THESIS

MOVING TOWARD A NEWER UNDERSTANDING OF WRITING ANXIETY IN

ADULT STUDENTS USING A CRITICAL EMOTION STUDIES FRAMEWORK

Submitted by

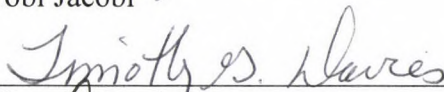Carmody Leerssen Smith

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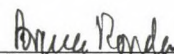WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY CARMODY LEERSSEN SMITH ENTITLED MOVING TOWARD A NEWER UNDERSTANDING OF WRITING ANXIETY IN ADULT STUDENTS USING A CRITICAL EMOTION STUDIES FRAMEWORK BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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Writing anxiety has been a part of composition scholarship for many years, but the research has failed to adequately address the effect it has on adult students. Early research on writing anxiety was primarily cognitively based and focused on quantitative data analysis such as Daly and Miller's Writing Apprehension Assessment from 1975. These cognitively based research strategies are useful and valuable to composition and for understanding writing anxiety, but in this thesis I argue that it is now time we move beyond the notion that writing anxiety is an internal, mental barrier to writing success and instead look at the causes as well as strategies for alleviating writing anxiety through a critical emotion studies lens. By using a critical emotion studies framework, we can begin to understand writing anxiety as a social and cultural construct that is created through the individual's relationship with writing.

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-Carmody Leerssen Smith

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Chapter One: Introduction to Research and Review of Literature

When I started college at twenty-four, like many non-traditional students, it proved to be quite difficult, intimidating, scary, and exciting. Making the decision to start or return to college as an undergraduate older student is a choice that will impact that student personally, professionally, and emotionally and will do so in ways that do not mimic those of his or her "traditional" aged classmates. Non-traditional students make the choice to attend a college or university for many different reasons. For many, like myself, this decision might not come until several years after high school, but it is a decision made with careful consideration about life goals, personal values, and individual circumstances, such as family and work obligations. My story is uncommon because I chose a different educational path than many of my peers, but also very similar to other non-traditional students because we all carry the stress, baggage, and fears that are inevitably attached to starting or returning to an institution for higher education.

When I began my college career at Front Range Community College, I was very nervous but also excited at the new possibilities ahead. My nervousness and anxiety came from not really knowing what to expect from college. It had been six years since I was in a classroom and I was afraid I would not "measure up" to college standards. I was especially anxious about my writing skills and the composition classes I would need to take. I always enjoyed my English classes in Junior High and High School, but felt uneasy about writing in college. Did the anxiety come from my age? From the preconceived ideas about the institution? From lack of experience? Because of my

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research for this thesis, I have been forced to think about these questions. In fact, my writing anxieties are still with me, even as a graduate student.

The nervousness and anxiety commonly felt among non-traditional students, specifically within writing-intensive courses such as college composition, happens for various reasons. Making a significant life change can induce many emotional responses and deciding to earn a college degree is absolutely one of those situations. Non-traditional students especially feel the strain. Not only is the student embarking on something new in his or her life, but family, age, work, and financial responsibilities are still present while the student is in school (Levin; Knowles; Sommer). This is not to say that "traditional" college students do not experience some of these strains, but ultimately the two groups are different because of family, friend, and institutional support. Since the common trend is for students to start college directly after high school, more accommodations are made for this particular group. Assistance with financial aid, housing, study skills, and peer/roommate support is readily found on college campuses, but the needs of non-traditional students should be attended to more, particularly within the composition classroom. I am not arguing that there are not services available to non-traditional students on college campuses; in fact, the Adult Learner and Veteran Services (formerly Off Campus Student Services) office provided me with great support as an undergraduate, but my focus deals specifically with the needs of non-traditional composition students facing writing anxiety instead of looking at university-wide programs and services.

During my research for this thesis, my aim is to answer the following questions:

- What makes someone a non-traditional student?

- What are the different learning styles of non-traditional students?

- Within a composition class, is the issue of writing anxiety being addressed? If not, how can it be?

- How can we as composition instructors alleviate writing anxiety in a composition class for adult students?

- What can research from critical emotion studies help us with when considering writing anxiety and its causes and alleviation?

I am interested in these questions and the study of composition and non-traditional students because I was a non-traditional undergraduate student who faced many challenges when it came to writing with confidence, succeeding in school, and balancing the various aspects of my life. These topics also concern me as an instructor of first year composition. Each student, traditional and non-traditional, has a life beyond the classroom, and it can improve the student's college experience if the instructor is aware and understanding of this. Since writing is a huge part of college education in most classes, not just English, it is important for us to understand and think about the questions above. Through my research, I hope to address these issues as well as discuss possible ways to help non-traditional students become confident writers, alleviate writing anxiety, and to find a voice within academia.

What We Need to Know About Non-Traditional Learners and Writing Anxiety

To understand the needs of non-traditional students in first year college composition, it is necessary to first know who non-traditional students are, as well as their particular learning styles.

The term "non-traditional student" can be defined in many ways. One example comes from The National Center for Educational Statistics and it defines a non-traditional student as someone who can be identified by one or more of the following seven characteristics: "delayed enrollment into postsecondary education, attends part time, financially independent, works full time while enrolled, has dependents other than a spouse, is a single parent, or did not obtain a standard high school diploma" (i). By using the National Center for Educational Statistics's definition, this opens the category of non-traditional student up quite a bit. In simpler terms, these seven characteristics seem to describe any student other than one who starts college the semester following high school graduation. Another common definition to describe non-traditional students is from Arthur Chickering, author of *The Modern American College*. He claims non-traditional students to be those "over twenty-five, women with families, minority students, and students from nonacademic backgrounds" (Harrison & Kaminsky 18). John Levin identifies non-traditional students very broadly as "students over the age of twenty-four who are engaged in some form of postsecondary learning activity" (23). Once again, this seems like a broad definition. It is difficult to pin down a clear, working definition of this particular group of students because each non-traditional student's experience, background, and circumstances are different. For the purposes of this thesis, I chose to focus primarily on age as an indicator of non-traditional status. More specifically, my focus is on students who start or re-start college at age twenty-four or after. Focusing on age as a non-traditional identifier also opens up the idea of "non-traditional" to several areas because with age comes experience, financial responsibilities, and life circumstances different than other traditional students. Since my focus is on the age of

students and not on the other factors that define non-traditional students, I found it appropriate to use the terms "adult learner" and "adult student" when referring to the group of students I am researching.

It is apparent that adult and traditional aged students have different needs, but who exactly are adult students and why are their needs so diverse? According to John Daines, Carolyn Daines, and Brian Graham, authors of *Adult Learning Adult Teaching*, adult learners "bring established attitudes, patterns of thought and fixed ways of doing things to their learning which can help them cope with new situations and ideas" (5). However, this does not imply they are fixed in their ways and unable to open up to the educational process without anxiety and uncertainty. Carol Kasworm suggests that "many adult learners experience significant anxiety and self-consciousness about their acceptance, place in a collegiate environment, and ability to perform as undergraduate students" (28). Even when trying to apply and be accepted to a university, adult students are quite apprehensive. This is not meant to imply that traditional college students do not also experience this, but for them they experience excitement for new opportunities instead of worrying about the strains going to college will have on their families and finances.

Characteristics of Adult Learners

Now that we have a better understanding of who adult learners are, an overview of characteristics commonly held by these students is needed. Again, it is important to reiterate that this is not a comprehensive list of all adult student behaviors, nor should it apply to every student. In *Adult Learning Adult Teaching*, Daines, Daines, and Graham describe adult learners as those who "bring to their studies a considerable store of

knowledge and experience gained over the years and they are able to transfer what they already know to their current learning" (5). Furthermore, "adults can be expected to assume responsibility for themselves" (5), have gained experience and knowledge "by doing," and "adults may find it difficult to recall isolated facts and to learn under pressure"(6). The authors also discuss adult learners as having issues with "confidence in themselves as learners and [they] underestimate their own powers and tend to be over-anxious and reluctant to risk making mistakes. Overall they will not want to fail or look foolish" (6).

Nicholas Corder, author of *Learning to Teach Adults,* touches on the same issues. He describes adult students as

> above the age of compulsory education, they have had some experience of the world of work, they have family responsibilities, financial responsibilities, domestic responsibilities, reasonably independent, able to make their own judgments about the world around them, have some experience of life, and their tastes are more sophisticated than they were when they were younger. (5)

In my experience as an adult college student as well as a composition instructor, I would agree with the above statements made by Daines, Daines, and Graham and Corder. Adult students are not *just* adults, nor are they *just* students; rather they might also be parents, employees, volunteers, and/or the sole source of income for themselves or their families. All students have a life beyond the classroom, but it is up to us as composition instructors to realize this and to understand the various circumstances our students face. It is also important to consider these traits as composition instructors because then we can be better equipped to create lesson plans and assignments that will help our adult students participate more fully in the learning process. I say this because it is apparent from the

characteristics listed above that adult learners might not have the confidence needed to succeed in college.

Jerold W. Apps, author of *The Adult Learner on Campus, A Guide for Instructors and Administrators,* describes the differences between traditional and returning adult students in four areas: "life experience, motivation, academic behavior, and problems faced" (41). Just as Daines, Daines, and Graham and Corder, Apps puts a great deal of emphasis on life experience and describes it in terms of relational value rather than from occupational experience. Since adult students have led "real" lives (jobs, families, bills, etc.) prior to college, they are invested in the material more and have personal reactions and feelings about the class content (42). Regarding motivation, Apps says the adult learners' "motivation to learn is high; it is the force that drove them back to college" and the differences in motivation between traditional and adult students is that "many traditional students are in school because their families expect them to be there, they haven't thought of any alternative to being in school. Many of them do not have a clear goal as to why they are there. For the returning student, the goal for being in school is usually much more clear, and thus the motivation is much more goal specific" (43). Apps also discusses the academic behavior of adult students saying "the traditional student's learning approach is highly influenced by formal education. The returning student's learning approach is more often influenced by informal education. This is only logical. Traditional students are continuing students" (44). However, returning students also have learning experiences, but these involve being participants in community meetings, learning from television and radio, newspapers and magazines, but this type of learning is

"very informal, often unstructured, and often not even called learning by those who participate in it" (44).

Lastly, as Apps outlines, the problems faced by adult students can be quite different than those experienced by traditional students. Adults might have problems with "concentration and time use, problems with study skills, and problems relating to instructors" (49). Apps identifies four major categories of problems facing adult learners: "unrealistic goals, poor self-image, social-familial problems, and a sometimes excessive practical orientation" (49). But should these be considered problems? Adult students are known for being highly motivated, but then are criticized for having "unrealistic goals." What exactly are goals that are too "unrealistic?" I believe in what Apps is saying because I experienced all four of the problems he describes during my time as an adult student, but considering Apps wrote about these problems nearly thirty years ago, updates to this list as well as new ways of addressing them are needed. This will be discussed further in chapter three.

This overview of adult student characteristics is important in our conversation about adults as learners and later, about writing anxiety. We first need to know who these students are before we can help alleviate writing anxiety, which from the research above, we already know is present for most adult students because of the traits just discussed— not accustomed to formal education, low self-image, and lack of confidence.

Learning Styles of the Adult Student

Not only do adult students posses characteristics that are different than traditional aged students, they also have different learning styles and needs in the classroom, especially in a composition course. Some scholars of adult education would argue that

adults should be taught differently than younger college students, and I agree, but I do not feel this is practical in the typical university classroom since many different learning styles are present and addressing them all would be very difficult. Colleges have students of all ages and backgrounds and it would be unfair to segregate students based on age. The problem is not with the student's age, but with how academic writing is taught as well as how it is perceived. However, before we can address these issues, we need to understand students' learning styles so we can better understand how to achieve our goals as teachers of writing while also helping adult students feel confident in academic discourse.

Originally discussed by Malcolm Knowles and later quoted in *Teaching Writing to Adults* by Robert Sommer, "the term pedagogy is derived from the Greek stem *paid-* (child) and *agogos* (leading). Thus pedagogy means, specifically, 'the art and science of teaching children'"(8). Therefore, Knowles re-discovered the term "andragogy" which he defines as "the art and science of helping adults learn" (8). Knowles's androgogical approach is based on four beliefs about adults:

> As a person matures, 1.) his self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directed human being; 2.) he accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning; 3.) his readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of his social roles; and 4.) his time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly his orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of problem-centeredness (9).

This theory of adult behavior has received criticism. Many scholars agree that "the learning process cannot be easily separated into distinct stages, but rather that it is a single, continuous process" (Sommer 10). Theories are important in helping us

understand certain situations such as adult learning behavior, but they can also be limiting. As we already know, every student, child or adult, learns differently and grows differently and it would be unwise to attach a learning theory such as andragogy to a group of people who are so varied in their experiences, circumstances, and expectations from the learning process. Furthermore, an andragogical approach would not be entirely helpful in a writing course. As Sommer writes, "the andragogical perspective on writing instruction would seem to create more problems that it solves. Adult students have a wide range of needs, abilities, and levels of achievement. Further, writing is a particularly troublesome topic for many nontraditional students, a means of exposure rather than revelation, a trial rather than a challenge" (11). Despite the criticism andragogy faces, from myself as well as others, I do see the benefit in utilizing what Knowles states in point number two; students' accumulation of experience which becomes a resource for learning. This stands out to me because it *is* the experience and "real life" knowledge adult students need to bring to the writing classroom and composition instructors should encourage this. Granted, some instructors might already do this type of writing in their classes, but it is something I hope to employ in my own.

Along with the adult learner's worries about home life once entering college, they also struggle to put their "real" life experience to use in the classroom. Daines, Daines, and Graham state that even though adult learners may not have had any direct experience with higher education, they still bring vast knowledge and experience from their work and professional lives. "Their learning may not have been drawn from general principles and theories, nor may it have involved a great deal of abstract thought [and] are much more likely to have been handling concrete issues and to have solved practical problems

'by doing'"(5). In other words, the education adult learners receive at the college level might be very different than what they learned "on the job." Adult learners do come to college with a great deal of "real life" or practical knowledge, but they might be uncertain of how this applies to the classroom when they begin college.

The idea of students using "real life" experience in the classroom also applies to one of the main learning styles of adult learners: experiential learning. There are many possible definitions of experiential learning, but my focus is on making a student's past a part of her present learning. Some might argue that bringing past knowledge and experiences into a college learning environment would impede the learning process because students may not be open to new ideas since they conflict with what they think they already know. This might be true, but I think this learning style is relevant in a first year composition course. In other words, if adult students are able to reflect on past jobs, family, and personal issues through their writing in class, they would feel more comfortable with the writing process and it would coincide with their preferred learning style. As Daines, Daines, and Graham state, "learning is more likely to occur when the material is relevant to the individual and/or where it can be linked to what is already known" (4). This concept is also stressed by Malcolm Knowles when he writes, "Adults' orientation to learning is life-centered; therefore, the appropriate units for organizing adult learning are life situations, not subjects," and "experience is the richest resource for adults' learning; therefore, the core methodology of adult education is the analysis of experience" (31).

Another example of how experiential learning helps adult students appreciate their writing comes from Kelly Belanger and Linda Strom's work in *Second Shift:*

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Teaching Writing to Working Adults where they studied adult students at Alfred North Whitehead College. In this instance of experiential learning, adult students were able to receive college credit for work they have done outside of school, but in order to receive the credit, they first needed to create a written portfolio and

> because earning credit for learning derived from life experience depended on effective written communication, the portfolio system immediately sent new Whitehead College students a clear message that writing in college is more than an empty exercise: Writing about experiential learning could get them something they want and value—college credit. Assembling the portfolio could also give students the confidence that comes from making new meaning of life experiences they themselves may not have fully valued. (33)

Ideas of how to use experiential learning in a first year composition class will be discussed in a later chapter, but for now it is important to understand some common themes among adult learning styles in order to expand them into classroom application later.

Learning styles such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic are common discussions among pedagogy scholars and can apply to all students, but when composition instructors teach adult learners more needs to be considered. As discussed above, experiential learning works well for adult students because they feel connected to the learning on a personal level, but the attitudes that fuel that learning might be necessary to explore as well. Motivation plays a huge role in not only *why* the student decides to start college, but also how well she will learn the material. I see the motivation to learn as more than the driving force, but as a learning style as well. Nicholas Corder claims there are two types of motivation. The first is "instrumental," "someone whose motives are instrumental is likely to see the course as a means to an end and they probably have specific goals in mind" (16). The second is "intrinsic" which "students learn the subject for its own sake"

(16). The reason and motivation behind why the student wants to learn and be in college varies, but when looking at motivation as a learning style we can help students learn college composition easier (and possibly with a little bit more enthusiasm) since we are able to understand their motives behind being in our class. Is it just another "hoop" to go through to get their degree, or are they truly invested in learning how to write well in an academic setting? Realizing these motives can help instructors shape writing assignments and activities that will reach "instrumental" and "intrinsic" students.

This brief overview of learning styles is not designed to address *all* of the ways adult students best learn and interpret information, but its focus is to illustrate the key elements that may help adult students succeed in college courses.

Higher education requires critical thinking and learning abstract theories and concepts, so the question becomes, how can instructors teach the necessary skills and information to adult students while also helping them relate it to "real life experiences" and situations? Because adult students' occupations prior to starting school might not have depended on the same type of work required in order to succeed in college (test taking, reading texts, and writing essays, for example), adult students feel their past experiences are not important in the classroom which may impede their performance and lead to writing anxiety.

Other styles of learning discussed by Nicholas Corder in *Learning to Teach Adults* are the activist learners, the theorists, the reflectors, and the pragmatists (14-15). The activist learner, as the name suggests, enjoys "active ways of learning. they love new experiences or having fresh problems to solve" (14). Theorist learners enjoy being challenged with complex ideas and are "largely unswayed by emotions" (14). Reflectors

like to "have plenty of time to observe what is taking place before embarking on a project" and do not like deadlines (14). Lastly, the pragmatist likes to be able to "see the point of something" they are learning and how it can apply elsewhere in life (15). It is important for us as instructors of composition to take into account these different types of learning styles before we can address writing anxiety. One of my purposes in writing this thesis is to argue for this increased understanding of learning styles among adult students in order to alleviate writing anxiety, particularly in the first year composition classroom.

Research has shown that adult students feel extreme anxiety when it comes to writing (Chandler; Harrison & Kaminsky). This is due to many factors such as lack of experience with writing, not knowing the "right" way to write academically, and a general lack of confidence in writing because they feel they have "nothing worthwhile to say" (Harrison & Kaminsky). Harrison and Kaminsky also note when citing Roueche and Snow and Shaughnessy that "many of these adult learners enter college deficient in reading and writing competencies necessary for success in college level tasks" (18). Since it might have been many years since these adult students have been in school, their understanding of concepts might be lacking or the education they have received might be out of date. Or, as mentioned above, they are unable to make the connection between academic writing with their own lived experiences.

Writing Anxiety and the Adult Learner

Many emotional responses, positive and negative, affect the adult learner's reaction to and interpretation of the college experience. It is important to note that not all adult learners experience anxiety and fear when faced with a writing task, but my purpose is to find out more about those who do. Professor John Dirkx describes the emotions

adult students experience as "important in adult education because they can either impede or motivate learning" (63). In its most basic form, emotions commonly seen as negative (fear, anxiety, confusion) can deter the adult student into feeling inadequate when it comes to succeeding in higher education. Professor Dirkx also states that "while emphasizing the positive contribution that emotion and affect makes on learner motivation and self-esteem, emotions are nonetheless widely recognized as a kind of baggage that impedes effective teaching and learning" ("The Meaning and Role of Emotion in Adult Learning" 8). In other words, the role of emotions and their presence in students' lives should not be dismissed, but instead seen as important factors guiding the learning process of adult learners. More specifically, the act of writing can create significant emotional duress, especially in non-traditional aged students (Chandler; Dirkx; Kasworm; Christie et. al.).

In *Teaching Writing to Adults*, Sommer emphasizes one of the big challenges in teaching adults to write is from their lack of confidence as writers and the lapse in time since they have been students. Because adult students are sometimes uncertain within the university as to if they are even qualified to be students, this same feeling comes out when trying to write. As Lillis and Turner point out when discussing "discourse transparency," the adult students are unsure of their writing skills because they just do not understand what academic discourse is supposed to look like (57). Sommer discusses a lack of writing confidence as something within the writer, but Lillis and Turner emphasize that it is within the discourse community. "A recurring theme in a study setting out to explore the writing experience of a group of non-traditional students in higher education is that of student confusion about what's required in their academic

writing" (58). Lillis and Turner argue how composition terms and phrases are unrecognizable to students new to academic discourse. The authors further state, "That the student writers should struggle with the conventions of an institution which is strange to them, is not surprising. However, this strangeness is compounded by the fact that such conventions are treated as if they were 'common sense' and communicated through wordings as if these were transparently meaningful" (58). Or, as David Bartholomae explains,

> every time a student sits down to write for us [composition instructors], he has to invent the university for the occasion—invent the university, that is, or a branch of it, like history or anthropology or economics or English. The student has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community. (623)

In order for adult students to gain access to academic discourse, they must be taught what terms mean before they are expected to perform a writing task. "For example, knowing that they had to *write an introduction* told the students little about what was required in an introduction" (58). Sommer's work on writing and non-traditional adult learners simply says the problems with writing comes from anxiety, but Lillis and Turner further this claim by saying this anxiety comes from within the institution and not the student. Others, such as John Daly and Deborah Wilson argue that writing anxiety stems from the student's personality and self-esteem. However, Christie, Tett, Cree et al claim the institution itself can cause anxieties and fears in students because:

> Individuals entering higher education, particularly those from non-traditional backgrounds, often have to adapt to changed ways of learning in order to get the greatest benefit from their course. But universities too must adapt to the changing needs of the 'new' learners, and questions are being asked about the role of university culture in supporting or impeding learning. It is becoming clear that learning is a profoundly reflexive and emotional construct, that entails the undoing of earlier learning as students

enter a new environment with different subjects, learning approaches and teaching styles. (567)

However, other takes on where the anxiety of writing, as well as anxiety in general, comes from are discussed by John Levin in his work *Nontraditional Students and Community Colleges: The Conflict of Justice and Neoliberalism* and Megan Boler in *Feeling Power*. Similar to the work done by Lillis and Turner and Christie, Tett, Cree et al, Levin argues that the underlying anxiety held by adult students comes from the institution of higher learning. Levin claims that higher education, much like economic classes, has the binary of the "haves and the have-nots" (1) and economic competition has led to stratifications within institutions and non-traditional students especially feel these effects because they are often students at community colleges—most commonly the place for "disadvantaged populations" (11).

On the other hand, Megan Boler explains emotions to be the "space between ideology and internalized feeling" (13). Again we see how emotions, specifically anxiety, is coming from somewhere outside of the student. Whether it is from the academic discourse or "discourse transparency" as Lillis and Turner define, the economics surrounding the institutional structure as Levin describes, or the "space" between what is felt towards an action as Boler outlines, the anxiety an adult learner feels towards college level writing is something outside of the student and needs to be understood and dealt with in the classroom in order for the student to progress and gain confidence as a student and as a writer. Further discussion about writing anxiety in relation to critical emotion studies can be found in the next chapters.

Many scholars discuss the presence of writing anxiety among non-traditional aged students, but few offer solutions to the problem. They understand where the problems are

coming from and discuss them at length, but fail to suggest any ideas for instructors to help their adult students cope in the writing classroom. Scholars such as Kasworm, Harrison and Kaminsky, and Sommer describe the problem of anxiety as stemming from the student's belief he has nothing important to write about. "Adult learners tend to think they have nothing worth while to say and feel they do not know how to say it [and] there is a need to convince older students to respect their own experiences in order to write about them" (Harrison & Kaminsky 20). In relation, Kasworm writes "adult students view themselves as novices in the stylized environment of the college classroom. Thus, they compartmentalize their prior understandings of self-efficacy and competence in their adult life worlds, believing that their backgrounds have limited or no value in the academic world" (31). Furthermore, Sommer describes the writing process for non-traditional students as one of "frustration led to panic, which in turn led to self-doubt. Perhaps I have nothing to say after all. Perhaps I have deluded myself. Writing is something others can do but I can't" (16). All of these are examples of adult learners trying to cope with the reality of academic writing and the anxiety that goes along with it.

Several factors contribute to writing anxiety felt by adult students: feelings of isolation, unfamiliar with academic discourse, unsure of resources such as the Writing Center, fear of being judged and evaluated, and even personal reasons such as low self esteem (Miritello; Daly & Wilson). One of the major problems, however, is most of the research conducted on writing anxiety was done in the early to mid 1980s with current (2000 and beyond) scholarship primarily focusing on writing anxiety and non-native speakers of English. Because of this significant gap in time, there is a definite need to bring the ideas about writing anxiety back into focus, especially in relation to adult

students in composition. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, "in 2003, some 6.1 million non-traditional college-age students (age 25 or older) were enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities, composing about 37 percent of all college students." It is important for compositionists to learn, or re-learn, the effects of writing anxiety in relation to adult learners because of their increasing presence in college classrooms.

Writing anxiety, or "a situation and subject specific individual differences associated with a person's tendencies to approach or avoid situations perceived to potentially require writing accompanied by some amount of perceived evaluation" (Daly & Wilson 327) can stem from a student's internal personality traits such as low self-esteem, feelings of alienation, powerlessness, or feelings of isolation (Daly & Wilson) or externally through preconceived notions about the university and its expectations, feeling "out of place" in a classroom setting, or from past experiences not performing well in other writing classes or being told they can not write well (Miritello; Raisman). With this in mind, the goal of this thesis is to address writing anxiety in relation to adult students, provide a background on early cognitive research surrounding writing anxiety, discuss new ways of approaching writing anxiety through a critical emotion lens, and to provide practical applications for use in the composition classroom considering adult student needs.

Chapter Two: Moving Beyond a Cognitive Understanding of Writing Anxiety in the Adult Learner and into a Theory of Emotion

The discussion over what causes writing anxiety and how to alleviate it has been happening for years. Cognitive research has provided great insight into what causes writing anxiety as well as strategies for alleviation. Because of its attention to what happens within the writer's mind, cognitive science is important and necessary when looking at and understanding writing anxiety, but it fails to address the social and emotional influences that also contribute to episodes of writing anxiety. Since cognitive studies of writing anxiety do not necessarily address the underlying emotional state of writers, nor do they adequately focus on adult student writers, a revised approach for understanding writing anxiety is needed. Therefore, my goal with this chapter is to provide an overview of this conversation between cognitive research and writing anxiety as well as to discuss the common theories regarding how writing anxiety develops and how to fill the gap in research by using a critical emotion studies framework, especially concerning adult students and writing anxiety. I will also discuss how critical emotion studies can lead us to a new understanding of the causes of writing anxiety.

Cognitive Approaches for Studying Writing Anxiety

From the mid 1970s through the 1980s, writing anxiety was a "hot topic" within the rhetoric and composition community. The discussions surrounding writing anxiety were even addressed by psychology scholars and studied as if they were a problem within the writer's mind. Putting this into a historical context, composition was developing as a

field during the early 1980s and trying to "make a name for itself" in the academy. In doing so, quantitative research was very popular in order to legitimize composition as a scholarly discipline. Because of this, researchers were eager to implement quantitative data collection and analysis in order to prove composition was scholarly work and worthy of critical critique and investigation. During this time, research on writing anxiety was also common and many researchers developed surveys and administered them to students to collect information about its prevalence. It is important to note that many theories and pedagogical fields have studied writing anxiety, but I chose to focus on cognitive theory because of its importance to the field of composition. The central issue, however, is that cognitive based research is not entirely effective when dealing with something as complicated as writing anxiety. Several factors contribute to writing anxiety that are outside of the student's control. Quantitative research does not adequately consider the individual needs (background, feelings, and perceptions about writing) of students. Cognitive research understands the writing process as a linear model that may require planning, which leads to drafting, which ultimately leads to revising (Flower and Hayes; Tobin). Writing anxiety, however, occurs according to cognitive theory when something interrupts this progression. The problem with using cognitive theory alone when addressing writing anxiety is its lack of focus on "outside" inhibitors. Since cognitive theories tend to rely on the idea that if a student experiences anxiety when writing, it is because she is not following the proper writing model, such as Flower and Hayes's process model. Or, as Rose points out, the student blocks when he is too rigidly stuck to the "rules" approach of writing (15-16). Once again, the drawback with using a cognitive approach for dealing with writing anxiety is that it does not attend to emotional

hegemony or social factors such as age, gender, race, etcetera as contributors to feelings of anxiety. Even though cognitive science might not always be the best method in dealing with writing anxiety, some very important research has developed that is useful for our understanding of writing anxiety. For example, in 1975, Daly and Miller were among the first to develop a survey to assess the level of writing anxiety in students. With the Writing Apprehension Assessment, respondents indicate their level of anxiety by answering a series of statements about writing (Daly). Furthermore, the assessment was devised of

> 63 statements about writing that focused on respondents' perceptions of their anxiety about the act of writing; their likes and dislikes about writing; the responses they had to peer, teacher, and professional evaluations of their writing; and their self-evaluations of writing. Respondents were asked to read each statement and indicate their reaction to the statement by circling one of 5 responses ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." (Daly 45)

It should be noted that the differences between the terms writing anxiety and writing apprehension are slight and commonly refer to individual's feelings and attitudes about writing. Those who experience anxiety and apprehension about writing often find "writing unrewarding and even punishing" (Daly 44) and fear writing tasks because of evaluation from teachers, not knowing what to say or how to say it, and often avoid writing all together (Daly and Wilson; Sommer). Writer's block, however, can be defined as "an inability to begin or continue writing for reasons other than a lack of basic skill or commitment" (Rose 3). All three—writing anxiety, writing apprehension, and writer's block—have commonalities which describe the writer as having difficulty getting through a writing task. Something happens within the writer that impedes his process

which can lead to not turning in assignments all together or to providing work that is unsatisfactory.

When the study of writing anxiety was popular in the early 1980s, scholars and researchers commonly viewed writing anxiety as cognitively based; something that prevented the writer from getting words onto a page because of some sort of mental block. As Sommer describes, cognitive scientists agree that language development is closely linked to the overall cognitive development of humans, but he also argues that this premise seems to lead to a false conclusion: "that a person with a limited vocabulary and with limited abilities in speaking and writing (by the standards of formal spoken and written English) is therefore an underdeveloped person, suspended or frozen at an early stage of development" (20). Also, Rose says students who experience writer's block do so because of their lack of planning and attempts to conceptualize the entire paper while outlining and organizing the material (45-49). In other words, they might be deficient in basic writing skills or become bored or uncommitted to completing the writing assignment which leads to "improper" composing style (lack of planning, revision, etc.) (3). Those interested in the cognitive analysis of writing anxiety often view writing as procedural and something that could be investigated through data collection. This was done through assessments and surveys such as Daly and Miller's Writing Apprehension Assessment and Mike Rose's writer's block questionnaire in which he investigated the "cognitive and cognitive/attitudinal [negative associations about writing which lead to the inability to write] variables related to blocking" and to identify blockers "as well as enable one to diagnose certain cognitive and cognitive/attitudinal difficulties" (17). Another popular research technique was to use protocol analysis (Rose, Flower and

Hayes). In Flower and Hayes's work in 1978, they found three things happening based on their protocol analysis model: "planning (retrieval, inferencing, and organizational subprocesses), translating (generating text corresponding to the internal representation under the plan's guidance), and editing (examining the text for grammatical and semantic errors and for failure to match the plan)" (1). The goal was to have the writer say out loud what was going on in her mind while writing in order to better understand the cognitive process of composing. Think aloud protocols help researchers pin-point the areas of confusion or apprehension for writers.

In 1981, Flower and Hayes made significant strides once again in understanding the composing process with their study regarding the cognitive process of writing. Although they do not address writing anxiety specifically in this study, it is possible that one of the goals of their cognitive process model is to alleviate writing anxiety by having students utilize a concrete process for writing. As I mentioned previously, cognitive research as well as studies on writing anxiety were common during the time of this study, and I see a direct correlation between Flower and Hayes's work with the research being done on writing anxiety during this time. Again, even though Flower and Hayes do not directly discuss writing anxiety, the methods they outline in their work can be directly applied to students who do experience writing anxiety because their focus on using a writing model seems to imply that when students use a concrete method for writing, the writing task will become easier.

In other words, they argue that in order to create better equipped student writers, we need to develop a distinctive process model of writing. Stemming from their work with protocol analysis, they determined the most effective way to teach writing involves

specific steps. Furthermore, issues such as the writer's long-term memory (knowledge of topic and audience) and his task environment influence the writing process (278). Using this cognitive model, the student writer composes in these steps: figuring out the rhetorical problem (what the task/assignment is), using what the writer already knows through his long-term memory, planning (by generating ideas, organizing, and goal setting), translating, reviewing, and monitoring his progress (279-83). By using this model, students learn how to compose by utilizing their cognitive faculties in a step by step way. Flower and Hayes's study is extremely beneficial to composition scholarship since it lays the groundwork for how student writers can approach the composing process, and it should also be noted that their model has been significantly revised and updated since the 1980s. Having a clear-cut model of how to write academic papers is a good idea in theory, but it is not an entirely realistic way to teach writing. The writing process is not something that can be addressed as if it were a mathematical problem nor can a cognitive process be applied to every writing situation or student. I make the comparison to math because that is how it is taught; through a step by step procedure. Writing, however, is not linear nor does it follow the same pattern each time. Using a cognitive theory towards writing is an important element in understanding how students write as well as how they can be more effective and efficient when doing so, but ultimately using this approach for all writing situations does not address the writing patterns of all students. It also does not offer ways to "deal with" writing anxiety. It implies that as long as the writer can follow the model, she will be successful.

Another example of a cognitively based approach to writing anxiety deals with personality traits as a contributing factor. Daly and Wilson's study in 1983 *Writing*

Apprehension, Self-Esteem, and Personality, found that individuals with high anxiety and apprehension in general face increased writing anxiety as well. After administering the Daly and Miller, the Rosenberg, and the Pervin and Lilly measures, Daly and Wilson found that "writing apprehension and general self-esteem are inversely related to one another" (330). They also found that feelings of "powerlessness, normlessness, and feelings of isolation" (334) were also contributing factors to writing anxiety.

Along the lines of addressing personality traits as a factor for writing anxiety, some researchers did look toward an understanding of emotion to further understand the relationship between students and writing anxiety. Reed Larson's research examined the composing process of adolescent writers in terms of their different emotional states. The first student in the study experienced such high writing anxiety that she hurriedly wrote the essay the day before it was due. Procrastinating allowed the student to use the excuse that there was no time left for revisions and editing which is why the paper is not as good as it could have been given more time. When looking at this student's level of anxiety, Larson applied a psychological and cognitive approach. He asserted that the student's emotional state interfered with her concentration and weakened her control over her thoughts and ideas (24). Once again, using a cognitive approach to understanding writing anxiety does not provide the whole picture of why it is happening. Using terms such as "weakened" implies that experiencing emotions while writing is something that must be overcome in order to be an effective writer. It seems to say that since negative emotions are clouding the writer's thoughts, she must be weak-minded since she cannot move past the emotional barriers. But this is what cognitive theory looks at; that the root of writing problems come from a disruption during the writing process; whether it is from internal

barriers such as unfamiliarity with basic writing practices, or outside emotional factors. This unfairly assumes that writers with writing anxiety just need to get these "bad" emotions out in order to produce better writing, but what cognitivists might not realize is emotional reactions to writing are not always coming from the writer's mind and in fact are produced socially. This is what critical emotion studies can help us understand: how our cultural and social upbringing shapes how we respond to certain situations. However, I do not dismiss Larson's claims entirely because it is true that some instances of writer's block and anxiety are mental and in this case psychological and cognitive interference might be necessary, but it is unreasonable to assume that *all* cases of writing anxiety are caused by a mental block or lack of skill. This might cause us to wonder, though, if there is a connection between emotion and thought/mental capacities. Is emotion separate from logical thought? Does this binary even need to exist? If we look at the emotion versus rationality idea from a cognitivist perspective, it does. Cognitive science would argue that emotions are in the mind along with reason and are engaged in a constant struggle of what will overcome the other (Boler 71-74). Since emotion is seen as "weak" and detrimental to a writer's success, reason must win in order to silence the damaging emotional side. As Larson states, "anxiety is a state of overarousal that interferes with concentration and control of attention" which leads to "impulsive and poorly controlled writing" (27). What Larson fails to realize is emotion is not something that can be turned off or overcome because it is not situated within the writer, but instead, as Sara Ahmed describes, in the relationship *between* the individual and the object. Emotions are commonly seen as inhibitors to rational thought and ideas persist that if the writer could just calm down and focus, she would be better off. It is not that simple though. Emotions

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are always present and shape how we approach the world, so it is not reasonable to ask writers to just turn off these states of heightened emotion. However, cognitive science does help us establish a good place to begin through its previous attempts at understanding writing anxiety, but looking further into the role of emotions is also critical to understanding writing anxiety.

Since cognitive scholarship should be recognized as an essential component in the study of composition and writing anxiety, I see the top three *strengths* of cognitive theory and its treatment of writing anxiety as:

- Effectively establishing composition as a legitimate field of study through its use of quantitative data analysis/research, thus creating appropriate studies toward writing anxiety causes and alleviation.

- Giving composition instructors an important foundation for how they teach writing through a concrete model. Although I do argue that this is not the best way to reach all students or all writing situations, it does provide the necessary "jumping off point" for composition research because it recognizes that the work of teaching writing, as well as addressing writing anxiety, as necessary to study.

- Providing significant gains toward the understanding of writing anxiety causes (through protocol analysis and surveys) as well as strategies for alleviation, such as Flower and Hayes's process model.

This early cognitive research is very important in our study of writing anxiety of students because it allows us to understand the composing process, but it seems to unfairly lump those who experience writing anxiety not only as weak writers, but also as

those who are basic writers. As Rose puts it, "certainly, the basic writer has difficulty getting words on paper. But, though sociolinguistic and affective forces interfere, a major reason for these students' scant productions is simply a lack of fundamental writing skills" (3). Many students, not just basic writers, experience writing anxiety. Also, having writing anxiety does not necessarily equate to "bad" writing. By taking what we know about writing anxiety from the cognitive stance and applying it to what we know about adult students, my hope is to dispel the myths associated with those who are anxious writers and move beyond the notion that it only happens to those at the "basic" level. Unfortunately, since the cognitively based research of the early 1980s, not much has been addressed in the area of writing anxiety. What *has* been looked at in more recent years are the effects of writing anxiety on English as a second language learners.

There is a consensus among researchers that writing anxiety exists in adult students, but the causes are varied. Some say it comes from a lack of self-confidence (Sommer), adult students being told they were not good at writing by previous teachers, lack of experience, and not being familiar with the "proper" academic discourse (Lillis and Turner). Since writing anxiety is an established problem (meaning it has been created over time) among adult students, researchers have also discussed remedies to the issue. Process-based over product-based writing has been highly valued in composition for this very reason. Process-based writing emphasizes the use of multiple revisions, which is especially useful for those out of practice with academic writing (Vielhaber 22), to produce *more* writing in order to gain confidence through multiple writing tasks, and to seek support in the writing center. Emphasizing the importance of drafting and revising is a key factor in teaching composition and I agree with its benefits, but the way it has been

addressed does not always apply to every type of anxious student, especially older students. As I have already established, adult learners experience college, specifically college level writing much differently than traditional aged students. Early cognitive theories about causes and alleviation of writing anxiety fail to address this group of students. In order to do so, we need to apply theories of emotion to further elaborate how writing anxiety should be looked at within college composition.

Therefore, I see the top *weaknesses* of cognitive theory as a way to teach writing to adults and address writing anxiety as:

- Cognitive theory does not adequately address the social dynamics of students' emotioned states—the profound connection/relationship between the student and the university which can lead to writing anxiety.

- Cognitive theory does not effectively take into consideration students' personal lives beyond the classroom—the students' "other lives" (family, work, and financial responsibilities) as a factor toward their writing anxiety.

With these weaknesses of cognitive theory toward writing in mind, we can now approach writing anxiety as well as effective ways to teach writing to adults using a critical emotion approach.

My aim is to fill this gap in research regarding writing anxiety especially in the context of adult students. Even though much of the research on writing anxiety is dated, it still holds value and importance and I agree with what most of the research says, but it is time to further complicate the issue of writing anxiety and its relationship with adult students by looking at it through a lens of critical emotion studies.

An Overview of Critical Emotion Theory's View of Writing Anxiety

Before discussing how a connection can be made between critical emotion studies, writing anxiety, and adult students, an overview of the tenants of critical emotion theory is necessary. When we think of emotions, we are drawn to words such as fear, excitement, happiness, and sadness, but the study of emotions goes beyond feelings and complicates them in relation to our surrounding world. Instead of emotions being something that are inside us, critical emotion studies argues that emotional responses evolve from our interactions with other people and places. It is the relationship between the individual and the object that can create emotional feelings. As Jennifer Seibel Trainor states,

> I use the term "emotioned" to suggest that such beliefs become persuasive through mediating and mediated processes of emotional regulation, individually experienced feelings, and dynamics of persuasion and rhetoric. While "emotional" suggests that such discourses relate causally to individual feelings—anger, hostility, fear—"emotioned" instead draws our attention to interconnected but nonlinear dynamics of lived affective experiences, emotional regulation taking place through institutional and cultural practices, and language (3).

The word that stands out to me here is "institutional." For example, the ideas and preconceived notions an adult student has about college level expectations might lead to her emotioned response. If the student experiences fear and anxiety about starting college at an older age, those feelings are coming from the relationship between the institution and the student, or as Sara Ahmed states, they "involve the 'sticking' of signs to bodies" (13). In other words, the student is the body and the university/institution is the sign, and that space between causes the emotioned response. It is argued that emotions are a product of our social situation and do not reside within us. For example, when I started as an undergraduate at Colorado State University, I was highly anxious. Since I did not have

previous experience as a university student, my anxiety was coming from my ideas and beliefs about the university setting. These ideas and beliefs were constructed through what I learned from friends, family, and media. My anxious relationship with the university was already in place before I even stepped foot on campus. These "gut" reactions we have to certain situations are socially constructed. Why do I get nervous when I turn in an essay? Why do I experience frustration and anxiety when I share my writing with others? These situations were constructed for me as I grew and experienced life with my family and friends. I was not born fearing the university; instead I learned and internalized that fear from witnessing my family and friends' negative relationship with going to school. Trainor would agree. She argues that emotions are not private, individual experiences but instead are socially constructed and learned at school and at home and are deeply rooted in our cultural upbringing (22).

Creating a Place for Critical Emotion Theory within Composition Studies

Many scholars agree that a definite emotional strain is placed on students when they are asked to write. There are differing reasons as to why, but overall the emotional response is usually negative. This is true in Professor Sally Chandler's case as she describes how her students dealt with being writing center consultants as part of a requirement for their first year composition class. Chandler describes how nearly all of her students expressed fear, discomfort, nervousness, and doubt when writing their final papers about the writing center tutoring experience (56-57). However, the papers usually concluded with statements showing how the student overcame his or her emotional boundaries through the experience such as, "fear helps you change, leading you to realizations that help you turn things around" (58). Chandler suggests that these overly

general statements show how the students have not made an identity shift to novice writers which is a critical step in becoming successful college students (59). Looking at this example through a critical emotion point of view, we might argue that the anxiety reflected in the students final papers are just as socially constructed as the emotional responses of fear and anxiety. When students compose clichéd writing (as Chandler suggests from the example above), this is a condition of fulfilling the perceived obligations of academic discourse. The students have internalized the notion that to write effectively for college, they must prove they have overcome their obstacles even if they have not as well as provide some sort of concise concluding statement. Perhaps general and clichéd statements are not a sign of bad or uncritical writing, but instead are an indication of truthful feelings. If a student makes a statement such as "life is what you make of it," or "anything can be accomplished through hard work," she could be relaying information to her audience that she truly believes. In other words, it might not be "bad" writing at all, even though many writing instructors would think so, but a declaration of genuine reflection (Murray). And, as Janet Bean argues in her essay, "Manufacturing Emotions," this type of "clichéd" writing should not be criticized because situations and circumstances each student possesses may constitute a reason behind emotional rhetoric. Because of this, composition instructors cannot deem writing as "bad" without an understanding of how the student arrived at his or her rhetorical choices. However, even if these statements are truthful, "clichéd"/emotional writing might not be "allowed" in the composition class. Emotions are political, as Megan Boler argues, which means discussions of one's feelings are unacceptable in social settings such as the classroom. However, some expressions of emotion are acceptable in writing classes, and even

encouraged, so the real issue is not with students being unable to express themselves, but with emotional hegemony—the emotions that are not considered "normal." Since cognitivists would like us to believe that emotions are internal, society has dictated that emotions should stay private and not cause interference with our "reasonable" lives. This includes writing for an academic setting. If a student indicates emotional states in her writing, she may be evaluated as a weak writer because she is not providing logical thought. One of the aims of critical emotion theory is to acknowledge emotions as important and meaningful in how we view and approach activities and situations such as college. This is difficult to do since we do not yet have a shared language to even accurately describe emotions. Since emotions have been so deeply individualized, an effective approach to addressing emotions as social and situational has not been established (Boler).

Also, the study of emotions has not been viewed as something substantial or necessary in academia, nor has it been adequately looked at in relation to writing anxiety. When we look at the cognitive research that has been done, it is apparent that student writers are viewed as subjects in a study rather than people with thoughts, feelings, concerns, and experiences. Researchers like Mike Rose tend to refer to their work as case studies; something that can be examined and diagnosed rather than understood as something beyond the writer's control. When Rose refers to his case studies in *Writer's Block: The Cognitive Dimension*, he bases the student's level of writing anxiety solely on her survey results and her protocol outcomes. Again, this is a fine way to conduct research and gather data, and it is important to note that Rose *does* test students' affective

responses to writing, but perhaps we should also use qualitative research to study emotion's connection to writing anxiety.

One of Rose's examples discusses how a student only had forty-five words written in sixty minutes, and therefore Rose concluded that the student was a highly anxious writer because of her lack of planning and attempts to conceptualize her entire paper while outlining and organizing the material (45-49). However, the problem occurs when no consideration to the student's emotioned state is recognized as a contributing factor to her writing anxiety. Throughout Rose's discussion of this particular student, he effectively summarizes her protocol analysis and writing procedure, but does not provide insight into her background or emotioned state going into the writing task. Rose's determination that she is a high blocker when it comes to writing only comes from her think-aloud protocol session and no attention to her emotional state before, during, or after the study is present. This lack of emotional recognition is because common assumptions are that cognitive based research is sound, logical, and based in reason whereas studying affect is not. Megan Boler writes,

> The common conceptions of emotion are linked to what I call the dominant discourses of emotions: the pathological, rooted in medicine and science; the rational, rooted in the Enlightenment philosophy of the Man of Reason; and the religious, rooted in conceptions of "channeling" passions in an appropriate manner. (8)

This is not to say that the cognitive based research is not valid regarding writing anxiety, and in fact I agree with the research and believe in the value of process-based prose, think aloud protocols, and assessments, but I am arguing that we need to move beyond what the cognitivists theorized and move into a new understanding of writing anxiety in light of emotion studies since writing anxiety spans far beyond what is happening within the

writer's mind. An example of this comes from Rose's theory on the "rules" approach to writing. He states, "it seems that a functional composing rule is not simply a directive, but, rather, a complex mental statement that somehow contains considerations of context and purpose" (79). Therefore, writer's block "can result if too many of a writer's rules are limited-alternative directives" (79). This means that the rigid rules that have been in place for the writer throughout her life are restricting her writing process because she believes she must always follow the "rules" of writing. In other words, the writing methods that are in place to potentially *help* this student are in fact creating her writer's block because she does not want to deviate from what she believes to be "proper" composing style. Furthermore, this directly relates to what critical emotion theory tells us; anxiety can be created through the connections we have to situations. The student who experiences writer's block does so because she is anxious about deviating from what she has always known and learned about writing. Instead of the anxiety and writer's block being caused from following the rules too rigidly, she is experiencing these emotions because she does not know what to do instead since following the "rules" of writing has always been expected from her. Also, the social implications of following the rules are present meaning she has internalized the idea that "good" writing means it is grammatically correct writing.

The attitude that reason trumps emotion can also lead us to the idea of the emotion versus logic and reasoning binary. Many times this either/or scenario takes place when discussing affective behavior because reason is seen as opposite to emotion. We often hear phrases such as, "just be reasonable," or "you are being illogical." In other words, don't be so emotional. Megan Boler's critique of cognitive theory addresses this

issue regarding the capitalization of emotion through emotional intelligence which is a way to identify and manage emotion and is used by companies to better screen applicants and employees based on their emotional states (62). It is important to address this considering students' writing anxiety because universities, much like corporations, try to control emotions by looking at them as though they can be categorized as "good" or "bad."

Boler discusses emotional intelligence as being based on a "universalized portrait of human nature and emotions which entirely neglects significant differences of culture or gender" (74-5). Also, she argues that emotional intelligence fails to acknowledge gender or culture as a factor of emotion and how "cognitive sciences of neurobiology and artificial intelligence conceptualize the person as an organism whose brain contains predesigned neural pathways to learn social behaviors" (Boler 75). In other words, emotional intelligence is cognitive science's way of allowing emotions to exist, but under certain constraints. A goal of cognitivists is to distinguish an intrinsic form of rationality and to view emotions as a "universal and hard-wired cognitive system" (Boler 71). When emotions are viewed this way, the cognition/emotion binary persists. Even though cognitivists are trying to legitimize emotions through scientific means, they still do not give credit to emotions as prevalent in the human experience. Controlling, or even silencing emotions, seems to be the goal of cognitive science since it inhibits rational thought, and in the case of emotional intelligence, makes emotions out to be things that should be maintained in order to succeed in life.

Alison Jaggar argues for this as well in her critique of early cognitive theory in which emotions are separate from other human senses and involve involuntary physical

reactions (148). Cognitive theory, as Jaggar explains, is also focused on keeping emotion and "feelings" distant from rationality and reason since emotions were seen as not being about anything, but rather a distraction from the "real" rational thoughts and observations (148). This approach to understanding emotions is called the Dumb View because, as Elizabeth Spelman states, "cognitivist theories are often contrasted to the view that emotions are like feelings of dizziness or spasms of pain since they do not involve any kind of cognitive state. According to this view emotions are, quite literally, dumb events" (265). However, newer understandings of the Dumb View emphasize emotional responses as intentional and purposeful. Jaggar further argues that the problem with cognitive theory is in its tendency to create an emotion versus rationality binary and push emotions to the side and ignore their implications instead of trying to understand their intentionality. The problem also lies in failing to explain the relationship between the cognitive and affective aspects of emotion (150). Critical emotion studies' aim is to look at situations like writing anxiety with a careful eye towards what is happening within the individual based on her connections to the university institution. It is not enough to evaluate something like writing anxiety based on surveys and analyses alone because so many other crucial factors are at work. The adult student's *attitudes* and *beliefs* toward the institution of higher learning are also reasons why he experiences writing anxiety more than younger students. In some situations writing anxiety is a cognitive problem, but again, too often this leads us to believe those with writing anxiety are also basic writers. Since this is not true, an explanation of why writing anxiety occurs needs to be attributed to the commonly held notions about college life and "fitting in" with the academic community and discourse.

Adult students in particular feel the emotional strain of academic writing because, as I have previously discussed, they often already have "emotional baggage" that they bring with them to the classroom. Worrying about their families, jobs, finances, *and* academic success is a huge burden for adult learners. Regarding writing anxiety, however, these feelings are also present in the composition classroom. Being out of practice, unsure of the academic language, and feelings of having "nothing worthwhile to say" (Harrison & Kaminsky) are all important factors in the adult student's writing process. Not only are many adult students uncertain about *how* to write in college (or what is expected of them and their writing), they may feel insecure since writing is inevitably a personal act. It does not matter what the writing is about, it is still personal and at risk of being judged by others. Critical emotion studies might tell us this is because of the student's ideas and interpretations of the university. They might have been brought up to believe that writing is hard, college professors grade harshly, or that academic writing means long, tedious research papers that have nothing to do with their "real lives" or future careers.

How can critical emotion studies help us view adult students and understand writing anxiety in new ways? By realizing the connection between the student and the institution (and its perceived expectations) is at the root of emotioned responses, such as anxiety. In an essay by Professor John Dirkx, "The Power of Feelings: Emotion, Imagination, and the Construction of Meaning in Adult Learning," he argues that emotions do play a significant role in adult learning experiences. He states, "dominant views of this relationship [emotions and learning experience] suggest that emotions are important in adult education because they can either impede or motivate learning," and,

"personally significant and meaningful learning is fundamentally grounded in and is derived from the adult's emotional, imaginative connection with the self and with the broader social world" (64). In other words, Dirkx is arguing that the adult student's emotional response to learning is closely linked to cultural and social ideologies. I see this description closely related to Sara Ahmed's theory of emotion, especially her ideas associated with fear. Anxiety and fear are two different emotions, but very closely linked. Ahmed, citing Rachman, argues that "anxiety can be described as the 'tense anticipation of a threatening but vague event,' or a feeling of 'uneasy suspense,' while fear is described as an emotional reaction 'to a threat that is identifiable'" (64). In that case, an adult student experiences anxiety more so than a traditional student because the upcoming event—college—is vague; something she is unsure about because she has never experienced it before. Since traditional college students are typically entering college directly from high school, they have a sense of what school-life is all about. They have been prepared for it. Fear can come to play when the student actually engages in classroom activities and writing assignments because the events have become real which can lead to consequences like grades, evaluation, and success or failure. But again, fear is established when there is *something* or *someone* to be afraid of, or "an emotional reaction to a threat that is identifiable" and anxiety is described as an "uneasy suspense" (Ahmed 64). In the case of writing anxiety, the adult student might not be fearful of the writing task because it is not a "thing" to be feared; rather, writing has become socially constructed as something difficult but necessary in college. The anxiety comes in because the student knows (again, through social means such as family, friends, and media) writing at the college level is different than what they have written before. The discourse,

assignments, and "hidden expectations" are all new and acts as the "space between" the student and the university which creates writing anxiety.

As Dirkx explains, the emotions of adult learners are real and can impede a student's promise in college. These emotions can be negative, as well as positive, and even though education scholars are aware of the importance of emotional theory, "emotions are nonetheless widely recognized as a kind of baggage that impedes effective teaching and learning" (Dirkx 8). These statements are especially true in the college composition classroom. College composition creates an entirely unique experience for the adult learner because he is normally not familiar with academic writing or discourse. Also, the student's writing tends to be product-oriented rather than process (Smith 20) which goes against the goals of college composition as well as what the early cognitivist researchers argue for. Since many adult students are busy juggling family life and jobs along with their school work, it is hard for them to see past the grade and focus on growing as a writer and student. Furthermore, the emphasis is placed on the final product rather than the learning process because adult students have learned (through family, friends, and media) that perhaps younger students have the time to enjoy the college experience whereas adults need to get in and get out in order to fulfill their many other responsibilities.

Therefore, this leads us to why critical emotion theory is so valuable to our understanding of adult students and writing anxiety. Critical emotion studies can help us address and "deal" with writing anxiety by:

- Providing composition instructors insight into students' emotioned state—anxiety as a symptom of the relationship between the student and the university's expectations.

- Helping adult writers incorporate lived experience into their writing—breaking down the notion that "proper academic discourse" *can* include emotional rhetoric and personal experiences.

- Recognizing that emotions, such as anxiety, are a normal part of the college experience and should be discussed openly in the classroom.

- Discrediting the idea that logic overrules emotion—giving recognition to emotion as an important part of the human experience.

Emotion studies allows us to look at what is happening beyond the student's control. If adult students are concerned about getting through college as quickly as possible in order to perform their other obligations (which also leads to a under appreciation of the learning experience), critical emotion theory might tell us this is due to the demands of the external world. We now understand that writing anxiety is not necessarily an internal response, but is constructed through the student's attitudes and beliefs about the situation. We can also apply this same theory to the student's motivation for learning. It ends up being a vicious cycle because if the student is not motivated to learn and believes a college education is a necessary evil for his success in life, he might also have the same attitude toward the writing process. Since many emotion theorists argue for an understanding that emotions are socially constructed, this same belief should also be applied to our notions about the university. I have established that writing anxiety is constructed, but so are our ideas about the college experience. The adult student's choice

to start or return to college is heavily influenced by social forces. The demands of everyday life—work, finances, family—can play a part in the adult's decision to earn a degree and these external influences push the adult to go to school even if her personal desire is lacking. In this situation, there is a disconnect between the student's emotional readiness to enter college and what is expected of her.

Keeping this in mind, along with what we know considering cognitive research of the early 1980s to what emotion studies can offer us, we are now able to move beyond the notion that writing anxiety is entirely within the adult student and that it is actually a factor of the socially constructed relationships between us and "the other" (institutions of higher learning in this case). Realizing this helps us create new ways of understanding writing anxiety as well as ways to alleviate it, or to even possibly accept it. Moving in this direction is also useful considering the needs of adult students. Since this has been a neglected group in writing anxiety research, we now have the tools to apply the theories of both cognitive and emotion scholarship to the ways we teach composition.

Chapter Three: Composition Classroom Applications for Writing Anxiety Alleviation through a Critical Emotion Studies Lens

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, cognitive research discusses writing anxiety through the use of such methods as protocol analysis (Rose; Flower and Hayes) and process models of composing (Flower and Hayes). However, knowing what we do now about critical emotion theory and how it can help us understand writing anxiety in new ways, it leads us to the question of how can we take what we know from cognitive research concerning writing anxiety and combine it with what we know about critical emotion theory regarding alleviation strategies? Now that I have established what is causing writing anxiety through a critical emotion lens in chapter two, it is time to discuss how to address it.

As described in the previous chapter, the way we look at writing anxiety through the work of cognitive research is far different than what critical emotion studies tells us. Cognitivists might "diagnose" someone as having writing anxiety through data analysis and send him to the writing "lab" for further evaluation and eventually "prescribe" him with revision strategies to help improve his condition, but this method is not entirely successful. The cognitive approaches from the 1970s and 1980s did establish writing anxiety as a significant problem in students' composing processes through the work of such researchers as Daly and Miller, Rose, and Flower and Hayes, but since writing

anxiety still exists (especially in adult students), a newer, more developed understanding of the causes needs to be established. To reiterate, cognitive studies tells us that writing anxiety happens when a student experiences an interruption in the composing process while trying to follow the writing model (Flower and Hayes), or it can even occur when student writers are too stuck on the internalized rigid "rules" according to their cognitive problem solving skills (Rose). In other words, writing anxiety persists because the student is unable to compose because of some mental barrier. But, *where* this barrier is coming from is the crucial factor that is not adequately addressed in cognitive theory. Instead, writing anxiety needs to be evaluated by looking at the relationship and socially constructed attitudes and beliefs the student has about college, which is what critical emotion theory can help us with. Using critical emotion theory in a composition class can help us break down the politics of emotion; meaning discussions of emotion in a classroom can help us critically engage students toward an understanding of emotion as a part of personal experience and valid for academic inquiry (Cain 43).

In this chapter I will discuss ways to alleviate writing anxiety in adult students through a critical emotion studies framework as well as practical classroom applications for how a critical emotion studies approach can function in a composition classroom.

Common Cognitive Approaches for Teaching Writing and Alleviating Writing Anxiety

Cognitive research has helped us, as composition instructors, to understand what we can do to lessen writing anxiety in students, which is why the process model has

become such an important factor in composition classes. It is theorized that outlining, getting feedback from peers, and conducting multiple revisions on papers will help the student realize why the process of writing is much more beneficial than writing merely for a grade, which can be a common occurrence in our society's view of writing and education. When the overall grade is the central reason for writing, writing anxiety will persist since grades are a final evaluation of work. Product-oriented writing is especially prevalent with adult students because sometimes adults are trying to get through college as quickly as possible and composition class is just one more "hoop" they need to jump through to get their diploma. Also, adult students may also create a "rigid rule" about writing which directly puts the focus of composition on the product rather than the process, despite the instructor's efforts at emphasizing the importance of process-based writing. I absolutely believe in the process method of writing and as a way to alleviate writing anxiety, but the message might be getting lost on some adult students because, as Sommer addresses, many adult students learned writing previous to college as a method, or a formula that should be followed. Many adult learners have not been exposed to process-based writing and are only familiar with the "rules" of writing (grammar, sentence structure, punctuation), and more importantly, "writing may have contributed to the person's difficulties on the first go-round [with school], and now it threatens to cut him or her off from new educational opportunities" (Sommer 11). Because of this, it is important for composition instructors to stress the role and importance of process-based prose over the product-based "only writing for a grade" mentality that many adults experience.

In order to illustrate the importance of utilizing critical emotion studies in a composition classroom, I will provide an example of the traditional ways (standard methods stemmed from cognitive theory) writing anxiety has been addressed using a "typical" adult student example, and later use this student model to demonstrate how critical emotion theory can function toward writing anxiety alleviation. Of course every student is different and by no means am I trying to imply that all adult students experience writing the same way, nor do they have the same backgrounds and experiences, but following Sommer's example, I want to create a profile of the "typical" adult student to use as an example. I will refer to this student model as Jane. She is female, thirty-five, a single mother of two children, and has not been in a classroom since her senior year of high school. After high school Jane married, had children, and did not work outside of the home. After her divorce she decided to pursue a college degree in interior design since she knew it was the best way to support herself and her children, and the field of interior design has always been of interest to her. By referring to Jane in this context, it is my aim to demonstrate the shortcomings of cognitive theory in relation to writing anxiety and later use this same "typical" student model to show how critical emotion theory can be a better alternative. It is also my attempt to humanize adult students because when evaluating student scenarios, we often forget the "real" people behind the theory and the personal lives they bring with them to our classes.

One traditional composition technique that comes from the cognitively based process model, such as Flower and Hayes's, involves peer workshops. Originally conceived as the reviewing process (Flower and Hayes 283), it later became known as collaborative learning (Bruffee 547). Again, utilizing peer workshops is something I

value and do in my own classrooms, but it might not be the best strategy for alleviating writing anxiety, and might actually make it worse. Traditionally, peer writing workshops occur in a composition class when students bring drafts of their work to share with their classmates. The students read each other's texts and provide comments regarding the writing. Of course, much of the success of peer workshops depends on how well the instructor sets up the task (what questions the students should ask each other, what rhetorical elements to look for) which is also a factor in how well this process is received by students. Since adult students are already experiencing anxiety from being older and surrounded by younger, more accustomed students, sharing their writing with them might inflate their anxieties even more. It is my experience that many students will not even attend class on workshop days. Writing, even academic research based writing, is personal and sharing this work with others is a definite cause for apprehension. In Sommer's research, when an adult student was asked, "when you read something you have written, what is your response to it?" the adult said,

> I don't like reading what I write. I don't even like other people reading what I write. Usually when you write something it tells a part of you to whoever is reading it. I don't want people to know that part. I write because I have to. If I had a choice I wouldn't take writing courses. I feel it infringes on me. (18)

This statement is quite telling, and even though this is just one example, provides great insight into how adult students feel about sharing their work and themselves. I am not making the claim that peer workshops should not be used because they *are* a crucial part to process-based writing, but I do want to address the inadequacies of peer workshops concerning adult students. Thinking about our adult student, Jane, she already feels anxiety about college level writing (and quite possibly, the college experience in general)

because of her lack of experience with academic discourse and the idea that she needs to share her work with her classmates might be detrimental to her writing process. It is quite possible that Jane might avoid writing all together just so she would not need to participate in workshops. Many traditional aged college students have had peer workshop experience before, so this activity is most likely not new to them, but some adult students, on the other hand, are unaware of the rhetorical purpose for sharing writing and feel anxious about possibly having their work criticized. Once again, since many adult students have little to no college level writing experience, like Jane, they do not understand the goals of peer workshopping and fear the worst—judgments from classmates, appearing ill prepared for college, or out of place in an academic setting. Of course, writing workshops were not originally designed to alleviate writing anxiety, but I do feel writing workshops are a major contributor to writing anxiety. Instead of using a traditional workshop approach, one suggestion I have is to consider using one-on-one conferences in lieu of workshops. If Jane were able to meet with her instructor face-to-face more often, she might feel less apprehensive about sharing her writing since it is not with "traditional" college students with whom she is not familiar. Again, since anxiety, as Ahmed states, is relational and comes from the "space between" objects and people, Jane's anxiety might lessen since the fear of judgment from her classmates is gone because the interaction (the workshop) is no longer there. However, I recognize that eliminating workshops and trying to find the time to meet one-on-one with every student is quite difficult, so another alternative is to keep the small group approach of writing workshops, but divide the groups according to traditional/non-traditional aged students. In this scenario, the instructor puts the adult students in a group and divides the rest of the

class according to writing strengths and weaknesses (heterogeneous groups). For example, if the instructor recognizes that one student is particularly good with paragraph transitions and another student could improve on this, she might pair them together. As far as our adult student is concerned, Jane might become less anxious about sharing her work if she is grouped with other adult students because they can relate to each other's discomforts and even discuss their writing anxieties openly. I see this type of workshop as a critical emotion approach because it dismantles the anxiety-inducing object: judgment from younger students. Of course one might claim that adult students are just as capable of judgment and negative critique of another student's writing, but when adult students are working together, I see it as a chance for them to feel more accepting and less apprehensive of critical critique. However, some still might argue that workshops are important for teaching students editing skills and for decentralizing teacher authority in a class, and I agree that workshops can be useful for these purposes, but we can still teach effective workshop strategies while reducing anxiety by reinforcing the idea that writing workshops are part of the overall composing process and the focus is on revision, not personal attacks or judgment.

Considering common cognitively based alleviation strategies further, Mike Rose suggests rethinking the "rules" approach of writing. He states that those with high writing anxiety like having rules of language to refer to when writing so the process does not seem as obscure. But, he says, "The rules are often represented in rigid, absolute, narrow ways. As we've seen, rigid rules focus the writer's mind too narrowly, don't allow him to work effectively with large issues of the writing task. They also skew his linguistic and rhetorical judgments" (90). In other words, if a student follows the "rules" of writing too

closely, he might become blocked since he is either unaware of the rules or he does not know how to incorporate them effectively into his writing.

Even though the process model outlined by Flower and Hayes attempts to move students into an appreciation for the writing process rather than a final product, it still tends to focus on a "rules" based approach that Rose says causes student writers to block. Tobin explains that "process pedagogy has become so regimented that it has turned into the kind of rules-driven product that it originally critiqued" (Tobin 10). So it seems, as Tobin argues, we are still pushing a "rules" based approach toward writing even though it is considered a part of the process. Tobin has a valid point, but where do we go from here? How do we combine the "rules" of writing, which are inevitably necessary in order to teach academic discourse, with an appreciation for the writing process while also addressing writing anxiety? It is my opinion that in order to truly lessen writing anxiety while teaching composition, we need to first address its cause head-on with our students and discuss new ways of invention that allow for personal as well as scholastic growth. This is what critical emotion theory can help us with.

It is possible that if we take a critical emotion theory approach toward understanding and alleviating writing anxiety, we can begin to understand why an adult student would feel anxious about activities such as writing workshops as well as possible strategies for alleviation. Considering critical emotion theory, anxiety is coming from the anticipation the student feels when handing her paper over to a classmate for feedback. The student does not *fear* her classmate, but instead is anxious about the anticipated event which, in the anxious writer's mind, is negative comments and judgment from her classmate.

Furthermore, nobody wants to be deceived and sometimes it seems that is exactly what we are doing to our students. We tell them that learning effective written communication will be necessary in order to succeed in school and in life, which is true, but the assignments and daily lessons do not always reflect that, nor does our language about anxiety. We have them write essays on topics they have no interest in, expect large research papers with proper citation, and create abstract assignment sheets that tell them to write about anything they wish as long as it fits with the overall class theme. What is this telling the student? That we do not value their past experiences or values since we expect them to adhere to certain themes? That personal writing is not valuable in class since it is not "academic?" One of the first things we can do is to just talk to our students about the university, its expectations, and what it means to write in an academic setting. Showing the students that we understand their frustrations and anxieties about writing will automatically create a sense of a shared community. Of course this is a difficult task considering how deeply rooted our emotions are. It becomes challenging to discuss our emotions since they are deeply embedded and often not brought up in classroom settings. Not only would we ask our students to express or analyze an emotion, as Micciche discusses, but to experience an emotion which requires a "titanic shift in thinking about emotions" (47). Perhaps, as Micciche suggests, we can ask students to *perform* their emotions during a type of role-play activity. Since it is difficult to talk about emotion because of its personal nature (as well as our lack of a shared vocabulary for emotion), students can act out their feelings. The experience of acting out an emotion is designed to "generate empathy for the embodied life experiences of others, to come into contact with difference through the study of language that evolves into a practiced way of seeing

another's distinct embodiment in the world" (55). This idea is extremely beneficial for the adult student because the activity promotes feelings of understanding and empathy toward other student's individualized situations. In Jane's example for instance, she would be able to act out her feelings of anxiety through role-play as well as share her personal background as a single mother. In doing so, she situates herself as not only a member of the composition class, but also as someone who performs many other roles in life. Similar to how an instructor would teach and explain the purpose of a writing workshop, the role play activity would be constructed as a beneficial part of the writing process. Furthermore, addressing the commonly held negative beliefs about college through a role-play activity would ease students into academic writing as well as into the feeling of a shared writing community. Composition should not be a class that creates anxiety and frustration, but instead foster individual growth and personal expression. We can still maintain the goals and objectives of first year composition requirements but we can do so in different ways which I will discuss later in this chapter. But for now I will discuss what we can do with writing anxiety alleviation using a critical emotion approach. The main ideas I will focus on concern adult students' desire for experiential, or "real life" learning, and a need for developing a shared vocabulary concerning emotions.

Adult Students and "Real Life" Writing

As we now know about adult learners, they value experiential learning (Sommer; Daines, Daines, & Graham; Corder)—things that can be taken from the classroom and applied to "real life." Critical emotion studies might tell us that this type of "real life" approach to writing would dispel the notions that college writing is *only* useful in college

and the common "I will never need to write like this for my job" attitude will lessen. Since writing anxiety can generate from what is between the person and the institution, employing writing genres that do have a pragmatic approach would help the student become more comfortable with what happens at a university. Since the vagueness that is college writing would be gone (through discussion with students about college level writing expectations) the student's anxiety might also be gone. Plus, just knowing that the instructor is concerned and aware of writing anxiety will also help the anxious students.

Neal Raisman's work elaborates on this "real life" writing approach with his implementation of how technical writing in a composition course can effectively decrease writing anxiety. He writes,

> Possible causes for the greater effectiveness of technical writing-based instruction lie in three areas. There is a current positive bias toward technical or "real world" writing, i.e., writing which is called for and used in the world outside the college classroom. Students appear to be aware of the possibly greater value of technical-styled writing over literary-essay, for example. As a result of this cultural bias and the present employment situation, students are more goal-oriented and might accept technical writing instruction as coursework which fits into their future plans. This attitude also generates a greater receptivity. (145)

The use of technical writing, as Raisman describes, is a useful approach to help students move their writing beyond the classroom, but it is not the only way. Implementing writing genres such as resumes, cover letters, and statements of purpose for graduate school are also effective tools for the composition classroom. So, the aim for effectively reaching adult students' expectations and learning styles (and in turn lessening their writing anxiety) is to provide them with opportunities for writing for multiple and genuine audiences. Not only does a writing approach such as Raisman's concerning technical writing work well in addressing the learning styles of adult learners, but it

might also help with writing anxiety. When a student can see how an assignment can reach beyond the classroom, she is also able to see beyond the grade as an indicator of success or failure. A writing assignment for class is something that will eventually go away. Once the grade is received, the writer does not need to look at it any more. This attitude is counterproductive to process pedagogy because it limits where the writing can go. Broadening writing assignments to "real world" applications will also help the student understand the concept of audience centered writing.

However, if we are discussing a first-year composition class, certain goals and objectives must be maintained since the course is usually required for all students and needs to maintain consistency because of the nature of the course. In order to establish this in context, as well as keeping in mind our adult student, Jane, I will draw upon Colorado State University's first-year composition class (CO150) as an example of how this type of course is generally structured regarding the required writing objectives. Since college composition, or its equivalent, is required by the All-University Core Curriculum to satisfy Basic Competency in Written Communication (catalog.colostate.edu), certain requirements within this course are necessary to fulfill the guaranteed transfer policy. Pulled from my own policy statement for my CO150 classes, I state: To address these core curriculum requirements as well as the CSU composition program's goals for first-year writing, CO150 focuses on initiating students into academic discourse and developing composing practices that will prepare students for success as university students and citizens. Therefore, the course focuses on critical reading and inquiry, writing for a variety of rhetorical situations, and enabling effective writing processes. Its key objectives include the following:

- Developing critical reading practices to support research and writing;

- Understanding writing as a rhetorical practice, i.e. choosing effective strategies for addressing purpose, audience, and contexts;

- Learning important elements of academic discourse, such as posing and critically investigating questions, using sources effectively and ethically, and writing effective summaries, analyses, and arguments;

- Increasing information literacy through strategies for locating, selecting, and evaluating sources for inquiry;

- Developing effective research and writing processes, including peer collaboration and response and using feedback to guide revision.

These requirements are set forth from the university and instructors must discuss them with their students. In order to reach these objectives, certain assignments should be followed such as; a summary and response essay, inquiry essay with annotated bibliography, and an argumentative essay. Other written work, such as the blog assignment (designed for the 2009-2010 CO150 syllabus) is meant to help students add their voice to the conversation. Each assignment's purpose is to enhance students' understanding of academic discourse and what is needed from them in order to participate in this dialogue. These requirements are necessary in order to fulfill the goals of CO150, and my issue is not with the assignments nor is it with the objectives of CO150, in fact I find the way the course is outlined quite successful, but it does lack the room for "real life" writing. The blog assignment does try and fulfill the idea of public prose, but it is not enough to really help the student think about writing for the "real" world, especially considering adult students. A blog is a type of non-academic writing

that can be composed outside of class, but writing that pertains to adult students' careers might be more beneficial. I am not arguing that adults do not write blogs, but as I have established, adults seek an education primarily on the basis of career growth and need practical applications for what they are learning. Writing assignments that would help in work-related or "real life" situations are better suited to their needs as students. Since this is usually not how a composition class is set up and is instead based on rhetorical concerns, writing anxiety persists. If anxiety is created through the relationship between the individual and the object, in our case the object is academic writing, instructors need to break down the reasoning behind why certain assignments are required in order for the students to learn effective writing strategies. Finding the bridge between teaching necessary composition skills (such as audience appeals, argumentative style, and annotated bibliographies for example), and students' goals for *why* they are in college might lessen the seemingly obscure reasoning behind the purpose of composition.

Not only should assignments be revised according to adult student needs, but we need to make room for a discussion of emotions toward writing and the college experience. If we at least discuss writing anxiety with our students, they will know we understand and are aware of the issue. But, as Laura Micciche states,

> interdisciplinary research on teaching and emotion bears out this difficulty [of making emotions "teachable"] as it focuses primarily on emotion's role in the context of teacher identity, efficacy, and work practices and conditions, with scant attention given to how one may actually teach students to deploy emotion as a critical term that yields valuable insight otherwise obscured. (48)

How, then, do we teach something that is individualized and situated within the relationships between us and the other (what connects the student to the university

institution)? How do we teach our students that emotions are important and necessary for not only understanding their writing anxiety, but for also realizing that they *can* and *should* be discussed openly? When we live in a society that is so used to controlling our emotions and "keeping things to ourselves," it is difficult to approach something as personal as emotions openly and publicly. I am not implying that students are discouraged from expressing themselves in a composition class, and in fact students are quite often asked to write personal narratives, but what I am suggesting is students might refrain from expressing their *true* emotions because they are a product of emotional hegemony; feeling what everyone else feels because it is expected. To quote Bartholomae once again, "every time a student sits down to write for us, he has to invent the university for the occasion" (623) meaning the student knows the primary audience is his instructor so he adopts the feelings he *should* have rather than the feelings he *does* have. Also, "the student has to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, and he has to do this as though he were easily and comfortably one with his audience" (624) which further points to the situations when the student writes based on what she thinks her instructor wants to hear. Jane, our adult student writer, wants to express enthusiasm in her writing so her instructor will think she is invested in the course, but Jane might really be feeling the opposite. Jane does not dare express her true feelings though for fear she will be seen in a negative light. Critical emotion studies will tell us that Jane's feelings are not true or false, but rather asks us to consider what these feelings *do* as well as what emotions are valued and deserve to be counted. It is necessary to engage in this emotional discourse in order to acknowledge and address writing anxiety. But another question persists, how can we teach something like emotion when we do not even have a shared

language to do so? If we do not have an adequate vocabulary to even discuss emotion, since the ways we perceive and experience emotion can be so varied, how can discussing it with our students be done?

Developing a Shared Vocabulary: Inviting Adult Students to the Conversation through Audience Awareness

Considering writing anxiety, even the way we present CO150 (using the course policy above) can be a cause of duress for adult students. On the first day of class instructors tell their students the requirements of the course, but in doing so automatically create anxiety from terms like "rhetorical practice," "purpose," "audience," "context," and "academic discourse" which leaves students who are not "traditional" out of the conversation from day one. Students starting college directly from high school might have heard and used these terms in other English classes so they are already familiar with this language, but adult students are most likely not. It is important to bring this up during the discussion of learning styles and student expectations because, as mentioned before, one of the main learning styles of adult learners is to learn through experience and to know their "past lives" have meaning in the classroom.

Regarding the hierarchy of rhetorical concerns (a way to approach writing by addressing issues such as audience, purpose, and context), audience awareness is a large component of effective writing and has been extensively researched. However, an understanding of audience based prose in light of critical emotion studies can help the student writer feel more confident in her writing and, once again, break down the misconceptions surrounding academic discourse. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, students feel anxiety when the situation they are entering is unclear and they are unsure

of the expectations. In other words, the "tense anticipation of a threatening but vague event" (Ahmed 64). Moreover, anxiety towards writing for the institution becomes stronger when dealing with a concept like audience. If we understand that anxiety can stem from what is between us and the other, this holds true when discussing the concept of audience because the writer knows herself, but is uncertain about what it means to write for an audience. Fear, however, can also happen when the student writer knows there is an audience because the fear is *placed* on an object (the audience) instead of just anticipated. "Anxiety becomes *an approach to objects* rather than, as with fear, *being produced by an object's approach* (Ahmed 66). Understanding the implications of an audience beyond the instructor and classmates moves anxiety into fear because the reader suddenly becomes real rather than imaginary. Where is this fear coming from? Critical emotion theory tells us that fear is caused from the relationships between us and the other, and is manifested through our cultural upbringing. In the case of a student experiencing fear when sharing her writing, this fear was produced prior to the student participating in a peer workshop. This fear might have been manifested from years of hearing she is a poor writer or that college level writing is difficult and tedious. Whatever this student has learned and internalized about writing has re-appeared as fear when she tries to share her work with others. But, *is* the audience real? How can a clear understanding of audience help alleviate this fear? We tell our students to consider an audience and to know their background, values, and beliefs, but in reality the writing does not go any further than our class. Much of the anxiety felt by students comes from not knowing what to expect from the university, so if we try and teach seemingly abstract concepts to students who are unfamiliar with the discourse, the anxiety will continue.

Audience selection is the first and most important aspect of writing an essay. A student writer should determine who his audience is, or whom they need to inform/persuade, prior to any outlining or drafting. Once a topic is chosen, the writer needs to ask himself "whom am I writing this to?" Composition instructors need to stress this in order for their students to have well focused papers. One of the big challenges facing composition instructors is getting their students to see beyond the instructor as the primary audience. This will come with time and practice, but it is something that needs to be understood early in a student's academic career. The concept of audience will inevitably come up again and again for students, even if English is not their major, because the papers written for other classes will have an even narrower scope. If students understand the value of knowing their audience early on, they will feel more confident as writers. Having a purpose for a paper is one thing, but knowing the audience—their beliefs, background, previous knowledge—is key to creating a successful paper. In terms of writing anxiety, when these ideas about audience are addressed, the student becomes more comfortable with the purpose of academic writing and can begin to develop confidence as a writer. As Sommer discusses, when adult students know the meaning and purpose behind a writing activity, they are more apt to be engaged and less anxious about the writing process, and "when objectives are clear and specific problems are concretely stated, adult students tend to perform at their best" (29). Using Jane as an example, if she is writing an essay for her composition class about interior design, she is able to hone in on a particular audience which also enables her to incorporate her personal, "real life" career goals. This audience becomes real and important because it directly ties into other areas of her life.

Many students—traditional and adult—have the "teacher is my reader/audience" frame of thinking. In high school, which is sometimes the highest level of education an adult learner has prior to starting college, students are meant to write papers based on what they think their teachers want to hear rather than something insightful and new. In college, however, instructors are typically more interested in hearing what the student has to say rather than simply rephrasing something they already know. How can college composition instructors help students make the switch from high school writing to college writing? One of the jobs of composition instructors is to probe further and help their students understand that there is a whole world of people who might be interested in what they have to say besides their instructor. Of course some papers are not meant for a public audience and are strictly used for academic, or closed audiences (classmates and instructor only), but once students see that the possibility of others reading their work as relevant, they can understand the importance of audience based writing.

Virginia Davidson, author of the article, "Siamese Twins: Helping Writers Cope with the Elusive Concept of Audience" offers this advice when dealing with these situations: "Perhaps an example would be helpful: explain the difference between a medical doctor's description of a rare disease in a medical journal as opposed to the description of the same disease to a patient" (2). Giving this example to students who are struggling with the concept of audience awareness might help them reframe their ideas as well as lessen their anxiety about writing for a public audience. Furthermore, Davidson suggests that instead of asking "who is your reader?" composition instructors should alter the question to, "who do I want my reader to be?" (3). This makes sense since not every assignment or piece of writing will come pre-packaged with a specific and clear

audience. In this case, instructors need to encourage students to think about who they would like to read their piece instead of assuming an audience. While writing, the student can ask, "who needs to know the information I am presenting?" Perhaps suggesting they generate ideas such as an age range they want to target, their social status, and political affiliation will help them determine who their reader might be. All of this will help students to re-focus their paper in a much more organized and detailed way. Also, if we consider one of the main goals of audience awareness as a way to decrease writing anxiety, the student becomes less apprehensive because she has asked herself the necessary questions concerning who she is addressing. Once the student has established some characteristics about who her audience is, she can use research and rhetorical strategies much more effectively and also begin to alleviate writing anxiety since the vagueness of the concept is taken away. Even though the audience becomes "real" (an intended group of people the student wants to address), the fear does not perpetuate as Ahmed might suggest, but instead decreases because the discourse has been deconstructed enough so the student feels comfortable sharing her work with others. When instructors are able to unveil what these new concepts are, the student may become less anxious about the concept of audience.

For example, while I was working at the Writing Center, a student came in and wanted help revising her philosophy paper. Mostly she was concerned about the flow and organization and wanted to know if it "sounded ok." After reading the paper out loud, I asked her who her intended audience is and she replied, "My professor." Since she initially came into the Writing Center concerned about the flow of her piece, I offered a suggestion: how can you keep the information you have, but also relate it to your own

ideas and opinions? Can you provide any examples to strengthen the theories you have presented in your paper? She then began to generate some ideas about how her experiences could apply to what she was writing about and by doing this she opened her range of appeal even further. Not only did her purpose for the paper improve, but also her organization, development, and style have changed in a way that made her paper a more polished piece of writing. Of course, this might not work for all students or for all situations, but the overall goal when addressing audience awareness is for the student to understand that once a clear audience is established, the rest of the writing process can go smoothly since she knows who she is writing to and for what purpose. She knows what questions to ask, she knows what her audience values, and she is able to write convincingly based on this knowledge. Since audience awareness is a complicated concept, it is important to note that the above suggestions are not meant as an absolute solution to the problem, but rather suggestions for how audience can be addressed in relation to writing anxiety.

Furthermore, Hayes and Bajzek's theory of "knowledge effect" presents a new set of criteria for writers to think about. They state, "effective writers and speakers must recognize the knowledge, attitudes, biases, and beliefs that they share with their audience, the "common ground," and just as important, they must recognize what is not shared" (104). They further this by saying, "if we underestimate audience knowledge, we may be seen as "talking down" (104). I have wondered this in my own writing and when working with student writers in the Writing Center. Not only do writers need to know enough about their audience in order to inform/persuade them, but to also determine what they already know about the subject. The writer cannot underestimate the audience's

knowledge. This problem becomes even more troublesome because people have a strong tendency to believe that other people are like themselves in knowledge, attitude, and behavior—a tendency that leads them to overestimate the ground they share with others (Hayes, Bajzek 105). Hayes and Bajzek's study provides solid evidence for the existence of the knowledge effect (117) especially with technical language and writing, but they do not provide any practical applications for how to change the occurrence of the knowledge effect. In their study, they conducted surveys and follow up tutoring, but this is not realistic for "real life" writing situations as I addressed in the previous chapter concerning cognitive theory.

Another approach to help students understand and cope with the concept of audience is the "reading like a writer" strategy, as Lisa Ede suggests in her book *Work in Progress*. She explains how writers need to practice the art of writing by reading other's works. Just like musicians will listen to various forms of live and recorded music to gain insight into their own work, a writer should be engaged in reading, but doing so with a careful eye. This means the writer must read a text closely, but not so much for the information presented, but what the author used stylistically to tell the story or relay information. Have students ask themselves questions as they read, such as: what made this interesting for me? Did I understand what the author was saying? Why was it effective? When they are able to answer these questions during their own reading they can apply the same rhetorical strategies to their own essays. Reading is actually a way to practice writing. In Ede's example of "reading like a writer," she also notes a way to become a "noticing" reader. "If you find an essay particularly interesting and effective, for instance, stop to ask yourself why" (85). Not only should writers do this when

reading other essays, but also when reading their own. By having the student place herself as the reader, she understands—and therefore is less apprehensive—the rhetorical purpose of "knowing" an audience. In thinking about these various invention strategies and how they differ based on a critical emotion approach versus a cognitive one, certain ideas remain the same.

Ultimately, the main idea is to break down concepts such as audience (which are generally new to adult students) first, instead of asking students to write an academic argument without a proper understanding of the idea. The student needs to first know what "audience" means and ways to figure out who they are, or who she wants them to be prior to drafting an essay. Once again, since fear and anxiety are produced from pre-conceived *notions* (many times false) about an activity or situation and not the *actual* activity (Ahmed), instructors are capable of alleviating fear and anxiety by simply discussing what the concepts—or sources of anxiety—mean.

Instructors can also attempt to alleviate the fear of a public audience by actually creating one. One way to approach the concept of audience awareness and lessen the fear associated with it is to simply encourage students to publish their work. Whether it is on a public blog site, in a newspaper, or magazine, they will understand what it means to write for a particular audience considering its context and what rhetorical strategies need to be applied to do so. The fear will also be mitigated because they will see how classroom concepts can apply elsewhere as well as how understanding complex hierarchical concerns can improve their skills as writers. This is especially useful considering adult students because of their desire for experiential learning. By demystifying what it means to write for an audience, the connection (i.e. space) between the self (as a writer) and an

audience will become clearer. In other words, by taking the time to do publication analysis activities and establishing what needs to be written considering the audiences' expectations, the writer will be better equipped to deal with this fear educing concept. This is especially useful for adult students experiencing writing anxiety because, like the role-play example (Micciche) previously discussed, it puts concepts such as audience into context. Our student model Jane, for example, might refer to interior design publications in order to gain a better understanding of who her audience is (what they already know, what they value, etc.) before she decides to make her writing public through a blog or newsletter. By doing a publication analysis prior to making her work public, she can gain more confidence as a writer because she understands what her audience already knows (which also helps lessen the knowledge effect discussed by Hayes and Bajzek) as well as situate herself among others in her area of interest, thus positioning herself as a member of the interior design community.

Creating a Space and Time for Adult Students

Another suggestion for how to alleviate writing anxiety involves creating a place and time outside of the classroom where adult students can talk, share experiences, and even share anxieties and concerns (Miritello 7). A major contributor to writing anxiety, as Miritello outlines, is the adult student's feeling of isolation (3). Since many adult students are rushing from one place to the next and juggling many activities besides school work, no time (or place) is left for interaction with other adult learners. Encouraging adult students to meet outside of class to discuss concerns with each other, and possibly their instructors, could allow them to "open up" more freely. Plus, it would let them know that they are not alone in the educational process and that other students are experiencing the

same issues. Additionally, this space and time away from class might be conducive for adult students to share their writing with other adults.

Also, having a separate place for adult writers to meet would allow for *more* writing to take place; writing that is unrestricted, not graded, and personal. It is not often that writing situations like this happen in a traditional composition class, so creating a space for this type of activity would not only help adult students feel less isolated, it would also help alleviate their writing anxiety. It is important to remember, however, that producing more writing will not necessarily yield better writing, but instead can force the apprehensive writer to practice his writing, which may help to reduce some fear and anxiety about the writing process (Vielhaber 22). But the goal of a writing group for adults would not be to necessarily make them "better" writers, but to establish a sense of community with other adults and feel more at ease with writing in general.

A Case for Embracing Writing Anxiety

Addressing audience awareness by helping students *create* audiences (Davidson; Hayes and Bajzek), using heuristic approaches (Raisman), and developing private spaces for adult learners (Miritello) are all wonderful strategies to help lessen writing anxiety, but I can't help but wonder if an alleviation of writing anxiety is entirely necessary or possible. Why this push to "get rid" of it? Looking through a critical emotions approach once again compared to a cognitive one, there is a definite possibility of *keeping* writing anxiety alive rather than trying to alleviate it.

The terms anxiety, apprehension, and fear are often seen as negative emotional states that hold people back in life, or in this case, in writing. We know that writing anxiety is prevalent among adult students starting or re-starting college for various

reasons. Remember, the causes of writing anxiety can happen for many reasons from not feeling comfortable with academic discourse to having feelings of "not having anything worthwhile to say" (Harrison and Kaminsky 20). Also, the strategies for alleviation are widely discussed, but as we have seen they are not always effective especially considering they have been primarily based in cognitive research. I am not arguing that we need to do away with peer workshops or writing multiple drafts because I do see them as absolutely crucial to how we teach composition, but multiple opportunities for invention are needed. Some of these have been discussed above, but what about throwing away the notion that we need to solve the writing anxiety problem? Instead of seeing it as a *problem* and something that needs to just go away, can we view it as a tool for better writing?

Cognitive research would have us believe that writing anxiety is something that can be resolved over time. The approaches they take to understand and deal with writing anxiety are very black and white; either someone has writing anxiety or he does not, or for those who do experience writing anxiety it is either something the writer ignores while trudging through writing tasks or he "gets rid" of it all together. But this is not the case. It is my feeling, along with other researchers, that writing anxiety can never completely go away especially for those who experience situational, not dispositional anxiety. It might occasionally lessen, but during certain writing tasks or phases in life it may come back. A student might feel completely at ease writing a letter to her mother, but panic when trying to write a term paper. As Megan Boler writes,

> *Feeling power* means at least two things: Feeling *power* refers to the ways
> in which our emotions, which reflect our complex identities situated
> within social hierarchies, "embody" and "act out" relations of power.
> *Feeling* power on the other hand also refers to the *power of feeling*—a

power largely untapped in Western cultures in which we learn to fear and control emotions. (3-4)

The emotional response we know as anxiety has been culturally understood as needing to be controlled rather than embraced as a symptom of living. We all experience anxiety from time to time, some more than others, so why is it always viewed negatively, especially in the classroom? It is hardly ever discussed publicly since we have learned, as Boler states, to control our emotions. Because of this, Boler argues for "creative spaces to develop flexible and creative modes of resistance involving emotional breadth and exploration that are not prescriptive" (4). This is especially true in the composition classroom.

It is difficult to say someone can embrace writing anxiety, but it might begin with what Boler calls "a pedagogy of discomfort" which

> begins by inviting educators and students to engage in critical inquiry regarding values and cherished beliefs, and to examine constructed self-images in relation to how one has learned to perceive others. Within this culture of inquiry and flexibility, a central focus is to recognize how emotions define how and what one chooses to see, and conversely, not to see. (176-7)

Discussing emotions such as anxiety with our students might be uncomfortable, but if we do as Boler suggests and create a "pedagogy of discomfort," it is necessary when addressing issues such as writing anxiety. As instructors we are capable of evaluating the "constructed self-images" with our students and breaking down the reasons behind anxious feelings in order to show them that it is acceptable to feel this way when writing. Of course this will be difficult to do, discussing emotions naturally is because of our culturally held beliefs that emotions are private and need to be "dealt" with rather than faced as real and important.

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From what we know considering cognitive research of the early 1980s to what emotion studies scholars tell us, we are now able to move beyond the notion that writing anxiety is entirely within and that it is actually a factor of the socially constructed relationships between us and "the other" (institutions of higher learning in this case). Realizing this helps us create new ways of understanding writing anxiety as well as ways to alleviate it, or to even possibly accept it. Moving in this direction is also useful considering the needs of adult students because of their heightened writing anxiety from their preconceived notions about college level writing as well as fear of judgment from classmates. As Ahmed writes, "fear responds to what is approaching rather than already here" (65) which means, in the context of writing anxiety, that the student's fear and anxiety about writing happens long before she starts a writing course. It is up to us as composition instructors to help bring the anxiety to light and address this student's concerns so she is not hindered by writer's block or writing anxiety. One possibility of how to do this and engage students in a discussion about writing anxiety and fear is to have students (preferably during the first week of the semester so it is brought up early on) respond to a writing prompt such as, "Do you experience anxiety when writing? If so, explain when this happens and, if possible, can you discuss why this happens to you?" Generating thoughts on paper might help the students formulate their ideas more clearly before trying to engage in a whole class discussion. Jane, for example, might find her anxiety useful when relating to other students and faculty. In other words, Jane has established a "common ground" with others who experience writing anxiety. In this case, Jane's anxiety is productive toward her role as a student.

Since adult students have been a neglected group in writing anxiety research, we now have the tools to apply the theories of both cognitive and emotion scholarship to the ways we teach composition, and in doing so, are better equipped at "dealing" with and addressing writing anxiety in the composition classroom.

Chapter Four: Conclusion of Findings and Areas for Further Inquiry

In this thesis my aim was to discuss adult students and their difficulties with writing anxiety. In doing so, I provided an overview of traditional approaches toward writing anxiety assessment and alleviation through the work of early cognitive research which included a discussion of the Daly and Miller writing apprehension assessment, Rose's research on writer's block, and Flower and Hayes's process model of composition and protocol analysis. Later I brought in the idea that these cognitive approaches are possibly not as effective at "dealing" with writing anxiety (considering adult students) as using a critical emotion approach might be. Through this, my argument was to show how writing anxiety is coming from the adult student's relationship and preconceived ideas about university level writing, rather than from a cognitive block or lack of compositional understanding. I then set out to apply theories of emotion into a "typical" composition classroom setting by elaborating on the usefulness of ideas such as audience awareness and peer workshops while considering the role of critical emotion theory.

The research concerning writing anxiety has been examined in great detail by many composition scholars, and I am indebted to their work and progress in this area. Rose was one of these frontrunners in how we diagnose and understand writer's block and its effects on student writers. His important contributions in this area have helped others like myself "figure out" writing anxiety/writer's block as well as how we go about helping those students who experience it. Daly and Miller are also significant in this area of research with their implementation of the Daly and Miller Writing Apprehension

Assessment which also helps compositionists determine when students experience writing anxiety. Similarly, the investigation regarding adult college students has made significant strides in pedagogical theory. The work contributed by Knowles and Sommer helps us understand the needs of adult students, their learning styles, and how their backgrounds and experiences contribute to their role as college students. However, more work still needs to be done considering adults in college level composition classes and their experience with writing anxiety. Again, significant work has been done in these areas separately, but more attention should be given not only to writing anxiety's effects on adult students, but also how an implementation and further understanding of critical emotion theory can help us achieve this necessary goal of addressing writing anxiety.

This thesis is not an attempt at solving the writing anxiety problem, nor does it provide a comprehensive classroom outline for how we should address adult students with writing anxiety, but instead primarily focuses on adult students' experiences with writing anxiety because, as Knowles claims, adult learners have been a "neglected species" in pedagogical research, so it is important for us to recognize these students as having different experiences, attitudes, and beliefs about college compared to their younger aged classmates. Knowing this helps us navigate not only adult learners' expectations and goals from the college experience, but for other marginalized students. We need to remember that each student in our class is different and not just one pedagogical model is effective at reaching all of them, but one that can help us understand the emotional implication of our experiences is critical emotion theory. To cite Ahmed once again, "emotions should not be regarded as psychological states, but as social and cultural practices" (9) and as occurring through our relationships with objects

and subjects—the "sociality" of emotion (8). What this means for us studying writing anxiety within composition is how impactful the socially constructed attitudes and beliefs about college truly are on the adult student.

In order to address writing anxiety alleviation (specifically for adult students) through a critical emotion framework in this thesis, I proposed we re-focus our attentions toward audience awareness/analysis, re-structure how we approach writing workshops, and provided suggestions for how we could even strategically *use* writing anxiety to our advantage in the classroom. Again, these are merely humble suggestions and without directly implementing these into a "real life" teaching situation, it is not clear how these activities will play out or succeed/fail in a writing class. This is especially true considering critical emotion theory in general. It is difficult to execute a theory that is not yet fully understood or regarded as important or necessary for studying something like composition. As Tom Kerr points out, despite the efforts of scholars such as Alice Brand and Lynn Worsham and their work regarding how we can build an "interdisciplinary bridge between thought, emotion, and writing" (25), departments of English continue to view emotion as someone else's issue. For example,

> Emotion, unlike language, is frequently treated as the proper subject of psychology or the sacrosanct substance of personality and/or character, as the implicit, taboo ground upon which explicit, public rituals of creative and analytical expression take place. For instance, we do not in our course descriptions or mission statements promise to engage deeply and/or critique (or evaluate) the *emotions* of our students or colleagues, but the constant interpretation, production, and exchange of text amounts to no less. (Kerr 25)

What is described here is how we as composition instructors continue to ask our students to engage with emotion through their writing and interpretation of texts, but fail to acknowledge these emotions as contributing to other social/cultural factors such as

writing anxiety. In other words, we do not actively engage in a discussion of emotions with our students, but ask them to interact with them during writing assignments by telling them to "express yourselves in your own words," or to provide a personal opinion/perspective. These classroom examples require "emotional labor" (Boler), but emotions themselves, or where they come from/what they are, are rarely discussed openly in a classroom setting. I imagine, of course, that trying to articulate emotions in a classroom is quite difficult considering how emotions have been placed in the "private spheres" of the home and family (Boler 19) rather than brought out as readily or easily into the public realm. I am not suggesting that a critical emotion approach to teaching is impossible, but until we can recognize emotions as an important part of how we view and live our lives, as well as how we can develop a shared emotional discourse, affective pedagogies will be difficult to use effectively. However, when looking at specific situations such as writing anxiety first instead of an entire curriculum, we can begin to make the connections between the role and impact of emotions on our students' writing experiences. In other words, how the adult student's experiences, attitudes, and beliefs about college level writing creates her writing anxiety and emotioned response toward the writing task.

Ideas for Further Investigation

Through writing this thesis I feel I have come across more ideas for research rather than precisely solve any lingering issues concerning writing anxiety. I merely offered suggestions of what *could* happen if we consider critical emotion theory when addressing writing anxiety. However, since we do not yet have a shared language for emotion in the first place, it makes classroom attention toward affect complicated. Since

emotional experiences can be individualized (i.e. not everyone has the same interpretation for feelings such as love, fear, anger, etc.), how can we adequately define/discuss emotions? How can we reach a consensus about what constitutes a feeling? These situations, among others, need to be considered in light of instituting a critical emotion pedagogy into a composition classroom and demands further inquiry.

During this investigation into adult students and writing anxiety, I have discovered several other paths that can lead us to an understanding of writing anxiety that could involve many factors aside from recursive emotional relationships. One question that persists is: how does gender complicate the issue of writing anxiety? Further, how does gender and emotion coincide? As Boler writes concerning the privatizing of emotions, "the relegation of emotions to the private sphere is inextricably intertwined with the simultaneous consignment of women to the private sphere, and the related neglect of women's histories. Women's work, which includes "emotional labor," is also consigned to the private sphere" (19). What does this mean for women, as opposed to men, concerning writing anxiety? Additionally, could applying a feminist pedagogy (either alone or in conjunction with critical emotion studies) reduce writing anxiety? This is not meant to imply that feminist pedagogy is a "pedagogy for women," but instead if we use Susan Jarratt's idea of what makes a feminist pedagogy distinctive as "its investment in a view of contemporary society as sexist and patriarchal, and the complicity of reading, writing, and teaching in those conditions" (115). It would be interesting to examine how implementing a feminist pedagogy in this way could add to writing anxiety research.

Another important avenue to consider when we think about writing anxiety is to possibly reformat/refocus the Daly and Miller Writing Apprehension Assessment. As discussed in previous chapters, this writing apprehension survey is crucial for our understanding of not only the history of writing anxiety research, but also in determining the factors that cause writing anxiety and the detrimental side effects for those who continually experience writing anxiety. However, being the fundamental research tool it is does not mean it still adequately holds up to our current needs and concerns regarding writing anxiety and could use a revision. Since this assessment was developed in 1975, much has changed culturally and socially, meaning the students we have now might have a different relationship with the university than they had thirty-five years ago. Considering the research that has been done on emotion, we could revisit the Daly and Miller assessment using the notions gleaned from studies on affect. Of course Daly and Miller *did* question the student's feelings about writing, but could we now develop survey questions that also include questions concerning the student's attitudes and beliefs about college prior to starting as well as questions that focus on the student's background and experiences beyond college? Using a type of critical emotion survey for writing anxiety might help us further understand the social implications of writing anxiety more so than the questions asked on the Daly and Miller assessment. I see this survey containing questions similar to the Daly and Miller assessment such as asking about the student's perceptions about anxiety during the writing task, her likes or dislikes about writing, and her attitudes about having her work evaluated (Daly 45). The revised assessment, however, would include questions more directly related to the student's personal life and experiences. For instance, we might ask the student to reflect on her beliefs about college

level writing prior to starting any writing course, ask her to describe her past writing experiences (whether they were for school, work, or personal situations), and what she expects a college composition class to do (what might be expected from her in this course).

As we move forward in composition research, it is important to also do more investigation into the realm of adult students especially concerning writing anxiety. As more adult students return to the college classroom, it is necessary for us to understand their learning styles, expectations from college, and how their "real life" influences shape their anxieties about writing for the academy. By applying theories of emotion, we are now closer to understanding and negotiating the ways our culture and society influence writing anxiety. There is no "cure" for writing anxiety, nor do I have definitive answers of how to effectively reach the needs of *all* adult students, but I do know that implementing a critical emotion approach toward teaching composition is crucial for our understanding of these issues as well as how to successfully teach adult students academic discourse.

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