entering our academic conversations in the past to become central contributors”

(123). However, it is uncertain if students, who have access to this computer technology and are given the opportunity to participate in a computer networked environment, will participate. Romano brings attention to this important concern in her 1993 *Computers and Composition* article “The Egalitarianism Narrative: Whose Story? Which Yardstick?” She questions the assumption that automatically labels a CMC space as egalitarian. In addition, Romano questions previous research’s reliance on quantitative data only. A student-centered classroom—a goal for composition instructors—translates into a dispersion of power. The assumption is that networked computer classrooms promote the student-centered classroom by forcing the teachers to relinquish their control. The power in the classroom, allegedly, is then transferred from the teacher to the students. But Romano finds fault with this rationalization. She contends that just because the teacher surrenders her authority does not necessarily mean that the power is directly transmitted to the students. A networked computer classroom can support this action, but it is not always an implicit result.

Romano asks for a clearer explication of the word *egalitarianism* for this situation. “[T]he concept of equality in its varied forms,” Romano states, “is dangerously vague and charismatic—easy to assent to, difficult to oppose” (22). She investigates this “imagined empowerment” (9) by looking not at empirical data, but by analyzing anecdotal evidence from students themselves. She finds that “what did and did not happen during these [...] sessions makes clear [...] that because opportunities exist for the marginalized to either center themselves or validate the margins does not mean they will welcome that opportunity” (10). In other words, networks might provide an opening, but students do not automatically jump in. As stated in Chapter One, Romano maintains reservations about the ability of a CMC space to provide an egalitarian forum for communication that allows for and encourages multiple patterns of discourse, not just the dominant styles.

Here, Romano is alluding to the theme of ‘old habits, new space.’ Computers, in this instance, are not displacing the patterns of dominant discourse and inviting alternative discourse styles; they are merely replicating them. Romano does not deny that the technology presents the opportunity for egalitarianism; however, she concludes that when “speakers squander the opportunity or if speakers are blocked by discourse to which they cannot connect, the narrative consigns them to failure” (22). Romano not only questions the Egalitarianism Narrative—or the Democratization Claim; the claim and the narrative are referring to the same phenomenon—but

she also challenges the assumption that when given the opportunity to speak—to participate—students will.

Like Romano, Herring questions the assumption that networked computer technology allows for a more egalitarian discussion space. Romano refers to it as the “Egalitarianism Narrative.” Herring calls it the “Democratization Claim.” In her 1993 *Electronic Journal of Communication* article, “Gender and Democracy in Computer-Mediated Communication,” Herring challenges the claim that computers democratize communication. She defines the democratization claim as “the belief that computer-mediated communication (CMC) is inherently more democratic than other communication media” because it offers “more equal access” to the conversational floor. Democracy, as defined by Herring, is composed of two key elements: (1) the access to communicate and (2) the right to communicate equally. CMC purports to offer a democratic forum that gives all members equal opportunity to participate; however, when a group dominates the conversation through (1) amount of talk and (2) rhetorical intimidation, this claim, Herring identifies, is false. “In a truly democratic discourse,” Herring states, “there can be no censorship” (2). Rhetorical intimidation is a type of censorship which results in discourse that is undemocratic. CMC is not inherently more democratic than traditional face-to-face discourse; its alluring features, however, allow some to automatically make that connection, although it is assumed.

Herring then goes on to identify four key democratizing characteristics: (1) accessibility, (2) social decontextualization, (3) new discourse, and (4) no censorship. Accessibility represents access to information and the opportunity to “connect and [communicate]”—“to express one’s views and be recognized in a public forum” (2). Social decontextualization is associated with identity. Similar to the aforementioned observations by Selfe and Spitzer, the CMC seemingly masks the identities of the participants. Status cues, Herring notes, such as accent, handwriting/voice quality, sex, appearance, etc., are allegedly neutralized in CMC. Furthermore, social decontextualization allows the focus of the communication to remain on the content of the message as opposed to the form. It is not who is saying it, but what is being said. The third characteristic, a new discourse, has “the potential to contribute to the breakdown of traditional hierarchical patterns of communication” (3). Since there are no “established conventions of use” (3) there is more opportunity to experiment with integrating nontraditional forms of communication. The final characteristic, no censorship, assumes that “each and every contributor

to a discussion theoretically has the same opportunity to have his or her messages read and responded to by the other members of the group” (3). With these four democratizing characteristics exists a sense of idealism. This idealism is what Herring questions.

Herring’s study investigated male and female participation on two academic electronic lists. To collect her data, she used ethnographic observations, discourse analysis, and surveys. As a result, she found that the participation levels between men and women were significantly different. Following are four intriguing observations:

1. Men participated more than women; women “participate at a rate that is significantly lower than that corresponding to their numerical representation” (4).
2. Messages contributed by women are shorter, “while a short message does not necessarily indicate the sex of the sender, a very long message invariably indicates that the sender is male” (4).
3. “Women are discouraged or intimidated from participating on the basis of the reactions with which their posts are met when they do contribute” (4).
4. “There are significant sex-based differences to be noted, such that it is often possible to tell whether a given message was written by a man or a woman, solely on the basis of the rhetorical and linguistic strategies employed” (7).

From her study, Herring concludes, “[R]ather than being democratic, academic CMC is power-based and hierarchical” (10), which is not hospitable to all participants because it favors one specific kind of discourse. This statement challenges Selfe’s earlier claim that computer networked technology provides a democratic space for communication. Herring continues, “This state of affairs cannot however be attributed to the influence of computer communication technology; rather, it continues pre-existing patterns of hierarchy and male dominance in academia more generally, and in society as a whole” (10), Herring also explains that women are constrained by censorship internally, as a result of cultural expectations, and externally, in consequence of dominance by intimidation. She finds that censorship occurs in CMC discussion boards and listservs as a result of domination and intimidation by means of adversarial rhetoric from gender based discourse patterns. Her findings lead me to question if censorship also occurs on another kind of CMC, the class blog.

Integrating computers into classrooms “without the necessary scrutiny and careful planning that the use of technology requires” is an imperative many composition teachers

overlook, according to Hawisher and Selfe in their 1991 *College Composition and Communication* article “The Rhetoric of Technology and the Electronic Writing Class” (55). Those students hesitant to participate in class might fear interruption, criticism, denunciation, or even being ignored. However, relocating the conversation to a computer does not necessarily remove those legitimate concerns. Criticism, in academia specifically, has been valued and promoted as a necessary approach to asserting one’s voice. CMC does not prohibit criticism. Those students confront the same fears with CMC, although the impact might be slightly deluded as a result of the lack of face-to-face communication. Hawisher and Selfe assert that “computer use simply reinforces those traditional notions of education that permeate our culture” (55). And they warn writing instructors to think critically about their “uncritical enthusiasm” for computer writing classrooms.

This “rhetoric of technology,” Hawisher and Selfe claim, is overly optimistic and “is the primary voice present in most of the work we see coming out of computers-and-composition studies” (57). They believe that there is a distorted view of the impact of computers in the writing classroom because teachers have neglected to tell the whole story; they, instead, impart only the positive aspects of their experiences and/or disregard other possible interpretations. From a more realistic standpoint, Hawisher and Selfe mandate that “[w]e must begin to identify the ways in which technology can fail us” (61).

Steven D. Krause documents one such failure in “When Blogging Goes Bad: A Cautionary Tale About Blogs, Email Lists, Discussion, and Interaction.” Attempting to integrate blogging into his class, Krause experiments with the technology and recounts his unsuccessful effort. His initial goal was “to facilitate dynamic and interactive writing experiences” for his students. However, after observing “bad blog writing” and the “non-dynamic” nature of the discussion on the blog, Krause deemed the experiment a failure. He attributes the breakdown to the following:

Some students posted repeatedly, while other students barely posted at all. The amount of text per posting varied considerably. While there were times in which some students wrote longer messages, more often than not, the posts were short, merely links to other documents, or text that was “cut and pasted” from another source. There was very little writing that could be described as reflective, dynamic, collaborative, or interactive. There was almost no exchange or

conversation between posters, and no “themed” group writing project emerged from any of the blogs, which was one of the goals of the assignment. It wasn't even clear if the students were reading other posts. Individuals made their posts in an erratic and inconsistent manner, and then they moved on.

Like other teachers who are persuaded by the allure of Web 2.0 technologies, Krause assumed that this space would automatically provoke students to want to write. He hoped the open-ended nature of his approach and his assignments would “foster student writing.” However, as he observed, “Students (or anyone else) don't just want to write, and certainly not in a blog space.” He goes on, “And when I talked with my students about this, they more or less said that they needed the direction of a teacherly assignment to write, and they weren't going to ‘just want to write’ in a blog space (or anywhere else, for that matter) just because they were given the opportunity.” His students' reactions mirror those of Romano's: just because students are provided the space and offered the opportunity to engage and participate in discussion does not necessarily mean that they will.

In retrospect, Krause notes three factors that contributed to the failure: (1) the use of Blogger technology, (2) his approach to assignments; he said he should have been more specific about the students' participation on the blog, specifically the requirements of posting (how long, how often, etc.), and (3) how the blog and mailing listserv—both electronic discussion spaces—functioned for the class. After a student used the class mailing listserv instead of the class blog to make a comment about an assignment (the exact opposite of what Krause had hoped for), Krause realized that this student knew her audience and identified the electronic discussion space that would best garner the attention she needed from her audience to make her argument.

Krause's cautionary tale illustrates why some are so resistant to wholeheartedly accepting the notion of technology's infallible feature to prompt discursive communication. His experience not only shows how not to use a blog in the classroom, but also, and more importantly, that students recognize how to use these spaces, and, if teachers neglect to think critically about how they are integrating these technologies, as Hawisher and Selfe advocate, repercussions will undoubtedly follow.

Gender

Technology is not the only factor that may or may not inhibit participation of students in the composition classroom. Gender is another important aspect of the classroom, and, therefore, should be considered with critical attention. In “Gender Issues and the Teaching of Writing,” Nancy Mellin McCracken asserts, “Gender makes a difference in a composition course perhaps more than any other course because it is in writing classes that women and men learn to extend their voices beyond the private sphere, and voice is an aspect of our culture in which sexism is so deeply ingrained we hardly even notice it” (116). McCracken advocates for a gender-balanced composition classroom that, in order to succeed, would fulfill eight main tenets:

1. Students would be helped to discover a way to make their contribution to the academic conversation *useful beyond the classroom* (120).
2. Students would be given the *opportunity to read* a variety of writers and genres on a given issue before being asked to contribute to the “conversation” (120).
3. Students would be given the *time to listen* long before they are asked to put in their oar and join the conversation (120-121).
4. Writers would likely profit by an opportunity to engage in *dialogue with texts* they are reading, to keep a dialogue journal in which they ask and answer questions, embellish the text with their own experiences, and offer affective responses (121).
5. *Social context* is important to the conversation (121).
6. Both men and women should be given the *opportunity to collaborate* in same-gender and mixed gender writing groups (121).
7. If response to student writing is to be helpful to students it makes sense for *teachers to practice women’s ways of listening* that are known to facilitate discourse (122).
8. A writing course based on what is known about gender and language would give all students the *opportunity to hear other voices like theirs*, not confine their assigned reading to a limited sampling of linear argument or exposition (122).

This approach, McCracken suggests, would expose both male and female students to alternative ways of thinking, learning, and writing. Using McCracken’s approach in conjunction with the

suggestions advocated by Krause, a teacher, ideally, could set up a class blog that would perhaps provide an egalitarian space for dynamic, interactive, collaborative discussion in a social setting. McCracken also addresses academia's favored form of scholarship:

[T]heorists point out that the academically privileged mode of thinking and writing is hierarchical and adversarial: *either* this *or* that proposition is true, not both *and*. [...] There are other modes, women's modes and non-western modes, of writing and thinking which are effectively used by both men and women.

These modes are less linear and less hierarchical, but no less truth bearing. (122)

These less linear and less hierarchical modes could be explored further through a feminist pedagogy that effectively uses the affordances of the networked computer system. Lisa Gerrard explores this topic, in addition to others, in her 1999 essay "Feminist Research in Computers and Composition." She offers several suggestions of study for feminist researchers to investigate the field of computers and composition. She discusses three ways how CMC technology might undermine the Democratization Claim: (1) the issue of computers as masculine, (2) the issue of prior access between males and females, and (3) the influence of feminist pedagogy. Although she does not fully expound on these explanations, she does suggest that further inquiry might demonstrate how they disrupt the underlying assumptions of the Democratization Claim.

Regarding feminist pedagogy, she asks if computers support a feminist pedagogy, a pedagogy that "diminish[es] hierarchical relationships in the classroom" (191). Gerrard observes, "When students enter a computer-equipped classroom, they confront a world that is doubly male: 1) the masculinist computer world, and 2) academia, a patriarchal institution dominated by a male professoriate and infused with competitive and hierarchical values" (190). Whether or not computers could provide a setting that would be more conducive to a feminist pedagogy is questionable. Their presence might, in fact, simply replicate the patriarchal institution. In "A Virtual Locker Room in Classroom Chat Spaces: The Politics of Men as 'Other,'" Christine Boese voices a similar concern:

Is this technology fair and democratizing, or is it simply a forum that reproduced and perhaps amplifies the biases and inequalities of the dominant society, despite anonymity and equal access to the "conversational floor"? And if the answer is the latter, does it mean that technology is unsuitable for use by teachers

employing feminist pedagogies? Should feminist teachers be using a computer tool that allows men to continue to dominate and oppress women? (196)

Competitive and hierarchical values espouse adversarial behavior, and since “women are not used to the competitive and boastful language that are common in conversations between men,” women might once again be at a disadvantage because, “among male users, adversarial behavior is regarded as friendly” (Gerrard 193). She further advocates researchers to “consider the extent to which such behavior deters women from participating in online discussions” (193). The specific factors, if any, which inhibit women from participating in CMC in the composition classroom, should be identified.

Since academia traditionally favors patriarchal hierarchy, Gerrard inquires as to how women are affected by nontraditional contexts. She asks, “Do these differences hold true when students write in nontraditional contexts?” (196) As some have noted, academia tends to favor hierarchical organization. This research suggests that if women are given the opportunity to participate in a new discourse space, a discourse space without defined conventions yet, their voices have a better chance to be heard because the new discourse does not rely on hierarchical standards of academia. Gerrard suggests exploring “whether computerized writing tools give female students a chance to be heard” (196). She also suggests examining, more specifically, who initiates topics of discussion, and changes topics? Whose messages are ignored, who responds to request for help? Who expresses personal feelings, who asks questions, who displays knowledge? Who agrees, argues, boasts, gives support, apologizes? [...] Which topics interest women, which interest men, which interest both? (198)

Gerrard raises a number of important questions which can lead to critical inquiry about the role of computers in the composition classroom. Therefore, her questions are important for composition teachers to consider since they’re applicable to blogs and how blogging is used in pedagogical contexts.

Communication

In Pamela Takayoshi’s 1994 *Computers and Composition* article, “Building New Networks From the Old: Women’s Experiences With Electronic Communications,” she maintains that with the introduction of a new medium, in this case CMC, there is not an inevitable displacement of old dominant discourse values. This echoes the previously mentioned

concerns of Herring and Romano. Setting up her study, she asks three important questions regarding computerized communication. I ask these same questions with a focus on the FYC class blog specifically:

1. Is the *FYC class blog* a tool that offers the possibility of dismantling these confining roles?
2. Can we expect our female students to use the *class blog* as a tool for empowering themselves and dismantling the “master’s house,” in this case traditional classroom discourse patterns?
3. Or is the *class blog* and its integration in the composition classroom merely a new tool that gets at the same results in a different way?

Takayoshi argues for a better understanding of the effects that CMC has on female students without automatically assuming that these electronic environments empower them. She criticizes these assumptions that fail to recognize technology’s potential to reinforce established structures of power and oppression (23). The Democratization Claim would assume that the answer to the first two of the above questions is yes. Like Herring and Romano, Takayoshi asks that we consider the implications of the third.

Reinforcing the assertions of Herring and Romano, Takayoshi claims, “Research that critically examines students working on computerized networks is necessary for an understanding of whether we are moving toward a more democratic and inviting classroom or if we are merely replicating in different ways the same oppressions marginalized groups have faced in the past” (27). This study, with a focus on the FYC class blog, is an attempt to undertake just such an understanding, in this case of the development of students’ discourse patterns in a CMC space. Takayoshi affirms that “just because women are offered a ‘safe’ space in which to speak does not mean they will know how to do so” (32). This statement echoes a concern similar to Romano’s. If marginalized students are given the opportunity to participate, it is not guaranteed that they will. Takayoshi advises, “We cannot adopt the computer into a situation that operates according to the same patriarchal rules as traditional classroom discourse and expect that patriarchal base to unravel without conscious awareness, discussion, and action on the participants’ part” (33). In other words, introducing students to a new discourse space that allegedly democratizes discussion will not automatically bolster egalitarianism.

In 2000, Takayoshi commented on the gradual change she observed in computers and composition scholarship that finally began to acknowledge that the utopian dreams of technology were not complete, and, in fact, were riddled with assumptions. She focuses on women's relationship to technology in her *Computers and Composition* article "Complicated Women: Examining Methodologies for Understanding the Uses of Technology." Although the research has begun to take a more critical approach against the overly optimistic narratives of CMC in the composition classroom, the research is still not representative of women and their experiences with technology. Takayoshi insists that the relationships between women and technology are much more complicated than the research suggests. She contends that the research is limited by two frameworks: (1) relying on person-based research as the primary methodology and (2) labeling technology as *either* good *or* bad instead of both. An inherent problem exists with person-based research, she says, because it limits the narrative to that of the researcher, the teacher. This approach fails to include other voices, and, therefore, other interpretations.

Takayoshi outlines the underlying problematic features of relying solely on teacher narratives:

Teacher-told, person-based narratives assume several interpretive stances: that the teacher has an accurate picture of what happens in the classroom, that there is one interpretation that makes more sense than other possible interpretations, that students represent themselves to teachers honestly and unselfconsciously (without constructing "student" personae), and that teachers' subject positions (that might vary significantly from students' race, class, gender, generational, sexual orientation, and body image positions) do not complicate interpretation. (128)

Thomas Newkirk, Takayoshi notes, advocates for counter-interpretation in research. What if students were to tell their stories? What happens if they tell their stories in conjunction with our own observations? How does this change our interpretations? Our stories? Our research?

Takayoshi seems to think that by avoiding using person-based research as the primary source of investigation, researchers might begin to better understand the complicated nature of women's relationships to technology.

Takayoshi also finds fault with classifying technology as either good or bad. The question if technology can be both good and bad at the same time requires further investigation. Although research has slowly moved forward from its initial utopian claims about the egalitarianism narrative, it has now adopted a new stance: technology is bad for marginalized groups. The

claims originated as good and then progressed into negativity. Takayoshi argues that this is the problem. Technology, specifically for women, can be both good and bad depending on the experiences of the woman. Takayoshi takes a critical stance against Barbara Kantrowitz's 1994 *Newsweek* article that brings attention to the gendering of computers, but in doing so, reinforces the "essentializing cultural narratives" (124) about women. What are these stories implying about women? And where are the hopeful stories? As Takayoshi reminds us, women's experiences with technology are not all bad. Stories like Kantrowitz's emphasize the either/or paradigm of technology as oppressive or empowering for women. This thinking fails to recognize that "women's relationship to technology is not simple" (134). Employing an approach supported by feminist theories of technology, Takayoshi suggests three ways to combat the reliance on the either/or model: (1) adopt a nondualistic way of thinking about technology, (2) think of technology as ambiguous, and (3) share both the empowering and oppressive stories in order to gain a more accurate picture of the situation (132). Furthermore, she advocates for the use as "narrative as heuristic" (137). Takayoshi voices a concern that is relevant to my study. And, as a result, I chose a methodology that did not primarily rely on person-based research, but instead, actively sought after and incorporated the students' reactions and experiences with the class blog. This review of literature establishes the exigence for this study. Though optimistic attitudes accompanied the initial introduction of networked computers into the composition, some have changed their position. As a result, there is a call to question the unchallenged assumptions implicit in the Democratization Claim. Herring challenged it and her study's findings undermined the assumption that CMC spaces offer equal opportunity for all participants' messages to be read and responded to ("Gender and Democracy" 3). Therefore, I have chosen to examine one specific type of CMC technology—the class blog—in order to determine if gendered discourse patterns that caused censorship on the listserv Herring studied also exist on the first-year composition class blog. In Chapter Three, I continue this study by outlining the methodologies I employed in my investigation.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Summary of Investigative Results

As indicated in Chapter One, the aim of this investigation is to determine if the patterns of gendered communication styles identified by Herring in 1992 still exist today in a re-designed but similar discourse space. In this chapter, I outline how the blog was set up for the class, specifically noting the blog's role in the class. I then describe the individual blog posts and explain why I chose the three data sets. Following, I provide a quantitative analysis of the blog posts and the responses. In sum, I look at three data sources: blog posts, blog responses, and survey responses. Then, I analyze them. I conducted my analysis in two stages: first, I conducted a discourse analysis of three blog posts to determine if gender patterns exist. I used the coding scheme Herring used in her discourse analysis in "Gender and Participation in Computer-Mediated Linguistic Discourse." Then, I surveyed the students for their overall experience of the class blog.

As mentioned previously, during the Fall 2009 semester I set up a fifteen week study. I conducted the study with an ENC1102 first-year composition course, approved through FSU's IRB process. There was a maximum of eighteen available student participants; fifteen consented. At the beginning of the semester, I created a class blog where students were required as part of the course to post their responses and comment on their peers' posts. Throughout the semester, I posted a total of ten prompts which focused on the content of the class including, but not limited to, invention activities, responses to class readings, and reactions to current events. After I posted a prompt to the blog, each student was instructed to compose a 300 to 500 word response to the prompt in addition to providing a 100 to 200 word comment on two of their peers' posts. The students needed to read their peers' posts and then select two of them that they would like to comment on for a total of two 100 to 200 word responses.

In my analysis of the discourse patterns on the class blog, I had a series of 10 prompts to choose from. As mentioned previously, the prompts focused on the content of the class including invention activities, responses to class readings, and reactions to current events. The topics included: the "Our Body: The Universe Within" exhibit; conceptions of identity; stereotypes

depicted in television, films, or other popular media; discussion of local laws prohibiting undomesticated animals' habitation; the boycotting of fur; the dissolution of print newspapers; texting while driving; and a discussion surrounding the question "Is Google making us stupid?"

In each of the 10 prompts, I chose to take a slightly different approach to responding to students. For example, for Blog Post #1, since it was the first blog and some of the students' first experience with blogging and using the software, I did not participate in the conversation. Instead, I selected a few quotes from the students' posts and presented them in a PowerPoint slideshow at the beginning of the next class in order to make the students aware that although I was not responding directly to their posts, I was reading them. In Blog Post #2, I also did not participate in the online conversation, but we had an in-class discussion about the prompt the day after the students had completed the Blog Post #2 assignment and I referenced several students' posts during the discussion. In Blog Post #7, I decided to join the online conversation. I avoided contributing my opinion and instead asked questions of the students and their posts. Some students responded back to me. Others simply ignored my comments. In Blog Post #8, I instructed the students to create their own prompt, instead of responding to one I posted. The students covered topics such as body art, sex education, Japanese whaling, celibacy, the Creation Museum, the "Balloon Boy" hoax, theft through Twitter, and polygamy. The exigence, or assignment, in this case, focused on invention for the third paper, a rhetorical analysis of a text of their choosing. The goal of Blog Prompt #8 was to demonstrate to the students that they could choose a topic that reflected their interests.

After reviewing all the blog posts and responses, I decided to analyze three different blog posts to show a range of student participation. I chose these data sets based on three criteria:

1. Chronological timeline
2. Teacher response
3. Writing process stages

I decided on these criteria because I thought that these specific factors might have influenced the students' discourse patterns. In terms of a chronological timeline, I chose prompts that marked three specific times during the semester: beginning, middle, and end. Blog Post #2 represents the beginning of the semester, Blog Post #4 marks the middle of the semester, and Blog Post #7 was posted near the end of the semester. This range offered three separate moments which might determine if the time in the semester during which the students were blogging affected how they

interacted with each other on the blog. I also included teacher response as a factor because I thought that how I responded to the blog assignments, whether by discussing it in class or directly responding to students on the blog, might have affected the students' discourse patterns. For teacher response, I chose prompts that I responded to in different ways. For example, I responded to Blog Post #2 with a PowerPoint presentation of quotes from students' posts. I responded to Blog Post #4 with an in-class discussion where I mentioned some of the students' posts. And for Blog Post #7, I responded directly to students on the blog. And thirdly, for the writing process stages, I chose prompts that complemented different stages of the students' writing process. For example, Blog Post #2 was used to introduce the first paper assignment. Blog Post #4 was introduced during the second paper assignment—the research component of the course. Blog Post #4 was used to help students begin using source material and to demonstrate how they should be integrating source material into their research papers. Blog Post #7 was introduced during the third paper assignment. When this prompt was presented, students were having difficulty understanding the guidelines of the assignment. I used this prompt in order to demonstrate to the students how they could approach the assignment. Again, I selected this criterion because it offered a range of different moments, which could have affected the students' communication with each other on the blog.

The first moment I chose to analyze was Blog Post #2. Below is the prompt:

Read the excerpt “The Veil” from Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis (Beyond Words* pgs. 110-116). How does the veil function as a symbol? Is it fair to say the veil limits conceptions of identity? Why or why not? The events in “The Veil” are both religious and political. How are institutions like religion and politics portrayed in the memoir? How do they relate to identity? [Remember these are questions to get you started on this topic. They do not need, however, to restrain or limit your discussion.]

This prompt was introduced with the first assignment which was based on identity. Initially, I wanted to choose the first blog post in order to illustrate the students' first encounter with the class blog, but the first blog post was more of a learning experience for the students; it allowed them to learn how to blog. As a result, I selected Blog Post #2 because it still represented the beginning-of-the-semester moment. In this blog, the students discussed a broad range of topics including social, political, and religious issues. They spoke about their own identities and I

witnessed how some students made connections with each other. Blog Post #2, although not the first prompt, still represents the students as writers at the beginning of the semester without the extra “first-time blogger” variable.

The second prompt I chose to analyze was Blog Post #4. Following is the prompt:

How would you feel if your best friend was taken away from you by the government in the city you lived in? Unfortunately a young autistic boy is facing this problem because his city council has removed his 80-pound best friend Loopey, who just so happens to be a pig. Do you believe that the city should get rid of this rule completely? Or possibly should the city grant a special right for the young boy and allow him to keep the pig? Or do you believe that the city is completely right in what it’s doing? Read more here: [ABC News \(link\)](#).

I decided on this prompt because a fellow colleague, Katie Bridgman, used this prompt with her own class and found that it sparked an active discussion on her class blog. In an effort to achieve the same effect with my own class, I decided to introduce the topic to my class’ blog. I chose this prompt for analysis because it produced two instances of back-and-forth debate-like responses (the only instances from any of the semester’s posts). This “back-and-forth debate-like response” can best be described as Student A responding to the prompt; Student B responding to Student A; and then Student A responding back to student B. The students rarely engaged in this type of back-and-forth dialogue, but during this blog it occurred twice. I wanted to know what elicited this “back-and-forth” pattern of communication that had not yet appeared on the previous posts and rarely happened again in the subsequent posts. In addition, this prompt also contained the student response that received seven peer responses, the most comments to a post of the data analyzed.

The third blog prompt I chose to analyze was Blog Post #7. Below is the prompt:

Animal-rights advocacy group People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA—[link](#)) often enlists celebrity activists—including musicians, models, and artists—to help promote its cause. This striking poster features well-known British model and actress Kate Ford. What are your thoughts on using celebrities as spokespeople for social and political causes? Do you think such appeals are effective? Do they sway you? Why or why not?

This prompt was introduced during the third assignment which focused on a rhetorical analysis of a text. This prompt focuses on a specific advertisement and asks the students to think critically about how celebrities advocate for social and political causes. During Blog Post #7, I participated in the conversation, and this is the main reason I chose to use this moment. Before this post, I did not respond to students directly on the blog. By responding to students directly on the blog, I wanted to see if my interaction with the students changed the dynamic of the discussion and/or affected how students responded. I also wanted to see if students would respond back to my questions and comments.

Quantitative Analysis

This section shows the results of the quantitative analysis which reports only the quantity of the students' text, not the content. First, using gender as the variable, I compare the number of words per student post in each of the three different blog posts. For example, I look at who posted more in terms of word count (length of post), males or females. Then, again using gender as a variable, I use the same process and look at the peer responses in terms of the numbers of words per response.

Posts

As indicated previously, there was a maximum of eighteen available student participants; fifteen consented. Although all eighteen students participated on the blog, the following results indicate only the participation of the fifteen students who consented.

A total of 14 students participated in the discussion in Blog Post #2, 9 females and 5 males. In total, the 14 students contributed 6,473 words.

Table 3.1: Quantitative Breakdown of Blog Post #2.

Blog Post #2	Participants	Percentage of Participants	Expected Contribution (number of words)	Actual Contribution (number of words)	Percentage of Actual Contribution	Disparity (number of words)
Female	9	64.3%	4,162.1	4,516	70%	+353.87
Male	5	35.7%	2,310.9	1,957	30%	-353.86

Given that 9 females participated in this discussion and 5 males, the females' contribution should have made up approximately 64.3 percent of the conversation and the males' 35.7 percent. This would mean that the females would have contributed approximately 4,162.1 words and males 2,310.9 words. Instead, females ended up contributing 70 percent of the conversation (353.9 words more than their expected contribution) and males contributed 30 percent of the conversation (353.9 words fewer than their expected contribution).

For students who participated in the investigation, the average length of a post was 262.4 words long. The average length of a female post was 275.9 words and the average length of a male post was 238 words, a difference of 37.9 words or 14 percent. The longest post was 389 words, which was contributed by nicolechivite, a female. The shortest post was 148 words, also contributed by a female, Rachel Espendez.

This pattern of disparity is also reflected in both Blog Post #4 and Blog Post #7. In Blog Post #4 there was a total of 7,175 words contributed.

Table 3.2: Quantitative Breakdown of Blog Post #4.

Blog Post #4	Participants	Percentage of Participants	Expected Contribution (number of words)	Actual Contribution (number of words)	Percentage of Actual Contribution	Disparity (number of words)
Female	9	60%	4,305	4,800	66.9%	+495
Male	6	40%	2,870	2,284	31.8%	-586

In Blog Post #4, the average length of a post was 273.7 words long. The females' posts averaged 312.1 words and the males' 216.2 words, a difference of 95.9 or 35 percent. Elyse, a female, contributed the longest post at 448 words long. The shortest post at 146 words was contributed by cwj09, a male. Thus, similar to the results in Blog Post #2, there is a disparity in the overall contribution. Females contributed 6.9 percent more than their expected contribution, with males contributing 8.2 percent less than their expected contribution. It should be noted that there was a

91-word response in Blog Post #4 whose author’s identity could not be determined. This accounts for 1.2 percent of the total discussion.

In Blog Post #7, there was a total of 6,744 words contributed. In this blog, I participated in the conversation. The results do not count my gender as female. The nine participating females represent the students only.

Table 3.3: Quantitative Breakdown of Blog Post #7

Blog Post #7	Participants	Percentage of Participants	Expected Contribution (number of words)	Actual Contribution (number of words)	Percentage of Actual Contribution	Disparity (number of words)
Female	9	60%	4,046.4	4,451	66%	+404.6
Male	5	33.3%	2,245.8	1,845	27.4%	-400.8
Teacher	1	6.7%	451.8	448	6.6%	-3.8

As with the previous two data sets, the males’ contribution overall is less than their originally anticipated contribution. On average, the posts were 232.6 words long. Females’ posts ranged from 297 to 183 words long and averaged 247.9 words. Males’ posts ranged from 223 to 179 words long and averaged 205.2 words, a difference of 42.7 or 18 percent. The longest post was 297 words long, which was contributed by kpeterson13, a female. Darrin Gibson, a male, contributed the shortest post at 179 words.

Responses

After students posted their post to the prompt, they were then instructed to respond to two of their peers’ posts. In Blog Post #2, the average length of a response was 103.7 words long. Females’ responses averaged 112.9 words. Males’ averaged 85.2 words, 9.2 number of words shorter or 9 percent. Csantara Britt, a female, contributed the longest response at 233 words. Gabriel Trujillo, a male, had the shortest at 53 words long.

Elyse’s post received the most responses with 4. She received 2 responses from females and 2 responses from males. Three students tied for second and received 3 responses each. Brian Petro received responses from 3 females. Rg131990, a male, received responses from 3 females.

Rachel Espendez received 1 response from a female and responses from 2 males. In terms of the students responding to each other, the results indicate that there is no pattern, and as the student survey answers suggest, there are reasons for the “no pattern” pattern.

In Blog Post #4, the average length of a response was 106.4 words long. Again, females, on average, had longer responses. Females’ averaged 124.4 words per response and males averaged 82.3 words per response, a difference of 42.1 words or 40 percent. The longest response was 256 words long, which was contributed by kpeterson13, a female. Cwj09, a male, contributed the shortest post with 36 words.

The student that received the most responses, seven, was colleen, a female. Out of the three response data sets, this student’s post received the most responses. These responses consisted of six comments from females and one comment from a male. The next post to receive the most responses with four was Drake 15, a male. He received responses from one female and three males. So in this case, the results are disproportionate: a female received the most responses, and a male received the second-most number of responses. As these results indicate, men responded to men, and women seemed to have responded to women.

On Blog Post #7, the average length of a response was 108.5 words. The females’ responses averaged 111 words and the males averaged 102.4 words, a difference of 8.6 words or 8 percent. Elyse, a female, contributed the longest post with 237 words, or twice as long as the average. Nicolechivite, a female, contributed the shortest response at 56 words, or just under half of the average.

Nicolechivite’s post received the largest number of responses at 7: 5 responses from females, 1 response from a male, and 1 response from me. Katie C. and kpeterson13, both females, received 5 responses. Katie C. received 4 responses from females and 1 response from me. Kpeterson13 received 3 responses from females, 1 response from a male, and 1 response from me. As the results across both posts and responses indicate, females are talking more.

Topic

This section looks at “topic” as a possible factor that contributed to students’ discourse patterns. As mentioned previously, Blog Post #2’s discussion centered on conceptions of identity and how religion and politics affect one’s identity. In total, the students produced 6,473 words in response to the prompt. Blog Post #4’s prompt asked the students to evaluate a city council’s decision to remove a pet pig from a young autistic child’s home. This prompt produced 702

words more overall than Blog Post #2. Blog Post #7 discussed using celebrities as spokespeople for social and political causes. In the middle in terms of rate of response, this prompt elicited 271 words more than Blog Post #2 and 431 words fewer than Blog Prompt #4.

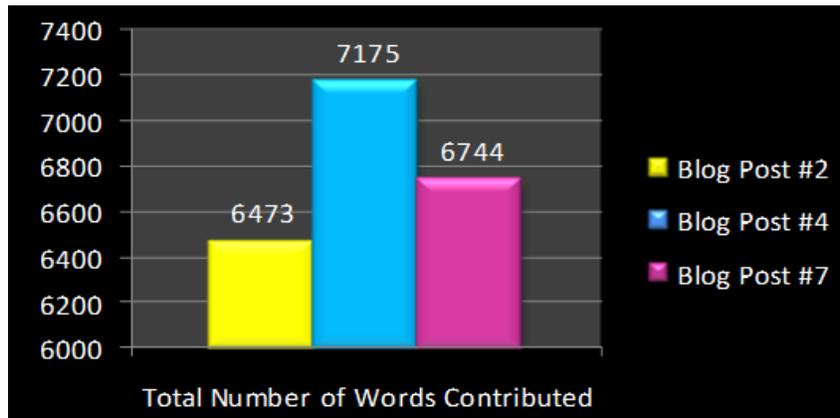


Figure 3.1: Breakdown of total number of words contributed.

In terms of the number of words contributed, Blog Post #4 produced the lengthiest dialogue. When comparing the average length of posts of the three different prompts, Blog Post #4 produced the lengthier posts—on average, 11.3 words longer than Blog Post #2 and 41.1 words longer than Blog Post #7. Not only did the students have more to say in response to Blog Post #4, they also produced lengthier posts.

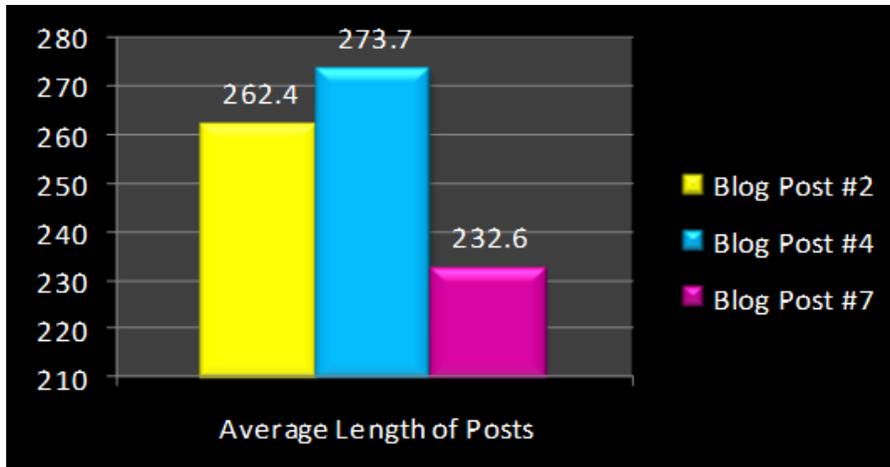


Figure 3.2: Average length of posts.

In terms of responses, the disparity between the three prompts is negligible. On average, the students' responses remained within the range of 103 to 109 words.

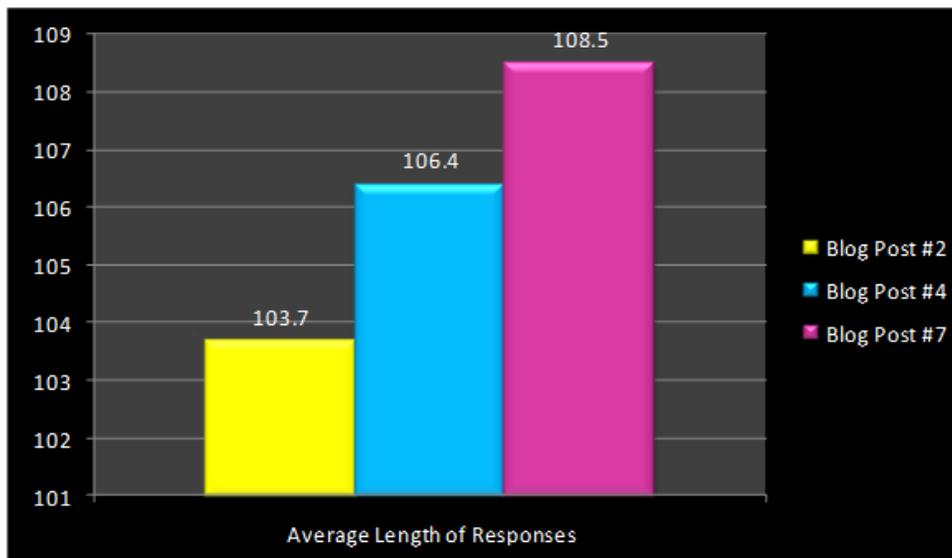


Figure 3.3: Average length of responses.

Text Analysis

Herring's investigation analyzes the messages of a discussion that took place on the LINGUIST listserv. Her research methods included both a survey of participants and a discourse analysis of the 71 messages "to determine whether gender-based differences were present in the language employed by the participants" (3). Her survey results showed that non-participants did not participate because they felt intimidated. Herring's goal was to find out why these non-participants felt intimidated. She conducted a discourse analysis in order to do so. After analyzing the messages, she observed "two distinct clusterings of linguistic and rhetorical features" (6). She labels these two clusterings "adversarial" and "attenuated/personal." The linguistic and rhetorical features of the adversarial are:

- strong assertions; absolute and exceptionless adverbials
- imperative forms of verbs
- impersonal, presupposed truths
- exclusive first person plural pronouns
- rhetorical questions
- sarcasm
- self-promotion
- representation of opponent's view as ridiculous

The linguistic and rhetorical features of the attenuated/personal are:

- attenuated assertions; hedges and qualifiers
- exhortations phrased as suggestions
- speaker's feelings/experiences
- inclusive first person plural pronouns
- questions as a means to elicit a response
- apologies

Herring's discourse analysis attributes the intimidation of non-participants to the adversarial rhetoric employed by the active contributors on the list, a majority of whom were men.

Adversarial rhetoric, according to Herring, is "the key to explaining the observed differences in male and female participation" ("Gender and Participation" 6).

To see whether the same patterns prevail in a classroom-related electronic space, I conducted a text analysis employing the same coding scheme used by Herring. (I have included pages of coding in the Appendix. I also employed frequent code checks².) I analyzed all three of the blogs for the specific linguistic and rhetorical features Herring identifies.

Percentage of Features

Blog Post #2

The table below shows the percentages of the discourse in total (both posts and responses). In Blog Post #2, every student, in some way, used a “strong assertion and/or absolute and exceptionless adverbial” in their posts. Out of the top five categorizations—that is, the categorizations that most frequently characterized the students’ discourse—two were adversarial and three were attenuated. The top two were adversarial. (Adversarial characteristics are indicated in red. Attenuated characteristics are indicated in blue.)

Table 3.4: Percentage of features for Blog Post #2 posts.

	Rhetorical Feature	Percentage
1	Strong assertions; absolute and exceptionless adverbials	100%
2	Impersonal, presupposed truths	86%
3	Speaker’s feelings/experiences	79%
4	Attenuated assertions; hedges and qualifiers	64%
5	Inclusive, 1 st person plural pronouns	50%
6	Rhetorical questions	14%
7	Self-promotion	14%
8	Imperative forms of verbs	7%
9	Exclusive, 1 st person plural pronouns	0%
10	Sarcasm	0%
11	Representation of opponent’s view as ridiculous	0%
12	Exhortations phrased as suggestions	0%
13	Questions as a mean to elicit a response	0%
14	Apologies	0%

The responses were somewhat similar. Out of the top five categorizations, two were adversarial and three were attenuated. However, for the responses, the students used “strong assertions” and “speaker’s feelings/experienced” equally. This is somewhat more balanced.

Table 3.5: Percentage of features for Blog Post #2 responses.

	Rhetorical Feature	Percentage
1	Strong assertions; absolute and exceptionless adverbials	93%
2	Speaker’s feelings/experiences	93%
3	Impersonal, presupposed truths	71%
4	Inclusive, 1 st person plural pronouns	64%
5	Attenuated assertions; hedges and qualifiers	64%
6	Rhetorical questions	21%
7	Sarcasm	14%
8	Imperative forms of verbs	14%
9	Self-promotion	7%
10	Representation of opponent’s view as ridiculous	7%
11	Questions as a mean to elicit a response	7%
12	Exhortations phrased as suggestions	0%
13	Exclusive, 1 st person plural pronouns	0%
14	Apologies	0%

Use of Each Rhetorical Feature

The following chart indicates the number of times students employed a specific rhetorical feature. For example, in Blog Post #2, in both posts and responses, students used a “strong assertion” and/or “absolute exceptionless adverbials” 97 times.

Table 3.6: Number of instances of rhetorical features in Blog Post #2

Rhetorical Feature	Number of Instances
strong assertions; absolute and exceptionless adverbials	97
impersonal, presupposed truths	56
inclusive 1st person plural pronouns	52
attenuated assertions; hedges and qualifiers	44
speaker's feelings/experiences	43
rhetorical questions	6
imperative forms of verbs	5
self promotion	4
sarcasm	3
representation of opponent's view as ridiculous	3
questions as a means to elicit a response	1
exclusive 1st person pronouns	0
exhortations phrased as suggestions	0
apologies	0

The following tables present the breakdown of the top five most popular rhetorical features by student. Each of the tables list, from largest to smallest, the number of times each student employed a specific rhetorical feature.

Table 3.7: Breakdown of “strong assertion” feature by student for Blog Post #2.

strong assertions; absolute and exceptionless adverbials			
1	F	Csentara Britt	11
T2	F	nicolechivite	9
T2	F	Elyse	9
4	M	rg131990	8
T5	F	Colleen	8
T5	F	Katie C.	8
T5	F	Rachel Espendez	8
8	F	katie	7
9	M	D. Gibson	6
T10	M	Brian Petro	5
T10	M	Gabriel Trujillo	5
T10	F	kpeterson13	5
13	F	Kayleigh	4
14	M	cwj09	4

The above chart indicates that out the “Top Five,” six of the students are female and one is male. The results indicate that using “strong assertions” and/or “absolute and exceptionless adverbials,” an adversarial characteristic, was most used by female students. The next most popular rhetorical feature was another adversarial characteristic: “impersonal, presupposed truths”:

Table 3.8: Breakdown of “presupposed truths” feature by student for Blog Post #2.

impersonal, presupposed truths			
1	F	nicolechivite	14
T2	F	katie	5
T2	F	Colleen	5
T4	F	Elyse	4
T4	M	Gabriel Trujillo	4
T4	F	kpeterson13	4
T4	F	Rachel Espendez	4
T4	M	cwj09	4
T9	M	D. Gibson	3
T9	M	Brian Petro	3
T9	M	rg131990	3
12	F	Kayleigh	2
13	F	Katie C.	1
14	F	Csentara Britt	0

The results indicate that out of the “Top Five,” six out of the eight students are female. Nicolechivite, a female, used this rhetorical feature the most. Again, the females used this adversarial characteristic more frequently than then males. The next most popular rhetorical feature was the use of “inclusive first person plural pronouns,” which includes the use of we, us, our, and/or “you and I”:

Table 3.9: Breakdown of “inclusive first person plural pronouns” by student For Blog Post #2.

inclusive 1st person plural pronouns			
1	F	Csentara Britt	12
2	M	cwj09	8
3	F	nicolechivite	6
4	M	Gabriel Trujillo	5
T5	F	Elyse	4
T5	F	Colleen	4
T5	F	kpeterson13	4
8	M	rg131990	3
T9	F	katie	2
T9	F	Katie C.	2
T9	F	Rachel Espendez	2
T10	M	D. Gibson	0
T10	M	Brian Petro	0
T10	F	Kayleigh	0

Herring labels this rhetorical feature as attenuated or personal. The “Top Five” is comprised of five females and two males. The fourth most popular rhetorical feature was “attenuated assertions, hedges and qualifiers,” another “attenuated/personal” characteristic:

Table 3.10: Breakdown of “attenuated assertions” feature by student for Blog Post #2.

attenuated assertions; hedges and qualifiers			
1	F	katie	7
T2	F	Kayleigh	6
T2	F	Csentara Britt	6
T4	M	Brian Petro	4
T4	F	Katie C.	4
T4	F	Rachel Espendez	4
T7	F	nicolechivite	3
T7	F	Elyse	3
T7	F	kpeterson13	3
10	M	Gabriel Trujillo	2
T11	F	Colleen	1
T11	M	cwj09	1
T13	M	D. Gibson	0
T13	M	rg131990	0

The “Top Five” consists of five females and one male. Finally, the fifth most popular rhetorical feature was an “attenuated/personal” characteristic: “speaker’s feelings/experiences.”

Table 3.11: Breakdown of “speaker’s feelings” feature by student for Blog Post #2.

speaker's feelings/experiences			
1	F	Csentara Britt	9
2	F	Rachel Espendez	6
3	F	Katie C.	4
T4	F	katie	3
T4	M	D. Gibson	3
T4	F	nicolechivite	3
T4	F	Colleen	3
T4	F	Kayleigh	3
T4	M	cwj09	3
T10	F	Elyse	2
T10	M	rg131990	2
T12	M	Gabriel Trujillo	1
T12	F	kpeterson13	1
14	M	Brian Petro	0

The patterns evident in the data from Blog Post #2 are reiterated in Blog Post #4 and #7. Information that deviates from the pattern above is negligible; therefore, the individual breakdowns for Blog Post #4 and #7 are located in the Appendix.

Brief Summary

The coding shows that the differences between the style of the posts and the style of responses are minor. In the breakdown of each of the posts and of the responses, the top five categorizations are the same: “strong assertions, absolute and exceptionless adverbials”; “speaker’s feelings/experiences”; “attenuated assertions, hedges and qualifiers”; “impersonal, presupposed truths”; and “inclusive, first person plural pronouns.” Overall, the most popular were the adversarial’s “strong assertions; absolute and exceptionless adverbials” and the attenuated’s “speaker’s feelings/experiences.” This seems to mean that students are in fact using both modalities. It is difficult to label an individual student as using only adversarial rhetoric or only the attenuated discourse style. When the results are broken down further and connected to a specific student, the results indicate that it is not always the same students. The same person is not always dominating. The students assume different roles and they use both modalities. So,

yes, these patterns are different than the patterns Herring found. The survey results in Chapter Four will provide additional corroboration to support the fact that Herring's observations do not apply to this particular investigation.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The intent of this chapter is to analyze the data recorded in Chapter Three and to connect the results back to Herring's findings in order to answer the original question: Do patterns of gendered communication styles identified by Herring in 1992 still exist today in a re-designed but similar discourse space? First, I compare the results of Herring's study to mine. Next, I discuss the five factors that I had originally thought might influence the students' discourse patterns: the topic of the blog prompt, the time during the semester the blog prompt was posted, the teacher's participation on the blog, the students' responses to each other, and the design and set-up of the blog itself. As mentioned previously, the goal of Herring's survey was to determine why non-participants were not participating. Since my students were instructed to participate, I constructed a survey that instead asked the students to comment on their overall experience of the class blog. Of the fifteen students who consented to the study, twelve submitted answers to the open-response survey. (A copy of this survey is appended at the end of this thesis). Using the responses from the students' surveys as corroboration, I explain how the students' discourse patterns remained consistent throughout the semester. Then I use Chris Anson's "Response Styles and Ways of Knowing" to show how my students adopted a more relativist mode of thinking as a result of the class blog. This is followed by an in-depth analysis of the students' survey responses. Finally, I connect back to Herring's study in order to answer my primary research question.

Gendered Communication Patterns: Herring's Study vs. My Study

In Herring's investigation, she observed gendered communication patterns in the discourse present on the listserv she looked at. In the investigation I conducted on the class blog, I did not find the same gendered communication patterns. Herring noted that the discourse on the listserv was dominated by a group of individuals, which was mostly comprised of men, who employed adversarial rhetoric. This group's rhetoric "intimidated" other listserv members, and, as a result, discouraged them from participating. There was no such group of individuals present on the class blog I investigated. No one group or even single individuals dominated the

conversation. Although my students did employ features of the adversarial discourse style, they did not use adversarial rhetoric to govern the direction of the discussion.

Furthermore, the discourse styles the students employed were not a result of gender. As a whole, the students did not rely on one single discourse style. Even when analyzed individually, individual students did not rely on a single discourse style. If one were to take an anonymous sampling from the blog of a selection of text, either a post or a response, it is uncertain whether or not the writer is a male or a female. As stated previously, a student's "post" was a 300 to 500 word response to my original prompt. A "response" was a 100 to 200 word reply to one of their peers. Using Herring's coding scheme as a way to determine the rhetorical and linguistic features of the students' posts and responses, I found that both females and males used both modalities. The hybrid style the students relied on consistently used a combination of the following features: "strong assertions, absolute and exceptionless adverbials"; "speaker's feelings/experiences"; "attenuated assertions, hedges and qualifiers"; "impersonal, presupposed truths"; and "inclusive, first person plural pronouns." There was not a difference between the students' posts and their responses to one another in terms of rhetorical and linguistic features.

Table 4.1 shows the individual student who had the highest number of instances of a specific linguistic feature in both their posts and responses. For example, in Blog Post #2, Csentara, a female, used "strong assertions, absolute and exceptionless adverbials" more often than any of her classmates. For Blog Post #4, however, Colleen used "strong assertions, absolute and exceptionless adverbials" more times than any of her classmates. Table 4.1 illustrates three points: (1) women used both modalities, (2) individual students did not rely on a single discourse style, and (3) no one group or even single individuals dominated the conversation. As indicated by the table below, in Blog Post #2, Csentara used both the adversarial and attenuated styles. She used "strong assertions, absolute and exceptionless adverbials" more than any other of her classmates; however, at the same time—in the same posts and responses—she also used "attenuated assertions, hedges and qualifiers" more often than her peers. This pattern is also reinforced with Elyse in Blog Post #4 and Nicole in Blog Post #7.

Table 4.1: Highest use of linguistic feature per student.

	Blog Post #2	Blog Post #4	Blog Post #7
strong assertions, absolute and exceptionless adverbials	Csentara	Colleen	Nicole
speaker's feelings/experiences	Csentara	Csentara	Colleen
attenuated assertions, hedges and qualifiers	Katie	Elyse	Kayleigh
impersonal, presupposed truths	Nicole	Elyse	Nicole
inclusive, first person plural pronouns	Csentara	Nicole	Nicole

As the analysis in Chapter Three illustrates, both female and male students employed both of the discourse styles. From analyzing just the two most popular adversarial rhetorical features, it is apparent that both females and males engaged in this discourse style. Females, in contrast to Herring's study, did not resist the adversarial style. Nicolechivite, a female student, appears at the top of three out of the six "Top Five" lists. I would not conclude that she dominated the conversation through adversarial rhetoric because she also appeared at the top of the "Top Five" lists for two out of the six attenuated/personal rhetorical features lists.

Furthermore, in their responses to one another, there is no pattern of gender favoritism, meaning that females replied to both other females and males and males replied to other males and females. Females, as a group, did not exclusively respond to male students, and similarly, males, as a group, did not limit their responses to only males.

Topic of Blog Prompt as a Factor

The data indicates that the topic of the blog prompt did not affect discourse styles. I chose these three moments (Blog Post #2, #4, and #7) because the topics reflect different moments of the writing process the students were in during their class assignments. The difference in topics had no influence on the discourse style patterns of the students. Looking across the three blogs, the tenor of the students' discourse remained consistently similar. As the survey answers evince, regardless of whether or not a student thought the blog prompt elicited "heated" discussion, the tone of the discourse styles did not favor adversarial rhetoric. These alleged "heated" topics

might have created additional discourse in terms of word count and length of post or response, but the tenor of the conversation remained balanced, and this is evidenced by the discourse analysis outlined in Chapter Three and the students' survey responses.

Time as a Factor

Another factor that did not affect the students' discourse patterns was time—the moment in the semester during which the blog prompt was posted. Blog Post #2 was posted near the beginning of the semester, #4 around mid-semester, and #7 towards the end. The analysis of the three different moments indicates a consistency in the students' discourse patterns. They did not, for example, begin the semester using mostly the attenuated style and then gradually began using the adversarial style. The students were consistent in their discourse styles throughout the semester.

Teacher Presence as a Factor

One of the factors that I had initially thought might affect the students' discourse patterns was my presence on the blog. My participation (teacher response) and activity on the blog did not seem to influence the students' discourse. As a participant on Blog Post #7, I contributed 6.6 percent of the words, which is nearly equal to the expected 6.7 percent of any participant. My commentary consisted mostly of the attenuated style, specifically the “question as a means to elicit a response” feature. When I responded to students' posts, some would respond back and others would simply ignore the fact that I made a comment. If my actual presence and participation on the blog did affect the students, it was not reflected in their discourse patterns, which, as indicated above, remained consistent throughout the semester. Furthermore, no survey responses mentioned my participation as an issue or a hindrance.

Students' Responses to Each Other as a Factor

In terms of the students responding to each other, no pattern emerged. The research indicates that gender was not a factor when students responded to each other and their survey answers reflect this. One of the questions asked students how they determined which of their peers' posts they would respond to. The students' strategies for responding ranged from avoiding lengthy posts to seeking out someone who would carry on a conversation, not necessarily

avoiding one gender's posts. Rachel adamantly avoided posts that were too long, and for her, "grammar didn't matter much to me as long as their response to the topic was interesting to me." Twenty-five percent of the students said that they actually wanted to begin a dialogue, and that is why and how they chose to respond to who they did. Kelsey's approach was to respond to "the most outrageous opinions, so I could either rebuke their claims or praise them." Typically, she "went for posts that could spark a conversation." These quotes support the idea that students wanted to talk to their peers. They were interested in what their peers were saying and they wanted to talk about it. They wanted to interact. This interaction came in different forms, including debate. Rafael was looking for debate: "Determining whose post to respond to was simple. I would read what they had to say and then I would comment back if I strongly agreed with their comment or strongly disagreed. I like debates so I would try and initiate as much of it as possible." Katie C. clearly took the opposite approach. She aimed to avoid conflict and debate:

I usually responded to people who seemed knowledgeable in their posts and who I deemed as people who wouldn't "attack" me for my beliefs or our differences. I know there are many people who think that their way of thinking is the only right way and I tried to stay away from them because I know from experience that it is just frustrating dealing with close-minded people and I prefer not to.

In the surveys, Katie C. was the only one out of the twelve students who alluded to "feeling intimidated" as a factor that discouraged her from engaging in conversation with other students. The other eleven mentioned other reasons for not responding to their peers. For example, Brian responded, "Topics which I didn't have any opinion on were the only ones I stayed away from." Elyse said, "Unoriginality and lack of effort deterred me from responding to a post. If a post seemed too bland or too rushed, I didn't feel the need to comment on it. Instead, I focused my responses on posts that were thought provoking and thorough." Elyse viewed her responses as "rewards" to her classmates—trophies that awarded thought-provoking commentary. Another student, Katie C., mentioned, "If I noticed that the original poster seemed close-minded or did not really care about the topic, I usually did not respond." The main factors that deterred comments were posts that were poorly written—both grammatically and in content (a visible lack of effort), posts that contained already stated points, and posts that were "too personal." As I explained earlier, all of the students who completed a survey, based on their answers, felt as though they could freely comment (or not comment) on any of their peers' posts; however, as is

obvious from these students' responses, they felt free to comment because they were cognizant of the situation and recognized the consequences of their actions, or in this case, their words.

Colleen's response reinforces this notion:

I never wanted to get too personal. When people referred to their personal lives in the blog and made comments that I didn't agree with, I wasn't particularly compelled to respond to them. I never wanted to offend anyone. One thing about blogs in a class is that no matter what you say to the person on the blog, you have to see that person again face-to-face. You're not anonymous just because you're on the internet.

The students were not apprehensive like the members of Herring's study. In order to help explain the students' behavior, I want to review Jolliffe and Harl's 2008 *College English* article which contextualizes why my students communicated the way they did on the class blog.

Jolliffe and Harl's Research

In their article, Jolliffe and Harl look at the reading practices of college students and the role reading plays in the transition from high school to college (600). They cite national surveys and studies that indicate that "neither high school nor college students spend much time preparing for class, the central activity of which we presume to be reading assigned articles, chapters, and books" (599). They describe the first-year composition class as "a course in which students mostly write about their reading" (600) and in their study, they wanted to find out how and why their first-year students read.

Through their study, Jolliffe and Harl found that their students did in fact engage with reading, but it was not the reading required for their classes. Their students found their class reading "uninspiring, dull, and painfully required" (611). Students reported that they spent time reading other texts such as email messages, websites, Facebook entries, fantasy fiction, articles in *Cosmopolitan* magazine, books of personal interest, and the *Bible*.

Their study also found that "students are motivated by and engaged with reading, but the texts that they interact with most enthusiastically are technologically based" (612). As a result, Jolliffe and Harl advocate teachers to integrate more technology into their reading assignments. Integrating technology will "help students reflect on and respond to reading assignments with their classmates" (614). They further argue that "students could also benefit from online

conversations with larger discourse communities and professionals in the field of study to enhance their reading about certain topics. Setting up a Web blog [...] could help get students interested” (614).

Although my study is different than Jolliffe and Harl’s, the affordances highlighted in it helps explain what we find here. The class blog I investigated did in fact “help students reflect on and respond to reading assignments with their classmates.” The class blog provides visual documentation of a semester’s worth of online discussions that produced in excess of 67,000 words. In one semester, an individual student, on average, was producing approximately 4,500 words of informal writing just on the blog alone. As Jolliffe and Harl suggested, setting up a blog might stimulate students’ involvement in class activity, and in this case, it definitely did. This larger discourse community that Jolliffe and Harl advocate is in fact the community on the class blog. The students were reading their assignments, responding to their reading, and responding to their peers (and not always in that order). The technology of the blog allowed for those dialogic interactions to occur.

The Blog’s Affordances: Setup and Design as a Factor

The setup and design of the blog was crucial for allowing the students to respond or not to respond to their peers. *Wordpress.com* allows its contributors to comment on comments. Therefore, like Katie C. mentions, if students wanted to avoid another individual or individuals, they could. Figure 4.1 illustrates a blog that is setup and designed to have one, linear conversation—a blog that does not have the option to comment on comments.

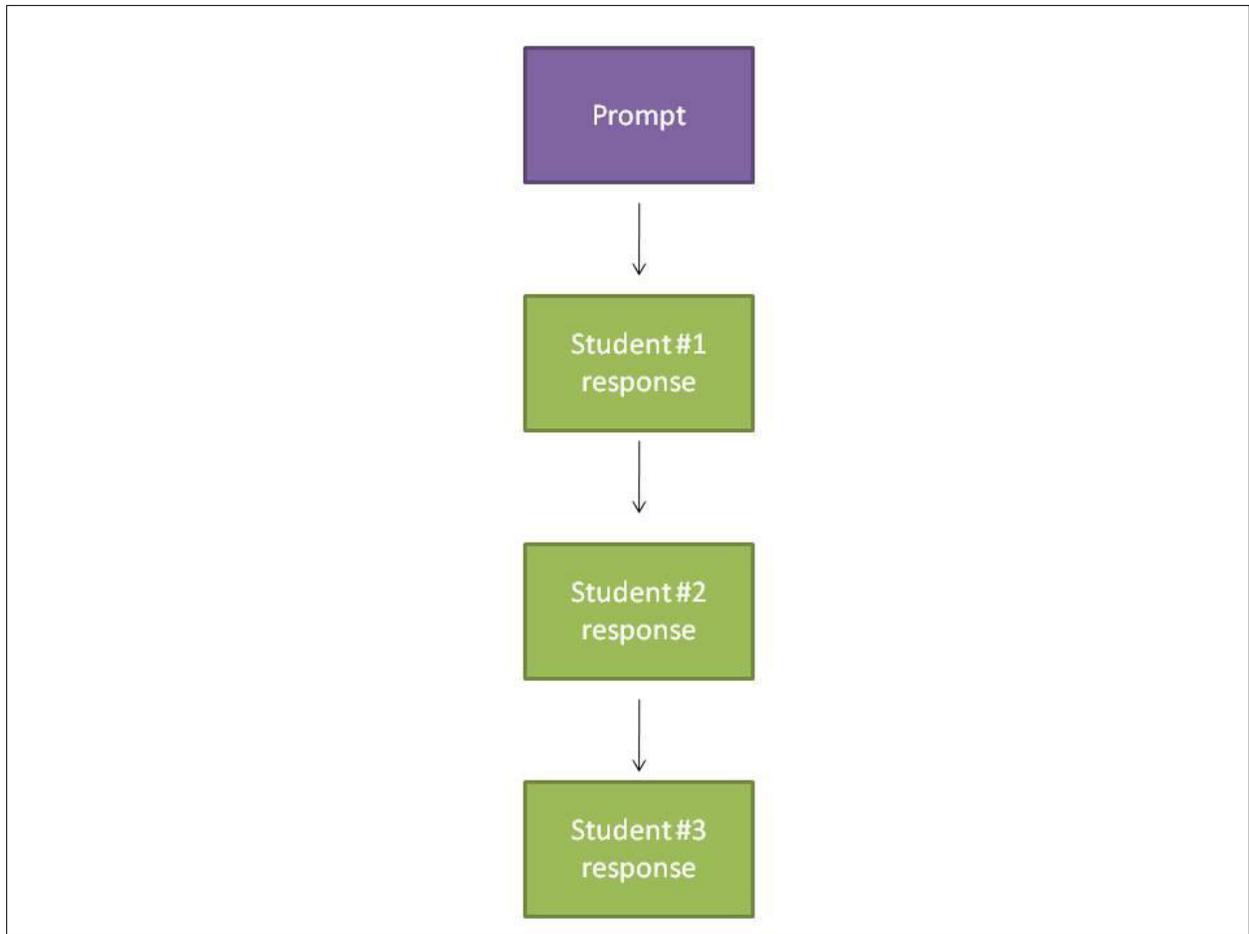


Figure 4.1: A blog setup for one, linear conversation.

Figure 4.2 illustrates how the FYC blog used in this study was setup and shows how there could have been as many as 18 different conversations occurring simultaneously.

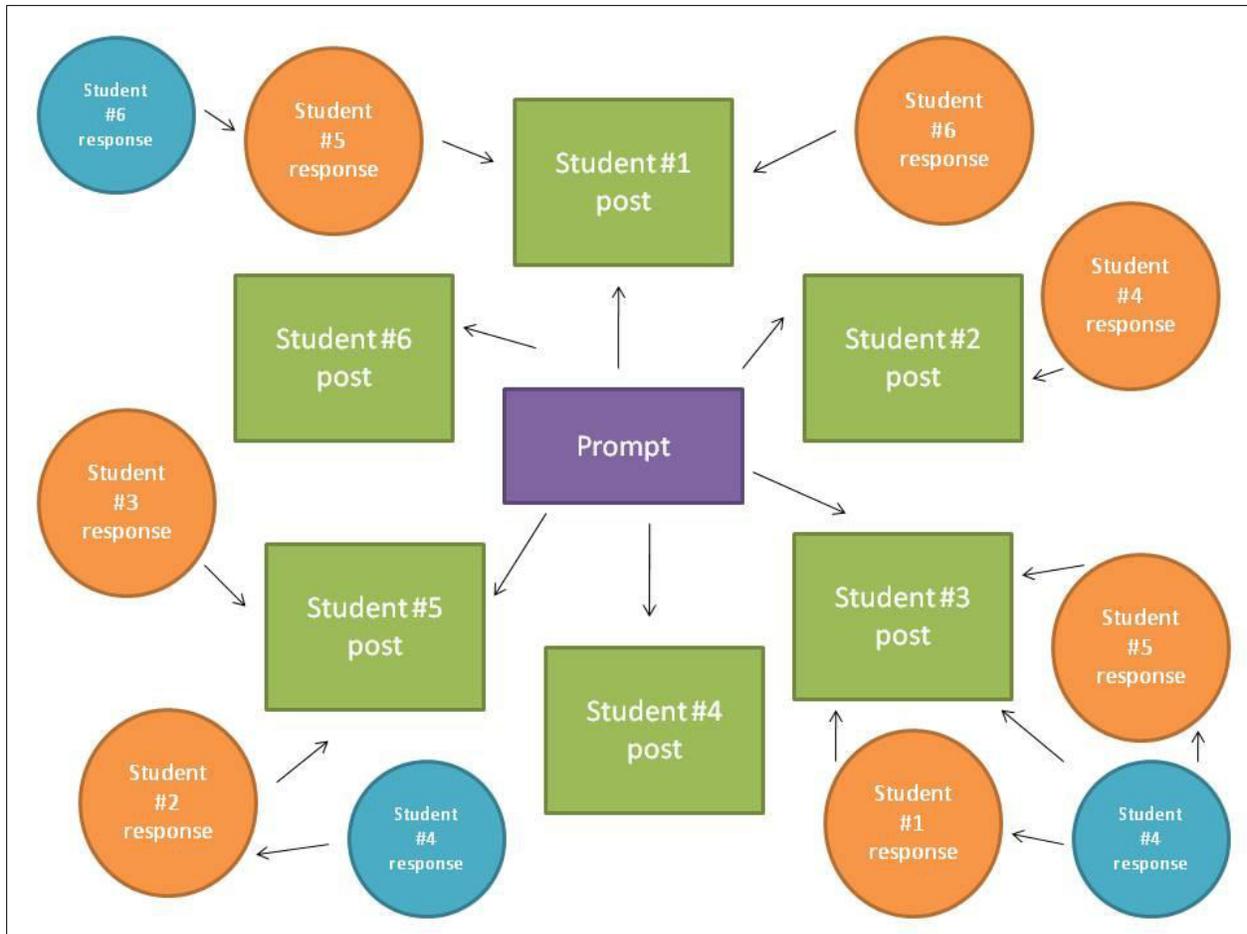


Figure 4.2: FYC class blog setup and design.

Notably, the most popular strategy for responding was the “similar/opposite” approach. Fifty percent of the students said they would choose a post that was either very similar in opinion as their own post or the exact opposite. Brian remarked how he only responded to two kinds of posts: those that were similar to his or those that were “the complete opposite.” Elyse answered: I looked for posts that contradicted my post or provided a completely new perspective on the subject to respond to. I tried to avoid commenting on posts that agreed with mine. Although if contradicting posts were lacking, I would try my best to elaborate on something the original blogger may not have considered.

In short, there was a dualism: the students preferred to respond to posts that were either very much like their own or very different. From what they are saying, they disregarded those

posts that did not have a strong stance on one side of the spectrum. Some students sought out the confrontations while others made sure to avoid them. The students were in fact seeking out different points of view. The students' responses above illustrate what Chris Anson says in "Response Styles and Ways of Knowing." He describes this behavior as *relativist*. "Committed relativists," he explains, "are always open to new ideas, values, and perspectives that might challenge whatever commitments they've already made" (337). In contrast, dualists "find it difficult to decenter and see their ideas from perspectives other than their own" (Anson 335).

Students: Dualists or Relativists

Anson uses William Perry's *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme* as a context for teacher response. His initial treatment of Perry is directly related to the students' participation on the class blog and their answers to the survey questions. Anson³ describes the Perry scheme:

The early stages of Perry's scheme describe an approach to learning that is 'dualistic.' When students begin college, they often see the world of knowledge in polar terms: right vs. wrong, good vs. bad. Authorities (teachers) possess all the answers, because they strive to accumulate Absolutes in their role as givers of truth. [...] Learning means collecting these right answers by passively receiving them from Authority. Dualistic students believe that if they adhere to the rules and regulations of Authority, they will succeed—a view built, in part, from the social and behavioral patterns often reinforced in the context of elementary education. (334)

When students show up in our composition classrooms, Anson claims, they are dualists.

According to Anson, dualists' writing:

- Shows signs of egocentrism
- Is often disingenuous or lacks conviction
- Is prone to making statements that conform to the dominant political or social ideologies of the time, perhaps in an attempt to show the teacher that they, too, know what is right. (335)

Although the students who participated on the class blog might be dualists, or at least were dualists upon entering college or even the semester, their answers to the survey questions reveal

that they are indeed relativists, or are at least transitioning into that role. On the blog, students were not looking for answers from the authority—the teacher (me). Not one survey mentioned the teacher or the role I played in the blog, in part because I played a very minimal role. The students did not look to me for answers; they sought out their peers to help them negotiate their own answers. Anson also asserts, “As students move through college, they begin to take on a more relativistic view of learning, recognizing that not all areas of knowledge are absolute. There are some questions that don’t seem to have ready answers” (335). Blog Post #4 in particular, which talks about the dilemma faced by a young autistic boy and his pet pig, did not have a “ready answer,” and, as a result, the students had to negotiate different options, different points of view. Anson tracks the progressions:

As students work their way through relativism, they begin to recognize that knowledge depends on context. They analyze concepts and ideas more fully, often using Authority to support generalization they eventually reach after systematic exploration. But once it becomes clear that even experts are uncertain in areas where solutions aren’t immediately available, relativists often begin to wallow in a kind of abandoned skepticism; since knowledge is no longer absolute, everyone has a right to their own opinion. (336)

This is exactly what happened on the class blog. Using Blog Post #4 as an example again, some students needed more context, so they conducted their own research—looking up other articles and tracking down updated information about the case that I had not provided on the prompt. As a result of their progression from dualists to relativists, the students did realize that “everyone has a right to their own opinion” because the students created and enacted a tone on the blog that made it possible for everyone to share their perspectives. When they shared their opinions, the students felt as though their contributions were not being classified as right or wrong. Instead, their opinions were recognized as a reasonable point of view.

Anson’s explanation of relativist behavior is illustrated in the back-and-forth dialogue that took place among the students. Some of the students said that they purposively sought out different points of view and wanted to learn more about the different perspectives their peers had to offer. For example, Katie D. stated, “I really enjoyed getting another person’s perspective on different stuff and being able to comment and hold a conversation back and forth.” Anson explains how “relativists sometimes let other students’ comments ‘run off them’ like water,

seeing the class community as a place made up of different people trying to understand things in many different ways” (336). Again, the students saw the blog as a community—a community, like Anson mentions, that was trying to make meaning and negotiate each others’ perspectives. According to the survey answers, if a post offered a “new perspective,” 42 percent of the students would most likely respond to that post. Gabriel stated, “I always preferred responding to posts that had a different stance on the subject than my own. It may be easier to agree with a certain post, but there’s no learning involved if you can’t create a different angle on a topic and think differently than another person.” Gabriel’s observation demonstrates Anson’s claim regarding students’ ability to develop into relativist thinkers.

Survey Results: A Closer Look

In the following section I analyze in more depth the survey answers provided by the students. The answers to these questions provide explanations of the students’ overall experience with the class blog. The students’ perspectives are important because they offer their own narratives. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Pamela Takayoshi thinks that by avoiding using person-based research as the primary source of investigation, researchers might begin to better understand the complicated nature of users’ relationships to technology. The students’ responses indicate that their participation on the class blog allowed them (1) to successfully negotiate “heated” conversations, (2) to develop an astute awareness of their audience, (3) to participate in a community, and (4) to engage in interactive and dynamic discussion with their peers.

“Heated” Conversations

One survey question asked, “Did any of the discussion on the blog become heated (characterized by anger or strong emotion—intense or passionate)? And if so, what was your reaction?” For 67 percent of the students, the blog as a whole was not “heated.” Rachel admitted that she was disappointed that “everyone was so nice all the time.” She went on to explain that “most of the time if someone disagreed with someone else they didn’t make that clear.” Elyse viewed it differently. She stated, “Yes, some of the posts enticed great passion and strong emotions from my classmates and I. Because it gave the arguments a REAL feeling, I particularly enjoyed these topics.” Elyse indicates that although a topic may have been considered “heated,” the interaction between her and her classmates was a positive experience.

“Heated,” for Elyse, was not a negative description of the discourse; it simply meant that she and her classmates were invested in the conversation. Nicole recollected a few specific moments of heated interaction:

I remember that [sic] were some prompts that caused more heated reactions than others, especially those that dealt with personal things. I always like reading the responses that didn’t feel forced but were natural. I think it is great when you can tell that the person is almost freewriting about something they are passionate about.

Katie C. remarked that the blogs in which her peers’ views conflicted were “the more interesting blogs to read.” Colleen actually pointed to a specific moment:

I think Post #4 caused some heat. It was about the pig that was taken away from the Autistic boy. I think most people had a very strong opinion on both sides. I personally was a little torn, but I stuck with my opinion from the very start that laws shouldn’t be flexible. I felt kind of bad when other people didn’t agree with me, I understood that I could be seen as kind of heartless. But I wasn’t going to change my mind because of other people’s opinions.

Colleen’s comment validates, again, that the blog provided a safe space for these types of discussions. She did not feel obligated to change her opinion because there was not intimidation from other students.

As is evident, most of the students agreed that the blog, in general, never became too controversial or heated. There were moments of “healthy” disagreements which allowed the students to witness the interaction of conflicting perspectives which enticed them to become engaged—to pay attention and to witness what was going on. They wanted to “watch” the debate unfold and found these moments of contention the most interesting to read. These answers demonstrate that the conversations surrounding even the more “heated” topics were not dominated by adversarial rhetoric.

Audience Awareness

Another inference that can be made based on the data and the students’ survey responses is that the students were also very aware of their audience. One of the survey questions asked the students to compare writing on the blog with writing in a journal. Seven of the twelve students

said that writing on a blog was very different than writing in a journal. The other five did not comment on the difference between the two per se, but they did remark that writing on a blog was “better” than writing in a journal. They associated the journal with being “private” and using “pen and paper.” The students’ responses collectively indicate three points of contrast: (1) access (who can read it), (2) dialogic interaction, and (3) publication.

Forty-two percent of the responses stated that blogs were “better” than journals. One student favored the blog over the journal “because your peers get to read and reply to your thoughts right then and there with the internet.” Another student stated, “I don’t think that the blog is anything like a journal considering almost anyone can read it. This effectively censors many thoughts that someone would normally write into a journal.” This student differentiates between the audience of a journal and the audience of the blog. Kayleigh described the blog as “better” because “you can interact with your classmates when you cannot with a journal.” In total, 25 percent of the responses mentioned interaction and the ability to reply as key factors.

As suggested by these students, the blog expands their audience. Writing on the blog makes them think critically about what they are writing, how they are writing it, for whom they are writing, and who might read it. Seventy-five percent of the students’ responses mentioned “audience” as a key determining factor. Out of these responses, 33 percent specifically referenced the role of their peers. Nicole articulates her comparison thoughtfully:

Writing on the blog made me more aware of what I was writing and it made me take the audience into consideration. Journals are usually meant to be private, so I don’t normally put as much thought into my responses, since I am the only person who will read it. With the blog, I had to consider the reactions that my classmates would have and I had to express myself thoroughly so they would understand the point I was trying to get across.³

In terms of class blog, the students were aware of their peer audience. They attempted to attract an audience on the blog as opposed to just write to an imagined audience. The students demonstrated through their interaction on the blog that their communication was not just static and aimed only at the teacher. What they wrote could elicit a response, garner support, or even spark a feud. Rafael commented that none of the discussions on the blog were taken to the “extreme” and that the debates that did occur were “healthy.” He said, “Everyone knew not to cross the line.” This statement exemplifies the fact that the students were aware of their

audience. It seems as though the students were hesitant to test the boundaries of the community by causing a disruption on the blog by being overly adversarial to a fellow classmate because they were unsure of (or did not want to find out) the consequences of combative discourse. By choosing to avoid these agonistic situations, the students demonstrate their want for a community, specifically participation in a community.

Participation in a Community

Another question on the survey asked, “What was your best experience writing in the blog, and why?” Most notably, most of the students connected their best experience writing in the blog with creating a community. The students interacted within this community by communicating with their peers through writing. Sixty-seven percent of the students mentioned that their best experience writing on the blog was actually learning about different perspectives from their peers. Based on their responses, the students’ best experiences resulted from three specific factors: (1) having the opportunity to engage with one another in dialogic conversation, (2) expressing opinions without fear of being right or wrong, and (3) learning more about each other.

As a result of the class blog, these students had the opportunity to form a community. Elyse explained how she liked when her classmates actively read the blog prompt in addition to the linked articles so that they could have an “intelligent correspondence about the topic.” For her, the blog provided a space for a “credible and respectable argument.” Gabriel’s best experience with the blog was “receiving feedback on the comments I left on the blog. [...] I especially liked when my opinion was disagreed and the opposing view caused me to think deeper about what I had written.” This statement reinforces Anson’s view mentioned earlier. Gabriel is exhibiting relativist-like behavior. Rafael also appreciated the “fact that we could talk about controversial topics and be able to argue back and forth with each other.” He explained, “I enjoyed that we were able to express our opinions to each other and although it caused some arguments, it was interesting to see what everyone thought.”

Because students seemingly sought to maintain a balanced environment on the blog, their community functioned without adversarial conflict. As indicated by the surveys, the students wanted to participate in a community—a community whose goal it was to provide a safe space to engage in topics that elicited different points of view. The students saw this space as a place to

exchange their ideas and opinions without the threat of persecution. The students knew not to cross the line because they would have to face each other in class the following day. This contrasts with Herring's study. The listserv members of Herring's study did not have to face each other in class the next day; their interaction remained in the electronic discussion space of the listserv. Therefore, a line to cross did not necessarily exist, and if it did, the absence of face-to-face communication may have allowed the discussion to reach limits of "heatedness." Without the threat of direct, face-to-face confrontation in class the next day, the listserv members perhaps felt more comfortable engaging in more heated discussions.

The class blog was created as a community site by the instructor to foster a sense of community and the survey results showed that this did in fact happen. Through reading their peers' responses and responding back to them, these students created conversations—conversations that made possible a class community. These dialogic interactions created a community of learners, thinkers, and most importantly, writers. The foundation of the community was created by verbal communication, and in order to communicate with one another, the students had to write. Through their responses it is evident that these students appreciated the opportunity to interact with their peers by engaging in dialogue with them, expressing their own opinions, and learning more about their peers from their peers' writing. As Kelsey noted, "I might not have gotten to know everyone personally, but I came to recognize each person's writing style and their personal opinions."

Interaction and Dynamic Discussion

When students are invited to write for others, the dynamic of the classroom seems to change. In this particular situation, the students were not writing for the teacher. Their responses indicate that they were in fact writing to their peers. As some of the students said, they liked receiving comments from their peers and frequented the blog even after they fulfilled the assignment just to see if anyone had commented on their post. Blog Post #4, in particular, prompted two instances of students responding back to their responders. Noting these instances is important because they demonstrate the interactive nature of the class blog. In one example, Colleen posted in response to Blog Post #4. Kpeterson13 responded to Colleen's post. Colleen responded to Kpeterson13's response. Below is the conversation. Colleen writes:

It's really tough to make a decision on something like this. But you have to think about the repercussions for everyone instead of just one single family. I don't think it's a good idea to allow someone to break the rules because it would just cause more commotion and more cases. If the city was willing to make decisions on a case-by-case basis, then that sounds great. However, since that wasn't the case (and I feel like I sound really heartless) I would have voted against it. There have to be other solutions besides breaking the law. I do believe that the family should cater to their son's needs. If that requires them to live somewhere else, then maybe that's what they should do. They're already making daily 35 mile trips to the ranch where they found the pig so I don't see why don't they just move out there. I'm a big sap and I love to make people happy so if it were my child and I saw how much he really needed this pet and how much his conditions improved, I would accommodate him as best I could. But I think that is the responsibility of the family, not of the city.

Kpetereson13 responded to Colleen:

Colleen, I completely agree with your idea about Anthony Pia and his family moving out of Fayetteville so they could keep Loopey. It just makes sense. Unfortunately, in the article the family mentions that they would love nothing more than to move, but it's just not feasible. So far, Anthony's parents haven't found a home that they can afford that would accommodate their children AND Loopey. The odds are really stacked against these people, and they have to make do with that they have. You bring up the idea of this family giving everything they can to make the best out of this situation. The idea of driving 35 miles every day for a pig may seem preposterous to YOU, but that's the only way they CAN "cater to their son's needs." Just because they aren't trying as hard as you think they should, doesn't mean that they aren't trying at all.

Colleen responded back to kpetereson13:

I didn't say they weren't trying at all. I also didn't say it was "preposterous." That would have been very contradicting of me to say they weren't trying and then to say that their efforts were ridiculous. Thirty-five miles every day is a big deal. That drive is a lot of effort in itself to make a child happy. And I actually think

that's awesome that they would do that for their son. That shows a lot of love for him and if I couldn't find a home out there, I would do exactly as they're doing. However, I couldn't find where they said they couldn't find a home they could afford. Was that in the linked article? If I had read that, my first post may have been different. But as far as I know, that was not part of the information I was given to write my post. I do think they should try as hard as they can and if this is their best then that's all someone can expect from them.

In the three blog posts I looked at, this “responding back to responders” happened only one other time—it also occurred on Blog Post #4 and Kpeterson13 was again the student that prompted responses in both cases. A few students even went beyond the requirements of the assignment and commented back-and-forth with their peers because they became so involved with the topic and conversation. Elyse explains, “The intense passions [of my peers] showed me who my peers really were and what they believed in. I found myself using more than two responses on topics like this.” Another student, Gabriel, remarked on how controversial topics acted as a catalyst for lively discussion: “There was a point where the topics were so controversial that the posts became more interactive and created a good dialogue between two or more individuals. It was these kinds of discussion that spurred new thinking processes and made blogging more enjoyable.” His response mirrors Elyse's. These students appreciated the slightly more controversial topics because they prompted more interactive dialogue—a dialogue of invested individuals responding back and forth to each other through smart and thoughtful commentary. This type of “interactive” and “good dialogue” that Gabriel recounts is exactly what Krause had hoped for in his blogging experiment. Krause's goal was “to facilitate dynamic and interactive writing experiences” for his students. From Gabriel's response, it seems as though this class blog made this type of interaction possible.

A Review

As made clear by the data presented in Chapter Three and the students' survey answers, the students were not apprehensive like some of the listserv members of Herring's study. The students' best experience writing on the blog was the opportunity to participate in an interactive dialogue with their peers where they were not only posting their own comments, but also reading their peers' and learning more about their peers and their perspectives. The class blog provided a

forum where topics could be discussed, and perhaps even argued, as Elyse, Gabriel, and Rafael explained. Most notably, it seemed as though students could voice their opinions without the threat of feeling right or wrong. One student, Csentara, points out that she felt comfortable participating on the blog:

My best experience writing in the blog was being free to write of my own opinion without it being a right or wrong answer. Then being able to read others responses to see how answers are similar or differ. This was my best experience because it was a great way to take one topic and be able to get feedback in all sorts of different ways without any one answer being right or wrong.

The audience was a key factor in the class blog and the students' peers played a major role. Their peers were their audience, an audience with whom they had a real relationship with; it was not an abstract audience of anonymous screen names or avatars.

As embodied in Csenatara's quote, the students saw the blog as a space for learning and growing as writers. In sum, students understood blogging as an opportunity to create a community with their classmates outside of the designated class meeting times. They recognized their community as their audience and responded as active community members—commenting on peers' posts, raising questions for the community, speculating solutions, and engaging in discussions. Students learned from each other by seeking out different points of view. The blog was not a space used for simply posting uninspiring answers to contrived questions, but a forum that invited participation and active discussion. Students were not intimidated by this space because the students themselves created an environment that was safe for "healthy" debate, but subconsciously warned against "crossing the line." The set up of the blog was the reason for this. Students could respond to any peers' post or response; they were not forced to read everyone's posts and responses in order to participate. The students saw the blog as a space to interact with their peers in new ways—ways limited or perhaps not available with face-to-face in-class communication. The students learned to write by writing on the blog and used their peers as a participatory soundboard for ideas, questions, opinions, and commentary.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

In this study, the goal was to examine the discourse patterns of an FYC class blog and to find out if this specific electronic discourse space replicated discourse styles similar to those Herring found in her 1992 study. I used Herring's investigation as a guide for my own. By analyzing the text of three blog posts and coding them using Herring's scheme, I aimed to find out if in fact there was a considerable amount of adversarial rhetoric on the blog, and if so, if this presence "intimidated" other students. I asked students to complete surveys in order to corroborate the text analysis. The students' surveys recounted their perspective of participating on the blog and described their experiences interacting with one another. In sum, the objective of this investigation was to determine if patterns of gendered communication styles identified by Herring in 1992 still exist today in a re-designed but similar discourse space.

As stated in Chapter One, Herring found that two factors contributed to what she calls "censorship" on the listserv she studied: (1) disproportionate amount of talk by one group and (2) rhetorical intimidation. Rhetorical intimidation, according to Herring, is embodied in adversarial rhetoric. After assigning the adversarial rhetoric of some listserv members as the reason for the lack of participation of other listserv members, Herring made two conclusions:

1. "[I]t is easier for men to maintain a distinct style (masculine, feminine, or neutral) than for women, who must employ some features 'of men's language' in order to be taken seriously as academics, and some features of women's language' in order not to be considered unpleasant or aggressive" ("Gender and Democracy" 8).
2. Discussion on each of the lists investigated tends to be dominated by a small minority of participants who abuse features of 'men's language' to focus attention on themselves, often at the expense of others" ("Gender and Democracy" 8).

My students' interaction on the class blog resulted in four findings. First, in this particular situation, no single student dominated the conversation on the blog. Second, the students assumed different roles, with both female and male students engaging in both modalities: the adversarial style and the personal/attenuated style. Third, while the discourse patterns identified

by Herring were classified by rigid classifications according to gender, in my study, the students' discourse patterns could not be attributed to gender. As demonstrated in my study for this group of students, the students' discourse patterns were not gendered; they exhibited a kind of hybridity. Fourth, the survey answers indicate that the students enjoyed participating on the blog. As noted by their responses, the students wanted to engage in dialogue with people whose views were different than theirs. They liked their peers and they liked communicating with them in this type of environment.

Although the students who participated in the blog relied on assertive methods of communication, their assertions were not hostile, but instead androgynous, nested within comments characterized by what Herring calls attenuated assertions that use hedges and qualifiers such as "perhaps," "may," "might," "seems," "sort of," "rather," "somewhat," and "a bit." This resulted, in part, because of the set up of the class, which also made it a different environment than the listserv studied by Herring. The class had discussions both in person and online. Therefore, the students understood that they had to face each other in class, so if they did decide to engage in hostile, combative arguments online with fellow classmates, they knew that they would encounter their peers in person as well. Their online relationships carried into the classroom and vice versa. Also, as demonstrated by the results, the students took on different roles on the blog. For example, one student who used features of the adversarial rhetoric the most for one blog was not the same student who used adversarial rhetoric the most on another blog. In addition, the same student(s) was not always the one dominating the conversation. The results from the three different blog posts show that different students took on different roles at different times. The roles are much less fixed. In this environment, they seem fluid, which is perhaps why students liked the blog. Thus, yes, patterns of gendered communication styles identified by Herring in 1992 do exist today in a re-designed but similar discourse space, however, not in the same way that Herring identifies them. The text analysis shows that the gendered communication styles that Herring identified are undoubtedly present on the class blog; however, they are not categorized by gender. In her study, Herring identifies two discourse styles. She labels one as masculine and the other as feminine. Herring characterizes the discourse she analyzed into two distinct categories, and by creating this binary, she attempts to create comprehensive labels that can be used to identify all discourse. Her study automatically attributed "adversarial rhetoric" to males and "attenuated" to females. By limiting her identification of discourse styles to two, she

fails to recognize another style—a style that is a blend of both adversarial and attenuated/personal which is thus less extreme or dichotomous. The blog participants that equally employed both discourse styles do not fall into a single category under Herring's scheme. Although this labeling process may have been more straightforward for Herring's study, it did not serve to describe student interactions on the blog.

My conclusion is that the students, unlike Herring's participants, did not feel intimidated on the class blog. As we see in the data set, the students liked participating on the class blog. They felt comfortable sharing their points of view but knew how to respond appropriately to their audience so as not to elicit an adversarial dispute. The students did not hesitate to participate, as indicated by their survey answers, and of course the grade encouraged them to do so, but not how to do so. The students wanted to interact with one another by engaging in conversation. The class blog allowed them to do this.

There are six possible factors that could account for the change between my study and Herring's: the age of the participants, the kind of technology, the difference between voluntary and required participation, the role of the facilitator, the blog prompts, and the change in culture. One factor could be the age of the participants: the students were college freshman ranging in age from 17 to 19 years old; Herring's listserv participants were academic professionals. Technology could be a second factor: although listservs and blogs can both be classified as computer-mediated communication spaces, they offer different affordances. The difference between voluntary and required participation could have also affected the change. Herring's listserv members volunteered their contributions; the students' participation affected their class grade. My role as the facilitator (e.g., the teacher) might have been influential in changing the dynamic. Also, the blog prompts could have shaped the results: Herring's listserv focused mainly on discussions of linguistics which were initiated by listserv members or listserv moderators as opposed to class blog where the students were obliged to respond to blog prompts provided by the teacher. Another factor could be the culture and how it has changed in the last twenty years which has resulted in less circumscribed gendered discourse patterns. This list is not comprehensive; however, it indicates a representative range of some of the influences that could have affected the change between the results of the two studies.

Implications of Research Study

The results of my research paint a portrait of the gendered communication styles in a first-year composition classroom. This study's implications challenge the assumptions and expectations of composition teachers, the field of study on gender and discourse, and those who advocate using a blog in the composition classroom. More specifically, the implications of this study play out in pedagogical objectives in terms of gender, communication, technology.

The results of this examination challenge a narrow delineation of gender discourse patterns. Herring distinguishes between gender based on essentialist qualities. The students' discourse on the class blog demonstrates that they are not readily consenting to those essentialist notions, whether they realize it or not. Female students used linguistic and rhetorical features from both the adversarial style and the attenuated/personal style. Their language shows that they did not feel obligated to adhere to the limitations of the features of the attenuated/personal style. This also happened with the male students. Not all males employed a strictly adversarial rhetoric. Instead, they used features from both modalities. The students' language did not easily fit into the prescribed categorizations Herring created. As Krause observes, "I think that Herring's approach to issues of gender online are a bit simplistic. It's more complicated than what she seems to be suggesting." Thus, this issue raises the following questions: If Herring's categorizations are too simplistic, how can her categorizations be revised to account for more complex discourse styles? What are these discourse styles? How are they classified? How are they represented? And should discourse styles be categorized by gender? Is classifying discourse styles by gender too narrow of an approach?

The results also show that features of online discourse cannot be easily attributed to one gender. Classifying as male a blogger who uses strong assertions; impersonal, presupposed truths; and sarcasm is based on a flawed assumption that incorrectly labels a discourse as male and attributes certain discourse styles to a particular gender. Another faulty assumption is automatically labeling a blogger as a woman because the speaker talks about feelings and personal experiences, asks questions to elicit a response, and apologizes. These classifications pigeonhole bloggers based solely on their gender. The need to identify a blogger as male or female seems to favor the notion that the gender of the blogger is more important than the content of the message. As the students on the class blog demonstrate, a strong assertion can be

used by either a female or male, and the use of a strong assertion does not immediately imply the gender of the blogger. The categorization of linguistic and rhetorical features as either female or male is not only essentialist, but also too simplistic, perhaps even unnecessary.

In computer-mediated communication spaces, it is not always apparent who is or is not female or male. Although there are some features that may lead to a conclusion that identifies the blogger's gender, those markers are not always accurate and do not hold true for all situations. The class blog illustrates this.

Also, the students' dynamic interaction on the blog shows that gender was not an issue for them. When responding to one another, as the previously mentioned survey answers help explain, the students sought out subject matter, not gender. They were less concerned about the form of the message and more affected by the content. For these students, gender did not appear to play a role; it was not an issue. These students' responses are important to note because they show how blogging on a class blog can be useful in overcoming gender binaries in an academic environment.

One of the main goals of the first-year composition course is to help students become more effective communicators. Communication, however, is often affected by the notions of miscommunication between the sexes. In Cheris Kramarae and H. Jeanie Taylor's "Women and Men on Electronic Networks: A Conversation or a Monologue?", they argue, "In almost any open network, men monopolize the talk. [...] Men, in general, are accustomed to talking more than women do in public conversations of various sorts" (55). Although this may be true in some situations, the ways in which women and men communicate may in fact be different in computer-mediated communication spaces.

The conventions of public conversations might inform communication practices in electronic discourse spaces; however, they do not regulate them. This study shows that, in terms of length and frequency of contribution, women took on a more active role in the conversation, not men. And the women did not use adversarial rhetoric to do so. This study shows that women are comfortable communicating on a class blog. This is important to note because it suggests that the class blog does not necessarily favor one discourse over another. It allows for students to interact and communicate with one another regardless of biological gender. The climate of the blog supported a community space for the students and invited both women and men to use different discourse styles to communicate.

This evidence is important because it resists the cultural norm that dictates the inherent conflict between women and men's communication. Some research suggests that women and men, due to their gender differences, find it difficult at times to communicate with one another. This study disrupts this notion in addition to raising questions for future research: Do both women and men communicate effectively together in this space? Although the students' responses to their surveys lack any evidence of this, was gender an issue in communicating on the blog? And if so, in what ways? Did students shape their communication in response to the situation and the genre? How did students see their audience—as females or males, or as a collective group of their peers? Did the blog allow them to execute effective communication skills—skills that they will hopefully transfer to other rhetorical situations they encounter in their academic careers?

Since more and more composition teachers are integrating or thinking about integrating technology like blogs into their pedagogies, it is imperative that we recognize the implications of incorporating these technologies into the composition class. Before integrating these technologies into the composition classroom, it is crucial to find out how these technologies affect the students and their writing practices. As Blair and Takayoshi report, “Without informational cues about age, gender, sexual orientation, class or race, the argument goes, discourse in cyberspace can be egalitarian” (11). Herring found, for her particular study, that this argument does not describe all cyberspace discourse. And although my study, in a way, contests Herring's conclusions, the results are not generalizable. However, it does raise a few important questions: Does a class blog provide a democratic space which is hospitable to multiple types of discourse? Does a class blog neutralize the informational cues cited by Blair and Takayoshi? What kinds of discussions occur in a computer-mediated democratic space and what benefits do these conversations have for the students?

My study suggests that a blog is an effective tool in a first-year composition class for creating a community of learners and writers. The technology displaces time and space constraints of classroom activities. This means that class discussions can continue after class and outside of the classroom. The blog creates a community of communicators who must rely on their communication skills—their writing skills—in order to communicate effectively with their peers. Blogging technology and the design of this class invited participation, and, in a way, decentralized the structure of the classroom. Because of the assignments, students were

discussing issues with each other and were asking questions of one another. The focus of the class blog was not responding to the teacher, but, instead, was creating a dialogue with peers. In this way, the technology of the class blog created a space where “dynamic, interactive, collaborative, and reflective” writing could take place (Krause).

If this study’s results had been different, and had instead revealed that some students were in fact being intimidated by other students as a result of adversarial rhetoric, than incorporating a class blog into a composition class would have to be reevaluated. I would need to redesign the setup and/or alter the role(s) of the blog, or eliminate it completely. Another factor to note is the amount of writing the students produced. Given the amount of writing students do on the blog, it might be worth pursuing how this kind of writing affects their writing processes. How does this writing contribute to their writing development? Does blogging in fact help students to think more critically? To read more critically? To practice analytical reasoning? To evaluate online sources? To communicate more effectively with others? To develop a deeper understanding of class material? To assert their personal opinion? Does blogging help students learn how to participate in a collaborative environment?

Some equate “new technology” with “good” and “positive,”; however, these assessments are not always accurate. As composition teachers, it is necessary that we evaluate and reevaluate our pedagogical goals to determine if the technologies that we invite into our classroom are in fact fulfilling these goals as opposed to undermining them. At the time of Herring’s study, listservs were the “new” technology. She investigated the effects that this technology had on the listserv members. As technology advances, it is important to continue investigations like Herring’s that examine how technologies affect its users. Although blogs will not always be the latest, innovative technology, the implication of incorporating new technologies into the composition classroom should be evaluated in a similarly critical way.

This investigation is by no means representative of all FYC class blogs. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the design and set up of this particular blog were crucial to the students’ interaction. Blogs can be designed, set up, and implemented in different ways, thus allowing for additional features and different results. This particular study suggests that Herring’s claim does not hold true given these specific circumstances; however, her claim could prove valid for another teacher, another class, another blog. As a result, this study raises additional questions: How does the design and set up of a class blog affect students’ discourse patterns? Do other

electronic discussion spaces invite adversarial rhetoric? What types of electronic discussion spaces encourage attenuated rhetoric, if any? When, if ever, does the Democratization Claim hold true for today's Web 2.0 technologies? The answers to these questions are not easily identifiable; however, they are important for composition teachers to consider when integrating computer-mediated communication into the composition classroom. This study raises many questions regarding the effects of CMC spaces, and, as a result, we still have much to learn about how these types of electronic discourse spaces function.

NOTES

1. I see that Tannen's claim is hypothetical and thus weak.
2. The coding was checked multiple times throughout the coding process by my committee professor.
3. I am using Anson as opposed to Perry because Anson connects Perry to writing and my interest is in the writing.
4. Without using the word genre, students are aware of genre distinctions.

APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Office of the Vice President For Research Human Subjects Committee
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2742
(850) 644-8673 · FAX (850) 644-4392

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 8/28/2009

To: Jennifer O'Malley

Dept.: ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research

An Examination of the Patterns of Gendered Communication Styles in the First-Year Composition Class Blog

The application that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Secretary, the Chair, and two members of the Human Subjects Committee. Your project is determined to be Expedited per 45 CFR § 46.110(7) and has been approved by an expedited review process.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals, which may be required.

If you submitted a proposed consent form with your application, the approved stamped consent form is attached to this approval notice. Only the stamped version of the consent form may be used in recruiting research subjects.

If the project has not been completed by 8/27/2010 you must request a renewal of approval for continuation of the project. As a courtesy, a renewal notice will be sent to you prior to your expiration date; however, it is your responsibility as the Principal Investigator to timely request renewal of your approval from the Committee.

You are advised that any change in protocol for this project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee prior to implementation of the proposed change in the protocol. A protocol change/amendment form is required to be submitted for approval by the Committee. In addition,

federal regulations require that the Principal Investigator promptly report, in writing any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the Chair of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protection. The Assurance Number is IRB00000446.

Cc: Kathleen Yancey, Advisor
HSC No. 2009.3112

APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVED CONSENT FORM

To: Students enrolled in ENC 1102, Fall 2009
From: Jennifer O'Malley, Department of English, Florida State University
Re: FSU Consent Form/Request
Date: Sept 14, 2009

The purpose of this study is to determine how blogging affects student writing in the composition classroom.

All students will need to blog as part of the course work. Students who choose to participate in this study will be asked to provide all blog posts and responses from the class blog and complete a brief questionnaire at the end of the semester. If you consent, you are agreeing to allow me to include your blog posts in the study and to take a questionnaire.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept completely private and confidential to the extent allowed by law. We will not include any information that would make it possible to identify a subject in any sort of report we might publish. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary and there is no penalty for nonparticipation. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your grade in the course. The identity of student participants will not be made known to investigator until after the end of the semester. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

When consent forms are signed, they will be placed in a sealed envelope by the proctor (student volunteer) and taken to the faculty advisor. They will then be placed in a locked location in the advisor's office and later opened after the term concludes and grades are submitted. This of course will eliminate further risks (rewarding for participation or lack of for not, since I won't know who consented until after the term). Also, this consent process will be repeated at the last class meeting (there is no final exam) so that students can withdraw from participation if they so choose.

Benefits and/or Risks:

This research will contribute to the ongoing scholarship in the field of Rhetoric and Composition pertaining to how teachers integrate technology, specifically blogging, in the First Year Composition classroom. The results of this study will indicate how blogging might affect the discourse patterns of First Year Composition students and explain how blogging is or is not helping to fulfill the goals of First Year Composition class. As a result, this research will help support student writers.

This research does not involve greater than minimal risk to human subjects.

“Minimal Risk” means that the risks of harm anticipated in the proposed research are not greater, considering probability and magnitude, than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions concerning this study, please contact:

Jennifer O’Malley
Florida State University

Dr. Kathleen Yancey, Director of Rhetoric Composition at Florida State University, faculty advisor

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the FSU IRB.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers.

I, _____, Consent to participation in the study.

_____ Signature

_____ Phone

_____ Address

_____ Email Address

APPENDIX C

CODING SAMPLE

Key:

Adversarial Style

1. Strong assertions; absolute and exceptionless adverbials
(e.g. certainly, definitely, obviously, never, by no means)
2. Imperative forms of verbs
(e.g. notice, note, observe that...)
3. Impersonal, presupposed truths
(e.g. It is obvious that...; It is clear...; It is a fact...)
4. Exclusive 1st person plural pronouns
(e.g. we, us, our, “he/she and I, but not you”)
5. Rhetorical questions
6. Sarcasm
7. Self-promotion
8. Representation of opponent’s views as ridiculous

Attenuated/personal style

1. Attenuated assertions; hedged qualifiers
(e.g. perhaps, may, might, seems, sort of, rather, somewhat, a bit)
2. Exhortations phrased as suggestions
(e.g. let’s/why don’t we...)
3. Speaker’s feelings/experiences
(I feel that...; I am intrigued by...; ...I get all worked up)
4. Inclusive 1st person plural pronouns
(e.g. we, us, our, “you and I”)
5. Questions as a means to elicit a response
6. Apologies

Sample: Blog Post #4

1. Elyse Says:

Fist of all, I’d like to know how this family decided to keep a black pot-bellied pig in their home as a pet? and if they live in the CITY, where on earth did they find a pig in the first place? Nevertheless, I’m sure if they had just gotten a dog or a cat, or even a hamster, the child could have bonded with that animal just as easily, if not more. A dog can play catch, licks your face, and doesn’t smell like, pig. I just can’t see how having a pig for a pet in the first place could have seemed like a remotely good idea. I don’t blame the city for following its ordinances and taking the pig away from the family. Surely a house in a city is not the place for a pig. Taking away the

pig could even be beneficial for the pig's sake, **ever think of that? Pigs are not meant to be domesticated and held in houses.** Moving the pig to a farm outside of the city, and allowing the boy to visit his pet pig, is **hardly** an irrational concept.

From a medical point of view, this could be a breakthrough for autism. Seeing how the child reacted after becoming bonded with his pet could be beneficial in finding other alternatives to help autistic children. He immediately stopped wetting the bed which creates a strong correlation between the pig and the boy's improvement. Although his parents tell reporters that he is still not calmed by 35 minute daily visits to the farm where the pig, Loopey, is held, this could change overtime. He could get used to the fact he will only see Loopey so often, and be forced to find relations within his family and children in his school.

Having any type of pet taken away from you just out right sucks. **I know how much like family pets can feel, but a city home is just not a place for a pig, plain and simple.** I feel sympathy for the boy for losing his closest friend because friends are understandably hard to make for a young autistic child. **Honestly, the parents should have thought of that before taking the animal into their home and allowing their child to create a strong bond with it. It is truly a sad story, but laws need to be enforced.** However, I would not be totally against an investigation into the medical benefits of the pig, and **perhaps** allowing the family to keep it as a "service animal" for their son, provided that it does not hinder the living conditions of the pig.

This is quite an unfortunate circumstance.

Reply

Kayleigh Says:

I agree with you on the fact that it is strange to have a pot-bellied pig as a pet, but they already had domestic animals that Anthony did not like. He thought their cat was boring and their dog's movement frightened him sometimes. When the family took in Loopey, Anthony formed a special bond with her that he couldn't form with the other pets. **Well it is true that they could've tried using other domestic animals** such as a hamster, like you mentioned, or a bird, but they didn't for some reason.

Reply

kpeterson13 Says:

You make several very strong arguments, **Elyse, but your ideas seem to be based heavily on a personal bias rather than a full understanding of the story.** Like Kayleigh mentioned before me, the article talks about other pets that Anthony's parents owned that Anthony did not connect with. When they visited a ranch, Anthony took an immediate liking to the pigs, and the rest is history. **It's not as if the parents went out on a limb and came home one day with Loopey,** set her and Anthony in a room, and forced them to bond. Anthony and Loopey chose each other, and Anthony's parents took it in stride and adopted Loopey. **I suppose it's as the old saying goes,** you really can't help who you love.

While we're on the subject of pigs, I'd like to point out that pigs are already considered to be domesticated animals. They may not be a common house pet, but Loopey wasn't "wild" per se. Pigs like Loopey live on farms and rely on constant human interaction to survive, just like cows, horses, chickens, et cetera. If that isn't domestication, I don't know what is. It's true that pigs may not be the most practical house pets, but Anthony's parents researched how to properly care for their pig, and even received approval from an animal control officer in the city.

All I know is, if I were a pig, I certainly wouldn't complain about being fed and washed every day and having a roof over my head every night.

Reply

Elyse Says:

I had no idea they had other pets or that they had gotten approval to house the pig. I read the ABC article and watched the video, perhaps I missed something? I rescind my comments about not trying other animals as pets for the boy, however, I stand by my claims about a house not being the place for a pig, especially if there is a law in the city against it.

I don't think the city is at fault, but agree with monitoring this law on a case to case basis. If there are medical benefits from the pig living with the boy, then by all means, let it happen. It is indeed a heart wrenching story, however, adjudication stands, devoid of sentiment.

2. kpeterson13 Says:

I feel so wishy-washy. I've been sitting here for a very long time thinking about this article, and as much as I would like to give a coherent opinion, I simply cannot pull my thoughts away from how Anthony Pia feels about all of this. Just imagine the emotional roller coaster he must be on, after losing his dearest Loopey. Obviously, having his pet pig taken away from him isn't the same as you or I having to give up a dear pet of ours. Let's face it, neither of us is an eight-year-old boy whose entire world was brightened by finding unconditional love and an uncanny friendship with an 80 pound pot bellied pig. I'd even go as far to say that Anthony probably found truer companionship with his pig than any eight year old could find with a person. Needless to say, my heart is completely torn in two knowing that that part of him was ripped away, without him fully understanding WHY.

Now for the million dollar question: is this right? My upstanding moral values say no. But, is the Fayetteville city government completely in the wrong? No, absolutely not.

So begins the debate.

The way I see it, the city council should not be forced to change the ordinance. I agree with the argument mentioned in the article that the city manager should decide on these types of

situations on a “case-by-case basis.” I believe that in THIS case, there’s plenty of evidence in support of the family being allowed to keep Loopey. On top of the obvious aid she provided for Anthony’s development, as far as we know she was properly cared for and trained, and was probably less of a nuisance than the “regular” pets roaming around their neighborhood. I keep fighting with myself, though. I realize that the city has their ordinances in place for a reason, although I’d like to know WHAT reason and what EXACTLY this ordinance says. (There must be a loophole, I just know it.) I know exactly where those five council members were coming from, too. If they bend the rule for one person, others will take advantage of it. Rules will only change if people are willing to change, and this story serves to remind us of that.

Reply

Katie C. Says:

I totally agree with you. The city is completely right for upholding their position on this issue because they are defending the law. It would be vastly different if the family had come to them first before getting Loopy and asked for an exception, but that did not happen. And Loopy IS probably less of a nuisance than the neighborhood pets, so the only thing holding the family back is the law—a bit hurdle to overcome.

Reply

Rachel Espendez Says:

I undersand why you are torn. Personally, I’m more stubborn and just take the boys side, but that’s only because I’m ignoring the other side of the coin. You’re right, they do have a point because if they break the rule for him they have to consider others who want to do the same. I like what you said about a loophole. That would definitely be something important to find out about. Anyways good job on the your post by showing both perspectives.

3. **drake15 Says:**

There’s no such the absolute rule. For every rule there is always an exception. On many occasions there’s more than one exception to a rule. But in the case of the autistic boy with the 80 pound pig Loopey, there is no reason why they should take away his friend. The city Council should definitely make an exception for this young boy just for the fact that he has special needs. They should take into consideration that this young pain makes him happy and give them something to do.

But only other hand of the equation he does live in the city. A pig is not a pet that most people would choose to have in the city. There are certain sanitary rules that are necessary for the banning of pigs the city. Pigs can carry diseases that are transmittable to humans, therefore living in close proximity with pigs could be a health hazard. Also pigs are noisy and grow to be very large in some cases. Their large size can cause a problem in cities just just because they grow to

be too big for where they live.

So **my suggestion** to the young boy and his family is to move outside of the city limits where it's perfectly legal to have Loopey the pig as a pet. Also the fresh air **might** do the kid some good.

Reply

nicolechivite Says:

I love your answer, you took such a simple approach (whereas, it **seems** to me as if **I could go back and forth with my thoughts all day**) and **I find myself agreeing with almost everything you said.** **There are exceptions to every rule, that much is true.** With this particular case, the pig could possibly be a health hazard and I like how you introduced the suggestion of moving away and I especially liked your last sentence "the fresh air **might** do the kid some good".

Reply

Rafael Gonzalez Says:

i absolutely agree with the you when you say that the family could take the initiative and move away in order to allow the child to keep his pig. I also agree that moving away from the city can help the child with his problems. **The law is to be followed.** You have given many alternate options in order for the child to keep the pig and **the family should consider them**

Reply

cwj09 Says:

Although I feel that the city should make an exception in this situation, I feel that your final statement is an excellent compromise. I think that would work, and both sides would get what they wanted.

Reply

D. Gibson Says:

haha!! interesting point... but I like how you qualified the question. And **it would be understandable to say that the special needs kid should recieve special treatment, but then other people would be asking for special exceptions to other rules they feel that they should be exempted from.** **It's just not too fair to let some people get away with stuff, despite the fact that they had a pretty severe shortcoming.** **You just have to treat them like anybody else** so that they feel that they have a place in society even with their disabilities.

APPENDIX D

STUDENT SURVEY

To: Students enrolled in ENC 1102, Fall 2009

From: Jennifer O'Malley, Department of English, Florida State University

Re: FSU Questionnaire

I am conducting a study of the participation in the ENC1102 class blog. The following is a brief (6 question) questionnaire regarding your participation in the class blog. Please take the time to fill out the questionnaire below:

1. What was your best experience writing in the blog, and why?
2. How does writing on the blog compare with writing in a journal?
3. Explain your process for composing your blog posts. For example, did you make notes ahead of time? Did you read others' posts first before you composed your own?
4. How did you determine which of your peers' posts to respond to?
5. Did any of the discussions on the blog become heated (characterized by anger or strong emotion—intense or passionate)? And if so, what was your reaction?
6. Were you ever deterred from commenting on a peer's post? If so, why?

APPENDIX E

ADDITIONAL TABLES FROM CHAPTER 3

Blog Post #4

Table A1: Percentage of features for Blog Post #4 posts.

	Rhetorical Feature	Percentage
1	Strong assertions; absolute and exceptionless adverbials	100%
2	Speaker's feelings/experiences	80%
3	Impersonal, presupposed truths	73%
4	Attenuated assertions; hedges and qualifiers	67%
5	Inclusive, 1 st person plural pronouns	33%
6	Rhetorical questions	33%
7	Self-promotion	13%
8	Sarcasm	7%
9	Imperative forms of verbs	7%
10	Representation of opponent's view as ridiculous	7%
11	Exhortations phrased as suggestions	7%
12	Questions as a mean to elicit a response	0%
13	Exclusive, 1 st person plural pronouns	0%
14	Apologies	0%

Table A2: Percentage of features for Blog Post #4 responses.

	Rhetorical Feature	Percentage
1	Strong assertions; absolute and exceptionless adverbials	93%
2	Impersonal, presupposed truths	80%
3	Speaker's feelings/experiences	53%
4	Attenuated assertions; hedges and qualifiers	53%
5	Inclusive, 1 st person plural pronouns	47%
6	Self-promotion	20%
7	Rhetorical questions	7%
8	Imperative forms of verbs	7%
9	Representation of opponent's view as ridiculous	7%
10	Questions as a mean to elicit a response	7%
11	Sarcasm	0%
12	Exhortations phrased as suggestions	0%
13	Exclusive, 1 st person plural pronouns	0%
14	Apologies	0%

Table A3: Number of instances of rhetorical features of Blog Post #4.

	Rhetorical Feature	Number of Instances (including posts and responses)
1	strong assertions; absolute and exceptionless adverbials	96
2	speaker's feelings/experiences	72
3	impersonal, presupposed truths	48
4	attenuated assertions; hedges and qualifiers	36
5	inclusive 1st person plural pronouns	29
6	rhetorical questions	15
7	questions as a means to elicit a response	5
8	representation of opponent's view as ridiculous	4
9	self promotion	3
10	imperative forms of verbs	2
11	Sarcasm	2
12	exhortations phrased as suggestions	1
13	exclusive 1st person pronouns	0
14	Apologies	0

Table A4: Breakdown of “strong assertion” feature by student for Blog Post #4.

strong assertions; absolute and exceptionless adverbials			
1	F	colleen	13
2	F	Csentara	10
T3	F	Elyse	8
T3	F	kpeterson13	8
T5	F	nicolechivite	7
T5	M	Gabriel Trujillo	7
T5	M	Brian Petro	7
T5	F	Rachel Espendez	7
9	M	drake15	6
10	F	Katie C.	5
T11	F	Katie	4
T11	F	Kayleigh	4
T11	M	cwj09	4
T14	M	Rafael Gonzalez	3
T14	M	D. Gibson	3

Table A5: Breakdown of “speaker’s feelings” feature by student for Blog Post #4.

speaker's feelings/experiences			
1	F	Csentara	13
T2	F	colleen	8
T2	F	nicolechivite	8
4	M	Gabriel Trujillo	7
T5	M	Rafael Gonzalez	5
T5	F	Rachel Espendez	5
T6	F	Elyse	4
T6	F	kpeterson13	4
T6	F	Katie C.	4
T6	M	cwj09	4
T6	M	D. Gibson	4
12	F	katie	3
13	M	Brian Petro	2
14	F	Kayleigh	1
15	M	drake15	0

Table A6: Breakdown of “presupposed truths” feature by student for Blog Post #4.

impersonal, presupposed truths			
T1	F	Elyse	8
T1	M	drake15	8
T3	M	Rafael Gonzalez	5
T3	M	D. Gibson	5
5	F	kpeterson13	4
T6	F	colleen	3
T6	F	Rachel Espendez	3
T6	F	Katie C.	3
T9	F	nicolechivite	2
T9	M	Gabriel Trujillo	2
T9	F	Csentara	2
T9	M	Brian Petro	2
13	F	Kayleigh	1
T14	F	katie	0
T14	M	cwj09	0

Table A7: Breakdown of “attenuated assertions” feature by student for Blog Post #4.

attenuated assertions; hedges and qualifiers			
1	F	Elyse	8
T2	F	katie	6
T2	F	kpeterson13	6
4	F	nicolechivite	4
T5	M	drake15	3
T5	M	Gabriel Trujillo	3
T7	F	colleen	2
T7	F	Csentara	2
T9	F	Kayleigh	1
T9	M	D. Gibson	1
T11	M	Rafael Gonzalez	0
T11	M	Brian Petro	0
T11	F	Rachel Espendez	0
T11	F	Katie C.	0
T11	M	cwj09	0

Table A8: Breakdown of “inclusive 1st person plural pronoun” feature by student for Blog Post #4.

inclusive 1st person plural pronouns			
1	F	nicolechivite	7
2	M	D. Gibson	6
T3	F	kpeterson13	5
T3	F	Rachel Espendez	5
5	M	Brian Petro	4
T6	M	Rafael Gonzalez	1
T6	M	cwj09	1
T8	F	katie	0
T8	F	Elyse	0
T8	F	colleen	0
T8	F	Kayleigh	0
T8	M	drake15	0
T8	M	Gabriel Trujillo	0
T8	F	Csentara	0
T8	F	Katie C.	0

Blog Post #7

Table A9: Percentage of features for Blog Post #7 posts.

	Rhetorical Feature	Percentage
1	Strong assertions; absolute and exceptionless adverbials	100%
2	Speaker's feelings/experiences	86%
3	Attenuated assertions; hedges and qualifiers	86%
4	Impersonal, presupposed truths	57%
5	Inclusive, 1 st person plural pronouns	43%
6	Rhetorical questions	36%
7	Imperative forms of verbs	21%
8	Sarcasm	14%
9	Self-promotion	7%
10	Apologies	7%
11	Representation of opponent's view as ridiculous	0%
12	Questions as a mean to elicit a response	0%
13	Exhortations phrased as suggestions	0%
14	Exclusive, 1 st person plural pronouns	0%

Table A10: Percentage of features for Blog Post #7 responses.

	Rhetorical Feature	Percentage
1	Strong assertions; absolute and exceptionless adverbials	86%
2	Speaker's feelings/experiences	79%
3	Attenuated assertions; hedges and qualifiers	71%
4	Impersonal, presupposed truths	57%
5	Inclusive, 1 st person plural pronouns	50%
6	Rhetorical questions	29%
7	Imperative forms of verbs	21%
8	Self-promotion	7%
9	Questions as a mean to elicit a response	7%
10	Sarcasm	0%
11	Representation of opponent's view as ridiculous	0%
12	Exhortations phrased as suggestions	0%
13	Exclusive, 1 st person plural pronouns	0%
14	Apologies	0%

Table A11: Number of instances of rhetorical features for Blog Post #7.

	Rhetorical Feature	Number of Instances (including posts and responses)
1	strong assertions; absolute and exceptionless adverbials	106
2	speaker's feelings/experiences	53
3	inclusive 1st person plural pronouns	47
4	attenuated assertions; hedges and qualifiers	33
5	impersonal, presupposed truths	31
6	rhetorical questions	18
7	questions as a means to elicit a response	16
8	imperative forms of verbs	10
9	sarcasm	4
10	self promotion	2
11	exhortations phrased as suggestions	2
12	apologies	1
13	representation of opponent's view as ridiculous	0
14	exclusive 1st person pronouns	0

Table A12: Breakdown of “strong assertions” feature by student for Blog Post #7.

strong assertions; absolute and exceptionless adverbials			
T1	F	nicolechivite	12
T1	F	Kayleigh	12
T1	F	Elyse	12
4	F	Rachel Espendez	10
T5	M	Rafael Gonzalez	8
T5	F	Katie C.	8
T5	F	kpeterson13	8
T5	M	Darrin Gibson	8
9	F	Colleen	7
10	F	Katie	6
11	F	Csentara	5
12	M	Brian Petro	4
T13	M	Gabriel Trujillo	3
T13	M	cwj09	3
15	F	jomalley (teacher)	0

Table A13: Breakdown of “speaker’s feelings” feature by student for Blog Post #7.

speaker's feelings/experiences			
1	F	Colleen	7
2	M	Gabriel Trujillo	6
T3	F	Elyse	5
T3	F	Rachel Espendez	5
T3	F	Csentara	5
T6	F	nicolechivite	4
T6	M	Brian Petro	4
T6	F	Katie C.	4
T6	F	Katie	4
T10	F	kpeterson13	2
T10	M	Darrin Gibson	2
T10	M	cwj09	2
T10	F	jomalley (teacher)	2
14	F	Kayleigh	1
15	M	Rafael Gonzalez	0

Table A14: Breakdown of “inclusive 1st person plural pronouns” feature by student for Blog Post #7.

inclusive 1st person plural pronouns			
1	F	nicolechivite	11
2	F	kpeterson13	10
3	M	Rafael Gonzalez	9
4	F	Elyse	4
T5	F	Colleen	3
T5	M	Darrin Gibson	3
T7	F	Katie	2
T7	F	jomalley (teacher)	2
T9	F	Rachel Espendez	1
T9	M	Gabriel Trujillo	1
T9	F	Csentara	1
T12	F	Kayleigh	0
T12	M	Brian Petro	0
T12	F	Katie C.	0
T12	M	cwj09	0

Table A15: Breakdown of “attenuated assertions” feature by student for Blog Post #7.

attenuated assertions; hedges and qualifiers			
1	F	Kayleigh	5
2	F	Rachel Espendez	4
T3	M	Brian Petro	3
T3	F	Katie C.	3
T3	F	Elyse	3
T3	F	colleen	3
T3	M	Gabriel Trujillo	3
T8	F	nicolechivite	2
T8	M	Rafael Gonzalez	2
T8	M	cwj09	2
T11	F	katie	1
T11	M	Darrin Gibson	1
T11	F	jomalley (teacher)	1
T14	F	kpeterson13	0
T14	F	Csentara	0

Table A16: Breakdown of “presupposed truths” feature by student for Blog Post #7.

impersonal, presupposed truths			
T1	F	nicolechivite	4
T1	M	Rafael Gonzalez	4
T1	F	Elyse	4
T4	F	Katie C.	3
T4	F	Rachel Espendez	3
T4	F	Csentara	3
T4	F	jomalley (teacher)	3
T8	F	kpeterson13	2
T8	M	Gabriel Trujillo	2
T10	M	Brian Petro	1
T10	F	katie	1
T10	M	Darrin Gibson	1
T13	F	Kayleigh	0
T13	F	colleen	0
T13	M	cwj09	0

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jennifer O'Malley was born and raised in Ormond Beach, Florida. She graduated from Jacksonville University in 2006 with a Bachelors degree in English and a minor in Writing. Under the direction of Kathleen Yancey, she earned her Master's degree in Rhetoric and Composition in 2010 at Florida State University. Currently, she is pursuing her Ph.D. at Florida State University. Jennifer's research interests converge at the intersection of gender, technology, and communication. Specifically, she is interested in how women navigate Web 2.0 technologies and how digital technology in the composition classroom affects marginalized students.