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Writing anxiety and the developing writer

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WRITING ANXIETY
AND THE DEVELOPING WRITER

A Thesis

Presented to the

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In Partial Fulfillment

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in

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ABSTRACT

College students who are categorized as developing writers frequently express anxiety about approaching writing tasks, thus suggesting a correlation between writing anxiety and writing development. An analysis of the consequences of anxiety from the perspectives of cognitive-psychological and social-psychological theory (specifically: cognitive development, ego-centrisism, and avoidance motivation theories) provides insight into anxiety's effect on writing development. The application of these theories to modern composition theory of developing writers supports the hypothesis that the act of writing, the effectiveness of writing, and the development of writing skills are all negatively influenced by anxiety.

Anxiety stimulates negative cognitive schemata that disrupt positive tasks of planning, translating, and reviewing. Internalized anxious responses to threatening task environments can cause writers to formulate ineffective writing strategies, hamper memory recall, and over-activate evaluation monitors. External interaction with threatening environments triggers hyper-sensitivity as writers' attempt to protect their personal constructs of self-presentation, evaluation, and self-esteem. It is these self-protective tactics that cause narrowed-focus, a

catalyst for task misinterpretation, underdeveloped thought, repetitious ideas, blocked access to stored language and information, and a lack of clarity in organization and presentation. Fortunately, teachers can help writers manage writing anxiety by focusing students on the development of professional voices within writers' own targeted discourse communities.

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INTRODUCTION

Writing often appears to be performed in isolation, yet many voices influence it: the voice of the third grade teacher admonishing that commas and capitals are needed, the sister laughing over the note left on the refrigerator, the sophomore English teacher writing "frag." with a giant red marker. They call to the writer from the past and create apprehension in the present. Many fundamental writing problems, both globally (at the logical development of thought levels) and locally (at the technical skills level), are manifestations of inappropriate cognitive reactions evoked by these external voices playing upon writers' various levels of social anxiety. Donald Murray encourages teachers to be quiet and let writers write with the supposition that practice develops writing. But this quiet setting is not necessarily an anxiety-free environment for writers plagued by the fearsome noise of past evaluators. How do apprehensive writers rise above these voices to express their own voices? If writers have trait-anxiety (anxious personalities), the voices are too loud and writing is obstructed. The outcome is writing anxiety.

Writing anxiety has been studied by composition theorists, including Rose, who describes what occurs when

writers are apprehensive or blocked, and Daly and Miller who assess attitudes towards writing. However, in these studies, the ways that apprehensive writers react to writing tasks are more obvious than the reasons they react in these ways.

Fortunately, the disciplines of cognitive psychology and sociology provide a broader context for understanding writer's apprehension and the mindset of trait-anxiety writers within the social environments. By interweaving these cognitive and psycho/social theories with current composition theory, my intent is to present current composition theorists' findings on both writing anxiety and developing writers; locate these findings in cognitive psychological and social-psychological theory; and identify the influence anxiety has on both the act of writing and the development of the writer. This correlation suggests a pedagogical strategy that provides basic writers with a field for developing self-respect within their own targeted discourse communities.

In the first chapter, I will discuss the cognitive responses to writing anxiety and how they relate to the elements of the writing process as described by Linda Flower and John Hayes. Using their well-known cognitive model of the writing process, I will demonstrate how that

writing process can be interrupted by the cognitive responses of writing anxiety. I will use psychoanalytical cognitive theory to explain the power anxiety has in disrupting writing effectiveness.

In the second chapter, I will locate compositionists' cognitive blocking studies within the context of psycho-social anxiety theory. By establishing this foundation of theory and further interrelating these findings with basic writing theory, or what I refer to as developing writers, I will show how writing anxiety seriously influences writer development.

In the third chapter, I will demonstrate sociological influences on the writer. Some compositionists argue that writing constructs are inner-directed while others support that writing is outer-directed. The processes of the anxious writer are affected by both. How the writer relates to the community influences the writer's ability to communicate in the community. I will also explain three major social constructs that lead to anxiety, including self-presentation motivation, the need to belong, and self-esteem and self-image. These constructs play a major role in not only defining the individual and how others perceive him or her but also in how the individual communicates with the community.

In the final chapter, I will discuss the implications of these findings, especially focusing on ways to encourage anxious writers to develop discourse community voices. It is by establishing this personal voice within a discourse community that not only gives confidence to writers but transforms them from inexperienced to experienced.

CHAPTER ONE

Cognitive Responses to Writing Anxiety

Cognitive development is closely tied with language development and thus is of great interest to compositionists who attempt to categorize the many cognitive schemata found in developing writers. Cognition is also of interest in the study of anxiety, as anxious writers' modes of processing and responding to information often are shaped by anxiety. Many psychological studies have been focused not only on how anxiety develops cognitive schemata in general but also on how it impacts specific communication processes. These psycho/cognitive findings and theories provide cross-disciplinary support for classic composition theories of the cognitive process writing. Composition theorists Linda Flower and John Hayes developed a widely recognized cognitive theory of writers' writing processes that provides a framework for correlating cross-disciplinary findings.

Describing the cognitive process model for the writer in their classic essay "A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing," Flower and Hayes clearly differentiate between the cognitive process from the stage process of writing. Whereas, the stage process is product oriented and moves in a linear manner from

pre-write to draft to revision and finally to "completed" product, the cognitive process model describes the act of writing itself as chains of schemata that order the writing strategy sequentially, recursively, or a combination of these orders.

To study writers' overall writing cognitive processes, Flower and Hayes isolate three sub-processes, planning, translating, and reviewing, which are strongly influenced by writers' perceptions of the demands, rewards, and punishments of the external task environment. Thus, the cognitive act of writing is the convergence in these two internal and external systems that writers translate into written code. When writers fear that they cannot effectively write in this environment, they experience anxiety that, in turn, influences their cognitive processes. Therefore, it is important to consider the components of the writing model, including task-environment, long-term memory, the writing process, and writers' decision-making monitor, to understand the anxious reactions various individuals have toward writing. Although these components are not truly isolated, examining them individually clarifies their holistic complexity. Anxiety not only frustrates the development of each of these writing components, but also serves to redirect planning and even formulates crystallized schema responses to writing

situations.

- **Task Environment**

The task environment is "all of those things outside the writer's skin, starting with the rhetorical problem or assignment and eventually including the growing text" (255), which implies that the task environment stays constant. Indeed, the task environment does provide stimuli that initiate the writing process; however, the constant task environment is an arguable assumption. The task stimuli, although perceived as constant by the teacher, is quite fluid to students. Furthermore, perceptions of the task environment differ widely among students because they analyze and translate assignments according to their individual backgrounds, beliefs, and personal perceptions of audience and self. A classroom of students hold not only a variety of perceptions about the writing task but also a variety of planning strategies for how that task will be approached and completed.

Either purposefully or subliminally, students negotiate all assignments regardless of whether or not the teacher participates in this negotiation. Purposeful negotiation may be a result of students realizing time constraints, valuing the assignment and the grade associated with it, and assessing the pressures from other

classes, home, and work. Considering all of the variables, a student may negotiate for the B rather than the A. However, students with trait anxiety may not engage in this obvious negotiation process. Even when anxious writers find time to overtly negotiate the A, they may become blocked. Differences in writing quality, thus, may not be for lack of study, time, or even ability. Rather, an established response to certain stimuli initiates pre-conscious inhibitors that derail anxious writers.

In trait anxiety, writers' perceived threats can activate a behavior inhibition system at a pre-conscious level of cognition. Consequently, these subconscious inhibiting responses impose themselves on the willful or conscious level of the writer. According to cognitive psychologist J. A. Gray, individuals who are high in trait anxiety have a more active behavioral inhibition system than do those who are low in trait anxiety, and these inhibitors diminish their cognitive systems' ability to access long-term memory, complete tasks, elaborate, and activate normal monitoring functions that are essential in the Flower and Hayes model. Consequently, these students' task environments can shift far afield from the teacher's original intent and become a source of tremendous upheaval.

- **Long-term memory**

Long-term memory, the second major component in the Flower and Hayes' model, exists not only in the mind but in outside resources as well. The problem with the long-term memory, however, is that it must be accessed or triggered in order to use information that is relevant to the task environment. Furthermore, it must also be able to recall the required rhetorical style to organize and present information appropriately (258). To be sure, this is a complex cognitive chain, leading from one response to the next rather than accessing the entire memory at once. Long-term memory is triggered by cueing, which depends not only upon the main task but also on the sub-variables of the environment, including audience, evaluation, self-perception, and personal skill. In combination with the main cue, these variables provide access to schemas developed through past experiences and set into long-term memory.

To further complicate the system of memory, not only do schemas trigger memory but other schemas determine how memory is accessed. Current writing tasks that are perceived or translated as similar to past writing tasks evoke these determinant schemas.

Since anxiety can shape writers' recollections of past experiences it also acts as a precursor to formulating

their plans for current writing tasks. Anxiety psychologists Beck and Clark describe the essence of the schema theory approach to anxiety disorders:

> Cognitive structures [i.e., schemas] guide the screening, encoding, organizing, storing and retrieving of information. Stimuli consistent with existing schemes are elaborated and encoded, while inconsistent or irrelevant information is ignored or forgotten . . . the maladaptive schemes in the anxious patient involve perceived physical or psychological threat to one's personal domain as well as an exaggerated sense of vulnerability. (24-25)

Because of this perceived threat to their personal domain and the feelings of vulnerability this threat stimulates, trait anxious writers will access planning schemas differently than non-anxious writers. When writers feel vulnerable in a given area, then the schematic responses may lead to a chain of reactions that are at cross-purposes with the writing assignment. For example, when students are asked to respond to the prompt "analyze the poem," non-anxious writers may draw on a series of task related schemas (called modes) with individual schemata for each task such as: plan, scan poem, divide into categories of scansion, plan, interpret archetypes, plan, and deduce content. In contrast, anxious writers may draw on modes that initiate schemas of hyper-vigilant monitoring skills, self-doubt, self-consciousness, switching away to other non-relevant tasks, or narrowing attention to only one part

of the task. These kinds of cueing strategies create dysfunction because they do not tap into content relationships located in long-term memory that help formulate ideas about the writing task. Rather, they cue internal survival strategies that distract writers.

Mike Rose's case studies of blocked writers characterizes high-blockers as those who employ some of these self-defeating schemas:

> 1.Ruth believed that every sentence she wrote had to come out grammatically correct the first time around. This rule led Ruth to edit before she wrote; it closed off the free flow of ideas that can be tidied up in later drafts.
>
> 2.Martha created a plan of such elaborate complexity that she was unable to convert its elements into a short, direct essay. Her days were spent constructing a plan that looked like a diagram of protein synthesis (she was a biology major), leaving her only hours to move from outline to paper to deadline.
>
> 3. Mike anticipated assignments. He generated strategies and plans for probable paper topics or essay exam questions before they hit his desk. When his predictions were accurate, he did very well ("psyched-out" the professor), but when he was off, he had great difficulty changing his plans. Plans, for Mike, were exact structural and substantive blueprints, not fluid strategies with alternatives. And because Mike's plans were so inflexible, he blocked. (16)

These three scenarios exemplify the rigidity with which blockers will hang onto schemas even, if they block access to their own creativity. Unfortunately, this blocking can lead to further frustration and as deadlines loom, anxiety

levels grow. Writers with rigid schemas that employ negating tactics build feedback loops that spiral down a vortex of anxiety.

These cognitive feedback loops not only activate chains of both positive and negative emotions but also disrupt long-term memory and planning. Joreskog and Sorbom, who studied anxiety-achievement relationship cognitive chains in high-trait anxiety individuals, found that the individuals most susceptible to these negative feedback loops evaluated themselves negatively, viewed their achievements unfavorably, and often attributed poor performance to either bad luck or low ability. Their stable feedback loops then caused their worries about negative achievement to obstruct competent task performance, which then elicited further negative self-evaluation and circumvented access to long-term memory reinforcing subjects' feelings of low self-esteem (51-53).

Applying Joreskog and Sorbom's work on anxiety feedback loops to Flower and Hayes' cognitive writing process model allows one to hypothesize the effects these feedback loops have on anxious developing writers. Loops that create feelings of low self-esteem produce negative self-speech that can alter planning goals anywhere in the writing process. These feedback loops turn in upon writers

plummeting them into a spiral of depression about their writing abilities. The inability to access memory disrupts the writing processes of planning, applying appropriate rhetorical modes, giving sufficient supportive content, and retrieving relevant vocabulary. Even though writers know how to apply these skills, they cannot use them when accessing them is blocked. Subsequently, this long-term memory blocking results in anxious writers being categorized as basic writers.

- **The Writing Process**

The third component in the Flower and Hayes cognitive writing model is the writing process that they subdivide into three parts: "planning, translating and reviewing which are under the control of a monitor" (255). Planning includes the subprocesses of goal setting, translating is putting writers' ideas in a visible language, and reviewing is evaluating and revising.

Planning, which includes organizing, goal setting, and generating ideas, is not static but is affected by evaluation or interpretation of the stimuli, which for college students, usually is a writing assignment. Good planners can interpret the assignments given, select appropriate rhetorical modes, consider the audience, and create relevant goals. Composition theorist James Britton

contends that many writers reduce these large planning tasks into simpler more manageable ones, creating attainable objectives. Although this strategy may economize the task, this reductionism may exclude important key elements. The relevance of reductionism to anxiety has less to do with redefining strategy than it does with attention narrowing. Anxious writers become fixed on minimal aspects of their tasks and don't see the entire task plane, thus limiting the rhetorical problem.

Narrowed interpretation of the rhetorical problem can further be explained psychoanalytically. Anxiety can lead to selective bias in which threatening stimuli are preferentially processed. Psychologist Michael Eysenck explains that "anxious individuals generally attempt to maximize the probability of threat detection. As a consequence, they should have a selective attentional bias favoring threat" (53). This focus narrowing may explain why some writers respond to only one or two components of a three-part essay prompt and direct their attention bias toward what they perceive to be the most threatening portion of the assignment. Heavily weighted responses thus may reflect anxious students' preferences in covering material that they feel confident about. Eysenck's theory of selective attention bias may also explain paradoxical

bias favoring of threat that leads anxious students to focus on unfamiliar areas rather than on areas of strength, further negating confidence and frustrating planning strategies and reinforcing negative feedback loops. Either way, neglecting any one portion of a placement exam writing prompt usually causes a significantly lower score for the writer.

Writers compare the cues from the prompt against what they already know in order to plan the writing task. Flower and Hayes explain that " . . . in the planning process writers form an internal representation of the knowledge that will be used in writing" (258). It seems logical that narrowing the field for perceiving problems also narrows the field of planning, which restricts writers' resources for the planning process. The result is underdeveloped thought, thin examples, and weak support.

The second part of Flower and Hayes' writing process component is translating, which Ellen Nold describes as "the essential process of putting ideas into visual language" (Nold 260). Translating requires access, deftness with a code, and the ability to use a set of socially accepted symbols; thus, it is primarily skill oriented. Even though translating is secondary to planning, it can upset and discourage the planning process

because the concern for skill is one of the major worries of high anxiety writers. Because translating skill is the primary focus of many writing teachers, it becomes a field of battle in the composition theory arena.

The writing task itself is not the only medium for narrowed perceptions. An encroaching timeline affects perception bias as well. Psychologists C. MacLeod and A. Mathews used a visual study of semantics to investigate the attentional bias of students toward word recognition, introducing the additional elements of time pressures and increased perception of failure into the threat-biased experiment.

> In this task, two words are presented concurrently, one to an upper and the other to a lower location on a screen. . . one of these words is threat-related and the other is effectively neutral. The distribution of attention is measured by recording speed of detection of a dot which can replace either word. . . . High and low trait-anxious students demonstrated no attentional bias towards or away from examination relevant stress words a long time prior to an important examination. However, . . . in the week before the examination, when the levels of state anxiety were elevated. . .the students high in trait anxiety showed attentional bias to the threat-related stimuli, whereas those low in trait anxiety showed bias away from the same stimuli. (659-670)

MacLeod and Mathews found that selective bias is swayed by state anxiety as well as by trait anxiety. Situational stress effects most people restricting the ability to do multi-functional or complex tasks. However, those students

who were identified has having a personality of trait-anxiety were affected at significantly higher levels and particularly when the variable of a looming due date was introduced. For those who demonstrate internal anxiety traits, complex tasks become more difficult than those whose anxiety constructs are around the norm. This task frustration was identified by other researchers as well. For example rather similar performance patterns involving the interaction of trait and state anxiety were reported by D.E. Broadbent and M. Broadbent (165-183) in their studies of task performance.

Furthermore, some trait/state anxiety studies suggest that when the variables of examination and evaluation are included, threatening words stand out more to anxious writers as revision deadlines approach. Hyper-sensitized perceptions have relevance not only to textual comprehension but also to the reader's comments. On first revisions, therefore, writers may not attend to the comments in the margins as much as those written on later drafts. Thus, one might assume that in portfolio projects, comments on the next to final draft would become bolder or louder in the minds of trait anxious writers than those written on early drafts.

Unfortunately, this hyper-vigilant focus on grammar

can confound writers' translating cognitive processes. Translating requires response to formal and generic plans, syntax and lexicon, and even motor-skills for forming letters or using a keyboard (261). Increased attention on one specific area of translation may diminish anxious writers' focus on other important areas of content, critical thinking, audience, and organization. Yet institutions that place writers through assessment exams base their evaluations chiefly on translation and error, so, naturally teachers and students will too. This not only perpetuates developing writers' anxiety about translation errors but also activates the internal monitor narrowing revision strategies to surface errors rather than content issues.

Reviewing is the third part of the writing process component and has two functions: one is to act as a springboard that initiates new ideas and propels writing forward, and the other is to provide the means for evaluation and revision of what has already been written. This reviewing process may recur more frequently in high anxiety students, who become caught up in surface repair during drafting rather than moving forward with their thought. Clearly, a primary focus on skill can be distracting, subverting reviewing devices that initiate new

ideas.

Any of the cognitive writing process mechanisms can be activated at any point in the writing process, but evaluation is often the most heavily accessed schemas because it is essential in interpreting stimuli and then either reinforcing or changing their writing plans. Cognivists J. William and F. Watts describe how this evaluation mechanism works in an anxious situation:

> At the pre-attentive stage, stimulus input is processed by an affective decision mechanism. This mechanism assesses the threat value of the stimulus or stimuli presented, and this information is then passed to the resource allocation mechanism. This mechanism directs attention towards or away from threatening sources. (175)

Writers use their decision mechanisms to analyze a task environment and to rate its threat value. If the situation is considered ambiguous or neutral, then no action is needed; if not, then writers ask, "what resources are available to approach the task?" Based on this review, writers decide whether to edit previous writing, generate new ideas, or elaborate on the current idea. However, trait anxiety writers may see stimuli as ambiguous or neutral because they see a wide field of stimuli as being threatening. Thus, they have difficulty sorting or prioritizing the real threats.

Trait anxiety individuals have overactive evaluation

mechanisms, causing them to divert resources from decision making to constant scanning and evaluating the environment. They may show ". . . a permanent tendency to react to input from the ADM [affective decision mechanism] by directing attention towards or away from the location of threat" (Williams, Watt, MacLeod and Mathews 175). These directional biases become broader as state anxiety increases.

Overactive evaluation mechanisms make it difficult for anxious writers to stay on task yet easy to become distracted since this sensitivity may lead to constant scanning of the environment for threat. Anxiety increases the level of distractibility as task performance efforts are shifted from good writing goals to the task of responding to "task-irrelevant stimuli" (Eysenck 52). In an essay exam for example, a writer's focus may shift from the task of fully answering a question to a hyperbolic focus on sentence structures or lexicon, as did one student I observed during an essay exam. He wrote one sentence, then waved his pencil, then stared at me and looked around the room for five minutes, reread what he had written, wrote another sentence, and returned to staring at me. He drew out a normal forty-minute exercise into two hours of self-torment with little writing to show for his pain. Although

it is difficult to pinpoint what the perceived threat is, whether it is diction, grammar, number of pages written, or even the proctor, this continual scrutinizing of the environment detracts from writers' efforts to form task relevant ideas necessary for forward movement in the writing process.

The Monitor

The monitor function registers progress in the writing process. Flower and Hayes explain:

> The monitor functions as a writing strategy which determines when the writer moves from one process to the next. For example, it determines how long a writer will continue generating ideas before attempting to write prose. (261)

What Flower and Hayes term "the monitor", is the function in the writer's mind that makes decisions. This function is difficult to study as it can't be determined when the subject is moving from one process to the next, is closing down one function, or is initiating another. However, the monitor is important in determining which schema will next be activated and can be influenced both by state and trait anxiety. It may initiate positive schemas for the writer by accessing long-term memory, elaboration or organization, but it also may access negative schemas that inhibit, scan, or distract from the task.

The monitor function responds to the evaluation

function deciding what mode to engage and what strategy to employ next. However, when an overactive evaluation function strains this monitor, staying on task for any length of time becomes strenuous. Developing ideas becomes difficult and static thought development may result in sound-bit writing that is underdeveloped or shallow.

Neuropsychologist J. A. Gray claims that the hippocampus is part of a system that functions as a comparator that takes in information about the current state of the world as well as guesses as that state should be. If the comparator sees a match between the predicted and real events, then it checks the next actual event. However, if it detects a mismatch (i.e., a discrepancy between actual and expected events or a stimulus warning of an event that could disrupt planned behavior), then it activates the behavioral inhibition system (Eysenck 345).

The limits of the Flower and Hayes' model of writers' cognitive processes has been argued by constructionists since it was first published in 1981. Nevertheless, the model does provide a framework for correlating the cognitive structures of anxiety with the cognitive structures of writing. John Hayes later revised his theories in "A New Framework for Understanding Cognition and Affect in Writing" (1996) that synthesizes the

cognitive and social theories of anxiety and cognitive and psycho-social constructs of composing. Anxiety creates a complex web of internal and external responses that affect the basic writer.

CHAPTER TWO

Locating compositionists' anxiety findings within the context of psychosocial anxiety theory.

The previous chapter showed how writing anxiety can create dysfunction within writers' immediate cognitive writing processes. But why do some writers employ effective writing strategies while others return again and again to ineffective writing strategies? The answer to this question is as varied as the multitude of human personalities. As a component of personality, trait anxiety is affected by humans' psychological internalization and processing (inner-factors) of their external social environments (outer factors). Composition researchers have studied the symptoms of writers' block, writing minimization, narrow revision tactics and writing ego-centrism; however, the broader context of psycho-social theory adds breadth to understanding of why various writing anxiety responses occur. In this chapter, I will apply three psychosocial theories (cognitive development theory, ego-centrisism theory, and avoidance motivation theory) to explain why writers access the strategies that they do. Aligning these three theories with findings in composition research suggests that the fear of writing diminishes anxious writers' normal development. Moreover, the

strategies that these writers employ are closely related to those strategies used by basic writers.

Cognitive development theory is associated with the Swiss cognivist Jean Piaget who explains cognition as a stage developmental process that moves from basic concrete thought to abstract analysis and synthesis of a multitude of concepts. He further proposes that the ability to perform more sophisticated levels of thought does not occur until late adolescence. Specifically, in "Intellectual Evolution from Adolescence to Adulthood," he asserts that between the ages of eleven and fifteen operational thought processes are developed. However, some students may not achieve this level of thought development until as late as age 20, and some may never achieve it at all. These operational thought processes are a requisite for the development of higher levels of abstraction and thinking in removes.

The theory of cognitive development has become important to college writing professors whose students may still be in this developmental stage. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, cognitive development theory initiated debates in the composition community about basic writers' abilities to perform formal cognitive functions. Angela Lundsford supports Piagetian theory in her article

"Cognitive Development and the Basic Writer" stating that basic writers . . . have not yet attained the level of cognitive development which would allow them to form abstractions or conceptions" (38). She believes that some freshman may not have developed cognitively enough to meet the demands of formal thought processes required at the university level. Her work, in turn, prompted a number of teaching models that promote the development of formal thought through graduated steps. Much controversy ensued with Mike Rose and Patricia Bizzell as major dissidents of cognitive development pedagogy. Their perspectives, however, will be suspended for the moment as exploring Piagetian theory in context with basic writing and anxiety reveals some interesting connections about writing development.

Cognitive maturity becomes manifested in a human's ability to reason, decentralize, perform problem solving, adapt to new situations and, specifically, to communicate these abilities in writing. Thus, if cognitive development is slowed, then writing development will also be slowed. Two theoretical premises about cognitive development are necessary to establish the link with the influence of writing anxiety upon writing development: adapting to new situations and decentering.

The first of Piaget's premises of development through ability to adapt is as follows:

> Since intelligence is, by definition, adaptation to new situations, there is a continual building up of mental structures, structures linked to a need for internal consistency and organization. As they confront new experiences, individuals must constantly seek to regain a sense of equilibrium by either assimilating new information into their existing mental structures or adapting their existing structures to accommodate that new information. (Winchell 34-35)

This ability to adapt new situations to old ideas is defined by cognivists as intelligence, that human capability to see basic similarities in various situations despite their particular diversities (Snow 350). New situations have various levels of novelty in relationship to the familiarity the subject has with its content. However, new situations are often the very sites that create feelings of anxiety.

Flower and Hayes also address this premise of novelty for intellectual development in "The Cognition of Discovery: Defining a Rhetorical Problem. Based on their study of what writers actively consider when approaching a writing task, they propose that two types of intelligence are needed for rhetorical problem solving. The first is "stored problem representations" or the information about rhetorical problem solving or rhetorical models that a writer already has. These are used to approach conventional

tasks such as writing "Thank You" notes. The other form of intellectual approach is "unique problem solving" (25) which is employed when a writer approaches a novel task. Based on their findings, Flower and Hayes report that ". . . one of the most telling differences between our good and poor writers was the degree to which they created a unique, fully-developed representation of this unique rhetorical problem" (25). Good writers can adapt what they know about writing and use it to create an effective plan. Flower and Hayes, thus, provide the link to explore the connection between trait anxiety, basic writers and the ability to create new or at least highly variant cognitive processes. The following psychological studies support the thesis that writing anxiety diminishes writers' abilities to adapt to new writing tasks.

Many studies of anxiety and cognition demonstrate how stored problems of representation and unique problem solving mechanisms of anxiety subvert the evolving cognitive processes necessary for novel problem solving. Based on the theory that new situations create a greater state of anxiety than familiar ones, learning behaviorist R. E. Snow devised an assessment tool for evaluating the effect of anxiety on the cognitive process. Novelty and familiarity act to create a paradigm on which adapting the

new and the familiar to a given task occurs and also demonstrates how task problem solving responses arise. Responses that arise along this spectrum may evoke fluid (unique problem solving) or crystallized intelligence (stored problems of representation). According to Snow, crystallized intelligence is a group of previously used responses that are retrieved to respond to situations that are perceived as similar to those in the past. In contrast, fluid intelligence is new gatherings of performance responses that can be used to meet the demands of novel situations. In Snow's terms, ". . . the distinction is between long-term assembly for transfer to familiar new situations vs. short-term assembly for transfer to unfamiliar new situations" (350). The responses to novel situations vary from persistence to avoidance, positive interpretation to negation tendency (expectations of success or failure), and finally in the development of new response strategies.

The novel task situation study is useful to anxiety theory as novel situations evoke stress in nearly everyone. The fear of failure, a motivation toward task avoidance, and the retrieval of inappropriate responses arises. Furthermore, the novel-familiarity dimension effects levels

of self-evaluation. People simply feel more confident in performing familiar tasks than novel ones.

Mike Rose discusses the rigidity of rules used by writers who suffer from writer's block (high-blockers) when approaching a novel writing task. Rose attributes blocking to various schemas that he claims are not based in anxiety, yet the symptoms he describes do reflect characteristics of anxiety. He states, "The rules by which they [high-blockers] guide their composing processes are rigid, inappropriately invoked, or incorrect" (4). That is, that writers' rules are filled with absolutes such as always putting the thesis statement at the end of the first paragraph (5). This rigidity that Rose describes reflects a tendency of anxious writers to access fossilized schemata. Because the most accessible chains of responses to the anxious writer are the habitual ones, fear pushes the writer to access the most immediate solution. Snow explains that when accessed repeatedly, these habitual schemata, become fossilized or rigid. The inability to adapt schemata to novel tasks restricts creative critical thinking skills (Snow 350). The conclusion is then that the rigidity that fear creates diminishes the ability of writers to develop intelligent thought.

The second premise of Piagetian cognitive development theory is that at each stage of cognitive development the individual experiences egocentrism.

> At each level of cognitive development individuals go through a period of egocentrism before some source of conflict forces them to adjust their way of thinking to regain equilibrium. This repeated decentering out of egocentrism is necessary if they are ever to get to the level of formal thought, at which they can see simultaneously both their own and their audience's point of view. (Winchell 34-35)

Here, Piaget claims that repeated decentering out of egocentrism is necessary in order to move to higher levels of formal thought. This premise reflects the struggles of outward focus and extending imagination to be able to realize another individual's perspective. Yet, humans are the most anxious about either how they think that others are evaluating them or how they are evaluating and controlling their own presentations. If intellectual development means increasing an awareness of others' perspectives, then intellectual development may also increase anxiety.

Awareness of the reader has the potential for two opposing responses within anxious writers: either, writers may mentally block out the possibility of social-threat, or writers may become overly focused on the social-threat of reader evaluation. The first defensive tactic of mentally avoiding or blocking reader awareness narrows the field of

rhetorical strategies that writers may use such as establishing common ground, providing definitions, organizing, strategies of persuasion, argument and refutation, and even varying diction levels. Naturally, if these writing tools aren't accessed, then they can neither be practiced nor developed by the writer. This evokes the question: can trait-anxious developing writers develop into professional writers if they ignore or block out their awareness of audience? Conversely, high trait anxious writers who are overly concerned with reader-evaluation still maintain their own high-levels of self-focus because of the perceived need for self-protection. Hence, the perceived threat of the environment is turned inwardly, and again, decentering skills are frustrated when the subject is feeling threatened. Ergo, both cognitive and writing development are affected.

This self-focus of anxious writers is further demonstrated in Rose's case studies. He noted that hi-blockers " . . .edit too early in the composing process" (Rose 4). This may be caused by trait-anxious individuals' over-active evaluation monitors (Eysenck 52) that force immediate scrutiny of every line as it comes onto the paper. This hypersensitive focus on grammar grows out of a need to sustain a high-level of self-presentation, so trait

anxious personalities see even neutral circumstances as harmful and will initiate their defense mechanisms (Ball 107). These inner-focused mechanisms override outer-focused planning writing strategies.

A variation of the egotistic response is that of self-centered content. Sondra Perl's "Five Writers Writing: Case Studies of the Composing Process of Unskilled College Writers" characterizes the egocentricity often observed in basic writers. In this set of case studies, Perl, using an assessment tool to define composing behaviors, categorizes strategies of basic writers. She found that these writers wrote from an egocentric point of view, that is:

> [t]hey did not see the necessity of making their referents explicit, of making the connections among their ideas apparent, of carefully and explicitly relating one phenomenon to another, or of placing narrative or generalizations within an orienting, conceptual framework. (320)

They seem oblivious to their readers' need for back-grounding. Yet, anxious writers are far from oblivious to their readers and defensive ego-centrism does arise in writers if they feel that their identities are being threatened. It is ironic that decentering is a gauge of cognitive development, yet this same mechanism increases audience awareness and initiates anxiety that restricts cognitive functions.

Another widely accepted anxiety theory is Snow's Avoidance Motivation Theory: the fear of failure often provokes task avoidance. Anxious individuals will either avoid tasks altogether or initiate avoidance while performing tasks. This avoidance motivation hypothesis was tested by Hagtvet, Knut and Min, who provided subjects with tasks that differed in novelty and familiarity corresponding to Snow's intelligence paradigm. Two subscales were created to gauge motivation; on one end of the scale was the motivation to gain success (MS) and on the opposite end, the motivation to avoid failure (MaF). The novelty-familiarity paradigm was tested through a tool using mental puzzles requiring large cognitive operations in which a principle had to be discovered to solve or master a problem. The outcome was that:

> fear of negation is certainly a motivating factor because humans like to be neither evaluated nor rejected. The researchers observed that those individuals who were motivated by fear of negative outcomes resisted . . .those who scored high on the MaF scale show a strong negative affective expectation under the condition of uncertainty. High-scoring people on the MS scale show a strong positive affective expectation under uncertainty. High scoring people on the MaF scale are characterized by a resistance to positive interpretation or by negation tendency. (Forgays 70)

The positive interpretation; they not only were less motivated by reward but resisted positive interpretation. What becomes paralyzing to these writers is negative

criticism. Thus, they may have difficulty receiving positive internal or external reinforcement because they are on the alert for only negative comments.

Joreskog and Sorbom, define hyper-vigilance as a narrowing of attention that sees only what is perceived as threatening (51-53). Vigilant awareness of the social environment is helpful to normal problem solving and social behavioral survival tactics as it directs appropriate adaptations, problem solving, or preservation tactics to specific situations. However, trait-anxious individuals are over-stimulated by the environment and apply inappropriate strategies to situations that are normally non-threatening. The fear of negative evaluation promotes hypersensitivity in anxious writers that amplifies criticism and motivates them to withdraw and get off task. Hypersensitivity in the task can divert writers' attentions to minute detail or divert and distract essential writing process procedures.

Rose observed that some of his subjects became overly anxious about the drafting process becoming bogged down with minute editing from the very beginnings of the drafting stage. This hyper-vigilant focus on the code created too much distraction for these writers to concentrate on ideas. Rose's explanation of this focus is that high-blockers' " . . .assumptions about composing are

misleading" (Rose 4). By misleading assumptions, Rose means that the writer's beliefs about writing do not consider the full diversity and complexity of the writing process (5). This may include notions that the first draft has to be perfect, or that writing is a gift, or that good writing is inspired writing. The tactics of hyper-vigilance become complex, affecting the self-perception of anxious writers. If writers don't feel inspired and words are not flowing, then they may perceive themselves as poor writers. Subsequently, this negative self-perception perpetuates itself through feedback loops that, according to Joreskog and Sorbom, hamper comprehension, extend negative self-talk, and further excite hyper-vigilance (51-53).

Secondly, Hagtvet, Knut and Min's avoidance motivation findings provide an arena for understanding why trait anxious, basic writers have a difficult time staying on task. For them, the novel situation leads to a motivation toward avoidance of completion. This results in fluency problems such as thin research or analysis, underdeveloped thought, or even not attempting certain sections of the writing assignment. Often, these anxious writers merely reformulate assignments so that they fit their own stored problem representation. Thus, writing products that

teachers ultimately receive are not at all what were expected.

Finally, Hagtvet, Knut and Min's study revealed the effects on the learning process of those high in trait-anxiety. The first problem presented in a test would naturally evoke state-anxiety simply because it is the first problem, but once that problem is faced what subjects do with following problems reveals their own intellectual adaptability or process of approach to the remaining set of problems. The researchers found that although the motive to avoid failure impacts the performance process even on the first problem, trait anxiety does not begin to significantly interfere in the problem-solving process until the third question because, by then, the intellectual process is stabilized. The level of stability in approaching later sections of the problem set indicate a state of learned helplessness has occurred for those who still experience failure but that a state of mastery has occurred for those who are now able to solve the problems (Forgays 70-71). This state of helplessness is often what causes basic writers to throw up their hands in despair. They then may resort to familiar tactics such as repetition and circular reasoning rather than continuing to seek a solution to the problem.

Even if the solution to the writing problem is laid out by their teachers, anxious writing students may still revert to familiar although ineffective tactics. Rose describes one high-blocker who stated that she mistrusted planning strategies offered by her teachers. The subject advocated ". . . a fairly spontaneous approach to composing and distrusts carefully plotted attempts to compositionally solve problems" (56). She perceived these alternate styles of planning as threatening to undermine her own strategies, so she clung to the old strategies even though she was aware that they weren't effective. Writers may find solace in engaging in familiar tactics even if these tactics become subversive. One such tactic that Rose notes is that the subject ". . .also gets pleasure out of 'monkeying around with words' and toying with ideas, apparently at the expense of production and, occasionally, at the expense of deadlines" (Writer's Block 56). This toying with distraction reflects a subliminal strategy of avoidance and delay. Although postponing the inevitable is immediately comforting, it is ultimately self-destructive.

Applying newly introduced strategies is uncomfortable to writers, and this discomfort makes it difficult to assimilate these strategies into their process structures. These responses not only block access to effective problem

solving techniques but also reinforce their existing ineffectual models including low self-evaluation. Therefore, students need to be given the opportunity to apply new methods to situations that are simple enough that they can be used successfully, for writers remain skeptical about a new method introduced by the teacher, access to it may be blocked in other writing task environments.

Snow's Avoidance Motivation Theory also explains why some of Rose's high-blocker subjects' writing processes ". . . included a higher passage of time with limited productive involvement in the writing task" (37). This down-time may reflect wrestling with avoidance that then leads writers into periods of distraction and also, as Rose observed in high-blockers, a tendency to produce satisfactory prose that stops mid-essay. So the problem of failure avoidance becomes two-fold for the writer: not only is the product of writing weak, but also the writer loses self-esteem because of the act of writing.

Unfortunately, the most devastating result of writing anxiety is its affect on the development of formal thought. Composition theorist Walter Ong pleads the value of writing through the evolution of consciousness. In "Literacy and Orality in Our Times," Ong emphatically states that writing is ". . . an absolute necessity for the analytically

sequential, linear organization of thought. . . ." (3). Regardless of the theory of cognitive development, writing can be shown to be a source of cognitive enrichment. Indeed, writing does organize thought and is a useful tool for problem solving as well as communicating abstract concepts. Therefore, if writing teachers can break through rigid writing schemas and reroute negative feedback loops, then writers have a better opportunity to develop productive writing strategies.

Basic writing teachers have an awesome responsibility in helping their students to positively approach rather than to negatively avoid the act of writing. Writing is not merely distributing knowledge but is essential to perform the abstract formal operations that generate knowledge. Thus, writing avoidance is a critical threat to students" academic development.

CHAPTER THREE

Sociological Perspectives of Writing Anxiety

Writing is a social act. It is a collaboration based in both past and current thought and depends on community developed and socially evolved genres. Advanced writers adjust their rhetoric according to their perceptions of and familiarity with an audience, and with the goal of persuading or influencing that audience. Self-evaluation is a part of audience awareness because it is the way that people judge themselves in relation to the environment; which then, enables them to monitor their own behavioral adaptations. Having this sense of evaluation is important because other's responses to people's need-to-belong helps to regulate self-presentation. Of course, evaluation creates an anxious response in most everyone, but some personality types become overly focused on it. Unfortunately for anxious writers, this fear of evaluation causes them to be influenced more by how they feel readers perceive their writing than by the possibilities that their writing can influence their readers' perceptions. A plant that lives under the shade of an oak may be able to survive but not to thrive; anxious writers who live under the fear of evaluation cannot thrive as writers, and anticipating negative social recourse challenges developing writers'

abilities to write fluently.

Three Constructs Leading to Social Anxiety:

Social-psychologists claim that anxiety is based upon three factors of social relation: 1) self-presentation, 2) evaluation, and 3) self-esteem (Leary and Kowalski 16-19). Self-presentation is the way that individuals want others to perceive them. This may be an attribute that finds its genetic roots in the sexual rewards that successful self-presentation brings. In nature, the elephant seal with the longest tusks or the peacock with the most brilliant plumage jockey for eminent hierarchical positions for mating. In humans, stature is not only important for influencing procreation but also for education, socio-economic status, and even communication skills. Because these qualities have influenced mating for a million years, presentational styles may well be found in some DNA chromosome. No wonder self-presentation is so vital to feelings of survival. In addition, the need-to-belong dominates basic survival instincts. Humans are dependent on one another for sustenance and protection; indeed, isolation, especially in harsh environments, can lead to death. Finally, self-esteem and self-image create internal perceptions of one's adeptness at handling situations and whether or not a person will set and follow goals, defend

or submit, or, in threatening circumstances, employ fight or flight strategies. These constructs by no means act independently from one another, so an anxiety symptom may fit into two or all three of the constructs. In fact, one construct may initiate a response of another construct. For instance, the need to belong generates a concerned focus on self-presentation, which is then evaluated for its effect on meeting the need to belong. When combined with individuals' belief systems about their communities, these innate social concerns establish a range of personality anxiety traits, which become evident within the act of writing.

Self Presentation Motivation:

Even though people do not like to think of themselves as being strongly engaged in self-presentation, in reality, they spend a great deal of effort on presentation. They want others to respond to them in ways they like and also not to respond to them in ways they don't like. Others' responses exert strong influence on the well being of individuals economically, hierarchically, or sexually. So naturally, people want to make an impression that positively influences these outcomes.

This self-presentation focus in some people, completely dominates their consciousness. Thus, they are

able to convincingly present an opinion or idea in a one-on-one conversation but completely choke-up when they have to present that same idea from a podium to a large audience; what they could express clearly and effectively in a non-threatening environment now becomes confused, vague, and flimsy. Being the center of attention often triggers impression monitoring because it alerts the individual of the potential for evaluation, and this fear supersedes the ability to effectively communicate.

Social anxiety is a reaction to real or imagined needs to present the self well. The way people evaluate and manage themselves in social circumstances is called impression monitoring which regulates the amount of effort that people devote to the impressions that others are forming. At some level, most people are motivated to manage the impressions that they make. Some individuals monitor self-presentation impressions at below average levels and seem impression-oblivious, while others have impression monitors that are highly active and are overly sensitive to their social circumstances.

John Daly defines writing apprehension as ". . . a general avoidance of writing and situations perceived by the individual to potentially require some amount of writing accompanied by the potential for evaluation of that

writing" (37). The threat of evaluation is frightening even for those with normal apprehension levels.

The presentation faculty works in the apprehensive writer to direct course and even career preference as these writers tend to avoid writing intensive college courses (Daly and Shamo, 1978) and even making career decisions (Daly and Shamo, 1976). If the probability of negative presentation is high, they avoid these writing situations. Daly and McCroskey found that apprehensive communicators tend to select occupations that they believe require less communication; therefore, significant life choices are made based on the fear and avoidance of writing. Even though making these choices gives anxious writers a feeling of controlling their impressions, in fact it narrows their fields of opportunity.

Other avoidance maneuvers anxious writers employ in basic writing classrooms are brought to light by Donald Murray in "Teach Writing as a Process." He claims that those who are socially anxious tend to withdraw or to employ conversation tactics that require minimal involvement. They may retreat into listening tactics like giving an affirming nod (whether they agree with the teacher or not) and asking further questions simply to keep the speaker speaking. If students don't have to write, then

they avoid demonstrating areas of writing weakness. Writing teachers often comment that their basic writing students really talk and enjoy group discussion much more than their upper-level students do, and my own basic writing students also tell me that they enjoy class discussion topics and wish we had more of them. However, even though talk is important in the social acts of writing, teachers need to resist the manipulative talents of apprehensive writers who draw them into their own tactics of avoidance.

Although teachers dominate the social construct of the writing environment it is also influenced by the number of people in writing groups, writing group purposes and dynamics, types of writing tasks, and the methods of evaluation.

One writing class tool that creates threat is the editing group. Affecting anxious writers in different ways, these editing groups can become a nightmare for some, yet provide a haven for others. Some students not only fear public scrutiny of their writing, but they also are reluctant to communicate in a group setting. Daly and McCroskey found that "people who feel socially anxious are less likely to initiate conversation, speak less often, talk a lower percentage of the time and take longer to

respond to what others say" (158). These students may hide or disengage from the group.

However, other anxious writers welcome editing groups that act as buffers from teacher evaluations. Also, working with others makes some people feel that less focus is put on them as individuals. An analogous study for the phenomenon in less fear in numbers is demonstrated in a study by J.M. Jackson and B. Latane (1981) who observed college participants in a talent show. He found the greater number of co-performers on stage, the less nervous each performer felt. Specifically, performers felt much less nervous when they performed with four rather than with two other people. The effect that the number of participants in a writing group has on writing anxiety would be an interesting topic of further research.

Another writing class tool that increases anxiety is the first-day diagnostic test. Remember that people engage in self-presentation awareness because it has value to them and the most serious time to employ impression monitoring is during the first impression. Even young children are admonished to make good first impressions with such adages as "you never get a second chance to make a first impression" and "put your best foot forward." Why? One sociologist explains that "When people are motivated to

convey images of themselves, they expect that the impressions others form will affect how others evaluate and treat them, and how they see themselves, or how they feel" (Schlenker 58). Parental instruction that presentation is a means for success is well justified. The first impressions research by E. Jones and G. Goethals, empirically demonstrate that first impressions weigh more heavily as people form impressions of other people than does information received from subsequent contact (44-46). If the first impression is the most important impression an individual can make, it stands to reason, then, that first-day diagnostic tests are particularly difficult for apprehensive writers.

Teachers who give diagnostic-writing assignments often hold them as an "off-the-record" evaluation of the student. Yet this is not a fair representation of the writing levels of anxious students worried about making a good impression. First-day jitters can impede cognitive creativity, development, and organization for students in a new social community trying to become a part of a clan, for students have no hope of revision in this style of diagnostic when the writing looks immature. It is not uncommon for students to nervously approach a teacher immediately after such a test with disclaimers that this was not their best writing,

and indeed, the teacher later discovers that it is not. Moreover, poor first impression writing creates a lack of credibility when a take-home assignment looks better than what the diagnostic assessment originally suggested. The teacher may become suspicious and harsher in grading those individuals who need the familiarity and comfort of writing in their own stress-free cave.

Another factor that adds to the threat value of the writing class environment is the way students perceive the writing teacher. The perception that individuals have of someone whom they are trying to impress is another motivation for self-presentation:

> Most people are more concerned with how they are perceived, evaluated and treated by those whom they regard as attractive, competent, socially desirable, and powerful than by those with less desirable characteristics. (Leary and Kowalski 39)

Obviously, the reason that people value high opinions from competent, powerful, high-status people is that they are in a position not only to provide valuable rewards but also to inflict punishments. This concern causes social anxiety.

Laughably, it could be suggested, that teachers portray themselves as incompetent, socially undesirable, and non-powerful in order to reduce students" anxiety of evaluation and interpretation of hierarchy. As ludicrous as this seems, dressing down is not such a bad idea.

Teachers who try to impress their students with business attire, titles, and over-achiever life experiences may increase respect, but also decrease the nurturing writing environment. Yet, don't teachers want their students to be motivated to stretch, so shouldn't teachers command an impressive image? Depending on the personality traits of the student, the response evoked by teacher presentation may either be positive or negative. It is impossible for the teacher to meet the needs of a variety of students, so the most important personality quality is consistency. If anxious writers know what to expect and that expectation is consistently met, then the environment is perceived as stable. Consistency reduces anxiety and creates a stable target for self-presentation.

What perception are teachers creating? Are they perceived by students as rewarders or punishers, advocates or adversaries, facilitators or gatekeepers? One maxim is that "we perceive ourselves in the manner that we perceive that others perceive us." How teachers support or negate students" impressions of them as evaluators adds to the perceptions that writers have of themselves and of the self-presentation that they are making to others.

The learning institution outside the classroom can also create positive or negative feelings of self-

presentation through its power of labeling. Within the university community, the ability students have to make an impression can already be inhibited by the institution that has predetermined their abilities through placement exams. Labels such as basic, remedial, or challenged place boundaries on individuals" own self-perceptions of identity and self-assessments of abilities.

Discussing the errors of labeling, Mike Rose denounces both labeling and inaccurate definitions of literacy because they jeopardize the educational goals of even well-intentioned teachers who may feel the need to get students to meet a quantifiable standard of writing rather than to develop the quality of writers" thoughts ("The Language of Exclusion" 67). Rose shows the evolution of writing labels from medical analysis of "congenital word blindness" to the now politically charged term of "remedial" for those below a given university standard of literacy set by legislators and administrators. Even though students can read and write, if their style of literacy deviates because of race, ethnicity and socioeconomic difference then they are labeled illiterate. The label literate, Rose explains, has the historical connotation of "character, intellect, morality, good taste" (356). The antithetical term illiterate is a label that generates negative self-

presentation.

Some elements of social threat are neither classroom or institutionally created but rather simply buried in the depth of biological socialization, specifically--sex. The concern for gender presentation is strong on the college campus and carries itself into the classroom. "Between 11% and 37% (depending on the study) of college students report feeling nervous while interacting with people of the other sex" (Arkowitz, Hinton, Perl and Himadi 42). Modern society and elevated cultural refinement, as Freud so adamantly argued, cannot quell sexuality but merely attempt to bridle it. Freud claims that sexuality releases itself in repressed anxiety and behavioral responses, so classroom cross-gender sexual awareness may effect the perception of the writing task environment as well as writers' planning methods.

A definite difference exists between the attitudes that men and women have toward writing. Daly and Miller's writing apprehension studies were prompted by research that had consistently shown that females tend to be rated significantly higher in their composition writing than males (Further Studies 252). Daly and Miller's empirical research supported their hypothesis that "males were significantly higher in writing apprehension than females"

(255), which attribute males' development of poor writing self-esteem to years of receiving negative response to their low composition skills.

As a writing teacher, the most common difference that I have noticed between male and female student writers is that males tend to be more authoritarian and females tend to give fewer opinions with much more support. Does this necessarily reflect apprehension? It may or may not because gender differences in expressing and supporting opinions could be a reflection of cultural communication styles rather than an apprehension strategy. Yet, the two could overlap. Perhaps women in today's culture fear that their opinions aren't being taken seriously and thus they give more effort to proving these opinions. Cynthia Caywood and Gillian Overing suggest that this is a result of maternal thinking, a form of nurturing that provides a lot of explanation to the listener. Lowering the value of personal opinion provides a field for listeners to develop their own thoughts. But feminists who consider the mothering language theory as a form of labeling reject this theory. At any rate, crossing popular conceptions of gender roles and gender-speak can evoke battles that result in rejection, a cause for self-presentation apprehension in writing.

The Need to Belong

The need for survival through socialization is as old as the ancient clans of the world and even older from the Darwinian perspective as seen in congregating primates. Early humans probably would not have survived if left alone on the Savannah. Banning a member from the tribe was the most severe threat of punishment as it could easily result in death. Even in modern times, some religious sects use shunning to punish an errant member. In prisons the harshest confinement is in the solitary lock-up. Thus, rejection and isolation are at the seat of many people's most dreaded fears. Driven by the need to come together, people are strongly influenced by their social environment that defines who they are, how they perceive the world, and the strategies they use for daily living.

Basic to human nature is the need to have a sense of belonging and of being beloved. Those who feel different often try to normalize themselves, which results in stress. To exacerbate the problem, some personality types have an inordinately high need to belong which is characterized by an abnormal need for social approval and/or a strong fear of disapproval. This may be due to feelings of insecurity, self-debasement or life traumas. Whatever the reason and

at whatever the level, the need to belong creates anxiety. Thus, those who differ from the cultural norm work harder at belonging than others do and naturally experience more anxiety.

Unfortunately, the efforts of early psychologists to classify behaviors and skill levels outside the population norm as deviant created labels that too easily stereotype individuals. A host of modern "isms" arise for the socially excluded to contend with, including racism, sexism, classism, and heteroism, and the anxiety these "isms" cause becomes evident in the writing processes of those who are struggling to belong. Some writers have struggled for years with a system that ostracizes them and forces them to internalize their feelings of alienation from those of the "normal" group. Their frustration becomes obvious in writing classes where students are called upon to interject their individuality into their writing in order to establish voice.

Those writing tasks requiring self-disclosure conflict with the common coping mechanism used by those who see themselves outside the social norm. People who fall into these deviant categories often create elaborate fictious fronts to avoid being detected. Those who have practiced hiding their identities or at least softening them so that

they can better blend in, are suddenly asked to uncover them, to voice their own opinions and use support from their own personal experiences.

Marginalized identity anxiety, then creates a crisis when students are asked to write an essay about a sensitive piece of literature or an opinion on a social issue that is personal. Students who are asked to relate their personal experiences to a text may find themselves feeling fragile or unsafe in sharing certain identities.

In the current trend of consciousness raising, students are pressed to unmask themselves and give voice to their writing. Students' personal experiences become a part of the learning environment "to shore up the liberal humanist concept of self" (Caughie 111). These students who have internalized a strategy of passing are now expected to assume the environment is suddenly nurturing and the water no longer cold. Even if apprehensive writers are not hiding their differences, they still may be reluctant to offer their personal experiences into dialogue. The research findings of Giffin and Gilham indicate that highly apprehensive people generally engage in less self-disclosure (72), so assignments calling for self-disclosure are threatening for students who are trait-anxious or socially marginalized.

This threat may be magnified when teachers who mean well ask students to write across racial differences within the classroom even when racial hostilities remain outside the door. Even though the in-class environment, policed by the teacher, seems safe, the halls outside the classroom are not. Thus it is important to consider the ethics of asking writers to set aside the protective masks that allow them to pass when these masks are necessary in the real world.

For example, one of the most intensely marginalized groups who often closet their identities are homosexuals. Their socially apprehensive experiences in writing represent some of the same apprehensions found in other nondominant groups seeking acceptance or perhaps just unobtrusively attempting to blend in. That people of various races, ethnicity and classes may find this comparison offensive simply further highlights the rejection of this group by American society. Homosexuals are reared within a society that not only finds their existence offensive, but also fears them. Thus, homosexuals have learned to censor their own writings.

Some English writing courses are theme related offering course outlines that reflect cultural diversities. One such class offered at University of California at Santa

Cruz is named "Writing in the Margins", a pun that combines the study of marginalized groups and the development of composition skills. One section of the course focuses on lesbian and gay issues. Naturally, a course like this might attract lesbian and gay students, yet even in this setting where the teacher attempted to decrease negativism through education, these "marginal" students still felt intimidated. The fear of heterosexual homophobia is deeply entrenched in the homosexual. One student contextualizes her feelings in presenting her topic proposal to her classmates:

> I didn't know where to start. The class went around talking about the ideas people were thinking about. As I heard the ideas I began to feel more isolated. I knew I was probably the only lesbian in the class, but suddenly I really felt it. Frustration was silently pulsing through my veins as my turn to speak was coming close. As the words came out of my mouth, my shoulders were knotting up and my once clear idea started to get fuzzy as I heard my voice. . . . When the discussion was over I felt like I was even more confused about what I was going to write about. I wasn't thinking about writing something for myself, instead I was thinking about how I would represent a gay perspective in a class full of straight people. . . . When I finally sat down to write, my brain felt like a blank slate. (Hart and Parmeter 161)

This student's conflict is between her desire to belong and her need to express own personal identity. She reaches beyond her individual self because she not only wants to be accepted by the group, but she also wants her lesbian community to be accepted by the group. She takes on the

role of becoming a "representative voice", and it is this self-imposed burden that intensifies her anxiety and further frustrates her writing.

The apprehension of another closeted homosexual student writer was discussed in a 1998 CCCC session in which Kim Costion described two assignments she gave to her college writing class. The first essay assignment required an analysis of a short story. One of her female students had no trouble analyzing the story and presented her beliefs in a coherent well-organized essay with clear logical points that were well supported: an A paper. The second project was to analyze a poem, and the student chose Adrian Riche's "Diving Into the Wreck," a poem about coming-out. The student was lesbian, and because of her experiences the symbolism of the poem had instant meaning for her. Yet, as she attempted to write, she had difficulty following a point. The essay wandered, and her ideas were implied rather than clearly stated. In a later interview, she perceived that her essay was a coming-out effort, yet neither her teacher nor her writing coach had been able to interpret her innuendoes. She thought that she was "shouting" her identity, but really it was no more than a whisper (Costion). The issues of her self-perception of being marginalized (and therefore an

undesirable) created such writing anxiety that her ability to organize and support her ideas were impaired to the point that an A essay writer became a D essay writer. She also had difficulty evaluating her effectiveness, believing that she was communicating her point and that her voice was clear when, in reality, her readers were unable to see her point.

The environment often creates this conflict of goals. Psycho-social researchers Carver and Scheier indicate that:

> . . .external impediments can disrupt behavior and so can internal doubts or conflicts. Yet another source of difficulty is the perception that the effort to move toward one goal is creating an undesired discrepancy with respect to another important goal. (Forgays 13)

This conflict of goals within the act of writing can create further anxiety. The student asks, "Should I be true to my own identity and my own values or should I write a text that will get me the A I want from my teacher?" Motivational psychologist H. A. Simon theorizes that emotion creates shifts in goals. He claims that anxiety (an emotion) signals to the person that not enough attention is being focused on personal well being and that more attention should be shifted to it (29-39). This shift of attention creates a shift in goals.

This could explain some strange organization occurring

in students' essays. Simon claims that:

> . . .when the discrepancy is large enough and the emotion is intense enough, the person's behavior is interrupted and attention is drawn from the action that is now underway to the alternative goal such as safety or making a good impression on someone or even avoiding a bad impression. (Forgays 14)

Thus, the goals of identity, presentation, and the need to belong can cross each other, redirecting thought and organization. Personal disclosure causes anxious writers to feel vulnerable, often shiftting from goals of presentation to goals of self-protection.

The relationship between writers' confidence and their community's acceptance of them is firmly fixed in the minds of students who have been marginalized by their own culture's expectations. Smokey Wilson, communication educator, attempts to deconstruct marginalization when she states "really there are no margins, only a variety of centers" (Hart and Parmeter 155). Although this view seems liberating, it remains idealistic, for the realities of normalization and marginalization are strong in both academic institutions and in society. Conflicts between writers' identities and local structures can shape and often confuse writers leading to writing anxiety and to disjointed writing.

Self-esteem and Self-image.

Self-esteem and self-image initiate writers'

evaluation of their presentation strategies and the ways they blend into social groups. Most people experience situational anxieties that help them monitor their behavior to fit a certain setting. However, some people find themselves in a constant state of worry, whether or not the situation warrants the level of concern expended; these people have personality trait anxiety. And so it is with writers; some writers have a general apprehension about all types of writing whether or not real-threat exists. The most significant difference between apprehensive writers and nonapprehensive writers is that the writing experience is much more painful for apprehensive writers, or they negatively project the outcome of their work far in advance of its actual evaluation.

Apprehensive writers' negative perceptions of self is shown in Madigan, Linton and Johnson's analysis of self-talk between the two writing groups, apprehensive and nonapprehensive. The negative self-talk significantly increased in the apprehensives as the complexity of the essay assignment and the levels of distracting noise increased. Although nonapprehensive writers engaged in negative talk as environmental conditions changed (distracting noise levels increased), they were usually quiet in a quiet setting. However, the apprehensive

writers were self-deprecating no matter what the level of assignment or outside noise. Overall, their self-evaluation was significantly lower than nonapprehensive writers. Madigan, Linton, and Johnson describe their findings:

> Writing apprehension is a manifestation of evaluation anxiety . . . writing apprehensives tend to judge themselves and their own text harshly; they fail to see that their text and the facility with which they produce it are much the same as those of nonapprehensives writing under the same conditions. (301)

Negative self-talk that distracts from the writing process and appropriate cognitive schemata initiates the evaluation, resulting in a feedback loop of more apprehension and more negative self-talk.

Oddly, Madigan, Linton, and Johnson's research indicated no significant difference in the quality of the text produced between nonapprehensive and apprehensive writers (36). This finding is hard to explain when compared to the findings of similar social-anxiety and test-anxiety studies. For example, self-confidence effects the outcome of completion of tasks. The study of test anxiety performed by Charles Carver and Michael Scheier studies analyzes the interactive roles of self-focus and feelings of self-degradation influence disengaging in tasks. Those who perceived that they could not complete an

assignment attempted it but did not persist toward its resolution (Forgays 18). I would suggest this hypothesis for further study: students with trait anxiety may write shorter papers or present less contextual support of their assertions as a tactic of disengaging the writing task. This correlation is suggested by research from other fields. The act of disengagement launched by self-conscious issues likely serves to inhibit writing fluency and also the development of ideas.

An important anxiety study conducted by Rich and Woolever supports the idea that negative self-focus inhibits task performance for those high in trait anxiety. These experimenters manipulated those test-taking subjects predetermined as high-anxiety and not high-anxiety into believing that they were doing well on a test beginning with questions that the subjects were able to answer correctly. The researchers then measured the amount of high or low self-focus in the subjects. Subjects were also given a test that they were not initially able to perform well. The findings showed that when high anxiety subjects were led to be confident about their progress, their self-focus helped them to confidently progress with the test. Yet, when they had self-doubt their negative self-focus impaired their ability to perform. The findings were ". . .

particularly striking in that both facilitation and impairment occurred among subjects who were high in anxiety" (Carver and Shier 18). Rich and Woolever's findings clearly indicate the importance of positive and negative performance expectancies in accessing problem solving intelligence. Highly anxious individuals feel a need to protect their writing egos because they are doubtful about their performance. It follows that writers' self-perceptions of inadequacy can be increased by outside sources such as teachers, parents, or peers who reduce writing effectiveness. Conversely, these same agents can help writers to decenter or reduce self-focus by creating environments where writers can feel confident about their work.

The evidence, thus, is clear that when teachers and writing coaches create a nurturing writing environment writers are more likely to be able to write. Therefore, considering students' need for self-presentation, the need to belong and the need for positive self-esteem will lead teachers to become facilitators and support staff rather than to maintain the traditional teacher/evaluator role.

CHAPTER FOUR

Inferences

Both identity and voice are important for self-presentation and self-esteem that overcome writing anxiety, but these constructs need to be taken into consideration with the need to belong. Belong to what? Generally, the goal of the students going to the university is to obtain the skills to enter a profession. The goal of the writing teacher and the subject of writing assignment, then, should be to aid students in developing voice and identity within their targeted communities as they develop from novice to professional writers.

It is essential that teachers become concerned with voice development and identity issues so writers can create niches for themselves in both academic and professional worlds. But beyond this, writing teachers need to equip anxious writers with coping tools for managing anxiety and developing professional voice in their communities.

Teaching students to develop learning schemas that accept convention without question may add to anxiety. Although it seems reasonable to anxious writers that the best place for sanctuary is in a hiding place, a place of anonymity, a place of inconspicuously blending it, in actuality, without the tenacity to present personal voice

in the targeted community, people are never sure of their footings. They don't know where they themselves stand. Confident self-perception of their own abilities to negotiate knowledge creates confidence in establishing writing goals and objectives. Becoming equipped to negotiate meaning, to establish voice creates a feeling of self-respect and a sense of knowing that supports the need to belong.

Teachers can help their students develop these learning schemas by enabling them to discover rather than to absorb. This is more time consuming than one-way deliverance of information, but the knowledge that is established through self-discovery and dialogue is more readily retrievable as a foundation for future discourse and argument by students.

Writing teachers can provide social settings that help students to realize personal empowerment of community voice. Murray provides a list of pedagogical suggestions to create this environment.

> 1. The text of the writing course is the student's own writing. Students examine their own evolving writing and that of their classmates, so that they study writing while it is still a matter of choice, word by word. (Teach Writing as a Process 13)

Although the teacher may monitor the types of critique that students provide for themselves and each other, writers

gain control over self-evaluation. The nature of the writing group is that of allowing for change and development of ideas rather than a completion of the process. This gives students the idea of being able to formulate opinions, to develop them, and to change them without the threat of formal evaluation.

> 2. The student finds his own subject. . . It is the responsibility of the student to explore his own world with his own language, to discover his own meaning. (13)

This implication allows students to express their identities. People like to be appreciated for who they believe they are, and by supporting these identities, teachers not only allow for a free flow of ideas but also support students' self-perceptions and increase personal confidences.

Interestingly, the teacher's reinforcement of the individual's self-constructed identity is more supportive than bolstering what appears to be the writer's identity. The constructs that make up people's self-concepts may be arranged in a hierarchy according to how important or central they are to their own identities. "It seems likely that people are more motivated to convey impressions of themselves that are more central to their self-concepts" (Leary and Kowalski 43). Thus, a person might be more interested in being perceived by others as an animal lover

than as an athlete, even if he has bulging muscles and is the team's star quarterback.

Writing assignments that provide latitude to enhance self-constructs are more interesting for students to write. Comments such as "It sure seems you like animals" or "It's great that you give so much time to the Humane Society" can then reinforce these self-constructs. Social psychologists believe that feedback regarding attributes that are central to one's self-concept is quite rewarding--more so than feedback regarding constructs that are peripheral to one's identity (Leary and Kowalski 43). Thus, even though the support of self-constructs is not writing directive, these identity affirmations do establish safe spaces for writing and positive spaces for reinforcement.

3. Allow the student to use his own language (14). Teachers are not giving students a different voice but enabling them to develop the voice that they already have. If students have something that they value saying they will exploit their own language in an effort to relate it to the audience. It requires discernment on the part of writing teachers to determine when to intervene. If teachers interfere in the creative process too early, students' voices can be lost. The timing of intervention is critical which leads to Murray's final relevant point.

> 4. The students are individuals who must explore the writing process in their own way, some fast, some slow, whatever it takes for them, within the limits of the course deadlines, to find their own truth" (14).

Many teachers realize that ten weeks is all the time they'll have to help their students and, therefore, feel compelled to push their students along a determined path. In a large classroom, the goal that the median of the group should reach and the attainable goal of the individual can be dramatically different. Apprehensive learners and writers require more time as they are slowly letting their guard down, testing the waters, finding their voices, unlearning old tactics, and developing new ones. How much headway can teachers expect to make? By rushing students, teachers place time limits that are the very harbingers of anxiety that trigger the cognitive process problems for writers. A little progress is better than no progress; therefore, teachers' goals should be flexible to accommodate anxious writers in their classes. With flexible plans, the pressure is lifted from both students and teachers, and both feel more capable of accomplishing their goals. With accomplishment comes confidence that what is being written has value and that the writer behind the pen has worth.

Voices that assertively develop meaning are essential as writers work to carve out places in their professional

communities. Charles Bazerman's "Living With Powerful Words" implores teachers to focus curriculum on building intellectual foundations that prepare students to enter their disciplines as "empowered speakers rather than conventional followers running as hard as they can to keep up appearances" (67). This presentation of power establishes the student and creates a sense of self-esteem.

Followers have very little control of where they are being led, and this lack of control and attempting to adapt to conventions works to strip identity. Even though tools and lists can help students to overcome anxiety, the focus of these should not be at the expense of creating students who adapt or on efforts that colonize them into the current doctrines of the community. The need to belong is not met by adapting; it is met by becoming useful, adding to the group, and creating a need for the individual's identity within the group.

Students need to negotiate old and new theories around their own beliefs and identities, as this is how professionals find their niches in a community. It is this negotiation that gives credibility to the work of the individual not only establishing writers but also empowering them. Empowerment bolsters self-perception and self-esteem, which, in turn, provides support for self-

presentation and specifically, freedom in written expression. As teachers help writers develop positive perceptions of their own voice, the resulting self-confidence rises to help writers reduce writing anxiety to manageable levels.

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