

**NEGOTIATING IDENTITIES:
APPALACHIAN VOICES IN ACADEMIA**

A Thesis Presented for the
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Degree
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ABSTRACT

This study reports the experiences of five Appalachian students at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The investigation seeks to understand how students from Appalachia negotiate their identities in their academic writing and, as a result, suggests implications of current writing assessment measures related to Standard American English conventions. Participants completed semi-structured interviews to explain their experiences with preconceptions about Appalachia, feedback on their writing, and negotiations of identities in their writing. Based on interview responses and current literature, this study provides a deeper understanding about the relationship between personal and academic identities and how writing feedback from instructors affects both identities. This study offers recommendations for future research, which may include intentional diversity of participants, commentary from instructors on how they approach feedback, and a greater consideration of how students maintain multiple identities.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Freshman year was just such a culture shock... My male peers, a lot of the time, hear my accent and think, “Oh, this guy’s dumb,” and won’t hold their tongues about it. A lot of people, right off the cuff, say, “oh you’re a hick,” “oh, you’re a redneck,” “oh, you’re a hillbilly.” And I’m like... “You don’t even know me.”

—Dominic (second-year student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, from Greenville, TN)

This answer from Dominic’s (pseudonym) interview for this study explores his experiences as an Appalachian student with peers at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK), and serves as a blanket explanation as to why this study exists. Dominic’s experience represents what students who come from Appalachia have experienced as they write in First-Year Composition courses at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. This study is focused on gathering a deeper understanding about the social and academic experiences of students from Appalachia who have taken First-Year Composition courses at UTK. On a personal level, Dominic’s answer from his interview delineates my writing experiences as an undergraduate student at the university. As a researcher, I feel an emotional connection to this research topic because of my positionality. I chose this specific population because I am an Appalachian student who has previously had to adjust my identity in order to fit into First-Year Composition classrooms and, ultimately, into academia. In this study, any mention of Appalachia means the Appalachian region of the southern United States. The study is focused on this specific region

because there are distinct regional and cultural differences between the various regions of Appalachia.

When I made the transition from high school to college, I felt prepared to write college-level papers because of my phenomenal high school English teachers who had essentially taught me to write in a uniform way like all of my peers. In practice, ignoring my authentic voice to sound more robotic was easy; internally, writing like every other person to fit in felt wrong. To be successful, though, I learned to cope with the idea that I sounded like the typical scholarly writer and my unique voice only existed in my personal life. Eventually, I found myself wondering about the reason for writing: Isn't writing supposed to be an extension of the person, and isn't the written language supposed to reflect the intricate thoughts, ideas, emotions, and personality of the writer? The concept of universities enforcing Standard American English (SAE) conventions, which blatantly ignores linguistic diversity in academic writing, is not a new phenomenon; writing assessment practices at the university level reinforce SAE conventions, leaving little to no room for different dialects of English to operate within writing assessment. In *A Dictionary of Varieties of English*, Hickey (2013) defines Standard American English as, "a supranational form of written English which is normally used in printing, in various documents of an official nature and which is taught to foreigners" and explains that such an approach to language is "a disguised form of prescriptivism and discrimination" (p. 299). For linguistically diverse students, there would be more opportunities for success if SAE writing conventions at the high school and university levels had more leeway to sound both personal and professional. Our success should not be determined by how well our writing fits into SAE conventions and how well we hide parts of ourselves in order to sound like everyone else. There is an issue with the concept of writing assessment measures penalizing students who may not fit into the mold of

SAE writing since such penalties instill the idea that having a different dialect is overall “wrong,” and the best way to be successful is to write and sound exactly like every person in the academy (Amos, 2019, p. 2). For Appalachian students, in particular, merely making a long story short in order to have a concise academic paper is not natural; any point we make, idea we share, or argument we form comes with great exposition as a result of our culture.

Thankfully, my English teachers prepared me that a large Southeastern Conference (SEC) university does not often value the art of storytelling and building personal relationships in order to justify decisions or make points in a written assignment. I learned that most SEC universities encourage students in writing intensive courses to adhere to SAE conventions—conventions so narrow that a student’s identity is often hidden to fulfill expectations of writing “properly.” SAE conventions are incredibly different than components of Appalachian rhetoric, particularly with regard to lexicon, phonetics, and grammar. I have been disheartened since being fully able to understand what it means to adhere to SAE conventions because writing in a way that conforms to Standard American English conventions means suppressing parts of my Appalachian identity when I would want to include stories or be more personal in my writing. It is difficult to feel proud of my writing when I am discouraged from presenting my identity on paper or telling a story when piecing together an argument.

Based on current SAE conventions, there is some understanding that personal identities should not intersect with academic identities in writing unless prompts specifically require students to write personal narratives (Sheridan, 2013); this is a concept encouraged by writing assessment practices at both high school and college levels. This concept can most easily be seen with the omission of the pronoun “I” in academic writing; removing a word that would otherwise position the author’s existence in their own writing is ultimately removing their personal

identities from the piece of writing. Starfield (2015) emphasizes the tension of personal identities existing within academic writing, reminding scholars that, “‘I’ comes to stand for or index a range of available identity options, some more dispreferred than others, that need to be understood as shaped by sociohistorical forces operating within the academy” (p. 250). Snow and Uccelli (2009) claim that “The typical interpersonal stance expected in academic language is detached and authoritative” which includes “a distant construction of opinion” (p. 118). There is some academic writing which may not necessarily require first-person language, but writers should not entirely feel restricted to third-person language if using only third-person language would make a writer feel disconnected from their work. This may look like a researcher using first-person language to establish the exigence of a study before shifting to third-person language throughout the rest of the research paper. Further, because there has been a sociohistorical component which mostly excludes personal identities from writing, it is normal for writers to feel uncomfortable when attempting to sound personal in writing when the practice in academia has mostly avoided including personal identities within academic pieces.

Additionally, assignments in academia that encourage personal writing may be difficult for scholars to adjust to since, for so long, this kind of writing has not been included in academia. Davies (2012) discusses that, in her career as a social scientific inquiry researcher, she has experienced this issue for herself: “Using ‘I’ and adopting a personal narrative went against the grain for me and goes against the grain of academic writing. Writing in this manner has been challenging and difficult” (p. 750). This tension is amplified since a system exists wherein personal identities are separate from an academic identity; this may cause an imbalance in a person’s life because a person’s academic identity rather than personal identities is valued more in academia. Though multiple identities exist within one person at any given time, the academy’s

approach to only utilizing academic identities and mostly excluding personal identities in writing is too harsh. Because of this, part of my study examines this issue because students have likely felt this tension if researchers and distinguished scholars in the academy have. Essentially, this study demonstrates why examining how students negotiate their Appalachian identity in their writing contributes to an understanding of how institutional expectations for students' written performances may negatively affect those students. Because I am considering these effects, this study includes an examination of Appalachian students' experiences in composition courses at UTK.

My interest in studying the concept of Appalachian students negotiating their identities in first-year composition courses stemmed from my personal experience as I transitioned from high school to college because this time of transition, while brief, was powerful since I felt the need to suppress components of my Appalachian identity to fit in at the university. Feeling some level of discomfort when adjusting to a new college environment is likely a universal experience for first-year students, but I felt especially out of place because I immediately noticed that my lifestyle and values, which derived from my Appalachian upbringing, were different than other first-year students who surrounded me. On a personal level, it was difficult to maintain and be proud of an Appalachian identity because interactions with people who believe stereotypes about Appalachia left me feeling as though I did not belong at the university. As a white student at a predominantly white institution (PWI), I anticipated feeling a sense of belonging; I had prepared myself to acknowledge my privilege as a white person because I had the potential to help others feel welcome in a place that may have otherwise felt unwelcoming because of social statuses. My behavior and confusion about my identity stemmed from my position in relation to my environment. Kezar (2002) asserts that, "Within positionality theory, it is acknowledged that

people have multiple overlapping identities. Thus, people make meaning from various aspects of their identity” (p. 96). The confusion I felt about my identity was a result of being in an environment where Appalachian backgrounds were not frequently acknowledged, and if they were acknowledged, stereotypes about Appalachia dominated conversations. After hearing negative judgments about Appalachia and the people who reside there, I found myself wondering if other Appalachian students felt dismissed and excluded like I did.

Based on my experiences, Appalachian rhetoric is more than the art of persuasion because our speech—and ideally our writing— often includes personal anecdotes and shared stories in order to make a point; it is through storytelling that Appalachian folks build relationships with people so that our personal thoughts and perceptions are better understood by those around us. Within Appalachian rhetoric, an Appalachian English and, sometimes, an Appalachian drawl exists; however, it is essential to note that stereotypes that exist about the region as a whole are incorrect, as each region within Appalachia may speak, write, and otherwise operate slightly differently. While there is no one exact definition of Appalachian rhetoric, author of *Politics of Appalachian Rhetoric* Amanda Hayes (2018) offers a definition that is specific enough to relate to the entire region and broad enough so that a disparate population of Appalachia is not placed under one umbrella: storytelling as a means of conveying ideas. It is crucial to note that there is a nuance to Appalachian rhetoric since storytelling, in this sense, should come from a person who identifies with the Appalachian culture and who has a specific exigence in telling their stories. Storytelling as a whole is not considered Appalachian rhetoric just as Appalachian rhetoric cannot be merely considered storytelling. By practicing Appalachian rhetoric, Appalachian speakers and writers alike may frequently use specific language, like subjects and verbs that do not totally grammatically agree, to convey ideas.

Part of Appalachian rhetoric, then, is the Appalachian English language, which may include, “Scots-Irish subject-verb concord (e.g., *Them woodpeckers is back again*) and demonstrative pronoun alternation (e.g., ‘those’ → ‘them’)” and “completive *done* (e.g., *They done raised a batch of kin-folk*)” (Hazen & Fluharty, 2004, p. 52). Just as there are regions within Appalachia where this specific Appalachian English is more common or more heavily used, there are regions where the Appalachian Drawl is more apparent in the language compared to other regions. This is particularly important to acknowledge because the Drawl is most heavily heard in “a socioregional cross section of Appalachia, namely the poorest residents of the most isolated areas of central Appalachia” (Hazen & Fluharty, 2004, p. 51). Appalachian English is always in Appalachian rhetoric, but there is dialect discrimination and stereotypes related to the entire region because of the mostly unincluded Appalachian Drawl. When the Drawl is apparent, listeners overemphasize the accent and assume that every person in Appalachia sounds that way, which results in another stereotype that equates the accent with a lack of education—a topic for later discussion. Ultimately, there are many components that determine what it means to sound, or write, like a person from Appalachia; this unique dialect and culturally significant language, deeply embedded in a local identity, has been deemed as incorrect by the majority of academia even if it is authentic to people within the region.

When I began to question my identity as a person from Appalachia at a PWI, I experienced initial confusion about the compliments I received from English instructors; all my papers were met with praise, and an A was the lowest grade I ever made in my first-year composition courses. Without recognizing it at the time, I was confused because my writing was completely devoid of my Appalachian identity since I was merely completing assignments to meet rubric requirements rather than letting a personal voice show up on paper; this meant that I

was unintentionally adhering to the SAE conventions I had originally been taught in high school so that I could avoid being criticized for maintaining an identity that exists outside of academia. It was because of this identity crisis that I could not understand that multifarious identities are part of one person and that I never had to choose one identity over the other in order to succeed as a student. In fact, both identities can exist at the same time, but Amos (2019) explains that the approach to teaching SAE should be revised because the current approach is not beneficial:

When we tell students that they are saying something “wrong” or that they are speaking “incorrectly,” we are placing a value judgment on how they speak in their home, with their families, or with their friends. This is not to suggest that we should not teach Standard American English in school, or that we should not require all students’ written work to be in elevated, academic language; this is simply to suggest that we need to reframe the way we teach Standard American English: with an understanding that English is one of many languages, and that cultural dialects are just as valid, and are often the most effective way of expressing oneself. (p. 2)

If scholars could readjust the concept of SAE to include the unique backgrounds and dialects of students, then a significant identity crisis would not be an issue since the authentic voices of linguistically diverse students would not be penalized.

The goal of this study, then, is to generate a better understanding about students who maintain an identity related to Appalachia and have experienced or are currently experiencing the phenomenon of negotiating their identities in first-year composition writing at UTK in order to meet institutional expectations. To do so, this study explores how high school teachers’ feedback on their writing prepared students to meet these expectations in order to avoid disapproval of their papers being too personal at the college level. Further, this study investigates if writing

assessments in high school reinforce the act of students choosing to ignore their Appalachian identities in their writing in order to adopt a more “academic” identity to meet formal standards that adhere to SAE conventions. Determining the influence that writing assessments have on high school students is essential because, in the field of linguistic diversity, there is an agreement that academic experiences influence students’ identities to some extent. This is seen in Ball and Ellis’s (2009) research which suggests that experiences in educational settings can positively or negatively affect identities beyond the classroom: “identity is a result of interactions between individuals in that setting, and students either passively or actively take on an identity based on how the teacher and/or peers interact with them discursively” (p. 616). Because identity is a crucial part of every person’s lived experience, especially the experiences of students whose personal lives can be drastically affected as a result of writing assessments, this research will hopefully contribute findings to the field of linguistic diversity.

Overview of Chapters

This project has five chapters. In Chapter One, I establish the exigence for this study by recalling personal academic experiences. This chapter also suggests that a better understanding of identity may inform writing assessment measures. Chapter Two reviews relevant literature about Appalachia, identity theory, and writing assessment implications in order to establish the theoretical framework in which this study is situated. Chapter Three offers an explanation for my methodological approach, which includes recruitment of participants, utilization of interviews, collection of data, and analysis of data. Chapter Four presents the results of the study which are thematically separated based on participants’ responses: high school preparation for college-level writing, negotiating Appalachian identities in composition courses, and writing assessment

implications. Chapter Five addresses both discussions and conclusions of my study, which includes restating research findings, answering my original research questions, addressing limitations of the study, and offering suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is twofold. The first purpose is to highlight the negotiation of Appalachian students' academic identities in first-year composition courses. Another purpose is to determine if students feel that institutional expectations value one identity more than another in their writing and, if so, how this experience gradually affects their personal lives. This chapter discusses the development of Appalachian identity, Appalachian English, identity theory, and writing assessment implications. This study uses identity as a theoretical framework in order to understand how Appalachian college students negotiate their personal identities in their writing and how the academy can better assess the writing of linguistically diverse students.

History Behind the Appalachian Identity

The Appalachian region of the southern United States has a rich, diverse history that is often ignored by society because stereotypes, rather than the truth of lived experiences, control many peoples' perceptions of the region. Even if individuals like to think they hold no prejudice against people from the region or the region itself, there is likely some kind of unconscious bias that they have not addressed. It is almost impossible for people outside the region, and sometimes people inside the region, to not be influenced, whether intentionally or not, by prominent figures' opinions and assumptions about the region; corporate giants, scholars, and politicians continue to influence people about the region because of the power they hold. In *Appalachia Revisited*, editors Schumann and Fletcher (2016) note the issue of individuals insufficiently understanding the region, a result of researchers' narrow focuses and findings:

Researchers make decisions about what constitutes a relevant research question, a process that informs the scope of possible methods for answering the question, and this in turn narrows the potential range of valid answers to the question. Place is not a neutral field where research occurs; it is a contributing factor in defining “legitimate” research. This is not to argue that there is no “real” Appalachia to be studied but to recognize that our understanding of Appalachia is directly shaped by how we go about asking, “What is the Appalachian region?” (p. 11)

If prominent figures who are exerting influence on others about the region are not fully aware of what the region entails because of their limited lines of inquiries, then no meaningful change is being made since stereotypes will continue exist, or even be reinforced, as a result of this issue.

It is no surprise, then, that stereotypes do not accurately portray the many components that make up Appalachia; there is almost complete disregard of the complex history and progress that has been made in the region because of limited research and incessant stereotypes. Shapiro’s *Appalachia on Our Mind* (1978) confronts the idea that many Appalachian stereotypes exist because individuals are more comfortable believing preconceived ideas and opinions about the region instead of actively seeking answers and adjusting to how the region itself has been limited by external factors. While Shapiro’s work is not considered new research, it does offer insight on the Appalachian region’s intricate history and emergence of stereotypes. Following the economic disruption of the Civil War, the region was forgotten by the rest of the country after the region’s natural resources were mostly depleted; this exploitation of the region resulted in a socioeconomic setback, and as Shapiro (1978) notes, “In Appalachia, it was said, a style of life and a mode of social organization once common to all areas of the country seemed to persist unchanged after a hundred or more years” (p. 8). Since people in the region were left with no

choice but to operate in the same way they did before the Civil War, outsiders began condemning the region as a whole for operating in ways that seemed dated and usual to the rest of the nation. Stereotypes about the region emerged as a result of exploitation and how the folks in the region learned to maneuver through hardships imposed on them by people outside the region. The perception of Appalachia's "otherness" is one that persists today because of limited research scopes and comfortability with ignoring the truth behind this "otherness."

This disregard for progress is a result of how Appalachians are viewed from an outside perspective. After the Civil War, the region was considered to be "in but not of America" because of how differently the people in the region operated (Shapiro, 1978, p. xiv). The region's lack of connection and overall similarity to the rest of the nation continued through World War II. After John F. Kennedy's campaign trail travelled through the region in 1960, Kennedy and other outside political figures were determined to "save" the region by establishing antipoverty legislation (Eller, 2008, p. 102). The issue with this, though, is that the outsiders maintained a savior complex; programs were put into place to aid people in the region, but outside reformers oversaw the programs and continued efforts that they thought were necessary instead of listening to the voices of the region. Ultimately, these programs were not as beneficial as they could have been because the definite issues of the region—exploitation and deep-rooted poverty—were overlooked by reformers since they had no experience or authentic knowledge about the region. Eller (2008) explains that the issue was that the political reformers were disconnected from the region's disconnect:

For many intellectuals and poverty warriors of the 1960s, Appalachia needed only to be redeemed from government neglect and geographic isolation. Once the mountaineers were returned to the cultural mainstream, the problem of poverty in the region would be

alleviated without any significant restructuring of the political and economic system. (p. 102)

Even with programs offering assistance to Appalachian people, the long-established issues of the region were still unseen. Though the region's history has been studied by scholars, the issues from Appalachian history are still frequently ignored because of a lack of in-depth studies in the region that focus on exploring what people need without including predetermined ideas. The identities that Appalachian folks embrace are related to the struggles that have come with region's history and the rest of the nation's altogether misunderstanding.

Because of a long history of exploitation and poverty, the southern and central regions of Appalachia have noticeable cultural differences compared to other regions in Appalachia. Even though all regions in Appalachia are clearly distinct from one another, many outsiders group all Appalachians together under one category and place stereotypes on the region as a whole. This is an issue, not only because stereotypes continue to hold space, but because these stereotypes are typically exaggerated and inaccurate. The stereotypes placed on entirety of Appalachia mostly stem from the southern Appalachian region even though the southern region is not reflective of all Appalachian regions because "stereotypes about Appalachia and the people who live in Appalachia seem to emerge and persist at the local community level" (Hess et al., 2018, p. 9). Since this study explicitly focuses on students who are from the central southern region of Appalachia, I am interested in specific differences in dialect of this region compared to the Standard American English conventions found in high school- and college-level writing. To fully explore the experiences of Appalachian students, it is necessary to define Appalachian English in order to understand the differences that exist between this dialect and Standard American English

and the negotiation of identities that must take place when adjusting to academic writing which may sound inauthentic to the writer.

Defining Appalachian English

To think about Appalachian English as a whole, it is important to understand the difference between rhetoric and dialect. There is no single Appalachian dialect since a person's overall lexicon and speech in relation to phonetics are all different; however, folks from the central southern region of Appalachia sound incredibly similar even if their speech is not exactly the same. Clark and Hayward (2013) explain that each region of Appalachia is different because identities are formed locally rather than as a whole, asserting that "While the label 'Appalachian' is useful to denote shared beliefs, identities, and language features in a general way, [scholar] Montgomery stresses the importance of localness in forging community identity and language variety" (p. 8). Ultimately, distinguishing dialect from rhetoric means understanding that dialect and language is part of the rhetoric; they are not the same concepts since one (dialect) contributes to the other (rhetoric).

In composition courses, students have long been taught that rhetoric is the art of persuasion (Farris, 2003); though this is true, this definition of rhetoric may result in students omitting personal voices from writing since academia does not frequently allow for students to tell stories as a means of conveying ideas outside of creative writing classes or narrative assignments. This issue is of particular interest to me because the participants in this study may not view rhetoric as merely the art of persuasion; Appalachian rhetoric is more than the art of persuasion because it includes personal anecdotes and shared stories in order to make a point because it is through storytelling that we build relationships with people so that they better

understand us. The Appalachian region includes many cultural differences, so it is impossible to pinpoint one exact definition of what Appalachian rhetoric sounds like; however, author of *Politics of Appalachian Rhetoric* Amanda Hayes (2018) offers a definition that is specific enough to relate to the region and broad enough so that a disparate population of Appalachia is not placed under one umbrella:

My definition of rhetoric, then, particularly in terms of my regional background, is something more nuanced. In my experience, when people really want to say—or write—something important, they tell a story. Specifically, they tell the story of how they have come to believe or decide something. Listening to how others decide what matters is, I believe, a deeply rhetorical act. (p. 9)

Understanding that language is part of identity is essential for Appalachian students' success because, as they further learn to adjust to academic writing, their academic identities begin to outweigh their personal identities when their writing does not reflect their personal identities. In academic writing, adhering to SAE conventions ensures success, even if this means that Appalachian rhetoric and personal voices are left out of their writing.

Understanding the lack of personal voices in academic writing is necessary because the language and culture component of a person's identity that is learned in childhood development may not easily transfer to academia. SAE conventions held by the academy are difficult to conform to because of differences in personal and academic identities. Speaking allows for the expression of "social and cultural identities through use of language in social contexts," (Kramsch, 2014, p. 40) but allowing students to write similarly to the way they speak is not frequently encouraged in academic writing since there are "conventional ways of writing academic papers" (Patriotta, 2017, p. 752). The academy's value of academic identities over

students' and scholars' personal identities may have adverse effects, like being unable to develop a sense of self outside of academic writing or not being able to be personal enough in writing when personal identities warranted in various academic assignments (Davies, 2012; Starfield, 2015). Acknowledging this issue is critical for my study since Appalachian students, in particular, experience adversity and will continue to do so until more studies focus on how this demographic navigates their identities in composition courses. The ensuing section about identity theory is a crucial part of this study; identity theory suggests that multiple identities exist at one time (Norton, 2013), but there may be tension between this theory and the academy because of the extreme emphasis that is placed on omitting personal voices in academic writing.

Identity Theory

Norton (2013) defines identity as “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p. 45). Using identity theory to approach this study would suggest that students understand their relationship with their surroundings at the university and understand that their writing will not be reflective of their personal voices unless they encounter creative writing assignments or narratives. Because of what the students are currently experiencing, they will adjust their approach both socially and academically in order to better succeed at the university. There are obvious relations of power apparent in the Appalachian students' attempts at closely following SAE writing conventions, which can be expected of them because of the unique power dynamic that exists between language and academia:

Since language and culture do not exist in neutral relationships but are almost always structured asymmetrically with respect to power, the teaching of writing to all students,

and particularly when taught to students who are members of linguistic minority groups, requires that researchers and educators recognize “the role of language (a factor of culture) as a major force in the construction of human subjectivities... and the way language may either confirm or deny the life histories and experience of the people who use it.” (Masedo, 1994, as cited in Mitchell, 2015, p. 4)

Because of this power dynamic, students are expected to adhere to SAE conventions, even if the way they write is not authentic and they would not speak in the same way they write (Norton, 2013, p. 36). This is detrimental to the success of students who do not have backgrounds in SAE conventions or otherwise only conform to conventions in their writing to appease others to have a sense of achievement.

Students who have learned English as a second language (L2 learners) are particularly harmed by this great, negative power imbalance that exists in academia (Morita, 2004). Not only are L2 learners harmed by this, but any person who originally learned nonstandard English dialects in their childhood years are harmed because this power dynamic instills the idea that part of their identity can be considered to be “wrong” in academia. Flowerdew and Wang (2015) note that the power imbalance that exists cannot be ignored since the phenomenon leaves students experiencing a loss of power related to their personal identities: “Power is an important discursively constructed dimension of identity. In academic settings... academic writers may find themselves in less powerful positions, as they have to conform to the expectations of gatekeepers who are often native speakers (or to nonnative speakers, who nevertheless apply native-speaker norms)” (p. 90).

Closely related to identity theory is the concept of positionality theory, which refers to how the relationship of physical location influences, and is influenced by, social identities

(Kezar, 2002). I draw attention to this theory because my study explores how Appalachian students navigate a new environment at the university and how they negotiate their identities in their writing within the new environment. Behavior and confusion about identities may stem from an individual's position in relation to their specific environment. Kezar (2002) asserts that, "Within positionality theory, it is acknowledged that people have multiple overlapping identities. Thus, people make meaning from various aspects of their identity" (p. 96). It is essential to acknowledge that the population for this study is unintentionally entirely comprised of Caucasian students. Students who are from the Appalachian region may feel confusion about their identity at a primarily white institution (PWI) because of "a unique construction based on insider/outsider presence" (Powell, 2022, p. 3). There is still a privilege that exists for this outsider group, and I wish to acknowledge the experiences of minorities at PWIs; this experience is entirely different, and beyond the scope, from the experiences of Appalachian students that are examined in this study.

In relation to positionality theory, sense of belonging theory advances the idea that college students need positive social and academic interactions at their university to feel like they belong and so that they avoid social isolation. Strayhorn (2018) offers a definition specifically about college students' sense of belonging:

In terms of college, sense of belonging refers to students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus such as faculty, staff, and peers. (p. 4)

If a student's sense of belonging is relational and depends on reciprocity, meaning that they feel like they matter within a collective group and indicate to other members of a group that they

matter, then it should be assumed that faculty would ensure students' sense of belonging in a class; however, that sense of belonging is challenged when Appalachian students join academia and are met with expectations of conforming to the social and academic norms while trying to maintain familial relations as part of their Appalachian identity. This attempt at grappling with an academic identity holding more influence than a personal identity, which ultimately means adjusting to a new kind of power structure, results in feelings of isolation in Appalachian students: "students of Appalachian origin... are more likely to report pressure from their families to return home frequently and less connection to and more isolation from the university" (Wilson et al., 2018, p. 139). Appalachian students' sense of belonging further deteriorates in academia since social isolation is met with academic isolation as a result of adhering to SAE conventions in their writing rather than including Appalachian rhetoric. By changing their writing and fitting into a mold, their authentic selves do not exist in writing (Webb-Sunderhaus, 2016, p. 17). Additionally, peers who mock Appalachian students' accents cause further isolation, leaving the students without a great sense of belonging both socially and academically in their new community: "Students whose speech includes stigmatized features feel that they are subject to stereotyping by others on campus... These findings have implications for how educators should reconsider the role of language diversity on American college campuses" (Dunstan & Jaeger, 2016, p. 57). If Appalachian students find it difficult to feel a sense of belonging socially and academically, other students who have non-standard American dialects or who are EL learners likely experience this, too; if multiple populations feel isolation instead of belongingness within academia, the "sociohistorical forces" (Starfield, 2015) are inherently wrong and should be reconsidered.

At this point, it is apparent that the influence the academy has on personal identities is a negative one. The only reason that students feel a need to develop a writing style that is inauthentic to them is because of “sociohistorical forces” (Starfield, 2015) at play in academia that have always required students to conform to SAE conventions to maintain the imbalanced power dynamic that exists between students and the academy (Flowerdew & Wang, 2015). As argued/suggested by Flowerdew and Wang (2015), “This unequal power relation may be mitigated if there is a change of perspective on the ownership of language and L2 scholars’ writing comes to be assessed according to communicative effectiveness, or intelligibility, rather than native-speaker standards” (p. 90). Not only must teachers’ assessments of student writing change, but standardized testing practices that reinforce SAE conventions, and ultimately penalize students, should be reevaluated because they cannot accurately capture students’ academic abilities or take various backgrounds into consideration. The following subsection further explores the necessary writing assessment adjustments.

Writing Assessment Implications

Writing assessment issues at the high school and university levels are the result of a loop associated with SAE standards. The largest issue with writing assessment lies within the standardized testing measures used for high school students because standardized tests cannot consider the backgrounds of each individual student. Kelleghan et al. (2012) posits that this issue is not new and there should be further investigation into the actual contributions of written assessment measures on tests since “the content of tests, for students of any background, is often trivial and provides no basis of evaluating a range of pupil characteristics, such as ability to learn, ability to make informed judgments, creative ability, or imagination” (p. 4). This may

suggest that, even if a high school student demonstrates that they understand content through their writing, standardized testing measures will determine their answers to be “wrong” if their writing mimics how they speak instead of strictly adhering to SAE conventions. Any student who writes in a different dialect, whether Appalachian or not, will be penalized because it is impossible for standardized testing measures to consider unique backgrounds. Though most literature that addresses the relationship between linguistic diversity and writing assessment advocate for different writing assessment approaches, the fact is that Common Core standards will continue to utilize SAE expectations since universities mostly encourage these expectations, too. Ruecker (2015) explores the effect of Common Core standards on English Language Learners (ELLs), but this information is relevant to my study because students who were taught Appalachian English before Standard American English can relate (based on the responses from my participants) to the struggle of doing well on high stakes writing assessments when the SAE conventions they are following do not make sense or otherwise come naturally. In Ruecker’s (2015) study, teachers agreed that Common Core writing assessments do more harm than good for linguistically diverse students: “Teachers.... recognize the multiliteracies and different competencies that their ELL students bring to the classroom but see how non-locally designed assessments fail to capture these competencies” (p. 8). While Appalachian students are not considered ELL students, writing assessments that are not designed locally and do not take unique backgrounds into consideration will penalize every student who cannot perfectly follow SAE rules.

Understanding how Appalachian students navigate writing papers and feeling a sense of belonging during their first year of college may have a positive impact on how universities and colleges in the Appalachian region approach writing assessment. While there are scholars who

advocate for alternative assessment approaches, like labor-based grading contracts, these alternative assessment and grading measures are not utilized by the majority of writing classes; traditional grading is hard to push back against since it has been in place for so long that it “has been understood universally,” even if it “focuses on the product of a letter grade, which promotes competition and stress” (Erbes et al., 2021, p. 64). Standard writing assessment measures do not take linguistic diversity into consideration and rely heavily on traditional grades to motivate students; however, this kind of motivation is detrimental to students’ perceptions of themselves (Cain et al., 2022). This issue is a result of the outdated first and second waves of writing assessment that utilized objective tests and focused more on students’ products rather than their writing process. Though writing assessment studies is in a new third wave, issues from the first and second waves are reflected in the third wave, even if this new wave is advanced and encourages instructors to acknowledge “the discrepancy between what it is that we [teachers] say we value and what we enact” (Yancey, 1999, p. 494). Behm and Miller (2012) offer a fourth wave of writing assessment which would address the “racial politics of assessment” and discuss current writing assessment values which “defines, positions, and excludes groups of students, possibly limiting access to resources that facilitate learning” (p. 127). Progress toward a fourth wave of writing assessment (Behm & Miller, 2012) has been made at some colleges and universities, including UTK, but most composition courses are still operating with third wave writing assessment measures since there is a heavy focus on traditional grades in relation to the process and products of writing. For composition courses to be fully operating with fourth wave writing assessment measures, White (2019) offers that higher education institutions should place focus on inclusive assessment, complete equitable assessment which relates to linguistic

diversity and social justice, genre innovation (departing from conventions but still being accepted by the audience), and internationalization.

Since universities are not focused on allowing personal voices to be part of academic writing, then high schools will continue to train students to write primarily in third person instead of exploring different writing techniques. Instead of embracing lexical differences outside of Standard American English, writing assessment standards continue to penalize these differences and obstruct the success of linguistically diverse students. To combat this, Spinelli (2008) suggests that informal writing assessment measures would benefit high school students since current standardized testing measures cannot correctly assess students' literacy skills since the measures only consider SAE writing to be acceptable. Spinelli defines informal assessment as "authentic forms of assessment that emphasize the collection of data which are naturalistic, flexible, open, idiosyncratic, and descriptive rather than numerical and standardized" (2008, p. 105). If this approach were utilized, students could proceed to write without fear of penalty and teachers could finally be more flexible with curriculum in the classroom that can determine what students need to learn. Spinelli's (2008) idea would allow writing assessment measures to include lexical differences and consider that it is more important for students to understand class material and clearly convey ideas instead of only focusing on the components of SAE, like specific sentence structure and perfect grammar.

In a final analysis, this literature review shows that there are research gaps about Appalachian students' negotiation of their personal identities in their academic writing. After realizing that there is a lack of literature about Appalachian students navigating their identities while performing in first-year composition classes, I recognized that it was necessary for me to explore the stories of Appalachian students to further my understanding of how identities are

negotiated in academia. There is already a great amount of alternative writing assessment research, and the exploration of writing assessment implications in this study will hopefully further the conversation and urge the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, to encourage linguistic diversity in writing rather than strictly adhering to SAE conventions.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Instead of conducting a large-scale study, I chose to examine the experiences of five Appalachian students at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in order to learn more about the complexity of experiences rather than assuming that all Appalachian students have a definite negative experience with negotiating their identities in writing assignments. All students are from the central southern region of Appalachia and are taking or have taken composition courses at the university during the time of study. The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, was specifically part of my investigation as opposed to other institutions because of my positionality and desire to learn if participants had similar experiences as I. This study focuses on both personal identities and approaches to writing; I was able to obtain thorough responses from participants about a topic that does not already have detailed literature.

This study explores how Appalachian students adjust to writing in college classes and how they negotiate their identities through writing in composition courses. The aim of my study is to generate an understanding of the writing skills Appalachian students learned in high school and how those skills translate to college-level writing. Particularly, this study focuses on how students have been taught to omit personal voices, and ultimately their identities, from academic writing. My primary concern is that students from Appalachia struggle to embrace multiple identities since they attend an institution that dissuades students from including linguistic diversity in writing. These research questions emerged as a result of my concern:

- How do high school writing experiences influence how students feel about writing in college?

- How do students from Appalachia negotiate their identity in composition courses at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, by conforming to Standard American English conventions?
- Drawing on the results of this study, in what ways can programs and instructors encourage culture/non-academic identities in writing?

To answer my research questions, I designed an interview-based qualitative study which took place at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Each interview took place sometime between November 2023 and December 2023.

Participants

There were two targeted groups of students for this study: those who are first-year students who are currently taking English 101 or 102 and those who are no longer first-year students and have taken English 101 and 102. I recruited participants via email (See Appendix A) and in-person with the help of the ten colleagues in the English department who shared information about the study from my descriptive emails with their students (see Appendix B). Each email to students invited students to share their writing experiences in both high school and college English classes during an interview; there was also an explanation that the study sought to generate an understanding of how Appalachian students negotiate their personal identities within academic writing. Students who were interested in being part of the study emailed me to participate. Once I clarified that each student who reached out via email was eligible, they returned consent forms electronically. Seven students initially communicated their interest in participating in the study, but two of them were not eligible because they either did not meet the

requirement of being from the region or of having taken a first-year composition class at the university.

After recruitment efforts, participants were selected through homogenous and criterion sampling because they are all Appalachian students at the university who have taken English 101 or 102. Ultimately, five students agreed to participate in interviews for this study. After returning complete consent forms (see Appendix C) via email and finishing interviews, students received \$15 gift cards as compensation for their participation. For the sake of protecting participants' identities, all participants have pseudonyms. Brief backgrounds of participants are as follows:

1. Silas is a freshman studying psychology. He was born and raised in East Tennessee. He has completed only English 101 and is taking English 102 in the Spring 2024 semester.
2. Aria is a freshman studying elementary education. She was born and raised in East Tennessee. She has completed only English 101 and is taking English 102 in the Spring 2024 semester.
3. Daisy is a freshman studying kinesiology. She is from Western North Carolina. She has completed only English 101 and is taking English 102 in the Spring 2024 semester.
4. Dominic is a sophomore studying political science. He was born and raised in East Tennessee and has taken both English 101 and 102 at UTK.
5. Maeve is a senior studying audiology and speech pathology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She lived in North Carolina before moving to East Tennessee at the age of seven. She has taken both English 101 and 102 at UTK.

The study explores detailed responses of five students who were eligible to participate in interviews. Three of the participants are women and two are men—3 first-year students, 1 sophomore, and 1 senior. Two participants have majors within the College of Arts and Sciences

while 3 have majors within the College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences. Most students are from East Tennessee, but one student is from Western North Carolina. I conducted interviews with participants since I wanted to understand their different experiences with negotiating their identities in first-year composition writing.

These participants were specifically chosen for the study because they could contribute to a greater understanding of the necessary adjustment that Appalachian students make in their writing, and sometimes in social settings at a university that mostly adheres to Standard American English conventions. I recognize that not all experiences of Appalachian students are the same, which is why I did not focus on a more specific area of the region (e.g. strictly participants from East Tennessee) and instead explored various areas within the region. All participants of the study are considered traditional students because they enrolled at the university immediately following graduation from high school. Further, all participants are Caucasian, which is not representative of the multiple ethnicities and cultures that exist within the Appalachian region; it is essential that I recognize that there are many groups that make up Appalachia, but all the participants who responded to recruitment efforts have Caucasian identities and do not represent other populations within the region.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were utilized so I could ask follow-up questions when any responses could use further elaboration. I am specifically interested in their performance in first-year composition classes because feedback from and writing experiences in high school may affect how well or poorly these students adjust to an unfamiliar environment and college-level writing, depending on how much they feel the need to suppress their Appalachian identities. This

would be a direct result of ignoring linguistic diversity and penalizing diverse subject-verb concords that exist outside SAE conventions, since high school teachers' feedback may frequently explain that "the student's poor writing style indicated she/he did not take time (or perhaps even care enough) ... to revise the sentence structure, and so she/he deserves the poor grade" (Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010, p. 26). Each participant completed a one-time interview, and the interviews with students were separated into three sections: high school writing experiences, college writing experiences, and reflecting on overall writing experiences. The interviews focused on various kinds of writing experiences in an attempt determine the effect of high school writing feedback, the approach to negotiating personal identities in writing assignments, and the support felt within academia. Completing interviews with participants was an appropriate method of data collection for this study because participants' longer responses about their experiences contributes to a more thorough understanding of how Appalachian students may negotiate their identity in writing for their first-year composition classes and if this negotiation takes place in other areas of life aside from written assignments.

To gather answers about how the students' overall experiences with writing in relation to their identity, the interviews were long since there are only five participants and because there is only one interview per participant instead of multiple rounds of interviews; some participants took 45 minutes to give detailed answers while others took an hour or 75 minutes. Interviews were conducted primarily via Zoom, though one interview took place in the John C. Hodges Library, and another took place in the Humanities and Social Sciences building at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The participants responded to a series of questions that were predetermined (see Appendix D). None of the questions asked were closed-ended in an attempt to elicit thoughtful and more detailed responses from participants since open-ended questions

“will reveal information that the interviewee feels is important and relevant” (Siedlecki, 2022, p. 79). After interviewing participants, I transcribed each participant’s recorded interview to begin the data analysis process.

Though survey responses and email interviews could have been an option for this study, I chose to conduct interviews in real time. This approach allowed me to gather data that answered my research questions with more attention to detail whereas a different approach would not have yielded the same detailed responses. Within research methodology discussions, there is existing literature that critiques how much in-depth understanding can truly be acquired from interviews; such literature suggests that interviews are not as reliable as they could be because researchers are not able to fully understand a participant’s worldview and internal thoughts that inform the answers they give during interviews (Atkinson & Whitaker, 2019). This critique is essential because it highlights the lack of information that researchers may have about participants before interviewing them, but my study is not concerned with a deeper understanding of the participants’ psyches.

My study is concerned with how particular writing experiences influence other writing experiences, but it is not necessary to understand the psychology of my participants for this study. Further, an extension of this critique suggests that researchers should avoid claiming in-depth information emerged as a result of their qualitative interviews because “depth is treated as synonymous with the psychic or experiential depth understood to be derived from permitting a supposedly ‘authentic’ voice to speak” (Hughes et al., 2020, p. 592). It is crucial to recognize that I am not using ‘depth’ in a manner which illustrates a deep understanding of my participants’ psyche or lived experiences; I only suggest that the participants’ answers are considered to be in-

depth because the open-ended interview questions required them to offer answers that went beyond a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ for this specific research topic.

Data Analysis

I manually transcribed student interviews to maintain accuracy since I was doubtful of transcription services’ precision. After transcribing and ensuring the accuracy of interviews, I began the process of coding to determine major similarities and differences among the participants. My approach to coding included Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) constant comparative method, which is “concerned with generating and plausibly suggesting many categories, properties, and hypotheses about general problems... in the same study to any kind of qualitative information” (p. 104). I utilized deductive coding followed by inductive coding. Using the constant comparative method, I organized the data from all interviews around each of the three themes focused on in the interviews— high school writing, college writing, and overall writing feedback— in the first round of coding before narrowing down more specific codes as I recognized new themes in the data in following rounds of coding. While coding for these overall larger themes, subcategories of each code unsurprisingly emerged. I was able to determine fifteen different codes in total, thirteen of which are each related to the initial three major codes. Two surprising codes emerged throughout the analysis; aside from codes related to writing experiences and identity within writing, a new code about negotiation in everyday life emerged along with a new code about storytelling as a means of conveying thoughts. Because there are multiple codes, however, I narrowed down six succinct codes (see Table 3.1).

To determine these codes, I utilized fifteen different colors to manually color-code the transcribed interviews. To narrow down a smaller number of codes, I determined which codes

could be categorized together based on common answers. For example, I originally used a light yellow color to indicate general high school writing experiences and a dark green color to indicate feedback received from high school teachers on written assignments. Because the light yellow code did not explicitly indicate a quality related to the participants' high school writing experiences, I eliminated this code and kept only the dark green code because the participants' experience with feedback from high school teachers held a quality of being good or bad. Further, to narrow down the existing codes, I considered the weight that each code held. For example, the maroon code was representative of the effect that first-year composition has on participants' current writing; I eliminated this code because it only occurred once in each transcribed interview and did not contribute useful substance to the overall findings. On the other hand, I kept the black code related to the impact of grades because, even though this code mostly emerged in one participant's interview, it still emerged in all other interviews at least once; I determined that the black code was important to keep for the discussion of my overall findings because it contributes to a greater understanding of how grades alter students' perceptions of their academic performances. The point of explaining this process is to bring attention to the fact that this was a tedious process, and, as a result, the original fifteen codes do not remain in this study, which Table 3.1 indicates. After determining which codes to keep and eliminate, I finally narrowed down six final codes as defined in Table 3.1. Once I narrowed down codes, I revisited the transcribed interviews to ensure accuracy. I then manually counted the emergence of each code in each interview, as indicated in Table 3.2. Both tables can be viewed on the following page.

The frequency of codes is important because this allowed me to immediately review all the research data. The greatest challenge I faced during the data analysis process was narrowing

down codes since multiple codes overlapped with one another; however, most codes that overlapped frequently, like light yellow (high school writing experiences) and dark green (high school feedback), rarely overlapped with other codes which somewhat eased the difficulty of this process. Another example of narrowing down my codes was combining the original “Appalachian Preconceptions” code with the “Approach to Academic Writing” code because participants discussed their personal experiences with people who are not from Appalachia before explaining how they approach academic writing. I was able to reorganize my findings and address my research questions once I determined the final codes and each frequency. This was a crucial part of the research because this data elicited answers for the research questions that sought to understand the effects of high school writing in college, the negotiation that occurs when college students are writing academic papers, and the potential ways in which new writing assessment approaches may help linguistically diverse students.

Table 3.1: Codes

CODE	DESCRIPTION
High School Writing Experiences (dark green)	Participants describe how both positive and negative feedback on writing assignments in high school influenced self-perception; they also consider their previous levels of enjoyment with high school written assignments
Effects of High School Writing Experiences in College (royal blue)	Participants establish advantages and disadvantages about how high school writing experiences and teachers' feedback effects their performance with college-level writing
College Writing Experiences (gold)	Participants detail their levels of enjoyment with written assignments in college; they also suggest favorable self-perceptions and feelings of satisfaction after receiving positive feedback from instructors
Appalachian Preconceptions (red)	Participants express their negative experiences with people who are not from the Appalachian region and convey feelings of insufficiency in their social environment
Influence of grades (black)	Participants point toward a sense of accomplishment stemming from good grades rather than their writing skills
Appalachian Rhetoric (teal)	Participants indicate a desire to include storytelling and personal voice in more academic writing assignments

Table 3.2: Code Frequencies

CODE	FREQUENCY
High School Writing Experiences	63
Effects of High School Writing Experiences in College	18
College Writing Experiences	67
Appalachian Preconceptions	34
Influence of grades	18
Appalachian Rhetoric	13

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

In this chapter, I highlight central themes that emerged from semi-structured interviews with the participants and placed each theme under appropriate categories. The categories are as follows: High School Preparation for College-Level Writing, Negotiating Appalachian Identities in Composition Courses, and Writing Assessment Implications. Each category contains subcategories based on codes that emerged; each subcategory contains excerpts from student interviews. Overall, this research study shows that the population of Appalachian students have an overwhelmingly negative relationship with writing assessment feedback from high school teachers and a more positive relationship with feedback from first-year composition instructors. Most participants found that their high school English classes prepared them well for college-level writing; however, this preparation came with negative feedback on students' writing which encouraged students, though not explicitly, to adopt writing styles that essentially eliminated any trace of personal identities. With the data I have collected, this chapter is meant to answer the three research questions posed in the beginning of the study.

High School Preparation for College-Level Writing

As discussed in Chapter Two, the largest challenge of writing assessment is the standardized testing measures which are unable to determine a linguistically diverse student's "ability to learn" (Kelleghan, 2012, p. 4) as a result of a reinforced "unequal power relation" (Flowerdew & Wang, 2015, p. 90) that exists between the student and the academy. Following such measures has proven to be problematic. Because standardized tests are "non-locally designed assessments" that are not concerned with the "multiliteracies and different

competencies” of students (Ruecker, 2015, p. 8), students’ unique voices are eliminated from their writing in both high school and college. This study’s findings illustrate that students mostly experience written assignments in high school as a means of preparing them for standardized testing that comes at the end of the school year. These results from participants contribute a greater understanding of how Standard American English conventions are cemented in student writing, both in high school and college, as a consequence of adhering to standardized testing measures. Further, participants of this study commented that high school writing is primarily meant to prepare students for standardized tests, which resulted in receiving negative feedback from teachers which was “cold” or simply unhelpful. It is necessary to underscore this finding since negative feedback altered students’ self-perceptions in the process of training them to use SAE in their writing.

High School Writing Experiences

When participants answered questions about writing feedback received in high school, the answers given were grouped into two categories based on quality; Maeve and Silas had both positive and negative experiences with writing, while Aria, Daisy, and Dominic had overwhelmingly negative experiences. This subsection begins with positive experiences, followed by participants’ negative experiences. The definition of positive writing experiences comes from the data this study evoked; I define positive writing experiences as writing experiences that include positive feedback from teachers on written assignments which resulted in a boost in confidence or encouraged further learning for students. When Maeve was asked about the content of her teachers’ feedback in high school, she noted that, “most of the feedback was about grammar and spelling. Not necessarily what you were writing, but more of how you

were writing it.” This statement is neutral, but leads to her follow-up answer clarifying that this was a positive experience: “High school feedback was mainly really specific things that would help me when I was way younger, I think. Like, continuing to learn to write and continue to read and further learning to speak so the phonology of it [general writing skills] looks good.” These were the only answers from Maeve that suggested positive writing experiences in high school, which did not directly reference how teachers were assessing her writing or what the quality of overall feedback was. Silas directly mentioned the quality of feedback and how it directly affected his confidence: “In Honors English II, my teacher would do comments... Like, she just went through comments and that always helped. It helped me become more of a confident writer and not second guess myself, if that makes sense.” In comparison to Maeve, Silas’s positive writing experiences were directly related to how his teacher left feedback whereas Maeve’s positive writing experiences were related to how much she felt like she was learning. Maeve and Silas were the only two participants to indicate positive writing experiences, though they followed up their discussions of these experiences with comments about how their positive high school writing experiences pale in comparison to college feedback or about how their feedback from high school teachers could be occasionally negative.

Negative feedback from high school teachers on written assignments was one of the greatest themes that emerged from participant interviews. All of the participants agreed that feedback on written assignments in high school was often focused on SAE conventions such as proper grammar and wording with an objective writing style. In some instances, such as Silas’s, students had to write timed essays every day to prepare for the AP exam at the end of the school year. Silas suggested that “revisions helped a lot” during his high school writing process; however, he followed up this comment by adding that the revisions were a big part of the process

since he writes differently than he speaks: “When I’m speaking, normally I kind of just say everything that comes to my mind, and it can be a bad thing because I’m very informal.” Other participants shared this sentiment concerning negative feedback from teachers with Silas. This result suggests that such negative feedback contributes to a lack of confidence in student writing.

Student responses indicated that there were two kinds of negative feedback: futile feedback and harsh feedback. I first explore the former since this kind of feedback did not emerge as frequently as the latter. Futile feedback, in the context of this study, can be defined as any feedback from teachers on written assignments which students deemed unhelpful or pointless, ultimately contributing to negative feelings toward writing. Futile feedback was seen in most participants’ interviews, Dominic’s response details his experience with this kind of feedback when asked to describe feedback he received in high school:

Whenever you have a teacher in high school and you’re in their class every day, they’re kind of grading you with you in mind. And I wasn’t exactly the best student, so a lot of the times, I’d get feedback and they would mark up my papers with red pens. And it [a paper] would have question marks, and I’m like, “A question mark don’t help.” It don’t tell me what I did wrong... They [teachers] would mark up the papers and it would be super vague, and it doesn’t help at all. It just caused animosity toward the teacher, the class, the subject.

Meaningless feedback in high school was frequent among participants, not only Dominic. Such moments with futile feedback may indicate a lack of care, according to some participants. When asked how teachers approached leaving feedback on her writing, Daisy expressed that she thought her teachers did not fully care because of her continuous lack of understanding and because of the futile feedback. She explained this lack of care by referencing her experiences

with writing senior year: “I felt behind in my senior year class. There was no directions on how to write senior year. I had a friend in the class that just kind of helped me through it more than my teacher did.” To learn more about her experience, I followed up by asking what her teachers’ feedback on her writing looked on the rare occasions that she received it; her answer points to no feedback or futile feedback:

My senior year English high school teacher just didn’t do that [give feedback] and I still got an A. And in my junior year, my teacher didn’t really focus on grammar as much as she did on content. So, I was mentioning the content she wanted to see, and she would say ‘good job’ even if my sentences or writing itself could have been better.

It is important to note that, at a glance, Daisy’s experience may be considered positive because of the ‘good job’ comment; however, this comment was a result of her teacher giving futile feedback which is considered negative because this experience did not contribute to the betterment of her writing skills. On the other hand, there are some instances where both futile and harsh feedback overlapped.

In this study, harsh feedback is considered negative feedback from teachers on students’ written assignments that only focuses on what teachers considered to be wrong and offered no encouraging comments, which resulted in students feeling belittled. An example of futile and harsh feedback overlap can be seen in Aria’s response when asked about her teachers’ feedback on her writing in high school: “I feel like, in high school, it was more negative feedback... They’re just like, ‘Nope, that’s wrong. Figure out a way to fix that.’ They would just say, ‘Oh, this needs to be changed,’ but not tell me what to do to change it.” This negative experience falls under both the futile and harsh feedback categories because this feedback merely criticizes her work (harsh) then offers no solutions to help her improve her writing (futile). Similarly, Silas has

encountered a combination of both futile and harsh feedback from his teachers, noting, “I’ve had some teachers in high school that only base their feedback on what went wrong. If something was wrong, they just put an X with no feedback.” Based on participant responses, Aria and Silas’s comments about negative writing experiences, particularly harsh feedback, was something similar to what each participant, except for Maeve, commented on.

In terms of harsh feedback, Dominic stated that his teachers “were definitely looking for a lot of grammar issues” because he was “corrected on that a lot.” When I asked Dominic for clarification about what it meant to be corrected, he said it mostly looked like the teachers saying, “don’t do that,” before he began telling a story about negative feedback outside of high school. Further, Silas was exceptionally clear with how most teachers left their feedback on his writing: “High school feedback was just very cold, like they [teachers] did not actually care about anything. They were just doing that [giving feedback] because they had to.” There was no assumption that could be made about how this “cold” feedback made Silas feel because he was incredibly transparent with his emotions, asserting, “I never felt like I was actually seen before in high school... No one ever actually received a ‘good job’ or ‘keep it up.’” Comparably, Aria received harsh feedback in high school, recalling, “I remember all my high school teachers, every single one, especially the English teachers, would grade papers and be like, ‘Your English professors aren’t going to put up with this.’ They prepared us for such a hard, intense environment.” Though teachers prepare high school students for severe college-level writing through fear tactics, participants agreed that their writing experiences in college were better than their experiences in high school.

Effects of High School Writing Experiences in College

Participants expressed that they mostly did not enjoy writing in high school. After learning about how high school feedback was meant to prepare students for college-level writing, I asked questions which were meant to elicit response about college writing experiences in comparison to high school writing experiences to determine how high school feedback effected their writing in college. Their interview responses revealed mixed findings: the positive effect of high school feedback on college writing, the hinderance of high school feedback, and the encouragement of college feedback were common answers. Because of writing approaches taught in high school, two participants felt that writing in English college classes was somewhat difficult to adjust to. Dominic mentioned the infamous five-paragraph rule, in his response to my question about how high school feedback influenced his writing in first-year composition and other writing-intensive classes: “I always knew I wouldn’t use that [five-paragraph rule] in writing college because, Lord, most of my papers are, like, five pages. I don’t know if it [five-paragraph rule] set me back, but it definitely stunted me a little bit.” On the other hand, Silas felt like his high school writing experiences did not “stunt” his growth as a writer, which he credits to the only teacher he positively spoke about in his interview: “My AP English teacher really is one of the biggest reasons that I am such an okay writer, like I’m decent, not an author or anything. But I know I can write a good paper now because of her.”

Students mostly pointed toward better experiences with college feedback when thinking about how high school feedback influenced their college writing. Silas is the only participant who felt somewhat negatively about his writing experiences in college in comparison to his high school writing experiences:

In college, I honestly kind of feel a little like my full potential is being cut off almost. I'm a person who loves to write. In high school I never had the challenge of not going over a word limit. Now if there's an essay that has, let's say, a 1300-word limit, I could easily say 2,600 words if I wanted to. It's kind of hard to get my thoughts out in a limited amount of words."

This negativity is a result of high school teachers who did not encourage a limited number of words used in written assignments and instead encouraged longer writing. No other participants indicated a negative feeling about college writing experiences in comparison to high school writing experiences. Maeve also noted positive writing experiences in high school, stating, "I think my brain is just jumbled sometimes. So sometimes I take it back a step like, 'Let's remember what Mr. So-And-So said in high school.'" The majority of participants indicated that their high school writing experiences pale in comparison to their college writing experiences.

Aria was explicit in how her writing experiences in both high school and college impacted her confidence: "I don't really like to write. Not at all. In high school I was wrong. But now [in FYC], I've always got pretty good feedback, so I feel like personally I'm a good writer." Daisy and Maeve answered similarly to Aria, though they offered more detailed responses. Maeve attributed her confidence in writing during college to her reading and storytelling abilities rather than her high school feedback:

When I was in high school, I was not ever really the best at writing, and I don't know why because I love to read. But I wasn't a writer, I just wasn't... After reading more in college, I feel like my lexicon has gotten a lot bigger. I think when you read more, you're reading someone's writing and so it's easier to grasp more things even if it's the silliest book ever. So, I can be good at writing something now because I can take that storytelling

ability the other people have, and like feed off of it. And it's giving me a better way to write myself.

It's important to note that, when asked about how high school feedback impacted her success as a college writer now, Daisy did not reference high school feedback. She, on the other hand, specifically mentioned how her high school writing experiences have not helped her at this point in her higher education:

Writing has always been a challenge for me, just because I don't like reading and I don't like English. But more recently it's definitely gotten a lot easier because of my past experiences... High school feedback hasn't really helped, but I feel like college feedback alone has made me a stronger writer and more willing to learn more because of how positive the instructor is when my writing isn't considered 'all there.'

Each participant had different relationships with high school feedback, though most participants indicated a mostly negative relationship with high school feedback or a positive relationship with college writing experiences in comparison to high school experiences. Because of this, it is crucial to explore only college feedback's effects on the participants' self-perception. Because the study is interested in how Appalachian students negotiate their identities in writing, the following section explores college feedback and identities within college writing.

Negotiating Appalachian Identities in Composition Courses

The primary purpose of this study is to understand how Appalachian students negotiate personal and academic identities in their first-year composition writing assignments. This section first examines a general idea of how participants perceive feedback from FYC instructors, and if the negotiating of identities in writing is a result of feedback or if there is no relationship. Aside

from feedback from FYC instructors, this section examines experiences with Appalachian preconceptions that students have endured as well as their techniques as they approach their writing with the skills they have learned from both high school and college feedback.

College Writing Experiences

All participants expressed that feedback from college instructors can be considered as more positive feedback, especially in comparison to feedback from their high school teachers. With each discussion about positive feedback in college writing assignments, participants indicated a boost in confidence, an effect of feedback which was rarely seen in their responses about high school. Subthemes emerged as a result of participant responses. Participant responses pointed toward paper topic interests, peer review, professors' encouragement, and a better understanding of writing expectations when describing their positive experiences in FYC; however, I cannot fully separate these answers based on subthemes because there is a significant amount of overlap in participants' responses. Dominic was the sole participant who did not compare his high school feedback to his college feedback and merely expressed his excitement about receiving feedback, remarking that college feedback is not "judgy or hateful" before expressing that "getting feedback is like Christmas Day" because feedback in college is like "a little present." Aside from Dominic, other participants referenced their high school experiences to better convey how their experiences with writing and feedback in college was more positive than in high school.

Silas began discussing his experiences in FYC by comparing his most recent feedback to the feedback he received in high school, explaining the contrast between his two different experiences with feedback:

The feedback I've gotten in 101... I feel like the younger instructors can sympathize with students more. Freshman year is tough, and this instructor is more understanding and lenient, so the feedback is not too harsh but still very educational, and obviously there is some critiquing, but the tone isn't just like, 'this is trash' like high school teachers did. Echoing this sentiment, Daisy compared her feelings about high school and college experiences to highlight how these experiences influence the extent of her desire to attend classes:

I honestly feel like I've done pretty well in English 101 and that I can continue to do better in my writing... The teacher is very welcoming and relaxed but still expects work to be done from us. But it's never like I'm on my own and I have to figure things out myself like I did in high school. It's overall structured way better. I feel like I had a mentality in high school that I was there because I had to be, you know? But it didn't feel that way in 101.

When I asked her to clarify what she meant by "it didn't feel that way in 101," Daisy offered the following answer about how her FYC instructor's positive feedback influenced her to feel more excited about attending college classes compared to high school classes:

I feel like college feedback alone has made me a stronger writer and more willing to learn because of how positive the instructor is when my writing isn't all there. It's been great when I get 'just try to work with this' or 'add this' or 'explain this more.' It makes me want to do better because I feel like I'm doing well already. I feel like if I had my college teacher in high school, freshman year or even for AP English senior year, it would have been completely different, and I would have been a lot more confident coming to college for sure.

Based on the results of this study, participants feel more confident as a result of their positive college writing experiences in comparison to their mostly negative high school writing experiences. This is further indicated in participant responses which explicitly reference positive feedback from FYC instructors.

FYC instructors' positivity is one of the largest subthemes that has emerged from participant responses about their feedback from writing assignments. Not only did all participants express that their FYC instructors were encouraging, but they also indicated that they felt more confident as writers because of that positive feedback. Like Daisy's previous comment about feeling confident, Silas noted that, "the encouraging comments in 101 now and the fact my professor thinks I'm a good writer makes me feel seen." I reminded Silas that he had said he did not "feel seen" in high school, and I asked him to clarify what he meant by that statement since this was his second time using this phrase. He responded by explaining that "feeling seen" means receiving some praise from teachers, and "feeling seen" helps with his confidence:

My 101 professor actually shows and displays that they actually care a little bit, or at least show some encouragement. I feel like the encouragement that is given [in English 101] just makes me more confident as a writer and makes me want to push myself more. So, I wouldn't say it's just the feedback for a specific assignment that helps but instead the content of the feedback that's reflected. Just the encouragement I've seen so far helps. Similarly, Aria matched Silas and Daisy's point of view about confidence, stating, "I try harder in college because I feel like these papers matter. Here, I'm headstrong." This feeling of confidence not only comes with the encouragement from FYC instructors but also how they structure the class to be beneficial for students.

Participants elaborated on how they had positive writing experiences in college when instructors had given them the freedom to choose a paper topic they are interested in; participants also noted the positive effect that peer review has on their writing skills and confidence. Daisy embodied both of these subthemes in her response about how she feels about her most recent writing assignment: “I feel pretty good about it [the current writing assignment], especially after peer review then having the teacher review it. It definitely makes me feel so much better... I felt confident in what I was saying.” Aria had an almost-identical response to Daisy’s, stating, “I feel good about my work in this class, probably because all my feedback was pretty good. I mean, there was obviously mistakes, but feedback from the teacher and my classmates was good.”

Aside from peer review, participants also referenced how their interest in paper topics contributed to a greater feeling of satisfaction and confidence. Silas specified that he enjoys writing about topics that are interesting to him in classes outside of his specialized interests, especially his college major: “I like being able to use psychology in my writing for this [most recent] paper because that’s what interests me about social media. Social media and psychology, I like both of them, so writing about that makes me feel more confident.” While Silas enjoyed writing about topics he enjoys in general, Dominic pointed out that he specifically enjoys argumentative writing about topics he enjoys; he pointed out that his first year at the university was crucial in his persuasive writing skills, remembering, “I think learning about the study of rhetoric itself kind of taught me a little more about persuasive writing... It was more research reading, but I enjoyed most of them because it was the argumentative essays.” When asked to elaborate on how he feels about his writing now in comparison to his time in his FYC classes, Dominic conveyed great positivity about the development of his persuasive writing:

I'm very satisfied with my writing now. Whenever it is something that you're very fascinated by, it's going to be something that you talk to people about, people that are around you. But now after doing all that research, I can't just say, 'oh, something is stupid.' I have evidence that it's stupid so I can back up my opinion. And if I were ever to get into an argument about it, or if somebody agreed with me but they were curious, I could educate them about it and that is very satisfying to me.

Likewise, Maeve described her excitement about writing about topics that she is personally interested in; her response also overlapped with the subtheme of positive feedback from instructors:

He [101 instructor] would go in and put, like, paragraphs of feedback. I can remember one time he called me out for my rough drafts being too similar to my final paper. He told me I did an awesome job, but rough drafts are supposed to be different than the final draft to show the progress that I've made. Maybe for my rough draft I was just really excited about the topic and that's why my final paper wasn't that different.

Though Maeve referenced paragraphs of feedback, this experience was positive for her because this answer emerged after she discussed her experiences with more "meaningful" feedback in her English 101 class. Her discussion about feedback in FYC only included positive experiences:

It was never anything like, "This needs to be better," but maybe, "You'd say this in a different way." But I wasn't marked off for this... It was more meaningful feedback, I guess, compared to high school. He [101 instructor] was reading my paper to read it, not just to correct every little mistake on it. He was reading it to understand what I was writing about and how I could write clearer.

Maeve's explanation of what positive feedback from her FYC instructor was not rare. Daisy's response almost completely mirrored Maeve's, explaining, "The college English feedback [from instructors] has been pretty positive. Like saying 'do this instead,' but it's never like 'you're wrong,' never harsh. And, so, it's easier to take that feedback and actually listen to, it if that makes sense."

The findings of this study point toward more negative writing experiences in high school compared to writing experiences in college. Moreover, participants indicated more feelings of confidence as a result of college feedback and did not indicate as much confidence as a result of high school feedback. Along with discussions about how feedback affects confidence, participants also voiced their thoughts about other feelings. For example, Silas said, "If I did not have the good English teacher that I did have in high school, I would be a terrible writer, and I feel like a lot of Appalachian students didn't really have the luxury of having such. I feel like the fact that our high school had good English teachers makes me not take that for granted." Silas attributed his positive experiences with writing in high school to having a good teacher and recognized that other Appalachian students may not be as fortunate as he. In what follows, a more detailed discussion about Appalachian preconceptions is explored.

The Effect of Appalachian Preconceptions on Writing Approaches

This subsection explores participants' responses about their experiences with people who are not from the Appalachian region and how academic writing is affected because of preconceptions. Part III of the interviews (Appendix D) included questions about Appalachian identity in relation to the participants' writing experiences. I intend to explore participants' responses about their Appalachian identities as a means of determining if, and how, there is any

relationship that exists between negative personal experiences with identity related to writing experiences; however, this discussion of a relationship will not occur until Chapter 5.

Participants expressed feelings of being misunderstood by peers; however, the concept explores the responses from three participants because only Aria, Dominic, and Daisy shared their personal experiences with identity. Silas and Maeve's answers mostly pointed toward how their personal experiences with identity effects their writing experiences. It is impossible to fully separate the two concepts within the subsection because there is a lot of overlap in participant responses.

When answering the question about how she navigates maintaining an Appalachian identity in her writing, Daisy offered an answer about her social experiences at the university before leading up to her definite answer about writing; her answer pointed out the apparent differences in social classes at the university, though she was distraught when thinking about her answer. Daisy, though not fully articulating her final thought, pointed out that the norm at the university is to ignore differences instead of address them:

I'm thinking about how I fit in here since my high school didn't have good English teachers really. I don't know if it's a Tennessee thing or a UT thing because UT is such a big school, but I feel like I have seen a lot of people with privilege, and I've also seen people with next to nothing. People with scholarships are working so hard. My high school, at least in North Carolina, was the most diverse school ever—multimillion dollar homes to homelessness, it was the full range. And it seems to be the same thing here, too, but people ignore it. In the grand scheme of things... I don't know what to say.

After her discussion about the different social classes at the university, Daisy went on to answer that her personal identities are not found in her writing because "I consider my personal identity

to be different from my academic identity.” When I asked how she considers her identities to be different, she responded by saying that “I try to sound like I’m educated now [in writing].” This is similar to other participants—Aria, Dominic, and Silas. Upon request for further elaboration, Daisy told me what she thought it meant to “sound educated,” noting the differences in feedback from high school teachers and FYC instructors:

My writing in AP classes was not supposed to be in first person. It [writing] was supposed to be purely research-based. I’ve definitely felt more comfortable saying the word “I” in college writing because certain assignments definitely call for my opinion, especially in persuasive essays when you really need to connect with your audience. So, now I’m allowed to say, ‘I would do this’ or ‘you should do this’ along with research. If I sound educated then my audience will listen more to what I’m saying, so that’s like giving research and my opinion with more professional words.

Daisy’s responses are an example of an overlap between both subthemes, Appalachian perceptions and the effects of those perceptions in her writing as a result of feedback. This means that her identities are affected by these factors. Daisy’s responses illustrate that she holds a social identity, personal identity, and academic identity; this illustration is seen from Aria, Dominic, and Silas, too.

Like Daisy, Aria first began discussing her identity within her writing by referencing her social experiences. Aria discussed more direct and negative social interactions with people who were not from the region compared to Daisy who shared observations about the dismissal of social class differences. Aria shared a recent personal experience while also talking about her writing:

I feel like it doesn't matter how you're talking to someone, unless it's someone of authority, then maybe I'll talk proper. But papers are more formal. I'm not going to correct my grammar in every single sentence I speak to someone. But like when I write papers, it doesn't sound like me. Coming to school here, everyone's like, "Are you from here?" and I'm like, "yeah, how do you know that?" They say, "I can tell because of your accent." But if I wrote them a paper, they would not be able to tell. But someone told me I sounded like cornbread the other day. And I just said, "Oh."

Aria further discussed how she feels about how her voice sounds compared to her writing, but when discussing, she began to hesitate: "I'm smarter on paper. I try to not sound like cornbread because I've been told... No, never mind, I feel like my answers are stupid." I responded by telling Aria that her answers were good, then asked if she wanted to continue elaborating; she did not want to keep recalling her negative experience, so we moved on to a new discussion about how she negotiates her Appalachian identity in her writing. Like Daisy, Arai's responses pointed to feedback that she received which influenced her approach to adjusting how she writes:

When I would get feedback in high school, she [the teacher] would say, 'Oh, don't use that [wording]. That sounds too personal.' But if it's an argumentative essay, you want your argument to be strong. So, sometimes, I would have to bring my personal identity in to make my argument stronger. If I approached a paper right now, since I've felt better in college, I would do a mixture and be personal and professional at the same time.

Like Aria, Dominic discussed his personal experiences with people who are not from the Appalachian region while thinking about how he negotiates his Appalachian identity in his writing. When thinking about his Appalachian identity in relation to writing, Dominic's short answer about his approach to negotiating his identity in writing got straight to the point: "I have

to completely switch it up.” When I asked Dominic to explain what he means by “switch it up,” he expressed that he switches his identities based on the context in which he is operating. To fully explain what he meant, he began recalling personal stories to help me fully understand his reasoning behind his responses. He began by offering a general statement about his overall experiences with people who are not from Appalachia: “A lot of the times, you go out of the region and people think you're stupid because of the way you talk. It can't be further from the truth... People from out of state don't understand.” I asked Dominic to describe what he meant by this statement, particularly about what he thought out-of-state people did not understand. He gave a detailed answer which examined his Appalachian background and how he must adjust the way he speaks depending on who he is conversing with:

There's a lot of words or phrases that I say that aren't grammatically correct or phonetically correct or anything like that, but that's how it is in my head because that's how I learned it, and that's how I've been raised to say it just for years. I mean, everybody has their own pronunciations of things, but yeah, I had to be a little bit more professional. So, I don't turn the accent off. I just be a little more precise and enunciate a little more and don't say things that aren't really grammatically correct. So, it really depends on the audience of how to switch up kind of.

Dominic offered even more details about his personal experiences when he was adjusting to the university. He had to learn to navigate the perceptions of others and his Appalachian identity:

Freshman year, I would try to dial down my accent a little bit because everybody always comments on it. Freshman year was just such a culture shock because me and my dad's from near Knoxville, so I don't know why y'all think I'm some alien. My male peers, a lot of the time, hear my accent and think, “Oh, this guy's dumb,” and won't hold their tongues

about it. A lot of people, right off the cuff, say, “Oh you’re a hick,” “Oh, you’re a redneck,” “Oh, you’re a hillbilly.” And I’m like... “You don’t even know me.” It started getting to me less and less eventually.

Once he finished explaining his personal experiences, Dominic noted that his Appalachian identity is not separate from his writing, like Aria, when he writes argumentative essays: “I think it’s inevitable that my Appalachian identity shows through some when I’m writing, but a lot of that just depends on what I am writing about... Any kind of opinion writing or argument writing, a lot of the times, it [Appalachian identity] does show through.” He went on to explain the differences in his writing styles depending on genre, noting that his Appalachian identity is more apparent in some genres when compared to others:

I had to write a paper for Classics the other day and it was a film review talking about ancient literature. Nothing about Appalachian identity ever came to mind. I was just solely focused on that stuff [ancient literature]. But I would definitely say that, in rhetorical assignments—argumentative, persuasive, narrative— they have the Appalachian identity behind it... But, yeah, in papers like the one I just did [for Classics], I try to keep my opinions out of it. But my writing style definitely stems from the way I was raised and where I was raised and stuff like that.

Dominic discussed his approach to academic writing by sharing personal stories during his interview about his Appalachian background; no other participant shared as many stories as Dominic did. In contrast, Maeve and Silas did not share personal stories, but they still described how they approach academic writing when asked about negotiating their Appalachian identities in their writing.

Silas explained that he rarely thinks about his Appalachian identity in his writing because feedback on his writing has trained him to omit his personality from his writing:

It's a subconscious thing, I guess, because whenever I'm writing, I don't really think about who I am as a person or my identity outside of writing. I just kind of get into a mode, and in that mode, I'm a different person. It sounds so complex, but most of the time I just pick up my pencil and just start writing what I'm thinking about the material without the consideration of my own experiences. It's more just about completing the assignment mostly... As far as the Appalachian identity, I don't worry about including that in my writing because that writing mode just kind of gets rid of it when I write because of conditioning—I guess conditioning is a good word for that.

Silas's experience of not thinking about his personal identity within his academic writing is not a rare experience when compared to other participants' responses, as indicated by previous discussions. Maeve spoke about her identity only in terms of writing like Silas, but instead of only discussing how she does not think about her identity in her writing, she distinctively clarified how her writing is tailored to her instructors. Though Maeve did not explicitly discuss how her identity is "conditioned" out of her like Silas, she briefly mentioned feedback before explaining how she merely focuses on writing in a way that each of her teachers would like:

I got feedback that was something like "You're not writing professionally enough."

Adjusting is hard but it's just something I have to do. I have to put myself in professors' shoes and just think about what they want and how they want me to sound even though it's me writing. I just have to think about "This is for a grade." And they want me to be able to write in a way that the professional world is going to quote unquote want, even if

that's not what general people would want these days. I think most people really just like personal writing, but the professors want something different.

Instead of focusing on her identity in her writing to answer the posed question, Maeve was more focused on the grade she received from instructors. Along with Maeve, three other participants partially directed their attention to the influence that grades have on their writing; Maeve is the only person who answered a question about identity with a discussion about the influence of grades, but the other participants, excluding Silas, referenced the influence of grades while answering various questions throughout the interviews.

Writing Assessment Implications

This section of the chapter intends to reveal participants' experiences with both grades and storytelling—two themes which may offer implications for a change within writing assessment measures. Four out of five participants communicated that they were concerned about the grades they receive on written assignments. Multiple answers related to grades emerged throughout the interviews; participants demonstrated that high grades increase confidence and are usually the outcome of understanding of what professors want to see in student writing, as Maeve expressed in the previous section. When discussing the influence of grades on participants' writing, some participants again referenced writing about topics they were interested in; based on responses, participants feel more confident when writing about a topic they are interested in because this interest encourages them to produce better writing and, in turn, receive higher grades from instructors.

As a reminder from previous sections, participants revealed that they mostly only use their personal identities in genres such as narratives and persuasive essays. Participants agreed

that storytelling as part of their writing is beneficial because their personal identities are allowed to be present in their academic writing. Utilizing storytelling in writing would be specifically beneficial for Appalachian students since Appalachian identities include storytelling as a means of establishing exigence and conveying thoughts. As defined in Chapter Two, storytelling is a major component of the nuanced definition of Appalachian Rhetoric—a crucial part of participants’ identities since this is part of a larger Appalachian English. Since participants pointed toward feeling more enjoyment with writing when storytelling, necessary alternative writing assessment measures as discussed in Chapter Two may include storytelling within academic writing.

Influence of Grades

Aside from feelings of confidence previously described, participants associated writing experiences in both high school and college with the grade they receive for their work. Only two participants referenced their high school writing experiences when discussing the influence that grades have on their self-perceptions. First, Daisy referenced the influence of grades on her writing, though her answer overlaps with her response about lack of feedback in high school: “I just didn’t get a lot of feedback in high school, at least senior year. So, I was either like, ‘I don’t know why I got this grade’ or ‘thank God I got this grade.’” Similarly, Silas noted that he felt like his good quality of work was not reflected in his grades, which clearly bothered him as he voiced, “At first, I thought my AP teacher was biased because she didn’t really like... I felt like I was putting in a lot of work, but my grades didn’t really reflect that.”

On the flip side, participants demonstrated confidence in college writing assignments when they wrote about topics they enjoyed; all participants suggested that they expected higher

grades on written assignments which they genuinely enjoyed completing. Dominic best describes his experience, which all other participants aside from Maeve related to: “If it [a paper topic] was something I was interested in or fascinated by, I was able to write a lot more fluently about it, and then obviously get a better grade. But you know, internally, I think, it’s more satisfying to finish something that you wanted to do.” When participants were not thinking about grades in relation to writing they enjoy, they mostly thought about how to adjust their writing only to get better grades—not because they cared about their writing. Daisy’s answers portrayed this attitude as she expressed that, “I think my writing was easy to digest, but it wasn’t something that I would necessarily submit for some other academics to read because I was just doing it to get a good grade.”

Maeve and Aria related to Daisy’s writing mindset. Maeve referenced the importance she placed on grades when she discussed how negotiates her personal identities in her academic writing, as stated in the previous section; to her, writing is not about her identity but rather about thinking about “what they [professors] want and how they want me to sound even though it’s me writing” because she always reminds herself that “this is for a grade.” She further elaborated on her approach to writing within the same genres she has already written in before—an approach that only focuses on her grade instead of her actual writing:

When I was doing something that was similar to a paper I had already written about, I would be like, “Okay, yeah, I can do this. I can get an even higher grade on this new one [new paper of similar genre].” Even if it wasn’t something similar, I still looked at it the same way because I wanted a good grade on everything.

The other four participants’ responses about writing about topics they enjoy conveyed a boost in confidence, whereas Maeve did not indicate feelings of confidence related to choosing her

writing topics. Aria somewhat related to Maeve's comments about grades, but the grades she got reflected how she felt about herself: "It [feelings about writing] depended on what the grade I got back was. If I got a good grade and I know that I done good on something, I felt more confident in my writing." When I asked Aria to think about her confidence without the grade attached to it, she said, "I guess I'm a good writer. I mean, I just follow the rubric like a map." Even when I suggested that she remove the concept of grades from her writing, Aria still referenced rubrics related to grading.

Appalachian Rhetoric

As defined in Chapter Two, Appalachian English is the language that individuals from the region utilize when speaking, which includes components such as the Appalachian Drawl and Appalachian Rhetoric—components which contribute to personal identities. Within Appalachian English, Appalachian Rhetoric primarily appears in the language as storytelling (Hayes, 2018). In their interviews, four out of the five participants pointed toward enjoying the concept of storytelling as a means of communicating their thoughts in their writing; Silas is the only participant who did not mention storytelling. Participants stated that they are not frequently encouraged to utilize storytelling in academic writing because storytelling is typically reserved for narrative papers or argumentative assignments. Current implications point toward students' desire to include Appalachian Rhetoric in other genres, but students are mostly restricted from doing so. Some courses have adopted alternative writing assessment measures to encourage linguistic diversity in writing, but the majority of classes should follow suit to effect real change.

Aria offered that her ideal approach to academic writing in general would be to "mesh my different identities in my writing so I can tell a story, almost, and appeal to whatever audience,

and give ideas and research.” She revealed that she does not feel totally comfortable doing this because she has been told that her writing “sounds too personal.” Daisy related to Aria’s struggle with not writing exactly how she wants to because she “only learned to use third person [writing],” which she suggested hinders her writing because “the point’s not getting there” in her impersonal writing. She further explained that telling a story in writing is a good way to develop a connection with her audience because “there isn’t really a topic that shouldn’t be personal” since, according to her, “academic papers can still have opinions with the logic and statistics.” Comparably to Daisy’s response, Dominic claimed that most of his academic writing has been research papers which require him to “keep it a little more factual,” but even so, he said that “it’d be a lot easier to tell a story” in his research papers, even if that means including only a short personal anecdote.

Maeve did not specifically suggest that academic writing should include storytelling, but she did express that her confidence in writing came from her storytelling abilities as discussed earlier in this chapter. During the final question of her interview, when I asked her if she had any final thoughts to share, Maeve expressed that she misses writing now that she is not currently enrolled in writing-intensive classes. She mentioned her focus on grades in her response about the absence of writing in her life now:

I love telling stories, and it’s kind of sad to see how I went from doing this because I wanted to, but now I only had to for a grade. And even for a grade, I still just had to think about what the professors wanted out of my writing instead of what I wanted. My friends tell me I’m a really good storyteller, so it could be interesting to write a paper again if I’m not so focused on the grade.

A relationship between the focus on grades and the omission of personal identity in writing seems to exist, which is why both themes are grouped under the section for alternative writing assessment measures. Current measures place too much emphasis on grades, which does not encourage students to think critically about their writing practices; alternative measures could focus more on identities in writing instead of grades, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses overall findings related to identity negotiation and writing assessment implications. The purpose of this study was to answer the initial research questions concerned with how Appalachian students adjust to college-level writing after high school, how students negotiate their Appalachian identities in academic writing, and how understanding writing assessment implications can encourage linguistic diversity in writing. Participants ultimately suggested that the feedback received on college writing assignments was encouraging and, overall, more positive compared to feedback received in high school. Negative feedback on high school writing assignments encouraged participants to omit personal identities and precisely follow SAE conventions; this helped students feel prepared for college-level writing since most college writing assignments also do not include personal voices and typically adhere to SAE conventions. Although participants felt prepared for college-level writing, there is an issue with the extent to which students must only utilize academic identities in their writing. This study shows that students maintain multiple identities at any given time, but academia only seems to value academic identities; in turn, participants expressed that they dilute their Appalachian identities in general because of negative academic and social experiences. The following subsections offer a greater discussion about the participants' identities in relation to current literature and how current writing assessment implications may pave the way for the acceptance of more linguistic diversity in written assignments.

Identity Theory

Findings from this study confirm that identity is multifaceted and everchanging, and Appalachian students know which identities to bring to the forefront in particular contexts. This aligns with Norton's (2013) definition of identity, as discussed in Chapter Two, because students know how to negotiate their identities since each person "understands his or her relationship to the world" (p. 45). Though Appalachian students in this study learned to negotiate their identities, this negotiation was taken to extreme measures as a result of negative personal and academic experiences at the university; part of this negotiation included an attempt at entirely suppressing the Appalachian identity to avoid ridicule from peers who are not from the region. "Sociohistorical forces" that define academic expectations—Standard American English—encourage inauthenticity (Starfield, 2015, p. 250) and contribute to negative experiences (Dunstan & Jaegar, 2016) since Appalachian students have a nonstandard English dialect. This is a particularly important issue to examine because Appalachian students continue to face a battle of power in academia after facing power battles within their region. Students went from a region which is overlooked to a new environment where they frequently feel overlooked unless they suppress their Appalachian identities.

As Schumann and Fletcher (2016) noted in *Appalachia Revisited*, there is an insufficient understanding of the region which can be partially attributed to imperfect methods to studying the region; this study sought to explore the experiences of Appalachian students at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, who were adjusting to writing in a new environment rather than attempting to place an all-encompassing label on the region, as previous research has done. Each participant expressed unique experiences, though there were many similarities between their responses. Overall, participants' responses confirmed Shapiro's (1978) discussion of Appalachia

being considered as “in but not of America” forty years after publication. When asked how they negotiate their identities in writing, three of the five participants recalled personal experiences; two of the participants specifically discussed negative interactions with peers who are not from the region. The experiences from both Aria and Dominic, wherein they referenced being called “cornbread” or a “hick,” proved Shapiro’s (1978) concept to be true since people who are not from the region resorted to name-calling to distance themselves from the Appalachian participants; both groups of people are geographically part of America, but the Appalachian participants demonstrated a lack of social acceptance. This is an issue because Appalachian students are adjusting to a university in which their personal identities are not fully accepted socially or academically.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, sense of belonging theory furthers the concept that students need to feel cared about in their new environments both academically and socially; however, four of the five participants likely cannot fathom true acceptance in a place where their language is dismissed. All participants expressed that their academic identities and Appalachian identities were separate, which confirms suggestions from identity theory literature about every person maintaining multiple identities (Norton, 2013). I do not argue that individuals do not have multiple identities, but I do suggest that there is an issue with the power imbalance that exists in academia which influences students to value their academic identities more than their personal identities; this concept is seen in literature (Starfield, 2015) and in four of the five participants’ interviews. For students to feel valued and cared for in their environments, people within those environments must be welcoming and accepting of diversity. Because participants had negative social and academic experiences in their new college environment, they felt the need to suppress their Appalachian identities to fit in. Merely suppressing a personal identity does not allow a

person to truly belong since there is a lack of authenticity. The separation of Appalachian and academic identities that participants pointed to does not mean that one identity is ever entirely erased, but rather this approach is an extreme negotiation as a result of negative experiences. To fully experience a sense of belonging, each Appalachian student should feel encouraged by peers to be “authentically oneself, flaws and all” since “true belonging is not about fitting in” (Strayhorn, 2018, p. 9).

Part of maintaining an Appalachian identity means speaking Appalachian English, which entails Appalachian Rhetoric. It is important to understand that Appalachian Rhetoric, defined as “storytelling” by Hayes (2018), is a large part of an Appalachian person’s identity since storytelling is how we convey ideas and express ourselves; rhetoric is not merely “the art of persuasion,” even if this is the popular definition (Farris, 2003). Participants never explicitly mentioned the phrase “Appalachian Rhetoric” because I never specifically asked a question about it, but all answers about storytelling are considered to be Appalachian Rhetoric since that is how the concept is defined. Four of the five participants signified feelings of enjoyment when storytelling and offered that they would better be able to achieve any rhetorical purpose of a given paper if given the opportunity to utilize Appalachian Rhetoric in their writing. Based on their answers, participants feel as though they could more effectively persuade, inform, or suggest ideas in writing if current standards at the university allowed more room for students to write in a manner that is natural to them rather than a manner that is expected of them.

Writing Assessment Implications

Davies (2012) brought attention to the omission of personal identities from writing by discussing the encouragement of writing in third person and avoiding the first-person “I.”

Writing in first person indicates the author is a person who maintains an identity, but this is not encouraged in academic writing since there are traditional ways that students write academic papers (Patriotta, 2017). Participants disclosed that they feel “more comfortable” writing in first person in their FYC courses, but this does not come naturally to some, namely Silas, since high school English courses teach students to not use “I” in writing; Aria, too, demonstrated a difficult time transitioning to writing in first person in college since some of her high school teachers had told her that her writing is “too personal.” If students cannot present their personal identities in their writing, how is their writing truly considered an extension of the writer if the language is not authentic? Appalachian students may be set up for failure in writing-intensive courses since high school feedback discourages first-person writing when some college courses require personal writing. Because of this, a large issue exists: colleges allow first-person writing—which students are not prepared for—and accept this form of personal identity in some writing assignments, but they simultaneously reject the concept of Appalachian Rhetoric in most written assignments since storytelling in writing does not uphold the “sociohistorical forces” of academia (Starfield, 2015) and, ultimately, pushes back against the power imbalance that exists between the academy and the students (Flowerdew & Wang, 2015).

By not allowing students to include their personal identities in their writing, the academy is inadvertently penalizing students for their personal backgrounds and ways of speaking which do not follow Standard American English conventions; students are expected to adjust to SAE conventions in their writing, but this means that they are stripped from their unique rhetoric since it does not fit the mold of Standard American English (Amos, 2019, p. 1). The heavy reliance on SAE is an issue in academia because the reinforcement of power relations negatively impacts students’ experiences (Flowerdew & Wang, 2015). When asked about negotiating their

Appalachian identity in writing, two of the participants could not finish their entire thought as a result of exasperation. One participant, Aria, even went on to suggest that her answers about her experiences during the interview were “stupid,” and even after offering words of encouragement, her demeanor quickly shifted, and she began answering the questions more quickly and with less detail afterward. As students adjust to SAE conventions in their writing and are told by teachers to sound “more professional” in their writing in order to adhere to such conventions, their authentic voice is lost since they are expected to maintain their role in the power dynamic which confirms that “language and culture do not exist in neutral relationships but are almost always structured asymmetrically with respect to power” (Masedo, 1994, as cited in Mitchell, 2015, p. 4). Students who are mocked by peers for their use of Appalachian English in a new environment at the university should at least feel some sense of freedom to explore their Appalachian Rhetoric in their writing, but four of the participants in this study revealed that they do not feel accepted socially or academically at the university.

SAE conventions have caused students to entirely separate their academic identities from their personal identities, even though both identities can exist at the same time. This is seen in all participants’ answers, but Aria highlighted the issue when she claimed that she “sounds smarter on paper” and, because of interactions with her peers, she tries to “not sound like cornbread.” Students should not worry about separating identities in their writing because the writing is meant to be an extension of the author. Amos (2019) was correct in suggesting that the teaching of SAE should be taught differently so that cultural dialects are not penalized. Dominic’s entire interview, for example, was one large illustration of Appalachian Rhetoric because he answered every question with a story; if he cannot do this in his writing, then the current SAE conventions can be considered suppressive. This study does not propose that there be no standards for writing

assessments, nor does it propose a complete disregard for academic genre conventions. This study does, however, propose that more instructors and colleges within the university should adopt writing assessment measures at the university level which do not penalize students for including their authentic voices and personal identities. Along with the initial guidance from Behm and Miller (2012), more inclusive writing assessment measures may also look like not deducting points from initial student grades for SAE conventions, such as perfect grammar and sentence structure, and allowing for more revisions. Writing program administrators at both high school and college levels should consider designing courses that reflect the broader community; this may look like mixing home and community literacy practices with academic literacy practices (Ball & Ellis, 2009). Some instructors currently push back against SAE conventions, but more instructors should emulate this so that they are not unintentionally discouraging linguistic diversity in writing and teaching students to value one identity more than another. In contrast to Silas's experience of being "conditioned" to eliminate personal writing, writing assessment measures should accept linguistic diversity rather than penalize it. Dominic remarked that his writing style is a result of the culture he was raised in; if he is penalized for not adhering to current SAE conventions, then such conventions are simultaneously penalizing students for their cultural diversity.

Implications of Study

This study was concerned with understanding the effect of high school writing experiences in college, the perspective of negotiating Appalachian identities in writing, and the alternative writing assessment measures which the university could adopt. This study found that participants were met mostly with negative feedback in high school and the elimination from

personal voices in writing was a result of the negative feedback; participants indicated a lack of confidence in their high school writing experiences, but, as they write more in college, they feel more confident because the feedback is mostly positive. Participants expressed that their writing feels more personal when writing in first person, but it could feel more personal if they could tell stories. Though most writing experiences in college are positive, participants suggested that their personal identities are entirely separate from their academic identities, but they would enjoy written assignments more if they had more freedom to include Appalachian Rhetoric—that is, storytelling with great exigence from an Appalachian person—in their writing. If unique backgrounds were taken into consideration when determining writing standards for students, it is likely that more students would feel a greater sense of belonging both academically and socially.

This research was necessary to understand how Appalachian students negotiate their identities in their academic writing since there is a lack of research done on this specific topic. More studies with wider scopes should be done on the Appalachian region as a whole since current research is not entirely complete or accurate (Schumann & Fletcher, 2016). The findings of this study indicate a lack in confidence in writing as a result of negative feedback, which directly impacts students' perceptions of themselves; this is a large issue because negative writing experiences will continue to effect nonstandard English speakers if current assessment measures do not change. These findings can contribute to future studies about Appalachian students since future researchers can focus on a specific issue within a specific population. Scholars who research identity theory may consider examining how learned behavior influences the extent to which Appalachian students negotiate identities in different contexts with a specific focus on sense of belonging theory. The university should consider developing a space or club on campus specifically for Appalachian students to foster community. Further, this study can guide

future research in multiple fields, primarily writing assessment studies. Writing program administrators may consider adding narrative assignments to the writing curriculum in order to foster a more positive experience for students. Before curriculum is established, instructors should attend mandatory workshops to address potential biases against nonstandard English dialects; since some instructors are native speakers of a “prestigious” standard English, they may unconsciously hold biases toward individuals, namely students (Dunstan & Jaeger, 2016, p. 50). On an individual level of writing assessment, instructors both in high school and college should allow students to use first-person language in their writing since this will allow students to be more easily understood by their audiences (Davies, 2012). Further individual approaches include instructors reminding students that SAE is a necessary skill to learn in order to navigate business and academia; part of this reminder should include telling students that SAE is not meant replace their culture since it is merely a tool. Finally, instructors may consider utilizing proficiency-based grading, which focuses more on personal growth and meeting curriculum requirements rather than focusing on traditional grades and penalties (Erbes et al., 2021).

Limitations of Study

This study has many limitations since the sample size of participants is small. To begin, these students are only from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and may not reflect the values or share the same experiences as other Appalachian students who are taking or have taken first-year composition courses at another college or university. Students were chosen from this university because this is the university I attended, and I wanted to see if we shared similar experiences at the same institution. These participants were chosen with intention since they must meet the requirements to participate in the study, but there could have been a larger

representative sample; all participants in this study are from a Caucasian background, and they were the only students who communicated their interest in participating in the study and met the requirements to participate.

Suggestions for Future Research

There are quite a few suggestions that future research may consider since this was a small-scale study. First, researchers should ensure that students of various ethnic backgrounds are included in the study. The stereotype of “rednecks” making up the entirety of the region may be combatted if the known diversity in the region is further explored; this study, unfortunately, was not able to explore and fully combat stereotypes since all participants who responded to recruitment efforts are from Caucasian backgrounds. Next, if future research only focuses on the experiences of students at one institution, the sample size of participants from that institution should be larger; more responses warrant more information. If future research is not only focused on one institution, I recommend comparing the experiences of students at two institutions to one another; if researchers are interested in learning more from multiple institutions in the region, they should have a set number of participants from each university.

Future research may also consider components which were not included in this study. To learn more about student writing and delve deeper into unpacking what it means to negotiate identities in writing, researchers may ask students to provide writing samples to review; researchers may examine writing samples for adherence to SAE conventions, or they may ask participants what they would have preferred to have written if they did not have the pressure of sounding more “professional.” Further, researchers should examine Appalachian students’ sense of belonging in high school compared to college to determine more specific factors which

influence feelings of belonging. Sense of belonging theory in relation to Appalachian students may be further explored on college campuses by establishing and examining the impact of having a social space or club reserved for Appalachian students. Finally, I recommend interviewing high school English teachers and FYC instructors from the Appalachian region to determine what exact components they look for in student writing and how they justify their feedback on students' written assignments.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Student Email Invitation

Subject: Invitation to Participate in Research Study

Dear Students,

You are invited to participate in an interview about your experience writing in English classes in both high school and college. This interview, which will last approximately 90 minutes, is part of a study that aims to explore how the Appalachian identity fits into academic writing. This study will generate an understanding of how Appalachian students negotiate their identities within academic writing contexts.

The interview will take place sometime between late September and early November 2023; this interview will focus on your experience writing academic papers in high school and college. The interview will take place in person, either in the Humanities and Social Sciences building (HSS) or in Hodges Library, depending on your preference. You may skip questions you feel uncomfortable answering and may stop interviewing at any time. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed; the audio recordings will be deleted once transcriptions are complete. You will be given a pseudonym so that you remain anonymous.

Upon completion of the interview, you will receive a \$15 Amazon gift card.

If you agree to participate in an interview or have any questions, please email me at croger54@vols.utk.edu. Thank you for your help with this research project.

Best regards,

Cameron Rogers

Appendix B: Recruitment Email to Colleagues

Hi _____,

I am conducting a study that aims to explore how Appalachian students adjust to writing in college classes and how they negotiate their identities through writing in composition courses. This study will produce an understanding of writing skills Appalachian students learned in high school and how those skills translate to college-level writing.

I am reaching out to you to request your help with recruiting Appalachian participants for my study; these participants should have taken English 101 or 102 at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I have attached a document with more information for students if you wouldn't mind sharing that with them!

Thank you for your help,

Cameron Rogers

Appendix C: Consent Form

Consent for Research Participation

Research Study Title: Negotiating Identities: Appalachian Voices in Academia

Researcher: Cameron Rogers, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Why am I being asked to be in this research study?

You are being asked to participate in this research because you are a current student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and have indicated that you are from Southern, Central, or Southern-Central Appalachia. You have also taken or are currently taking an English course at the university that follows Standard American English conventions.

What is this research study about?

The purpose of the research study is to better understand how Appalachian students negotiate their identities in English courses at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, since the dialect does not align with Standard American English conventions. These conventions do not take different dialects and backgrounds into consideration when assessing student writing because such conventions focus on the outcome of writing rather than the process. By determining how Appalachian students conform to SAE conventions, professors/lecturers can better understand and value the linguistic diversity that comes with teaching English. If a new wave of writing assessment is adopted by the university, students with different dialects will no longer be penalized for their language usage, and ultimately their upbringing, in their writing.

How long will I be in the research study?

If you agree to be in the study, your participation will be no longer than 90 minutes. There is a consent email/discussion to ensure you understand your involvement in this study and the aims of this study, which should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete; this will also include an informal screening process to ensure that your information is accurate and that you are eligible to participate in this study. Finally, I will interview you for approximately an hour, though we can interview for up to an hour and a half if you have extensive details you wish to share.

What will happen if I say “Yes, I want to be in this research study”?

If you agree to be in this study, I will contact you for a screening process. Once your information has been screened and you are considered an eligible applicant, we will set up an interview day and time. The interview will take place in person, either in Hodges library or an empty classroom in the Humanities and Social Sciences Building; I will record this interview, and the recording will be deleted once I have transcribed it. There is also a Zoom option for convenience, and if you choose this option, our Zoom meeting will be recorded. Your name will not appear in the research report; you will have a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. Further, if you provide revealing details even with a pseudonym, those details will be left out of the study to protect your identity from those who could detect it.

What happens if I say “No, I do not want to be in this research study”?

Being in this study is up to you, but it is preferred for you to let me know sooner rather than later that you do not want to be in the study. Your decision won't affect your standing with the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

What happens if I say “Yes” but change my mind later?

Even if you decide to be in the study now, you can change your mind and stop at any time.

If you decide to stop before the study is completed, you will need to contact the primary investigator and let her know that you wish to stop participating in the study. Any data that has been collected from you will be immediately destroyed and not used for the study. You will not receive compensation if you do not complete the study.

Are there any possible risks to me?

Your risks related to participating in this study are minimal, though it is possible that your privacy may be violated or that confidentiality may be breached. Even though I will mask your identity by using a pseudonym and by redacting identifying features, there is a chance that something you say could reveal your identity. I will do my best to omit any identifying statements from the study.

Are there any benefits to being in this research study?

There are no direct benefits for participants. However, participating in the study may contribute to results that would encourage the university to implement a fourth wave of writing assessment and encourage linguistic diversity.

Who can see or use the information collected for this research study?

Information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely in password-protected Google Drive folders and will be made available only to the person conducting the study unless participants specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link participants to the study. The information provided by participants will only be used for this study.

What will happen to my information after this study is over?

Once the research is complete, your recorded interviews will be deleted. Confidential interview transcriptions will be retained, but they will not have any identifying features (e.g., they will use pseudonyms as opposed to your real name), until the final report has been completed; after completion, all materials with personal information will be destroyed.

Will I receive compensation for being in this research study?

Each participant will receive a \$15 Amazon gift card upon completion of the study.

Who can answer my questions about this research study?

If you have questions or concerns about this study, you may contact Cameron Rogers at croger54@vols.utk.edu. You may also contact one of the members of the research team: Dr. Tanita Saenkhum at tsaenkhum@utk.edu; Dr. Jeff Ringer at jringer1@utk.edu; Dr. Jamal-Jared Alexander at jlexa71@utk.edu. For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Institutional Review Board at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville at utkirb@utk.edu or 865-974-7697.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read this form, and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the chance to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have more questions, I have been told who to contact. By signing this document, I am agreeing to be in this study. I will receive a copy of this document after I sign it.

Name of Adult Participant

Signature of Adult Participant

Date

Appendix D: Interview Questions

Please verify your name, year in college, major, city/state where you grew up, and what English classes you have taken or are currently taking at UTK.

Part I: High School Writing Experiences

1. How did you learn to write in high school?
2. What writing assignments did you complete in high school?
3. Tell me about your favorite writing assignment you completed in high school.
4. What writing assignments did you not enjoy?
5. How did your teachers assess your writing skills in high school?
6. How did you approach applying teachers' feedback you received to your later writing assignments?
7. How did your feelings about writing for your favorite assignment influence how you wrote for other assignments which you weren't too fond of?
8. How is the language you use in everyday conversations different from the approach you took to writing papers in high school? How does this influence the way you write?
9. How did your high school teachers prepare you for writing in college-level English classes?

Part II: College Writing Experiences

1. You previously stated that you've taken English ____ (will be answered with 101 or 102). Can you tell me about your writing experiences in this class(es)?
2. What assignments are you currently working on, or have you most recently completed, and how satisfied did you feel about the quality of work you submitted?
3. What are your writing methods when you had/have writing assignments due?
4. How is the way you write in this class(es) different from the way you speak?
5. What approach does your professor(s) take when assessing your writing?
6. How do you feel like your academic identity is separate from your Appalachian identity?
7. How does the way your professors assess student writing influence the way you write?
8. How prepared did you feel coming into English ____ (101 or 102)?
9. Describe the feedback you've received from your English professors.

10. How does/did this feedback affect your writing process for other assignments?

Part III: Reflecting on Overall Experiences

1. Based on your experiences writing in both high school and college contexts, compare feedback received in high school and feedback received in college writing classes.
2. Without thinking about assessment, how would you describe your overall experiences with writing?
3. How has previous feedback from both high school and college influenced how you write now?
4. How do you navigate maintaining your Appalachian identity in writing assignments while taking feedback into consideration when writing?
5. Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share?

Appendix E: Table of Codes

Table 3.1

CODE	DESCRIPTION
High School Writing Experiences (dark green)	Participants describe how both positive and negative feedback on writing assignments in high school influenced self-perception; they also consider their previous levels of enjoyment with high school written assignments
Effects of High School Writing Experiences in College (royal blue)	Participants establish advantages and disadvantages about how high school writing experiences and teachers' feedback effects their performance with college-level writing
College Writing Experiences (gold)	Participants detail their levels of enjoyment with written assignments in college; they also suggest favorable self-perceptions and feelings of satisfaction after receiving positive feedback from instructors
Appalachian Preconceptions (red)	Participants express their negative experiences with people who are not from the Appalachian region and convey feelings of insufficiency in their social environment
Influence of grades (black)	Participants point toward a sense of accomplishment stemming from good grades rather than their writing skills
Appalachian Rhetoric (teal)	Participants indicate a desire to include storytelling and personal voice in more academic writing assignments

Appendix F: Table of Code Frequencies

Table 3.2

CODE	FREQUENCY
High School Writing Experiences	63
Effects of High School Writing Experiences in College	18
College Writing Experiences	67
Appalachian Preconceptions	14
Influence of grades	18
Appalachian Rhetoric	13

VITA

Cameron Jade Rogers is from Gruetli-Laager, Tennessee. She graduated summa cum laude from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in 2022, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in English and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science. She subsequently tutored undergraduate students in English and taught First-Year Composition courses at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Cameron earned her Master of Arts in English in the Rhetoric, Writing, and Linguistics program at the University of Tennessee in 2024. Her interests are in Appalachian Rhetoric and technical writing.