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**Between Bodies and Engagement:**
**A Recovery of Listening in the First-Year Composition**

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Abstract

Although contemporary rhetoric and composition scholarship has engaged in sustained inquiry into writing, speaking, and reading as rhetorical acts, little attention has been paid to the ways in which listening functions as a mode of rhetorical conduct. Recent developments in feminist rhetorical studies have recovered listening as a rhetorical art deserving of inquiry and attention. While this work establishes how listening engages rhetoric to foster cross-cultural dialogue, we have yet to determine how rhetorical listening mediates writing classrooms. In Between Bodies and Engagement: A Reclamation of Listening in First-Year Composition, I respond to this gap by exploring first-year composition (FYC) instructors’ perceptions of listening and its role in the FYC classroom. Using disability studies and feminist rhetorical frameworks, I map the ways in which instructors’ notions of listening engage perceptions of students’ bodies and student engagement to reveal how perceptions of listening rely upon notions of able-bodiedness and gender that may marginalize students’ ability to demonstrate listening in the writing classroom.

Drawing on grounded theory as the methodological framework, this dissertation uses a mixed methods approach to investigate instructors’ perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs in FYC. First, I used interview protocols to determine the salient features of instructors’ notions of listening, which revealed how instructors perceive of listening as a rhetorical activity while deflecting an embodied notion of listening. Then, I engaged in classroom observations with three participants to observe how listening mediated classroom activity. I followed-up these observations with instructors and students interviews and coded the data using concept coding to understand how participants were
operationalizing listening within the context of everyday classroom experiences. Finally, I collected randomly-selected FYC course syllabi to understand how notions of listening, engagement, and bodies are circulated among different FYC stakeholders within the institutional setting. Using concept and value coding, this analysis demonstrates that the attitudes identified in interviews and classroom observations circulate within the broader context of the research site, which suggests that the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions are part of instructors’ interpolation into institutional sites of practice.

Given the results of the study, I argue for expanding how listening and engagement are assessed within the FYC classroom. Not only will reframing how we think about listening be essential for a more inclusive FYC experience for students, but it will also reflect the ongoing development of listening as a rhetorical art. I argue that an embodied model of listening that accounts for the ways in which listening is a function of an individual’s intersecting identities will create more inclusive learning experiences in first-year composition.
Acknowledgements

During the 2012 presidential campaign, former President Barak Obama and Mitt Romney debated the nature of entrepreneurialism in the United States. While Romney portrayed himself as a champion of the entrepreneurial spirit, Obama’s response to Romney’s rhetoric went viral. His refrain, ‘you didn’t build that’ was alternately praised, critiqued, and mocked. Seven years later, I have found myself contemplating what I’ve built, and as I finish this work, I feel great resonance with President Obama’s expression.

I wrote this work, but it is not mine. My name appears on the cover, but that page is made possible by so many.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Embodying Listening: A Recovery of Listening as a Rhetorical Act

“I think I would define listening as taking the time to actually hear what someone is saying and how they’re saying it—not just listening to respond but to understand their point of view.”
—Britney (Personal Interview, 26 Oct 2017)

“When I think of listening, I think of active listening. It’s not just sitting there looking like you’re paying attention, but actively taking notes, actively asking questions for clarification even, being involved in the process.”
—Garrett (Personal Interview, 23 Oct 2017)

“[Listening is] an active process in which the recipient, and by recipient, I mean the person who’s not speaking, gives their attention to the speaker, so I would say it has a social and a cognitive element.”
—Eli (Personal Interview, 20 Oct 2017)

Introduction: Listening in Three Vignettes

Vignette One

I spent the bulk of my twenties working as a paralegal for a very successful corporate attorney, John1. When he met with clients for the first time, John preferred to do so in his office, rather than our conference room. While the books and files that littered the credenza, empty chairs, and even his big mahogany desk suggested chaos to me, this was always his preference. His door was plated glass and, as those meetings waxed on, I could catch glimpses of him listening to clients as I walked by. When he was listening to a client, he would typically lean back in his overstuffed leather chair in careful repose. Intermittently, he would lean forward and scribble notes in heavy blue ink

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1 All personal names and locations in these vignettes are pseudonyms.
on his yellow legal pad. Occasionally, if a client revealed something troubling, he would bring the fingertips of each hand together, the pad of the left thumb lightly pressing against the right, the pointer against pointer, on and on in front of his mouth, perhaps in an unconscious effort to hide his concern or worry.

John kept the same clients for decades, partly because of his careful listening and attention to detail that came out in meetings like these. But what none of our clients ever knew was that when those yellow pages were ripped out of the pad and delivered to his assistants, there were very few words written on the pages. The ‘notes’ that he deliberately took during his meetings were mostly geometric shapes; triangles, three-dimensional boxes, and swirls took up almost all of the margins and squeezed in between lines of text. His notes looked more like a scrap from an artist’s sketchbook. Sometimes an important name would be written, and then written again in highly stylized layman calligraphy, the lines run over in his heavy ink multiple times. The lettering could have been copied from illuminated script in the *Books of Kells*, gaudy and ostentatious. If you were to just look at his notes, it would appear as though John listened very poorly during his meetings with clients, but his clients (and the outcomes of his cases) tell a very different story. His listening, I found over time, had many different performances.

Vignette Two

The first composition course I taught was in the spring of 2010. I taught in Madison Hall, a building that was designed by an architect who made his name designing prisons. Madison was the epitome of his design: classrooms were on the left side of the hallway and on the right were large open windows. Each individual classroom was built for utility—they were rectangles painted eggshell white with chalkboards and
(sometimes) a little air conditioning. Because the building was designed to be used as 
shared classrooms for multiple disciplines, the walls were bare aside from a plaque that 
announced the room’s maximum capacity and a faded piece of paper that warned 
occupants that food and drink were prohibited. One day early on, I realized that one of 
my students was staring out our window. Following his gaze, I realized that spring had 
arrived, and the student was carefully studying a tree blooming outside, bright and 
cheerful with delicate purple blooms. Another student was also taking mental stock, but 
her object of study was a series of sallow yellow spots that appeared on the ceiling, ugly 
reminders that the building was in decay. As I talked on, I realized that many more 
students were likewise engaged—a girl twirled her hair around her fingers, a boy picked 
at his nails. At the time, I considered the possibility that I was failing in the class because 
my students weren’t paying attention to me.

Vignette Three

RSA held its 2016 conference in Atlanta, Georgia. The hot, humid air hung in my 
lungs and on my clothes. I arrived at the last session of the last day anxious to get going, 
knowing I would have to navigate public transit back to the airport, where, no doubt, the 
air would become even more stifled and sticky. Despite these distractions, I had no 
intention of skipping my first chance to attend a panel on disability studies (DS), 
especially one being led by Melanie Yergeau, Stephanie Kerschbaum, and Jay Dolmage. 
As Dolmage opened the session with an accessibility statement, he invited everyone to 
inhabit the space in whatever way best served them—to stand, stretch, knit, or do 
whatever they needed to be comfortable in the space. One of the presenters was already 
sitting at the front of the room with her feet up on a second folding chair in front of her.
As the session wore on, a woman to my right began to knit, and I could hear her needles click every time they met to push the yarn. Someone behind me shuffled past others toward the wall, where he did a simple forward fold, a gentle yoga-based stretch. A blind attendee to my left began taking notes on his portable Braille notetaker, which made punching sounds as it embossed the paper. And in the midst of this scene of inclusivity and diversity, I became aware of the fact that I was no longer listening, and, in that moment, I was suddenly filled with shame as I realized that I was distracted by all these other listeners.

Listening is a slippery business. This may be because listening is an internal process, something that happens inside a person and yet, when speakers are met with their audiences, we anticipate that listeners will give some kind of outward appearance of listening. It is through these performances of listening that interlocutors proceed in conversation. In the classroom, like my experience described in vignette two, instructors often anticipate that students will make eye contact or nod their heads from time-to-time as indications that they are listening and following the discussion, yet, in reality, we cannot know for certain that students who appear not to be listening are in fact not listening. In other words, while listening is often indicated by bodily performances, we cannot claim the converse to be true: bodily performances (as signifiers) do not perfectly equate the signified inward attitude of listening. Listening, it seems, is simultaneously both everywhere and nowhere, present and absent, at every moment in every day.

It is because listening is operationalized as a bodily performance that it becomes a more complicated question of study. Culturally, listening has been naturalized in such a way that the performance of listening appears to be common sense. Given the definitions
in the epigraph to this chapter, however, listening is anything but common sense. When we think—and talk—about listening, we could mean any number of things. Depending on our subject position and our multitude of identities, we may define the practice of listening in a variety of ways. Britney frames listening as a kind of social contract in which individuals engage in sharing perspectives in order to understand one another. Eli, on the other hand, identifies the need for considering the cognitive elements of listening and the affordances and constraints that influence the social component of listening. In contrast, Garrett constructs an image of listening founded upon bodily performances that enable the kind of social interaction suggested by Britney and Eli.

The bodily performance of listening—how we listen—is dependent upon our identities in diverse discourse communities and the values and beliefs they hold about who participates in conversations and how conversations should take place (Lareau; Tannen). Additionally, how we listen is also dependent upon the unique contexts in which any given conversation takes place: we may listen to our friend discuss a problem they are having at their work differently than we would listen to an HR director or one of our subordinates in the workplace talk about a similar issue.

Listening is central to all areas of life, including academia. While myths of the creative genius working alone in her garret still hold some cultural weight, the nature of higher education is founded in social spaces in which scholars work alongside others. Researchers attend and present at conferences; teachers work with students and mentor new instructors; and faculty members participate in service and committee work in which they collaborate with colleagues from across the disciplines. The social nature of higher education has cast an increasingly bright light on the need for collaboration and
interdisciplinarity, yet little attention has turned to the role that listening plays within academic life.

This project argues that listening should be more carefully theorized and studied, especially within classroom contexts. Because listening is both nowhere and everywhere, this dissertation demonstrates that this contradiction results in many first-year composition (FYC) instructors relying on student bodies as a heuristic for understanding to what extent their students are listening during class. Using disability studies, this dissertation reveals the complications for understanding listening through bodily performances; namely, that students with non-normative bodies\(^2\) risk being ‘read’ as not listening in class. Unless we, as composition instructors, understand how college students listen, we will struggle to enact classroom practices that effectively link learning, bodies, and listening. Sharifa Daniels, Rebecca Babcock, and Doria Daniels note that, “despite such inclusionary intentions, the reality is that some students are often acted on differently, depending on markers that include race, ethnicity, gender and disability” (Daniels et al). While Daniels et al. specifically explore the writing center as a site for developing inclusive pedagogies, this dissertation extends their critique to the classroom by asking how students with disabilities or other non-normative bodies are acted upon differently. One way to attend to the role of bodies in the classroom is by exploring how listening is operationalized within the classroom context, paying specific attention to how instructors’ assumptions, beliefs, and attitudes regulate bodies and listening. My dissertation takes on that exploration by offering thick descriptions of my FYC classroom.

\(^2\) I am using the term ‘non-normative bodies’ as a broad category to encompass bodies that violate normative standards. See “A Word Regarding Terminology” later in this chapter for additional information and definitions.
observations and of FYC instructors’ understanding of listening within the classrooms I observed.

My dissertation research led to several key findings. Firstly, I found that instructors rely upon a consistent set of bodily performances to ascertain when their FYC students are listening. These prescriptive principles include making regular eye contact with the instructor or other students when speaking, nodding the head at key moments during discussions, and taking notes. However, these performances, are entangled in dominant conceptualizations of student ability. The recognition of these performances, then, lies upon a shared logic of ableism, which Tobin Siebers (2011) defines as follows:

The ideology of ability is at its simplest the preference for able-bodiedness. At its most radical, it defines the baseline by which humanness is determined, setting the measure of body and mind that gives or denies human status to individual persons. (8)

While these performances are entwined in the logic of able-bodiedness, that is not to say that instructors actively seek to marginalize students along lines of identity (such as disability). Indeed, the fact that these attitudes and preferences go unnoticed in the classroom considering composition’s work regarding democratic learning spaces demonstrates how deeply-ingrained the logic of ableism is in many areas of academia. Jay Dolmage has observed that ableism in the context of higher education “faces specific forces of disguise and submersion,” in part because higher education has, historically, been a place for the select elite to study—a place for the able-bodied and able-minded (Academic Ableism 35; see also Price, 2011). And, while this may have been true in the past, in an era when open access universities are increasingly available and first-year composition continues to be required of nearly all students admitted to universities in the
United States, the time has come for rhetoric and composition to investigate questions of inclusivity and marginalization in first-year writing courses.

I extend Sieber’s definition of ableism to the context of the FYC classroom and define it as having the power to regulate the baseline by which ‘student-ness’ is determined, setting the measure of the body and the mind that gives or denies ‘good student’ status to individual persons. In terms of listening, my research demonstrates that students who choose not to perform—or are for many reasons unable to perform—prescriptive bodily habits of listening are often deemed lazy or are labeled ‘bad’ students. As a result, FYC students who do not perform listening through the normative description above are likely to receive lowered overall grades because of how FYC instructors assign course points to ‘participation’ during class.

In this introduction, I offer a brief history of listening research conducted in composition studies. I then explain how my research questions stem from and contribute to listening and composition studies. Finally, I conclude with a preview of the dissertation chapters.

Listening Research and Pedagogy in Rhetoric and Composition Studies

Intersections of listening theories and rhetoric and composition studies are a relatively recent development; the first work that explicitly articulated these connections is Krista Ratcliffe’s 1999 CCC article “Rhetorical Listening: A Trope for Interpretive Invention and a ‘Code for Cross-Cultural Conduct.’” Ratcliffe claims that “reading,

3 While Ratcliffe does not define ‘culture’ in her 1999 CCC article or later in her book, she explains that listening, when situated as “a code for cross-cultural conduct…signifies respect” and asks listeners “to acknowledge, to cultivate, and to negotiate conventions of different discourse communities” (210). Her
writing, speaking, and listening were cornerstones of Western rhetorical studies for more than 2,000 years” (195, emphasis is original). When rhetorical theory was recovered in the twentieth century, Ratcliffe argues, reading and writing were restored to positions of prominence, while speaking was marginalized to “a respectable third [place]” and “listening runs a poor, poor fourth” (“Rhetorical Listening” 195). This has only been further perpetuated in the twentieth century by the division in higher education between writing instruction and communication (speaking). Since listening is most often associated with speech, it has remained largely unexplored in composition studies during the twentieth century (“Rhetorical Listening” 195-196). Despite this larger absence, rhetoric and composition studies have started to turn some attention to listening in three main areas of research.

**Multimodal Composition**

The insurgence of interest in rhetoric and composition toward multimodal composing has been one way that contemporary scholars have attempted to breach the historic divide between writing and speaking. Scholars like Cynthia L. Selfe have argued that turning toward visual, digital, and aural composing is not only in better step with students’ composing practices outside the classroom, but that teaching these composing practices in composition creates myriad “valuable semiotic resources for meaning making” (617). Steph Ceraso argues that, despite composition’s turn toward multimodal composing and a growing interest in ‘sound studies,’ listening has been largely

Explanation of cross-cultural conduct invokes Mary Louise Pratt’s “Art of the Contact Zones,” which articulates the social spaces where cultures “meet, clash, and grapple with one another, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (34). Such social spaces can extend, as Pratt notes, to the classroom spaces of the university (37).
understudied and undertheorized. Ceraso argues that listening is a multimodal experience, for we do not only experience listening within the ear: “it is also possible to feel sound in one’s stomach, throat, legs, and other areas of the body” (102). For Ceraso, composition studies’ turn toward multimodal composing is incomplete without attending to sound to help students become more “savvy consumers of sound,” which, in turn, will help them become more sensitive producers of sound-based texts (103, emphasis is original).

Building on Ceraso’s work, Christina M. LaVecchia has argued that framing listening to audio material as a form of rhetorical reading is not sufficient motivation for students to “critically and productively engage with audio media” (LaVecchia). Her experiences teaching an elective digital composing course at her university led her to believe that, for students to listen rhetorically, they must first understand “the very nature of the medium as well as what listening might require of them in terms of bodily activity” (LaVecchia). In practice, this has led LaVecchia to what she calls “a materially sensitive, embodied practice” of listening, which requires students to engage in observation and reflection about their listening practices—what their listening environment is like, how they felt while listening, and what the various elements of the audio clips they listened to imparted (such as tone of voice, ambient sounds, etc.). LaVecchia’s attention to listening in the context of digital media and composing, however, has application for this dissertation’s focus on classroom interactions. Specifically, LaVecchia argues that “students need to understand the ways that listening involves the body and examine the role attention plays in these processes” (LaVecchia). In this project, I extend her call by arguing that instructors need these same understandings and examinations. More to the point, I argue that if instructors can learn to attend for the role the body plays in
negotiating classroom discussion and how we make sense of students’ ‘attention,’ we (FYC instructors) will be better prepared to attend to bodily difference in the classroom.

**Feminist Rhetorical Inquiry**

Composition and rhetoric has also begun exploring listening as part of feminist rhetorical inquiry. Much of this feminist work has focused on the reclamation of lost female voices over the centuries (Glenn *Rhetoric Retold*; Jarratt; Sutherland and Sutcliffe). This work is rooted in the tenet that female voices have been silenced through the process of creating rhetorical and literary canons. This early work to reclaim female voices has, however, transformed over time to explorations of silence and listening as productive rhetorical arts. Alongside Ratcliffe’s work on rhetorical listening, Cheryl Glenn’s work has focused on how silence can be a powerful rhetorical stance for rhetors (*Unspoken*, 2004). This body of work draws on linguistic research that demonstrates how listening and silence have historically been gendered feminine and thus marginalized within the rhetorical tradition (Glenn and Ratcliffe 3-5). This move has invited sustained inquiry into listening as a complex rhetorical practice that is implicated by gender and other systems of power. As Pat Belanoff (2001) has shrewdly observed, silence can take two distinct forms in social situations: a noun or a transitive verb. When it functions as a noun, silence can be a positive position. It signals a conscious choice to engage the processes of listening, contemplation, or reflection. As a transitive verb, however, silencing takes the form of oppression and violence (400). Mitsuye Yamada reaffirms this position and argues that “one of the most insidious ways of keeping women and minorities powerless is to . . . let them speak freely and not listen to them with serious intent” (qtd in Stenberg 250). The work of feminist rhetorical scholars has invited
continued work to trouble easy assumptions regarding listening as a social and rhetorical practice.

These threads in feminist rhetorical inquiry have been built upon cross-disciplinary research. Specifically, Ratcliffe draws from philosophy scholar Gemma Corradi Fiumara’s *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening*. Fiumara reads Heidegger’s reclamation of *legein*, the ancient Greek verb form of *logos*, which slowly fell out of usage sometime after Heraclitus (2, 14). We thus receive from Aristotle a form of *logos* that can be defined in many ways, including “word, speech, computation, reckoning, account,” as well as “hypothesis,” “reason,” “formula,” “thinking,” and “report” (Moss 182). However, none of these renderings of *logos* capture the value of listening. For Heidegger, the loss of *legein* resulted in a “coercive *logos*” devoid of its original commitment to “letting-lie-together-before” (Heidegger qtd in Fiumara 6). Ratcliffe incorporates Heidegger’s *legein* into her notion of rhetorical listening as a stance of openness, one in which competing ideas and opinions are not brought to the mind in order to compete, one the victor and the other the loser; rather, it is a moment in which these ideas are allowed to lay before the mind (or the body, or both) simultaneously and without preference in order to observe, rather than judge, what is there.

Ratcliffe’s reclamation of Fiumara and Heidegger for rhetorical inquiry reinforces feminist rhetorical inquiry’s commitment to openness. As Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch explain, one of the “tectonic shifts” in rhetorical inquiry brought about through feminist rhetorical inquiry is a “re-forming of [the rhetorical landscape] to create a much more open and expanded view of rhetorical performance, accomplishment, and
rhetorical possibilities” (29). Ratcliffe recovers listening as a rhetorical practice to foster more effective “cross-cultural dialogues,” a process she claims is troubled by prevalent tropes of gender and whiteness in the United States (“Rhetorical Listening” 195). These tropes of gender and whiteness complicate cross-cultural dialogue by erasing differences among women. When differences are elided, it makes it difficult to identify and express how different groups experience the same spaces differently: how white feminists, for example, have access to different opportunities for activism than, say, feminists of color. The erasure of difference is one of the byproducts of whiteness as a trope in contemporary public discourse in the US, a danger which “negate[s] the possibility for cross-cultural dialogue not just about gender and race but about any subject” (Rhetorical Listening 2-3).

In this dissertation, I take up Ratcliffe’s work by beginning with the premise that listening is a central rhetorical art. However, in order to understand the extent to which FYC instructors see and utilize listening as rhetorical, this project analyzes how conceptualizations of listening are laden with invisible assumptions of gender and disability, rather than gender and whiteness. This project extends the work that Ratcliffe herself saw possible: she notes in her 1999 CCC article that gender and whiteness are only two of the many cultural categories to which rhetorical listening may provide a code.

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Another thread in feminist rhetorical inquiry suggested by Ratcliffe’s definition that provides context for this dissertation is the ongoing study of the relationship between bodies and composing and bodies and rhetoric. The rise in material perspectives on writing and rhetoric has been due, in part, to feminist rhetoricians’ attention to how the body is implicated in composing. From Elizabeth Flynn’s “Composing as a Woman,” to Kristie Fleckenstein’s Writing Bodies: Somatic Mind in Composition Studies,” feminist theories have helped us to understand the role of bodies in composing and in rhetoric. Such work illuminates the complex relationship to how use language and symbols to move in the world and the available means of language and symbols available to us because of perceptions of our bodies.
of conduct. As she argues, rhetorical listening “may be employed to hear discursive intersections of any cultural categories (age and class, nationality and history, religion and politics) and any cultural positions (child and parent, patient and doctor, clergy and parishioner, teacher and student)” (“Rhetorical Listening” 196). What is suggested in this extended description of cultural categories is that ‘cross-cultural conduct’ is about the dual effort to (a) make ourselves intelligible to those who do not share our subject positions or our relationships to the institutions of power that mediate our everyday lives and (b) learning to listen to those whose subject positions are different than our own in ways that honor their unique experiences and relationships to institutions of power. In order to listen for additional intersections and insights into listening, this project specifically takes up gender and disability.5

**Crippling Composition**

A third intersection falls at the overlapping interests of disability studies and rhetoric and composition. Brenda Jo Brueggemann’s *Lend Me Your Ear: Rhetorical Constructions of Deafness* (published in 1999, the same year as Krista Ratcliffe’s *CCC* article) explores how deafness is operationalized, while also considering how Western rhetorical traditions have failed to fully consider deafness as part of Quintilian’s *vir bonus dicendi peritus* (good man speaking well). Brueggemann thus considers “deafness as rhetoric” and explores “the way we might reconceive rhetoric by listening to deafness” (16, emphasis is original). The education of deaf students has historically overemphasized teaching them to speak orally by “spending inordinate amounts of time

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5 I discuss the implications of my deflection of Ratcliffe’s attention to whiteness and my selection of disability in Chapter 6.
teaching them how to speechread, make sounds, impersonate spoken language
(something that not too many of them ever get very skilled at),” while investing less time
in teaching them “manually, using a language that is, if not simply more natural, certainly
considerably easier for them” (Brueggemann 121, emphasis is original). This,
Brueggemann claims, demonstrates how literacy has been caught up in orality and
underpinned by the basic proposition that “speech is language and language is human”
(121-122, emphasis is original).

Additional disability studies and rhetoric and composition scholarship has pushed
for a radically kairotic understanding of bodies. As Margaret Price has described in Mad
at School: Mental Disability and Academic Life, much of the university experience for
teachers and students is composed of ‘kairotic spaces,’ defined as moments that are “the
less formal, often unnoticed, areas of academe where knowledge is produced and power
is exchanged” (60). For students, these kairotic spaces are built in the spontaneous
“infrastructure” of classroom life: “not only its tables and chairs, its technologies, and its
participants, but also the beliefs, discourses, attitudes, and interchanges that take place
there” (Price, Mad at School 61). The normative performances of listening can be
understood as part of this infrastructure. When bodies cannot (or choose not) to perform
normative listening behaviors, they risk losing critical opportunities to be recognized as
community members who are in the process of building knowledge or as subjects who
are acquiring power. What students are met with, instead, are predetermined expectations
of what listening performances should be enacted by students in any given classroom
moment.
Like Price, scholars such as Jay Dolmage have examined the infrastructures of academic and classroom life to understand how students with disabilities have been marginalized. These infrastructures are the foundations for all spaces, kairotic and otherwise. Given the configurations of these spaces, such as social expectations and the physical and architectural components of space (to name only a few), Dolmage has argued that we continue to retrofit physical and discursive educational spaces, which continues to marginalize students with disabilities (“Mapping Composition”15). Like many disability studies scholars, Dolmage argues that we must move past retrofitting and toward creating academic spaces through approaches like universal design that are inclusive of all bodies.

The works in this growing body of scholarship demonstrate that, when those in higher education design classrooms, buildings, and even pedagogies, such invention typically relies on stereotypes of able-bodied and able-minded students. Using Price’s & Dolmage’s notions of kairotic spaces and retrofitting, this dissertation adds to this expanding body of scholarship by looking at the social and discursive spaces in the classroom to analyze how listening and bodies are mutually overlooked in ways that complicate our ability to reclaim listening as a vital form of rhetorical education and how such recovery can enable a more inclusive space for FYC students. Specifically, this work investigates how classroom discussions and notions of engagement function as kairotic spaces and how compositionists have attempted to retrofit, fit, and misfit discussion for various bodies (see Chapter 4).
Listening Defined

The short history I have traced in the preceding section demonstrates one of the central issues of this dissertation: understanding the various ways in which listening can be defined and, specifically, what instructors understand it to be. For example, the scholarship detailed in the preceding section alternately uses a variety of definitions and descriptions, such as the following:

1. a rhetorical art, a stance of openness, and code for cross-cultural conduct (Ratcliffe 196);
2. a multimodal, full-bodied act (Ceraso 103);
3. a conscious choice to engage in processes including contemplation or reflection (Belanoff);
4. when listening is ‘hearing,’ it can be an identity and literacy marker (Brueggemann 56);

While all these definitions provide for innovative perspectives of what listening is beyond the biological function of receiving aural symbols, ultimately, this sampling demonstrates how the body continues to be elided as a critical mediator of listening. As my experiences at RSA described in the third vignette to this introduction demonstrate, listening and its attending habits of mind (such as engagement, curiosity, and openness) are always already located in the nexus between bodies and minds and are mediated by the social constructs that give rise to listening as a communicative act.

This dissertation intervenes in the ongoing listening scholarship by articulating some of the ways in which bodyminds are central to understanding listening. To do so, this project proposes an embodied theory of listening that:
1. reveals the integral role of the body as a central mediator of classroom life—how students’ bodies fit or misfit with typical FYC practices, how instructors grapple with values and expectations around engagement in the classroom, and how they work and rework classroom practices considering those values and the student bodies before them.

2. exposes how notions of listening are not neutral. They are designed to fit certain kinds of student bodies and, in so doing, disenfranchise students whose bodyminds do not conform to normative expectations.

3. makes apparent how bodily difference impacts how students choose to engage in class and how listening can be a dynamic configuration within students’ broader practice of engagement.

4. emphasizes listening as a rhetorical act that can demonstrate students’ engagement in ways that may better fit a range of learners.

**Study Overview**

The research I conducted for this project is designed to build upon past research and contribute to current listening and embodiment conversations. As a result, I designed a study that would examine how instructors define listening and how they situate it within FYC courses. To understand how teachers operationalize listening in FYC classrooms, I explored how listening functions as an embodied rhetorical practice within the classroom. Specifically, my research questions are as follow:
1. What does ‘listening’ mean to FYC instructors? How do they conceptualize listening in the classroom? What role does the body play in these notions of listening?

2. How do FYC instructors operationalize listening in the classroom?

3. What role do various textual genres of FYC reify or qualify in FYC instructors’ attitudes toward listening and bodies in the classroom?

4. What insight can disability studies and feminist rhetorics provide in terms of the range of listening performances available in the classroom?

This dissertation makes several contributions to teaching, learning, and administration. First, my research contributes to composition and rhetoric’s ongoing interest in developing more inclusive pedagogies, which has become a growing area of research and pedagogy (Brewer et al.; Dunn; Vidali “Discourses of Disability”). My dissertation uses qualitative research to analyze how one area of embodiment has been under-researched and theorized: listening. By mapping how instructors situate listening in FYC classes, I produce the research needed to continue working toward accessible and inclusive FYC pedagogy and infrastructure.

Second, my dissertation’s goal of recovering listening within contemporary composition studies expands my research to conversations related to feminist rhetorical inquiry. For example, much recovery of female rhetors has surrounded women in positions of speaking or writing (Lewis Gaillet; Palmer-Mehta). Less attention, however, has been paid to other forms of rhetoric, such as listening. The research produced in this dissertation helps to continue filling that void by demonstrating a full range of embodied rhetorics available for female rhetors. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 2, specific
attention to listening has implications for feminist rhetorical methodology. My attention to listening as both an object of research and as a research method helps to articulate the critical role listening plays in qualitative research.

Third, writing program administrators have always had to attend to challenges from state and college administration about the efficacy of first-year writing programs. As a result, the Council of Writing Program Administrators and several scholars (Johnson; Newcomb; Sullivan “Essential Habits”; Sullivan A new Writing Classroom) have been working on articulating a Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing. This framework enumerates the ‘habits of mind’ considered critical for success in postsecondary education (Framework 1). The findings of this dissertation suggest that FYC instructors inscribe perceptions of students’ listening with some of these habits of mind, including curiosity, openness, and engagement. Unpacking listening as a site for assessing students on these habits of mind can be one way of invigorating conversation about the framework and habits of mind as areas of ongoing study and discussion among writing program administrators.

A Few Words Regarding Terminology: Definitions and Descriptions of Key Terms

This project makes repeated use of several key concepts imported from disability studies. To orient readers to this theoretical lens, below I discuss how I use this terminology.

1. Ability & Disability

Following contemporary disability scholarship, this work rejects the medical model of disability that locates disability as a defect fixed in the bodymind of the
individual (Siebers 3). This model has historically emphasized bodily difference as a negative, something to be fixed, corrected, cured, and eradicated and, in the absence of such possibilities, to be pitied, scorned, or hidden. Instead, this project operates from a social perspective of disability, one that recognizes that bodily difference is a valuable contribution to any and all societies and that disability only becomes a “problem” when the built structures we live and work in are not designed to be used by a range of individuals. Disability scholars have used the example of Martha’s Vineyard to demonstrate how disability can be located in social and physical infrastructures, rather than in the body. Nora Ellen Groce’s *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language: Hereditary Deafness on Martha’s Vineyard* reveals that, for more than two hundred and fifty years, Martha’s Vineyard had an unusually high rate of hereditary deafness. During the 1800’s, for example, Groce notes that the one American in every 5,728 was born with hereditary deafness, yet during the same time, residents of Martha’s Vineyard experienced the same hereditary condition at a rate of one in every 155 individuals (3). In Martha’s Vineyard, however, being born with this hereditary condition was not a “problem,” and deaf individuals were completely integrated into society. One factor that led to this integration was that everyone spoke sign language, effectively removing communication barriers between deaf and hearing community members. Groce’s research concludes that “handicaps” are born not out of bodily difference, but rather by the communities in which these differences appear (4). Drawing from the social model, this project honors disability and bodily difference as part of an individual’s complex identity formation. Moving away from a medical model of disability that makes disability pitiable means that we can reclaim disability as a positive form of diversity that offers unique perspectives.
If disability is no longer a fixed identity marker, then neither is ability. As such, ability has been redefined as a temporary condition. For example, a person born without a diagnosed disability may be badly injured in a car accident, rendering that person either permanently or temporarily unable to walk. Because of this, the lines between abled and disabled is a permeable, fluid space (Garland Thomson *Extraordinary Bodies* 14). Most importantly for this project, able-bodied and able-mindedness are, as suggested by Siebers earlier in this chapter, the baseline by which our very humanness is measured. Rosemarie Garland Thomson theorizes able-bodiedness through the figure of the normate, whose unmarked body bestows cultural capital upon the individual and renders individuals with marked bodies as cultural Others. Despite how able-bodiedness seems to be the norm, Garland Thomson warns that, despite its seeming ubiquity, the “normative subject position” is one that people try to fit into “in the same way that Cinderella’s stepsisters attempted to squeeze their feet into her glass slipper” (*Extraordinary Bodies* 8). Simply put, we are all more non-normative than perhaps we would like to admit, and our collective impulse to ‘pass’ as normative, able-bodied individuals only pushes those with visible disabilities further away from establishing disability as a legitimate identity position (also see Davis).

This project disavows itself from terms such as “handicapped,” or “handicap,” except when those terms are used in direct quotations. This decision follows in the tradition of the social model of disability, and instead refers to, at times, impairments as separate from disabilities (Bourke & Waite). Thus, while individuals may have an impairment (physical, sensory, intellectual, emotional, or otherwise) located in the bodymind, the disability is located in the social environment that fails to support such
individuals. Carol Thomas has explained that, while some second wave disability scholars and activists avoid references to impairments because of its medicalized origins, she argues that the term can be useful when it accounts for the biosocial and social constructions. In so doing, she defines impairments by their effects:

The direct and unavoidable impacts that ‘impairments’ (physical, sensory, intellectual, emotional), have on individuals’ embodied functioning in the social world. Impairments and impairment effects are always bio-social and culturally constructed in character, and may occur at any stage in the life course. (14)

2. Bodies & Bodyminds

While this project mostly focuses on how listening is construed between and among students and instructors in physical ways, that does not mean that the theories developed in this project only relate to the physical body. While, at times, I use the term ‘body,’ this also includes a broader concept developed by disability studies scholars called ‘bodyminds.’ The concept of bodyminds is based on the premise that, while the mind and the body are often thought of as separate entities, their processes “not only affect each other but also give rise to each other” in such a way that it makes more sense to conceptualize of them as a compound, but singular, unit (Price “The Bodymind Problem” 269). Therefore, even as this project explores embodied practices of listening, it takes as a given the complex interplay between: the minds and bodily performances, practices, habits, and dispositions of the subject. When referring to bodies, this project generally uses the term bodymind, although some related terminology (such as embodiment, embodied, and bodily) remains unchanged and should be understood as incorporating the more inclusive bodymind.
3. **Non-normative bodies:**

   If, as discussed in “Ability and Disability,” the figure of a normate is a cultural myth, then all bodies can be situated somewhere along a continuum of normativity, with “normative” on one side and “non-normative” on the other. I draw from Rosemarie Garland Thomson to define ‘normative bodies’ as bodies that adhere to the expectations we have for “certain kinds of bodies and behaviors” and ‘non-normative bodies’ as those bodies that “look or act in ways that contradict our expectations” (*Staring* 6). Returning to the previous discussion of ability and disability, non-normative bodies are bodies that have been rendered illegitimate because of social expectations or preferences.

   To demonstrate how this manifests today, we can look to a 2017 protest at Virginia Tech over the construction of a new set of stairs on campus. The newly-constructed staircase was built with walls on either side and without an accompanying ramp. While walkers can use the stairs and cover the distance from the bottom of the staircase to the top in thirteen seconds, protestors demonstrated that using the closest ADA route to go from the same starting point to the same ending point would take users three and a half minutes (O’Meara). In this situation, individuals who use wheelchairs, crutches, and any number of mobility devices are constructed as non-normative bodies, given the University’s implied belief that most individuals on campus can climb the stairs without difficulty. As one of the sit-in participants observed, “If you're going this route day after day, it starts to wear on you, because you constantly have to put in that extra time and that extra effort because when they designed the space, they weren't designing to include you” (O’Meara).
Preview of Chapters

In Chapter 1, I construct a history of listening in composition. In doing so, I show how the contemporary imperative in rhetoric and composition to recover listening as a rhetorical art stems from its absence in most scholarly conversations about first-year composition from composition’s inception as a field of study. I also demonstrate that current discussions about listening in rhetoric and composition are born out of interdisciplinary projects: feminist studies and disability studies. These intellectual couplings create opportunities for centering student bodies within FYC research and scholarship and illuminate the ways in which listening is encoded with ableist and gendered assumptions about bodies.

In Chapter 2, I establish a feminist and embodied methodological frame for studying listening in FYC. I designed this study with two central goals: 1) accounting for embodied aspects of listening through interview and direct observation of FYC classrooms and 2) conducting research that is guided by a polylogical and polyvocal approach, which is intended to allow difference and dissonance to emerge alongside participants’ lived experiences. To meet these two goals, I approached my research with specific attention to listening on my part as the researcher and on my participants’ part to interrupt the “taken-for-grantedness” of listening as both an object of study and as a method.

In Chapter 3, I report on interviews conducted with seven FYC instructors of various ranks and academic backgrounds to understand how they make sense of listening’s role in the first-year writing classroom. Using Burke’s notion of terministic screens as reflections of our realities that select elements of that reality while also
deflecting other aspects, this analysis demonstrates that, while the participants in this study select for conceptualizations of listening as a rhetorical activity dependent upon discourse communities, identities, and other factors, they simultaneously deflect an embodied perspective of listening that would enable recognizing student engagement across bodily difference. This chapter utilizes disability studies and feminist rhetorics as ways of demonstrating how the participants’ notions of listening deflect more inclusive, embodied conceptualizations of listening in ways that marginalize students.

In Chapter 4, I continue my analysis of instructors’ conceptions of listening by exploring how the attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs identified in Chapter 3 play out in the classroom. This chapter draws upon my observations in three FYC classrooms and investigates listening’s role in class discussions—a practice central to FYC pedagogy. Using feminist disability theories, this chapter reveals that engagement in class discussions is often misfitted for diverse student learners, while, at other times, instructors attempt to retrofit discussions to be more inclusive—an effort that is met with differing levels of success.

Chapter 5 qualifies the findings of Chapters 3 and 4 by contextualizing the documented instructor attitudes, perceptions, and practices within the larger system of institutionalized higher education. Using rhetorical genre studies as an analytical lens, this chapter looks at FYC course syllabi as a locus of overlapping and conflicting desires for student engagement, student bodies, and listening that are brought to bear on the classroom from multiple stakeholders.

In Chapter 6, I conclude this dissertation with a discussion of suggestions for new directions for composition pedagogy and further research into listening. The conclusion
draws upon several ongoing projects and approaches as examples of how teacher training may begin to resituate listening as a vibrant component of composition theory and pedagogy. Finally, this chapter outlines some of the limitations of the study, as well as the problems inherent in the study of listening and engagement.
Chapter 2

Listening as Research Object and Method:  
a Feminist Embodied Approach to Grounded Theory

“[Feminism] has developed a methodology that tolerates internal conflict and contradiction. This method asks difficult questions and accepts provisional answers…This method validates the personal but implements disinterested inquiry. This method both writes new stories and recovers traditional ones.”
–Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (“Integrating Disability” 41)

“Whether we locate the subjects of our research in the library, the archives, or the face-to-face interview, our goal is respectful interaction and rhetorical listening.”
–Cheryl Glenn (Rhetorical Feminism 97)

Introduction: Listening to Research Entanglements

On April 17, 2018, after conducting a follow-up interview with one of Garrett’s students from his ENG II class, I found myself driving home in a fog. A week prior to the interview, I had observed one of Garrett’s class in which the students were asked to work together to create a grading rubric for their final research project. Two students—who happen to be twin sisters—had exhibited signs of frustration during the class. As the students worked together to propose grading criteria and then to assign points to each criterion, Eve and Kit became increasingly angry at the fact that their peers outvoted them on an issue that they cared greatly about: whether an abstract for the research paper should be counted as points and, if so, how many points. Kit and Eve kept trying to make their voices heard by repeatedly and increasingly loudly objecting to having an abstract graded, at times interrupting Garrett and their classmates. When they finally gave up,

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6 Eve and Kit are pseudonyms selected by the student participants.
they slouched back in their chairs and lamented not being heard and vented their frustrations at, and distaste for, the class in general.

While I previously had very pleasant interviews with Eve after other class sessions, something about my conversation with her on that day was bothering me, even if I couldn’t quite put my finger on what it was. As I exited the freeway, I had a moment of clarity and, at the next red light, grabbed my phone and dictated the following audio note:

I just left an interview with Eve and I am struck by how differently Garrett and Eve’s impressions of the same class are. I will admit that I perceived Eve in much the same way as Garrett. She seemed disengaged from doing the classwork and appeared to be more interested in being disruptive with her sister than in furthering anyone’s knowledge, including her own. She didn’t seem [during class] to value the collaborative work going on. About halfway through my interview with her, I realized that I was listening more like a researcher trying to find information than engaging in rhetorical listening to understand her perspective. I tried to change my approach and understand where she was coming from, and as I did so, I found myself sympathizing with Eve. I feel bad that she feels like her instructor doesn’t like her, and while I understand the behaviors that Garrett is frustrated with from a teacher’s perspective, learning to shelter Eve’s experience from her perspective left me feeling really sad that these two don’t seem to be listening to one another in a way that produces positive classroom experiences for Eve. (Field Notes, 18 April 2018)

What had been bothering me was my own entanglements in a project in which I had set out to be as neutral as possible. Certainly, I had not started this dissertation with the idea of being completely separated from this work in the kind of scientific objectivism that Sandra Harding and other feminist scholars have dismantled. On the other hand, however, I had not imagined myself quite as entangled in the classes I was observing as I had suddenly realized. I found myself nonetheless intertwined with what had transpired in class: my identity as a FYC instructor led me to see the classroom dynamics and specific encounters like Garrett did—a dilemma made more manifest perhaps because,
due to scheduling conflicts, I happened to interview Garrett before I interviewed Eve after this observation. In my car while driving home, I realized that my own identity had initially caused me to listen to Garrett with perhaps more legein than I had originally approached my interview with Eve. And, while I had actively re-oriented myself during my interview with Eve, this new understanding caused me to reflect greatly on my research interactions with Eve, with Garrett, and with other participants in an effort to scrutinize each detail, every encounter, and to root out any other moments where my ability to be a ‘researcher’ may have been compromised.

My failed attempt at achieving a certain kind of fictitious objectivity that I later corrected is not what this chapter is about, but I believe this experience highlights one of the questions at the heart of the methodology that informs this project: how do we use listening as method of data collection and interpretation? As this chapter will demonstrate, this project focuses on the dual effort of reporting on and describing, analyzing, and theorizing from the experiences of others as well as on situating these experiences within the activity system of WU’s institution. These experiences—these stories—however, are not something that I can handle with complete objectivity, in part because my various identities (as a FYC instructor, as a researcher, as a woman with an invisible disability, etc.) inform how I approach these questions. This reality, however, is not a “problem” that my methodology seeks to resolve; instead, as the quote from Rosemarie Garland-Thomson that opens this chapter suggests, it is a reality that this research project accepts as inevitable and, though my entanglements create provisions on my findings, provisional answers are appropriate outcomes when we ask complex questions (“Integrating Disability” 41). To ask complex questions about listening, this
project utilizes a methodology based on Cheryl Glenn’s call for feminist inquiry that respects our research subjects, in part by employing rhetorical listening as a research method (*Rhetorical Feminism* 97). To orient readers to this approach, this chapter begins with an overview of the dissertation research, including the project origins and an outline of the phases of data collection and analysis procedures. From there, this chapter charts an approach to grounded theory research that is informed by both disability studies and feminist rhetorical inquiry. This approaches necessarily provide opportunities to see and reflect on certain aspects of classroom life while also foreclosing others. I discuss the complexities, importance, and opportunities inherent to research designs informed by an ear toward listening. To that end, this chapter concludes with a discussion of the provisional nature of the research findings as well as the research tools created through these particular lens of data collection and analysis.

**Project Overview**

Because there has been no significant research into the role of listening in writing instruction in FYC, this project utilizes grounded theory to explore what can be discovered about listening through various research methods (Edmonds and Kennedy 146). This dissertation was designed to explore the connections between listening and writing instruction in first-year composition (FYC) in light of the various insights from feminist rhetorical scholars already exploring silence and listening as well as the important critiques of educational design from disability studies (DS) scholars. Over the course of one academic year, I enlisted FYC instructors at Western University (WU) as participants and informants as I attempted to uncover and articulate the palpable
connections between listening and writing instruction. These collaborations consisted of surveys, interviews, and classroom observations. I collected data in two phases. Phase One, conducted during the Fall 2017 semester, included a short-survey distributed to FYC faculty at WU that explored what I considered to be basic connections between listening and writing instruction (n=58; See Appendix A). The survey invited faculty respondents to participate in hour-long interviews that more deeply explored their attitudes and perceptions. During these interviews, I was able to discuss with seven of the original survey respondents their perceptions of listening outside FYC classrooms (such as “how do you know when somebody is listening to you?”) as well as attitudes towards listening in the classroom (“what is the value of listening in a FYC classroom?”) (see Appendix G for sample interview questions). Additionally, Phase One included analyses of twenty-nine syllabi taken from the two courses that compose the first-year writing sequence (what I will refer to as English I and English II) (see “Phases of Data Collection” below for descriptions of the analysis process). This analysis explored the ways in which other classroom genres like the syllabus reinforce certain attitudes toward listening and regulate listening in the classroom. In total, I analyzed fifteen percent (15%) of course syllabi available from the Fall 2017 (n=fifteen syllabi sampled; total number of sections of English I=93) and previous Spring 2017 (n=fourteen syllabi sampled; total number of sections of English II=92). There was no attempt to connect the participants in the interviews to the available syllabi.

Phase Two of the research was conducted during the Spring 2018 semester. From the seven faculty members who participated in the interviews, two were available and willing to allow me to periodically observe their classes. One faculty member was
teaching English I and the other was teaching English II. A third faculty member who had not participated in the survey or interviews agreed to allow me to observe her English II class. Each class was observed four times throughout the semester and included follow-up interviews with instructors and student volunteers. These interviews engaged participants about what occurred during class and the extent to which they understood listening to be part of the work that was being fostered. In all, I observed eleven classroom sessions and conducted eleven additional interviews with faculty members and nine interviews with students.

Research Origins

This project began in earnest at the confluence of several different experiences. A few years ago, I taught a developmental writing course during a summer term at an open-access community college in Northern California. In that class, I had a student who I will call David. David in particular struggled, and his difficulty with the class became most apparent one day while we were conducting a peer review session. During that session, the students had been assembled into small groups, exchanged their drafts, and were given the instructions to read the essay and then to respond to some questions that I had tailored to the essay assignment. I noticed that, when most of the students in David’s group had finished reading their peers’ drafts, David wasn’t even halfway through the reading. When his peers had started responding to the assigned questions, David still wasn’t done reading. When the group was ready to discuss their observations and

7 I was only able to observe three of the four intended classroom observations in Morgan’s class.
exchange feedback, David had only started answering the questions, a situation that left him feeling confused as to whether he should join the conversation or continue responding to the draft.

At the conclusion of class that day, David stayed after to discuss his frustration with the class and to talk about potentially dropping the course. During this conversation, David finally blurted out, ‘well, you know I have ADD, don’t you?’ In truth, I didn’t know that. David had never provided an Accommodation Request form and had not previously disclosed his disability to me. Suddenly, however, it made sense why David struggled so much during some of the class activities, such as peer review. While David and his classmates had the same amount of time to complete tasks in class, the amount of time students were given was usually based on how long it ‘seemed’ to take students before they completed the task and began to be off-task, either by talking with their classmates or checking their cellphones. I realized that there was inherently something unfair about the way I structured my classes for David and other students, but I didn’t know what to do about it.

While I was teaching this course, I also happened to be reading Margaret Price’s Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life. Price’s work served as my introduction to disability studies generally and disability rhetorics more specifically. This work gave me a new vocabulary to apply to what I was experiencing in the classroom—to see that, inadvertently, the ways in which I structured some of my

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8 While I do not know why David chose not to disclose his disability previously, or to disclose it at this moment, the decision to disclose a disability or to engage in the accommodation request process is politically fraught. For more extensive discussions, see Kerschbaum (“Access in the Academy”), Soorenian, and Vidali (“Rhetorical Hiccups”).
classroom practices created access barriers for students because I failed to imagine differently abled bodies in my classroom and, in so doing, participated in the myth of the normate body. Because, on some level, I expected to see an Accommodation Request form to tell me when and how to make accommodations, I had failed to consider how issues of access and inclusivity impact students with non-normative bodyminds. Working with David gave me a way of thinking about Price’s claim that disability disrupts higher education’s emphasis on a particular kind of bodily presence. In Mad at School, Price theorizes how a “fleshy appearance” because the a priori form of presence, on that is considered part of the “essential duties” of faculty members, in ways that marginalizes faculty members with disabilities (112). This got me thinking: in what ways does this notion of ‘presence’ trickle down to our student’s bodyminds in the classroom? Enter listening. While theorizing presence seemed too large to tackle in one project, I could think about how presence was brought to bear in one area of classroom life. As I thought about what it meant to me for my students to be ‘present’ and ‘engaged’ in the class, I found myself returning again and again to students’ verbal participation in class discussions in ways that I suddenly found to be reductive of the range of possibilities that students could choose to engage and in ways that could especially marginalize students with disabilities.

These experiences led me to create a project that would enable me to explore the range of questions, topics, and concerns that interested me: from composition pedagogy to recovering listening as a rhetorical act, from disability perspectives to feminist ones. I then began to refine research questions that would help me use these critical modes of inquiry to begin peeling away at the larger research question:
1. What does ‘listening’ mean to FYC instructors? How do they conceptualize of listening in the classroom? What role does the body play in these notions of listening?

2. How do FYC instructors operationalize listening in the classroom?

3. What role do various textual genres of FYC reify or qualify FYC instructor’s attitudes toward listening and bodies in the classroom?

4. What insight can disability studies and feminist rhetorics provide in terms of the range of listening performances available in the classroom?

These questions direct attention toward components of first-year writing instruction that is often overlooked: listening, bodies, and engagement. There is still much to be learned about the relationship between listening and writing instruction. These questions begin to articulate those relationships and to highlight the importance that bodies play in mediating and organizing the work that takes place in writing classes.

This chapter describes how my research was designed to get at these questions and the wealth of knowledge that stands to be gained by turning our attention to the seemingly invisible role that listening plays in writing instruction and how critical attention to listening can add to the ongoing work of composition and rhetorical studies.

**Phases of Data Collection**

**Phase One**

To address these questions, my study included two phases of data collection, both of which took place at Western University. Western University is ranked by U.S. News and Review as a national Tier 1 university and, according to its website, as of 2016 has a
population of approximately 18,000 undergraduates and nearly 3,000 graduate students. Most of the students are in-state residents (comprising 70% of total enrollments) but attracts enough students from across the state to not be considered a “commuter school.” WU attracts most of its out-of-state students through the Western Undergraduate Exchange Program. WU’s website further claims that thirty-six percent (36%) of the total student population are “underrepresented students,” and that as of 2016, the total Hispanic/Latino population was eighteen and one-half percent (18.5%) of the total student population.

Phase One consisted of three processes: syllabi analysis, faculty surveys, and initial faculty interviewing. Phase One began with collecting ENG I and ENG II syllabi from the Fall 2017 and Spring 2017 semesters as artifacts of classroom genres. This was done to locate textualized iterations of attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions regarding listening, bodies, and engagement. Syllabi were selected as artifacts of listening because they hold enormous regulatory power in the classroom. Anis Bawarshi analyzes this potential in Genre and the Invention of the Writer: Reconsidering the Place of Invention in Composition by considering the syllabus as a genre which “frames the discursive and ideological site of action in which teachers and students engage in coordinated commitments, relations, subjectivities, and practices” (121). In other words, the syllabus functions as a catalyst that introduces teachers and students to a variety of discursive, bodily, and material performances and relations that are maintained, refined, or even

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9 Schools affiliated with the Western Undergraduate Exchange Program charge students no more than 150% of the in-state tuition, and some provide in-state tuition rates for out-of-state undergraduate students. The Program is active in fifteen states as well as US Pacific Territories and Freely Associated States, including Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marina Islands (“Western Interstate Commission”).
added to throughout the course of the semester. Because the syllabus initiates these relations, Bawarshi refers to it as the “master classroom genre,” one that is simultaneously foundation to all action that occurs between students and teachers throughout the course of the semester and occluded from notice (119). Phase One thus begins by looking at a range of syllabi from two semesters. Because WU tends to have significantly higher numbers of ENG I sections during the fall semester and significantly higher numbers of ENG II during the spring semester, I chose to randomly collect syllabi from fifteen percent (15%) of ENG II courses from the Spring 2017 semester, totaling 12 syllabi (80 sections offered). ENG I syllabi totaled 13 for the Fall 2017 (86 sections offered). The syllabi were collected from WU writing program assistant directors, redacted so that no instructor information was available, and then coded. Given the reliance of grounded theory for my dissertation, coding the syllabi included multiple rounds. Following Johnny Saldaña’s recommendations in *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, each group of syllabi were read multiple times in order to in order to identify “categories or ‘families’” within the data that “share some characteristics” that could lead to identifiable patterns (10). Subsequent readings allowed for these early categories to be refined and attuned to what was emerging in each set (Saldaña 11).

Based on these readings, I ultimately coded using concept coding and values coding that emerged from the syllabi (see Appendix F for the coding schema). These systems emerged as the most flexible and responsive way of “imposing” on the data,

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10 To randomize course selection, all sections of ENG I and ENG II were entered Random.org. The website then randomly selected the specific courses from each list.
given my specific research questions (Grant-Davie 272). Specifically, four major categories emerged: concepts and values of participation in class, and concepts and values of discussion. Listening as a concept does not appear as a central category simply because it does not appear in syllabi in substantive ways. It is, however, often either evoked or deflected in the policies and statements surrounding participation and discussion, as do conceptualizations of bodies and engagement more broadly. In other words, discussion and participation become the vehicles for getting at larger concepts that are central to this project. Given this, a concept coding seemed to be a good approach, given the ways in which concept coding offers researchers “word[s] or short phrase[s] that symbolically [represent] a suggested meaning broader than a single item or action – a ‘bigger picture’ beyond the tangible and apparent” (Saldaña 119). This ‘bigger picture’ system enables a better understanding of what listening is and what classroom behaviors or performances constituted listening, when these things could be ascertained. For example, one ENG I syllabus included the following statement:

The structure of this class requires active participation by all members of the class. Each member is required to contribute to class discussions. If you are uncomfortable with class participation, you will need to discuss with me strategies for overcoming this. This is a mandatory part of the course. Not participating will result in a reduction of your overall grade. Also involved in active participation is in-class work, annotations, workshops, and reading responses.

From statements such as this, coding for concepts and values begins to illuminate the instructor’s relationship with listening and how s/he sees listening in relation to the work of FYC. The instructor’s characterization of participation as “active” suggests as marginalization of listening, which is often characterized as a passive activity. This leads
to an understanding that the instructor may believe vocal participation is more important
that listening as a form of participation in the class.

Other syllabus statements revealed other components of a value-based coding,
such as the following from a different ENG I syllabus: “We’ll look to the text and various
visual and audio sources to gain a broad understanding of the creative process and how
we can actively contribute to ongoing conversation.” Here we see an instructor’s attitude
toward listening that suggests a stronger relationship between writing and listening. It is
important to recognize that these syllabi have been de-contextualized from the instructors
and classrooms they create and maintain. However, this is not necessarily a downfall of
this corpus. By collecting a representative sample of syllabi for both FYC courses, the
goal was to see what themes emerge not just in one classroom but in WU writing
program more broadly. In other words, I approached this corpus by wondering if a
consistent conceptualizations and values of listening could be mapped through randomly
selected syllabi. The resulting themes and patterns from this investigation are discussed
in more detail in Chapter 5.

Phase One of the dissertation project also looked to begin collecting more
personal representations of teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about listening. This began with
a survey that was sent to all instructors of ENG I during the Fall 2017 (the total number
of instructors during that semester was fifty-eight; see Appendix A for survey questions).
I recruited faculty participants through a recruitment email that was sent to all Western
University instructors teaching ENG I or ENG II during the Fall 2017 semester (see
Appendix H for the approved recruitment email). This survey draws on themes of values,
attitudes, and beliefs, given the results of the syllabus research. The survey invited
instructors to define the word ‘listening,’ to discuss what the characteristics of a “good listener” are, and, using Likert-scale questions, to respond to a variety of statements about listening and FYC, their students, and the university. Fifteen instructors completed the questionnaire. An additional six instructors started the survey but did not complete it. Instructors who completed the survey (n=15) were given the option to participate in a one-hour follow up interview. Because the surveys were completed anonymously, instructors who chose to participate in the interviews were not provided copies of their survey responses to orient them or direct them during the interviews. During the interviews, I encouraged participants to draw on their recollections of their responses from the survey if it helped them. However, some participants indicated that they did not recall their responses, such as Pablo:

Leslie: The next section is going to go back to those questions from the survey.

Pablo: Okay, I don’t remember any of them.

Leslie: Perfect. They’ll be like brand-new questions. The first one is, how would you define the word listening? Or what does it mean to listen? (Pablo, Personal Interview, 23 Oct. 2017)

In this respect, the survey functioned as an attempt to discover what sorts of themes might emerge, as well as what issues seemed to resonate with the instructor respondents. Following a grounded theory approach to research, many of the survey questions were not followed up on in the interviews because they did not appear to resonate with instructor respondents. For example, I began the survey process by wondering whether instructors considered listening to be important for their students’ success. Of the fifteen instructors who took the survey, seven respondents indicated that
they agreed with the statement “being a good listener is important for my students’ success in this course,” seven respondents strongly agreed, and only one indicated a neutral as depicted in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: Example Survey Results

Q7 - Instructions: For each statement below, please check the box that best describes the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statement in regards to ENG 101. Being a good listener is important for my students’ success in this course.

Recognizing that more instructors considered listening to important in some respects guided my decisions in generating questions for the semi-structured interviews to follow. In response to survey results such as those illustrated in Figure 2.1, I chose to focus less on establishing whether the instructor participants shared basic beliefs about listening and focused more on drawing out the nuances of such beliefs.

In total, of the fifteen instructor participants who completed the survey in its entirety (twenty-one total instructor participants began the survey, but six did not complete it in its entirety), seven instructors agreed to be interviewed.
Phase I Interview Participant Backgrounds

My interview participants ranged in personal and academic backgrounds. Most of my participants identified as female (five total) and all participants identified as white, but beyond this clustering, their backgrounds ranged deeply. Figure 2.2 (below) provides a snapshot of the participants’ background information:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender Identity</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Racial Identity</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Academic Degrees and Interests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Britney</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Graduate Student in Rhetoric and Composition PhD program</td>
<td>MA in Literature; interested in feminist theories and inclusive &amp; queer pedagogies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eli</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Declined to state</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Graduate Student in Rhetoric and Composition</td>
<td>MA in Composition; interested in literacy studies, public engagement, and qualitative research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garrett</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>MA in Rhetoric and Composition; interested in professional communication and genre studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>PhD in Literature, Victorianist; MFA in Creative Writing, nonfiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marilyn</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>PhD in Literature; interested in trauma studies, theories of silence, and Vietnam-era women’s writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pablo</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Graduate Student in MFA program</td>
<td>BA in Literature and Creative Writing; interested in poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Tenure-track faculty</td>
<td>PhD in Rhetoric and Composition; interested in</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each participant agreed to an interview that lasted approximately one hour (see Appendix G for sample interview questions), which were video recorded. After the interviews were transcribed, participants were given an opportunity to review the transcript and to correct any inaccuracies (see Appendix D for a description of the transcription process for Phase I and Phase II interviews and Appendix E for the Phase I Interview Coding Schema). It is also at this point that I encouraged to take the opportunity to clarify any point of their discussions where they felt as though meaning is convoluted or where their words did not accurately reflect what they were attempting to articulate. This was done in order to triangulate my interpretations of the data I recorded (the transcripts) with the participants’ own recollection and understanding of our conversations. Such efforts increase the internal validity of the data and the conclusions drawn from it (Merriam and Tisdell 246).

**Phase II**

Phase II builds upon what I learned from the array of data gathered in Phase II by focusing on more extended classroom observations. I was able to recruit two of the Phase I faculty participants to allow me to observe their ENG I or ENG II classes in the Spring 2018 semester. Using a second recruitment email (see Appendix I), I was able to recruit a third faculty participant. The three Phase II participants were all at the rank of lecturer at the time of the data collection, as featured in Figure 2.3 below.
Each participant allowed me to sit in their ENG I or ENG II class four times throughout the semester: once during a peer review session, once when the instructor planned to introduce a new concept, and twice when students were to discuss a reading. The two discussion-based observations occurred at separate times during the semester; one was to take place during the first four weeks of class and the second was to take place during the last four weeks of class. The goal was to observe the class at different times during the semester and during different kinds of class activity that might elicit different kinds of listening and engagement. During each observation, I attended the class and took field notes. During the last fifteen minutes of each class, the instructor gave me the time to distribute a freewrite to students and the instructors (the instructor freewrite is found in Appendix B). After class, I scheduled a post-observation interview with the instructor, which typically lasted between forty-five and sixty minutes (see Appendix C for sample
interview questions). During this phase, I also collected freewrites and interviews with students who volunteered to participate, though that data is not reported on in this project.

In the next section, I outline principles that were key to creating ethical interviewing practices, which include “active interviewing” and my approach to ethically representing my research participants in the write up of this project.

**Grounded Theory as Methodological Design**

Grounded theory is an appropriate research design when the goal of the project is to build a theory (Merriam and Tisdell 31). As an inductive process, the goal of grounded theory is not to test how a theory occurs in a particular setting (abductive research), but rather in discovering how a theory emerges from the data (Edmonds and Kennedy 145). An emergent theory can arise within this methodological approach when the researcher takes “an inductive stance and strives to derive meaning from the data” (Merriam and Tisdell 31). Typically, such projects must necessarily utilize mixed methods including interviews, observations, and “a wide variety of documentary materials” (Merriam and Tisdell 32). From these mixed methods, researchers using grounded theory discover theoretical concepts and categories as they emerge (Sim). As these categories emerge, researchers engage in an iterative process of coding data and then retesting the categories based on multiple rounds of coding. Each round draws the researcher closer to the theory as it develops (Sim).

The purpose of this project is to employ an inductive research process in order to discover a theory of listening within the context of writing instruction. To arrive at such a theory, this project utilizes three distinct research methods (interview protocols,
classroom observations, and rhetorical genre analysis). Each research method individually reveals elements of theory of listening. After rounds of coding, the individual findings of these research methods come together to reveal an array of listening’s characteristics within the FYC classroom. In order to engage in grounded theory, this project draws heavily on two research methodologies: phenomenology and rhetorical genre studies. In the sections that following, I briefly outline how this project deploys these methodologies in ways that enable deep explorations of the roles of gender and ability in the FYC classroom.

**Feminist Phenomenological Research Design**

I drew heavily on feminist and embodied phenomenological methodologies for qualitative research by combining interview protocols, textual analysis, and classroom observations with post-observation interviews. This combined approach is essential when considering how instructors come to imagine the role of listening in a writing classroom as well as how those constructs inform the instructors’ classroom practices. Phenomenological research as a tradition began in earnest with Edmund Husserl’s insistence “that the relation between perception and its objects was not passive” and that “human consciousness actively constitutes the objects of experience” (Holstein and Gubrium “Phenomenology” 263). Alfred Schutz built upon Husserl’s work to explore the ways in which discourse is central to any phenomenological account, given that language “is the central medium for transmitting typifications and thereby meaning” (Holstein and Gubrium “Phenomenology” 263). As a phenomenological project, this dissertation is primarily focused on how instructors experience writing instruction and their perceptions of its relation to listening. Following a phenomenological approach, this project
recognizes that each faculty member will have differing attitudes, beliefs, and experiences that will inform how they harness listening (or, conversely, are unaware of listening) within the classroom.

To enhance the phenomenological approach, this research draws heavily on feminist methods and critiques. As discussed in Chapter 1, this research takes as one of its basic tenets that listening has long been gendered female within the context of US education. To recover and observe listening then requires an attention to the political implications of such a task. I take Patricia Sullivan’s critique that, “students enter an academic community in which men have largely determined what is important to know, how knowledge is organized, how knowledge is made, and most importantly for composition scholars and teachers, how knowledge is expressed (39). The subsequent chapters of this dissertation will deal primarily with interrogating the ways in which listening functions in classrooms as a gendered activity. Specifically, Chapter 3 illuminates the ways in which bodily displays of listening are encoded with gendered norms. These snapshots reaffirm the ways in which students’ and instructors’ gender identities inform how they situate listening within the classroom.

My approach to designing this project called the use of various data collection methods. This decision was informed by Jaqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch’s call for feminist scholars to not only consider the topology of research methods for feminist inquiry but to deploy research methods born of a “polylogical analytical model, and inquiry framework, for understanding, interpreting, and assessing feminist practices in rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies” (14). In other words, the approach to data collection and data analysis discussed in this and subsequent chapters had to enable
multiple logics to emerge from the research and the participants—to hear (or listen to) the divergent (and sometimes conflicting) accounts of listening within the many micro-sites of FYC. In other words, to only interview instructors outside of the classroom setting would not have been sufficient for understanding how listening emerges within the social spaces of classroom and writing programs. To observe classes in action would also be incomplete without considering the written texts like syllabi that regulate those spaces. Thus, a feminist polylogical approach must necessarily draw on different points of access.

**Active Interviewing**

The Phase I and Phase II interviews were informed by the “active interview” approach developed by Hames A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium. Active interviewing is founded upon the belief that meaning is co-created between interviewers and interviewees\(^{11}\). Because of this, active interviewers must recognize that what the interviewee says, “is as much constructed as it is tapped from narrative resources” (Holstein and Gubrium *Active Interview* 33). This became an important consideration for me at times as I conversed with participants and later read and analyzed the interviews. In most interviews, there were points where I had to question whether or not the participants’ potential belief that I considered listening to be important or central to FYC (for example, given that it is my research being conducted) lead them to respond to questions about listening favorably or to characterized listening as more essential to their pedagogical choices than perhaps they might describe if they were not being interviewed.

\(^{11}\) This approach to qualitative research methods also echoes the ongoing work in rhetoric and composition, which situates knowledges as a co-production among participants (Bruffee; Burke *A Grammar*)
Similarly, throughout each interview there were times where I would say back to the interviewee what I thought s/he was getting at. At times, the participants’ responses caused me to question to what extent my presence as the researcher was influencing how they were making sense of their own thoughts and experiences. For example, in my interview with Britney, we talked about how she would define the word ‘listening.’ As part of that conversation, I stopped to make sure I was understanding what she was driving at. Our conversation proceeded as follows:

Leslie: It sounds like, listening as you define it, is not merely a process as you said to get information or to respond to somebody, but to understand people better, first know something about them, and that listening in that respect builds community?

Britney: Absolutely.

Leslie: Is that what I’m hearing?

Britney: Absolutely. That’s a much better way I’ve saying it then I did. (Personal Interview, 26 Oct 2017)

During the interview, Britney’s response first caused me some anxiety. I wondered if I had inserted myself too much into dialogue with her and had therefore colored her feelings. However, recognizing that interviews are active co-constructions of meaning reduces this anxiety from feeling as though I had inappropriately led Britney to some conclusion that she may or may not have been inclined to think but rather as the very inevitable reality of qualitative research methods. This fear was also assuaged by focusing on times in interviews in which respondents chose to respond by asserting some new direction. For example, Marilyn took one opportunity to correct my characterization of our conversation about what makes a good listener:
Leslie: Aside from [looking at the cell] phone…can you think of other examples of things people do that bring their attention away from the moment of interaction and that would make them not a good listener?

Marilyn: I wouldn’t want to label them as not a good listener. They may just be distracted due to personal things or just actual distractions, right? Like, if there’s a fire blazing over here, we are going to turn our heads. But, breaking that gaze in any kind of way, it doesn’t have to be directed at a phone. It could be cutting someone off in speech and speaking over someone. That’s aggravating as well. That is not a good listener. (Marilyn, Personal Interview, 17 Oct 2017)

Marilyn refocuses my attention away from imagining that she thinks that students who are distracted by their cellphones are bad listeners by moving my attention (and her narrative) toward the idea that distractions cause disruptions in one’s ability to listen. Her focus on distractions as temporary interruptions as opposed to an inherent weakness in particular that makes him/her a ‘bad listener’ (as some sort of static identity marker) became an important way that Marilyn spoke back to my characterizations of her beliefs and attitudes.

Some of participants’ willingness to direct and assert their own ideas and beliefs about the topics we were discussing could be informed by the participants’ own sense of status. For example, as graduate students, it is possible that participants like Britney, Eli, and Pablo may be more inclined to accept my own rendering of our conversation or what I hear each of them saying as opposed to participants like Paul, whose status within the university may engender more confidence in his own beliefs. Likewise, in Marilyn’s interview, she comes across as willing to critique my snapshots of our conversation when necessary, perhaps because she studies silence as it relates to Vietnamese-American
women’s writing. Her scholarly expertise in a closely related field may increase her confidence in her own responses.

**Member Checking**

As the research developed and participants’ words were selected for inclusion in specific chapters, I provided copies of those materials to research participants for their review and response. Inherent in my approach to feminist qualitative research is a commitment to ensure that I represent participants fairly and, more importantly, that they have a voice in the representations I was building about them. I began this project committed to limiting the extent to which my participants might feel betrayed by having spent time getting to know them and then representing them in ways they may feel are unfair, inaccurate, or might even portray them in a negative light, even though their identity has been protected. Like Maurice Punch, I took seriously the understanding that all qualitative research is inherently political and, more importantly, reject the “false view of the research process as smooth and unproblematic” (85). These issues came up with my interactions with Morgan, a participant that in Phase II of this project. Following the practice of member checking in qualitative research (Merriam and Tisdell 246), Morgan wrote me an email after receiving copies of the chapter drafts for her review and comment that contained the following reflections:

> I loved reading the parts about [my classes]. They were very illuminating, and because of your research and discussions—such as at [a conference we both attended]—I’ve changed my approach, but I have a lot of work to do in terms of questions and waiting for people to respond. I tend to jump in because I re-live being a student who didn't have the ‘right’ answer right away in a society that equates intelligence with speed in response.

> One tiny change: you stated all of us had graded participation, but mine hasn't been for a couple of years. (‘Re: Research Participation”)
Morgan is able to respond both to an inadvertent misrepresentation (a reference to her policy regarding participation), as well as her own personal responses to what she read. Several days after she wrote this email, Morgan called me on the phone. During that conversation, she described how humbling it is to read about yourself in printed research. She was specifically disappointed in her own failures to wait longer for student responses, but at the same time, she remarked that it was “comforting” to see that she wasn’t alone (“Re: Research Participation”). Reading the drafts, in part, led Morgan to ask me what I thought of as her strengths as a teacher, a question she indicates comes from a place of insecurity of her own teaching excellence, but I also suspect stems, in part, from having read a critical analysis of her teaching. Regardless of where her feelings came from, my goal is working with these participants was to ensure that they had opportunities to contribute to the write-up that resulted from our interactions and that they would be treated fairly.

**Combating the Observer Effect**

As with all research methods, there are affordances and constraints to utilizing classroom observations as a mode of data collection. While classroom observations can lead to improved teaching quality for the observed instructor, the process is fraught with institutional and personal pitfalls. One potential pitfall of using classroom observations as a method of data collection is the observer effect, or the phenomenon whereby instructors behave differently because of the presence of an observer (McIntyre 36). This effect is compounded when the subjects know what the researcher is looking for (McIntyre 37).

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12 See Chapter 4 for the discussion Morgan is referencing, as well as the integration of Morgan’s thoughts on how she is represented in this project.
the context of teaching observations in higher education, classroom observations are regularly used for evaluative purposes, such as when tenure-track faculty members go up for tenure, when graduate students are observed by a department member, or when contingent faculty members hope to maintain their position. Evaluative classroom observations are often intended as a way of improving teaching quality (McMahon et al.), but recent research suggests that participants feel that observations contributed the least to teachers’ ongoing professional development (Ávila de Lima and Silva). A growing body of literature suggests different ways to improve the quality of teaching observations, such as creating opportunities to integrate reflection into the process (Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond) and allowing the instructor control over (a) the choice of observer, (b) the focus of the observation, and (c) how feedback is given (McMahon et al.).

Even though the classroom observations conducted for this project are removed from the evaluation process, one potential limitation to using classroom observations is that participants may still experience the research observations through the lens of institutionalized classroom observations for evaluative purposes and may thus feel the need to behave in a certain way (to be more authoritarian, to be friendlier and more accommodating, etc.). The research methodology of this project is intended to help combat this problem in several ways: first, instructors are provided with anonymity; secondly, none of my reports or observations are provided to WU’s writing program (thus protecting participants from having these observations included in their personnel files); and, thirdly, because I am a graduate student researcher, I do not represent an authority over the participants within the hierarchical structure of WU.
Despite these attempts to create spaces where the teacher participants could feel more at ease in “being themselves” in the classroom, the promise of anonymity can only go so far. As Geoffrey Walford’s recent article “The Impossibility of Anonymity in Ethnographic Research” suggests, there are limitations to the protection provided by research practices that involve anonymity of subject and research site (518-520). A sophisticated sleuth may be able to deduce the identity of Western University based upon the characteristics I describe from the roughly one hundred and sixty colleges that participate in the Western Undergraduate Exchange Program or by investigating my connections to different areas of the WUE region to determine potential research sites. From there, such a sleuth might be able to identify participants. In other words, anonymity goes only so far, and the research cited here suggests that participants know this in ways that potentially alter how they behave when they are observed in the classroom, a factor that limits the generalizability of the conclusions drawn from the classroom observations collected in this project.

**Embodied Research Design**

Beyond the use of feminist theories to inform my approach to this study, I also rely heavily upon theories of embodiment, primarily those that have emerged from the developed of disability studies as an interdisciplinary field of study. While feminist theories do provide similar attention to the role of the body in mediating social interactions, disability studies bring a unique lens to understanding the ways in which bodily differences emerge and circulated as deviant or undesirable. Students with disabilities have historically been marginalized within institutions of learning, including higher education (Price *Mad at School*; Dolmage *Academic Ableism*).
Just as it is important to theorize about the female body and its relationship to listening and the writing classroom, considering the ways in which this topic also implicates students and teachers with disabilities is vital for creating an inclusive picture of the writing classroom. I say this not because I am “in search” of students and teachers with disabilities, but precisely because the boundaries between “able bodied” and “disabled” bodies are blurry at best. Rosemarie Garland Thomson defined disability as “the attribution of corporeal deviance—not so much a property of bodies as a product of cultural rules about what bodies should be or do” (*Extraordinary Bodies* 6). From this we can build a construct of disability as a social phenomenon, not merely a biological or physical reality. Stephanie Kerschbaum has applied the social theory of disability specifically to the college composition classroom and has argued that “because it traces how people position themselves alongside others, attention to markers of difference can help us resist simplistic generalizations of students” (*Toward* 113). I believe that one way of approaching this task is through phenomenological qualitative research that pays attention to bodies and the ways in which bodies or bodily behavior (or even, at times, the omission of ‘correct’ bodily behavior) plays out in writing instruction and how instructors construct listening.

One example of this emerged from my interview with Pablo. During our conversation, Pablo never identified as having a disability. However, more than halfway through our conversation, I turn Pablo’s attention to something he said about the physicality of language, which creates a moment in which Pablo connects his own body to his understanding of language:

Leslie: You had thrown this out as an aside, but I’m sort of wondering if
you can dig in—

Pablo: –Okay–

Leslie: –you talked about the physicality of language being related to listening. Can you say more about what that means?

Pablo: Yeah. So, in a very literal sense I think the physicality of language that I think of first comes with the idea of sight. I am not hearing-impaired to the degree that I need a hearing aid or anything like that, but I don’t have 100% hearing capacity, especially in my left ear. I think that being able to see language is another way that I might listen as well. I take notes. They might not be very organized in my own documents. Sometimes they’re not even organized on the whiteboard when I’m teaching but seeing language and being able to have physical representations of the words in front of me helps me and helps my brain focus on something, so in a very literal sense, seeing language connects to listening for me and that’s what I mean by physicality. (Personal Interview, 23 Oct. 2017)

Employing an embodied phenomenology creates opportunity in which small exchanges like this can be organized into meaningful revelations about Pablo’s understanding of listening as it relates to his hearing impairment. It also allows these moments to remain in tension—Pablo resists the identity marker of “disabled,” but impairment and deviance are clearly on his mind as he constructs a physicality of language that for him, emerges in part from his physical experiences and in part from his interest in poetry. Pablo’s embodied experiences resist neat and tidy explanations that could be generalized easily.

**Rhetorical Genre Studies**

While phenomenological research enables researchers to understand how participants conceive of, experience, and interpret a phenomenon (in this case, listening in the context of FYC), it does not provide an understanding of how the participants’ conceptualizations are informed and mitigated by the environment around them. Because
of this, I also utilize rhetorical genre studies (RGS) as a way of contextualizing the findings drawn out in the phenomenological portions of this project. RGS specifically offers two key contributions to the emerging theory presented in this project. First, RGS provides alternative ways of understanding the classroom observation participants’ sense of agency within their classrooms. RGS challenges Romantic notions of agency, epitomized by the figure of the lone genius in the garret (Lunsford). In contrast, RGS offers models of agency that situate an individual’s agency, including their intentions to act within any given context, as a distributed among various agents (human and otherwise) that the individual encounters within a specific activity system. These models of agency tend to take ecological perspectives on agency (Bawarshi; Cooper). Secondly, an RGS perspective on this project aids the development of a theory of listening that can begin to account for the ways in which additional institutional stakeholders also exert control and agency over the formation of FYC at WU in ways that complicate the participants’ actions and shape their intentions, desires, and agency.

Calculating a Phenomenology of Bodies

In the previous sections, I have been discussing the ways in which feminist and disability-oriented lenses can be brought to bear on phenomenological approaches to research to tease out the body and listening within the complicated classroom tapestry. In so doing, however, I fully acknowledge that these approaches only provide slices of the possible implications of embodiment on understanding listening and writing instruction. As Kenneth Burke has argued,
Men seek for vocabularies that will be faithful **reflections** of reality. To this end, they must develop vocabularies that are **selections** of reality. And any selection of reality must, in certain circumstances, function as a **deflection** of reality…In its selectivity, it is a reduction. Its scope and reduction become a deflection when the given terminology, or calculus, is not suited to the subject matter in which it is designed to calculate. (*Grammar of Motives* 59, emphases are original).

In choosing feminist and disability-oriented lenses (my ‘vocabularies’), I have created research protocols that will not only collect information but that will also, as Keith Grant-Davie has argued, creates the data by “selecting and defining” what to choose and how to interpret it, “especially if the material is produced…in response to the researchers’ prompts” as the interviews and freewrite protocols in this research study were (274). In other words, this research project has selected (in the Burkean sense) material that will, inevitably, also deflect other calculations of listening within the context of first-year writing. This, of course, cannot be avoided, and proceeds confidently in suggesting that the portraits of listening that do emerge—that have been selected for—will enhance what we know about listening, but is not to be interpreted as the final word on listening within college composition classes. In the next section of this chapter, I move away from describing my research methods and the methodologies that have informed these choices and discuss the implications of attention to listening for research methods and methodologies.

**Implication of Listening on Qualitative Research Methodologies**

Throughout this chapter, I have been addressing the first half of this chapter’s title (“Listening as Research Object”) by detailing how I approached the task of studying an object that is both present and absent in every moment of the research process. To
conclude this chapter, I reflect on the second half of the title ("Listening as Research Method") by exploring what my own experiences as a researcher suggest are the implications of listening for grounded theory. Specifically, I explore the ways in which a more critical meditation of listening as part of our research methods can help qualitative scholar create more ethical research practices that also reinforce the goals of feminist and grounded theory methodologies.

**Epoche and Listening**

As has been discussed thus far, grounded theory research focuses on capturing a theory as it emerges through the data collection process. Given that interviews are often utilized as the basic unit of grounded theory research, W. Alex Edmonds and Thomas D. Kennedy advise researchers to carefully prepare for interviews by engaging in the Greek process of *epoche*, which is described as the process of “refrain[ing] from judgment” (Edmonds and Kennedy 173). The researcher must first “[explore] his or her own experiences, in part to examine the dimensions of the experience and in part to become aware of personal prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions” (Merriam and Tisdell 27). They continue that prejudices and assumptions must be “[bracket[ed]] or isolate[d] in order to be open to the experience itself” (Merriam and Tisdell 227). Phenomenology researchers like Max van Maren acknowledge that we are not able to do this fully, and this is where methods infused with rhetorical listening may be beneficial (224). Rather than working to rid ourselves of our beliefs and prejudices, attention to rhetorical listening may help us recognize disidentification as a more generative way of paying attention to what our participants say and how they make sense of the world.
Ratcliffe calls identification into question in her exploration of emphasis of Kenneth Burke’s notion of consubstantiality in the tradition of rhetoric and composition. In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke describes consubstantiality as the process through which an individual comes to identify as being “‘substantially one’ with a person other than himself” while still maintaining some differences (21). While Burke acknowledges that the two will never be identical to one another, the emphasis is on the ways in which individuals learn to associate themselves with others, which Burke sees as “necessary to any way of life” (21). For Ratcliffe, Burke’s notion of consubstantiality reaches into the depths of the rhetorical tradition, to the extent that identification has come to represent the “common ground for persuasion and political action” (*Rhetorical Listening* 52). For Ratcliffe, the emphasis on finding consubstantiality limits the ways in which rhetorical listening can serve to highlight difference between individuals, which she considers to be vital for developing cross-cultural dialogue (*Rhetorical Listening* 48).

In phenomenological research, walking the lines of identification on the part of the interviewer and interviewee can be difficult. My previous discussions in this chapter about the ways in which my presence in interviews as the “expert” on listening is one example of identification and disidentification at work. In order to engage in the process of “acting-together” by engaging in mutual understanding and meaning making within the interviews, my participants and I needed to engage in explorations of the “common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, [and] attitudes that make [us] *consubstantial*” (Burke *Rhetoric* 21, emphasis is original). It required, in other words, some basic assumptions that my participants and I identified as substantially the same—as educators, as academics, etc. But to focus too much on the ways in which we identify as substantially
the same would hinder my ability as the researcher to engage in the process of *epoche* (such as my failure to identify enough with Kit and Eve in the beginning of this chapter). If researchers are to truly ever be able to bracket our own assumptions, beliefs, and prejudices as is required by phenomenological research, we can only begin to accomplish this task by carefully attending to the ways in which we (the researchers) are at times identifying and disidentifying with our participants, and vice versa. Because the interview proceeds from the researcher’s questions, interests, and assumptions, we must acknowledge that even before the interview has started, our participants have been interpolated into our realities and our identifications.

**Tool #1: Listening Rhetorically within the Interview**

In order to combat this interpolation, I consciously worked to practice interviews that allowed the participant to guide the direction of the interviews. This was an easier task to accomplish during Phase II of the research, given that both the interviewees and I had experienced the same class session and that interviewees had taken the time to engage in freewriting at the end of each session.

To listen rhetorically, I had to bracket my assumptions about what I saw and experienced during the class session and allow the teachers to guide our discussion. This required that work to not identify too much with the instructor and to learn to listen with the grain and against the grain of what they were saying. For example, during one interview with Morgan, she discussed a class session I had observed in which she perceived her students to be more reserved and less prepared for class than she would normally expect. My immediate reaction was surprise; from my perspective as a teacher, I thought the students had seemed engaged and my interview with one of her students,
Rachel (also a pseudonym), had revealed that not only did Rachel feel engaged with the class session, she had remarked that she felt most of the students had been engaged because they found the topic of the class to be interesting and important. This moment created a multitude of incongruities that, by impulse, I wanted to resolve. However, listening rhetorically to Morgan required that I attempt to keep my identifications and disidentifications in check, to bracket them as much as possible. Rhetorical listening invites an attitude in which we not only ‘[let]-lie-together’ as Heidegger proposes, but in which we cultivate legein, the capacity to shelter the perspective of another to more fully understand it (quoted in Fiumara 17). Each of us (Rachel, Morgan, and myself) had experienced the classroom differently, yet none of our experiences could be allowed to raise to The Reality of the class and cultivating a process of listening enabled me to understand each of the participants’ realities more fully.

**Horizontalization and Listening**

Like *epoche*, qualitative researchers have also explored the value of the process of horizontalization for qualitative research. This process requires “laying out all the data for examination and treating the data as having equal weight; that is, all pieces of data have equal value at the initial data analysis stage. These data are then organized into clusters or themes” (Merriam and Tisdell 27). Van Maren describes this as a “free act of ‘seeing’ meaning that is driven by the *epoche* and reduction” and which can only occur after allowing for horizontalization by considering materials first by sentence or sentence clusters, then paragraphs, and finally as whole texts (320). While horizontalization is a hallmark of phenomenological research, it offers a guide for attending to the call in grounded theory to engage in constant comparison in data analysis (Glaser and Strauss;
Merriam and Tisdell). Other scholars who focus specifically on coding, like Johnny Saldaña, also advocate for a similar approach when researchers begin to analyze their data. Coding, for such scholars, is a “heuristic…an exploratory problem-solving technique without specific formulas or algorithms to follow” (9). In order to make meaning, to categorize and impose a system upon our data, the process must begin with a laying out of the data equally (Moustakas). Without some systematic approach to horizontalization, we risk transforming this key component of phenomenology into nothing more than an empty phrase with little meaning in actual practice.

**Tool #2: Horizontalizing through Listening**

In order to more closely approximate the goal of horizontalizing my data, I employed rhetorically listening as a way of engaging in cross cultural dialogue, as Ratcliffe recommends. The cultural logics I was attempting to locate, identify, and negotiate, however, were not always easy to identify, given that in many ways, my participants and I shared cultural logics of whiteness, gender, and profession. To accomplish this task, I combined my focus on listening with van Maren’s notion of wonder as a critical component phenomenological research. For van Maren, wonder is “the unwilled willingness to meet what is utterly strange in what is most familiar” (223). For van Maren, focusing on wonder enables researchers to avoid missing key moments in our researcher. Reading Heidegger, van Maren argues that “the problem is that the ordinary tends to be passed over in favor of the extraordinary—however, wonder concerns itself with the ordinary itself, and so everything that belongs to the ordinary is therefore extraordinary” (223).
I see van Maren’s notion of wonder as a way of engaging in rhetorical listening. Phenomenological research calls for a practice of transforming the ordinary into something telling of a larger phenomenon. However, in order to recognize that there is something ‘extraordinary’ in the ordinary, I needed to be able to create critical space between myself and my participants’ experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of the classroom and listening. This is, essentially, a process of learning to disidentify from the cultural logics that my participants and I shared and learning to recognize what those logics are and how they are informing each participant’s experience during the class observations.

**Conclusion**

This dissertation began with the goal of uncovering how instructors make sense of listening, bodies, and engagement and learning how they organize these principles within the space of FYC classrooms. To reach that objective, I created a feminist and embodied approach to grounded theory. The feminist portion of that design served as a backdrop to this research and ensured that listening, as an effeminized rhetorical art, could be configured as a dynamic and active component of classroom life and by employing a polylogical research design. This design would create the space needed for dissonance to emerge and for wonder to account for this discord as part of the larger phenomenon. The second portion of this project—an embodied research design—required a cultivation of interview procedures that could take into account the lived, bodily experiences of participants to emerge. These two approaches were made possible, in part, by a concerted effort to consider the ways in which listening as a researcher is problematized by the fact
that there is an agenda, albeit a very open agenda, that interpolates participants and
primes them to certain considerations. To combat these impulses, I developed tools that
would interrupt the “taken-for-grantedness” of listening both as an object of study and as
a method (van Maren 215).
Chapter 3
Exploring Listening’s Rhetoricity: The Salient Characteristics of Listening in FYC

“Good listening is reciprocal not just receptive: active not passive; responsive not silent. The best listeners combine verbal and nonverbal reactions to encourage a speaker and sustain interaction.”
–Karen Spear (116)

Introduction

Nathan W. Pyle’s comic Strange Planet is a four-panel comic series that features two humanoid characters engaging in mundane human experiences. Their unfamiliarity with the rituals of life on earth and in a Western context means that the ‘strangers’ must approximate human interactions. Their approximations are both surprisingly accurate and completely wrong, resulting in comic delight for all of Pyle’s readers.

In March 2019, Pyle published a comic titled “s p i t,” in which the strangers (the two blue-colored, humanoid figures depicted in the comic) discuss putting honey on toast. One of the strangers sits at a table with a piece of toast in front of it. The other
stranger stands next to the table holding a container of honey in one hand. The panels are outlined in a blue frame and the scenes of each panel have a light purple background. The dialogue between the two strangers is relayed in black font.

Panel 1
Stranger 1: You want some plant liquid on your hot doughslice? (Holds honey jar in right hand, which is extended toward Stranger 2.)

Stranger 2: No thank you (remains seated in chair, right arm is resting on the table.)

Panel 2
Stranger 1: It’s been partially digested by some insects

Stranger 2: I’m listening (cups chin with right hand and slightly narrows its eyes, as if to suggest heightened interest.)

Panel 3
Stranger 1: They spit it out so I stole it

Stranger 2: I’ll take it (right hand returns to the table, left hand is opened toward Stranger 1, palm up, as if to accept the honey.)

Panel 4

Stranger 2: If it’s almost good enough for them, it’s good enough for me (points left index finger toward Stranger 1).

Stranger 1: Exactly (Pyle)

While Pyle’s comic is about the strangeness of honey (that we happily consume matter that insects have partially digested), he also reveals the ways in which listening, too, is somewhat of a strange act. Stranger 2 in the panel must approximate listening to keep the conversation going with Stranger 1, and the stranger does so by using a range of verbal and nonverbal cues, as suggested by Karen Spear in the epigraph to this introduction. Stranger 2 not only tells Stranger 1 that it is listening, but Stranger 2 uses its body to signal that it is, in fact, listening; for example, Pyle depicts Stranger 2 in the
second panel with slightly narrowed eyes. As individuals living in a contemporary Western culture, we know, however, that Stranger 2 is not exhibiting other emotions that may be suggested by narrowed eyes (anger, agitation, etc.) in part because Pyle depicts Stranger 2 as cupping its human-like chin with its hand, a gesture that is commonly meant to indicate heightened interest in or deep thought on a subject. The combination of these gestures with the verbal response (“I’m listening”) demonstrate that listening is a complex interpersonal process—a strange process, unless we know and understand the rules of the culture we are inhabiting.

This chapter explores the conceptualizations of listening of the FYC instructors who participated in this research conceive of listening as a quasi-rhetorical act that is central to the project of FYC. Their conceptualizations of listening rely on the body as a heuristic for understanding listening (like Pyle’s strangers). This configuration of listening creates opportunities for bringing listening to bear on first-year composition pedagogy and theory while simultaneously foreclosing a fully-recovered conceptualization of listening as a rhetorical art. From these conceptualizations, we can begin building a theory of listening in which listening functions as a rhetorical act. Because the body can be an unreliable heuristic for ascertain when a person is listening, this emergent theory favors an inclusive approach to understanding when students are ‘signaling’ that they are listening, a theory that can account for diverse bodily performances of listening.

To articulate this emergent theory of listening, I draw from my interviews with seven FYC instructors in which I asked instructors a variety of questions geared toward eliciting their attitudes and perceptions of listening (see Appendix C). My interviews and
surveys of FYC instructors at Western University revealed salient features or characteristics of listening that seemed consistent across disciplinary orientations, fields of study, age, gender, and years of teaching. Despite my assumptions that instructors would characterize listening mostly in instrumental terms, the participants of this research project identified multiple features of listening that suggest that they think of listening as a rhetorical art, even if they don’t use such a term. Even as they gesture toward a rhetorical practice of listening, however, assumptions about bodyminds that tend toward a normative practice of embodied listening foreclose a more fully recovered conceptualization of listening.

Rhetoricity of Listening

Ratcliffe’s depiction of listening first and foremost as a trope for interpretive invention is worth investigating in order to understand the nature of listening’s rhetoricity. While figurative language (including tropes) is often understood as literary technique, rhetoricians have long relied upon tropological analysis for rhetorical purposes. In A Grammar of Motives, Kenneth Burke observes that the master tropes are valuable for rhetoricians not simply for “their purely figurative usage, but [for] their rôle in the discovery and description of the ‘truth’” (503). Listening, as a trope, creates opportunities for “interpretive invention,” which Ratcliffe later defines as “a way of making meaning with/in language” (“Rhetorical Listening” 202). In essence, listening is

\[13\] Readers will note that the glaring omission of difference from this list is racial differences. All of the participants in this project identified white. I return to this issue in the Limitations section of the Chapter 6.
a rhetorical art in that it enables rhetoricians to understand how individuals/texts/cultures make sense of their worlds through the use of tropes.

To begin building a theory of listening in FYC that accounts for listening’s rhetoricity and to explore the rhetoricity of listening suggested through these interviews, I highlight five attributes of listening identified by interviewees that demonstrate the participants’ perceptions of listening as a rhetorical art.

Method

To determine how instructor-participants make sense of listening as a concept, I began with seven initial interviews conducted during Phase I of this study. I then coded these interviews using a concept coding scheme, which attempts to “assign meso or macro levels of meaning to data or to data analysis work in progress ... A concept is a word or short phrase that symbolically represents a suggested meaning broader than a single item or action” (Saldaña 119). During my first round of coding, fifty-two independent codes emerged from the interviews (see Appendix E). During second-round coding, I condensed several codes initially represented as independent of one another into a single code (see Appendix E). For example, I had initially coded items that discussed “context” for listening as independent of items coded as describing how listening is “community driven.” This resulted in forty-one codes in round two. In order to determine which codes could be considered salient, I looked for codes that were common among at least four of the seven participants. Doing so produced the following five salient features of listening, as defined by the Phase I participants.
Findings

Salient Feature #1: Listening is a Social Act

The FYC instructors who participated in this phase of the research seem to draw on the disciplinary notion that writing is a social act and apply this notion freely to listening as well. Many FYC courses focus on teaching and exploring the idea that writing is not conducted in a vacuum. The same appears to be true for WU faculty where listening is concerned. While each participant seemed to note that the physiological process of listening was the same—it was something that happened in the ear and was processed in the brain—none was very interested in exploring this point. Rather, they focused on how performing listening is dependent on communities. Take, for example, Eli, who observes that the way that someone responds when they are listening is community-dependent, like what’s appropriate maybe in one setting might not necessarily be appropriate in another, and people can be listening in both settings, but the way that they respond to what they’re hearing or listening to may be different.¹⁴ (Personal Interview, 20 Oct. 2017)

Eli brings together the idea of community with appropriateness, propriety, or etiquette, a point he returns to later when he observes that students learn to listen from society and communities. He emphasizes that the process of learning transcends any one person or community. For Eli, “it takes a village, right? … I believe that the significant figures in students’ lives: role models, parents, families, friends, siblings, teachers, all play a role in [learning how to listen]” (Personal Interview, 20 Oct. 2017). But Eli’s first observation seems to suggest that it’s not just one village that a person learns to listen from, but many communities.

¹⁴ See Appendix D for a description of the transcription process of all Phase I and Phase II interviews.
villages, and that part of our development is in learning how to signal appropriately to
speakers and community members that we are listening.

Pablo also highlights listening’s social component by focusing on how the context
of a conversation influences how a person listens. In his interview, he imagines the
difference between listening to a person next to you at a dinner table versus trying to
listen to a person on the other side of the table. These notions of proximity and intimacy,
drawn from the social contexts of the two imagined scenarios, suggest that Pablo
considers listening to be a social act. He further extends his dinner table analogy to a
fictitious scenario in which he has the opportunity and challenge of listening to Steve
Bannon, former White House Chief Strategist to President Donald Trump, at a dinner
party. Pablo imagines being able to participate with Bannon in conversations about
immigration in ways that Pablo doesn’t think would be feasible if he were listening to
Bannon give a public lecture. The social context of the party provides Pablo with the
opportunity to ask Bannon to rephrase, restate, and clarify his positions. By providing
these two drastically different contexts, Pablo suggests that his approach to listening to an
inflammatory co-conversant would be different as a direct result of the social contracts
implied by each setting.

Responses like those from Eli and Pablo are provocative because they appear to
map onto what John Austin calls speech acts, or acts that are “carried out in patterned,
typical, and therefore intelligible textual forms or genres, which are related to other texts
and genres that occur in related circumstances” (Bazerman 311). Typified written action,
according to Bazerman, is best understood as a complex interplay between what we say
or write, our intentions in the speech act, and what an audience thinks we should do
From this complex nexus of language and interlocutors, social action is made possible and realities are created. The participants of this study seem to be making implicit connections between the study of written and verbal genres to the act of listening to an interlocutor. They feel connections to the kinds of contexts in which they typically listen and note that, to understand what listening is requires attention to what expectations and opportunities listening can assume, given the social contests characteristic of such settings. Marilyn, for example, can’t even begin to define listening without having some kind of context for her response:

Leslie: How would you define the word listening?

Marilyn: Outside of academia?

Leslie: Sure.

Marilyn: To fully consider and then, of course, there’s all kind of body language—cues—that go along with that, so, eye contact, not being distracted by other things, full involvement in the rhetoric that the speaker is saying.

Leslie: You had mentioned you were defining [listening] not in academic settings. Does your definition of listening differ or become—

Marilyn: —no, it just has a bit more of an agenda.

Leslie: Can you say a little bit about what that agenda would look like or what it is?

Marilyn: Yeah, I encourage my students to try and adopt that stance of nonidentification so that they may fully listen to others, so they can be more equitable in how they view experience that is different than their own and other people, and just be as inclusive and not merely tolerating, but accepting and appreciative of other experiences. That can be other with a capital “O” or lowercase. (Personal Interview, 17 Oct. 2017)

In this exchange, Marilyn states that, although she asked for the context of defining listening, her definitions are only different because listening in academic settings has an
agenda, yet I would argue that this is not a trivial difference and is, instead, evidence of Marilyn’s conceptualization of listening as context-dependent.

This realization—that listening is context driven—is both obvious and, yet, a critical step forward. On the one hand, communication scholars like Deborah Borisoff and Michael Purdy observed this fact in their 1991 edited collection *Listening in Everyday Life: A Personal and Professional Approach*. A major contribution of this text was how it brought together an array of listening experts whose research documents the role that listening plays in various professional contexts, such as K-12 classrooms, medical and legal practices, and service industries. The nature of the collection implicitly argues for community- and context-driven notions of listening. Despite this research, however, rhetorical inquiry has, as demonstrated in Chapter 1, only recently begun exploring listening’s rhetoricity. Given that all but one participant of this study are unaware of rhetorical listening as a scholarly subject, this research suggests that FYC instructors’ sensitivity to a rhetorical approach to textual production has already extended to other communicative arts such as listening.

**Salient Feature #2: The Body is a Heuristic for Recognizing Listening**

The second salient feature of listening produced by this research is, in some respects, an extension of the first. As the comic and the quote that open this chapter suggest, listening is often operationalized as a bodily process. For Karen Spear, this means that listeners participate in giving their speakers “verbal and nonverbal” responses in order to “sustain interaction” (116). Because listening is a social act, it necessarily includes performative aspects located in the body. How then do instructors make sense of the role of the body while engaging in listening?
In my interviews with participants, exchanges about how the participants know when a person is listening to them became key moments for understanding how they make sense of listening as a concept. In one way or another, all participants drew upon their ability to read bodily cues as important in establishing whether interlocutors are listening to them. The most commonly-cited bodily indications of listening included the following:

- Eye contact
- A specific look in the eye
- Facial expressions
- Mannerisms
- Verbal responses and backchannelling (responding with ‘uh huh,’ ‘yeah,’ to show interest, assessment, or comprehension)
- Nodding
- Note taking (in academic settings)

What has become evident in my interviews with FYC instructors at Western University is that listening can be difficult to identify without our interlocutors providing a variety of performances that, like listening, are community- and context-driven. For example, multiple participants observed that eye contact is essential for ascertaining if a person is listening to them, yet the participants often struggled to define exactly what it is they are looking for in terms of eye contact and a look in the eye:

- Garrett: “I think as long as a student looks engaged in the work they’re being asked to do…it can be just staring someone in the face and looking like they are paying attention.” (Personal Interview, 23 Oct. 2017)
- Jennifer: “Something other than the dead eyed stare, you know what I mean.”

• Paul: “When they are listening, I think about eye contact, but I’ve also had conversations with people who are sort of boring holes in your eyes.” (Personal Interview, 24 Oct. 2017).

• Eli: “I don't know if it's something that's taught, or if it's intuitive, but the gaze, sometimes you can just see the gaze on someone's face and they might be looking at you, but there's just something about—you know what I mean? It's like you can't, there's a brightness to the eye—I don't even know if it's a brightness or a spark—I don't know. It's intuitive I guess.” (Personal Interview, 20 Oct. 2017).

The consistent notion among these observations is that the participants need to see or experience something in the eyes of their listeners, but what that ‘something’ is can be hard to identify. Like Eli and Jennifer, the participants seemed to rely upon my shared experiences and felt senses and assumed that I would understand what they meant by a ‘dead stare’ or a ‘brightness.’ In this respect, the participants seemed to be relying upon the body as a heuristic for ascertaining listening, but even as they described how they use the body as a heuristic, their heuristics seemed to lose their reliability. What, for example, constitutes a “brightness” in the eye? How is a ‘dead stare’ different from the look of someone deep in thought? These heuristics thus become what I call ‘slippery heuristics.’

Heuristics, on the most basic level, are processes or scaffolding that enable learning. As described by James Kinney in his 1979 article “Classifying Heuristics,” heuristics are “methods of finding out or knowing something” (352). From composition’s early disciplinary years, the use and even the classification of heuristics has sparked controversies (Hawk “Embodying”; Kinney; Vitanza). My interest in heuristics, however, sidesteps some of these controversies by focusing on the function of heuristics in educational settings. Byron Hawk argues that, when we run the concept of heuristic through a tagmemic process (a particular heuristic at the heart of some of the 1970s
debates), it becomes a “complex and distributed activity, one that extends mental operations through historical movements and material spaces” (“Embodying Heuristics” 726). Heuristics enable the user to “[pull] disparate information together to its fixed points” (Hawk “Embodying Heuristics” 727). When used by students, for example, a heuristic can assist them in discovering lines of reasoning to forward an argument or to discover which types of evidence will be most compelling, given a particular genre or rhetorical situation.

Like students, instructors also deploy heuristics. As my interviews demonstrate, FYC instructors utilize student bodies as systematic ways of detecting listening in class. But using a body as a heuristic is challenging at best and marginalizing at worst. The usability and reliability of any given heuristic relies, in part, on the “material conditions of deployment [of the heuristic] and the pedagogical attitude that drives its use” (Hawk “Embodying Heuristics” 723). What are, then, the material conditions under which the body is deployed as a heuristic for measuring student engagement? The responses from my interview participants demonstrate little awareness of bodily difference as a material condition that influence the use of the heuristic. The use of student bodies as heuristics, however, is further complicated when we consider bodily difference in the FYC classroom. Karma Chávez, for example, observes that:

> with rare exception, only when actual bodies are *not* white, cisgender, able-bodied, heterosexual, and male do they come into view as sites of inquiry. The body has mattered in an abstract sense, with theorizations that are meant to apply to everybody by acknowledging that rhetorical practice and training are embodied after all, or only an abstract conceptualization of the body is significant for rhetorical practice and theory. (246, emphasis is original)
Chávez’s articulation of the tension between rhetoric’s reliance upon the body as an abstract notion and that abstraction’s reliance upon a narrowly-available body (that of a white, cisgender, able-bodied, heterosexual male) is emblematic of the problem with heuristics that I am suggesting here; namely, that the measures by which instructors assess listening are narrowly available to particular bodies with particular histories, dispositions, and desires. In short, the body cannot be used reliably as a heuristic, for when instructors attempt to read any bodily behavior as telling of a habit of mind, they only ever measure a bodily disposition, not a mental or scholarly endeavor. For example, when instructors use eye contact as evidence that the student is paying attention in class, it assumes that the student can, in fact, engage in eye contact. This requirement immediately excludes various populations of students that include (but are in no way limited to) students with disabilities that effect eye movements and students from socioeconomic classes or cultures who were raised to be deferential to authority by deferring eye contact.

I refer to the use of student bodies as a ‘slippery’ heuristic in order to illuminate how disability studies scholarship can bring to light how this particular heuristic marginalizes discrete, often historically underrepresented student populations. To do so, I turn to Jay Dolmage’s recovery of the ancient art of mētis, one that has been described as both “wise counsel” and “wisdom,” but also “cunning” and “trickery” (“Metis” 5). In ancient Greek traditions, mētis was often represented by the octopus, suggesting an embodied nature of “double-ness and unpredictability” (“Metis” 24). Perhaps most telling of the nature of mētis is that it is named for the goddess Metis, who, despite being married to Zeus, embodied such a powerful, unpredictable, wily art that she was able to
wriggle from Zeus’s attempts to rape her. This caused Zeus to consume her to contain her rhetorical powers (“Metis” 9).

The wily, unpredictable, and embodied nature of mētis helps illustrate why slippage occurs between the abstraction of bodies found in the listening heuristics used by FYC teachers and the bodies that are actually present in the classroom. Even as we may create abstractions for bodies, bodies—for better or for worse—are cunning, double, and unpredictable. Despite our desire to control the body through predictable and systematic heuristics, much like Zeus attempted when consuming Metis, bodies do not behave as orderly and tamable. Those students who have been disciplined—through classist, gendered, able-bodied expectations, to name only a few—to behave in accordance with the heuristic can be read and assessed as “good,” engaged, and active in the classroom. Those students how have historically not had access to such bodily and mental discipline or who, for various reasons like the presence of disabilities, cannot conform to those regulations are read as “bad,” disengaged, and inactive, which may tend to marginalize their presence in the classroom.15

**Salient Feature #3: Listening is an Act of Volition**

In my conversations with Marilyn, the notion of volition came up in several different ways. Marilyn connected listening with the term “paying attention,” a concept she defines as inextricably connected to her idea of listening:

Leslie: So, how would you define the word listening?

Marilyn: Outside of academia?

Leslie: Sure.

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15 More extensive analyses of the role of gender and disability are the focus of Chapter 5.
Marilyn: For me, listening, this comes from [Krista] Ratcliffe, it just does, it’s adapting a stance of nonidentification and by that I mean, where you don’t identify or disidentify with the speaker. Instead, you divest yourself of the ‘I,’ so that you may fully comprehend and pay attention to what the speaker is saying, so you take the ‘I’ out of it.

Leslie: And when you say ‘paying attention,’ what do you generally, we don’t have to talk about the classroom, but what does it generally mean to pay attention?

Marilyn: To fully consider and then, of course, there’s all kind of body language—cues—that go along with that. So, like, eye contact, not being distracted by other things, full involvement in the rhetoric that the speaker is saying.

Leslie: So, in other words, giving everything we can—

Marilyn: —uh-huh—

Leslie: —bodily attention, mental attention, and a willingness to step outside ourselves.

Marilyn: Exactly

Leslie: So, if there’s something we can divest of, we do, and that’s paying attention?


Marilyn’s definition of listening as “adapting a stance of nonidentification” is the baseline that she uses to understand the idea of paying attention as an act of volition.

According to Marilyn, the divestment of listening is made possible by choosing to give mind and body over to the moment of listening. She suggests that the act of being distracted when listening is, for the most part, a choice. Later, she qualifies her stance by explaining that there are times when an individual will not be able to help being distracted by using the following scenario: “if there’s a fire blazing over here [gestures to the right], we are going to turn our heads” (Personal Interview, 17 Oct. 2017). By
drawing on an emergency situation, Marilyn makes room for a handful of instances when
the act of choosing to divest ourselves while paying attention may be thwarted by factors
that are outside the control of the listener. However, she also implies that such
occurrences should be rare in a student’s day-to-day classroom life through her use of
such an extreme example.

Like Marilyn, other participants attempted to articulate how listening is an act of
volition, while also attempting to account for the moments in which a student’s ability to
avoid external factors is compromised. Garrett, for instance, recognizes that the social
setting of the classroom can often interfere with a student’s willingness to give
themselves over to listening. He remarked that students are often distracted by the
behaviors of their peers seated nearby. Garrett recognizes that laptops, for example, can
be distractions for students (although he allows them to be used in his FYC classes), but
he notes that glancing toward a neighbor’s screen is often not something that students
have control over. What they can control, however, is what they do once they’ve glanced
over. He considers the duration of a person’s distraction by a computer to be a key factor:
when attention is “pulled away and stays away,” that becomes an act of volition on the
part of the student, not the initial glance, which Garrett seems to suggest is beyond the
student’s control (Personal Interview, 23 Oct. 2017).

For many participants, students’ ability to give their full attention to listening is
also diminished when they are using cellphones. Six of the seven participants point to this
issue in some way, such as the Britney, who makes the following observation:

Leslie: On the flip side, are there body cues that tell you students aren’t listening?
Britney: Yeah, head down, asleep, that’s a pretty—
Leslie: —Yeah that’s pretty—

Britney: —Good one. Phone, right? Like, disengaging—I can tell they’re texting on their phone and they’re not listening. Although they are good multi-taskers, they are not that good, so if you’re doing something down here [holds hand near table top, uses fingers to motion texting, head tilted down, eyes gazing down] you’re not listening [left hand motions toward the opposite wall] to the board or wherever the thing is happening.

Leslie: Got it.

Britney: But those are the two biggest ones I see, the cellphone/texting and the physical exhaustion/sleeping. (Personal Interview, 26 Oct. 2017)

These instructors’ concerns about the role that technology plays in distracting students during class time are not without warrant. Anecdotally, instructors have years of experience that they can point to that demonstrates the point, and recent scholarship backs up teachers’ felt sense about cellphone; Michael J. Berry and Aubrey Westfall’s 2015 article “Dial D for Distraction: The Making and Breaking of Cell Phone Policies in the College Classrooms” reports on surveys from nearly four hundred undergraduate students across multiple public and private universities on their cellphone use during class. Over eighty percent of undergraduates surveyed reported that they check their cellphones at least once per class period (65). However, Berry and Westfall’s study further shows that cellphone use is drastically diminished in classes with small class sizes and in classes that utilize group discussion and group exercises in class (69).

Whether or not students’ use of cellphones or electronic devices are truly a source of distraction, what gets drawn out in these instructors’ perceptions of how listening is operationalized in FYC contexts is that, within many university contexts, our shared understandings of listening rely upon the topos of orderliness. Topoi are important in educational settings. As Margaret Price notes in *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental*
Disability and Academic Life, a topos “contributes to the construction of a rhetor’s ethos, or perceived character. It is often an issue or theme with which she must contend in the process of presenting herself as a credible and persuasive person” (5). In order to establish ones’ self as a legitimate ‘student,’ ‘professor,’ or even ‘researcher’ within a university setting, one must be able to embrace the values, beliefs, and practices of the group, while eschewing any contradictory practices. Price identifies some of the common topoi of academe as rationality, criticality, participation, collegiality, and coherence (Mad at School 5).

Orderliness as a topos invokes some of the topoi Price has identified, but it further suggests a conformity to established rules of conduct. In this way, it can be operationalized as a physical form of rationality: when one is being orderly, s/he is acting rationally, given the established codes of conduct. Orderliness also conjures images of regularity. Students in college settings are regularly expected to sit through a seventy-five-minute class meeting without taking breaks to the bathroom, for example. Knowing that these are proper ways of behaving in a composition course requires a vast array of knowledge sets that are acquired through the process of enculturation. When students fail to engage in these kinds of listening performances or try to signal their performance through non-normative performances, they run the risk of being labelled as ‘resistant,’ ‘absent-minded,’ or disengaged.

Salient Feature #4: Listening’s Purpose

The fourth salient feature that emerged in this project revolves around the purposes of listening in the FYC classroom. This feature makes sense, given how purpose is often depicted in rhetoric and composition as an essential element for understanding
the rhetorical context of any given text or speech (Bitzer; Melzer; Swales). If listening is to be understood as a rhetorical act, it makes sense that, in order to understand what it is, we have to understand the purpose the listener has for engaging in the act. For many of the participants, listening (depending on the context within the classroom) serves one of two main purposes: firstly, listeners listen in order to provide some kind of response, and, secondly, listening is the vehicle for attaining understanding.

**Listening to Respond**

Listening to respond was a function of listening that, for some of the participants, crossed listening’s many contexts. As Britney notes: “if you are really listening to a person, some type of follow-up questions come naturally,” and, while she doesn’t seem to limit herself to only academic settings, she gives a conference panel as an example of how this might work. She notes that, if asking a question during the designated Q&A portion of the panel is not comfortable, or isn’t “your moment,” listeners should still “get [the speaker’s] contact information and follow up” (Personal Interview, 26 Oct. 2017). Following up our listening with questions is important to Britney because it demonstrates the listener’s interest in the conversation “by trying to understand more of where [the speakers] are coming from” (Personal Interview, 26 Oct. 2017).

Like Britney, Garrett sees asking questions as inextricably connected to the act of listening. He defines listening as an “active process,” and when pressed to define what it takes to make listening active, he reiterates several times the need to ask questions: “it’s not just sitting there looking like you’re paying attention, but actively taking notes,
actively asking questions for clarification even, being involved in the process (Personal Interview, 23 Oct. 2017). Paul follows this line of thinking when he notes that, when a person is listening, how they frame follow-up questions is important too. He observes that there’s a difference in a person asking a follow up question framed as "what's that like?" versus “is it like this?” (Personal Interview, 24 Oct. 2017). The difference for Paul seems connected to Britney’s idea that asking questions is about showing interest by offering a response. In Paul’s case, if a person is truly interested in listening, Paul seems to think that a person will ask more open-ended questions that allow the speaker to explain, define, or qualify a topic on their own terms. Conversely, a person who is not truly listening may ask a narrow follow-up question in which the listener begins to impose his/her own agenda on the conversation by laying their own interests or assumptions on the question, as might be the case if the question were phrased “is it like this?” He makes this point when he associates the “is it like this” form of questioning with “offer your assumption,” in which he observes that “I really can't stand that either. I try to ask people questions and draw them out” (Personal Interview, 24 Oct. 2017).

Pablo also uses questioning as an indicator of student listening. He observes that when he introduces a new writing prompt:

Pablo: I think that in the process of talking about a prompt with students, listening in that sense for me might look like me describing a part of the prompt and then checking in with my students and being like “hey, is what I said understandable? Do you have any questions, or what questions might you have about the task that I just went over on the prompt?” Or something like that. And if they don’t ask me questions, I don’t know if that’s an indicator that they are listening or not, or if I’m just fantastic in my prompt—or if I’m just so understandable [said in an exaggerated tone],

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16 See Chapters 5 and 6 for discussions about creating listening-informed pedagogies.
but I feel like listening plays a role in that sense too. (Personal Interview, 23 Oct. 2017)

Jennifer also notes that “part of listening would be asking follow-up questions, and not just questions, but you saying things that are meant to generate, to help qualify, or to give you more information about [what the person said]” (Personal Interview, 25 Oct. 2017). Jennifer makes clear an important element of instructors’ conceptualization of listening: that instructors are more sensitive to the rhetoricity of listening than I had hypothesized. Yet, Jennifer establishes an instrumental purpose for listening—that we listen in order to respond, and such response is meant to keep a conversation in motion, a point I address in more detail in salient feature #5.

**Listening to Understand**

It is important to note that response is not the only purpose participants discussed during their interviews. The second purpose for listening they identified was ‘listening to understand,’ an attitude in which the listener listens to see the topic under discussion through the eyes of the speaker. Paul describes this as “listen[ing] in order to understand, not simply to respond or to categorize what the person is saying,” (Personal Interview, 24 Oct 2017) while Jennifer speaks of listening as a dwelling space: “someone can just say something and you can acknowledge that something was said and it can just sort of sit there if they want it to” (Personal Interview, 25 Oct. 2017). In classroom settings, Jennifer sees this as especially important when an individual receives critical feedback or when discussing individual experiences:

Jennifer: I think sometimes, if someone is being critical of you, and I don’t necessarily mean critical like angry or finger wagging critical, I just mean, if they’re, like if you’re being observed while you’re teaching and someone comes in and sort of gives you like, here’s what I was seeing—
and it doesn’t necessarily match up with what you—just being able to be like ‘okay, that’s what they’re saying but I don’t necessarily need to try to change their mind, maybe. And I also think that in situations in which people are talking about experiences with which I might not be, like the situations didn’t happen to me, or that I don’t really have a lot of context for. I think about that a lot with respect to diversity in the classroom, particularly if you’re working in a classroom where most of the students are white. At [my previous institution], most of the students are upper-middle class generally because it’s pretty expensive to go there, and so allowing someone who has an experience that is different than everyone else in the class to just sort of say it and not necessarily having everyone—not trying to necessarily—this is tricky.” (Personal Interview, 25 Oct. 2017).

While listening to understand is represented by the same number of participants as listening to respond, it is important to recognize which participants touched upon listening to understand during our interviews. Participants who identified response as a purpose of listening were a mix of individuals who identify as both male (3 participants) and female (2 participants). However, the responses among participants who considered listening to understand are skewed more toward female: all three of my female participants from Phase I considered listening to respond, while only one male participant (Paul) discussed it. While this data set is too small to make any strong generalizations about male and female instructors’ approach to listening, in this study, gender seems to be an implied factor for understanding who considers ‘listening to understand’ as a significant issue when talking about listening.

It is not all the surprising that, when it comes to the function of listening, it is the only feature that was skewed along gendered lines. Psychologists, sociologists, communication scholars, rhetoricians, and linguists have long acknowledged gendered assumptions about listening. Research dating back to the 1980s has documented the ways in which emotional labor has fallen primarily on women operating within motherly roles
The term emotional labor was coined in 1983 by Arlie Hochschild and is generally recognized as the unpaid and invisible work carried by individuals serving in care-taking roles. This work primarily involves the intentional management of the feelings of one’s self and of those for whom they care (Parks and Barta 32). This role, in many Western contexts, falls to women (Hochschild) and to those serving in care-giving roles, such as nurses (Gray) and nursing home workers (Lopez). Within institutions of higher education, emotional labor falls onto the plates of female academics (Tuck) and writing program administrators (Holt et al.; Gillam).

While listening may be undertheorized in the classroom, many scholars have documented how listening often functions as one of the many forms of emotional labor. For example, Carol Gilligan’s 1987 work documents the ways in which listening (when defined as a being heard and the understanding gained by hearing) is an aspect of care. Gilligan’s definition of listening as the process of gaining understanding or feeling of being heard resonates with Marilyn’s, Britney’s, Paul’s, and Jennifer’s descriptions of listening to understand. It also echoes Heidegger’s description of the divided logos described in Chapter 1 as the process of “standing under,” and not just under-standing. All of this is to say that, the fact that it was primarily female participants who noted this purpose of listening makes sense, given the gendered nature of listening itself\(^\text{17}\).

**Salient Feature #5: Listening is Part of How Academia Works**

Five of the seven participants in some way described listening as simply being part of how the university operates. Marilyn, for instance, drew specifically on the trope

\(^{17}\text{More extensive analyses and discussions of the gendered implication of this work are found in Chapters 4 and 5.}\)
of the Burkean parlor when asked to describe the role of listening in a FYC class. As she notes:

Marilyn: Well, I mean, it goes back to the Burkean parlor, right? We have to listen to the conversation before we can join it, and this is the number one thing that I think students have to grasp before they can engage in writing projects. Even though that’s reading and writing, if they imagine it as conversation—because they engage in that all the time—so it’s really applicable to them and just jumping in and throwing your two cents in and not really knowing what you’re talking about, you’re going to sound like a fool. This is something they can really grab on to and it makes writing instruction a little easier, I suppose. (Personal Interview, 17 Oct. 2017).

Marilyn’s insistence that students must learn how to treat writing as a conversation suggests that, for Marilyn, the university operates as an ongoing Burkean parlor in which academics are always engaged in conversations: learning and listening, adding to them, and staying in the conversation until their work takes them to other conversations. Seemingly for Marilyn, part of teaching writing in the university setting is preparing students to write and therefore participate in Burke’s “Unending Conversation of Mankind”—a task which necessitates learning and modeling listening in the classroom.

Marilyn is not alone in assessing academia as a series of unending conversations. Pablo sees a difference in the kinds of learning between high school and college. He remarks that “we get students at the college level after they’ve been exposed to ways of thinking and ways of moving through the world, and it’s our job to introduce them to different ones and to maybe help them shape practices that they already have” (Personal Interview, 23 Oct. 2017).

18 The “Unending Conversation of Mankind” is also commonly referred to as the Burkean parlor, metaphor Kenneth Burke uses to describe the unending conversation of mankind in *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (110-111).
In six of my seven Phase I interviews, the topic of where students learn to listen came up and, of those six participants, all of them identified FYC instructors as one of the places where students learn to listen. The reason for this seems consistent across participants: academia operates through the Burkean parlor and, in order to prepare students for work in the university, it is our job to prepare them to engage in those conversations. Eli illustrates this attitude when he suggests: “I feel like learning the sort of academic environment is important in first-year composition, in that they’re able to hopefully take those sort of skills (for lack of a better word) and use them in other classes” (Personal Interview, 20 Oct. 2017). Eli sees listening as being part of that education. He suggests that “by listening, [students] learn the moves of what’s going on in the conversations [taking place in the university]” (Personal Interview, 20 Oct. 2017).

**Conclusion: Listening’s Vocabularies & Entanglements**

When I began this project, one of my working assumptions was that FYC teachers do not think about listening as relevant to the work of first-year writing courses or as central to their pedagogies and practices. My interviews during Phase I of this project, however, demonstrate that the participants conceive of listening as a deeply rhetorical practice and central to their FYC classes. The participants I worked with demonstrate an awareness of how features such as discourse communities, embodied practices, volition, purposes for listening, and the contexts in which listening arises influence how a person listens. The salience of these features among participants, however, comes with consequences. To understand what the consequences of these are for first-year writing, we have to first understand what reality is created through this conceptualization of
listening. As Kenneth Burke notes in *A Grammar of Motives*, “[m]en seek for vocabularies that will be faithful *reflections* of reality. To this end, they must develop vocabularies that are *selections* of reality. And any selection of reality must, in certain circumstances, function as a *deflection* of reality” (59, emphasis is original). The questions that emerge from my interviews with FYC instructors are: (1) what realities related to listening, students, and FYC are selected in their definitions of listening and (2) what deflections of reality are implicated? To conclude this chapter, I briefly outline the selections and deflections that emerge in this project, which will be developed in further detail in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

**Selections of Listening: A Rhetorical Listening**

In this chapter, I have outlined the vocabularies selected by my Phase I participants, and these vocabularies select portions of reality that highlight listening as a rhetorical act. If Burke is correct in asserting that our selections are intended as a way of creating a “faithful reality,” then these selections beg the question: what is my participants’ reality I hear reflected in their vocabularies? To answer this question, I turn again to Byron Hawk’s “Sound: Resonance as Rhetorical,” in which he claims that sound is not a singular object, but is, instead, better understood as an assemblage, “part energy, part material force, and part relational exchange—that is entangled via resonance” (315).

I return to Hawk here to imagine what listening to my participants’ words, individually and collectively, aurally and in writing, tells me about their reality. What I hear is an assemblage of composition’s commitment to teaching writing as rhetorical. I hear resonance with composition’s commitment to debunk the myth that writing is a set of rules that must be learned, tested, and mastered, rather than a series of acts that require
attention to context and are negotiations that writers make in response to particular exigencies. When asked about listening, specifically in the context of first-year writing, I hear resonance of principles, approaches, and values likely taught to the participants either through their coursework in rhetoric and composition or in TA orientation programs. As Hawk observes, resonance “refers to the capacity of a material structure, like a wall, to vibrate at a certain frequency. Some of a sound wave’s energy gets reflected back into the room as reverb, some of it passes through the wall and is heard on the other side” (“Sound” 316). If we imagine pedagogy as such a material structure, then perhaps we are hearing the reverb of composition’s commitment to writing as rhetorical in their interviews. The participants’ knowledge of composition’s history, commitments, and pedagogies is necessarily entangled in their understanding of listening. In other words, we must see their reality, then, as a series of entanglements that create resonance and reverb. Thus, to untangle the reality of listening encoded in their selections, we must tangle it up with other commitments, much in the same way that Jay Dolmage sees mētis aiding rhetoricians in getting the history of rhetoric crooked (Disability Rhetoric 8). To more fully entangle participants’ reality, however, we must also understand that those entanglements create deflections of reality in their vocabularies. Perhaps the most significant deflection (for the purposes of this dissertation) is the entanglement of bodies in the classroom.

19 Though certainly not an exhaustive list, notable composition scholars who argue this point include Beaufort; Berlin; Bizzell; and Cooper “The Ecology.”
Deflections of Listening: Bodies, Gender, and Disability in the Classroom

The participants’ invocation of the body as a heuristic for understanding listening suggests a deflection of a fully-embodied recovery of listening. As discussed in this chapter, the participants utilize the student body as a way of ascertaining when and if a student is listening, but my interviews demonstrate little awareness of the slipperiness of this heuristic. More specifically, these interviews suggest two key\textsuperscript{20} deflections of an embodied conceptualization of listening: the ways in which gender informs how we listen and the ways in which disabilities impact bodily performances of listening. What this research suggests is that listening in FYC classrooms is regulated through gendered and ableist norms about how students should signal their engagement with class discussions and course content.

In saying this, I do not mean to suggest that I think my participants specifically, or FYC teachers more broadly, actively marginalize students in the classroom based on embodied intersectional factors like gender and disability.\textsuperscript{21} Rather, I believe that, because rhetorical instruction has historically been focused on the training of selective groups of able-bodied men, we can see vestiges of this history still playing out in classrooms today. While this argument has been made by scholars before me, we have yet to see how gendered and able-bodied notions of listening specifically impact FYC pedagogies and classroom culture. Brenda Jo Brueggemann has called for “a rhetoric of

\textsuperscript{20} These are not the only bodily deflections that can be extracted from this research, and more research should be done to address how other avenues of intersectional identity is selected and deflected in teachers’ conceptualization of listening and bodies in the FYC classroom.

\textsuperscript{21} More to the point, because these interviews may feel like a form of auditing (see Chapter 2), we do not know the extent to which the participants espouse these attitudes, or whether they feel they should perform these attitudes, given that they are being interviewed about their work as educators.
responsive and responsible listening that matches our rhetorical responsibilities for speaking—[it is] time for a rhetoric that lends its ear” (17). The findings discussed in this chapter help to clarify what a “responsive and responsible listening” must entail.

A responsive rhetoric of listening must draw on the knowledge of mētis in order to account for difference in the classroom. The feminist and disability critiques outlined in this chapter demonstrate that, without an accounting of bodily difference in the classroom, FYC risks marginalizing students who may not perform listening through historically white, middle class, male, and able-bodied notions of orderliness. This marginalization may have significant impacts on students. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, many FYC classes require ‘participation’ as official parts of students’ overall grades. If instructors do not recognize that listening is performed at the intersections of identity and bodily difference, we run the risk of potentially using assignments like ‘participation’ to bolster the grades of students simply because they are not marked as different in the classroom. This insight, however, should not be construed as suggesting that teachers need to know how a student identifies (as a gendered, racial, or dis/abled, for example), for, as Stephanie Kerschbaum has argued, such endeavors would emphasize a “difference fixation” in the classroom (Toward 57). This is one way of discussing a responsible rhetoric of listening. First-year composition needs a responsible rhetoric of listening that allows for a range of performances of listening that honor the students who engage in class in a variety of ways and that shifts instructors’ attention away from assessing students’ engagement in class based on behavioral cues and toward assessing their engagement in the work they produce for the course.
A responsive and responsible theory of listening must thus account for listening’s rhetoricity while must also go beyond that by recognizing how listening is embodied in diverse ways. A responsible theory of listening must account for the body as part of a student’s listening practice and performance without reducing students’ bodies to a set of predetermined assumptions about how students should use their bodies to perform listening. In making such acknowledgement, the theory of listening that begins to emerge in these findings place an emphasis on an inclusive, expansive understanding of how listening is performed and that provides the space for instructors to recognize and appreciate that diverse students with diverse bodyminds will use their bodies to listen in varied ways.

In the next chapter, I draw on my classroom observations conducted during Phase II of the study and present three case studies about how listening is operationalized over the course of a semester. Through these case studies, I explore how the features detailed in this chapter intersect in the participants’ classes in real time and further demonstrate how feminist and disability critiques allow for future exploration into listening’s primacy in FYC and how these selections and deflections further impinge upon the performances of teachers and students in the classroom.
Chapter 4

‘Fitting,’ ‘Misfitting,’ and ‘Retrofitting’ Engagement in Class Discussion: A Case Study

“Fitting and misfitting denote an encounter in which two things come together in either harmony or disjunction. When the shape and substance of these two things correspond in their union, they fit. A misfit, conversely, describes an incongruent relationship between two things: a square peg in a round hole. The problem with a misfit, then, inheres not in either of the two things but rather in their juxtaposition, the awkward attempt to fit them together.”

–Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (“Misfits” 593)

“retrofit, n.: A modification made to a product or structure to incorporate changes and developments introduced since manufacture;”

–Oxford English Dictionary

“The retrofit is...part of composition pedagogy, particularly in relation to issues of difference. Too often, we react to diversity instead of planning for it. We acknowledge that our students come from different places, and that they are headed in different directions, yet this does little to alter the vectors of our pedagogy.”

–Jay Dolmage “Mapping Composition” (21)

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I reported on the findings derived from my interviews with first-year composition (FYC) instructors to answer the question ‘What is listening?’ in relation to FYC. This produced five salient features of how the FYC teachers I interviewed operationalize listening. These features tend to highlight listening’s rhetorical nature, but they also demonstrated a lack of awareness for how bodily difference impinges upon the performance and interpretation of listening behaviors. While this portion of my project illuminates FYC instructors’ perceptions of listening, the interviews were decontextualized from the FYC courses the instructors taught. During these interviews, when participants gave examples from their classes, they tended to be
generalized to the point that the experiences could have been in any first-year writing course.

In order to more fully capture the participants’ understanding of listening as directly related to the FYC classroom, Phase II of this project engaged in ethnographic research. From my original seven interview participants, two volunteered to allow me to visit their FYC class four times over the course of a sixteen-week term. Additionally, another instructor at Western University (who had not previously participated in Phase I) allowed me to likewise observe her class, producing three distinct cases that produce thicker descriptions of how listening is taken up in the FYC classroom. This produced key data on several levels. Firstly, it provided sets of classroom interactions that both the participant and researcher had observed, thus allowing us to engage in conversations about discrete moments that we could use to discuss listening in more depth. Secondly, it forced participants to move away from their general conceptualization of listening toward applying those notions at the immediate classroom level. The ethnographic data produced through these observations provides a richer picture of how FYC instructors conceptualize listening and the roles that listening plays in writing instruction.

During my observations and post-observation interviews, it became apparent that the participants connected listening to FYC classrooms through their regular practices of incorporating discussions into class time. Unlike other first-year courses across the disciplines, the FYC instructors that I observed rarely utilized lecture-based pedagogies. Lecture-based pedagogies might be described as classes in which an instructor utilizes most of the class period to orally disseminate information for students to learn, record (by taking notes), and commit to memory, similar to the banking model of education.
famously critiqued by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* The instructors that I observed instead utilized pedagogies that largely draw from composition studies’ commitment to models of collaborative learning, in which instructors and students participate in the co-production of knowledge (Bruffee; Glenn and Goldthwaite; Holt). In the FYC classrooms I observed, listening was always connected to what the participants would alternately call ‘engagement’ in or ‘paying attention’ to class discussions. Students’ ability and willingness to engage in the discussion would ideally culminate in the students joining the discussion through verbal participation.

Because the participants connected class discussion with learning in FYC, it begged two important questions: (1) what does it mean for students to ‘participate’ in FYC class discussions and (2) how do instructors conceive of listening as part of students’ participation? In this chapter, I draw on my three case studies to demonstrate that student participation (conceived of mostly verbal participation in group discussions) is important for FYC instructors because it functions as evidence of students’ broader engagement. However, when participation is primarily conceived of as verbal engagement, FYC classes potentially become environments where marginalized students (such as students with disabilities and female students) can become further disenfranchised. These case studies reveal help to illuminate how notions of engagement are not neutral: they fit or misfit certain bodies. Furthermore, bodily difference impacts how students choose to engage in class and that listening—and its attendant performances—are only a portion of students’ broader practices of engagement.
‘Engagement’: A Bodymind Dilemma

Engagement, as defined by the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and the National Writing Project (NWP) in their jointly published Framework for Success in Postsecondary Education, is “a sense of investment and involvement in learning” and is “fostered when writers are encouraged to: make connections between their own ideas and those of others; find meanings new to them and build on existing meanings as a result of new connections; and act upon the new knowledge that they have discovered” (Framework 4). While the Framework attempts to articulate engagement’s role in students’ ongoing development, one of the problems with this habit of mind for composition studies is how it is extended from observations of students as writers to observations of students as speakers in class discussions, a transference not unique to writing studies. In Chris Vander Ark’s column published in the English Journal, he reports on a study in which he interviewed thirty-five college instructors from different disciplines to understand how they make sense of engagement as a habit of mind. He reports that multiple instructors foster engagement through in-class discussions. In one instance, a sociology professor asked students to write weekly responses and then discuss those responses during class (Vander Ark 104). Another participant—a philosophy professor—also used class discussions because he “[wants students] to learn how to have an argument about the morality of something that matters a lot to them” (Vander Ark 105). Like the instructors in my case studies, Vander Ark’s participants employ class discussions in order to foster engagement through dialogue.
In the context of FYC, the ramifications of using classroom discussions to gauge students’ engagement are increased, given how ‘participation’ is structured into students’ course grades. Kerry Dirk surveyed instructors through emails on a listserv and found that ninety-three percent (93%) of respondents required participation as part of a course grade and that, on average, participation counted for fifteen percent (15%) of a student’s overall grade (89, 104). Among the three case study participants presented in this chapter, two required and graded participation, as outlined in Figure 4.1 later in this chapter.

The dilemma created by assessing engagement through class discussion necessarily crops up when we return to the presence of difference in the classroom. While these discussions are meant to be inclusive of all students, they can pose significant access barriers. In order to analyze these barriers, disability scholars have developed useful apparatuses for articulating them. In her book *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, Alison Kafer explores the concept of “compulsory able-mindedness,” which she defines as “a way of capturing the normalizing practices, assumptions, and exclusions that cannot easily be described as directed (exclusively) to physical functioning or appearance” (184, emphasis is original). Margaret Price has extended Kafer’s notion of able-mindedness by pairing it with Rosemarie Garland Thomson’s concept of “misfitting,” or the idea that flesh (mind and body) and environment exist in a “co-constituting relationship” (Garland-Thomson “Misfits” 594). As noted in the epigraph to this chapter, misfitting denotes disharmony between body and space. For Price, the notion of “fitting” is “a function of relations of

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22 Dirks’ findings corroborate John C. Bean and Dean Peterson earlier research that demonstrated participation was graded, on average, at fifteen percent (15%) of a student’s course grade.
power, for a person’s fit or misfit is ‘sustained’ or not by changing contexts and attitudes” (“The Bodymind Problem” 271-272). When we bring able-mindedness and misfitting together, we have a better conceptual apparatus for understanding the dilemma of assessing engagement through classroom discussion. To be “fit” in the context of a class discussion suggests several dispositions, capabilities, attitudes, and inclinations that students must be able (and have a desire) to assume in the class.

Composition studies, and higher education more broadly, have recently begun attending to the misfittings that occur between bodies and educational spaces (physical, social, and discursive). Primarily, this has been encapsulated in academia’s move to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act\textsuperscript{23} requirement for reasonable accommodations. However, Jay Dolmage argues this effort can be best described through the metaphor of a retrofit, which is described in the epigraph to this chapter as modifications made to something after its initial design and manufacture. As Dolmage has clarified in his most recent work, \textit{Academic Ableism}, retrofits “fix space,” but they do so in very limited terms because of the inherent “chronicity” of a retrofit (70). Thus, retrofits like the move to making accommodations “temporarily even the playing field for [students with disabilities] in a single class or activity,” making it “clear that these retrofits are not designed for people to live and thrive with a disability” (Dolmage, \textit{Academic Ableism}, 70). For Dolmage and many other disability scholars, the danger of retrofits is that they appear on the surface to correct the misfitting between body and space. In the case of a ramp attached to a historic building in compliance with ADA

\textsuperscript{23} This includes all amendments to the ADA, as well as Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act.
regulations, on the outside, the building appears to have been made fit for use. Yet, what retrofits reinforce is that the misfitting occurs because of a body—a student—not because of something inherently misfitted in the structure. Bringing the retrofit to the pedagogical level, retrofits reinforce the idea that our approaches to teaching writing are fine until, and only when, our campus ADA officers or Disability Resource Centers indicate there is a misfitting.

This chapter traces the ways in which listening, engagement, and student participation are misfitted and retrofitted in the FYC courses of my case study participants. The results presented in this chapter reveal that large class discussions present misfittings along both gendered and able-bodied lines. In some instances, the participants try various forms of retrofitting to make discussions accessible, primarily along gendered lines. While the attempts to retrofit the class demonstrate the instructors’ awareness of the limitations of group discussions, this chapter argues that such moves represent a limited attention to the access barriers students face in the classroom and an opportunity to, as Jay Dolmage has urged, “alter the vectors of our pedagogy” in light of the presence of difference which has always already existed in first-year composition (“Mapping” 21).

**Method**

To capture how bodies are misfitted as ‘engaged’ in class discussions in FYC, I was able to recruit two participants from Phase I to allow me to visit their FYC classes four times over the course of a semester. A third participant volunteered to allow me to visit her class, although she did not participate in Phase I. Figure 4.1 below provides a
snapshot of the participants’ background information and short narrative profiles on each participant:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Racial Identity</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Grades Students’ Participation?</th>
<th>Participation Value of Total Course Grade</th>
<th>Disability Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Garrett</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Y – Learning Disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marilyn</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>No Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Y – “Former impairments stemming from PTSD”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to observe a range of potentially different classroom interactions, I asked participants to allow me to observe their classes as follows:

(a) on a day that they introduce a new concept to students;

(b) on a day that students are engaged in a peer workshop; and

(b) on two days (once during the first four weeks and once later between weeks eight and twelve) when students discuss a reading in class.

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24 Gender and racial identity are self-reported by the participants and I have used their words in this table.

25 After the classroom observations, participants were invited to self-discoelease any disabilities via a secure survey platform. See Appendix J for the survey questions. These questions were modeled after the National survey of Student Engagement’s 2014 demography questions (BrkaLorenz et al. 2014).

26 Morgan initially completed the survey and indicated in the survey that she did not have a disability. Later, Morgan emailed me to indicate that she remembered that she had previously been diagnosed with PTSD. Together, we created the description written in Figure 4.1.
These parameters were created in order to elicit different kinds of classroom interactions among students and teacher that might produce an array of experiences. These parameters were based on my own experiences as a FYC instructor and what I have experienced in my own classrooms in terms of opportunities for and difficulties with cultivating listening. For example, over eight years of teaching FYC, I have observed that, at times, FYC students tend to tune out while we discuss course readings. I wanted to observe classes that might have similar difficulties and to hear what other FYC instructors think about the role of listening in these moments.

The kinds of listening that students and teachers engage in while discussing a reading, however, seem to be different than the kinds of listening engaged with when an instructor introduces students to a key concept that must be utilized or applied in a writing project. These key ideas widely ranged: in one class they discussed planting a naysayer into an essay and how to make the significance of an argument clear to a reader. In another class, the new idea was how to read (and then write) an abstract for a research paper. I anticipated that students in these circumstances might be motivated to listen as carefully as they would in a traditional lecture by taking notes and asking clarifying questions, but I was especially interested in hearing from teachers the role that listening would play for them.

At the end of each classroom observation, I asked the instructor to complete a short freewriting exercise, which was meant to capture their initial impressions of the class that was observed and the role of listening in that class (see Appendix F). These freewriting exercises helped me prepare to interview instructors after the class (which took place within seven days of the observation) and were also given to the instructors to
refresh their memories at the beginning of each post-observation interview. Additional interview questions were asked of each participant after each observation (sample questions are found in Appendix C). In all, these three case studies produced eleven classroom observations, thirteen hours of class observations, and fifteen hours of interviews.27 These cases produced three distinct portraits of how FYC instructors draw upon their areas of scholarly inquiry, experiences teaching FYC, experiences as students, and their personal and professional commitments as they operationalize listening in the classroom. From these three case studies, two major themes emerged: misfitting bodyminds in class discussions and retrofitting participation along gendered lines, which will be discussed in the following sections.

Findings

Crip Time as an Able-Bodied/Minded Misfittings in Class Discussions

While the effects of intersections such as gender, race, linguistic identity and diversity, and socioeconomic class on classroom participation in higher education have been thoroughly studied in recent years, much less scholarly attention has been paid to how intersections of ability impact participation. In response, disability scholars have used the concept of ‘crip time’ as a way of articulating some of the access barriers students with disabilities face. Alison Kafer suggests that “rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds” (27). To approach the classroom from an understanding of the need to crip

27 I was only able to observe Morgan’s class three of the anticipated four times.
time, instructors must “[reimagine] our notions of what can and should happen in time, or [recognize] how expectations of ‘how long things take’ are based on very particular minds and bodies” (Kafer 27). Most often, the concept of accessibility in higher education results in time being used as an accommodation. An example of this is when students are provided extra time for test-taking purposes (Wood 261). Like my student, David, who I discussed in Chapter 1, students need varying amounts of time to complete even the most seemingly mundane tasks, like peer review. Crip time, however, avoids placing the problem of time on the shoulders of students with disabilities and looks instead at the problems inherent in higher education’s concept of what should be accomplished in any given timeframe. Moreover, crip time functions as lens that illuminates how notions of engagement and classroom pacing are not neutral; rather, such notions tend to fit certain kinds of bodyminds while marginalizing the engagement and participation of students whose bodyminds do not conform to normate assumptions.

Crip time has been successfully used to demonstrate the limitations of commonly-accepted spaces in higher education. Margaret Price et al. have made compelling arguments that scholarly and academic conferences are not built around crip time, thus marginalizing the ways in which presenters and attendees can engage with the conference (Composing Access). Tara Wood has looked at how normative concepts of time related to timed writing and the pacing and sequencing of writing assignments negatively constrain students with disabilities. While these endeavors continue to develop more inclusive spaces in higher education, both overlook perhaps the most pervasive space in FYC: class discussions. This lays the groundwork for understanding how instructors conceive of time
as it relates to class discussion has the potential to continue developing more inclusive classrooms paces.

One of the most striking observations about all of the classes I observed was how little time students had to prepare for and then engage in class discussions. Over my eleven classroom observations, I observed class discussions in which Marilyn, Morgan, and Garrett elicited student responses by asking questions. However, each instructor allowed less than one minute of silence before intervening in the silence. This seems less a problem on the instructors’ part and more of an indication of how normative time impacts classroom pacing and design. Presumably, the instructors believe that students have come to class prepared to engage in dialogue, supported by the fact that many questions are derived from the assigned reading for the day. For example, during my third observation, Marilyn lead her students through a discussion of the importance of planting a naysayer in their essays. Prior to class, students were supposed to have read a section from the required textbook titled “Answer Opposing Arguments.” Marilyn’s questions stem from the content of the textbook and ask them to make connections to other discussions they have had. At one point, Marilyn asked her students why they might want to plant opposing viewpoints in their papers (Class Observation 3).

Marilyn then prompted her students to make connections to previous discussions of bias and fairness that are not covered in the required reading for that day (Class Observation 3). When discussing a separate issue, Marilyn notes that it’s important to help students “make connections between lectures that may seem very distant temporally but close in theme throughout the course” (Personal Interview, 10 Apr. 2018). Comments such as this suggest that Marilyn recognizes the difficulty first-year students have in
making connections and sustaining attention to topics that recur throughout the semester, but what seems to be lacking is an attention to the time first-year students need to build these intellectual and temporal connections. What seems to occur is that Marilyn poses a question and looks for students to make the connection quickly and silently and then offer a verbal response, but with such small amounts of time to do these intellectual gymnastics, Marilyn loses the opportunity to build crip time into her class discussions.28

While time seems to be working against students in moments like these, Marilyn also seems to miss other classroom scaffolding that might help ameliorate normative time constraints. For example, composition theorists have long upheld practices such as freewriting and small group discussions as routines that allow students to discover and distill their thinking about a topic, to make and clarify connections, and to rehearse their thinking in low stakes circumstances prior to reporting to the class and the instructor in larger group discussions (Moore Howard). During none of my observations did I notice Marilyn using these approaches. After my second classroom observation with Marilyn, I asked her why she doesn’t use small group discussions more often, to which she replied:

Marilyn: The one thing that I see that small group discussion does that I’m not one hundred percent on board with is it gives them ample opportunity to engage in underlife, as opposed to staying on track and making sure that they actually really understand the concepts. (Personal Interview, 6 Mar. 2018)

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28 A counter-reading of this could be that Marilyn feels—because she is being observed—that she needs to move the class along at a steady pace. While she never brings up a desire to slow down the pace of the classroom, the audit culture that surrounds my presence in the class makes this a viable alternative for consideration (see Chapter 2 for a more extended discussion of the audit culture of classroom observations).
What emerges in this moment is Marilyn’s conceptualization of her students’ hierarchy of needs. While small groups have advantages for Marilyn, she also sees a more important need to understand concepts correctly and fully as taking precedent, leading her to seek out large group discussions in which she can control the content, direction, and pacing. However, with all decisions come consequences, and what seems to be sacrificed in choosing to control the class discussion is the option to maximize crip time and to use pedagogical frameworks that could potentially support a class committed to crip time.

Like Marilyn, Garrett also tended to focus on large group discussions when introducing concepts that students need to understand, but, unlike Marilyn, he typically allotted time after these discussions for students to work in small groups to apply the principle. For example, during my second observation in Garrett’s class, Garrett was introducing his class to John Swales’s “Creating a Research Space” model as for writing an introduction to the students’ current essay project. During this discussion, Garrett provided information about the model through a PowerPoint and oral lecture in which he connected the material being displayed with other discussions they had had in class and added supplemental, clarifying descriptions of each conceptual point on the slides. After describing the information contained on each slide, Garrett would check comprehension of the material with his students, typically by asking them “does this make sense?” (Class Observation 2). During this particular class session, no students responded verbally; at times, a few students would nod their heads in assent, and Garrett would advance the

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29 Again, another alternative could be that Marilyn feels as though she should espouse this belief because she is being interviewed, a point I return to in the conclusion.
slides within ten seconds of asking the question. At no time did any student ask for clarification.

After introducing the idea of the Swales moves to the class, Garrett projected an introduction to a published article written by Cynthia Selfe and, with his students, they at the introduction to see how the different moves played out in a published work. Garrett had highlighted the text in different colors to demonstrate where the different moves started and stopped, as illustrated in Figure 4.2.

*Figure 4.2: PowerPoint Slide Depicting Color-Coded CARS Moves*

Example

- The term "writing apprehension," originally coined in 1975 by Daly and Miller (1975b), refers to a generalized tendency to experience "some form of anxiety when faced with the task of encoding written messages. Much of the early research in writing apprehension was concerned with defining the theoretical construct of writing apprehension and establishing the validity of the Writing Apprehension Test (WAT), an instrument designed to measure that construct (Daly & Miller, 1975b, 1975c). Later research has explored the correlative and predictive functions of the WAT. Specific studies have connected scores on the WAT with choice of academic majors and careers (Daly & Shamo, 1976, 1978), scores on self-concept and self-confidence measures (Daly, 1979), and performance on various assessments of writing skill and writing quality, (Daly, 1978a, 1978b; Daly & Miller, 1975a, 1975d).

To date, however, no substantive research has been done to define the relationship between writing apprehension and the processes students employ as they compose. It is not even certain, for example, how or to what extent the theoretical construct of writing apprehension is evidenced during the act of composing, whether, in other words, there are definable differences between the composing process of high and low apprehensives. The current study was designed to address this particular question. The research project reported in this paper had three main goals: a) To record the predrafting processes of several high and several low writing apprehensives engaged in academic writing, b) To analyze the predrafting processes of both groups, c) To examine the results of this analysis for evidence of differences related to writing apprehension


Garrett then checked the group for understanding:

Garrett: How do we know this [gesturing to a particular line in the passage] is where she is ‘indicating the gap’?

Student: [Reads from projected slide] ‘no substantive research has been done.’

Garrett: Does this make sense now that it looks like this?
[Silence. No students responded verbally. Several students nodded their heads in assent. Garrett then instructed students to get out the research articles they had found on their topics and, in partners, to read the introductions and identify the Swales moves used by the authors.] (Class Observation 2)

During my follow-up interview with Garrett about this class, I asked him if his students listened to the mini-lecture or in the group exercises in any way that surprised him. He returns to this moment in class and describes his reaction to what followed:

Garrett: It’s not that I don’t anticipate it, it’s something about the listening that the students do in their groups. It always gets me, you know, when they get in groups, [inaudible] conversations they have or some of the things that they [inaudible] small things that aren’t like, [inaudible].

Leslie: Can you think of any particular conversations that you overheard that day that surprised you?

Garrett: I did hear a student talking about what it means by a ‘gap’ and how the researcher was probably paid to do the research but also had to show a ‘gap’ in the research and wondering, ‘why is there a gap?’ (Personal Interview, 1 May 2018).

Garrett seems to indicate that the students’ discussion of what a gap is and whether the research was funded is tangential to the task at hand, yet it may not be. It may, in fact, indicate that the students still have questions or concerns about what gaps in established literature are, why researchers establish them in research articles, and the role that indicating a gap plays in ongoing scholarly conversations. Simply put, the questions may be digressive to the task of analyzing the article the students brought into class, but the questions do not seem inconsequential for students to understand the role that these moves play in order to prepare themselves to replicate them in their own essays.

While Garrett is surprised by this line of discussion, it is important to recognize that Garrett allows the conversation to continue without shutting it down or redirecting
the students. His decision, while not necessarily rooted in an awareness of crip time, demonstrates that he recognizes that something valuable can come from allowing students the time and space to work out their understanding on their own terms and with their peers. This stands as a comparison to Marilyn’s concern about students’ underlife interfering with learning. Underlife, as described in Robert Brooke’s foundational text, “Underlife and Writing Instruction,” “refers to those behaviors which undercut the roles expected of participants in a situation” (141). Brooke argues that underlife, while often lamented by college instructors, is actually “connected to the nature of writing” and, drawing from Erving Goffman, that such behaviors are “a normal part of institutional life” (141, 142). In his semester-long study of one FYC course, Brooke revealed that underlife in the writing classroom is generally associated with what is taking place in class (144). As an example of this relationship, Brooke describes a scene from one class session in which students were exploring Young, Becker, and Pike’s tagmemic matrix by observing how their understanding of a common object like a potato changes by applying it to the matrix:

While the class was discussing how a potato might change over time and in what contexts this change would be interesting, these students began a private discussion of how to ferment the potato to get vodka. When asked by the teacher what they were talking about, one of the two (looking nervous) explained that the process of fermentation was obviously a ‘change over time’ and that this process was interesting ‘in the context of alcohol production.’ In this example, the students had openly ceased to participate in class, and seemed (from their giggles) to be ‘telling jokes’ behind the teacher’s back. But the content of their ‘jokes’ was actually a way of applying the class concepts to their own late-adolescent interests in alcohol. Their retreat from class participation was a retreat which took a class concept with it, and which applied that concept in a highly creative and accurate way. (144-145, emphasis added).
Brooke’s dual recognition that (a) students’ divergence away from class activities is usually not a real departure and (b) that the class concepts go with them is a significant demonstration that instructors’ fears about giving up control of the classroom to allow students the intellectual, social, and physical space and—most importantly—the time to make sense of course concepts on their own terms is at times unfounded. This position has been reasserted by contemporary scholars like Derek N. Mueller, whose 2009 *Computers and Composition* article “Digital Underlife in the Networked Writing Classroom” argues that even in the presence of significant digital underlife in the classroom, such as students checking social media, underlife can still be framed as “productive and generative—a welcome presence rather than a predetermined hindrance to learning” (247). To this, I add that creating space for underlife to become productive and generative may also be an inclusive move in composition pedagogy because it disrupts the misfitting that exists between large class discussions and lectures and the time allotted for students to perform the complicated mental and social gymnastics involved with the performance of ‘engaged first-year student’ in those settings.\(^{30}\)

These portraits of the misfittings that occur during classroom discussions are not intended to point out any deficiencies in Garrett and Marilyn’s practice. During my time working with each case study participant, their dedicated to cultivating their students’ learning and development was readily apparent. In sharing and analyzing these classroom moments, my goal is to try to develop a theory of listening that moves beyond listening’s

\(^{30}\) It is impossible to tell whether Marilyn truly believes that underlife is distracting or whether she professes this belief because of the observer effect (see Chapter 2). Nonetheless, if Marilyn believes that she should disavow students’ underlife, this still speaks to the need for reimagining the value that underlife can bring to the classroom, especially from an inclusive classroom perspective.
rhetoricity by exploring how attention to embodiment may enrich such a theory. The
misfitting of student bodies in class discussion helps to articulate the ways in which
assumptions about engagement more broadly and class discussions more specifically fit
some students while also being misfitted to other students. This places a greater emphasis
on developing a theory of listening and engagement that can account for diverse
bodyminds in ways that honor the fact that how students choose to engage in class
reflects the dynamic interplay between their experiences in classrooms, their bodyminds,
their goals, and other factors.

**Gendered Retrofitting in Class Discussions**

It has long been documented that the gender norms students are exposed to
influence how they engage in the classroom (Caspi et al.; Opie et al.; Tatum et al.). Tina
Opie, Beth Livingston, Danna Greenberg, and Wendy Murphy’s 2018 *Higher Education*
article explores the role of student gender, instructor gender, and classroom
demographics on student participation in business schools. They note that male students
are more likely to participate during class and to view participation as central to their
learning (Opel et al. 3). Altermatt et al.’s 1998 study found that male students were more
likely to volunteer responses in class than female students, a finding that has been
reaffirmed by Eddy et al. in 2014.

The female participants in Mary Reda’s study of five self-identifying “quiet
students” in first-year composition help to illuminate how the will to speak during class
can marginalize female voices. Catarina, a self-identified eighteen-year-old white woman
speaks of being asked to talk in class, both in high school and in first-year writing
courses, as a form of surveillance. Reda observes that the students “have become
accustomed to seeing speech as an examination,” and that Catarina perceives class discussions as “another way that teachers subtly but publicly test them and ensure their compliance” (88).

Another student, Lucy, an eighteen-year-old born in Israel to American parents, shares an experience in which she objects to the content of a film being shown in class on Rasputin and his intimidation of women. Lucy describes the instructor as “‘drilling’” her about her objection and then reflects on her feelings about the experience:

I kind of felt like, ‘What do you want from me?’ Just stop. Forget it. Never mind. I just wanted to say that. I didn’t want you to ask me anything.’… He wanted me to say what exactly it was, in one sentence that’s bothering me. And I didn’t know really what it was…I didn’t have an answer for him, because I didn’t have an answer for myself…I almost wanted him to tell me what my answer was because I felt like he had something in mind that he wanted me to say, that he wasn’t going to leave me alone with it. So I said, ‘I don’t know,’ but it really bothers me. (Reda 99, emphasis is original)

Reda, too, reflects on what she—as an instructor herself—hears from this student. Reda notes that she “certainly empathize[s] with [Lucy’s] growing uneasiness throughout this story,” yet she also “feel[s] an uncomfortable kinship with Lucy’s teacher who, I believe, desperately tried to capitalize on this eminently teachable moment” (99). I suspect many instructors would likewise feel such kinship. Yet, Lucy’s recollection of being asked to vocalize her indescribable objection in class illuminates how speaking in class can be a risky enterprise. Lucy voluntarily voiced her concern yet seemingly wanted her objection to stand for itself without interrogation—presumably because Lucy herself was not ready (or perhaps did not feel safe enough) to venture down that line of thinking. Given the sensitive topic at hand, we can draw forth White’s observation that minority students are often “doubly challenged with having to overcome cultural differences to express their
views while at the same time they are expected to represent such differences on a much larger scale” (254). Lucy ventures toward one side of the bind—speak and be recognized—yet she immediately regrets her decision. Catarina on the other hand, chooses silence because she feels as though there was a right answer that she needed to discover, but couldn’t.

Reda’s discussion of her female students is reminiscent of one of my observations in Marilyn’s class. I observed Marilyn’s class for the second time toward the end of February of the spring term. On the day I observed her class, Marilyn and her students were beginning their second unit, which would culminate in a rhetorical analysis of a text of the students’ choosing. To begin the unit, Marilyn used this class period to review some material the students were to have read from the textbook new teachers were required to use during their first semester teaching FYC at Western University. This text included definitions of rhetoric from classical to contemporary rhetorical scholars, descriptions of the ‘rhetorical triangle,’ and information on the three rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, and logos). In order to help students learn how to dissect a situation in terms of the rhetorical triangle (which she identified as rhetor, audience, and text), Marilyn verbally narrated three of what she considered to be “everyday situations,” but ones which she described as being “fraught with tension” (Personal Interview, 6 Mar. 2018). Through her version of the Socratic method,31 she worked toward preparing students to apply this knowledge in a future writing assignment while also shedding light on issues related to gender and race in the context of the United States.

31 Marilyn describes the Socratic method as the process of using questioning to achieve learning and a form of teaching that is directly opposed to traditional forms of lecture (Personal Interview, 9 Apr. 2018).
In one example, she relates a story told to her by a former student when she taught in the South told her. She describes this discussion again in her post-observation interview as follows:

Marilyn: I used a student’s story. She is a black woman and goes to school in a predominantly white school, and this actually happened to her in high school, she told me. One of her white girlfriends said, ‘you’re very pretty for a black girl.’ And so I wanted to investigate that [in class] and see where that comes from, and have students pick that apart and see its racist underpinnings. That was kind of the goal of the class, and in order to aid in that kind of comprehension, we also watched a short video about the surprisingly racist roots of the word ‘Caucasian,’ as put forth by MTV’s “Decoded.” (Personal Interview, 6 Mar. 2018)

This portion of class began by going over the three points on the rhetorical triangle and using several examples before coming to this scenario. As the students analyze the situations, Marilyn kept track of some of the information on triangles she had drawn on the board, which are depicted in Figure 4.3.

![Figure 4.3 Picture of whiteboard with Marilyn's notes, dated February 26, 2018.](image)

After narrating her former student’s experience and viewing the video, the following exchange took place in class:
Marilyn: How might the history of the word ‘Caucasian’ be related to this scenario?

[Silence. No students answer.]

Marilyn: Come on, guess.

[Silence. No students respond.]

Marilyn: White skin was seen as… [trails off and does not finish sentence]

Student #1: Beautiful.

Marilyn: The fairer you become, the more beautiful they are, like Snow White. The darker you become, the uglier you become, which leads to microaggressions, racism, et cetera. Does that make sense?

[Some students nod in assent. Others remain seated without verbal or physical response to Marilyn’s question.]

Marilyn: Do you see why rhetoric is important?

[Some students nod in assent, some verbalize ‘uh huh’ (affirmative). Others remain seated without verbal or physical response to Marilyn’s question.]

Marilyn: It’s because it helps us break down forces of oppression. (Class Observation 2).

This particular exchange during class is significant when thinking about how the impetus to talk during class discussion can potentially marginalize female students. Marilyn’s line of questioning seems to fall flat with the students, but not necessarily because the questions are impossible to answer. Marilyn begins the discussion with the question “How might the history of the word ‘Caucasian’ be related to this scenario [the student story she told about a black woman being told she is “very pretty for a black girl”]” (Class Observation 2). Essentially, Marilyn had asked her students to take what

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32 Certainly, this moment could also potentially disenfranchise students of color and other minority groups, but such discussion is outside the purview of this chapter.
they heard in the video and apply it to the previous narrative. Yet, only one out of eighteen students present chose to speak, and only did so after Marilyn prompted them to respond and then provided them with a leading answer (‘White skin was seen as…’).

One potential explanation for why this could involve how female students, especial women of color, are implicated in the content of the dialogue. Marilyn asked her students to lay bare the racist undertones found in the kinds of backhanded compliments given by young women to one another, but to speak out and name those impulses required her students to be able to speak both to the subtle infiltration of racism into everyday interactions and to the kinds of underhanded comments made by self-conscious young women. They must, as Reda notes, choose between a ‘desire for ‘self-expression”’ and the safety of silence (99).

Morgan, another case study participant, also focused on discussing the implications of class discussions on female students of color. After my second classroom observation, Morgan reflected on a class discussion regarding the information collected by companies like Facebook and Google on their users and the potential violations of privacy such data collection poses. To begin this discussion, Morgan projected for the class a Twitter thread by a user, Dylan Curran (@iamdylancurran), that uncovered all of his information that was being stored by the two companies (depicted below in Figure 4.3).
Morgan read the twitter thread aloud while simultaneously projecting it for students to read. The following discussion ensued:

Morgan: How are you feeling about this? [pause] Are you okay with this?

[Silence. No students respond.]

Morgan: Rachel, you look freaked [out].

Rachel: Yeah, this is scary.

[An unknown student whispers ‘shit.’]

Morgan: Thoughts?

Alexander: I can kind of assume when I go online that I’m being watched. I don’t want to be, but I know [I am]. But I’m a teen, white male who doesn’t do anything. If they want to look at my information, that’s fine.

Morgan: But are they [looking at your information]?

Alexander: I don’t know.

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33 All names are pseudonyms.
Morgan: They are, and they used your information to spread propaganda and misinformation on the 2016 election. Any other thoughts? Alexander is okay. Gabriel, is this just Facebook and Google? If I use a different browser, would [the same thing] happen?

Gabriel: Yup.

Morgan: Tony?

Tony: I kind of expect this, but if my parents knew this they would freak out.

(Class Observation 2)

During our interview, I had asked Morgan to reflect on the role that listening played during this discussion. Morgan begins with the following observation:

Morgan: I think that, if you wanted to be part of the discussion on privacy invasion, you had to listen. You had to be reading and taking in what I was reading from that thread, and then obviously paying attention to the questions that were posed and comments made by other students. What I did notice, tell me if you want me to stop, was a particular student who is on my left, kind of in the corner, Alani, and she doesn’t usually participate verbally. She’s a good student, I just don’t think she’s a morning person, or she’s just shy, which I was a student and I try to be really cognizant of that. I don’t believe in forcing people to talk. I’ll try to draw people out because I think that it is important from my own experience, because when I did start participating, I did listen more effectively.

It seemed like, judging from her facial expressions, she often was disagreeing with people in the class and [I was] kind of struggling with, ‘should I invite her into this conversation?’ I also noticed that other women who are normally pretty quiet—Rachel—she seemed troubled by [the tweets]. And I believed they made a couple of comments—

Leslie: mm-hmm (affirmative)

Morgan: but I’ve got two dominant males in the back: Tony, who is also very tall, which works in his favor, and Alexander, who has a very deep voice and has no problem voicing his opinion. I think that sometimes my students, because I have a lot of shy students in that class, and then they feel like they don’t have that entry point and then they just kind of zone out because, who wants to listen to Tony and Alexander the whole time? So I try so hard to bring in other voices, but I’m really not sure. I don’t want to embarrass anybody, which I think, as I did [as a student] in one class
because the teacher just kept calling on me because he thought it would help me. Instead, I just shut down and got more and more embarrassed. (Personal Interview, 9 Apr. 2018)

While Morgan and I don’t talk much more about these female students, or Morgan’s belief that dominant male students in the class are potentially preventing female students from participating in class discussions, I happened to see Morgan approximately a week after the interview. She indicated to me that she was thinking about our conversations and was doing things differently in class because of those discussions. We returned to this topic again in the next interview:

Leslie: When I saw you after the last observation, you said that you had implemented some things or done some things differently based on our last conversation. Do you remember what it was that you were doing differently?

Morgan: Mmmmm-hmmm [affirmative]. I thought of Katie and Alani right on the left side. I was being much more conscious about calling on them, also Audrey. Waiting for a question that maybe would be one that wouldn't feel like too much of an imposition because Audrey does not speak much and so I thought, ‘Well, she doesn't have that practice. I don't want to overwhelm her.’ So being very conscious.

Also, Christina in the back, who's very shy and I think suffers from some lack of confidence. I noticed that when she started talking, she stopped. Anybody who wants to help out, jump in. I don't believe in just waiting out that student. I think that's torture. I've had it done to me a number of times and it's horrible.

Leslie: Right.

Morgan: Your brain shuts down.

Leslie: What, if anything, did you notice was different based on your conscious effort to call on these women in the room?

Morgan: I don't know if I noticed anything was necessarily different. Katie is kind of like, I know I bring her up frequently. I think that's
someone who wants to really be a part of the conversation. I can see it in her body language. She kind of lurches a little forward. Her facial expression is like [exhales sharply]. She really likes it. I have a feeling she might be a budding researcher.

Leslie: Okay.

Morgan: She seems very interested. Some of the questions that she asked about Regnerus' study were especially interesting to me, especially for a freshman level. (Personal Interview, 2 May 2018)

Morgan’s observation that nothing was significantly different in class despite trying to incorporate her female students into class discussions is an important consideration. Like Marilyn, Morgan is conscientiously seeking ways to make female students active participants in the classroom, but her solution to the ‘problem’—calling on them and providing them with low stakes questions and allowing other students to contribute when the student does not respond—simply doesn’t seem effective at transforming the classroom space in ways that Morgan is satisfied with. To her credit, Morgan seems to recognize that class discussions tend to marginalize the participation of certain students (including female students) and genuinely wants to include female students with something to say (based on bodily dispositions and behaviors) in the conversation, a point she discussions in much more depth later in the interview:

Morgan: I think it's really trying to balance out what does true equality look like? I'm also conscious of the fact that my three white guys in the back, this is also their classroom. And they are helping me out immensely. If I didn't have them, I'd [inaudible]. Because I think they kind of get [discussions] going. It's that feeling of, who does the classroom belong to? As educators we often say, 'it's not my classroom, it's our classroom,' in that really sanctimonious way that we sometimes do. I am becoming more and more aware of who gets to be what in the classroom. It obviously doesn't just stop at perceived ethnicities. It comes with so many factors. For me, we could say that being first generation made me very reluctant to speak. But I had always been shy. I had been shy long before
college. I was more of a Christina. I always felt like whatever I had to say was so stupid. I really didn't like meeting new people. It just wasn't my thing. (Personal Interview, 2 May 2018)

Morgan sees a relationship between who is speaking and who has 'ownership' in the classroom; namely, that those who speak regularly in class may feel a greater sense of ownership of the classroom itself. For Morgan, the understanding that “who gets to be what in the classroom” is beginning to take on new importance and, perhaps, more urgency. As an instructor, Morgan realizes that talkative, dominant students can prove to be powerful because they can get a discussion going when no other students feel interested or inclined to speak, but finding balance between dominant voices and quieter ones, for Morgan, is a matter of creating a classroom space based on equality.

Despite these heartfelt goals for the classroom, dominant male students continue to talk, and quiet, female students remain, by Morgan’s account, mostly silent. One potential reason this remains true is because the apparatus Morgan and Marilyn use to cultivate participation—verbal discussion among students and instructors—is misfitted for creating the kind of inclusive space where loud and quiet voices can find equal footing alongside each other. As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson’s epigraph to this chapter suggests, Morgan recognizes there is a problem of fitting between the student bodies in the classroom and the discursive space of class discussion. Her attempts to correct the dilemma and restore harmony between education and student bodies is more akin to a retrofit, or it could be the result of feeling the pressure of an outside presence in her class. In my discussions with Morgan, we can think of class discussion as the thing to be retrofitted. Conversations are often thought of as springing forth from some impetus, like a question raised by an instructor. From that stimulus, different participants weigh in on
the topic, adding to what has been said, disagreeing with what has been said, or modifying some position with new reasons, for instance.

In the class discussion where Morgan talked about privacy violations by Google and Facebook, the mechanism of classroom discussion had broken down; discussion flowed from Morgan, to one or two dominant male voices, and back to Morgan. The problem, then, necessitates a retrofit of the conversation: calling on students who Morgan believes are interested in the conversation but hesitant to participate for various reasons. Yet, even after applying the retrofit, the mechanism remained unchanged.

A similar process occurs at times in Marilyn’s class. Marilyn attempted to retrofit the conversation and engage students in discussion not by calling on students individually, but by applying two retrofits: using ‘real life’ examples that engage students’ intersectional identities and providing leading answers. Even with the added retrofits, the conversation remained unrealized. Returning to Price’s argument that misfitting is a function of power, class discussion represents one moment in FYC in which the conflict between gendered discourse practices (including the desire to remain a silent, listening member of the classroom) and the construction of student-hood as an engaged speaking member of the classroom are brought into high relief. This rhetorical double bind that female rhetors often face has been well-documented among feminist rhetorical scholars (Belanoff; Glenn). Yet, my experiences in Marilyn’s class demonstrate how seemingly innocuous classroom practices tend to reify the divide in discourse practices for many FYC students.

The practice of retrofitting class discussions suggests that Morgan, and potentially other FYC instructors, are aware of the inaccessibility of class discussions for some
students and may also represent a genuine concern to make this pedagogical approach work for everyone. Yet, the fact that class discussions need retrofitting helps to reinforce the elements of a theory of listening that suggest that institutional beliefs about what it means to be engaged and participatory need better ways to account for students’ diverse participation performances and practices.

Conclusion: A Feminist Disability Reading of Engagement

The findings of this chapter reinforce my findings in Chapter 3 that instructors’ conceptualizations of listening tend to deflect bodily difference, while also demonstrating how the body and listening are marginalized in Marilyn’s conceptualization of how students demonstrate ‘engagement’ as a habit of mind central to first-year writing. For Marilyn and Garrett—and so many other FYC instructors—‘participation’ in class discussions is a required component of student course grades, yet there seems to be little reflection about how the organizing principles of ‘class discussions’ shape students as participants or non-participants. To conclude this chapter, I begin by considering the limitations of the conclusions drawn from these classroom observations. From there, I look how student bodies have historically been situated in higher education and how that situation produces unarticulated ideologies about ‘engagement’ that rely upon ungendered, able-bodied (and able-minded) student subjectivities.

Limitations

As with all qualitative research, this chapter relies upon my interpretations of what took place in each class that I observed. To arrive at these interpretations, I rely on
the post-observation interviews to get a clearer sense of where the participant and I see events similarly and differently. My conclusions (in the form of chapter drafts) have been provided to the participants to allow them to check that I have represented them and their classrooms fairly. Each participant was instructed to let me know of any instances where I didn’t get something right and, as readers have noted, periodically participants have done see (see Morgan’s response in Chapter 2). This process of member checking is vital for increasing the reliability of the results of a qualitative study.

Even though participants are provided with opportunities to speak back to my representations, responsible qualitative researcher must attempt to account for moments when their interpretations have viable alternatives. There are, of course, reasons why the participants in this study might not have provided alternative readings of our interactions. One reason could be that the participants simply do not feel comfortable doing so, or confident that the researcher will be open to alternative readings. Additionally, participants simply may not have the time to devote to doing work that they feel is the researchers’ responsibility. While these alternatives point to why participants may not be able to provide such feedback, Price & Kerschbaum, following Brenda Brueggemann, interrogate whether such requests are even ethical, noting that:

> It is not automatically the most respectful, most ethical thing to do to ask participants for more and more of their time and effort; in some cases, it is more respectful to realize that they may not wish to be involved in the process of composing representations. (25)

This brings me to the question: what if these interpretations are not correct? What if, for example, Marilyn does not really disregard underlife as a valuable source of learning? For this project, the answer seems to be in not in why the participants align themselves
with such attitudes, but that they do. In other words, the question of why leads us to motive or intentionality. That they share these attitudes with me—whether such statements are performances or heartfelt—tell us something about the landscape that these participants operate in. For this project, I am less interested in why they believe what they do or enact the practices they do because ultimately, their attitudes and practices are shaped by the landscape in which they work, what will be called in Chapter 5 the activity system in which these participants work. Thus, the unarticulated ideologies discussed in the next section still apply can be attributed to the activity system in which this study takes place rather than trying to ascribe them to individual instructors.

Unarticulated Ideologies of Bodies and Engagement

To disentangle the relationships between class discussions, bodies, and listening, I bring together two analyses that I have heretofore handled separately: those of gender and ability. Contemplating these two groups separately has enabled me to shed light on how different identity markers produce different sets of constraints on student engagement and participation. However, to imagine that the groups are separate, mutually exclusive identity categories would be to perpetuate cultural myths about identity that identity scholars have long persevered to undo. As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson observes, no individual woman is ever merely a woman, but instead inhabits multiple subject positions. The same has been said for individuals with disabilities (“Integrating” 30; see also Spelman). I turn, then, to the insight of the burgeoning field of feminist disability studies to investigate the history of student bodies in higher education.

Feminist disability studies, as described by Kim Q. Hall, is “more than the sum of its parts” and reimagines and transforms both disability studies and feminism (1). One of
the goals of this scholarly enterprise is to reveal the socially-constructed ideals of ‘normalcy’ and ‘control’ through gendered and able-bodymind norms and practices (Hall 5). One of the earliest advocates of this interdisciplinary field of study, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, draws on her early concept of the normate to demonstrate how both female and disabled bodies are often marked as deviate, ugly, and unfit when compared to “the corporeal incarnation of culture’s collective, unmarked, normative characteristics” (“Integrating” 23). Feminist disability studies maximizes the insight of both fields in order to show how cultural notions of gender and ability are built out of “culturally fabricated narratives of the body” (“Integrating” 17). The questions this line of inquiry leads us to are: (a) what are the “culturally fabricated narratives of the body” within the context of higher education? and, (b) how do these narratives continue to constrain bodies through the continued practice of enforcing—to varying degrees—a static notion of engagements as verbal participation in the classroom?

The data collected through these classroom observations suggest that one “culturally fabricated narratives of the body” related to the practice of class discussions in FYC include the following is that engaged students verbally participate in class discussions. This narrative, however, constrains bodies in varying ways and with varying effects on students. For some students, the constraints of a verbal conversation about a reading or a topic mirror the kinds of conversations that they have in their life outside of the academy and for these students, such conversations can be engaging, illuminating, and even exciting. For other students, these conversations are filled with uncertainty, and move in ways that can be difficult to follow, recognize, or anticipate.
The findings from these case studies reaffirms that the body is a central mediator of classroom life and that the FYC instructors observed grapple with the values and expectations surrounding student engagement. In response to the complicated performances of listening and engagement—and the myriad ways students performance engagement—they, at times, rework classroom practices in attempts to fit students to classroom discussions. This helps to further articulate an embodied theory of listening in which some students are disenfranchised when their bodymind performances do not conform to normative expectations.

Our classrooms today are filled with students of such diverse backgrounds, and many—if not most—FYC instructors see this as an opportunity to be seized, rather than a burden we have been saddled with. The evolution of FYC toward pedagogies that speak to our students’ vastly different backgrounds and experiences provides great opportunities to engage students in conversations that will help them learn to negotiate difference in the personal lives, in public discourse, and in their professions. However, the findings of this chapter suggest that we can rethink ‘engagement’ by rethinking what it means to have a ‘conversation.’ The vast body of research into multimodal composing, for example, may be one way of pursuing alternative formats of classroom dialogue, a move that may allow instructors to recognize the presence of different voices and may engage students in new and invigorating ways. Instructors may need to also think laterally about crip time during class discussions and how negotiating a conversation with an ear toward crippling time may create new opportunities for students who have been sidelined from the conversation to take center stage. What we need, in other words, are more conversations: conversations that are structured differently, that engage students in
different modalities, conversations that have different kinds of rules and platforms so that, at the end of the day, all our students have had an opportunity to voice (verbally, digitally, artistically, bodily, etc.) their thoughts and experiences in ways that honor our students’ vastly differing bodyminds.
Chapter 5

The Sex Life of Syllabi: A Rhetorical Genre Analysis of Listening and Engagement in FYC Syllabi

“When presence appears more literally on the scene of academic discourses—that is, when it is used to refer to whether or not students physically attends classes—the conflation of presence, goodness, freedom, control, and individuality is used to construct pedagogies that presume that, first, presence is the sin qua non of learning in higher education, and second, that the ‘choice’ of whether or not to be present belongs to the individual student.”

–Margaret Price (Mad at School 65)

“[We argue] overall for a more complex notion of telepresence—one that goes beyond imagining the normate body projected into various digital realms, and instead brings the disabled and re/mediated body together... Telepresence calls into question the very meaning of presence and absence, and in particular, calls into question which bodies are marked (or forced to be) present and absent in given contexts.”

–Margaret Price (“Toward”)

Introduction

During my Phase I interviews, I spoke with Britney, a PhD student in Western University’s rhetoric and composition program. As we talked, it became clear that Britney holds a deep investment in composition pedagogies and first-year writing, especially in her commitment to feminist and queer pedagogies as inclusive approaches to FYC. She talked eagerly about Sarah Ahmed, Paulo Freire, and bell hooks. Britney loves teaching FYC and she loves her students. During the final week of each semester, she invites her students to take a picture with her that she shares on her social media page with her own reflection about the intellectual work her students engaged in and how they challenged her to be a better person, a better teacher, and a better community member (she always encourages student to stand behind the camera if they are uncomfortable being photographed).
During our interview, I asked Britney to talk about how she asks her students to participate in class. She began her response by telling me about the first week of class. She recalls her approach as follows:

We have this conversation on day two because everyone freaks out about participation in such a small classroom. And I’ve actually had several students ask how I define participation in class, which I thought was cool. I hadn’t had that happen before. So, I say that the way I have it set up, or the way that I structure their class, [it] allows for you to participate and engage in a variety of ways. (Personal Interview, 26 Oct. 2017)

Britney goes on to tell me about a variety of ways that she ‘measures’ her students’ participation: checking at the beginning of class that her students annotated the reading as instructed, collecting a freewrite written during class, and participating in small and large group discussions. For Britney, students’ willingness to write what their group talked about on the whiteboard—even if they then ask a group member to explain it—“counts” as participation. Like other participants, Britney remembers her undergraduate days as a time in her life when she was not “a talker.” As she concludes her thoughts on student participation, Britney makes the following observation about her pedagogy:

I want there to be other ways built-in that I measure participation, like your body being there in whatever capacity it’s supposed to be there, and those types of things. My most attentive students don’t say a damn thing, but they’re working, they’re getting A’s, they’re turning in stuff I see what they’re writing, and they’re good with me one-on-one. (Personal Interview, 26 Oct. 2017)

We can see Britney’s commitment to inclusive pedagogies coming forth in this description of her goals for student participation. She wants students to come to class “in whatever capacity [their bodyminds are] supposed to be there,” and she begins communicating her goals and expectations for their presence and engagement in the class in the syllabus (Personal Interview, 26 Oct. 2017). Moreover, Britney’s efforts to
cultivate a range of participation performances moves toward Price’s concept of telepresence by calling into question what it means to be engaged in class: for Britney, students don’t need to talk to be engaged. However, even as she moves toward a conceptualization of telepresence, Britney cannot escape the logic of a “fleshy” presence that Price claims to be central to the work of higher education (Mad at School 64-65, 112). Even though they can signal their participation in multiple ways, students must still be physically present in class in order to be recognized as engaged learners.

Like Britney, the participants in this research project, like so many other instructors in higher education, rely on students’ bodily presence (often called ‘attendance’) and “active” engagement as ways of assessing students’ overall performance in their course, which culminates in a course grade. This configuration of student engagement and presence, however, becomes yet another way in which listening is marginalized in the classroom because the requirements for student presence and constructions of active participation fail to account for how listening—inside and outside of class meetings—contributes to students’ learning. The process by which instructors come to rely on this configuration, I argue, is a complex process of inherited institutional habits and desires for student success.

The purpose of this chapter is to problematize what may be construed as a misleading assumption embedded in the use of qualitative methods in this project: namely, that FYC instructors create—or invent—desires for students and then act upon those desires in the classroom. Scholars in composition and rhetoric have dispelled this myth and, following the postmodern tradition, have echoed the death of the subject. In so doing, the notion of individualized agency as conscious decision making by rational
agents has also been called into question and replaced with models of agency as emergent, enacted, and embodied (Cooper “Rhetorical Agency”); as a property of the rhetorical event, not of agents (Miller “What Can Automation”); or even as a “rhetorical negotiation between speakers and audiences” (Kerschbaum “On Rhetorical” 60). This is to say that, if we truly want to understand how instructors make sense of listening, engagement, and bodies in the FYC course, we also have to account for how institutional, professional, and programmatic desires for student engagement inform how instructors approach the classroom. This discussion sheds light on the larger question of this dissertation; namely, how do FYC instructors operationalize listening in the classroom?

This chapter qualifies the preceding findings by turning to questions of agency, desire, and genres as a way of theorizing the role of listening in FYC.

In this chapter, I argue that FYC instructors enact classroom models of student presence and engagement that marginalize listening’s rhetorical potential, not because instructors actively align themselves with such attitudes, but in part because such beliefs are interpolated by genres common to FYC. In order to do this, I use rhetorical genre studies (RGS) as a lens through which we can analyze (a) how syllabi are entrenched with attitudes toward presence, engagement, and bodies, and their effects on listening, (b) how instructors work with and against those attitudes, and, finally, (c) how the attitudes and desires encoded in syllabi playout in classroom interactions. The analyses in this chapter demonstrate that notions of engagement are not neutral, but that these notions are regulated within contexts that may interpolate instructors. Furthermore, while students may have vastly different approaches to their bodymind performances of listening and
engagement, institutional, program, and instructor policies may unnecessarily restrict the performances available to students during class.

**Institutional Context & Activity System**

The syllabi that make up the corpus for this project are created, negotiated, and disseminated within the all-too-familiar hierarchy of public universities. Western University is a public, four-year institution in the Western United States of America.³⁴ The Writing Program is housed within the English Department, which is located within WU’s College of Humanities and Social Sciences.³⁵ For the 2018-2019 academic year, incoming freshman enrollment exceeded 3,500 students. During the fall semester in which the syllabi were collected, Western University’s Writing Program offered ninety-three sections of ENG I alone. These sections were staffed by fifty-eight writing instructors whose rank ranged from graduate student teaching assistants, permanent and term lecturers, and tenure-track faculty. During the Fall 2017 semester, all instructors were expected to write their own syllabi for the Writing Program courses, though sample materials were available to new instructors in a Writing Program Employee Handbook. The handbook also contained verbatim polices that must be included in each syllabus as mandated by the WU’s provost’s office.

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³⁴ See Chapter 2 for more extensive institutional information about Western University.
³⁵ Name changed to protect anonymity.
Agency, Desire & Genre’s Oscillating Tension

Rhetorical genre studies (RGS) has emerged in the field of rhetoric and composition as a powerful approach to understanding the material, discursive, and sociohistorical nexus that surrounds all rhetorical acts. As Carolyn R. Miller has observed, the rise in attention to genre studies is valuable to the field “not because it might permit the creation of some kind of taxonomy, but because it emphasizes some social and historical aspects of rhetoric that other perspectives do not” (“Genre as Social Action” 151). Miller famously describes genre as “represent[ing] typified rhetorical action” (“Genre as Social Action” 151). Here, rhetorical action becomes ‘typified’ in the sense that larger patterns of symbolic action take place in recurrent patterns: “genre is rhetorical when it captures large-scale patterns of symbolic interaction, patterns that are taken as meaningful” (Miller et al. 270). Essentially, Miller sees rhetorical situations as recurrent. While the specifics of any rhetorical event may be slightly different, we can understand rhetorical action as unfolding along patterns of interaction. Recurrence, as Miller argues, is not found in the “material configuration of objects, events, and people,” nor is it a “subjective ‘perception;’” rather, it is “an intersubjective phenomenon, a social occurrence” (“Genre as Social Action” 156).

While the recurrence and typifications of genres are made possible through social interactions of beings who recognize certain situations as calling forth a particular pattern of symbol-making and symbol-using, this stabilizing function does not negate the need to account for variation in genre production. Robert Brooke and Dale Jacobs argue that variation is a product of negation between writers, “the internal structures of the ideas [writers are] building and the external structures that come from what we know of [a
particular] genre” (qtd in Bawarshi 79). Anis Bawarshi extends this analysis by suggesting that such denials must necessarily include “the relationship between a writer’s material, local conditions, and the genre’s ideological and discursive demands” (*Genre* 79). Central to understanding genres for Bawarshi is a careful accounting of the ideology embedded within all genres, since, ideology makes social motives for action available to actors (*Genre* 88). Bawarshi draws from sociologist Anthony Giddens’s work to explain this interconnection between the ideological demands of genres and how individuals take up and enact genres. As he explains,

> Human beings reproduce the very social structures that subsequently make their actions necessary, possible, recognizable, and meaningful, so that their practices reproduce and articulate the very structures that consequently call for these practices. (*Genre* 87)

In other words, individuals and ideology exist in a co-constructing relationship by way of genres. Genres call for particular ideological desires for action and the performance of such action, which, by way of generic performance, create the structures that bring forth the conditions for the generic performance.

One way that RGS scholars have tried to explain this phenomenon is by incorporating notions of agency. The idea that the ideologies embedded in a genre impinge on the action of the individual calls into question Romantic notions of identity, subjectivity, and agency. Within such Romantic worldviews, individuals act on their own genius; their identities are built based on individual will and intentions. This, however, is in conflict with RGS’s understanding of how the ideologies found in genres impact individuals in myriad rhetorical situations. How then are we to make sense of the individual’s agency? Bawarshi favors an ecological model of agency, one that recognizes
that agency is negotiated across the “dynamic relations” of materials, relationships, bodies, and social relations found within “textured spheres of activity” (Genre 71). This form of agency rejects positioning the individual as the “primary agent of his or her desires” (Genre 71). Instead, agency is negotiated between the individual’s intentions and desires and “the agency of the genre’s conditions of production” (Genre 79). In suggesting this tension between the different agencies (the individual’s and the genre’s), Bawarshi produces a model of agency that echoes Richard A. Lanham’s oscillatio, a figure that embodies permanent oscillation between polar perspectives (Miller et al. 273). Genres, figuring as permanent oscillatio, act as a “fulcrum mediating such polar oscillations,” a model for genres that illustrates how “individual intentions and socially objectified exigences mutually produce and sustain each other” (Miller et al. 273).

One of these oscillations that occur within the context of first-year composition is the undulation between the instructor’s goals and desires for FYC and those suggested or imposed on them by their departments, programs, and/or the university at large. When I interviewed Eli (a first year PhD student and graduate teaching assistant), we came to a line of questioning that seemed to make him uncomfortable. I had asked him what I thought was a fairly innocuous question: does participation impact the students’ grades? Eli indicated that it did. I then asked him how much participation was worth. This question gave Eli some difficulty. He started and stopped several times as he tried to explain how student attendance, paired with having the required short writing assignment completed and in hand when Eli checked during class, created a participation grade. Somewhat uncomfortably, Eli told me that, when he had arrived at Western University, he had been required to participate in a two-week orientation program and that, during
that orientation, the required attendance policy had been explained. Eli seemed to feel that the policy was far too liberal (by his account, students could miss eight days of class before failing the course for excessive absences). Eli’s solution to the problem was not to change the attendance policy himself, given his impression that the policy was mandatory. Instead, Eli created a workaround for the policy; while his syllabus included the mandated attendance policy, he also created a participation grade in which students receive credit for having assignments completed and with them at the start of the class. One of Eli’s final comments to me during this discussion stuck with me: “hopefully this doesn’t get me in trouble” (Personal Interview, 20 Oct 2017).

Eli’s reflection on the decision-making process that he had undergone while creating his syllabus and his disagreement with the policy highlights the oscillatio Lanham describes as central to genre production. In Eli’s own words:

I mean that's a lot of absences, I'm used to maybe four-ish, like four or five, but literally I want to say it was eight, but that's almost three weeks’ worth of class, so I just can't imagine missing three weeks’ worth of any class and passing the class. (Personal Interview, 20 Oct. 2017)

Part of the reason Eli disagrees with the policy is based on his own experiences in college—either as an instructor, a student, or possibly both. His own experiences are caught up in oscillation between the desires of the program to allow for a more lenient attendance policy than what Eli is accustomed and his own desires to enforce a stronger student presence during class. So, while he feels as though he must concede to the program’s policy, Eli resists the program’s desires by creating other policies in the syllabus to pull students back into the class more, which he accomplishes by checking homework in class and counting it for points. The result is a syllabus that highlights the
tension created by writing into being a document that regulates students’ bodies and practices in the classroom.

The oscillation found in an RGS approach to agency can be misinterpreted as suggesting that the individual’s purpose is always thwarted by the agency of the genre’s ideology. However, using her experiences in disclosing disability, Stephanie Kerschbaum challenges this assumption. Kerschbaum reveals how she is often asked to make disclosures about how she identifies as disabled in academic settings, by reviewers of journal articles, by colleagues, or during Q&As at conferences (“On Rhetorical” 55-56). Kerschbaum notes that such disclosures can be complicated for numerous reasons, one of which being that, when agency is negotiated between speakers and audiences, it means that individuals do not have full control over their identities (“On Rhetorical” 60). Extending that observation, she demonstrates that making a disclosure of a disability means that the individual making the disclosure does not have control over how an audience receives that information, interprets it, or makes meaning from it. When audiences do not receive such disclosures in ways that speakers have intended, it should not be construed as a loss in the metaphorical battle between the individual’s agency and that of the genre. Rather, Kerschbaum suggests that:

> Even when disability disclosures are met with disappointing reactions, they are, nevertheless, consequential: They have effects on both writers/speakers and audiences. Those effects are not always purposeful or intended, but intention is not the source of agency. (“On Rhetorical” 64)

Drawing on Cooper, Kerschbaum argues that the source of agency is found in the “‘dance of perturbation and response as agents interact’” (“On Rhetorical” 64). Kerschbaum concludes that “agency thus emerges interactionally and is shaped by individuals’
readiness to act in particular situations” (“On Rhetorical” 64). The agency of a genre is thus made possible because of the agency of the individual, and vice versa.

In order to more fully understand how FYC instructors’ desires for student engagement—especially as those desires are taken up as verbal participation at the expense of listening—this chapter engages in sustained genre analysis of the syllabus as a site in which multiple desires for student engagement are made manifest, negotiated, and enacted. This chapter follows Paul Prior’s call to rhetorical scholars that, “[i]f you want to understand why a text is written as it is…then it makes sense to look not just at the text itself, but at the history of work and the varied materials from which the text was produced” (167). To uncover the relationship between FYC instructors’ desires and goals for students and the desires embedded within the genres surrounding the teaching of writing, this chapter begins by looking at how the shape of course syllabi collected during Phase I—their content and the desires embedded within them—is informed by the various authors at play. From there, this chapter synthesizes the sample syllabi with the Phase I and Phase II interviews to demonstrate how instructors’ desires for student engagement are informed by the broader set of stakeholders invested in FYC and how the tension between those parties’ desires for student engagement is played out as oscillatio in the syllabus and other classroom genres. In so doing, I argue that, instructors’ desires are informed by the larger activity system that surrounds the teaching of FYC. Moreover, in order to recover more inclusive models of listening and engagement in FYC, we have to attend to how these concepts are informed by other stakeholders and conversations about higher education more broadly.
Method

During Phase I of this project, fourteen sections (representing fifteen percent) of the first-semester writing course (English I) at WU were randomly selected from the overall sections offered during Fall 2017. Copies of the instructors’ syllabi, which are kept in the writing program’s office, were copied and redacted to remove all identifying information about the instructor. The syllabi were coded using value coding and concept coding schema, as described below.

Concept Coding

As in Chapter 3’s analysis of Phase I interviews, I found that concept coding provided the most useful apparatus for working through questions of presence, bodies, and engagement in the course syllabi. As described by Johnny Saldaña, concept codes “are appropriate for studies focused on theory and theory development,” as well as when “the analyst wishes to transcend the local and particular of the study to more abstract or generalizable contexts” (120). While this project does not seek to transcend FYC, or even WU as the local site of this study, this chapter reorients the research by focusing less on individual instructors and their choices, attitudes, and beliefs and focusing more on contextualizing their attitudes toward presence, bodies, and listening within their institutional context. Thus, the generalization occurring with this data is at the level of the program and university, whereas previous chapters have dealt with instructors and their classrooms. Concept coding enables me to step back and ask questions such as, “What kind of student presence is called forth in this policy?” and then to trace those policies back to the writers.
This triangulation was done through several steps. When I located a policy that seemed to add to a concept of a key topic, I first described the attitude as a concept. Take, for example, the following passage regarding the use of technology in class from one of the syllabi in the sample:

**Technology**
Get off your phone—the texts/snapchats/tweets/things I don’t know exist yet—will still be there after class. If there is an urgent matter, please simply exit the room. You will need electronic or hard copy access to course materials each day. It is your responsibility to check our course site daily for announcements and/or calendar changes—no exceptions will be made for missing critical correspondence. You’ll need access to readings in hard copy or electronic form; therefore, it’s more than appropriate to use your phone, tablet, laptop for only such purposes. (2017 syllabus)

Engaging in concept coding in this passage required that I step back and ask: What role does technology play in mediating presence, engagement, bodies, and listening in class? This particular passage is coded with three separate codes: use/abuse of technology, disruption/distraction, and absence/attendance (see Appendix F for the full list of codes). The syllabus writer vacillates between recognizing the need for technology as a learning device, while also seeing it as a threat to student’s attention during class (as characterized by the chastising description of students’ use of cellphones for entertainment in the first sentence). Ultimately, the passage characterizes cellphones as distractions that impede student engagement with the course. Finally, while the policy does not make mention of penalties to student attendance, it becomes clear that, when the instructor thinks of how students should behave in class, it is not by having their eyes on their cellphones. In the case of emergencies, the instructor requests that students mark themselves as absent (even temporarily) by removing themselves from the class.
Understanding how this policy creates larger conceptualizations of student engagement, presence, and bodies is exactly what concept coding was created for, but for the purpose of this chapter, this cannot be the final step. From here, this project locates the policy by looking to other textual resources in order to determine from where the policy arises. Based on my readings of the syllabi and my interviews, it is apparent that there are three primary syllabi authors: the instructors, the writing program, and the university provost’s office. To identify which writer contributed to each policy statement, I looked at other textual materials provided by WU’s writing program: an instructor handbook that had templated and sample syllabus statements and the provost’s office’s website, which lists mandatory syllabus statements.

Within the materials from the provost’s office, I was able to find a statement that may have influenced the production of the above technology policy: “In addition to the required information listed above, it is strongly recommended that the syllabus include: methods for communicating with students outside the classroom regarding matters such as class cancellations, meeting times, or room changes.” We can begin to see how these different writers work in tandem (or, as will be demonstrated later, against one another). The provost calls for instructors to clearly identify channels of communication with students, which is taken up by the instructor as a need to be engaged in class outside of class time (by checking the course site). This, again, contributes to the larger concept of what it means to be ‘present’ in class, even though being present in this case also takes place outside of class. Looking at how these writers interact allows me to contextualize the instructor’s agency (writing and distributing the syllabus) within the push-and-pull instigated by other agential actors (Kerschbaum “On Rhetorical Agency”).
Value Coding

Conducting value coding required the same process as concept coding: after establishing what concepts were manifested in the syllabi, I needed to understand how they were valued, and by which syllabus writers. In terms of the syllabi sampled for this chapter, establishing value required thinking about the notion of ‘values’ from several perspectives. The first and most obvious value was looking at course grades and how they were broken down. Because this chapter deals with how notions of presence contribute to the reclamation of listening and the role of engagement in FYC, some of this work required counting how ‘participation’ factored into students’ overall course grades (value coding) and how instructors defined participation (concept coding). Beyond using grades as an indication of value, I also attended to how the policies themselves placed value on certain kinds of behaviors, attitudes, dispositions, and attributes and how these traits are imbricated in gendered and ableist assumptions of student’s bodies and select and deflect listening in the classroom. For instance, another syllabus contains the following statement regarding participation:

If you choose to attend class, I expect you to be here when you are here. By this, I mean that you should always come to class having read the material, completed any written work, and prepared to discuss both. I also mean that you should not be on your cellphone, asleep, surfing the internet, etc. Your choosing to attend tells me that you are here to learn, discuss, contribute, and share. If preparedness becomes a class-wide issue, I will institute a more regulated measure of accountability.

This policy reveals several value-based conceptualizations of participation, engagement, bodies, and even listening. We come to understand that listening, for example, is not a meaningful part of the instructor’s conceptualization of listening; its absence in the list of ways that students participate speaks volumes. We can also couple listening’s absence
with the reiteration of participation as an “active” process that relies on verbal participation, sharing ideas, and “[being] here” when students are physically present in class. In other words, the kinds of student presence and engagement valued by the instructor include: students who have the time and energy to complete all outside assignments, students who feel confident sharing their opinions, students who can following organically unfolding conversations, and students who can maintain the performance of ‘attentiveness,’ regardless of the complications that this project has raised to these characterizations in Chapters 3 and 4.

Together, these layers of concept and value coding, as well as tracing the origins of the policies as much as possible to the original author create multiple opportunities to account for how desires for student presence and engagement deflect an embodied theory of listening in the writing classroom. To demonstrate how this occurs, this chapter begins by analyzing attendance policies as the baseline measure of student presence and engagement. From there, this chapter demonstrates that FYC combines fleshy presence with a demand for “active” participation in ways that doubly marginalize students with disabilities, while also making it increasingly difficult to attend to listening as an embodied form of engagement that includes of a range of learners (see Chapter 4).

**Tracing Authorship: Syllabi as Sites of Authorial Tension**

As mentioned previously, the syllabi collected from Western University demonstrate a minimum of three discrete authors: the instructor, the writing program at WU, and the university’s provost’s office. As demonstrated in Figure 5.1, while the various authors contribute to different areas of the syllabus, they also sometimes
contribute to the same material. For example, one component of the course syllabi that have multiple authors include course descriptions, descriptions of writing assignments, and some policies.

Figure 5.1: Breakdown of Syllabus Authors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Examples of Contribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>Customization of templated materials from writing program and provost office, course descriptions, descriptions of writing assignments, course calendar, additional policies (civility/professionalism in the classroom, late work policy, use of technology in the classroom)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western University Writing Program</td>
<td>Course descriptions, descriptions of writing assignments, policies regarding: attendance, email, grading scales/criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provost Office</td>
<td>Course objectives, student learning outcomes, policies related to: academic honesty, audio and video recording, disability services, academic success services, and course evaluations, attendance policies, grading scale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Determining the overlapping authorship of any given text can create significant insight into how the document came to represent the attitudes, subjectivities, and desires embedded in the document, and this is no less true for syllabi. For example, we can see how the three authors impinge on one discrete policy by exploring how attendance policies appear as assemblages of multiple texts written by multiple authors. Figure 5.2 contains an image of one instructor’s syllabus statement regarding attendance that has been annotated to trace the content’s origins and authors.
As Figure 5.2 demonstrates, the instructor contributes very little to a policy that represents important desires for student subjectivities. For example, in the opening line, the desire for student attendance is represented as “there are no excused absences.” This hard-and-fast policy suggests no room for exception and creates a rigid relationship between instructors and students that allows for little negotiation. The writing program’s policy supports the university’s policy by answering an important question: Why? The program explains, “attendance is particularly important in [writing program] classes because so much of the learning in these courses happens during in-class writing exercises, peer review, and discussion.” Working in concert, the university and program policies create a clear picture of student embodiment: they must be physically present in the classroom for the vast majority of the scheduled class time or they will incur penalties (even though these penalties are not clearly articulated in the syllabus presented in Figure 5.2).
5.2). As such, the provost’s and the writing program’s own policies serve as intertextual resources—the echoes, borrowings, and influence of other texts on the text under examination—for the instructor’s syllabus (Bakhtin; Prior). It is also important to note that the ‘actor’ in the policy, as written, is the university and not the instructor. It is not until halfway through the first paragraph that the instructor identifies him/herself as acting, and the presence of the instructor is only called forth when the delivery of an official notice for participation in university extracurriculars takes place.

These two moves (the intertextual resourcing of other authors’ texts and the removal of the instructor as an actor in the attendance policies) mitigates the instructors’ presence and could be attributed to several different scenarios. It could be that the instructor feels no authority over the policies and, as such, maintains his/her absence. In so doing, the instructor potentially sidesteps students’ complaints regarding the policy by naming the author of the policy (the university) and potentially aligning him/herself closer with students and creating an us (instructors and students) versus them (the university at large) dynamic.

While we do not know the instructor’s exact attitudes toward the policy, we can look at how the presence of this policy creates subjectivities and desires for the instructor to inhabit—how, in other words, the policy delineates social motives that lead to individualized interpretations that Bawarshi calls intention (Genre 90). The motive supplied by the provost’s policy mandates that instructors should account for students’ bodily presence in the class, a motive that is both reinforced in the writing program’s policy but also expanded to account for both not just for bodily presence, but also for students’ implied participation in and engagement with the kinds of interpersonal
activities listed in the policy (in-class writing exercises, peer review, and discussion). The attendance policies, together, sketch out a student body that is ‘actively engaged’ in class and creates a standard by which all student bodies are measured. The resulting policy creates an image of a normative student body enrolled in the course.\footnote{See Chapter 4.}

The fact that the provost’s office and the writing program contribute significantly to the attendance policies helps us to contextualize why engagement is often rendered as an active, able-bodied and able-minded performance. Like Britney, whose interview opened this chapter, many faculty members recognize that our students in FYC come from diverse backgrounds, differing cultural practices, and diverse bodyminds. However, as Price has observed, the valorization of a “fleshy,” physical presence is so entrenched in the fabric of higher education that attendance polices regulating physical student presence in the classroom come from on high, thus interpolating instructors into the ideologies about presence that takes for granted a bodymind that needs regulating. Furthermore, like Britney, many instructors want to recognize students’ attendance as part of their engagement in the course, but to do so, they use the body again as a heuristic for rendering their engagement as observable, assessable, and valid. As was discussed at length in Chapter 3, the bodymind will always be a slippery heuristic when we try to use it for assessment purposes because, while the ideology of ableism seeks to normalize bodies, the reality is that we experience bodyminds with such great diversity that such a goal is unrealistic.
Based on the analysis of authorial tension among the multiple contributing authors to the syllabi sampled in this chapter, we can see how the emergent characteristics of a theory of listening in Chapter 3 return with more emphasis. The interviews contained in Chapter 3 suggest that the emerging theory of listening brought about through this research would need to account for the body as a central mediator of classroom life. In the policies explored in this section, as well as the observations of participants like Britney, we come to see that the body mediates classroom life that is manifested in syllabi’s adherence to ‘fleshy’ notions of presence. The next section reinforces this theory of listening by exploring how the instructors who participated in this research and the syllabi sampled in Phase One grapple with the expectations for engagement and presence in light of the students before them in the classroom.

**Conflicting Desires in FYC Syllabi: The Role of Antecedent Genres**

In order to pursue an RGS approach to understanding how these syllabi policies came to be scripted as they are, I also account for the roles that antecedent genres play in the creation of the syllabus. For Kathleen Jamieson, it is not just the immediate rhetorical context that creates constraints on how writers work with genres, but the genres’ pasts instantiations and the writers’ history with the genre that also further constrain the available means of persuasion (414). Lee Clark Johns furthers this point through his analysis of workplace documents, which reveals that the past writing practices of an organization strongly influence the present documents. His metaphorical description of this process—the sex life of a file cabinet—demonstrates that employees in all types of organizations routinely go to the file cabinet for models of how particular documents
have been successfully created in accordance with company, department, or supervisor preferences, resulting in sometimes ineffective documents, content, styles, and genres that continue to reproduce and survive despite their outdatedness (155).

Jamieson’s and Johns’s points bear out in both the syllabi I collected and my interviews when it comes to how instructors frame student engagement. While attendance policies interpolate instructors’ desires from a position of institutional hierarchy, the same is not true for participation policies. In fact, across the disciplines we can see many classes that do not require the kinds of “active” participation called for in FYC (large lecture-hall classrooms are one such example). So, if instructors do not inherit their attitudes toward active, vocal engagement from the university, where does it come from?

In my interview with Jennifer, a newly-hired lecturer at WU, she remarked how participation was not something that she was accustomed to grading at her prior institution. When I asked Jennifer if she graded participation and what it was worth, she responded as follows:

Jennifer: Well, this is tricky because I feel like at [my previous institution], we weren’t really required to have a separate participation grade, I don’t know if we’re required here, but I was somehow under the impression that we are—

Leslie: —okay—

Jennifer: —or there was something that made me think that it was something that I needed to roll into my—who knows what I was thinking two months ago. (Personal Interview, 25 Oct. 2017)

Jennifer’s uncertainty about how she arrived at a particular formulation for grading participation brings us back to the role of the antecedent genre. While not discussed, we can assume that, at her previous institutions, Jennifer either did not grade participation at
all or was more accustomed to including participation as part of a different course requirement. In any event, she recognizes that including a separate participation grade is not something she would normally do, but like Eli, she chooses to adhere to the policies she believes to be expected by the program.

The Sex Life of Syllabi

The varying degrees of participants’ uncertainty regarding how the grade participation leads to a second question about participation at WU: How has this program come to grade participation as a vocal performance that marginalizes listening? Syllabi, in Lee Clark Johns’s words, have rather active sex lives. Instructors borrow, copy, paste, and alter syllabi from coworkers and colleagues alike that, as this short history will demonstrate, replicate a model of participation that is single-mindedly focused on vocal participation in class. To demonstrate this pattern, I draw on existing syllabi records maintained by WU’s writing program.

First and foremost, however, I need to explain that WU’s writing program—like so many programs—does not have a consistent method or approach to maintaining course syllabi. Under different directors, some documents have been maintained, whereas others (including syllabi) were considered ‘old,’ unneeded documents that were shredded. Thus, there are no consistent record-keeping practices when it comes to course syllabi. At least one ENG I syllabus was located for the following years: 1998, 1999, 2000, and 2001, and multiple syllabi (ranging between fifteen and thirty) were located for 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2016. The earliest syllabus does not contain a separate syllabus statement that defines participation, but it does include participation as part of the course requirements:
**Requirements.** In addition to your regular participation in the writing, reading, speaking, listening, and thinking that go on in class, you need to do these things: … Provide written and verbal responses to your classmates’ written work… Participate in a group research project and panel discussion. (1998 syllabus)

Interestingly enough, while this syllabus locates listening as a form of participation, in 1999, the same template was modified to replace “regular” participation with “active” participation and to remove listening as a form of participation (in addition to other minor changes in requirement descriptions):

**Requirements:** Active class participation is necessary for every student. You will also need to do the following things: … Provide written and verbal responses to your classmates’ work…Participate in a small-group skit or presentation as assigned.

In the 2000 course syllabus, participation is relocated from course requirements and merged with attendance. However, the use of participation is connected with the “workshop” element of the class—of writing, conferencing, reviewing, and revising each other’s work:

Because this is a workshop-based course, and as such requires a cooperative effort from everyone, promptness and regular attendance are absolutely crucial. We do a great deal of writing, both in and out of class. If you are missing, your work suffers.

Perhaps more importantly, though, your absence denies your classmates and their work the benefit of your comments and presence. Department policy allows you to miss a week’s worth of contact hours. This means that in this course, you may miss three class periods—a whole week’s worth of contact hours with the class—before your grade is lowered. This seems reasonable to me. Thus, absences beyond 3 will affect your process grade, and likely the quality of your papers and portfolios as well. Obviously, if you have a serious illness or emergency, things are somewhat different. In that event, be sure to get in touch with me as soon as possible.

These early course syllabi at WU are useful because they demonstrate a consistent commitment to participation, thus reinforcing the role of antecedent genres while also
highlighting the fact that genres evolve. These early syllabi locate a range of habits that ‘count’ as participation (including listening) but also show how listening becomes discarded in favor of vocal participation.

By the time we arrive at the most recent course syllabi (2010-2012 and 2016), participation is a graded component of class in twelve of the fifteen (eighty percent) sampled syllabi, and, among those that grade participation, it weighs on average ten and a half percent of the students’ overall course grade. All of these syllabi describe participation as an “active” process, with one even describing active participation as follows: “Participation is expected. Active participation—voicing your opinions by speaking in class, asking questions, sharing in-class writing, and contributing to group activities—is what makes our class a community.” Of the syllabi collected between 2010 and 2016, only two make mention of listening as a form of participation:

Discussion is a major part of this class, and everyone in this room shares responsibility for helping to make it successful. Come to class prepared: read thoughtfully, think of questions and comments ahead of time, and bring required materials to class. Besides speaking in large group discussions, you can also earn participation points for small group work and listening attentively to your classmates. Allowing yourself to be distracted or doing anything that distracts your classmates will take away from your participation points. Your final participation grade will be based on both my records and your own self-evaluation. (2011 syllabus)

Course Policies. Participation. The structure and success of this course hinges upon your active participation. The term “active participation” is applicable to all respects of the classroom. Asking questions, proposing answers, interpreting and analyzing the arguments of others, listening and responding to the comments of the instructor and your peers, and pulling your weight in group assignments are all included in the term “active participation.” Be prepared to talk in class every day. Please note; however, that this does not necessarily mean you must speak in front of the entire classroom everyday (although you may), but to earn full participation points you must be willing to talk with—at a minimum—a partner or the members of your peer work group. (2012 syllabus)
The 2011 and 2012 syllabi do not equally locate listening as a form of engagement. In the 2011 syllabus, “listening attentively” is presented as a separate action in a list of a range of displays of participation (though we have to wonder to what extent this instructor may have used the body as a heuristic for listening, as discussed in Chapter 2). In the 2012 syllabus, however, listening is couched in instrumental terms: students are presumed to listen in order to respond “to the comments of the instructor and your peers,” rather than to listen as an end in and of itself. This marginalization of listening as a form of engagement, according to a rhetorical genre studies lens of analysis, interpolates the syllabi writers in the data set collected for this project.

**Student Subjectivities in Participation Policies**

Thus far, this chapter has specifically engaged with how instructors’ attitudes toward students are informed by the attitudes and desires called for through the syllabus as a genre, antecedent genres and genre knowledge, as well as through the attitudes of contributing syllabus authors, such as the writing program and the provost’s office. In order to understand this complex relationship between teachers, students, and the syllabus, a careful accounting is needed to show how the contributing authors and intertextual process of integrating university and program expectations impinges upon how FYC instructors take up and deploy their own sense of agency through the syllabus. This process uncovers strong attitudes toward student attendance that depicts verbal participation and fleshy, physical presence in the class as the *a priori* form of presence in class. Given this idealized form of presence, in this section, I explore how student subjectivities are created in the contemporary writing program at Western University.
Some syllabi collected during Phase I represent a conflation of students’ physical presence with their participation in the course. This, however, is not the only place within the syllabi that instructors define ‘participation’; nine of the fourteen syllabi (64.2%) have specific participation policies in which the instructor defines what participation is and the role that participation plays in the FYC classroom. The presence of such statements may be useful for students and teachers inasmuch as they attempt to articulate the expectations for participation. However, these policies tend to be written in ways that preference verbal participation in group discussions, thus narrowing the range of performances that students can take up to signal their participation in the course. Figure 5.3 below illustrates the range of student performances that are identified in these participation statements/policies.

*Figure 5.3: Categories of Student Participation Represented in Syllabi*
Seven of the fourteen (fifty percent) sampled syllabi specifically define participation as verbal participation. At times, the syllabi situate verbal participation as the *modus operandi* for FYC classes. By listing no other forms of participation, the syllabi fail to envision how listening may be a central form of participation, which echoes Ratcliffe’s argument that listening is more broadly ignored in Western cultures. Furthermore, while we may look at forms of participation such as “attentiveness” and bodily dispositions like eye contact and body language as potential ways of describing students’ need to be engaged in listening, these descriptions reify listening as a practice of able-bodied students, as was demonstrated in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

While there is arguably a range of student practices that can be counted as forms of classroom engagement, many of the forms of engagement are only utilized by singular syllabi within the sample, and those forms of participation that are identified by multiple syllabus writers tend to reinforce bodily norms that are narrowly available to students. In other words, that the participation policies ‘fix’ participation in terms of bodily disposition and vocal performances during class discussion makes sense because such forms of participation set a clear standard that can be assessed.

One of my classroom observations with Marilyn highlights this point. Prior to my second classroom observation with Marilyn, I observed a one-on-one conversation between Marilyn and a student in the classroom prior to the start of class. During the week prior to my observation, Marilyn held individual conferences with students regarding the upcoming paper and their course progress. The student approached Marilyn and asked her how he can improve his participation grade in the class. Marilyn’s syllabus provided to me prior to my class observations weighs participation as fifteen percent
(15%) of the overall course grade. Like many instructors, Marilyn also includes a statement defining participation, which reads as follows:

**Participation**

Participation in this course is calculated by taking attendance, class participation, reading quizzes, in-class writings, the peer review assignments, and other appropriate means into account. In order for you to be considered participatory, it is imperative that you have completed the readings for the day, understood said reading, and contributed to class discussion. **Not having done so could result in you being dismissed from the class and being counted as absent.** Finally, please be advised that unacceptable and/or disruptive behavior is also calculated into this portion of the grade. (Bolding and italics are original.)

While I was not present for Marilyn’s previous conference with the student, Marilyn responded to the student’s request by suggesting that, as she told him during the conference, the student could do more to speak up during class discussions. Marilyn’s response suggests that, among the range of activities that the syllabus defines as ‘participation,’ when it comes down to improving the grade, verbal participation is the most important performance. While we lack additional context for the encounter to further situate this moment, we can turn to the stylistic choices Marilyn chose when constructing the syllabus statement to triangulate her comment among other classroom genres in which desires for students’ performances are located. Her decision to visually highlight syllabus passages related to verbal participation through bolding and italicizing suggests that this portion of the definition carries more emphasis than the rest. In making this choice, Marilyn “fixes” difference in favor of an idealized, normative student body and misses the opportunity to enact listening as a form of engagement (Kerschbaum *Toward*).

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37 This again echoes the larger disciplinary trends described by Dirk and Bean and Peterson.
While Marilyn fixes the performance of engagement, Eli’s interview demonstrates attempts to relocate participation beyond verbal participation and bodily dispositions. At the conclusion of our interview, Eli and I had the following conversation:

Leslie: So those are the questions that I intended to ask people. Are there any other thoughts now that you’ve had a good 45 minutes to talk about listening that we haven't touched on that might be important to you when thinking about listening?

Eli: So the one thing that has come up in the latter part of our conversation, since I knew this interview was scheduled, it's been on my mind—a couple of times I've thought about it. I feel like I wouldn't be a good teacher if I hadn't even considered, if I just came in here—I didn't just go and start reading about listening or anything like that, but I do think it raises important issues about the importance of listening, especially in a composition class, but also, how is that assessed? Because it's such a—there’s such that's sort of social-cognitive sort of tension there, I don't know how that's assessed. I feel like the way that it could be assessed could be—and I might even try this on one of my online journals, is ask students how they listen and ask them what does it mean to listen and kind of hear from them because that assessment component—it's not something you can just test like, you're a good listener or you're not, because I don't know what connection they're making and some are from a different cultural background than me—might make a different connection than me. And that doesn't mean they didn't listen just because they don't see what I saw, doesn't mean they didn't listen it means they heard it and they connected it to something in their experience not mine. So I feel like those sort of things are in tension.

Leslie: Yeah.

Eli: It's definitely something I can see myself making in a couple of places a more explicit focus, even if it means just ceding my dialogue in the class, 'okay now that we've listened to this and hearing'—do you know what I mean? (Personal Interview, 20 Oct. 2017)

During this portion of the interview, Eli actively attempts to create several models for including listening outside of bodily performances or vocal participation in discussion. His first thought is to ask students to informally write about listening itself; he considers asking them what listening is and how they listen. Next, he considers how students may
conceive of listening in different terms than he might. He considers the complexity of such a proposition, and he notes that differences in listening practices among students and himself as the instructor might produce different ‘takeaways’ from a conversation (“I don't know what connection they're making and some are from a different cultural background than me—might make a different connection than me”). Secondly, Eli considers how students’ interpretations of texts or conversations may be a way of assessing listening—an approach to assessing listening that seems to stem from his realization that cultural backgrounds and individual experiences could impact students’ listening practices. His final idea has to do with inverting classroom conversations so that he (as the instructor) steps away from the dialogue and allows students to enter into conversations amongst themselves where he, presumably, becomes the listener (and thus, models listening).

Eli’s think-aloud as it relates to listening and FYC suggests a model for a more expansive definition of engagement than is described in the common syllabus statements sampled from Western University. His models for listening echo key elements of *The Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*’s definition of ‘engagement’ as a three-part process of (1) making connections between ideas, (2) discovering meanings new to students or building on existing meanings, and (3) acting upon such new knowledge (NCTE 4). Eli’s new model of listening as a form of interpretation that students can sustain in different ways, then, enables Eli to move beyond fixing student participation as one set of normative practices (Nicolas). Despite Eli’s sense that listening is difficult to assess, he has nonetheless begun articulating a way of creating a more inclusive definition of participation that has concrete applications in the classroom. In other words,
even if instructors conceive of listening in ways that reflect a more sophisticated understanding of listening as a rhetorical practice, the conventions of the syllabus genre, which tend to construct verbal participation as “normal” participation, pathologize different forms of engagement that, while valid, are constructed as non-standard.

The findings of the first portion of this chapter demonstrate how the body functions as a mediator of classroom life, as manifested within syllabi policies. This section of the chapter adds to that finding by articulating how instructors work within and against the conventions of the syllabus as a genre when trying to articulate the subjectivities that students can inhabit in FYC. In so doing, this analysis contributes to the development of a theory of listening that emphasizes that listening is an ongoing negotiation among participants in an activity system and that instructors specifically grapple with notions of engagement, presence, and bodyminds. Moreover, the syllabus as a genre—because it functions as a codification of expectations—often limits the performances available for students to signal that they are listening and engaged in class. To develop a theory of listening and engagement in FYC, then, we must be willing to make apparent how bodily difference impacts how students choose to engage and listen and to create policies that can account for such diversity in the classroom.

**Conclusion**

The various textual practices enacted by FYC instructors in their syllabi and in their conversations with me reveal much richer authorship practices than are often perceived to be part of the writing and updating course syllabi. Syllabi, when viewed through a rhetorical genre studies lens, expose overlapping and sometimes conflicting
desires for student participation and presence in FYC. Instructors rely on multiple intertextual resources when composing syllabi: this includes required or suggested syllabus material written by other stakeholders (such as programs and provost offices), their antecedent genre knowledge, and their experiences in teaching, which are all deployed in the context of the higher education. These resources influence how FYC instructors enact policies and practices surrounding student participation as a way of encouraging certain signals of student engagement. For teachers and scholars interested in writing pedagogy and writing program administration, embodiment, genre studies, and listening, this analysis reminds us that classroom practices are largely informed by a document whose influence and, indeed sometimes its presence, is occluded (Bawarshi). It reminds us that the syllabus itself has a history—one that is rooted in a narrow definition of student presence and participation—and it asks to recognize that not all students will be able to embody engagement as it is called for in FYC’s “master genre,” thus setting into motion the potential perpetuation of such attitudes in other aspects of classroom life as well.

This analysis of syllabi stresses that instructors, too, have histories, and it calls for writing program administrators and composition scholars to actively participate in helping them build new understandings of syllabi, participation, and attendance that are better suited to the students actually entering our classrooms, rather than imagined, normative student bodyminds. Finally, it prompts us to create better models of engagement that can recover a wider range of practices (like listening) to cultivate greater inclusivity in the classroom. FYC instructors, writing program administrators, and composition scholars can then invite a broader range of engagement across cultural,
bodily, and social intersections, and in so doing, reflect rhetorical practices as ways of moving in and through the world (Dolmage *Disability*. 186). The analyses in this chapter demonstrates that syllabi themselves are not neutral: the contain multiple, overlapping attitudes about students, about their bodies, and about their expected subjectivities while in the classroom. These attitudes exist before instructors arrive on campus and interpolate instructors into a system of assumptions about students and listening. While students may have vastly different approaches to their bodymind performances of listening and engagement, institutional, program, and instructor policies may unnecessarily restrict the performances available to students during class.

As feminist disability scholar Karen Elizabeth Jung observes, “it bears remembering that there is no precise or universally accepted definition of disability; defining disability is a practice of power wherein the category can be contracted or expanded in accordance with the vested interests of the definer” (263). The analysis presented in this chapter demonstrates that, like the category ‘disability,’ the same principle can be extended to concepts like ‘presence’ and ‘engagement’ as categories for identifying, labeling, and regulating student bodies. The contracting of these concepts toward narrowly-defined embodied practices is a matter of power, and it is likewise through enacting power in new ways that these concepts can be expanded for inclusivity.
Chapter 6

Conclusion: Toward an Embodied Theory of Engagement & A Reclamation of Listening in FYC

“[It] is more productive to think of listening in terms of sensory possibilities than organ-specific binaries (that is, you either have the capacity to listen or you do not). The fact that bodies can be retrained to experience listening via multiple modes—that listening is an adaptable, dynamic practice that can be learned or unlearned—presents instructors with an exciting opportunity to explore how a wider range of listening practices and sonic experiences might inform their pedagogies.” –Ceraso (120)

Introduction

When I began this project, my goal was to come to understand listening within the context of the first-year composition course. While I knew I would not arrive at a totalizing, universalized understanding of listening, my goal was to carve out different research methods that might capture some partial truths about the nature of listening and, together, those pieces might sketch out a skeletal system of listening that could later be fleshed out. But if there is one thing that this project has taught me, it is about the seeming impracticability of trying to study listening, for, as the chapters in this project have demonstrated, as soon as you decide you have found listening, studied it, and understood it, it slips through your fingers, shifting as it goes. My attitude at the beginning of this project mirrored José Arcadio Buendía’s pursuit in Gabriel García Márquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude to capture the image of God on a daguerreotype. In order to prove God’s existence, or disprove it once and for all, Buendía set up about taking superimposed images in different parts of his home with a daguerreotype, seemingly hoping that, through the process, somewhere, God’s image would appear (53).
Spoiler art if you haven’t read *One Hundred Years of Solitude*: Buendía’s work, however noble, doesn’t pan out, and he eventually moves on to other projects. I’ve felt a sense of comradery with Buendía for listening, much like God in the Christian tradition, seems to be everywhere and nowhere simultaneously. To study listening require one to seek out specters, to look for footprints in the snow that seem to eventually lead to no one. But unlike Buendía and his daguerreotypes, this project has not been without some fruits. To conclude this work, this chapter begins by summarizing the key findings of each chapter, followed by considerations of the two types of portraits of listening captured in this project, as well as the limitations of each. Finally, this chapter concludes with observations for charting new ways forward in the study of listening in first-year writing courses.

**Chapter Summary/Key Findings**

In Chapter 2, “Listening as Research Object and Method: A Feminist Embodied Phenomenological Approach,” I make a methodological contribution to writing studies by sketching out a framework for researching listening in the writing classroom. Because of the dearth of listening research within the context of higher education more broadly, and writing studies more specifically, I demonstrate how disability studies and feminist rhetorics could inform phenomenological research to create a framework for studying listening. I then turn to reflections on how listening itself becomes a vibrant research method for conducting qualitative research. Finally, I offer two tools for using listening as a research method: rhetorically listening to interview participants and using listening as a way of horizontalizing data within a phenomenological research study.
Using this phenomenological frame, Chapter 3, “Salient Features of Listening in FYC” reports on my interviews with FYC instructors and demonstrates how the participants select conceptualizations of listening that highlight its rhetoricity while simultaneously deflecting an embodied perspective of listening. In so doing, I argue that listening is encoded with normative notions of bodyminds in ways that limit listening’s rhetorical potential.

Chapter 4, “‘Fitting,’ ‘Misfitting,’ and ‘Retrofitting’ Engagement in Class Discussion: A Case Study,” extends the findings of Chapter 3 by tracing how listening is operationalized in FYC classrooms. Through the three case studies presented in this chapter, I trace how engagement is taken up in FYC in ways that marginalize the role that listening can play. I demonstrate that, while instructors imagine listening as a rhetorical activity, such awareness does not always manifest at the level of classroom practices. This finding suggests that students are expected to conform to a narrow set of practices when demonstrating engagement that limit students’ abilities to signal their engagement through a broader set of practices that can include listening.

In the penultimate chapter of this dissertation, I step back from my focus on FYC instructors themselves in order to understand how their attitudes, beliefs, and practices related to the writing classroom, bodies, engagement, and listening are situated within the context of institutional ecosystems that contain numerous, overlapping, and sometimes conflicting attitudes and preferences that mediate instructors’ desires for listening and student engagement. Chapter 5, “The Sex Life of Syllabi: A Rhetorical Genre Analysis of Listening and Engagement in FYC Syllabi,” investigates FYC syllabi as genres that reveal the tension between and among various stakeholders of FYC and analyzes how
desires for student subjectivities—including their presence and engagement—mediate the ways in which instructors’ own attitudes toward listening and engagement are manifested in the classroom. These findings situate the failure to operationalize listening in the classroom (documented in Chapter 4) as, in part, a complication of the complex ecology that surrounds the teaching of writing.

Two Portraits of Listening

The chapters of dissertation deploy two distinct research frameworks, producing different images of listening, much like Buendía moving his daguerreotype around to different places in home. In the following sections, I reflect on the types of images of listening that are created through these research lenses, what they offer rhetoric and composition, and their respective limitations.

Phenomenological Portraits of Listening

Chapters 2 and 3 reflect research that is rooted in phenomenology—in research that is primarily focused on how individuals experience a specific phenomenon. The instructors who serve as my collaborators and subjects in these chapters reveal a great deal about how they experience students’ listening within the context of FYC. As the image captured through this research develops in the dark room and is distilled within these pages, we come to recognize two key features of listening through a phenomenological lens: first, the FYC instructors studied perceive of listening through rhetorical elements and, second, the FYC instructors surveyed rely on student bodies to determine when and how students are listening and engaged in class. But just as the instructors select and deflect elements of listening, so too does a phenomenological
framework. What follows are some of the limiting elements of phenomenology, as utilized in this project.

1. Participant Pool. Unlike Chapter 5, where texts could be selected at random to be included in this study, the participants of the phenomenological research self-selected into the study. While the ability to enroll (to participate) in the study was open to all FYC instructors at WU, not all instructors chose to participate. Furthermore, while the participants range in gender, age, academic backgrounds, disciplines, and teaching experience, there is one demographic feature which is common to all the participants: their racial identification. Given that Ratcliffe’s work on rhetorical listening began as a project to interrogate gender and whiteness, it is significant that all the participants here identify as white and as from the United States. This renders the images of listening captured in Chapters 3 and 4 as potentially white renderings of listening. In other words, it is not currently known the extent to which these characteristics of listening might be shared by persons of color or across national or continental lines.

Moreover, because this project focuses on instructors’ perceptions, rather than students’ perceptions, this project, at times, can only speculate at how instructors’ perceptions and pedagogical approaches impact students based on gender, disability, and any number of other intersectional identities. Thus, even as I conclude this project, I recognize the limitations of this study because of the multiple and diverse questions we are left with: What role do students imagine listening plays in their learning processes and in writing? Do students recognize the need to ‘perform’ engagement and listening?

\[38\] Ratcliffe did not intend for rhetorical listening to only examine issues of gender and whiteness. See Chapter 2 for a discussion of Ratcliffe’s call for work on rhetorical listening that engages other lines of intersectionality.
How do they select such performances? How do those performances reflect their sense of self, their relationship with the university, and their understanding of their role as a community member in a FYC class?

2. Phenomenology & Intentionality. The participants in both the Phase I interviews and the Phase II case studies are generous in providing me with a look behind the curtain in terms of their beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of listening, especially as they relate to students in FYC. However, chasing after instructors’ ‘true’ attitudes and feelings or assigning intentionality to what they say and do during interviews and classroom observations can be a tricky enterprise, fraught with consequences (real or perceived) for the participants. I approached my classroom observations with the hope that the promise of anonymity and the fact that I did not represent a hierarchal figure to the participants would encourage them to “be themselves” and to avoid the impulse to play the part of a “perfect teacher”—whatever that may mean to each of them. Nonetheless, as discussed in Chapter 2, anonymity can only go so far, and participants cannot simply choose to ignore what they have learned about being observed.

Additionally, Garrett, Marilyn, and Morgan, each bring their own histories to our classroom observations. These histories include their own experiences with classroom observations for evaluative purposes, their own understanding of conducting qualitative research (or a lack thereof), and their own sense of stability and safety within the Western University hierarchy, and these histories have the potential to filter what they choose to say and choose to do both during the observations and during the interviews.

This does not mean that the classroom observations presented in Chapter 4 are without any sense of reliability or generalizability. My goal in using mixed qualitative
methods was to triangulate findings—to look for patterns that crossed boundaries and that persisted even among the natural limitations of any given research method. That we can trace issues related to students’ bodies, listening, and engagement to different research sites (interviews conducted outside of the classroom, classroom observations, and textual analyses) suggests that there is some level of reliability among these findings, even if they are only preliminary or limited in scope.

3. Case Studies. A final design decision that limits these findings was the decision to observe each of the three Phase II classrooms only four times throughout the course of a semester. One of my assumptions when designing the classroom observations was that listening would unfold in the classroom largely based on the rhetorical situation. Because of that, my goal was to sample different types of class activities at different times of the semester. However, the more time I spent with Garrett, Marilyn, and Morgan, the more I realized that they used their ongoing interactions and relationships with their students as a way of operationalizing listening. I think about the moment before class one day when a student asked Marilyn how he could improve his participation grade. Marilyn’s response that he could talk more in class was not necessarily informed by a static commitment to talk as the only way to participate; it was likely influenced by her overall impressions of the student, her interactions with him, and her everyday observations in the class leading up to that moment. Being able to more fully understand and contextualize the attitudes and perceptions of the participants within the larger arc of a semester would enable greater opportunities to document and understand the role of listening in writing instruction. More longitudinal case studies are needed to more fully understand and
appreciate how listening is negotiated between instructors and students as part of their evolving relationships within the classroom.

**Rhetorical Genre Studies Portraits of Listening**

Because the qualitative chapters in this dissertation place a fair amount of weight on what the participants say and do, I wanted to be able to balance that emphasis by offering another portrait of listening by way of rhetorical genre studies. Chapter 5 offers that balance by looking at how the attitudes and practices observed in Chapters 3 and 4 are circulated within the broader institutional context at Western University. Nonetheless, rhetorical genre studies, as taken up in Chapter 5, also has its own limitations, as noted in the following section.

1. Rhetorical Genre Studies as a Theory of Agency and Action. In Chapter 5, I explore how we might consider instructors’ attitudes regarding listening, bodies, and engagement as a product of an activity system by exploring how these attitudes are created and reified in the syllabus as a genre. This theoretical orientation contrasts with that of the phenomenological framework in Chapters 3 and 4. Where phenomenological research may put too much stock in what the participants say and do, one limitation to rhetorical genre studies is that it may move too far in the opposite direction. For example, while we don’t know that Garrett, Marilyn, and Morgan do or do not ‘truly’ believe what they say or are committed to the practices enacted in the classroom, we also don’t fully understand the extent to which the attitudes embedded in course syllabi, required syllabi statements, and in instructor handbooks interpolate the participants into a system. Just like in the phenomenological framework, this dissertation attempts to overcome this by triangulating the attitudes in the syllabi across research sites, but questions remain about
how the activity system at WU serves as a screen to filter the decisions made by instructors. This demonstrates the need for continued research that invites participants to explore their decision-making processes when it comes to course design and course management, as well as exploring other textural sites that might help researchers understand the relationship between system and instructor decisions. For example, following a cohort of incoming graduate teaching assistants or lecturers as they begin their work at a new institution through their first years of teaching, research, and service at that institution may be able to flesh out the extent to which the system impinges on their approaches to FYC. Additionally, this project suggests that recovering other textual sites beyond syllabi enables researchers to track the shifting and evolving attitudes toward bodies, listening, and engagement. We may ask, where else might we see instructors’ evolving sense of self and of their relation to their institutions? These textual sites may include lesson plans, faculty development programs, teaching circles, and more.

**An Embodied Theory of Listening and Engagement: Primary Findings**

Together, this dissertation’s chapters draw on the experiences, attitudes, and beliefs of first-year composition instructors as they relate to listening. From those experiences, I establish an embodied theory of listening and engagement. Each chapter focuses on a different facet of listening and how assumptions of bodily normativity affects how listening and engagement are operationalized in FYC classes. Chapter 3 explores FYC instructors’ perceptions of listening’s rhetoricity and its relationship with bodies and engagement. Chapter 4 shows how those attitudes play out in the classroom
by means of three case studies, and Chapter 5 qualifies this work by demonstrating how instructors’ attitudes and perceptions of bodies, listening, and engagement are entangled with the beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of other FYC stakeholders, as manifested in FYC syllabi.

As a whole, across the chapters, this dissertation demonstrates the need to reclaim listening as a rhetorical practice in FYC, not only because of listening’s potential to increase our students’ rhetorical awareness and dexterity, but also because it enables a more inclusive model of student engagement in the classroom. This dissertation also forwards an embodied theory of listening and engagement characterized, again, by the following principles:

An embodied theory of listening and engagement:

1. emphasizes listening as a rhetorical act that can demonstrate students’ engagement in ways that may be better fitted for a range of learners.

2. reveals the integral role of the body as a central mediator of classroom life—how students’ bodies fit or misfit with typical FYC practices, how instructors grapple with values and expectations around engagement in the classroom, and how they work and rework classroom practices in light of those values and the student bodies before them.

3. exposes how notions of engagement are not neutral. They are designed to fit certain kinds of student bodies and, in so doing, disenfranchise students whose bodyminds do not conform to normative expectations.
4. makes apparent how bodily difference impacts how students choose to engage in class and how listening can be a dynamic configuration within students’ broader practice of engagement.

As I reflect on the phenomenological process that enabled this research, I see that the range and complexity of the instructor attitudes and experiences, their pedagogical practices, and the textual resources that compositionists might identify as part of first-year composition directly depends on how instructors understand what first-year composition is. If they look at FYC as a generic classroom space, then we miss opportunities to understand how listening and bodies mediate students’ and teachers’ expectations of FYC. If they look to FYC as a reflection of our disciplinary commitment to democratic learning, then we miss opportunities to recognize how such spaces highlight the presence of certain bodies: those bodies that, by reasons of gender, ability, socioeconomic status, and otherwise, can engage in participatory education with ease.

**Charting a New Path Forward: Creating Flexible Classroom Practices for Engagement**

Creating new classroom constellations for recognizing and navigating student engagement across diverse student bodies and recovering listening as a form of engagement in the process is no easy task, and this project only begins to scratch the surface of how we might accomplish this work. What this project does reveal, however, is that we need to develop new ways of listening to the embodied student voices that come to the classroom. In the section that follows, I begin to sketch out a path forward by
turning to compositionists and writing program administrators and how this project intervenes in these communities.

Years ago, I worked in a department that was undertaking the process of writing and implementing a ‘common syllabus’ that all new contingent faculty would be expected to use. At one point, a colleague referred to the project as “an infection model” in which preferred practices, policies, and assignments would spread throughout the department. At the time, the metaphor seemed rather comical and a bit hyperbolic to me. It was not until I worked with my corpus of FYC syllabi that I realized just how powerful an image this was and how rapidly syllabi and syllabi statements replicate themselves. It was only then that I saw the DNA of some common syllabus ancestry duplicated again and again, sometimes with only minor mutations. Of course, this can either be good or bad, depending on what’s in those documents.

Recent scholarship in writing program administration has undertaken the work of crippling the writing program (Kerschbaum “Avoiding the Difference”; Kerschbaum Toward; Nicolas; Vidali “Disabling Writing Program”). Through critical inquiry, this existing work has productively critiqued how WPA scholarship and administrative practices have perpetuated ableist notions of student bodies and writing, among other factors. This work demonstrates the need to reexamine our syllabi practices more broadly—the models and templates we offer new teachers, the policies we write and enforce, and how we teach and support new teaching assistants and contingent faculty. This project demonstrates that ableism is embedded in some of our DNA, and more attention to the genres that support FYW deserve more attention than they sometimes receive. Additionally, the ongoing training and professionalization of new teachers must
invite opportunities for them to consider the roles of bodyminds in composition pedagogy more broadly and how FYC can foster intellectual, discursive, and physical engagement.

One way to get instructors moving toward this recognition is to invite opportunities for them to reflect on their own embodied experiences in classrooms. While new teachers might not identify as disabled, certainly all have experienced moments when they were uncomfortable in a classroom setting for myriad reasons. Like Pablo, who does not consider himself hearing impaired but who, nonetheless, experiences hearing loss, everybody has a body with a story. And, if FYC instructors can recognize that they have bodies with diverse needs and abilities, then we can take a step forward toward radically reimagining the classroom as a space that must always be under revision to be more inclusive.

Calling for a greater recognition of our own bodies in the classroom is not just about telling stories, though creating the intellectual and professional spaces for sharing those stories is an important step in this process. WPA scholarship has always relied on storytelling to help us theorize who we are: as scholars, as institutional agents, and as ‘managers.’ Rita Malenczyk notes in her introduction to *A Rhetoric for Writing Program Administrators* that WPA scholarship “grounds itself, perhaps more than any other discipline, on the rhetoric and politics of departmental and university life and structure, as well as on the lived experiences of its practitioners” (3-4). We need the stories of instructors, students, and administrators and the complicated relationships they have with classroom spaces and the commonplace practices embedded in our pedagogies that feel anything but common; we need their stories as they relate to how listening mediates their work as classroom and university citizens and how it relates to their writing.
Beyond these stories, however, this project points to several ways that writing program administrators and compositionists can learn to get first-year composition—in the words of Hans Kellner—crooked. Specifically, Dolmage takes up Kellner’s call for getting our stories crooked by inviting rhetoric to get its history ‘crooked’—an act that involves both the recovery of disability rhetorics as well as shifting “our view to bodies that exceed and challenge norms” (Disability 8). In the space that follows, I chart out three areas that provide opportunities for getting listening and engagement crooked.

**Getting Writing Instruction Crooked through Listening**

Disability rhetoricians like Brueggemann, Dolmage (Disability), Garland Thomson (Extraordinary Bodies), and Siebers have made compelling arguments that the history of rhetoric and the Western rhetorical canon need to get their stories crooked. This existing work lays significant groundwork for considering the many ways we might get rhetoric crooked, and, to this body of scholarship, this dissertation adds an embodied rhetoric of listening to the possible ways forward. While Ratcliffe makes the case for recovering listening as a rhetorical art based on cross-cultural dialogue, this project compliments her work by arguing that we need a form of rhetorical education and rhetorical inquiry in FYC that invites listening in the front door of our pedagogies. Doing so will provide students with both more opportunities to engage in the writing classroom and other ways of understanding how rhetoric invites different ways of moving in the world (Dolmage, Disability Rhetoric 186).

As currently taught in many FYC classrooms, ‘rhetoric’ can include persuasive speech, writing, and design (visual, aural, etc.). Yet, in the worlds our students move in,
listening appears everywhere and nowhere: it’s called for in their workplaces, in the media and entertainment, in public dialogues, and in our democratic processes. Yet, while FYC engages in the vital process of teaching and fostering students’ rhetorical development, we have yet to help our students begin to grapple with the difficulties, the affordances, and the limitations of listening in these various spaces.

As I write this conclusion, we (composition scholars, WPAs, FYC instructors, and students in higher education, among others) are tasked with coming to terms with what writing can do and how rhetoric mediates action in the context of late-stage capitalism. We work, play, and live in spaces that are faced by a new crisis everyday: some old, some new. We approach democratic action considering the challenges of demagoguery39 to our democracy. While rhetoric is poised to help students, citizens, and scholars navigate a political and social landscape marred by conflict and injustice, we must account for what it means to listen to these voices as a precursor to our students’ democratic participation.

**Getting Presence Crooked**

In Chapter 5, I turned to Margaret Price’s concept of telepresence, which actively attempts to blur the boundaries between what it means to be present and absent in the world. For Price, the concern with presence and absence is whose bodies are marked (or are forced to mark themselves) present and absent in any moment? The findings of this project suggest that using participation grades as part of a course grade is complicated

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39 The process by which complex policy issues are “reduced to a binary of us (good) versus them (bad)” (Roberts-Miller 8).
because it marginalizes students who, for various reasons, cannot or do not assume the kinds of participatory student subjectivity that instructors rely upon.

But the issue of presence extends beyond participation grades and diffuses into every moment in the class: peer workshops, in-class writing exercises, assignment due dates, attendance, conferences, essay submission and evaluation, and so much more. If we want to crip presence—to get it crooked so that students with non-normative bodyminds are marked as present rather than absent, then we fundamentally need to change what we imagine when we invite students to attend class.

Telepresence began as a way of understanding how bodies—normative, deviant, and otherwise—are incorporated into the digital realm. The question that telepresence adds to this research is how can FYC instructors teaching face-to-face sections of FYC import digital presences into the class in ways that cultivate an inclusive accounting of students’ presence in the classroom? While this question resists easy answers, I’ll turn to peer review as an area of FYC pedagogy that, like my student David 40 helped me to understand, creates tension between individual learning processes and collaborative composing processes, thus making it a suitable entry point for telepresence.

In Marilyn’s class, students do not conduct peer workshops in the physical space of class or even during the class’s regularly scheduled hours. Instead, Marilyn asks her students to bring a copy of their draft for peer review to class the day before peer review begins. At the conclusion of that class period, Marilyn assigns students to peer review partnerships or groups of three and explains the peer review tasks students must

40 See Chapter 1.
complete. During the next class meeting, students do not meet in class as a group; instead, they work independently to read the essay several times and, using the peer review assignment sheet, create a letter to their peer that discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the draft. When they return to class for the next class period, students are given the first portion of class to then discuss the drafts as partners and exchange their written feedback (a copy of which is also sent to Marilyn for grading and accountability).

What I think is useful about Marilyn’s approach to peer response is that she leverages time inside and outside of class to her students’ advantage. By rethinking how and when peer review can take place, Marilyn expands the possibilities for her students by implementing a form of telepresence in the practice of peer review. When I asked Marilyn why she chooses this format, she responded that it may take students different amounts of time to complete the exercise (especially because her peer review is rather intensive) and that she wants to give students time to do it well. Even though she doesn’t think in terms of crip time (see Chapter 4) or disability, Marilyn’s commitment to ensuring students have the time needed to complete an assignment demonstrates the opportunities that telepresence holds for making space for student diversity and more inclusive FYC pedagogies.

**Getting Student Learning Outcomes Crooked**

This project calls into question what it means to teach FYC considering bodily diversity in the classroom. While the question of what FYC is or should be is still a contested issue in composition studies, Doug Downs has offered that FYC “can and should be a space, a moment, and an experience”—in which students might reconsider
writing apart from previous schooling and work, within the context of inquiry-based higher education” (50, emphasis is original). Our students’ experiences with writing before they arrive at our doors—and often even after that—offer many opportunities but fail to provide a space in which to more fully consider writing as an embodied individual.

One way of getting our programs and our classrooms crooked and creating this shift toward non-normative bodies is by turning to the course outcomes that set into motion the work that is taken up in the classroom. While individual course outcomes vary between department and institution, in 2014, the Council of Writing Program Administrators ratified a third version of its “WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition” (hereafter “Outcomes Statement”). The Council of Writing Program Administrators (“Council”) asserts that this document “describes the writing knowledge, practices, and attitudes that undergraduate students develop in first-year composition” (Council 144). The Outcomes Statement outlines for key outcome areas:

A. Rhetorical Knowledge

B. Critical Thinking, Reading, and Composing

C. Processes

D. Knowledge of Conventions

The “Outcomes Statements” defines FYC-level rhetorical knowledge as “the ability to analyze contexts and audiences and then act on that analysis in comprehending and creating texts” (Council 145). Furthermore, the Council outlines five outcomes:

A. Learn and use key rhetorical concepts through analyzing and composing a variety of text.
B. Gain experience reading and composing in several genres to understand how genre conventions shape and are shaped by readers’ and writers’ practices and purposes.

C. Develop facility in responding to a variety of situations and contexts calling for purposeful shifts in voice, tone, level of formality, design, medium, and/or structure.

D. Understand and use a variety of technologies to address a range of audiences

E. Match the capacities of different environments (e.g., print and electronic) to varying rhetorical situations. (145)

While these outcomes for rhetorical knowledge are laudable and reflect much of the work of rhetoric and composition theorists, they fail to articulate a place for listening as a rhetorical art—either as a performance or as a form of analysis.

The Council further claims that the outcome statement is “aligned with the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing,” in which engagement is posited as a central habit of mind for students’ success in postsecondary writing (148). Despite this claimed relationship, the “Outcomes Statement” excludes the role that engagement plays in students’ work toward exemplifying the standards set forth therein. Thus, to get our outcomes crooked is to recognize the role that non-normative bodies and listening play in our composing practices inside and outside the classroom.

This project demonstrates that engagement is already used as a course objective at Western University—not because it is written as a student learning outcome, but because instructors regularly grade and assign students’ ability to engage in normalized modes of participation. Downs has called for WPAs simply to “write meaningful outcomes” (60). Despite the simplicity of his call, Downs also explains the challenge of this work: “When a program knows what it wants its students to learn, it can take many pedagogical paths.
The challenge is in articulating what actually matters” (60). If we cannot meaningfully construct outcomes that articulate what it means to be an engaged writer and define that engagement in inclusive terms, then perhaps we should not assess students on their ability to guess at such an approximation. This disjunction—between what we define our outcomes to be in SLOs and what we grade students on—perpetuates a hidden curriculum in our programs that favors those bodies that already have the intellectual and cultural capital to render their engagement meaningful.

Re-Locating Listening & Engagement

One of the goals of this project is to destabilize the practices of locating listening and engagement in student bodies that have appeared in these pages. At the conclusion of this project, it seems fair for readers to ask, if not here, where? In other words, if locating listening and engagement cannot reliably be located in students embodied practices during class, where then can we locate these practices?

As a writing instructor, I feel as though the answer to that question is both obvious and complicated. Paul, one of my Phase I participants, suggested that one way to locate listening is to look for it “downstream” in their writing (Personal Interview, 24 Oct. 2017). Britney, too, suggested a ‘downstream’ approach to listening when she recalls that “my most attentive students don’t say a damn thing, but they’re working…I see what they’re writing” (Personal Interview, 26 Oct. 2017). If Paul and Britney are correct (and I think that they are), that listening can be assessed downstream, after the fact of the class discussion, the reading assignment, the documentary shown in class, then how can FYC instructors adjust their classroom practices and pedagogies to capture listening as a textual practice embedded in student writing? I believe is that this is the next step
proposed by the findings of this project. Approaching student writing as evidence of their engagement and their ongoing practice of rhetorical listening would incorporate each of the three practices of getting FYC crooked posed in the preceding section: it would require us to position listening as a central element of our classroom work, it would demand innovative conceptualizations of presence in the classroom, and it would necessitate new approaches to student learning outcomes.

Final Thoughts: Between Bodies and Engagement

Long before I finished this project, I began referring to it by its current title, *Between Bodies and Engagement: A Reclamation of Listening in First-Year Composition*. While the title is admittedly a mouthful, it seemed to capture in shorthand what this project is about. As I began to conclude this project, I found myself meditating on an important question: What did I mean by this? The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers over twenty different definitions of the word ‘between,’ but two iterations seemed key to capturing what this project is about:

1. In the space which separates two points; and

2. Expressing the relation of the continuous space, or distance, which extends from one point to another, and separates them. (“between”)

This dissertation began as a question about the pedagogical, embodied, discursive, and social spaces between bodies and engagement—the space that separates them and the constellations that are formed from them. Through the process of developing, implementing, and writing up this project, it has become clear to me that the landscape that intervenes between bodies and the disposition of engagement is a rich, diverse
ecosystem that individuals and instructors must negotiate on multiple levels. And, while these negotiations often produce mixed levels of success in terms of meeting engagement and diverse student bodies, one way that such spaces can be navigated is by recovering the practice of listening as a rhetorical art fit for diverse bodyminds in the contemporary writing classroom.
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Vitanza, Victor J. “Three Countertheses: Or, A Critical In(ter)vention into Composition Theories and Pedagogies.” *Contending with Words: Composition and Rhetoric in a Postmodern Age*. Ed. Patricia Harkin and John Schilb. MLA, 1991, pp. 139-72.


Appendix A: Faculty Survey

Page One: Consent Information

I am conducting a research study to learn about instructors’ perceptions of and attitudes toward listening.

If you volunteer to be in this study, you will be asked to respond to a questionnaire about your attitudes of and perceptions toward listening.

Your participation should take about 15 minutes.

This study is considered to be minimal risk of harm. This means the risks of your participation in the research are similar in type or intensity to what you encounter during your daily activities.

Benefits of doing research are not definite; but I hope to learn how instructors situate listening in the classroom. There are no direct benefits to you in this study activity.

The researchers and the University of Nevada, Reno will treat your identity and the information collected about you with professional standards of confidentiality and protect it to the extent allowed by law. You will not be personally identified in any reports or publications that may result from this study. The US Department of Health and Human Services, the University of Nevada, Reno Research Integrity Office, and the Institutional Review Board may look at your study records.

You may ask questions of the researcher at any time by calling Leslie Anglesey (916-205-0957) or by sending an email to langlesey@unr.edu.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may stop at any time. Declining to participate or stopping your participation will not have any negative effects on your employment.

You will have an opportunity to opt-in to either focus groups or one-on-one interviews. Those that participate in the focus groups or in interviews will be enrolled in a chance to win a $25.00 Amazon gift card. In order to participate, you will be asked to provide an email at the conclusion of this survey. Your email will not be correlated against your responses. The odds of winning the gift card are estimated to be one in twenty.

You may ask about your rights as a research participant. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this research, you may report them (anonymously if you so choose) by calling the University of Nevada, Reno Research Integrity Office at 775.327.2368.

Do you wish to participate in this study?
Yes (next page of questions is loaded)
No (participants are exited from the survey)

Page Two: Student Conceptions of Listening

Instructions: Please answer the questions in the text box provided. Click ‘Next’ to skip any question.

1. What is listening?

2. What does it mean to be a good listener?

3. What does good listening by students look like in the classroom?

4. What difficulties do you experience in engaging students in listening?

5. What factors impact how well a student listens in class?

Page Three: Perceptions and Attitudes About the Value of Listening

Instructions: For each statement below, please check the box that best describes the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being a good listener is important for my students’ success in this course.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a good listener is important for my students’ success in college.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a good listener is important for my students’ success in their future career path.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Being a good listener will help my students achieve good grades.

Generally speaking, my students are good listeners.

Being a good listener is something a person is either naturally good or bad at.

Being a good listener is about mental discipline.

Generally speaking, it is easy to tell if a student is listening.

Being a good listener is important for my students for reasons other than receiving good grades.

I expect students to know how to listen before beginning Eng I.

I expect to teach students how to be good listeners in Eng I.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page Four: Participating in Classroom Discussions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructions: For each statement below, please check the box that best describes the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students who take notes are better listeners than those who don’t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I teach in class, I expect students to take notes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students who make eye contact with the speaker are better listeners than those who don’t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I teach in class, I expect students to look at me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally speaking, ENG I students listen during class discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally speaking, ENG I students listen during instructions and announcements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally speaking, ENG I students listen to each other during peer or group work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those who contribute to class discussion are more likely to be listening to the discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class discussions demonstrate how well students can listen to points of view they do not share.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I teach in class, I expect students to sit still.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students who are constantly fidgeting are not likely to be listening.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students who use electronic devices during class are not likely to be listening.

Page Five: Demographic Information
(I have used the guidelines provided by Indiana University in crafting some of these questions.)

What is your age?

☐ 18-24  
☐ 25-34  
☐ 35-44  
☐ 45-54  
☐ 55-64  
☐ 65 and older

What is your gender?

☐ Female  
☐ Male  
☐ Non-binary/ third gender  
☐ Prefer to self-describe __________________

☐ Prefer not to say

What is your racial or ethnic identification? (Select all that apply)

☐ American Indian or Alaska native  
☐ Asian  
☐ Black or African American
☐ Hispanic or Latino
☐ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
☐ White
☐ Other
☐ Prefer not to say

How many years have you taught first-year composition?

☐ 0-5 years
☐ 6-10 years
☐ 11-15 years
☐ 16-20 years
☐ 21-25 years
☐ 26-30 years
☐ 31 or more years

For purposes of this question, the term ‘disability’ may refer to sensory impairments, mobility impairments, learning disabilities, mental health disorders, and others).

Have you been diagnosed with a disability or impairment?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Prefer not to say

(If yes has been selected in the previous question, the following question will appear)

Which of the following have been diagnosed? (Select all that apply)

☐ A sensory impairment (vision or hearing)
☐ A mobility impairment
☐ A learning disability (e.g., ADHD, dyslexia)
☐ A mental health disorder
☐ A disability or impairment not listed above
☐ Prefer not to say

Would you be interested in participating in a focus group or interview (select all that apply)
☐ Focus Group ☐ Neither
☐ Interview
Appendix B:  
Post Observation Instructor Freewrite

Study Materials (Freewrite prompt given to instructors):
Learning to Listen: Disrupting Able-Bodied Normativity in First-Year Composition  
(IRB ID 1100887-2)

Instructors will be asked to spend the last fifteen (15) minutes of the observed class sessions writing in response to the following prompt. Instructors will receive printed copies of this prompt and will be invited to write on the same printed copies, both of which will be collected by the Co-Investigator. Instructors will be asked to write their name on the prompt so that the Co-Investigator may have them available during the interview.

During the last fifteen minutes of class, you will be asked to write a response to the following prompt. Please write your name on your response so that I may have it available for you to refer to during the interview.

Please describe and narrate in your own words what you and your students did in class today. You might think of this as a response you would give to a friend or family member asking you, “what did you do in class today?” After describing what you did, please respond to the following questions: (1) what role did listening play in class today? (2) How were your students asked to listen (if at all)? (3) In what ways did you or your students listen in ways that you did not anticipate (if at all)? (4) Who do you think listened to you and how well do you think they listened? (5) How does listening during this class session help your students to be successful in this class (if at all)?
Appendix C:
Sample Faculty Interview Questions

Study Materials (Freewrite prompt given to instructors):
Learning to Listen: Disrupting Able-Bodied Normativity in First-Year Composition
(IRB ID 1100887-2)

1. Please describe and narrate in your own words what you and your students did in class today. You might think of this as a response you would give to a friend or family member asking you, “what did you do in class today?”

2. What role did listening play in class today?

3. How were your students asked to listen (if at all)?

4. In what ways did you or your students listen in ways that you did not anticipate (if at all)?

5. Who do you think listened to you and how well do you think they listened?

6. How does listening during this class session help your students to be successful in this class (if at all)?
Appendix D: 
Transcription Process of Phase I and Phase II Interviews

All interviews were transcribed from either audio or video files. During the transcription process, I have deleted pauses and filler phrases such as: um, well, like, yeah, and so. I did not correct grammar in order to maintain the interviewee’s unique voice. The only instances of correcting grammar occurred in moments where the participant used their voice or a tone that aided in explaining their ideas or opinions, I have added such material in brackets.

After each interview was transcribed, electronic copies were sent to the participant for review. Participants were informed that they could mark any passage that they felt was not an accurate transcription of what they said, and they could add any explanatory notes if they felt such explanations were necessary. None of the participants added such notes. In keeping with feminist qualitative methods, all participants have had opportunities to read drafts of the chapters here and were invited to respond with any comments about the ways in which they are depicted. I include any such responses as footnotes in order to infuse this work with their voices.

In select passages, I have replaced pronouns used by the participants with words or phrases in order to aid in reader comprehension. All replacement instances are marked with brackets.
## Appendix E:
Coding Schema for Phase I Interviews: Rounds One and Two

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Round One Codes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Dependent</td>
<td>Volition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline Driven</td>
<td>Paying Attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volition</td>
<td>Volition</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Paying Attention</td>
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<td>Burkean Parlor</td>
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<td>How academia works</td>
<td>Part of academia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Status quo</td>
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<td>Model for students</td>
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<td>Instrumentalism</td>
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<td>Adding something new</td>
<td>Listening to respond</td>
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<td>Response</td>
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<td>Intent</td>
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<td>Generous</td>
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<td>Interruptions</td>
<td>Distractions</td>
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<td>Resistant listening</td>
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<td>Investment</td>
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<td>----------------</td>
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<td>Total: 52</td>
<td>Total: 41</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Appendix F:  
Syllabi Value and Concept Coding Schema

I. Concept Coding Schema – Participation

Active
Add to conversation, conversation
Adult/juvenile behavior
Bodies
Bodily participation, bodily dispositions
Disruptions, Distractions
Ethical behavior, respect, work ethic
Fully participate
Groups/group work/group discussion
Reasonableness
Responsibility
Silence
Sight metaphors
Use of technology, abuse of technology
Verbal/vocal

III. Value Coding Schema - Participation

Attendance/Absence
Discussion grade
Participation grade
Tardiness, Timeliness
II. Concept Coding Schema – Discussion

Audience awareness
Collaboration
Comfortability, overcoming discomfort
Community
Discussions = learning
Lead discussions

II. Value Coding Schema – Discussion

Listening
Voice
Respect
Appendix G: Sample Phase I Faculty Interview Questions

1. What role does listening play on a day-to-day basis in your FYC course?
2. What is the value of listening in a writing course? Why should students listen?
   – Define ‘openness’ and ‘engagement’ if these concepts come up
3. What is the value of instructors listening to students?
4. How do we teach students to be better listeners?
5. Who is responsible for students knowing how to listen well (is it their personal responsibility? K-12 education’s responsibility? Ours? Etc.)
6. What qualities do good listeners possess?
7. How is listening promoted through FYC pedagogy?
8. Discuss Burkean parlor if instructors use it.
Appendix H: Phase I Faculty Recruitment Email

Subject: Participants Needed for Study of FYC

Dear [Western University First-Year Composition] Instructors,

As part of my doctoral research, I am interested in exploring how listening is negotiated in first-year composition classrooms (FYC). For this project, you are being invited to take an online survey about your attitudes, beliefs, and understanding of listening as it relates to students in FYC. This survey is completely anonymous: no contact information is requested and your IP address will not be recorded by the host (Qualtrics). The survey is a mix of multiple choice and short answer response questions and should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts. You will not be compensated for participating in this survey, but you may learn more about your own feelings about the relationship between physical space and writing for yourself. At the conclusion of the survey, you will have an opportunity to opt-in to participation in a focus group on the same subject. If you are interested in participating in the focus groups or one-on-one interviews, you can choose to follow a link to an external site where you can provide your contact information. Your contact information will not be correlated with your answers on the survey.

Focus group participants and interview participants will be entered into a raffle for a $25.00 Amazon gift card. All participants’ names will be entered into a randomizing generator and one winner will be selected. Each participant’s chances of winning will not be known until the number of participants is calculated, but it is estimated to be approximately one in twenty.

You may contact Leslie Anglesey (anglesey@unr.edu; (916) 205-0957) any time you have questions about the research or you wish to report an injury. You may contact the Research Integrity Office at (775) 327-2368 if you have a complaint about the research or questions about your rights as a research subject. Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you will not be penalized or lose benefits if you refuse to participate or decide to stop.

By clicking on this link and completing this survey, you acknowledge your consent to participate in this research study.

Thank you for your consideration,

Leslie R. Anglesey

41 Language that might disclose Western University’s identity has been replaced by the generic language used in this project to maintain confidentiality.
Appendix I: 
Phase II Faculty Recruitment Email

Subject: Participants Needed for Study of ENG [I and II]

Dear [Western University First-Year Composition] Instructors,

As part of my doctoral research, I am interested in exploring how listening is negotiated in first-year composition (FYC) classrooms. For this project, I am looking for instructors who are teaching ENG [I and ENG II] who will allow me to come and observe their classes four times during the Spring 2018 semester. Toward the end of the observed class sessions, I will ask you to allow me approximately 15 minutes to have you and your students freewrite about the activity and their perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about the role that listening played during that class session. After the observed classes, I will also ask for your students to volunteer to participate in a 45-minute interview about their perceptions and attitudes about listening in the classroom. I will also ask you to participate in post-observation interviews that will last approximately 60 minutes in which we discuss the class session and your perceptions and attitudes about listening.

Your identity and your students’ identities will be kept anonymous, and participation in the study will not influence your employment. If you are interested or willing to participate, please email me at langlesey@umr.edu to discuss what full participation will entail. Please also send any questions to the same email.

Thank you for your support of this research.

Best,

Leslie Anglesey

---

42 Language that might disclose Western University’s identity has been replaced by the generic language used in this project to maintain confidentiality.
Appendix J:
Disability Disclosure Email and Survey

Dear Participants,

Happy beginning of the semester! I hope your classes are starting off well. I have a request for you all. In compiling and analyzing the data from my observations of your classes last spring, it has become apparent that knowing each instructor's identity in terms of disability may be useful for my analysis. However, please know that **this information is completely optional**. If you would be willing to self-identify, please click on the link below. You will be taken to a 3-question survey that asks you to self-identify. You may choose to decline to state either by sending me an email to that effect or selecting that option on the survey. The survey should take less than 5 minutes.

If you do choose to respond to the survey, I would like to protect your anonymity by having you write in for your name the pseudonym you choose during the observations. If you do not remember your pseudonym, please feel free to email or text me (916) 205-0957. Alternately, you can answer the survey with your first given name if you are comfortable doing so. The survey is maintained on a secure website administered through UNR's business school.

The survey can be found here: [link].

Thank you and best regards,

Leslie

Page One

Please write your selected pseudonym from the classroom observation. (If you do not remember it, please email me at langlesey@unr.edu. Alternately, you may also choose to write your first name.)

Page Two

For purposes of this question, the term ‘disability’ may refer to sensory impairments, mobility impairments, learning disabilities, mental health disorders, and others).

Have you been diagnosed with a disability or impairment?

- Yes
- No
Which of the following have been diagnosed? (Select all that apply)

- A sensory impairment (vision or hearing)
- A mobility impairment
- A learning disability (e.g., ADHD, dyslexia)
- A mental health disorder
- A disability or impairment not listed above
- Prefer not to say