

University of Nevada, Reno

**“Humor Me: Using Humor Writing to Teach First-Year Composition Students  
Rhetoric and Composition”**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in  
English

by

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## Abstract

A perennial problem for many first-year composition (FYC) instructors is deciding what curricular materials to use to teach their students about rhetoric and composition and how to use those resources to enable their students to practice and hone their writing skills. This dissertation argues that humor writing is a viable option as it offers unique points of connection between students and the curricular material that aid them in learning about, and achieving, college-level writing. Furthermore, humor writing can provide opportunities to teach FYC students how to engage consciously with and analyze the integral concepts of audience awareness and situated knowledge through a medium that is engaging and familiar. Thus, this dissertation's research is guided by three questions: 1) How might humor writing be used as a teaching tool in FYC? 2) How might humor writing be used to teach FYC students how to engage consciously with and analyze audience awareness and situated knowledge? 3) What are some of the risks of using humor writing to teach rhetoric and composition in FYC, and how can they be minimized?

Interestingly, two of the greats in rhetoric and composition, Aristotle and Quintilian, praised humor for its mastery of rhetoric and used it to teach their students. However, humor fell out of favor during the Industrial Revolution because entertainment was seen as anathema to "serious" curricular work. Humor is now making a slight and tentative return due to academia's increased acceptance of popular culture. In conjunction with an exploration of rhetoric and composition's historical on-again-off-again relationship with humor, this dissertation uses rhetorical analysis to ascertain how modern humor writers use audience awareness and situated knowledge.

The analyses' findings imply that much of humor writing liberally employs audience awareness and situated knowledge, thereby making it fertile ground for teaching FYC students about said concepts. In light of these findings, this dissertation offers activities, lesson plans, and assignments for FYC, and it discusses the benefits and possible risks of using humor writing and how those risks may be mitigated. Ultimately, this dissertation concludes that humor writing is a possible answer to FYC instructors' challenge of including engaging material that lends itself to students practicing and honing their writing abilities, particularly their knowledge and skills regarding audience awareness and situated knowledge.

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## **Preface: Laugh Through the Pain**

My interest in humor writing's possible connection to teaching first-year composition (FYC) students may seem odd upon first glance. Perhaps some find it strange to look toward a source of entertainment to accomplish serious academic tasks. Yet, however ironic it may be, my investigation of that connection has roots in something very serious—pain.

A month before I began my master's program, I was surgically diagnosed with endometriosis. Years of pain and abnormalities had finally been explained, but the relief of finding out that “yes, it does have a name and what you are feeling is real” was accompanied by sobering realizations—pain would be a life-long companion, having a biological child could be difficult or impossible, and there was no “cure” apart from a hysterectomy (which even then is no guarantee). I needed an escape and a reminder that I could still be happy despite those realities. That is when I turned to one of the happiest entities I could think of—standup comedy routines on YouTube.

I watched comedians ranging from famous modern names including Dave Chappelle, Robin Williams, and Eddy Murphy to more unknown comedians such as Jeanne Robertson, Chonda Pierce, Steven Wright, and Henry Cho. As often happens to people while watching YouTube, I started down the “rabbit hole” and was eventually led to classic comedians including Rodney Dangerfield, Richard Pryor, and Phyllis Diller. As I watched and laughed, I realized how smart the writing was in these standups. Every word had a purpose. Literary devices abounded to create surprises. The timing felt carefully crafted. In general, much of the writing had to be excellent in order to engage audiences. I also saw that comedians' anger, pain, and frustrations were encapsulated in a

package that delivered their messages while still making audiences laugh. All of this intrigued me, and I wanted to know more.

Therefore, as my final research project for my master's degree, I investigated how humor writers—primarily David Berry, Erma Bombeck, Nora Ephron, Lewis Grizzard, P.J. O'Rourke, Mary Roach, and David Sedaris—use irony and exaggeration to create humor. My suspicions were confirmed that much of humor writing required skillful and purposeful writing. Indeed, much of successful humor writing seemed to be a manifestation of writing mastery.

I went on to complete my master's project, present some of my research at conferences, and pen my own humor writing that placed well in contests. As I continued reading humor, watching humor, and working with humor writing in academic capacities, I found that in order to be a successful humor writer, an author had to be highly sensitive and accommodating to her audience. One particular incident stood out to me: a comedian made a 9/11 joke to an audience of Americans. I cringed at the joke's insensitivity and the audience booed the comedian off the stage. The audience refused to tolerate the cruelty, and it was then that I realized something that perhaps should have been obvious from the start—the audience will make or break a humor writer.

This built-in requirement of audience awareness in humor writing partly pushed me to take a chance on using humor writing as the bulk of my curricular material for teaching my first English 102 class. At the time, English 102 was a themed class, meaning that you would teach principles of rhetoric and composition through a chosen topic.



Still, I was hesitant because there were several risks. What if humor writing was not a curricular medium that easily lent itself to teaching the state's and the department's core learning objectives? What if studying humor writing led to students getting too riled up and out of hand during class? What if students did not find the material funny? What if students could not understand why I was having them read and analyze humor writing? What if students thought that my class was worth less than classes with more traditional curricular materials? What if some of the humor writing offended students? What if my class was not taken seriously by my students, colleagues, or supervisors because it included humor writing? I had not seen or heard of anyone using humor writing as the bulk of the curricular materials to teach first-year composition courses. What if there was a potentially dangerous reason for that?

I took the risk, and titled my English 102 class, "American Humor Writing." I included humorous texts by standup comedians and "traditional" hard-copy authors, and I tried to include racial, gender, and cultural diversity among the comedians as well as balance out the ideological standpoints that were presented in the texts—the number of liberal-leaning comedians was deliberately balanced with the same number of conservative-leaning comics. However, I stayed away from religious source materials as I felt that to be too risky, and I muted and blacked out any curse words in the texts to help reduce the possibility of offending students.

Although the analyzed texts were humorous, I kept the assignments academically rigorous. Students analyzed texts in terms of literary devices, rhetorical moves, and the rhetorical triangle, and they used humor as both a source of entertainment and, even more important, of academic inquiry and research. When they laughed, I asked them, "Why

was that funny?” and I pushed them to explain the logic behind their laughter. When they did not laugh at something supposedly humorous, I asked them, “Why wasn’t that funny to you?” Even when students made their own jokes in class and their classmates laughed, I would encourage them to think and analyze by asking them: “Why was that funny?”

Throughout the semester, my students learned about rhetoric and writing, and they appeared to enjoy doing so. Humor was something to which they could easily and quickly relate, and they consistently practiced audience awareness by asking themselves why something was/was not funny to them and why something was/was not funny to an audience. This required them to analyze their audiences as well as the authors’ personas, which in turn helped them to consciously use situated knowledge—an element of writing that I found in my studies to be inevitable in texts and useful when used consciously while analyzing texts.

By the end of the semester, my students’ writing had improved dramatically, their research skills had greatly increased, and many of the “shy” students had become vocal and active participants during class. Furthermore, my students collectively demonstrated a high level of audience awareness and an ability both to recognize and use situated knowledge when analyzing audiences and texts. I thought that the results were worth a repetition of this curricular experiment, so I repeated the materials and lesson plans for my next English 102 class. I observed the same results.

There is something in using humor writing to teach FYC students rhetoric and composition that is unique, powerful, and exciting. It appears to be an engaging medium to teach FYC students academic principles, particularly audience awareness and situated knowledge, and my dissertation explores this connection so that I can offer FYC

instructors another successful, and even joyous, medium with which to do serious work in FYC.

## Chapter I: Introduction and Literature Review

*Teach a PhD student a joke, and she'll tell it to everyone. But teach a PhD student to copy and paste and she'll make a dissertation out of it.*

### I. Introduction

A perennial problem for many first-year composition (FYC) instructors is deciding what curricular materials to use to teach their students about writing and rhetoric and how to utilize those resources to enable their students to practice and hone their skills. Some may say, "They will do it through writing and reading, of course." Yet, the questions then become: What kind of writing? What kind of reading? Available approaches continue to multiply, thereby creating new ways of understanding, engaging, and applying writing and rhetoric, which can seem at times both a blessing and a curse.

Instructors of FYC and scholars in rhetoric and composition have often wrestled with these questions. Additionally, in numerous college teaching environments, the levels of distraction and seemingly shrinking attention spans of many of our students add to the difficulty of finding materials that support the goals of FYC and remain interesting enough to engage students for an entire semester. This is not to say that an instructor's primary goal is to entertain students and keep them engaged 100 percent of the time. Nevertheless, the medium through which learning is presented affects students' attention rates (Wilson and Korn; Bligh; Bunce, Flens, and Neiles). Thus, a medium that shows potential to facilitate teaching FYC and positively engage students is worthy of research and exploration.

Therefore, the overarching question in this inquiry is: What medium may be used for teaching rhetoric and writing to FYC students? More specifically, within FYC and

reflective of the field of rhetoric and composition, how might audience awareness and situated knowledge be taught in an engaging way since such elements are often included in the teaching of rhetoric and composition? These are questions many FYC instructors have, and addressing these questions helps to demonstrate how my research fits within the field of rhetoric and composition. Also, these inquiries demonstrate how my dissertation's driving research questions connect to FYC/rhetoric and composition and help to fill gaps within the field. Such an investigation will contribute to rhetoric and composition's body of knowledge by addressing key questions about FYC practices and instruction.

I believe that humor writing is a potential medium for teaching FYC students about rhetoric and composition, because 1) humor writing can be used as a pedagogical tool; 2) humor writing can provide engaging texts to be studied; 3) and, humor writing presents useful and engaging opportunities for students to study principles of rhetoric and writing, particularly audience awareness and situated knowledge. Humor writing must be considered and handled carefully, and this dissertation examines both the benefits and risks of using humor writing in FYC. Indeed, the purpose of the project is to explore how humor writing might be incorporated into FYC, what benefits and risks exist, and how such risks might be addressed. Thus, the central issue to be studied is the potential for humor writing in the teaching of FYC. I believe that humor writing offers unique points of connection between students and their classmates and that the carefully-selected, humorous curricular materials aid them in learning about, and achieving, college-level writing. Furthermore, I believe that humor writing provides opportunities to teach FYC

students how to engage consciously with and how to analyze audience awareness and the situatedness of knowledge through a medium that is engrossing and familiar.

Investigating humor writing in this manner provides insights into its possibilities for FYC. This research also addresses gaps in the scholarship by bridging humor writing, rhetoric, composition, and FYC—something that is currently limited in rhetoric and composition. Instead of investigating if humor writing is more effective than other FYC approaches, my research endeavors to answer the questions of if and how humor writing may be used for the purposes identified within my project's parameters. Consequently, my research reviews the literature on humor, humor writing, and humor writing's uses in the teaching of rhetoric and composition as context for my study. I also discuss some applications of humor writing in current FYC—particularly regarding teaching audience awareness and situated knowledge—along with some of the risks of taking such an approach. Finally, this project considers the risks and options for activating such an approach and for future research.

Thus, my research questions are: 1) How might humor writing be used as a teaching tool in FYC? 2) How might humor writing be used to teach FYC students how to engage consciously with and analyze audience awareness and situated knowledge? and 3) What are some of the risks of using humor writing to teach rhetoric and composition in FYC, and how can they be minimized? In order to explore these questions, my project consists of the following chapters: Chapter I includes definitional work and a literature review that discusses humor, humor writing, and humor's history within teaching rhetoric and composition. This situates my research within rhetoric and composition and FYC and shows my project's relevancy and exigency to today's FYC instructors. I also discuss

some of the hesitancy toward using humorous texts in the classroom. Additionally, since my focus is on how humorous texts may help in teaching audience awareness and situated knowledge in FYC, I quickly establish why audience awareness and situated knowledge are taught in FYC. Chapter II establishes and justifies rhetorical analysis as the methodology for analyzing humorous texts in my research. I also identify my chosen humorous texts (including a standup routine) and explain their inclusion. Chapter III contains rhetorical analyses of three humorous written texts and one standup routine. Through these rhetorical analyses, I explain how humor writing (of which standup is a part) does, or does not, engage with and show audience awareness and situated knowledge. Chapter IV discusses the implications of my rhetorical analyses, possible pedagogical implications for FYC, possible approaches for future uses of humor writing in FYC, and possible other concerns regarding my research. It also explores some of the risks of using humorous texts in FYC in light of my rhetorical analyses and suggests how these risks may be minimized (if they indeed can be minimized). Chapter V summarizes my project's main points, offers some conclusions about the implications of humor writing for teaching audience awareness and situated knowledge in FYC, offers practical applications for using humor writing in FYC, and gives some suggestions for future research.

In order to set the foundation for exploring humor writing as an option for FYC, I first provide some definitional work. Then, I give an overview of humor and rhetoric's historical dance with one another with a focus on how humor has and, more often, has not been taught as a rhetorical device. This helps readers to understand the connections between rhetoric, composition, and humor while situating my proposed project in a way

that shows the roots of my research as well as how and why rhetoric, composition, FYC, and humor are connected and why such connections are worthy of study.

## **II. Definitional Work**

There are several terms that must be defined before diving into the literature review, including “humor.” For the purposes of this project, humor is defined as producing amusement, jocularity, fun, and/or critique while oftentimes expressing “some deeper and at least partially suppressed social truth” and whose success is determined by the humor’s target audience (Ritchie 280). Humor may or may not elicit laughter.

“Humor writing,” “humorous writing,” “humor texts,” and “humorous texts” refer to texts to be read and/or viewed. These texts include traditional words on paper as well as standup routines, audio clips, and videos. The reasons for this are discussed in the methodology section in Chapter II of the dissertation. I do not use humor writing, humorous writing, humor texts, and humorous texts to refer to students producing their own writing that is humorous. My focus is not on students *producing* humorous writing but on students *analyzing* humorous writing. I do not ignore the possibility of FYC students writing humor being useful in achieving FYC’s goals. However, thoroughly investigating that possibility is outside of my dissertation’s focus since such would make the project unmanageably large.

## **III. Literature Review**

The first section of this literature review focuses on how rhetoric has interacted with humor and vice versa. Then, the literature review briefly discusses how humor has been viewed in teaching rhetoric and writing, because such an arena is where my research is located within the field of rhetoric and composition. In this review, I endeavor to keep



the connections to FYC (particularly the goals to teach students audience awareness) clear and strong, since that is a main point of focus for my research.

### **1. Historical Situating**

This literature review commences by discussing humor's dance with rhetoric starting with Plato, because much of western rhetoric's history, and modern inquiries into humor, begin with him. However, one should understand that the concept of comedy and of using humor to persuade an audience does not originate with Plato. Indeed, ancient Greek comedies, one of the best known being *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes, used humor to reflect on the absurdity of human behavior, lampoon people in power, critique governmental actions, and persuade an audience to believe that an entity or behavior is ridiculous and should be shunned and avoided (Backes; O'Dell; Rishel; Stott).

Plato—both a user and, ironically, a critic of rhetoric—states in *Phaedrus* that it is through learning about the characteristics of one's audience, via determining the kairotic moment of one's speech/argument, and by knowing the complete Truth of the topic or entity at hand that people best learn how to lead “the soul” or, in today's vernacular, learn how to persuade one's audience (44; 27). Successful humor writing is often dependent upon Plato's concept of determining “the soul” of one's audience in order to decide what will and will not be successful with that person/group. This can largely be equated to audience awareness, which is an element of rhetoric and composition that FYC often strives to teach.

Yet, Plato is not humor's grandest fan. In *Philebus*, he explains his belief that humor mixes pleasure and pain, which makes laughter and humor wicked, because if one is being laughed at, then one is weak and ridiculous. If one is doing the laughing, then

one is malicious in taking pleasure in someone else's misfortune (Romanska and Ackerman 35). Ironically, Plato sometimes employs humor in his texts. For example, in *Gorgias* Plato has Socrates chide Polus with an alliterative and, arguably, mildly humorous line when he writes, "Please don't be rude, peerless Polus" (36). Indeed, Plato uses humor to chastise others and to entertain readers, despite at times supposedly loathing the persuasive technique.

Like Plato, Aristotle (often cited in both rhetorical and humor studies) also recognizes the importance of audience awareness. Aristotle writes in *Rhetoric* that one must "be able (1) to reason logically, (2) to understand human character and goodness in their various forms, and (3) to understand the emotions—that is, to name them and describe them, to know their causes and the way in which they are excited" (8). It stands to reason that the means through which students (akin to those in today's FYC classes) learn about rhetoric are thus through studying human behavior, studying communities and their written and implicit laws, and studying "the law of nature"—i.e., through examining "Truth" (48). Plato and Aristotle are in some agreement regarding how to study rhetoric; yet, they appear to part ways on their viewpoints on humor. Aristotle writes in *Poetics* that "comedy is an imitation of more buffoonish people," but it does not necessarily, as Plato asserts, entail maliciousness and pain (*Poetics*; Romanska and Ackerman). Aristotle admits that humor can be different from verbal abuse (to which Plato arguably equates humor) and that humor can have a useful place in rhetoric when retorting to one's opponent. Aristotle writes in *Rhetoric* that "Gorgias said that you should kill your opponents' earnestness with jesting and their jesting with earnestness; in which he was right" (157). Aristotle thus acknowledges humor as a useful and positive

tool in artful persuasion. He is thought to have written a book dedicated to comedy that is meant to be the sequel to *Poetics*, which demonstrates humor's importance to Aristotle (Watson 1). Unfortunately, this holy grail of comedy's location is unknown.

Cicero picks up the baton connecting rhetoric and humor with *de Oratore*, in which he explains and even categorizes how humor should and should not be used in persuasion. He provides rules for using humor, such as not to use prepared jokes for fear of being seen by one's audience as "frigid" (20). His text is aimed at a speaker/rhetor and at students of rhetoric, and his discussions of humor show the importance of audience awareness and audiences' inextricable connection to humor used in persuasion. This is important, because humor's strong link to audience awareness is among its most salient supports for showing how humor may be connected to rhetoric and therein be worthy of inclusion in teaching FYC. Cicero's classifications of humor also imply that humor can be taught. When humor is viewed as a nebulous concept, then it is likely to be seen as something that would be nice to teach but impossible to explain, replicate, and control. Cicero's text shows that humor can be dissected (at least to some degree) in terms of its use in rhetoric and that it can be taught, hence his rules (20-21).

Humor's potential for teachability is expanded in Quintilian's *Institutes of Oratory*. His book six, chapter three is dedicated to humor and its possible uses and misuses when implemented in rhetoric (313-332). Before enumerating humor's possibilities and giving guidelines for using the tool, Quintilian states that humor can "prove of considerable advantage to the orator," because humor works better than a direct attack on one's opponent and because exciting laughter through humor can dispel "melancholy affections" in one's audience as well as revive their minds "after disgust and

fatigue” (316; 314). Quintilian’s work is significant, because, like Cicero’s, it shows that humor may be dissectible, teachable, replicable, and used for positive rhetorical purposes. Furthermore, Quintilian’s work again shows that audience awareness is necessary for deploying humor successfully in one’s argument, which supports the notion that humor may be used to teach FYC students about audience awareness in rhetoric and composition.

If humor was used in ancient Greek plays to critique and persuade; if humor was recognized by Aristotle as useful against one’s opponents; if humor was shown to be teachable, replicable, and partly controllable in its rhetorical use by the widely-respected Cicero and Quintilian, then what happened to make it seemingly disappear from rhetorical teachings? Why is humor not taught consistently and pervasively in rhetoric and composition generally and in FYC specifically? Why do so few rhetoric and composition textbooks discuss and embrace humor as a rhetorical tool? Where did humor go?

The answer is complicated and, unfortunately, nonlinear. Yet, the answer aids in revealing the foundations for some of the hesitations and criticisms toward employing humor in modern FYC classes.

## **2. What Happened to Humor in Teaching Rhetoric and Composition?**

Tarez Samra Graban postulates that the answer to where humor went in rhetoric and composition lies partially in humor’s strong link with ethos. She writes that humor, in addition to its connection to audience, is frequently linked with a rhetor’s/writer’s ethos, and it is this connection that she believes is partly responsible for humor’s reduced role in medieval and Renaissance (circa 400 CE to 1600 CE) works on rhetoric (Graban 405). In

fact, St. Augustine is one of the last rhetorical scholars of the aforementioned period who hints at humor's rhetorical usage. He claims that one must capture his/her audience's attention in order to deliver one's message of Truth through "some beauty of style" that will "endeavor not only to be clear and intelligible, but to give pleasure and to bring home conviction to the hearer" (173). He states that giving pleasure to listeners and readers should not be the main aim of one's persuasion, but he proclaims that it is nevertheless possible for a person to be both "taught and delighted" (147).

Subsequently, humor's place in rhetoric and its role in teaching students about rhetoric and writing became hazy. Some, like Graban, assert that humor largely became "employed as a literary device during these periods, yet rhetors were by and large cautioned against it given its detrimental effects on their character" (405). Other historical scholars, including Magda Romanska and Alan Ackerman, claim that humor was not necessarily discouraged among rhetors, but instead manifested primarily in literature. Humor thus became something not necessarily to be employed as a tool of persuasion for those learning how to use rhetoric and composition, but a device to be analyzed as a literary feature or purpose (typically referred to as "the comic" or "comedy") and/or literary device in service of plot or character development (Graban; Morreall *Comic Relief*; Rishel; Romanska and Ackerman; Stott). This assertion is bolstered by the creation of comedic plays such as those by William Shakespeare (*As You Like It*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Measure for Measure*, etc.) and Christopher Marlowe (*The Jew of Malta* and *Doctor Faustus*) as well as works by Aelius Donatus, Dante Alighieri, Gian Giorgio Trissino, Sir Thomas Elyot, Niccolo

Machiavelli, and Ben Jonson (“Shakespeare’s Comedy Plays”; Romanska and Ackerman; Stott; Rishel 33). In these works, humor was often used as a reflection of life and as a corrective mechanism. Thus, rather than humor being used to appease and mutually interact with an audience, as in Cicero’s and Quintilian’s texts, humor was used in comedies and tragicomedies to correct its audience’s actions “through ridicule and derision” (Romanska and Ackerman 53).

Part of this change in humor and rhetoric’s relationship stemmed from Renaissance rhetoricians’ tendency to separate invention strategies (which oftentimes included humor) from rhetoric, evidenced by rhetoricians such as Peter Ramus who claimed that invention and arrangement are separate from, but not subordinate to, rhetoric (Romanska and Ackerman; Ramus). For those of the ilk of Ramus, humor, which would be categorized under *facetiae*, risked of buffoonery and could diminish one’s ethos (Grabau 406). Still, humor was not treated dismissively by all Renaissance rhetoricians. For example, Thomas Wilson included a short discussion of humor under his exploration of invention in *The Art of Rhetoric* (Bowen 413). There, he set out guidelines on who should and should not be targets (i.e., recipients of a joke’s hostility) of a speaker’s/writer’s humor (Romanska and Ackerman 80). He also stated that humor could be used for persuasion, so long as “in all our jesting we keep a mean, wherein not only it is meet to avoid all gross bounding and alehouse jesting, but also to eschew all foolish talk and ruffian manners, such as no honest ears can once abide, nor yet any witty man can like well or allow” (Romanska and Ackerman 80). Translated into today’s terms, Wilson essentially warned rhetors to keep their humor “classy.”

Wilson's text is a far cry from Quintilian's systematic classification of humor and guidelines on how to employ it in one's persuasion. However, it marks three important factors in humor and rhetoric's historical dance: 1) there is a shift back to seeing humor as a possible tool of rhetoric, although humor was still often seen as belonging to the domain of literature; 2) there is a movement back to viewing humor as engaging an audience rather than primarily correcting an audience's behavior; and, 3) there is an increased air of anxiety around using humor compared to Cicero's and Quintilian's work. This anxiety may be partly due to the medieval and Renaissance periods' frequent use of humor as a social corrective, thereby associating using humor in rhetoric with the risk of being seen as a buffoon (Graban; Stott). This anxiety is important, because it carries over to how humor is viewed within rhetoric and composition, FYC, and the academy as a whole, throughout history and even to current times.

The fear of buffoonery did, indeed, seep into the academy regarding the teaching of rhetoric and writing. During much of the time after Wilson's work, teaching humor as a rhetorical device was largely discouraged because humor was associated with the buffoonery of "popular culture"—a trait not befitting the high-brow literary studies that the academy embraced (Stott 24). This is not to say that writers stopped using humor as a tool of persuasion. Indeed, many authors, including George Etherege, Jonathan Swift, John Dryden, Richard Steele, and Henry Fielding used humor in their texts to persuade audiences and to critique societal expectations, cultural mores, religious dicta, and people and institutions of political power (Romanska and Ackerman; Morreall, *Comic Relief* 95; Graban). This is important because although humor was not being taught, it was being

used as a rhetorical tool that engaged one's audience in order to appease and persuade them, and as a corrective mechanism to discourage socially unacceptable behaviors.

Interestingly, although many writers used humor as a rhetorical device, humor was not taught to students for use in their own persuasive texts. The teaching of rhetoric and composition largely dropped the concept of humor from its repertoire during the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Romanska and Ackerman). Instead, at least within academia, humor became largely relegated to Literary Studies. Also, the examination of humor and its uses was primarily undertaken by Psychology, Philosophy, Sociology, Anthropology, Communications, Political Science, and Linguistics, particularly during the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries (Romanska and Ackerman). Some of the most notable names of the aforementioned fields include: Sigmund Freud, William F. Fry, Paul E. McGhee, Albert Rapp, Patricia Keith-Spiegel, and Avner Ziv in Psychology; Mikhail Bakhtin, Henri Bergson, Kenneth Burke, Simon Critchley, Jacques Derrida, Max Eastman, and Søren Kierkegaard in Philosophy; Mahadev L. Apte, Christie Davies, Henk Driessen, and Lawrence E. Mintz in Sociology and Anthropology; Arthur Asa Berger, Jennifer Coates, and Neal R. Norrick in Communications; J.C. Baumgartner, Amy Becker, and A. Bippus in Political Science; and Salvatore Attardo, Elliot Oring, Victor Raskin, and David Ritchie in Linguistics. It is through these fields that humor was, and is, frequently dissected in terms of its mechanisms for generating laughter (or for failing to create laughter); its usefulness in functioning as a reflection of life and as a window into human psyches, behaviors, and cultural expectations; its signaling significances in communication; its ability to critique the behaviors of individuals and institutions; and its potential as a weapon of resistance against institutions of power.



In addition to the fear of buffoonery associated with using humor in the rhetoric and composition sector of the academy, the rise of current-traditional rhetoric around 1850 may also explain some of the anxiety around humor and frequent shunning of it in college writing classes. Current-traditional rhetoric is, in part, a reaction to America's 19<sup>th</sup>-century love of the scientific method. During the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, writing was often viewed "as an extension of scientific method, with emphasis on inductive method" (Murphy 299). Much of the scientific method is built upon ocular centrism with sight being the "ultimate arbiter of reality" (Graham 389, 388). Under this zeitgeist, seeing is believing (Jack 193). Yet, with something as complicated as humor, it is difficult to dissect, show its components, methodically examine it, and "see" the humor. Analyzing humor does not necessarily follow the scientific method, and it is this difficulty of being able to put humor in the box of the scientific method that to some extent led to the exclusion of humor in writing classes.

Other aspects of this current-traditional rhetoric period that likely contributed to the lack of humor being taught in writing classes include the era's influx of students, emphasis on standardization, and overworked (and often overwhelmed) graduate student instructors. To understand these contributors, one must first know that current-traditional rhetoric is partly a reaction to a single failed test that panicked America—the 1847 Harvard entrance exam, which required a written test (Connors 128). Many students failed the exam, and many American academics viewed this as proof that American students could not write. Therefore, Harvard decreed that incoming freshmen must take a compulsory writing course. This was meant to be a temporary fix, but it endured and became freshman composition.

These classes were filled with many more students than instructors were accustomed to having. Under the classical regime, instructors had the freedom to teach the “classics,” such as Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, and the like, and they had the ability to conduct one-on-one meetings with their students. However, as Robert Connors writes in *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy*, huge influxes of students flooded colleges partially due to men coming home from wars (particularly after the Civil War) who needed training and professionalization to acquire new jobs, and in part because education was seen as a democratizing force in America. There was a belief that if one worked hard enough, then one could better his class and socioeconomic status through education. While such an admirable thought is in line with the meritocracy that America was trying to portray itself as, it resulted in substantial increases of students attending college and massive amounts of grading for writing instructors. Connors writes that

. . . the typical pedagogy became assigned daily and fortnightly themes, which were turned in, marked up in red ink for the perceived problems each one evinced, and returned to the students, who were either expected to repair all the marked errors or merely to move on to the next assignment and do better. . . mechanical correction methods like correction charts—and eventually handbooks—began to appear to help teachers “correct” student papers more efficiently. (Connors 13-14)

With such a load, there simply was not room for humor. Indeed, engaging with students’ thoughts and helping them to think in varying ways (which would include using humor as a persuasive writing technique) was often replaced by the time-saving approach of checking for grammatical errors and seeing how students’ work did, or did not, fit the

standard of what was expected from them. As Connors states, “A textbook was placed in their hands as graduate students, and most of them assumed that the wisdom of the text was the wisdom of the world. They read their texts, they studied their handbooks, they taught their tools” (Connors 101). The accepted way of thinking then became whatever the textbooks said was correct, and textbooks oftentimes did not include lessons on humor. In particular, the four primarily used textbooks of the time—Adams Sherman Hill’s *The Principles of Rhetoric and Their Application* (1884), Fred N. Scott and Joseph V. Denney’s *Paragraph Writing* (1894), John Franklin Genung’s *Working Principles of Rhetoric* (1901), and Barrett Wendell’s *English Composition: Eight Lectures Given at the Lowell Institute* (1918)—did not include extensive lessons, or any at all, on using humor as a persuasive device (Crowley 140). Codification manifested in textbooks, such as the aforementioned ones, became “absolute arbiters of classroom content and practice,” were easier to teach, faster to teach, and more tailored to college writing instructors (often graduate students themselves) who were frequently nascent in the field and in teaching (Connors 101; Burnham; Crowley; Murphy). Instructors were likely unfamiliar with humor being used as a persuasive writing tool, let alone knew how to teach it to their massive classes.

Under the current-traditional rhetoric regime, students were expected to produce error-free papers that were easily readable, logical, and followed the formulaic essay format of the five-paragraph essay (Berlin; Burnham; Connors; Crowley; Murphy). Thus, current-traditional rhetoric asserts that there is a standard way of writing and a standard of language. Burnham states that the various voices (and, by extension, diversity of thought) of writers were supplanted for what current-traditional rhetoric claims is

“standard” and grammatically correct, which reinforces “middle-class values, such as social stability and cultural homogeneity” (Burnham 22). Connors adds that current-traditional theory emphasizes the writing product as opposed to the writing process and contains “a denial of the personal voice of the student, a simple-minded prescriptiveness, an emphasis on reason to the exclusion of the other human faculties, a devotion to a simple, linear view of the writing process, and a belief that” the writer’s main job is to “transfer to the page ideas that exist already in the mind” (14). Following this logic, if individual voice must be denied for something homogenous, and if that homogenous “voice” did not employ humor, then humor would likely not be taught or encouraged. For the current-traditional period of teaching writing, the homogenous voice did not use humor.

As previously mentioned, humor as a rhetorical tool appears to have been mostly absent from the teaching of rhetoric and composition. Part of this stemmed from the rise of current-traditional rhetoric and part arose from laughter’s often negative reputation. As shown at the beginning of this literature review, Plato was not the most ardent fan of laughter (and, consequently, humor), because he believed it to be hostile at heart and anathema to reason (*Philebus*). Humor historian and theorist John Morreall writes that laughter and humor were often treated as synonymous, and that there remained eight main allegations against laughter that also carried over into how many academics viewed humor: “1. Humor is insincere. 2. Humor is idle. 3. Humor is irresponsible. 4. Humor is hedonistic. 5. Humor diminishes self-control. 6. Humor is hostile. 7. Humor fosters anarchy. 8. Humor is foolish” (*Comic Relief* 92).

We have examined some of the reasons for these charges, such as the fear of using humor and being seen as a buffoon and thus compromising ethos, and historians have pointed out that humor and laughter were often viewed as synonymous and largely negative because of cultural mores that discouraged laughter (Plato, *Philebus*; Hobbes; Morreall, “Philosophy of Humor”; Rishel; Romanska and Ackerman). Morreall also largely blames the Bible and “early Christian leaders” for these charges against humor because, “As a form of disengaged play, humor does not [appear to] accomplish anything,” and “early Christian leaders objected to it for that reason” (*Comic Relief* 93).

Modern rhetorician and humor scholar Albert Rouzie suggests that another reason for the academy’s resistance to teaching humor as a tool of rhetoric and composition has roots in the alienation of the worker from his labor in a capitalist system, which was largely encouraged by the Industrial Revolution. The worker’s labor can only satisfy his external needs (i.e., financial needs) but cannot satisfy his internal needs (i.e., the need for play and joy), which largely equated to the belief that work should not be enjoyable (Rouzie 31).

Romanska and Ackerman confirm that the Industrial Age (also referred to by the authors as the Victorian era) created a “duality of work and play” and emphasized “virtues of seriousness, sincerity, and meaning” as well as “earnestness” (179). Earnestness in this period was mutually exclusive to humor. As Romanska and Ackerman state, “Earnestness implied deep and genuine feeling, not irony, levity, or absurdity. To be earnest was to be serious,” not humorous (179). Even many writers of this time believed humor to be largely absent. Of the humorous texts that were written during this

era, many criticized the culture's insistence on earnestness and seriousness (Romanska and Ackerman; Oscar Wilde; William Makepeace Thackeray).

Connecting this concept of a work/play bifurcation to the realm of education, Rouzie claims that many college English departments emphasized, and continue to do so, that work must be separate from play. According to Rouzie, this stems from many departments privileging literature over rhetoric and composition, in part because literature is considered serious—the work is “earnest” (Rouzie; Romanska and Ackerman). Thus, to be taken seriously and earn respect equal to literature within an English department, those working in the rhetoric and composition field felt that they too must be “serious” and eschew any notion of play.

Rouzie's theory is supported by the dearth of rhetoric and composition textbooks encouraging college students to use humor in their persuasive writing and by the emphasis on literary theory and criticism within the academy during the periods of the Industrial Revolution up until the early 1900s (Stott; Morreall, *Comic Relief*; Romanska and Ackerman). Akin to Rouzie, other theorists, such as Anthony Backes, Ronald Berk, Russ Crossman, Henk Driessen, Paul Gibbs, Bruce Goebel, Alleen Nilsen, and David Seitz, also claim that academia's work/play bifurcation is unnecessary and erroneous. For example, humor scholar and anthropologist Driessen asserts that the work/play bifurcation “is a persistent misunderstanding that science is exclusively and at all times a serious activity fundamentally opposed to humour” (141). Like Rouzie, Driessen argues that studying humor can be both enjoyable and scholarly—thus, academics can work and derive fun from their labors. Seitz also states that humor can be used as a vehicle for students to enjoy learning about concepts. Within the context of a writing course, Seitz

asserts that studying a form of humorous text (the parody) encourages students to think about the intentions behind each rhetorical move a writer makes. He also postulates that “Perhaps encouraging students to approach critique through a comic frame, rather than traditional academic assumptions of objectivity, is more persuasive to them because it does not assume an ideological superiority that students sense in most approaches to critical writing” (Seitz 388). This, in turn, may encourage student engagement and effort with analyzing and critiquing texts by making the approach of analysis more welcoming and perhaps less intimidating to students.

It is interesting that the aforementioned scholars who defend using humor are from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Indeed, there seems to be almost a renaissance in scholarship defending and exploring the use of humor and humor writing in teaching. But why? How did the rhetoric and composition classroom go from shunning humor writing during the current-traditional period to seeing it as a legitimate option worthy of scholarly study and academic inclusion? Of course, the answer is, once again, complicated.

### **3. Welcome Back, Old Friend**

There are a few notable, co-occurring developments that may explain humor’s resurgence in the academy, particularly in the teaching of rhetoric and composition. First, humor as a field increasingly gained legitimacy in the eyes of the academy because of “the first international humor conference in 1976” and the creation of The International Society for Humor Studies in 1988, which is multidisciplinary and functions as “a scholarly and professional organization dedicated to the advancement of humor research” (Mintz 301; “The International Society”; Carrell 316-317). The organization then formed

the first scholarly journal devoted to humor research—*Humor: International Journal for Humor Research* (best known as *HUMOR*) (Mintz 298). *HUMOR* is published by the academic publisher Mouton de Gruyter (“About the Journal”). This is important, because having a scholarly journal published by a recognized academic authority is a method to centralize important information to be shared among scholars and is also a way to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the academy (Solomon). Ironically, it showed that humor studies was no joke.

Second, the instructors in rhetoric and composition were starting to shake off the cloak of current-traditional pedagogy and open up their teaching methodologies and curricular materials to new possibilities. In particular, the expressivist movement (starting around 1960) encouraged writing instructors to give value to and engage with students’ individual voices (Berlin; Burnham 23). In fact, voice was becoming increasingly important, particularly among expressivists, because, according to Burnham, voice “symbolizes the expressivist value system. [Peter] Elbow and the expressivists . . . work to subvert teaching practices and institutional structures that oppress, appropriate, or silence an individual’s voice” (23). The inherent “dissensus” within expressivism “recognizes, celebrates, and explores difference to reestablish social autonomy. Dissensus concedes the power of groups and culture to shape individuals, but maintains the possibility of individual agency” (Burnham 23). The recognition and embracement of culture in addition to the encouragement of individual voice may have been the window through which humor needed to reenter the teaching of rhetoric and composition. Humor writing has long been recognized as a method through which individuals can express their thoughts and voice while also functioning as a milieu for critique; therefore, it



seemed primed and ready for the writing classroom (Graban; Helitzer and Shatz; Rishel; Stott). This is not to say that expressivists fully embraced humor writing as curricular material. Instead, I hypothesize that the expressivist movement helped to pave the road for humor writing to reenter the teaching of rhetoric and composition.

Third, historian James J. Murphy writes that in the 1990s, rhetoric and composition instruction became increasingly concerned “with such issues as the social roles of the arts and intellectuals, education and literacy, postindustrial transformation,” and popular culture (283). Part of this was because instructors were continually being faced with increasingly diverse (ethnically, intellectually, economically, culturally, etc.) students and felt the need to ascertain how best to reach their myriad of students rather than force them into a one-size-fits-all sarcophagus. As Murphy puts it, “While mass culture was a disease to be inoculated against and resisted in some pedagogies, in much of composition, and subsequently in cultural studies, it became the portal to student learning and even to be celebrated in its own right” (284).

Part of instructors’ turn toward accepting and incorporating (to varying degrees) popular culture in their classrooms stems from those instructors seeing increasing evidence that students tend to write better when they care about what they are writing (Murphy). Maxine Hairston writes that writing instructors “know that students develop best as writers when they can write about something they care about and want to know more about. Only then will they be motivated to invest real effort in their work; only then can we hope they will avoid the canned, cliched prose that neither they nor we take seriously” (486). Thus, writing teachers began looking outward toward what students

found meaningful and interesting. This, at the very least, opened a door for humor writing to enter the writing classroom.

To summarize, there are a few developments that helped to create an opportunity for instructors to use humor writing in the classroom—humor studies as a field increasingly gained academic legitimacy; current-traditional pedagogy was waning; there was a turn toward encouraging writers' voices as opposed to suppressing individuality in writing; writing instructors were being faced with increasingly diverse students and were trying to figure out how to connect with them; and instructors began exploring how popular culture (of which humor is an element) could help them connect with their students and encourage their students to care about writing.

Increasingly, more scholars are investigating humor's possible role in academia. Some, such as Linda Ivy and Alleen Nilsen et al. find that humor can encourage students to think in new, creative, and "divergent" ways (Ivy 54; Nilsen et al. "Humor for Developing Thinking Skills"). Several researchers have investigated humor's possibility for making material more enjoyable and retainable for students. Ronald A. Berk asserts that humor should be infused into the classroom environment and studied material (such as the reading assigned to, and analyzed by, students) in order to make the educational atmosphere enjoyable and to help students engage with curriculum that may feel boring to them, and Neelam Kher, Susan Molstad, and Roberta Donahue's work, "Using Humor in in the College Classroom to Enhance teaching Effectiveness in 'Dread Courses,'" has similar findings. Furthermore, R. L. Garner's study on learning in online college classes leads him to conclude that the inclusion of humorous examples, metaphors, and anecdotes that are related to the lecture "can have a positive effect on student enjoyment

and content retention” and can create “the impression that the instructor took the extra effort to get the message across” (179-180). William Boerman-Cornell, Eric Endlich, Paul J. Gibbs, Bruce A. Goebel, Stuart V. Hellman, Sue S. Minchew, and Colleen A. Ruggieri also separately find that including humor into one’s teaching can engage students during class time and help them to learn curricular material. Avner Ziv finds in his empirical study that humor can improve student understanding and recall of relevant material for a class’s final exam when the humor is related to the studied concepts (as opposed to spontaneous and non-relevant humor) (“Teaching and Learning”).

Some researchers are also exploring how students writing their own humorous pieces may help students study elements of literature, rhetoric, and writing. Maureen McMahon finds that having her high school English students write parodies (a form of humorous writing) aids them in analyzing classic works of literature, such as William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. She further maintains that having her students read and write humor helps them in understanding rhetorical elements such as audience awareness, an author’s persona, and tools of composition including exaggeration, word choice, and various writing forms such as satire, essay, and poetry.

Like McMahon, Cathy Tower argues that using humor writing allows students to access and connect with the material inside of the classroom because that material relates to what they have already experienced, and what they continue to experience, in their everyday lives. She writes,

We can help students in the classroom to move to greater language appreciation by using humor. Students are familiar with the method and they enjoy it. Rather

than communicating to students that school is “serious business” and that humor has no place there, we should encourage students to use humor to experiment with language and to attend to the nuances of language and vocabulary. Writing should be a natural extension of this experimenting. And there’s no reason that language learning can’t be fun. (Tower 4-5)

Bev Hogue also touts that having her students (high school seniors) read and write humorous texts pushes them to pay particular attention to a text’s targeted and potential audiences. Hogue writes, “Humor writing requires careful attention to language. The elements that make humor effective—pace, timing, economy of expression, vivid language—also make other kinds of writing effective, so exercising these elements provides skills transferable to other tasks” (201). Nilsen et al. echo Hogue’s sentiments by asserting that humor contains word play, requires an awareness of audience, and that studying humor in a classroom encourages students to engage in word play and analyze their texts’ audiences (“Humor for Developing Thinking Skills” 71). Boerman-Cornell also claims that studying humor writing can help students understand audience awareness.

Humor even seems to be inching its way into FYC. Currently, *The Rhetoric of Humor* (2017) is an FYC reader that is published by Bedford/St. Martin’s. A representative of the company promoted it to me (an FYC instructor) at my university’s book fair in 2018, which signals that academic textbook companies such as Bedford/St. Martin’s are recognizing humor’s potential for teaching students rhetoric and composition. The book’s preface for instructors offers some support for the curricular inclusion of humor writing by stating:

Educators need not choose between teaching and delighting. Pedagogy can, to borrow Horace's maxim about poetry, entertain as it instructs. Professors can design first-year writing courses that combine laughing with learning so that students obtain and retain rhetorical knowledge that facilitates their becoming better critical readers and academic writers. To learn about laughing is to learn while laughing.

The ubiquity of humor makes it not only a powerful teaching tool but also a topic with a solid chance of piquing students' interest . . . .

Comedic texts and performers question societal assumptions and up-end our commonsense perceptions of reality, which is precisely the purpose of the critical thinking skills we instill in our first-year writing, humanities, liberal arts, and cultural studies students. (vii-viii)

Interestingly, the reader does not offer humorous texts for students to analyze. Rather, it presents academic analyses of humorous texts by scholars. Therefore, it is difficult to say that the book truly represents the academy's full embracement of using humor writing as curricular material. Rather, the book seems to be a mere step toward such acceptance.

As shown, much of current research on humor in the classroom is promising overall. Still there are few researchers who have investigated if and how using humorous writing specifically for FYC may help students to understand and practice principles of rhetoric and composition. This is where my dissertation fits within the larger conversation of rhetoric and composition, FYC scholarship, and humor studies, and this is where my project adds new research to said fields. However, before further delving into the specific principles—audience awareness and situated knowledge—of rhetoric

and composition that I am examining, I must preface my work by saying that not everyone in the academy wholeheartedly embraces the idea of humor in the classroom. Indeed, there is still some hesitancy and concern regarding such an inclusion.

D. Diane Davis, a strong proponent of using laughter (and its associated humor writing) to teach rhetoric and composition, attributes current hesitation regarding including humor writing as curricular material to rhetoric and composition's "fear" to push the supposed borders that need pushing. She writes, "Within the typical comp classroom, a writing toward futurity, an extremist writing that pushes the limits of knowing and explodes thinking's border zones is sacrificed for the sake of 'teachability.' *Composition*, it's time to admit, is a control freak" (8). In Davis's eyes, "any alliance with laughter is risky business" (9). However, she believes that instructors should embrace such risk. She writes, "I do not hesitate to say that" the topic of laughter "is a responsible, political, and ethical one. If it's risky, it's because b-r-e-a-k-i-n-g up necessarily involves risk—there is no way of knowing what will be left in the wake of laughter that shatters 'all the familiar landmarks of [our] thought'" (9). Davis's text is perhaps a bit extreme in its language, but it is purposefully so and fits its title of *Breaking Up [at] Totality*. Nevertheless, Davis rightfully points out that humor writing (which she often dubs as "laughter") is not fully accepted by many rhetoric and composition instructors as possible curricular material. There are still concerns and hesitations that linger, and some of them are overviewed presently.

#### **IV. Possible Criticisms of Using Humorous Texts in FYC**

It is worthwhile to discuss some of the hesitancies toward curricular inclusion of humor writing, because such provides a basis for which I may return after I conduct my

rhetorical analyses and explore my findings in Chapter IV of this dissertation. Doing so may result in lessening some of the fears that FYC instructors may have in including humorous texts into curricular materials, confirming some of the anxieties around such, and/or offering suggestions on how to deal with their worries. Some of the most common reservations are: 1) anything humorous is not serious enough to be worthy of inclusion; 2) including humor may put pressure on an instructor to be funny; and, 3) humor and humorous texts could offend students.

Some instructors fear that by including humor in any manner in the classroom, the material and the class itself may not be taken seriously by students, an instructor's colleagues, and the university. Gibbs recognizes these risks by stating that some instructors fear that they "run the risk of turning our classes and with it our discipline into a joke" should an instructor embrace humor in the classroom (Gibbs 130). The historical work/play bifurcation that was previously discussed in this chapter appears to be at the heart of this fear (Backes; Berk; Crossman; Driessen; Goebel; Nilsen; Romanska and Ackerman; Rouzie; Seitz).

There are also likely remnants of rhetoric and composition instructors feeling the need to be as serious and "earnest" as literature studies seemingly are (Rouzie; Romanska and Ackerman). This feeling of needing to match the supposed seriousness of literature departments is somewhat justified as they have historically been more well-funded and, arguably, more respected, than those on the rhetoric and composition side of English departments (Berlin; North *The Making of Knowledge*; Rouzie). So, it is logical that rhetoric and composition instructors would want to copy literature departments in some ways in order to gain that same respect and funding. However, this fear ignores the fact

that literature departments have used humorous texts to teach students literary devices such as exaggeration and irony. For example, frequent texts in literature instructors' repertoires include those by Mark Twain and Jonathan Swift as well as Shakespearean comedies such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Much Ado about Nothing*.

The anxiety over not being taken seriously, in some ways, carries over to the issue of an instructor's ethos (credibility) and the seeming precarious balance between humor and seriousness she feels that she must obtain in class when using humor and/or humorous texts. This worrisome balance also stems partly from humor's historic association with buffoonery.

According to Morreall in *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor*, Aristotle shows hesitant support for humor in *Nicomachean Ethics* when Aristotle writes that "People who carry humor to excess are considered vulgar buffoons. They try to be funny at all costs and their aim is more to raise a laugh than to speak with propriety and to avoid giving pain to the butt of the jokes. But those who cannot say anything funny themselves, and are offended by those who do, are thought to be boorish and dour" (Aristotle qtd. in Morreall 23). This dynamic between buffoonery and boorishness encapsulates one of the fears that some instructors have about using humor writing in their classes—they may not know how to enact that challenging balance between effective pedagogical humor and "vulgar" buffoonery, and even attempting such may risk their ethos with their FYC students.

Part of this issue is that some instructors feel as if they must be "funny" in order to use humor and humorous texts, and they may consider themselves to be inherently not funny. If they try to be humorous in class, then their jokes may fall flat and they risk



embarrassing themselves, looking like Aristotle's "vulgar buffoon," and losing ethos (credibility) with their students. This is not an irrational fear. There is a risk of an instructor telling a poorly-received joke in class and subsequently losing students' respect. This joke may simply not be funny to students, and some jokes and humorous texts will likely fall flat because what is humorous is highly subjective. Berk discusses this risk to instructors' ethos and its possible rewards in his *Professors are from Mars, Students are from Snickers*, and he recognizes instructors' fears about losing their students' respect through failed or offensive humor.

There is also a risk of curricular humor possibly offending students. Such offense risks an instructor's ethos (and perhaps the instructor's job if the offense is serious enough) and risks alienating students in such a way that they will not be receptive to the instructor or the lessons in the FYC classroom. Helitzer and Shatz write that "Sexist, racist, derogatory, or obscene humor is never appropriate" in the classroom, and "even a flippant remark might be viewed as offensive" (Helitzer and Shatz 316). Hicham Benjelloun finds in "An Empirical Investigation of the Use of Humor in University Classrooms" that while self-deprecating humor is desired by students, they "are not interested in extreme forms of humors such as acting like a clown and doing outrageous things. They desire some degree of formality" (317-318). Yet, the self-deprecating humor that a teacher employs should not be overused as too much may cause "students [to] feel uncomfortable or cause them to mistrust a teacher's abilities" (Ivy 57). Finally, current literature suggests that instructors should not use humor "that is derogatory or ridiculing and that masks themes of hostility or aggression" toward their students (Darling and Civikly 25). Students oftentimes know when an instructor is hostile toward them, either

purposefully through personal interactions or indirectly through curricular materials. Teachers taking out their frustrations on their students through these manners will likely be noticed and will increase the risks of offending students and subsequently alienating them and making them feel unwelcomed.

Curricular humorous texts may offend students in other ways as well. In “Aristophanes Can Wait,” Dionne O’Dell believes that students “should be exposed to both the tragic and comic elements of the human experience,” but she asserts that “risky” texts—which in O’Dell’s mind are “politically incorrect,” include sexual content, and/or may offend audiences—should not be taught in high school (O’Dell 46). Admittedly, college provides much more curricular flexibility and freedom than does high school, but some instructors may still be worried about including humorous works that are akin to O’Dell’s risky texts in their FYC courses.

Critics of incorporating humorous texts into FYC to teach rhetoric and composition may also argue that there are more serious, and often more academically-sanctioned, texts with which to accomplish FYC’s learning outcomes. This is true, and I do not claim that incorporating humorous works into FYC is the only way to accomplish desired curricular goals. Instead, what I wish to explore is humor writing as an *option* for teaching rhetoric and composition. Despite the aforementioned hesitations, using humorous texts in FYC is still worthy of exploration since humor writing has the possibility of encouraging analyses and critiques of texts among students.

While some researchers have begun to explore how humor and the teaching of rhetoric and writing interact with one another, few have viewed humor writing as an option for teaching FYC, and they have rarely looked at how humor writing could help

FYC students consciously engage with and analyze audience awareness and situated knowledge, which are two foundational concepts in FYC. The aforementioned intermingling could yield an interesting conversation and useful pedagogical implications for FYC, rhetoric and composition, and humor studies. Engaging in these critical conversations is one of the significant aspects of my project, and I hope that this will aid me in addressing my three central research questions: 1) How might humor writing be used as a teaching tool in FYC? and 2) How might humor writing be used to teach FYC students how to engage consciously with and analyze audience awareness and situated knowledge? 3) What are some of the risks of using humor writing to teach rhetoric and composition in FYC, and how can they be minimized?

Before investigating how humorous texts may help students in consciously engaging with audience awareness and situated knowledge, I explain why said concepts are taught in FYC because such gives me a foundation for my claims. This foundation also functions as a touchstone to which I may return and see how the results of my analyses of humor writing as a text for analysis in FYC connect, or do not connect, with FYC's goals regarding audience awareness and situated knowledge.

## **V. Audience Awareness**

One of the key factors of FYC is teaching students audience awareness and how such may impact arguments, the persona of the speaker/writer, and the language and evidence that are used within arguments. Audience is one of the elements of the rhetorical triangle, which is often a foundational concept in FYC, and audience awareness is one of the pillars of humorous texts. Before I explore humor writing's connection to

audience awareness though, I define audience awareness and briefly explain its connection to FYC.

Audience awareness is thinking about the readers of a text—who might read the text and to whom the author intends to write—and how that audience may affect how and why an author writes, what message(s) the author expresses, and how that/those message(s) may be received by one or more audiences (Berkenkotter; Bitzer; Flower and Hayes; Magnifico; Ong; Park; Wang). Kevin Roozen claims that audience awareness is “the rhetorical work of addressing the needs and interests of a particular audience” (“Writing is a Social and Rhetorical Activity” 17). Thus, consciously having audience awareness helps students to understand the “what,” “how,” “why,” and context of a text (Bartholomae “Inventing the University”).

### **1. FYC and Audience Awareness**

Muriel Harris explains the significance of audience awareness in teaching beginning college composition students about writing. She states, “The variety of audiences out there is not only real in academia . . . , it is also critically important when writers address the basic prewriting/planning questions such as ‘Who am I writing to?’ ‘Why?’ and ‘What do they need to know?’” (124). Wayne C. Booth maintains that it is through teaching students about writing via a rhetorical stance that instructors may be able to help students become adept writers. Booth states that “the rhetorical stance” is one that “depends on discovering and maintaining in any writing situation a proper balance among the three elements that are at work in any communicative effort: the available arguments about the subject itself, the interests and peculiarities of the audience, and the voice, the implied character, of the speaker” (166). He claims that it is this balance in

writing that “makes the difference between effective communication and mere wasted effort” (166).

Sondra Perl also asserts the importance of audience awareness when she writes that students need to learn “how to call up a sense of their reader’s needs and expectations” so that they can “attempt to become readers and to imagine what someone other than themselves will need before the writer’s particular piece of writing can become intelligible and compelling” (146). In order to help students consciously have and employ audience awareness in their writing, many FYC instructors have them read and analyze texts in terms of audience awareness in the hopes that students transfer the skills that they learn through such analyses and apply them to their own writing inside and outside of FYC.

Another reason why current FYC classrooms often put such an emphasis on audience awareness is because they are based on the concept that writing communicates meaning (Bazerman “The Problem of;” Bazerman “Writing Expresses and;” Perelman). Communicating implies that there is a person and/or community outside of the author to whom the message is being conveyed (Trimbur; Gentile). Knowing an audience’s characteristics can help a writer’s message to be well-received and will increase the persuasiveness of the writer’s argument. This is why audience awareness is a critical concept to learn and use consciously for FYC students (Perelman). Admittedly, there are those who argue that there is writing in FYC that has no target audience (Elbow). Also, some claim that a writer has a hand in choosing to invoke a certain audience or partially create an audience (Ede and Lundsford). Walter Ong even asserts that there is no real way to know an audience because each audience is speculative and therefore potentially

fiction. Nevertheless, FYC instructors have a responsibility to help students investigate and prepare for audiences that students may want to address inside and outside of their academic careers. Indeed, audience awareness when writing, reading, and analyzing texts can help students to have direction, goals, focus, “breadth and coherence” regarding “what to say next” in their writing, and to “de-center,” which can help them to “gain the distance necessary to effective[ly]” analyze and synthesize (Flower and Hayes 267; Lunsford 288; Gentile). Thus, audience awareness remains worthy of curricular inclusion and academic inquiry.

## **2. How Humor Writing Connects to Audience Awareness**

As shown, one of the goals of FYC is teaching students audience awareness and how such may impact texts, the persona of the speaker/writer, and the language and evidence that are used within texts. All of these elements of audience awareness are also key in humorous texts. Humorists and humor scholars continually point to the importance of audience awareness when writing successful humor. Helitzer and Shatz include the rhetorical triangle in their *Comedy Writing Secrets* and write that “the *audience* is the most important” and that “the first responsibility of every humorist is to evaluate the majority of the audience, whether it’s one person or a thousand” (14). They continue by stating that it is “only after you know your audience and the characteristics about the” writer’s persona that an author is “ready to start writing the material” (15). Emmy award-winning humorist Gene Perret also emphasizes the importance of audience when he writes, “There is only one good judge of comedy and that is the audience” (54). Writing instructor, humorist, and comedy screenwriter John Vorhaus claims that all humor writing “creates an expectation within an audience” and that “meeting an audience’s

expectation is about the single most useful thing a comic creator can do to win an audience's allegiance. Violating that expectation, on the other hand, is the kiss o' death" (137). Many humor writing handbooks continually encourage writers to view jokes from the position of an audience member, and that is oftentimes the lens through which such texts teach readers how to write humor (Vorhaus; Kaplan; Perret; Carter). This is because, for humorists, the success of their writing largely, if not entirely, depends upon the audience. Thus, to be successful, one must be aware of, and analyze, one's target and potential audiences.

Humor writing's strong connection to audience awareness is again demonstrated when Arthur Asa Berger writes that there are three requirements of humor: 1) the humor must elicit an emotional and "passionate" response; 2) it has a sudden impact on the audience; and 3) the humor allows the audience to feel superior to others or to their own past selves (Berger 7). Thus, humor writing naturally encourages students to ponder the issue of audience and consider how a writer's purpose interacts with an audience. Seitz affirms humor writing's potential for the study of audience and writer/speaker when he writes that studying parody—a type of humorous text—encourages students to think about the intentions and purposes behind each rhetorical move that a writer makes. Seitz states that parody "can encourage a more complex view of how language choices relate to audience identification and persuasion, particularly when it comes to the use of humor in persuasion," and that studying parody can "build a stronger ethical awareness" of the possible "politics" behind language (372).

Another example of humor writing teaching students about the importance of audience awareness occurs when students are exposed to, and taught about, irony. There

are several types of irony, but a general definition is that irony occurs when a viewer or reader interprets a double meaning from “a single impression” (Pole 116). This is seen when “what’s said and what’s meant” are different and when what is meant is “the exact opposite of what’s being expressed” (Rishel 291; Helitzer and Shatz 333). Irony is not inherently humorous, but the tension that it creates may generate humor.

According to J.R. Pole in “An Anatomy of American Irony,” there are two ways of assessing irony: 1) engaging with the audience and 2) the author’s intent. The first feature is important because in order to have successful irony, the author must “gauge, and thereby position himself to engage with, his audience” (116). The audience must feel included, otherwise the humor in the irony could fall flat or offend. The second feature—the author’s intent—refers to comprehending what the author wants his audience to understand. This necessitates that the writer controls his irony so that it is not misunderstood or too farfetched, because such may damage the author’s persona and/or purpose. The intent also means that there must be an element of surprise to the irony. Pole states, “Irony calls on an element of surprise, of the shock that requires the reader to take in a double statement from a single impression. To lose that is to lose all effect” (Pole 116). Thus, an audience’s misunderstanding may damage the message of the irony as well as its potential for creating surprise. Furthermore, the possibilities for misunderstanding and offense mean that, for irony, “the maximum prospect of entertainment must be accommodated to the minimum risk of offense” (Pole 132). Thus, by learning about irony through studying humorous texts, FYC students see the importance of an audience’s expectations and understandings of the material. Students



also understand, and see in practice, how an author's intent shapes what he crafts and how the audience impacts what he writes.

FYC students could theoretically study audience awareness using non-humorous irony and through other means; however, humorous texts imply a goal—that they should be humorous to their audiences. Students understand this intention, and by comparing that overarching goal to the details and rhetorical moves within the text, they may be able to ascertain clearly how and why certain moves work or fail. For instance, most FYC students can tell if something is, or is not, humorous to them. They may then compare the moves (including word choice, structure, claims, etc.) that authors make in their humorous texts and see if such add or detract from the text's humor. In this way, FYC students place themselves in the position of a text's audience and view the author's persona and textual choices through that lens and through their own subjective perspectives. Thus, the overarching goal of a text needing to be humorous is something that students can easily latch onto and comprehend, thereby giving FYC students a clear and relatable starting point for their scholarly analyses.

As shown, humorists must continually think about their audience and, in the words of rhetoric and composition scholar Andrea Lunsford, “de-center” themselves to look outward. Humor writing is primed and ready as a textual source for learning about and practicing audience awareness.

Studying humor writing may also help students to learn how to identify, analyze, and critique assumptions and biases of audiences and authors—frequent goals of FYC. Indeed, Meghan Sweeney states that “To effectively read with audience awareness, readers must consider how they are being written to and how their contexts and

worldviews affect their uptake of the message” (63). Thus, in order to understand how and why something is written and how that message may be received by readers, students must understand and be able to analyze a text’s possible audiences. Furthermore, as Sweeney rightly points out, readers must also be aware of “their context and worldviews” and how such may affect an audience’s reception of a text. This often necessitates that students understand, and be able to analyze, situated knowledge—a concept that will be presently explained.

## **VI. Situated Knowledge**

Situated knowledge is the belief that there are multiple truths as opposed to an all-encompassing truth, and it is knowledge that identifies its location (i.e., what—beliefs, power structures, social mores and institutions, cultural influences, experiences, etc.—caused a person to arrive at his conclusion). Donna Haraway claims that with situated knowledge, there is no objective Truth that is without biases or outside of human influence and perceptions (590). Rather, there are multiple truths, meaning that knowledge consists of “accounts of the world” and should not pretend to house one all-encompassing, correct, and singular view of reality. Linda Flower adds that situated knowledge is experientially-shaped and describes it as the “silent logic” that people use to make meaning of the world (39). Lunsford crystallizes this concept in terms of writing by stating that such “is shaped by the writer’s earlier interactions with writing and with other people and with all the writer has read and learned” (“Writing is Informed” 54). Therefore, how people (including authors) see and interpret the world is based upon their own individual lines of logic, and these lines of logic help to situate their knowledge. This can be extended to disciplinary knowledge, because, like individuals, disciplines

interpret the world—something that college students must acknowledge, identify, and analyze in order to be successful writers in their chosen fields.

These current scholars are not the first to promote the usefulness and inescapability of situated knowledge. A foundational scholar of rhetoric and composition, Plato, recognizes situated knowledge's inescapability, power, and importance. In *Phaedrus*, Plato claims that to be a successful rhetorician one must be aware of the different "souls" of people so that a speaker may pick the most effective form of persuasion for those "souls" (Plato 58). St. Augustine, another scholar of import to the field, also espouses that different people have different ways of interpreting the world and that speakers must adapt their persuasive styles to an audience's preferred ways of viewing reality. This is not to say that Plato and St. Augustine tout each way of interpreting the world as equal—they do not. However, their recognition that people view the world differently according to their experience, social class, economic status, etc., aligns with the situated knowledge that Haraway and Flower describe centuries later.

Another scholar who recognizes situated knowledge's usefulness and omnipresence is Berlin, who insists that politics, social expectations, and economic structures affect how knowledge is viewed, known, and treated. Critical pedagogy proponent Ann George also emphasizes situated knowledge's importance by asserting that students should analyze power relations to identify how institutions and cultural practices influence knowledge in order to critique current knowledge and change how it is treated so that society may move toward egalitarianism. Additionally, Paul Kei Matsuda recognizes situated knowledge's power by writing that language helps to shape one's thought patterns and, by extension, each individual's knowledge. Critical vitalism

champion Byron Hawk also acknowledges situated knowledge's power by viewing knowledge (and teaching knowledge within writing classrooms) as a creation of complexity and contextuality as opposed to a product of linear epistemology. Put in terms of the FYC classroom, learning about and working with situated knowledge thusly manifests as students recognizing and analyzing how writing functions within (and is impacted by) context, examining how language and stylistic choices are shaped (particularly by the author), exploring various standpoints and perspectives, and examining how the characteristics and experiences that authors and audiences (including the students themselves) have may influence how texts are crafted and interpreted.

Admittedly, teaching situated knowledge has not been encouraged within FYC by all scholars. There are some who appear to assert that a general bank of knowledge regarding writing should suffice for college writing, and some writing handbooks, such as Stanley Fish's *How to Write a Sentence and How to Read One*, seem to echo this sentiment. Knowing "the basics" (i.e., mechanics, the essay, the research paper, etc.) is essential for FYC students, particularly for those who may enter FYC at a disadvantage. Mina P. Shaughnessy emphasizes that students entering college, particularly those who may not be familiar with university rigor, need "the basics" in order to have a fighting chance of success in academia. These "basics" do not necessarily include the situatedness of knowledge but instead often assert that there is a certain basic true and correct way to write and express knowledge within academia. Shaughnessy's perhaps now-dated support for basics appears to be largely a product of her unique situation in which "unprepared" students flooded into her newly-open-admissions City University of New York. Still, it does not engage the rich "big picture" that situated knowledge aims to paint.

Additionally, as Carolyn R. Miller argues, texts are social actions and therefore inherently require students to explore writing past the “basics.” Thus, to argue that students only need a general knowledge of writing and to devote little or no attention to situated knowledge is to deny the very nature of writing.

Peter Smagorinsky confirms the importance of such general knowledge but rightly contends that persuasive and compelling writers must “become chameleons of convention” who “can adapt to new situations” (143). Additionally, as Bartholomae argues, FYC students need to be exposed to and learn about the conventions of academic discourse, and this remains true for today’s students who need to be able to identify and meet the writing conventions of various academic disciplines and media, thereby being able to “become chameleons of convention” (143). Doing so will likely help in developing the communicative competence that FYC seeks to instill in students, aid students in developing some awareness beyond writing’s basic functionality, and help them to be cognizant of varying situations for writing. Yet, such a task will likely be difficult for many college students if they do not learn about situated knowledge early on, because their minds can still be looking for, and expecting, a single “Truth” as opposed to being open to exploring various ways of viewing and writing about the world.

### **1. FYC and Situated Knowledge**

FYC classes often aim to train students to deal with situated knowledge because writing has an inextricable relationship with situated knowledge—each individual’s writing is situated within his/her experiences and writing processes; writing is socially situated within genres; and disciplinary contexts have their own situated knowledge that writers must learn in order to meet those contexts’ writing requirements. The onus of this

responsibility often falls to FYC because the course is meant to prepare students for college-level writing. Thus, the course must simultaneously teach students “the basics” of college-level writing while preparing them to meet the writing demands of various disciplines. Beyond teaching students the concept of situated knowledge is helping them to apply the concept to texts and situations within FYC and, hopefully, beyond. To some extent, students already have some functional abilities in practicing situated knowledge. For example, they often make different language choices around their friends versus when talking to their instructors. This demonstrates some awareness of language, context, audience, and register/discourse. However, these practices are not typically fully conscious, and, in order for such practices to become deliberately analytical and applicable, they must be conscious.

Despite unconscious applications, situated knowledge may be difficult for students to comprehend and engage with, because it requires critical thinking and viewing the world through multiple perspectives, which are oftentimes adult skills that are still developing in many FYC students. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that about 66.7% of 2017 high school graduates (ages sixteen to twenty-four) are currently enrolled in college, and the period between sixteen and twenty-four years of age is a time of significant developmental cognition (United States Department of Labor). Ronny Bruffaerts et al. assert that college can help “students make the transition from late adolescence to emerging adulthood” (97). The University of Maryland’s professor of human development Jeffrey Jensen Arnett claims that these are the ages in which people are most welcoming to, and even hungry for, “identity explorations in the areas of love, work, and worldviews” (Arnett 473). According to Arnett, many college students believe

that “deciding on their own beliefs and values is an essential criterion for attaining adult status” and that they desire “to reexamine the beliefs they have learned in their families and to form a set of beliefs that is the product of their own independent reflections” (Arnett 474). An awareness of situated knowledge can help students consciously engage in these reflections and assist them in learning the critical thinking skills and capacity for viewing the world in various ways that will aid them in evolving intellectually and attaining “adult status” (Arnett 474).

During these ages, students have the capability for complex critical thinking, and neurologist and neuroscientist Frances Jensen states that in teenagers (a category that includes a large portion of those enrolled in FYC), “the emotional center of the brain, the limbic system, which controls emotions, is fully connected,” meaning that those synapses have fully formed (11). However, “the frontal lobe that sharpens critical thinking isn’t well connected,” and the frontal lobe’s synaptic connections are largely responsible for allowing people to pause and think critically and consequentially about their and others’ actions (12). This indicates that students may “have trouble abstracting issues and making decisions in real time as rapidly as adults” (12). Studying, understanding, and analyzing situated knowledge requires analyzing abstract thoughts and possibly applying abstractions to real-world situations and vice versa. As Jensen asserts, those thought processes can be difficult for teenagers. Thus, thinking about the world in multiple ways with various possible answers and viewpoints and moving beyond either/or thinking, all of which are necessary when understanding and analyzing situated knowledge, might be difficult for some students. The teenage years, and even the young adult years according to Arnett, are times in which brains are being honed and modified, which makes FYC a

prime place for students to learn and practice their skills in understanding and analyzing situated knowledge (Griffin 14; Arnett 474).

FYC is often associated with analyzing texts, and “Just as written texts are contextualized and take conventional disciplinary forms, so do the thinking processes that go into them. For beginning college students, both are foreign concepts” (Merrill 2). It is in FYC that students often first come into contact with such “foreign concepts,” and it is in FYC that they might first learn about and practice such thinking processes, some (although perhaps not all) differentiated writing forms, and various collegial writing conventions. In FYC, students can also first encounter and learn how to use consciously the concept of situated knowledge. Thus, FYC instructors are faced with distinct challenges in teaching situated knowledge. Another hurdle is teaching students *how* knowledge is situated, which necessitates that students both understand situated knowledge in the abstract and recognize knowledge as situated within actual texts. So, students need to practice recognizing the situatedness of knowledge and analyze how that situating occurs.

The issues thus far are two: 1) FYC students must learn what situated knowledge is, and 2) they must learn how to analyze how that situating occurs. This work is achievable, I believe, through the curricular inclusion of humorous texts.

Within FYC, situated knowledge aids students in identifying varying ways of viewing the world and the possible results of such viewpoints—both manifestations of audience awareness—and it provides students with opportunities to identify disciplinary conventions and, for example, interact with and trace the influences of culture and power distributions so that they may investigate ways of being and thinking. In this manner,



teaching students about situated knowledge can help FYC to be inclusive, show that knowledge is both socially and individually constructed, and can aid students in learning how to analyze knowledge (and audience) both consciously and critically. Erin A. Cech et al. argue that the recognition and analysis of situated knowledge encourages “epistemic humility,” because it “asserts that knowledge advancement must come from listening to those who are marginalized, utilizing a fluid ‘bottom-up’ approach that responds to the needs of those who are disenfranchised, rather than a rigid top-down approach that replicates colonialist practice by dictating ‘one-size-fits-all’ solutions for all [...]” (763). Some instructors, such as Janice Wearmouth, believe that they may be able to include a fundamental and necessary aspect of teaching into their classrooms by including situated knowledge in their pedagogies—the acknowledgement that literacy is simultaneously a social practice and an act of individualism. From this perspective, situated knowledge is, in a way, reciprocal in that its connections move from a plurality (including audience) to an individual (writer/speaker), like a course community to a student and vice versa. Teaching situated knowledge then may encourage students to recognize that learning takes place within themselves as well as within a culture and that “Truth is never ‘out there’ in the material world or the social realm [alone,] or simply ‘in here’ in a private and personal world. It emerges only as the three [realms]—the material, the social, and the personal—interact” through language (Berlin 17). Situated knowledge thus acknowledges that literacy and social practice go hand-in-hand. Therefore, by teaching students about situated knowledge, “teachers-as-mediators of literacy” can be “sensitive and responsive to students’ existing culturally based literacy-related frames of reference [which] can be highly significant to literacy learning and cognitive achievement”

(Wearmouth 3). This indicates that teaching situated knowledge may help FYC instructors to teach students how to identify and analyze contexts of texts and the knowledge that texts espouse as well as see the effects of those contexts on that knowledge. Indeed, these are skills that aid students in their cognitive developments and quests for literacy.

Cech et al. also tackle the idea that situated knowledge enables FYC classrooms to be culturally sensitive and inclusive, because situated knowledge inherently recognizes the existence of various epistemological standpoints—even those that do not belong to the dominant culture. They believe that helping students to recognize consciously and apply this understanding of situated knowledge helps “students creatively manage incongruities or even blend epistemologies [which] may improve students’ experiences” and may encourage students “to explore and engage different ways of thinking [that] could be particularly empowering” (764). Ultimately, Cech et al. believe that students gain more opportunities to explore the world within the writing classroom by understanding that “*all* epistemologies are social constructs and that inconsistencies among them emerge out of cultural-historical variation in truth-making and legitimation practices, not more or less correct perspectives on an objective reality” (764). This is not to say that FYC students need to be able to handle such fluidity in the constructs upon which they build their worldviews with amazing dexterity, but they can, nevertheless, be shown how to embark on such an intellectual journey.

This assertion harkens back to Haraway’s belief that situated knowledge promotes objectivity that encourages a viewer or reader to identify the location (i.e., what caused someone to arrive at their conclusions) of a person’s knowledge, and, in doing so, the

observer must partake in a continued questioning of individual realities and truths. This, to Haraway, is true objectivity that is reflective, identifies power distributions, and admits that knowledge is largely about ethics and politics as opposed to epistemology (579). Furthermore, questioning that arises from teaching situated knowledge helps to teach students the deep examination skills that Susan Jarratt believes aid students in understanding “how this system works—and, perhaps even more important, [to learn] from their experiences how it works now and in many different ways” which “is centrally connected with the teaching of writing” (116). Indeed, teaching students about situated knowledge urges them to examine their worldviews and to understand how and why those viewpoints have developed. It also encourages them to explore how audiences’ worldviews may have developed and influence how they receive and react to texts. In these ways, the FYC classroom may promote reflection and critical questioning, because learning about situated knowledge can help students to understand, think through (as opposed to blindly accept), and question beliefs in order to motivate revision and alteration and, sometimes, to encourage more comfort and confidence in their existing views by working through challenges to those perspectives.

Should situated knowledge not be taught, then Cech et al. worry that classrooms could, perhaps unintentionally, encourage inequalities among students and ideas that may result in some ways of being and of viewing the world being relegated to “quaint cultural relics that may or may not need to be ‘accommodated’” (763). Possibilities of being in and of viewing the world may be denied to students within the FYC classroom, thereby cutting them off from exploring new intellectual avenues. This puts instructors at risk of seeming to present students with singular “Truths” and ways of viewing and existing in

the world, because FYC may be perceived as designed to fit within prescribed parameters as opposed to questioning, exploring, and altering them.

The scholarly conversations around situated knowledge and its teaching in FYC reveal several key concepts. Situated knowledge encourages the inclusion of diversity of thought, ways of being, and understanding of the world. Situated knowledge promotes the continued questioning of realities and truths and allows for nuances in these supposed realities and truths. Also, teaching situated knowledge encourages FYC students to identify and explore possible biases in writers and audiences in order to determine from where such biases originate, how they color a text/way of seeing the world, how and why they influence a writer's goals, and how an audience may view a text. This may embolden students to explore different worldviews and viewpoints, thereby pushing FYC students out of a "black-and-white" thinking pattern and into a more nuanced world of rich color. The challenge is to find pedagogies, practices, assignments, and materials that best facilitate this learning and make the most of situated knowledge.

Such a method should enable students to see that knowledge is situated and accessible in the sense that students can examine how such knowledge is steeped in biases stemming from beliefs, socioeconomic statuses, race, etc. Using humorous texts to teach students about, and how to analyze, situated knowledge is an option for accomplishing these goals.

## **2. How Humor Writing Connects to Situated Knowledge**

Humorous texts are often immersed in, and reflective of, the beliefs and attitudes of various eras, cultures, socioeconomic statuses, and ways of thinking. Their authors may even explicitly state such coloring biases. Kenneth Burke observes that humor

writing may reveal that there are varying ways to view the world (a hallmark of situated knowledge) and that such may challenge the dominant culture's and ruling class's intellectual beliefs and resulting power relations. Burke claims in *Attitudes Toward History* that a "comic frame" may embrace what is seen as "'error' as a *genuine aspect of the truth*, with emphases valuable for the correcting of present emphases" (172). Seitz argues that studying parodies engages with Burke's concept of "the comic," which Seitz claims "promotes seeing multiple perspectives as a hope for tolerance and social change" (Seitz 388). Thus, humor writing can act as a site of resistance against dominant culture and power by championing other "emphases"—ways of thinking and viewing the world. This means that humor writing used as curricular material could encourage students to think about and analyze how and why various audiences (not just those of the dominant culture) would view and respond to texts in certain ways.

Humor writing has a reputation for satirizing and lampooning much of dominant culture and traditional mindsets that may reject the idea that knowledge is situated. Romanska and Ackerman claim that a frequent goal of humor is to create "a transition from habitual behavior, arbitrary laws, obsession, hypocrisy, and fixed social arrangements to a state that is self-aware, more fluid, honest, and creative" (12). Humor's reputation for critiquing behaviors, society, and authority figures and their actions is frequently noted by humor scholars. Henri Bergson, Cloudesley Brereton, and Fred Rothwell discuss how humor can alert individuals and compel them to correct a behavior that society may view as an undesirable eccentricity and as a sign of not "living well" (Bergson, Brereton, and Rothwell 19). In this way, humor functions as a "corrective" (20). Mary K. Rothbart also discusses how humor and laughter can act as "a negative

social sanction, punishment, social control, or censure mechanism . . . indicating that [a person] is losing status, and thus motivate him to take care not to make a fool of himself again (i.e., to conform to the norm)” (Rothbart 88).

Yet, individuals may also push against social control and can critique governments, those in power, and society as a whole through humor—particularly via satire (Driessen 144). In discussing how people joke about a government and its laws, Oring points to how the Russian people would make jokes to express criticism under Lenin’s regime. He writes,

The political joke, with its incongruities and its mechanism for making those incongruities appropriate, allows for a momentary revision of reality . . . . The joke is a reduction ad absurdum by means of which the regime, the leaders, the rhetoric, the incompetence, the hardships, the duplicity, the surveillance, and even the terror are domesticated and discounted. In each of these jokes, a space is created—however small—that the Party cannot penetrate. The joke rejects conventional logic and with its own counter-logics affirms the independence and integrity of tellers and hearers. (Oring 126)

Indeed, authority figures are often criticized through humor, because, as Helitzer and Shatz write, humans enjoy “pricking the bloated arrogance of authority and watching it bleed” as such “gives the public an opportunity to blow off indignant steam at authority figures” (43). Helitzer and Shatz further acknowledge that humor can critique those that much of society deems as praiseworthy, such as celebrities. They write that some of the most popular targets of humor are celebrities because humor can “humble” such icons of societal worship (40).

Pedagogical scholars have also written about humor's satirical and critical uses in the classroom. Rishel asserts that satiric comedies may help students to see how authors "address the folly of society at large" (100). Graban writes that studying humor encourages students to "make social commentary on discourse" (420). This echoes Carol Reeves' belief that humor enables students to learn how to make salient social critiques (15). Stephen Smith also believes that humor can function as a way for students to question society's dominant views (51).

Additionally, Burke suggests that "the comic" may extend interrogation inwards from society to each individual. He states that "the comic frame should enable people *to be observers of themselves, while acting*. Its ultimate [goal] would not be *passiveness*, but *maximum consciousness*. One would 'transcend' himself by noting his own foibles. He would provide a rationale for locating the irrational and the nonrational" (Burke 171). Thus, humor writing may help question and trace the biases that society holds as well as those that inform each individual's and audience's identities and beliefs. Such questionings show that "the comic" promotes the idea of "human life as a project in 'composition,' where the power works with the materials of social relationships" (Burke 173). Thus, humor writing may guard against any finality of perception and knowledge, because, in Burke's notion of "the comic," ways of being, seeing, and acting are continuously being generated—the creations have no real finality. Therefore, studying humor writing in FYC offers students options for being, thinking, and seeing the world as well as examining and analyzing how others (audiences) may view the world. It can bring diversity of thought into FYC, and this, in turn, helps students to learn about situated knowledge and, by extension, an aspect of audience awareness.

## VII. Conclusion

This chapter has endeavored to accomplish several goals. It first identified a central issue in FYC, which is instructors deciding what materials to use to teach their students about composition and rhetoric and how to use those resources to enable their students to practice and hone their skills. Further investigation led to exploring humor writing as a potential option for solving this problem, which led to forming three guiding research questions: 1) How might humor writing be used as a teaching tool in FYC? 2) How might humor writing be used to teach FYC students to engage consciously with and analyze audience awareness and situated knowledge? and 3) What are some of the risks of using humor writing to teach rhetoric and composition in FYC, and how can they be minimized? This chapter also gave critical definitions regarding humor, humor writing, humorous writing, humor texts, and humorous texts. I also narrowed this project's scope to focus on FYC students *analyzing* humorous writing, not *producing* humorous texts.

The chapter then provided a literature review regarding humor writing's historic dance with rhetoric and composition. While researchers have explored how humor can be used to engage students and help them to understand literary devices, few have examined if and how humor writing can help FYC students specifically understand and analyze audience awareness and situated knowledge, which, as this chapter has shown, are two foundational elements of rhetoric and composition and are thereby worthy (even necessary) of inclusion in FYC. It is here that my research fits within the larger conversations of FYC pedagogy, rhetoric and composition, and humor studies.

I endeavor to answer my aforementioned three research questions through rhetorically analyzing humorous texts. The explanations and justifications for choosing



rhetorical analysis as my methodology are housed in Chapter II. The next chapter also discusses what humorous texts I rhetorically analyze and I why I have chosen those texts. Chapter II also briefly discusses the backgrounds for the authors of those texts as such information is useful when analyzing the texts in terms of situated knowledge in Chapter III.

## **Chapter II: Texts for Analysis and Rhetorical Analysis as Methodology for Analyzing Humorous Texts**

*What do you call a piscatorial vertebrate who is knowledgeable and enthusiastic about its research methodology? An aficionado.*

### **I. Introduction**

The previous chapter's exploration of humor writing's history with rhetoric and composition and its possible connection to audience awareness and situated knowledge led to forming this project's three guiding research questions: 1) How might humor writing be used as a teaching tool in FYC? 2) How might humor writing be used to teach FYC students to engage consciously with and analyze audience awareness and situated knowledge? and 3) What are some of the risks of using humor writing to teach rhetoric and composition in FYC, and how can they be minimized? In order to answer these questions, I have chosen to analyze rhetorically four humorous texts from different authors. This chapter explains why I chose rhetorical analysis as the approach for answering my research questions, what texts I chose and why, and how I conducted my rhetorical analyses.

### **II. Background and Justification for Using Rhetorical Analysis as Methodology**

Rhetorical analysis is useful for dissecting texts and for closely examining textual elements to see how they are created, what their effects are within a text, and how and why they are/are not successful. This makes it a practical methodology to dissect humorous texts and ascertain how audience awareness and situated knowledge function within such texts. The aforementioned close rhetorical analyses also enable me to

examine how and why humor writing may be used to teach audience awareness and situated knowledge in FYC.

In order to set the foundation for my methodology, I discuss rhetorical analysis via two approaches: 1) how rhetoric and composition theorists treat and use rhetorical analysis and 2) how rhetorical analysis is used in FYC textbooks. The first approach explains the theoretical underpinnings and application of rhetorical analysis within the field—both historically and currently. This particularly justifies my use of rhetorical analysis as methodology.

The second approach explores rhetorical analysis's application through the lens of FYC. This work aims to show why using a rhetorical analysis methodology is useful for research regarding teaching FYC and why my findings in this dissertation connect with, and are useful for, teaching FYC. Ultimately, this helps me best to understand which of my findings can be applied to teaching FYC and in what ways my findings may be used.

Additionally, my research regarding both rhetorical analysis scholarship and rhetorical analysis in teaching enables me to generate a working definition of rhetorical analysis, which appears to be lacking in the field. Thus, I look to locations where the application of rhetorical analysis frequently occurs—theoretical scholarship and FYC textbooks. My analyses of the textbooks are not in lieu of current scholarship but work in conjunction with existing scholarship in order to compile a general definition for what rhetorical analysis is and what it does. Indeed, it is because of what rhetorical analysis is and does that make it a powerful methodology for answering my research questions and showing how my results relate to FYC teaching.

## 1. Brief History of Rhetorical Analysis

Rhetorical analysis is at the heart of many investigations conducted by rhetoric and composition scholars because rhetorical analysis—often referred to as close textual analysis, textual analysis, or close reading—helps a scholar, as communications researcher Stephen Howard Browne puts it, to understand and explain “how texts operate to produce meaning, affect persuasion, and activate convictions” (Browne, “Close Textual Analysis” 91; Terrill 695; Leff, “Things Made By Words” 223). Michael Leff states that rhetorical analysis enables analysts to interpret a text’s dynamics through tracing its rhetorical moves, language operations, and effects while taking into account the social context(s) within which the text exists (223; 230).

Indeed, rhetorical analysis helps scholars to look at a text’s details, such as “the interplay of ideas, images, and arguments as they unfold within the spatial and temporal economy of [a] text” (Browne, “Close Textual Analysis” 91). This methodology thereby allows one to examine the parts—language, punctuation, images, literary devices, arguments, etc.—of a text as they connect with and influence one another. Rhetorical analysis can also reveal how textual elements come together and what effects they produce given when and where the text was created, when it is read, who reads it, etc. Such details/particulars are important in understanding a text and in understanding how and why a text works or fails, because it is through examining the parts that scholars are able to evaluate and understand the whole. Therefore, rhetorical analysis enables scholars and writers to see what is happening, why it is happening, what could happen, and to learn how to apply the strategies they have analyzed when composing their own texts (Terrill 694). Writers may also use these findings in conjunction with what they learn

about a text's possible (both intended and unintended) audiences in order to understand better how a text's messages are received by those audiences (Bitzer; Booth 166). In this manner, a text's rhetorical parts can be examined and the effects and successes of a text may be analyzed.

Lloyd Bitzer recognizes the importance of examining a text's rhetorical parts when he defines the rhetorical situation—and by extension rhetorical analysis—in terms of exigence, audience, and constraints (Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation”). It is through examining these elements that he sees rhetorical discourse as being able to be disassembled and analyzed by creators (authors and speakers) and researchers (Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation” 6; Jasinski 514-523). Charles Bazerman and Wayne C. Booth also recognize that it is via parts that a whole moment/text is shaped and created.

Although rhetorical analysis largely focuses on the particular, it should not focus on the particular to the exclusion of “the bigger picture.” Leff warns against this and argues that texts create social knowledge, so one should not ignore the social context(s) in which a text is created and read (“Things Made by Words” 230). This is because rhetorical analysis attempts to view texts in their “dynamic character[s]” as opposed to something “static” and existing in a vacuum (Browne, “Michael Leff and the Return” 681). Vatz also emphasizes that rhetorical analyses should not ignore possible contextual influences that may shape texts, because perception and all of its shaping elements influence a text's reception (154). Thus, rhetorical analysis requires the acknowledgement and analysis of situated knowledge. Conducting rhetorical analyses also reflects that knowledge is situated.

## 2. Some Uses of Rhetorical Analysis in Current Scholarship

In current scholarship, rhetorical analysis is often used to explore the interaction between the communicator and potential receivers. Mass media and communication scholar Siobahn Stiles states that rhetorical analysis “includes an examination, at least in theory, of all of the components of the communicative process” and is useful to examine meaning as “a conversation between author and receiver, with cultural context mediating between the two” (Stiles 193). Thus, rhetorical analysis allows for deep examination of communication beyond what is merely said or written on the page.

Some, such as education scholar Robert V. Bullough Jr., use rhetorical analysis to examine, critique, and call for change. Bullough employs rhetorical analysis to examine and critique the 2010 publication of *Preparing Teachers: Building Evidence for Sound Policy*, which was written by the National Research Council’s (NRC) Committee on the Study of Teacher Preparation Programs in the United States (187). Bullough uses rhetorical analysis to expose said document for its “quantification of human experience and performance for the purposes of rating and ranking,” which he feels devalues education and important relationships within education in favor of business models and pseudoscience (191). Furthermore, his rhetorical analysis functions as his foundation for calling for change within the NRC.

In regard to Stiles, she uses rhetorical analysis to dissect and deeply examine the power, intentions, moves, and effects in a sex-trafficking public service announcement (PSA) in order to offer some “best practice” guidelines for creating effective PSAs (Stiles 201). Thus, like Bullough, Stiles uses rhetorical analysis to understand thoroughly and dissect a text as well as to invoke change.

Communication and leadership scholar Rene' Minder likewise applies rhetorical analysis to a text to examine its moves and effectiveness. She examines Clint Eastwood's 2012 "Empty Chair" speech to the Republican National Convention, and she pays particular attention to Eastwood's use of performative rhetoric by including a visual prop to make his argument, which shows that rhetorical analysis can be, and is, used to investigate performative elements of a text (3).

Just as Minder uses rhetorical analysis to examine rhetorical moves and audience reception, communications and rhetoric researcher Katherine McCabe also employs rhetorical analysis in order to examine the possible effects of audience and audience awareness on speakers and their texts. She provides a comparison of rhetorical moves between former President Barack Obama and former Prime Minister of Australia Julia Gillard in order to investigate "whether the predominant audience disposition had any bearing on the rhetorical appeals used by the speaker in that setting" (39). What is even more intriguing about her research is that her qualitative rhetorical analyses have a quantitative enhancement that is interesting enough (and, in some ways, similar to this dissertation's methodology) that it is worthy of repeating in its entirety:

I conducted open-ended word frequency analysis to determine the presence of recurring words within the speeches (removing frequently occurring words of weak semantic value, such as "the" and "of", and words that would not have been orated, such as "laughter" and "applause"). Building on this analysis, I developed thematic maps that show the relative occurrence of, and relationships between, words and themes that were present in speeches. I also conducted targeted textual analysis by developing thesauruses of words that are indicative of political green

discourse and commercial green discourse, and quantifying the presence of such terms in sample texts. (39)

Thus, McCabe uses rhetorical analysis with a quantitative element to her research to understand what moves Obama and Gillard make, why they make them, and what possible effects they have (and why) on the speakers' audiences—all of which are similar, in part, to this dissertation's methodology.

This brief overview demonstrates that current scholars are using rhetorical analysis to make sense of the world around them. Furthermore, scholars, such as some of the ones I have discussed, use rhetorical analysis to examine and understand texts (both written and performed) or moments within texts, and then they often offer ways of change within the world. Likewise, my dissertation aims to examine moments within texts with the goal of understanding what is happening within those texts and then offer, in a way, opportunities within teaching FYC.

### **3. Why I Chose Rhetorical Analysis with a Quantitative Enhancement**

I chose rhetorical analysis because when I taught humor writing in FYC, I could see what was happening—that students were finding and analyzing moments of audience awareness and situated knowledge that enabled them to understand and practice these integral concepts—but I was not quite sure why or how it was working. The best way for me to understand what was happening in my classroom is to go to humorous texts and examine them, pull them apart, and look at them from different angles and levels.

Rhetorical analysis is the best method to allow me to do this work.

Rhetorical analysis best enables me to examine each word, move, and sentence in a text to understand what is happening and how it could possibly connect to what I



observed in my classroom. It allows me to zoom in on a text to see what a word/punctuation/move is doing in a particular sentence, to zoom a little further out to see what that element is doing and what effects it has in a particular moment, to zoom further out to examine what effects that moment has within a bigger chunk of text, to zoom even further out to see what effects that moment has within the text as a whole, to zoom further out to examine how that moment connects with the author's persona and background, to zoom further out to examine how that moment may impact/connect with or seek to influence possible audiences for the text, and to zoom further out and examine how the moment functions within the social and cultural contexts of when the text was written/performed and of when I read and analyze the text. Perhaps I belabor the usefulness of rhetorical analysis, but I do so to emphasize rhetorical analysis's unique ability to act as a lens with micro, mezzo, and macro capabilities that allow me to move within and among each sphere of focus. Since at the beginning of this journey I did not understand what exactly was happening and why in my class, I now need a methodology that enables me to examine texts at these various levels and that gives me flexibility to zoom in and out while I analyze my chosen texts—I need rhetorical analysis to understand what is happening in texts that may have then given rise to what I saw within my classroom. Only with this information can I truly answer at a sophisticated level my research questions of: 1) How might humor writing be used as a teaching tool in FYC? and 2) How might humor writing be used to teach FYC students how to engage consciously with and analyze audience awareness and situated knowledge?

My rhetorical analyses are conducted by the guiding light of ideological criticism, specifically ideological criticism's emphasis on how conflict and material interests

“shape and influence social and symbolic interaction” (McPhail 340). Ideological criticism lends itself to studying texts that are steeped in popular culture—which humorous texts often are—in part because of its ability to examine different points of view as well as investigate the forces that may shape those viewpoints. For instance, Samuel Allen uses ideological criticism in this way to examine the humor of modern comedians Michael-Keegan Key and Jordon Peele in order to analyze and question “the ideologies that often work at a sub textual level within media texts” (85). Thus, similar in this manner to Allen’s work, rhetorical analysis conducted through the theoretical lens of ideological criticism enables me “to expose the underlying beliefs and assumptions” at work within a text, which aids me in examining how texts use/do not use situated knowledge (McPhail 340).

Rhetorical scholar Sonja K. Foss states that in ideological criticism, ideology is “a system of ideas or a pattern of beliefs that determine a group’s interpretations of some aspect(s) of the world” (237). Therefore, an analyst working under ideological criticism “looks beyond the surface structure of an artifact to discover the beliefs, values, and assumptions it suggests” (237). Furthermore, ideologies comprise many of the beliefs through which individuals “interpret and evaluate the world and that encourage individuals and groups to adopt certain attitudes or beliefs” (238). Ideology may also effectively unite or divide people, and, in this dissertation, connect with/or alienate rhetors with their audiences (Makus 53). Thus, by examining what has possibly shaped authors (i.e., their backgrounds), I am able to dissect and understand some of the ideologies espoused in their texts. This allows me to trace many of the coloring biases and beliefs that influence what authors say and how they say it (both of which are integral

to examining situated knowledge) as well as how they appeal to their potential audiences (which speaks to dissecting texts in terms of audience awareness and exploring audiences' possible ideologies). Thus, working under the banner of ideological criticism aids me in analyzing texts in terms of situated knowledge and audience awareness.

Since I examine possible influencing ideologies both on the part of the authors and of potential audiences, I need to explore at least some of the authors' backgrounds and possible intentions as they likely influence/shape those "underlying beliefs and assumptions" in the authors' texts (McPhail 340). This dissertation does not negate the existence of created personas that are carefully crafted by authors and that function as "invitations" to audiences "to see and act from [authors'] ideological viewpoints" (Waisanen and Becker 259). Nevertheless, understanding what influences authors likely helps in this project's understanding regarding how and why authors craft their personas. It is likely that much of the reasoning that goes into forming those personas are the authors' targeted audiences (which speaks to the issue of audience awareness) as well as the aforementioned ideologies that ideological criticism helps analysts to unearth, which is helpful when examining texts in terms of situated knowledge.

Indeed, scholars sometimes look to the backgrounds of authors/creators in order to understand and explore underlying beliefs and assumptions that shape personas and generate effects in texts. For example, Bryan Kirschen researches and discusses the personal lives and backgrounds of Lucille Ball and Desi Arnez in order to show what influences helped to create the linguistic manipulation between English and Spanish that contributes to the multilingual humor in the television show *I Love Lucy* and that

generates humorous interplay between cultural and linguistic differences for Ball's and Arnez's characters (736; 746).

Rhetorical scholar David L. Wallace also heavily relies on authors' backgrounds to ascertain what standpoints the authors come from and explore how they use their experiences and characteristics to challenge dominant discourses. In his book, *Compelled to Write: Alternative Rhetoric in Theory and Practice*, Wallace asserts that "personal identity is intimately bound up in the practice and pedagogy of rhetoric, even if that identity is not always immediately apparent to all involved" (4). Therefore, it is necessary to examine authors' backgrounds to understand the ideologies that influence and shape their writing and uses of rhetoric.

For example, at the beginning of Wallace's analyses of David Sedaris's works, Wallace explores Sedaris's background and experiences. Wallace continually peppers aspects of Sedaris's personal life throughout his analyses, and it is through Sedaris's background that Wallace examines Sedaris's writing and his uses of rhetoric (Wallace 165). Wallace states, "Sedaris's work is highly intersectional, bringing many aspects of his identity to bear," and it is through identity that, according to Wallace, Sedaris "writes about the kinds of difference issues that often serve as the axes of oppression in American culture" 184). Thus, knowing and exploring Sedaris's background is integral to Wallace's analyses and to his understanding of the underlying beliefs and assumptions that shape Sedaris's persona and generate effects in his texts.

Another reason for using ideological criticism in this dissertation is because the theory allows for the exploration and deciphering of relationships among "social realities," which lends itself to studying situated knowledge within texts since situated

knowledge emphasizes that supposed “objective” realities are actually “social realities” (McPhail 340). Thus, since ideological criticism allows for social realities, this theoretical lens enables me to look at the possible social realities of authors, the potential social realities of possible audiences for my chosen humor texts (which, in turn, lends itself to studying audience awareness), and how these two realities may intermingle with one another.

Ultimately, this dissertation’s rhetorical analyses are meant to comprise another way to look at and understand how humor writing is working in my classroom and how it can/cannot function as future curricular material. The quantitative aspect of my methodology, in which I list and count how many instances of audience awareness and situated knowledge I find in my chosen texts, supports my endeavor to answer my aforementioned research questions in two ways. First, it allows me to see the prevalence of audience awareness and situated knowledge in the texts. Prevalence is important because it may indicate the likelihood of students being able to identify and connect with at least one of those instances of audience awareness and/or situated knowledge. Indeed, a high prevalence demonstrates that there are multiple opportunities for students to make such meaningful connections to texts, and meaningful connections may encourage students to care more about the work and put in more effort when working with a text than if the students cannot connect with the writing they are studying. Admittedly, prevalence does not guarantee that students will connect with (in terms of their feelings and experiences) at least one moment of audience awareness and situated knowledge; however, it likely increases the odds that such a useful outcome will occur.

Second, showing prevalence helps to give my findings credibility in that not only are those elements present, but they are present in abundance. Conversely, a lack of prevalence, particularly in the texts I had not taught, could indicate that the text, and perhaps humor writing in general, does not have enough learning opportunities regarding audience awareness and situated knowledge to be included and efficiently used for teaching audience awareness and situated knowledge. Although the use of quantitative analysis is perhaps uncommon within rhetoric and composition scholarship, more scholars are venturing into the quantitative waters in order to enhance their qualitative rhetorical analyses. For instance, in addition to qualitative rhetorical analysis, McCabe's work uses quantitative textual analysis of a set of texts in much the same way as I do—to “identify the presence and relative strength of themes and concepts . . . as well as to determine the relationships of themes to one another” (McCabe 39). Like McCabe, scholar Slobodan Tomic uses a combination of rhetorical analysis and quantitative analysis to examine and compare the rhetorical moves, patterns, and communication styles “of Serbian and Macedonian ethics commissions” in order to ascertain the effectiveness of said entities' communications to their audiences and to determine which stakeholders seem to have the most power and influence on said entities (544). Discourse analysis and linguistic scholar Annelie Ädel also employs a mixture of quantitative analysis and rhetorical analysis to investigate and compare the overuse and underuse of certain lexicogrammatical patterns in the writings of “a group of advanced [English language] learners [compared] to a group of native speakers of English” (80; 69). Here, Ädel first applies quantitative measures to identify the “it is” pattern (e.g., “It is said that . . .,” “It is written that . . .,” etc.) in said groups' writing and then uses rhetorical analysis

to “select a subset of a pattern for closer qualitative analysis” (69). Ädel states that the addition of rhetorical analysis to her method of quantitative analysis “was able to reveal further patterns in the data” (78). Thus, similar to my dissertation, Ädel uses both rhetorical analysis and quantitative methods to achieve a rich understanding of her data.

The quantitative aspect of my methodology also lends itself to a clear organizational method for me to keep track of my analyses and to be able to zoom in, or step back, when looking at my findings. Indeed, this organization, which is discussed more in detail later in this chapter, allows me to observe (and keep track of) individual moments and then view those moments within the different spheres of dissection I outlined earlier in this chapter. This is particularly useful when I discuss in depth two examples of audience awareness and situated knowledge for each of my chosen texts.

In addition to the rhetorical analyses, I offer narrative evidence and analyze several of my classroom experiences in Chapter IV of this dissertation. Such qualitative evidence is undoubtedly useful and necessary as it helps to paint a picture of what happened and allows me to explore why my students seemed to “latch on” to audience awareness and situated knowledge so well when studying humor writing. Such analysis of experience also allows me to explore what went wrong and why as well as what went right and why, and it enables me to offer concrete applications for the classroom reflective of that learning. However, despite this integral work, I need an approach that focuses on the material that I was teaching in addition to my experiences—an approach that enables me to look at the texts from different levels/spheres of dissection. This is why I conduct rhetorical analyses on humorous texts as well. Thus, my combination of rhetorical analyses and classroom experience and analysis should not be looked upon as

disparate and unrelated parts. Rather, they are diverse and useful approaches to my research questions that help me to generate an expanded picture of audience awareness and situated knowledge in humor writing and to understand better the phenomena I observed in my classes.

#### **4. Rhetorical Analysis in Teaching**

Instructors teach students rhetorical analysis, in part, because these lessons help students to develop skills that are fundamental to creating successful texts of their own (Terrill 694). In order to teach students how and why a rhetorical move works/does not work, so that they may learn how to analyze and use such rhetorical moves, instructors teach students how to dissect and analyze texts and their components. Hopefully, students will then transfer these skills to their writing as well as to when they analyze rhetorically and think critically about the world inside and outside of academia.

In addition to the aforementioned theoretical scholarship on rhetorical analysis, I examine textbooks designed for a first-year writing program at a mid-sized, land-grant university to ascertain how rhetorical analysis is described, used, and taught in FYC from that perspective.<sup>1</sup> Based on my analysis of selected textbooks and much of rhetorical analysis scholarship, I have developed the following working definition of rhetorical analysis for this project: A rhetorical analysis is the active reading and analysis of a text via questioning it, particularly regarding its writer(s), audience(s), meanings, purposes, parts, strategies, choices, contexts, and sentences. This definition is not meant to be all-encompassing but does reflect current scholarship and general application. The definition

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of readability, the details of my analyses of the selected FYC textbooks are in Appendix A.



functions as a foundation from which I explain rhetorical analysis and its importance and application in FYC.

Ultimately, rhetorical analysis is a successful methodology for exploring and revealing how important, prevalent, and analyzable audience awareness and situated knowledge can be in humorous texts. Furthermore, rhetorical analyses show the rich potential value that humorous texts can have regarding the teaching of audience awareness and situated knowledge in FYC. Thus, I choose this methodology to analyze four humorous texts.

### **III. Selected Texts for Rhetorical Analyses**

My selected texts for analysis are “Me Talk Pretty One Day” by David Sedaris, “What’s Drier than David Sedaris” by Michael P. Branch, “Types of Women in Romantic Comedies Who are Not Real” by Mindy Kaling, and “Dat Phan East Meets West Part 1” by Dat Phan.

I have chosen to analyze Sedaris’s and Branch’s pieces, in part, because I have taught those materials to FYC students in my courses. The students responded well when I taught these texts, particularly in understanding how audience awareness and situated knowledge were used in the works, and I want to explore the essays more in depth in order to ascertain what is occurring in a rhetorical sense that may have helped students to understand audience awareness and situated knowledge. Originally, I chose Sedaris’s work to include in my class because he is one of the most successful humorists in America, and one way to understand how writing tools and moves can be executed is to study a master of the trade—Sedaris is certainly a master of humor writing (Sedaris, *David Sedaris Teaches Storytelling*; Zinsser 235). I also chose Sedaris because his text

has a strong theme of student versus teacher, and I thought that my students would connect well with that.

I chose Branch's text to teach (and, subsequently, to analyze in this dissertation) because he is a writer based in Reno, Nevada, which is the location of the university at which I taught and hometown of many of my students. Since his regional affiliation matched those of most of my students, I thought that they would be able to connect well with his text and thereby be motivated to read it and participate in class discussions. Additionally, Branch's piece lampoons Sedaris, which I thought would make for an interesting and engaging connection between the two authors for my students. Furthermore, I selected Branch's text because he has won numerous awards for his nonfiction humor work as well as for his scholarly endeavors. Indeed, Branch's background as a scholar, professor, environmentalist, bioregional guru, and humorist make for an interesting perspective that adds diversity among my chosen humorists.

In addition to Sedaris's and Branch's texts, I include works from authors whom I have not taught. Admittedly, I had an inkling of how the texts could speak to my research questions, but I did not begin these analyses with the answers to my questions already in mind. Thus, I have included two texts that I have yet to teach—"Types of Women in Romantic Comedies Who are Not Real" by Kaling and "Dat Phan East Meets West Part 1" by Phan.

I chose Kaling's text because I am familiar with Kaling's screenwriting on her show *The Mindy Project*, which aired from 2012 to 2017 ("The Mindy Project"). She has demonstrated comedic ability in her writing for *The Office*, *The Mindy Project*, *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, and *Never Have I Ever*, and these projects are contemporary

and mainstream (“Mindy Kaling”). Both her credibility as a humor writer and her relevance to popular culture render her and her writing likely relevant to many students who go through FYC. Indeed, *The Office* in particular is an extremely popular show, and reading a text by someone with whom students are familiar could probably encourage them to want to read that person’s writing and help them to care about what they are reading. Essentially, Kaling’s popularity increases the odds that students will positively connect with her even before they begin reading her text, thereby making the writing relevant to them and, hopefully, emboldening them to participate in class. I am selecting this specific piece from Kaling’s book, *Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me? (And Other Concerns)*, because its content attempts, in a way, to situate Hollywood’s knowledge regarding women. This is an interesting move that I wish to explore further.

I have chosen Phan for three reasons. The first is that I desire to open this conversation about audience awareness and situated knowledge to standup comedy routine videos. The second is that I want to include racial diversity in my chosen texts, and Phan is of Vietnamese heritage. Thus, by including Phan, I hope to enable Asian Americans to feel included and to see some of their experiences represented in this dissertation. The third is that I am part Asian, and some of his humor, particularly in the “Dat Phan East Meets West Part 1” routine, resonates with me and is something that reflects some of my experiences with racism.

Standup routines are indeed forms of humor writing, even though they are performed. The visual and verbal components of a standup routine admittedly make it different from traditionally written texts. However, they are still, nevertheless, humorous texts and, as Minder’s work shows, performative texts can be analyzed via rhetorical

analysis. For Phan's text, I have selected a clip that is of a reasonable and practical length to include in classes, as opposed to including an entire standup routine.

Furthermore, as diversity is continually valued in college, the texts used in the FYC classroom may need to reflect such commitment to diversity. Traditional publishing is done in such a way that the voices allowed in are filtered, and some of the racial and cultural diversity that academia wishes to include may be pushed aside in traditional publishing for reasons that are beyond the scope of this research project. However, one medium that has been receptive to diversity is YouTube videos. This is not to say that this milieu is not filtered as well, but this platform lends itself to more voices than does traditional publishing. Admittedly, this diversity of voices could exist on other platforms, such as independent publishing, blogs, etc. However, YouTube is a medium that is frequented by many FYC students and, rather than eschew that from the FYC classroom, I would like to investigate how that may help students apply principles they learn in the classroom to media they observe.

To be clear, this dissertation does not aim to investigate the value of YouTube. Rather, with regard to Phan, it aims to investigate if and how Phan's text contains instances of audience awareness and situated knowledge and how such may be useful to teaching FYC students about those foci. Additionally, by incorporating a standup YouTube video excerpt as one of the rhetorically analyzed texts, I hope to open the conversation to possibly incorporating such media into FYC.

#### **IV. How I Use Rhetorical Analysis to Analyze Humorous Texts**

In order to analyze my chosen humorous texts for audience awareness and situated knowledge, I take several steps. While I set out these steps in a linear fashion, I

do so for the sake of readability. In reality, and in line with much of the writing process, I move back and forth between these steps in a recursive manner, one new insight taking me back to reconsider earlier ones. As a first step, I research the authors to learn about their backgrounds and how their backgrounds may impact their work. I record this information via using the template shown in table 1 below.

Table 1

Chart I Use for Recording Authors' Backgrounds

Text, Date of Publication, and Author:

<b>Author Background</b>	
Childhood Experience	
Ethnicity	
Gender	
Other (specify)	
Possible Trauma	
Regional Affiliation	
Religion	
Sex	
Sexuality	
Socioeconomic Status	
Notes on the Piece to Analyze:	
Possible Audiences	
<b>Seeming Overall Message(s) of Text</b>	

This background research enables me to trace possible connections between authors' texts and aspects (which are listed in table 1) of their backgrounds. Discovering and recording the information aids me in examining how the selected humor writers do/not situate their knowledge in their writing and helps in tracing possible ideologies/biases (positive, neutral, or negative) in the texts resulting from the authors' backgrounds. I provide these backgrounds in Chapter III in narrative form before my rhetorical analyses in order to help readers conceptualize what I observe in my analyses.

Second, I print out each text and read the piece as a whole before annotating it and deciphering the primary messages. I determine preliminarily those primary messages

by looking for recurrences of ideas and phrases and record them in a table such as table 1 above.

For Phan's standup routine, I annotate a physical copy of the transcript and rhetorically analyze and write notes as I watch the clip subsequent times. All of the annotated texts (including Phan's transcript) are included in Appendices B, D, F, and H.

I also identify each text's target and possible audiences after reading the text the first time and after I annotate it. The potential audiences are determined by the author's background, word choices, themes, and any direct addresses to specific populations. This work on audience captures both my first impression of the audience, which guides my annotation of the texts, and allows me to revise the possible audiences after reading more deeply into the writing.

During my rhetorical analyses, I use closed coding, which is a specific "selection of text features" that is likely "indicative of [a] pattern and reliably quantifiable," to find patterns of audience awareness and situated knowledge (Huckin 92; 91). I search for words that are typically associated with audience ("you," "your," "yours," "they," "their," "theirs," "them," "themselves," "we," "us," "our," "ours," "ourselves," "everyone," and "everybody") and highlight them in yellow. Doing this helps me to focus on how audience is implicated and/or reflected in the text.

I also look for words typically associated with the author ("I," "me," "my," "mine," "we," "us," "our," "ours," "ourselves," "myself," and the author's name) and highlight them in blue. This alerts me to if/when authors consciously bring themselves into the text, which can indicate when they are presenting something as their individual

truth (thereby at least partially owning and situating their knowledge) as opposed to posing such knowledge as capital-T Truth.

If words can be indicative of authors referring to themselves and the audience, then I highlight the word in both yellow and blue. For instance, “we” and “our” may show when authors include themselves in the audience, possibly exclude others, and/or bring their own knowledge into the text to introduce the audience to their lines of thinking and ways of being. An example of this is when Branch says, “He doesn’t even pronounce the name of our state correctly” (115). The “our” seems to refer to Branch’s audience due to its plurality, and it appears to reference himself since it is a form of the first person. Therefore, I highlight “our” in yellow and blue.

Next, I examine each of the highlighted words to determine if it can be exemplary of audience awareness, situated knowledge, or point to an example of either. I circle themes<sup>2</sup> that connect with audience awareness, and I bracket themes that connect with situated knowledge. I identify these themes based upon the definitions and foundations I set for audience awareness and situated knowledge in Chapter I.

After that, I read the text again looking first for instances of audience awareness and then again searching for situated knowledge. I then read through the text at least once more, combing through it for any occurrences of either that I may have missed. On the physical copy of the text, I briefly explain why the noted words/phrases/sentences are exemplary of audience awareness and/or situated knowledge. This provides short

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<sup>2</sup> By themes, I mean features that seem relevant to my analyses in terms of audience awareness and/or situated knowledge.

explanations that I later expand upon in my dissertation's narrative sections and in my appendices.

My notation method leads both to circling and bracketing some words/areas, but this is not necessarily a drawback. Rather, such double markings reveal where authors may use words to create more than one effect. For example, perhaps there is a word that simultaneously includes the authors as part of the audience and encourages their audiences to identify with them and share the writers' truths, as seen with Branch's "our."

The combination of closed coding and theme searching accomplishes two goals: 1) The closed coding points me to possible instances of audience awareness and situated knowledge in the texts. 2) The theme search allows for flexibility within my rhetorical analyses, such as in the case of noting a moment that is both exemplary of audience awareness and situated knowledge. Together, they demonstrate where, how, and why the selected authors use audience awareness and situated knowledge in their texts.

Next, I examine to what audience each instance of audience awareness and situated knowledge is addressed, and I postulate how each instance of audience awareness might be tailored to a specific audience via word choice or the presented concepts and to whom those ideas would likely appeal. I also determine the audience by looking at to whom authors are directly speaking and to whom a text's primary messages may relate and address. This helps to examine how the selected humor authors use audience awareness and situated knowledge. It can also show how authors situate their knowledge in ways that are/not persuasive to their audiences or how writers may attempt to situate their audiences' knowledge.



I also analyze how each instance of audience awareness and situated knowledge might connect to a writer's background, which allows me trace if and how an author's knowledge is situated in their background. I specifically look for verbiage that may reflect or reveal a part of a writer's background. An example of this occurs when Sedaris writes, "I recalled my mother, flushed with wine," which connects with part of his past because his mother was an alcoholic (169). If there is a connection to the author's background, I then explore how such a connection may affect the writer's overall message(s).

Next, I number each instance of audience awareness and situated knowledge on the physical copy of the text and record these occurrences into a table using the template shown in table 2 below.

Table 2

Chart I Use for Recording My Rhetorical Analyses Findings

Text, Date of Publication, and Author:

Instance	Quoted Example	Audience Awareness and/or Situated Knowledge & Corresponding Notes	Possible Audience(s)	How Instance Appears Tailored to Audience(s)	Possible Connection to Author's Background	Possible Message with This Instance / Effect on Overall Message(s) of the Text / Other Notes

This notation system enables me to keep track of each instance of audience awareness and situated knowledge, to refer quickly to occurrences on the physical copy, and to record more detailed and thorough explanations than are spatially allowed when writing on a physical copy. It also helps me to identify what I believe to be the strongest

examples of audience awareness and situated knowledge, which is integral to the next step in my research.

After rhetorically analyzing the texts, I pick two samples of what I believe are the text's strongest examples of audience awareness and situated knowledge. The reason for not discussing every instance of audience awareness and situated knowledge is that I have many instances and do not believe that it would be reasonable or useful to discuss each one. Indeed, I believe that concentrating on discussing four instances (two of audience awareness and two of situated knowledge for each text) in depth is most useful for answering my research questions as it allows for a strong focus, which is ultimately best when discussing in Chapter IV of this dissertation how the instances may/not be useful for FYC.

Researching writers' backgrounds, engaging in both the closed coding and theme searching that I have described, and conducting my rhetorical analyses as a whole enable me to examine how the selected authors do/not address their audiences and situate their knowledge. This information aids me in answering my research questions: 1) How might humor writing be used as a teaching tool in FYC? and 2) How might humor writing be used to teach FYC students to engage consciously with and analyze audience awareness and situated knowledge?

In order to answer my questions, I first examine the very basic foundation to those questions—how does humor writing contain audience awareness and situated knowledge? The planned rhetorical analyses reveal such information and show how the selected authors use audience awareness and situated knowledge. Furthermore, the deep reading required by rhetorical analysis assists me in identifying possible risks to teaching

the texts, which helps to answer my research question: What are some risks of using humor writing to teach rhetoric and composition in FYC and how can they be minimized? The discussion of these risks, as well as my classroom experience with Sedaris's and Branch's texts, are included in Chapter IV since both elements enhance the discussion of my rhetorical analyses.

### Chapter III: Rhetorical Analyses

*Don't you hate it when somebody answers their own questions? I sure do.*

#### I. Introduction

Thus far, Chapter I of this dissertation set the historical and theoretical groundwork for studying humor writing in terms of how humor writing uses audience awareness and situated knowledge. Chapter II justified rhetorical analysis as the most suitable methodology for my research and laid out the steps for how I conduct my rhetorical analyses. Chapter III examines whether or not the chosen texts use audience awareness and situated knowledge and, if so, how those moments are manifested within the texts. Such close readings investigate if there is indeed audience awareness and situated knowledge in the chosen texts. If there is, then I can reveal how these texts manifest audience awareness and situated knowledge. Ultimately, this chapter hopes to show enough strong evidence of the use of audience awareness and situated knowledge in the chosen humorous texts that I may then logically suggest that other humor writing likely contains similar uses of audience awareness and situated knowledge. In light of my findings, I will discuss in Chapter IV how humor writing could be used to teach audience awareness and situated knowledge in FYC, what risks there may be in including humor writing in FYC and how they may be mitigated, and offer specific activities, lesson plans, and assignments with this focus.

Chapter III is structured as follows: First, I provide a narrative of the author's background before discussing the rhetorical analyses, because knowing an author's background helps to orient my readers to how I view the text. Second, I discuss the possible audiences for the text and the primary themes/messages I found. Third, I give a

brief overview of how many occurrences I found of audience awareness and situated knowledge before I explain in depth two instances of audience awareness and two examples of situated knowledge in the text. Finally, I summarize the findings from my rhetorical analysis. This chapter's appendices include my rhetorical analysis charts for the authors and my hand-written notes on the texts themselves should readers wish to view my analyses more in-depth and read the justifications for each instance of audience awareness and situated knowledge.

As I conduct my rhetorical analyses, I rely on the Aristotelian definitions of ethos, pathos, logos, and kairos because this is the way that I envision these concepts and is reflective of my academic training. According to Aristotelian thought, ethos refers to the character of a person (particularly the author) and is a "mode of persuasion that relies on the speaker creating a credible character for particular rhetorical occasions" (Atwill 29; Johnson 243). Ethos can largely be thought of as the credibility of someone and includes the experiences, persona, and qualifications of a person that cause an audience member to believe, trust, and side with that person (Aristotle 7). Ethos may be used as evidence to support writers' claims as they use their experiences as verification that they are correct in their statements. Ethos may also be used as a place from which people speak, metaphorically giving them "a place to stand" within texts. Oftentimes, this "place to stand" can come in the form of experiences, but it may also arise from someone's ethnicity, gender, sexuality, location, etc. For example, Phan uses his ethnicity as part of his ethos in order to speak about topics pertaining to Asian communities. Likewise, Branch uses geographic location as part of his ethos from which he defends and celebrates the American west and its cultures.

Ethos can be tricky because some may equate ethos as giving writers passes to say what they want about a group and even speak for all of its members as long as the writers somehow belong to that group. Yet, not everyone in the group may have those same experiences. This is particularly seen with Phan as he speaks for much of the Asian community in his text and, while he does own much of his knowledge as his rather than as something that is true for all Asian Americans, there are perhaps moments in which his experiences may not be reflective of all Asian Americans' experiences. Interestingly, situated knowledge may help to keep ethos in check as it requires people to own their knowledge and trace its biases and origins. Situated knowledge may therefore encourage writers to portray something as reflective of their experiences, but accept that their experiences may not be reflective of everyone.

Pathos denotes the author using emotions to persuade an audience to feel or believe something and to put "the audience into a certain frame of mind" (Colavito 492-493; Aristotle 7). Pathos often centers on the emotional relationships the author hopes to build between the audience and the author, as well as the author's claims, in order to sway the audience. Writers may use pathos to gain sympathy for themselves and/or lampoon others. For example, Sedaris uses pathos to encourage his audience to side with him and against his French teacher. His instructor may have been somewhat correct in pushing her students. Yet, Sedaris frames her attempts in such a manner as to invoke feelings of disgust, outrage, and incredulity in audiences about his instructor and to garner audiences' sympathy and loyalty toward Sedaris. Thus, Sedaris likely uses pathos to appeal to his audience, encourage his audience to align with him, and incite his audience to villainize his instructor.

Logos is a persuasive appeal based on logic, reason, and real or supposed truths (Colavito 493; Aristotle 7). It focuses on the relations between entities and may rely on building logical proofs to show audiences the veracity and validity of what an author is arguing and/or to discredit a position (Yoos 410). Humor writers often use logos when pointing out the lack of logic in something either through explicit explanation, exaggeration, understatement, or comparison. For instance, Kaling uses logos by asking audiences to compare their real-life experiences with characters portrayed in romantic comedies. This comparison may show the extent of the logical fallacies promoted by many romantic comedies. She also exaggerates some of the romantic comedy archetypes in order to show how illogical they are and how they are not reflective of reality.

In this dissertation, *kairos* refers to the timing of an argument and occurrence (Sherwood 22-25; Koncz 97-101; Carter; Kinneavy and Eskin; Poulakos). This means that it takes into account genre, “time, place, speaker, and audience” (Helsley 371). Additionally, *kairos* is the situation or context of an argument/utterance/occurrence, which can be partly formed by events, social expectations, and culture (Carell 3). Put in terms of the rhetorical triangle, *kairos* is the circle of context surrounding the rhetorical triangle of speaker/author, audience/listener, and purpose/message. For humorous texts, the *kairos* may include the date at which the text is published (or, for Phan, the date at which the standup routine was originally conducted). It may also include the medium by which the text was originally and subsequently disseminated. For instance, Branch’s text was first published elsewhere and then republished and revised in the source from which I provide his analyzed text. Although my version of Branch’s text comes from his book, his essay being published in a different venue would necessarily mean that the original

venue is part of the kairos for the essay in question. Likewise, for Phan’s text, his original standup was performed at a comedy club where it is likely that only adults aged twenty-one and older were allowed to attend due to age-related drinking laws in many locales. However, Phan’s standup is also published on YouTube—a medium to which most ages have access—and this must be accounted for in the kairos of Phan’s text.

## II. David Sedaris: “Me Talk Pretty One Day”

### 1. Author Background

David Sedaris<sup>3</sup> is among the most famous and successful American humorists. He has nine published books, has five Grammy nominations, and won the 2001 Thurber Prize for American humor (Sedaris, *David Sedaris Teaches 2*; “David Sedaris: On Being an Open”; “David Sedaris: Biography”). He was born in 1956 in New York state but grew up in North Carolina as the second of six children (“David Sedaris: Biography”).

Sedaris is of Greek heritage and was brought up in the Greek Orthodox faith (“David Sedaris Biography”). During his childhood, his family’s middle class, suburban status and New York origin resulted in pride and snobbery that were influential in setting expectations for how Sedaris and his siblings were supposed to act and in establishing the persona his parents wished to portray to others—one of class and, at times, ostentatious, conspicuous spending. (Sedaris, “Unbuttoned”; *Me Talk Pretty* 64; “Now We Are Five”). Sedaris states that his parents consistently reminded him and his siblings that they were

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<sup>3</sup> I wrote an author background for David Sedaris for my Master’s thesis; however, this background was written anew. Any crossover in references or information (such as an author’s birthdate or hometown) are because those are unchangeable facts. Nevertheless, I have referenced my Master’s thesis in my works cited should anyone wish to read it.



above those who were native North Carolinians, and that “We might not have been the wealthiest people in town, but at least we weren’t one of *them*” (61).

Sedaris has always had a strained relationship with his father, whom Sedaris frequently portrays as direct, mean, physically abusive, selfish, cold-hearted, uninvolved with his children, and continually disappointed in Sedaris (Heard, “This American Lie”; Sedaris, *Me Talk Pretty* 63; Sedaris, “Why Aren’t You Laughing?”; Lyall, “David Sedaris, Dressed”). His father often demeaned Sedaris and told him that he was “worthless” and had “a dismal future,” and Sedaris often blamed his father for making Sedaris’s mother miserable (Sedaris, “Unbuttoned”; Sedaris, “Why Aren’t You Laughing?”; Sedaris, “Ashes”).

In contrast to his father, Sedaris adored his mother and believes that he received his comedic talent from her (Anthony, “The Tragic Family”; Bailey, “David Sedaris Talks”). Sedaris’s mother abused pills and, like her father before her, became an alcoholic and was a mean drunk who enjoyed intimidating others around her (Sedaris, “Why Aren’t You Laughing?”). While Sedaris asserts that her addictions were largely unproblematic when he was growing up, he claims that her alcoholism dramatically worsened after five of her of six children left to start their own lives (Sedaris, “Why Aren’t You Laughing?”). When he was an adult, her drunkenness embarrassed Sedaris, and he believes that everyone, including him, enabled her drinking (Sedaris, “Why Aren’t You Laughing?”; Bailey, “Sedaris Talks”). She died from lung cancer in 1991, which broke his heart (Anthony, “The Tragic Family”; Sedaris, “Ashes”; Encyclopedia of World Biography, “David Sedaris Biography”).

Although Sedaris gets along with most of his siblings, he had a difficult relationship with his youngest sister Tiffany who committed suicide in 2013 (Bailey, “David Sedaris Talks”; Anthony, “The Tragic Family”; Sedaris, “Now We are Five”). In addition to his sister’s suicide, another tragic moment in Sedaris’s life was when his sister Gretchen outed him as gay to their family when the siblings were teenagers. His family was largely accepting of his sexuality, apart from his younger brother with whom he now has a good relationship. His father encouraged Sedaris to marry a woman as late as 2005, but he has indicated that Sedaris’s choice to clean apartments was much more shameful than being gay. At the age of twenty-seven, Sedaris had his first serious boyfriend and now has a steady partner who is from South Africa (Bailey, “David Sedaris Talks”; Sedaris, *David Sedaris Teaches* 4). His partner, Hugh, is frequently referenced in Sedaris’s writing, but Sedaris does not openly discuss gay sex as he fears that such would be unacceptable to many readers and may render him “to the gay section of the bookstore” (“David Sedaris: On Being an Open Book BookTube”)

Despite Sedaris’s literary success, his educational background began in visual arts rather than literature, and after dropping out of college to hitchhike across America, he attended the Art Institute of Chicago to study writing (Sedaris, “David Sedaris Teaches Storytelling”; “David Sedaris: Biography”). Vocationally, he has been a janitor, performing artist, writing instructor, salesman, and standup comedian (Sedaris, *Me Talk Pretty* 51; 55-59). He got his big break in writing when he started appearing on National Public Radio (NPR) in 1992 after Ira Glass saw him performing at a Chicago club (Sedaris, *David Sedaris Teaches* 2; “David Sedaris: Biography”; “David Sedaris: On

Being an Open”). These NPR appearances led to him being published in *Esquire*, *Harper’s*, and *The New Yorker* (“David Sedaris: Biography”).

Although his commercial success began in America, his nationality is American, and he has regional affiliations with, and houses in, North Carolina and New York, he frequently criticizes American culture for its supposed egotism and ignorance (Anthony, “The Tragic Family”). He loves to travel around Europe, has a home in Sussex, and has studied in Paris (Sedaris, *David Sedaris Teaches* 10; Sedaris, “Why Aren’t You Laughing”).

Regarding writing, Sedaris believes that painful experiences make for good writing material, and he has been known to poke fun at his struggles with obsessive-compulsive disorder, alcoholism, and drug abuse (Encyclopedia of World Biography, “David Sedaris Biography”; Sedaris, *Me Talk Pretty* 44; Sedaris, *David Sedaris Teaches* 36; Anthony, “The Tragic Family”; Sedaris, “David Sedaris Teaches Storytelling”; “David Sedaris: On Being an Open”). Furthermore, he prides himself on writing in a journal every day, writing about relatable experiences, and focusing on emotional honesty (“David Sedaris: On Being an Open”; Sedaris, *David Sedaris Teaches* 20). Ironically, he was accused in 2007 by a *New Republic* article of fabricating his stories, and Sedaris admitted to fictionalizing parts of his works (Heard, “The American Lie”).

## **2. Audiences and Themes for “Me Talk Pretty One Day”**

The chosen text for the following rhetorical analysis is “Me Talk Pretty One Day” from his collection of stories titled *Me Talk Pretty One Day* that was published in 2000.

There are several possible audiences for this text including educated adults, particularly those around Sedaris’s age. Sedaris mainly publishes humorous essays, and

this genre is primarily read by adults as humorous essays are not often found in children's literature. Furthermore, Sedaris states at the beginning of this essay that he is forty-one years of age, so it would make sense that the readers who would most relate to this text and to Sedaris himself are adults and those who are around his age since being in the same age range likely indicates that they have similar basic life experiences.

Additionally, he discusses experiences that are most relatable to educated adults—such as going to another country and learning another language—and these experiences, and by extension this essay, would therefore likely connect with audiences of educated adults, travelers who have tried to learn a second language, and/or those who have tried to learn a new skill as an adult.

Sedaris's text also contains a theme of feeling like an outsider, so it is likely that this text targets audiences who feel, or have felt, as if they are outsiders in some way. This is typical for many humorous texts, so it is unsurprising that Sedaris's essay follows suit (Helitzer & Shatz 43; Smith).

Like numerous humor texts, Sedaris explores the theme of those in power versus those not in power. The "us versus them" motif, put in terms of the teacher in the story versus her students, is in line with much of humor writing by exploring power relations and often lampooning those in power (Helitzer and Shatz 43). Thus, Sedaris's text also has an audience of those who do not feel as if they are in power. This connects to current and past students as well as to those who have gone back to school as adults, particularly since students often believe that the power lies in the hands of instructors who may fairly or unfairly use it, and Sedaris specifically explores his student-teacher relationship in this text.

### 3. Rhetorical Analysis Results

Through rhetorically analyzing Sedaris's "Me Talk Pretty One Day," I found nineteen occurrences of audience awareness and eighteen instances of situated knowledge. There were five cases in which the text was exemplary of both audience awareness and situated knowledge. My notes on the text are in Appendix B, and the examples and corresponding explanations are in table 4 in Appendix C. To explore further how Sedaris uses audience awareness and situated knowledge in the text, I will discuss in-depth two of the strongest examples of each from his essay.

#### *1. Explanation of Two Instances of Audience Awareness*

In the text, Sedaris references *Playboy Magazine's* "Playmate of the Month" (168). This reference indicates awareness that many of his readers (if not most) are American since Playmates and the *Playboy* world are American creations and part of American popular culture. As stated, the copyright for Sedaris's text is 2000, so the kairos of this essay takes into account *Playboy's* notable popularity in mainstream America at that time (Houston and Kim, "Hugh Hefner's *Playboy*"). There were *Playboy* emblems on clothing and other merchandise at the time, and the early 2000s saw the rise of the *Playboy* reality show, *The Girls Next Door*, on American cable (Houston and Kim, "Hugh Hefner's *Playboy*"; "The Girls Next"). At the time of Sedaris's writing, it would be difficult to find an American who had not at least heard of *Playboy* and its Playmates. This is not to say that others living outside of America wouldn't be familiar with the concept of a Playmate, but the American origin and iconic status that *Playboy* once had indicate that Sedaris includes that Playmate reference to speak to and connect with his American audience.

Sedaris's position as a gay American male also puts an interesting spin on this popular cultural reference. Since *Playboy* primarily appeals to heterosexual males, one could say that the company and its publication do not view homosexual males as its primary audience. However, Sedaris still includes it, not necessarily for the sexual nature of the publication, but because of its iconic American status. The Playmate reference also demonstrates audience awareness in that the allusion will likely be most familiar to adults, which comprise most of Sedaris's target audience. While children may have heard of *Playboy*, it is unlikely that they would understand the humor in the reference as would adults. Thus, this reference likely shows that Sedaris thinks about who his readers are and tailors his writing to those audiences—American adults—thereby demonstrating audience awareness.

The reference may also endear Sedaris to his audience and help create an “us” versus “them” dynamic in order to speak to Sedaris's theme of those not being in power (Sedaris and his audience members) versus those in power (Sedaris's teacher) and the resulting injustice of such a power dynamic. By ingratiating himself to his American audience through the common and shared concept of *Playboy*, Sedaris exudes the impression of him being a likeable “everyman” and effectively othering his French teacher by portraying himself closer to being like his audience than his French teacher, which plays on his American's audience's likely feelings of American pride. Taken even further, the *Playboy* reference may be Sedaris attempting to reduce any alienation his audience may feel toward him because of his sexual orientation. He demonstrates knowledge of a seemingly heterosexual entity, perhaps so he may show that he is not out of touch with his heterosexual audience and is not different than his heterosexual

audience members—his sexuality does not separate him from other Americans; therefore, it should not create distance between him and his American audience.

Sedaris again demonstrates audience awareness in the text when he writes about some of the difficulties of learning French when his native language is English. He writes about his French teacher, “I absorbed as much of her abuse as I could understand, thinking—but not saying—that I find it ridiculous to assign a gender to an inanimate object incapable of disrobing and making an occasional fool of itself. Why refer to Lady Crack Pipe or Good Sir Dishrag when these things could never live up to all that their sex implied?” (170). Here he is likely showing audience awareness by using wording and images that would probably appeal to Americans and adults. There is a stereotype of some Americans believing that American characteristics and ways of being are often superior to others (Lewis and Hartzfeld, “Americans Superiority Complex”). Sedaris plays with that stereotype by subscribing to the belief that English’s lack of gendered word forms is superior to languages that have them. He lampoons the seeming ridiculousness of gendered words through humorous juxtaposition, which functions as an appeal to pathos toward his audience. The surprise created by placing an ignoble item like a crack pipe or a common dishrag against the noble titles “lady” and “sir” creates humor, and the irony helps to critique languages with gendered word forms. Those Americans who agree with Sedaris are likely to align with him and feel negatively toward Sedaris’s French teacher. The resulting separation between Sedaris and his instructor may also create feelings of the ingroup (Sedaris and some native English speakers) versus the outgroup (the French teacher). By positioning his instructor as an outsider to the audience, Sedaris encourages his audience to distance themselves from the instructor and

move emotionally closer to Sedaris. Thus, through pathos, Sedaris further creates a power dynamic between himself and his instructor, and he may be encouraging his audience to side with him. This critique as a whole speaks to his audience of native English speakers and likely boosts his ethos with his American audience because he portrays their native language as superior to others. This plays on an audience's likely desire to feel superior to others (which is frequently a desire in many humans), thereby functioning as an appeal to pathos (here, his audience's emotions) in order to help Sedaris gain ethos and further encourage his audience to side with him and against his French instructor (Helitzer and Shatz 23-26). These moves strongly suggest that Sedaris is showing audience awareness in this moment.

Sedaris again shows audience awareness by alluding to adult items (a crack pipe and dishrag), thereby demonstrating that he is tailoring his humor to his adult audience. Crack pipes and dishrags are not usually associated with childhood; rather, they are items that adults would either have experiences with or would likely know of. Furthermore, the sexual connotation of the aforementioned personified items "disrobing" appeals to adult humor more than that of children, although such may interest young adults. Still, the combination of the adult items and sexual implication indicates that Sedaris orients his humor toward his adult audience in this instance in order to create positive feelings toward Sedaris and perhaps further wins his audience's favor and sympathies thereby encouraging them to align with Sedaris and his messages.

## *2. Explanation of Two Instances of Situated Knowledge*

Sedaris displays situated knowledge in his text when he reveals his background regarding French. He writes, "I've spent quite a few summers in Normandy, and I took a



monthlong French class before leaving New York. I'm not completely in the dark, yet I understood only half of what this woman was saying" (167). He situates his knowledge by showing what his background is in French and what his perspective/lens is for viewing his teacher and overall seeming ineptitude in his current French class. He reveals where he has travelled, partly to give himself ethos and to portray himself as worldly, particularly since the places (Normandy and New York) he cites frequently have connotations of being travel destinations. Sedaris is indeed a world traveler, and he particularly enjoys France, so it is logical that he would want to present his persona in this text as well travelled and worldly in order to perhaps reflect how he views himself in real life.

It is key that he shows his background to demonstrate that he does not come to his current French class with zero experience and he does not view his situation with nascent eyes. Rather, he has experiences that cause him to conclude that he is not totally ignorant when it comes to French. His worldly resume likely increases his ethos for readers, because he is showing where his knowledge comes from, and there may be a feeling that since he has experienced France before, he would have at least some credibility to discuss the country and its language. This situating of his knowledge ultimately helps Sedaris to give himself ethos and to exaggerate how difficult his teacher was, which may render the overall situation more humorous than if he were not to situate his knowledge and instead simply say, "I understood only half of what this woman was saying" (167). Thus, situating his knowledge identifies the location of his knowledge regarding French, functions as the set up for his joke, helps to show how outrageous his French teacher was, and increases Sedaris's ethos.

Sedaris again situates his knowledge in the text when he reminisces about his mother while thinking how he should answer his instructor when she asks him what he loves. He writes, “I recalled my mother, flushed with wine, pounding the tabletop late one night, saying, ‘Love? I love a good steak, cooked rare. I love my cat, and I love . . .’ My sisters and I leaned forward waiting to hear our names. ‘Tums,’ our mother said. ‘I love Tums’” (Sedaris 169). This vignette shows one place from which Sedaris roots his thinking. By reminiscing about this childhood experience while he is an adult, Sedaris implies that this is a moment that shaped him, otherwise he would not have included it in a humorous essay format that values space and concision, and he would not go into such detail in the dialog for the reader.

Being “flushed with wine” in front of the children also implies that Sedaris’s mother had problems with alcohol, which reflects reality (Sedaris, “Why Aren’t You Laughing?”). In a different story, Sedaris states that his mother was an alcoholic and pill abuser who under the influence was mean and would intimidate her children (Sedaris, “Why Aren’t You Laughing?”). This reality and pain are at least partly illustrated in the passage about the memory of his mother. However, despite the apparent pain from having one’s mother insinuate that she loves steak, her cat, and Tums more than her children, Sedaris’s tone comes off as almost blasé since he chooses a neutral word, “recalled,” to introduce the memory. He also does not use any words when referring to his thinking that immediately come off as bitter or angry. “Pounding on the tabletop” could be tinged negatively, but it mostly works to punctuate the periods in her list of items that she loves, which dramatizes the scene and provides humorous exaggeration. Also, the word “pounding” refers more to his mother’s actions rather than to Sedaris’s

feelings about her actions, so such feels more like a description than as a reveal of any negative feeling he has toward her. Ultimately, Sedaris creates humor by using the irony of his mother mentioning the mundane and inanimate object of Tums before ever thinking about her children in her list of loved items.

This passage reveals pain and creates humor, and it situates Sedaris's knowledge by revealing to the reader that he is not coming from a place of anger. While it may, on the surface, feel confusing not to be angry at his mother's comment, Sedaris truly is not angry with his mother. He has continually stated that he wishes to celebrate his mother and her humor and to show how "great" she was (Anthony, "The Tragic Family"; Bailey, "David Sedaris Talks"; Sedaris, "Why Aren't You Laughing?"). So, it is through his tone in the passage and his celebration of his mother's humor that he brings his past experiences into his writing, subtly alerts the reader as to how he feels about his mother, and celebrates her memory in a quirky manner—a goal he continually strives toward in his career. Furthermore, this moment acts as an appeal to pathos so that the reader will both laugh with Sedaris and feel sympathetic toward him, which encourages a reader to align with Sedaris and his viewpoints throughout the story. Additionally, this may increase Sedaris's ethos in the power dynamic he creates between him and his teacher, because he likely comes off as the more sympathetic character between the two to audiences.

The passage also partly situates where Sedaris's quiriness and oddness come from. Indeed, his mother's off-the-wall humor is along the same kind of ironic, surprising humor that Sedaris himself uses. This further shows the location from which Sedaris and his knowledge come and perhaps keeps her memory alive for him and his readers.

It also hints that Sedaris views the world through the eyes of someone who had a parent who may have dealt with addiction (indeed, his mother was an addict), and knowing this perhaps explains why Sedaris treats his instructor's abuse toward him with humorous optimism, curiosity, and mild agitation. With this passage, he discloses that his teacher's abuse is similar to that of his past. Through divulging to the reader part of his background and connecting it to his present perspective—thereby situating his knowledge—Sedaris gives logic and grounding to some of his responses to his instructor. This is not to say that there are no places in the text where Sedaris feels extremely hurt by his instructor or that he does not exaggerate his teacher's actions, but this does show logic behind his seeming underreactions, such as when he says, “‘I hate you,’ she said to me one afternoon. Her English was flawless. ‘I really, really hate you.’ Call me sensitive, but I couldn't help but take it personally” (171). His instructor's quote is harsh and hurtful, but this is likely not the first time that Sedaris has heard sentiments along that type of negative spectrum. So, his understated response of, “Call me sensitive, but I couldn't help but take it personally,” is both funny and logical, because he has shown the reader the part of his background that could plausibly cause him to act in such an understated manner. Thus, the chosen examples of him reminiscing about his mother situate his knowledge and help to appeal to his audience through pathos, invoke his audience's sympathy toward him and encourage them to align within him throughout the text, increase his ethos by portraying himself as the more sympathetic character between him and his instructor, and make his perspective and responses to his teacher believable.

#### **4. Summary**

As shown, Sedaris uses audience awareness and situated knowledge throughout “Me Talk Pretty One Day.” He often employs audience awareness through word choice and allusions, and such helps Sedaris to relate to his audience (and them to him) and sets up a dynamic based largely upon his appeals to ethos and pathos in which his audience will want to align with him in the “us versus them” power dynamic between he and his French teacher. Sedaris also uses situated knowledge in his text to communicate to his audience where his knowledge is coming from and to memorialize his mother, thereby aiding readers in understanding his persona in the story and perhaps enabling Sedaris to play on the audience’s emotions so that they will side with him. Situating his knowledge also helps to make his responses and actions feel believable, which ultimately adds to the humor in his story and tempers anything that otherwise may feel too outrageous to be believed.

### **III. Michael P. Branch: “What’s Drier than David Sedaris?”**

#### **1. Author Background**

Michael P. Branch<sup>4</sup> was born in 1963 and has a B.A. in English from the College of William and Mary (1985) and an M.A. (1987) and Ph.D. (1985) in English, focusing on John Muir, from the University of Virginia (“Michael Branch”; University of Nevada, Reno, “Michael Branch, Ph.D”). He is a professor at the University of Nevada, Reno

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<sup>4</sup> For full disclosure, Dr. Michael P. Branch is a member of this dissertation’s committee and I have taken classes from him. In part, I am aware of his work on bioregionalism through my experiences with him as my professor, both in my undergraduate and graduate work. I obtained permission from Dr. Branch to analyze his “What’s Drier than David Sedaris?” before rhetorically addressing this work for my dissertation research.

(UNR) with emphases on literature, environment, and bioregionalism, and has received numerous awards for his teaching (“About”; University of Nevada, Reno, “Michael Branch, Ph.D.”; University of Nevada, Reno, “Michael Branch, Ph.D.”).

Additionally, Branch is the co-founder of UNR’s graduate program in literature and environment and is one of the co-founders of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), which is a scholarly journal that merges environmental literature, environmental studies, ecocriticism, science, literature, art, humanities, and classroom practice (University of Nevada, Reno, “Michael Branch, Ph.D.”; Sierra Club, “Michael P. Branch”; ASLE, “Vision & History”).

Indeed, Branch’s scholarly background in environmental literature and ecocriticism is vast and he is also a member of the Western Literature Association and was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize and received an Honorable Mention for the Pushcart Prize (University of Nevada, Reno, “Michael Branch, Ph.D.”; Sierra Club, “Michael P. Branch”; University of Nevada, Reno, “Michael Branch, Ph.D.”). Some of his other awards include the Ellen Meloy Desert Writers Award, the Nevada Writers Hall of Fame Silver Pen Award, and the Willa Pilla Award for Humor Writing (“About”; Sierra Club, “Michael P. Branch”; University of Nevada, Reno, “Michael Branch, Ph.D.”). Most of his texts intended for popular audiences are published in environmental, place-based publications, and his trilogy of creative nonfiction humor books is entitled *Raising Wild: Dispatches from a Home in the Wilderness* (2016), *Rants from the Hills: On Packrats, Bobcats, Wildfires, Curmudgeons, a Drunken Mary Kay Lady, and Other Encounters with the Wild in the High Desert* (2017), and *How to Cuss in Western: And Other*

*Missives from the High Desert* (2018) (“About”; Sierra Club, “Michael P. Branch”; Amazon, “Michael P Branch”).

As evident in his publications, Branch’s heart and loyalties lie primarily with the American West, particularly the Great Basin and the Lake Tahoe region (University of Nevada, Reno, “Michael Branch, Ph.D.”). Branch is originally from Virginia but settled in Nevada during the 1990s, and his publications aim to spread his love for the Great Basin, the high desert, and Nevada (Sierra Club, “Michael P. Branch”; “Michael Branch: Writer, Humorist, Desert Rat”; Hauserman, “Author Hilariously Recounts”).

He often writes and edits while walking the high desert (Branch, “How We Write”; Branch, “In Defense of Bibliopedestrianism” 59; Hauserman, “Author Hilariously Recounts”). In addition to being an avid walker, teacher, and writer, Branch is a blues harmonica player, baseball fan, and beer connoisseur—all of which he has written about in his humor writing and uses to create his writing persona (University of Nevada, Reno, “Michael Branch, Ph.D.”; Branch, “Rants from the Hill: Reno is”).

Branch also frequently writes about his wife and two daughters joining him in the wilderness and thereby portrays nature as a place for family, for women, and for raising children (Hauserman, “Author Hilariously Recounts”). Furthermore, Branch focuses on what environments and resources are currently available rather than what is being lost, and he endeavors to create environmental works that break the frequent use of elegy and instead use humor (Hauserman, “Author Hilariously Recounts”; Branch, “How We Write”).

## 2. Audiences and Themes for “What’s Drier than David Sedaris?”

Part of the kairos for “What’s Drier than David Sedaris” is that it was originally published in *High Country News* in 2016, which is a nonprofit publication that has been in existence since 1970 and currently has a print magazine and website that address “the important issues and stories that define the Western United States” and that aims to “inform and inspire people to act on behalf of the West’s diverse natural and human communities” (“About Us”). The publication also addresses political, social, and ecological matters pertaining to the west and is largely a nonfiction publication. It has a slight politically liberal bent and includes stories that explore the unique cultures, peoples, landscapes, and identities of the American west (“Submission Guidelines”). Such topics, the publication’s word choices, and its political stances indicate that its audience consists of educated, politically left-leaning adults who live in the western United States, and so this readership is likely one of the target audiences for Branch’s text.

“What’s Drier than David Sedaris?” was later republished in a collection of essays from Branch entitled *Rants from the Hill: On Packrats, Bobcats, Wildfires, Curmudgeons, A Drunken Mary Kay Lady, & Other Encounters with the Wild in the High Desert* (2017). When searched for on *Amazon*, the book is accompanied by suggested texts by well-known desert authors such as Ellen Meloy and Terry Tempest Williams (“Rants from the Hill”). Penguin Random House places the book in humor, science, and biography/memoir classifications (“Rants from the Hill”). *Goodreads*, a popular website devoted to book reviews, attaches the following labels to Branch’s book: nonfiction, environment/nature, humor, biography, autobiography, memoir, essays, and short stories



(“Rants from the Hill”). The marketing surrounding the book from the aforementioned sources indicates that the audience for Branch’s book and, by extension, his “What’s Drier than David Sedaris?,” includes those interested in nonfiction, memoir, environmental (specifically desert) writing, humor, essays, and science writing.

Considering the text’s original place of publication, the audience for Branch’s text includes educated adults living in the western United States. Branch’s own well-known background as a scholar likely brings into his audience those who are familiar with him and his work such as his colleagues, UNR students, and peers who have research emphases on environmental writing, humor writing, and memoir. Indeed, Branch’s background further supports the assertion that his audience consists of educated adults.

Additionally, Branch’s audience likely includes those outside of academia who are interested in humor writing, those who live in a desert setting, those who wish to explore different landscapes, residents of the Great Basin (specifically Reno residents), people who have felt as if they are outsiders, and those who may feel that they are not part of a group or class of people who are in power in society. Those who are familiar with Sedaris are also part of Branch’s audience since Sedaris is such a central figure in Branch’s story, and the piece’s connection to Sedaris would probably draw at least some of Sedaris’s fans to Branch’s text. Moreover, those who do not live in large, urban areas are part of Branch’s audience as one of the text’s central themes speaks to such readers.

Indeed, one of the main themes of Branch’s piece is “us versus them,” particularly regarding big cities versus less populous areas, the upper class/elite versus everyone else, and those in power versus those not in power. This is not to say that Branch is anti-power; rather, such themes are in line with much of humor writing, which frequently

lampoons those seen as superior or in power (Helitzer and Shatz 44). Other themes in the text include being proud of where you live and who you are even if others look down upon you and your home, as well as a cautionary note against effete snobbery. Indeed, Branch lampoons those he sees as hypocrites, and he does so through frequent use of audience awareness by addressing his audience, including himself in his audience, and elevating his audience to lampoon his audience's critic—David Sedaris.

### **3. Rhetorical Analysis Results**

Through rhetorically analyzing Branch's text, I found twenty-seven occurrences of audience awareness and thirty instances of situated knowledge. There were eleven cases in which the text was exemplary of both audience awareness and situated knowledge. My notes on the text are in Appendix D, and the examples and corresponding explanations are in table 5 in Appendix E. In order to investigate further how Branch uses audience awareness and situated knowledge in "What's Drier than David Sedaris?," I will discuss in-depth two of the strongest examples of each from his essay. However, first I must discuss what prompted Branch to write the essay as this forms part of the text's kairos.

There was an incident in which the famed humor writer David Sedaris discussed his book tour on the *Daily Show* with Jon Stewart (00:00:00 – 00:01:53). Stewart asked Sedaris which city he "hated the most" on his sixty-city book tour, and Sedaris answered, "Reno, Nevada." Sedaris continued to poke fun at Reno's residents and mocked some of them for wearing cut-off shorts and t-shirts to his reading event. Sedaris recalled how he asked one woman who was in her sixties and wearing a Count Chocula t-shirt if that was her "good Count Chocula t-shirt" (00:01:19 – 00:01:31). He implied that the woman

wearing a Count Chocula t-shirt and the people wearing cut-off shorts were somehow emblematic of the shallow intellectual depth and supposed low culture of typical Nevadans. In “What’s Drier than David Sedaris,” Branch answers Sedaris’s jabs from that interview with some of his own.

*1. Explanation of Two Instances of Audience Awareness*

Branch demonstrates audience awareness when he writes that Sedaris “doesn’t even pronounce the name of our state correctly (it’s NevAda, not NevAHda)” (Branch, “What’s Drier than” 115). Most Nevadans are sensitive regarding how their state’s name is pronounced, and a frequent mark of an outsider to the state is pronouncing the name as “NevAHda” (Buergin, “Knowing Nevada: Debunking”). As a Nevadan myself, I can attest to this sensitivity and to its importance to many Nevadans’ senses of identity and state pride. Branch seems to lower Sedaris’s ethos with Branch’s audience while raising his own ethos by spotlighting Sedaris’s faux pas. This likely speaks to Branch’s Nevadan audience by critiquing Sedaris on a point that is important, specifically to many Nevadans. Furthermore, it creates an “us versus them” dynamic between the ingroup (Branch and Nevadans) and the outgroup (Sedaris and people like him who do not appear to care enough to learn how to pronounce a state’s name correctly), and this separation increases the odds that Branch’s audience sides with him (as a member of their ingroup) and against Sedaris (a seeming outsider).

One of the goals of Branch’s text is to point out the ironic ignorance of Sedaris portraying Nevadans, particularly Reno residents, as backwoods and dumb. To accomplish this, Branch frames Sedaris as being ignorant by showing that Sedaris has gotten something as simple as pronouncing the state’s name wrong as emphasized by his

word choice of “even”—a move that is both based on logos since it logically seems to be the most basic of tasks and pathos because it plays on many Nevadans’ sensitivity on this matter. Not to accomplish this simple task implies ignorance and even a sense of egotistical blasé on Sedaris’s part, which likely lowers Sedaris’s ethos and appeals to Branch’s audience in terms of their emotions. Criticizing Sedaris further enables Branch to build up his Nevadan audience by showcasing their knowledge. This may also be Branch appealing to pathos by attempting to generate positive feelings in his audience. Portraying a group as intelligent and superior to its detractors probably produces positive feelings within that group and ingratiates the one creating that portrayal to the group. Thus, Branch depicting many Nevadans as smarter and superior to Sedaris likely ingratiates him to his audience of Nevadans, thereby increasing the probability that they will accept Branch as one of their own (which may also increase Branch’s ethos as a Nevadan) and will align with Branch in his argument.

This instance further demonstrates audience awareness, because by showing the correct pronunciation, Branch is seemingly demonstrating to his audience of Nevadans that he is one of them. Pointing specifically to this unique sensitivity among Nevadans helps Branch to demonstrate that he understands them and is also a Nevadan. He further emphasizes this through his word choice of “our state” and by asserting that the way locals pronounce the state is the way it is “correctly” pronounced. Both word choice instances likely appeal to his audience of Nevadans and help to increase Branch’s ethos. This awareness and appeal to his audience ultimately aids Branch in enticing his Nevadan audience to align themselves with Branch and against Sedaris.

Branch again demonstrates audience awareness in his word choices when he writes, “it is we who consider him the unwitting provincial” (118). As in the previous examples of audience awareness, Branch chooses a form of the first-person plural—“we”—to include himself within his audience. Branch is not an outsider looking at the situation from a third-party perspective; rather, he places himself as part of the population that has been unfairly criticized by Sedaris. In a way, by using “we,” Branch says to his audience, “I am one of you,” which adds to his ethos as a Nevadan, addresses his audience, demonstrates audience awareness, and contributes to the “us versus them” motif in the text.

The word choices of “unwitting provincial” also demonstrate Branch’s audience awareness by appealing to his educated readers and creating irony that holds his Nevadan readers in high esteem while lampooning Sedaris. “Unwitting” and “provincial” are words that have more of a scholarly than colloquial tone, and the choice to use these formal-sounding words is to contradict Sedaris’s implications that Reno inhabitants (and, in general, Nevadans) are backwoods, unthinking, uneducated hicks. In this context, “provincial” means “having or showing the manners, viewpoints, etc., considered characteristic of unsophisticated inhabitants of a province” (“Provincial”). However, Branch uses logos to contradict Sedaris’s portrayal of Reno since using “provincial” shows a level of sophistication that combats Sedaris’s criticism. Branch’s educated readers likely know what “unwitting” and “provincial” mean and may enjoy the irony that Branch’s word choices create. Thus, Branch’s generation of irony via word choice likely shows audience awareness and that he recognizes that his audience is probably

educated, intelligent, and would appreciate, and even find humorous, this irony that takes a few logical steps to understand.

Last, the irony created by Branch's word choices elevates his Nevadan audience by implying that they are intelligent and sophisticated, which places them in a position of power in opposition to Sedaris. This speaks to the "us versus them" theme in the text and shows a tailoring to, and awareness of, Branch's educated Nevadan audience and subtly suggests that if Sedaris cannot see and enjoy this irony, then perhaps he has little room and ethos to criticize or look down upon others.

## *2. Explanation of Two Instances of Situated Knowledge*

An example of Branch situating his knowledge occurs when he discusses why Count Chocula is important to him and others. In his text, Branch calls Count Chocula the "truly innocent victim in this story," a "slandered hero," an entity that was "needed" by millions of children at the time of Count Chocula's creation, and someone who would be supported for president of the United States by "anyone who was a kid in 1971" (115; 116; 117). Branch explains the kairos of Count Chocula's creation, which was in 1971, by writing,

Nineteen seventy-one was none too placid a year. The Charles Manson murder trial was nightly news, Ku Klux Klansmen were arrested for bombing school buses, Lt. William Calley was found guilty of the My Lai massacre in Vietnam, and the Nixon administration arrested thirteen thousand antiwar protestors during a single three-day period. Closer to home, Operation Grommet proceeded apace, as the United States spent the year continuing a decades-long program of

attacking Nevada (which they probably pronounced NevAhda) with nuclear weapons. (116)

By listing the events and showing part of the kairos of Count Chocula's creation, Branch delineates how and why his adoration for Count Chocula and his conclusions regarding the character were shaped and came into being, which helps to ground his knowledge and trace it back to its origin. Furthermore, this situating of his knowledge uses logos to peel away the seeming silliness of a cereal box cartoon character and to show readers why his feelings have logical foundations. Branch creates a juxtaposition between the light-hearted Count Chocula and his list of significant, serious, and oftentimes macabre events, and this comparison shows the logos of why the mental break of Count Chocula was important for many children, Branch included, growing up during that time. Moreover, Branch situating his knowledge about the character lampoons Sedaris by showing Sedaris's seemingly superficial understanding of Count Chocula. Indeed, within the context of the listed events, it seems at best ignorant and cold-hearted at worst to put down a character that gave numerous children emotional respite from the hardships of those times—all of which function as appeals to pathos and logos in Branch's piece and function to lower Sedaris's ethos.

In this portion of the text, Branch interestingly demonstrates both situated knowledge and audience awareness when he discusses events specifically of interest to many Nevadans. Branch situates his knowledge by showing what events speak to him as a Nevadan within the context of his outlined time (1971), and he uses the word "home" to show that he views these events from the perspective of someone who has ethos since he is close to, and invested in, the place. Moreover, he seems to make an appeal to pathos by

using “home,” because the word connotes feelings of belonging, love, and comfort—all of which Branch appears to feel toward Nevada. So, he is partly situating others’ knowledge (i.e., showing the biases, events, and influences that may have led to certain beliefs and feelings for others) regarding why they might like and respect the cereal box character. Thus, Branch uses both logos and pathos to 1) situate his knowledge of why Count Chocula may be important to Nevadans, even though he was not a Nevadan during that time and 2) show why, in light of those depressing events, the character may be worthy of being worn on a t-shirt for the Nevadan lady whom Sedaris mocked. Furthermore, he ingratiates himself to his audience and increases his ethos by referring to Nevada with the soft and caring term of “home.”

In addition to situating his knowledge, Branch shows audience awareness by tailoring his list of events to people who are likely in his publication’s age demographic—older adults, which was discussed previously in this chapter. These readers likely remember those events, so Branch’s list is something that they may connect and sympathize with as they are, in a way, shared events with him. Thus, Branch builds trust with these audience members through shared experiences, likely increasing his ethos with them. Branch’s short explanations after naming each event also may make his writing accessible to people who may be younger than Baby Boomer adults, but who are educated and can recognize the names, but not necessarily know the importance, of those events. This likely helps Branch to speak to this portion of his audience and shows that he is aware that his audience consists of more than people around his age.

Branch’s tailoring to his audience particularly shows in this section when he moves from the events generally experienced by Americans at that time to an incident



that was specifically experienced by numerous Nevadans—a battery of nuclear testing on Nevadan land (Green 283-284). Other westerners are often aware of the nuclear testing and its detrimental consequences, as demonstrated by Terry Tempest Williams’s *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* and Philip L. Fradkin’s *Fallout: An American Nuclear Tragedy*. However, it is one experience to see and feel the effects of the testing performed on someone else’s land, and it is another experience to, as Branch states it, be “attack[ed]” by your own government through the testing being conducted in your metaphorical backyard. Nuclear testing is unique to Nevada’s history (with a feeble challenge from Utah) and remains within the state’s current zeitgeist for many Nevadans since the US federal government continually endeavors to store nuclear waste in Nevada, the last attempt being as recent as 2020 (“What is the”). Branch referencing the nuclear testing therefore speaks specifically to his Nevadan audience thereby demonstrating an appeal to his audience through pathos. Furthermore, it again boosts his ethos and works as an appeal to pathos by reinforcing to his audience that he understands the state’s history and some of Nevada’s unique struggles. This helps to ingratiate him to his audience, thereby encouraging them to see him as “one of us,” increases Branch’s ethos with his audience, and ultimately encourages these audience members to side with Branch against Sedaris.

The reference to the mispronunciation of Nevada in the passage may also be Branch using pathos to further place Sedaris in a negative light. Stating that the people who chose to conduct nuclear testing in Nevada “probably pronounced” the state “NevAhda” may draw a line of similarity between them and Sedaris as they all supposedly say the state’s name incorrectly. This juxtaposition may imply that Sedaris

views the state, its people, and its value similarly to those who felt that it was acceptable to bomb it—as perhaps quite inconsequential. Such a comparison and use of pathos may then help Branch damage Sedaris’s ethos in the eyes of Branch’s Nevadan audience, thereby further indicating that Branch is likely exhibiting audience awareness in this moment.

There are several times throughout “What’s Drier than David Sedaris?” in which Branch uses situated knowledge in conjunction with audience awareness. For example, he uses both again when he describes Sedaris’s fashion choices. Branch writes, “While dressed like a cross between an editor at *The New Yorker* and a boozed-up birthday party clown, a comic who is raking large coin in our community mispronounces the name of our state on national TV while failing to answer the host’s inane query as to whether it is unusually humid in the high desert” (117). In a way, Branch seems to use audience awareness in this instance to situate his knowledge.

First, he uses “our,” which places him as part of his Nevadan audience thereby demonstrating audience awareness and building his ethos. Second, he writes “our community” and “our state” to demonstrate further that, as a Nevadan, he is part of his audience and to illuminate how he views Sedaris. He reveals that he interprets this scene of Sedaris on Stewart’s show through the lens of someone who belongs to the community that they are making fun of. By disclosing this bias to his readers, Branch’s unflattering depiction of Sedaris is perhaps better understood and sympathized with than if Branch had not situated his knowledge and shown what informs his perspective and feelings on the matter. Ultimately, then, Branch’s audience awareness here helps to situate his knowledge, and by situating his knowledge he helps to justify his anger toward Sedaris,

portrays such feelings as perhaps reasonable, and likely damages Sedaris's ethos while raising his own.

#### **4. Summary**

These analyses demonstrate that Branch uses both audience awareness and situated knowledge in "What's Drier than David Sedaris?" His word choices often reflect his audience awareness, and his allusions to unique western and Nevadan experiences as well as to events with which his audience would be familiar function to 1) incorporate Branch into his own audience in order to show that he is "one of them" in order to boost his ethos, 2) ingratiate Branch to his audience via appeals to pathos, logos, and ethos so that they align with him and are sympathetic to his argument, and 3) create an "us versus them" dynamic between the ingroup (Branch and his audience) and the outgroup (Sedaris and others like him who may act hypocritically and/or look down on others) in order to appeal to his audience's emotions, damage Sedaris's ethos, and increase Branch's own ethos. All of these ultimately work to convey his message that people should not look down upon others when they lack the ethos to do so and to explore the "us versus them" power dynamics regarding region (city versus less populous areas), class (upper class versus everyone else), and power (those who have power and those who do not). There are several instances, such as the aforementioned, in which Branch uses both audience awareness and situated knowledge. However, this does not necessarily detract from Branch's use of either of those elements. Rather, such instances indicate the frequent close relationship between audience awareness and situated knowledge.

#### **IV. Mindy Kaling: “Types of Women in Romantic Comedies Who are Not Real”**

##### **1. Author Background**

Mindy Kaling (originally named Vera Mindy Chokalingam) was born on June 24, 1979, in America to Indian immigrants, and she grew up in Cambridge, Massachusetts (Bauer, “Mindy Kaling”; Gerstenberger, “8 Things You”; Borden, “Mindy Kaling Has”). She has one older brother, and her mother was an OB-GYN physician and her father was an architect (Bauer, “Mindy Kaling”; Gerstenberger, “8 Things You”; Kaling 25; Kaling 33; Lang, “Mindy Kaling Created”). Kaling changed her name to “Mindy Kaling” when she decided to become an actress and writer after college and wanted a “more Americanized” moniker (Gerstenberger, “8 Things You”).

Kaling has always had a close relationship with her parents and enjoyed their company while she was growing up (Kaling 31). Her mother’s death from pancreatic cancer in 2012 devastated Kaling, and she now is an ambassador for the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network (Murex, “Family Tragedy has”).

Kaling maintains that as she was growing up, she was intelligent, creative, respectful of her elders, and committed to academics, but she was also overweight, shy, sensitive, and did not party (Kaling 29; 31). She frequently felt like an outcast throughout high school and dubs herself as one of the “overlooked kids,” in part because of the bullying she experienced centering on her weight and because she did not see anyone who was like her in body shape, experience, or race in popular culture (Kaling 31).

However, when she went to Dartmouth College, she had a booming social life and great academic success (Kaling 47). She wrote for Dartmouth’s humor magazine and had a regular comic strip for the school’s newspaper (Gerstenberger, “8 Things You”; Mauer,

“Mindy Kaling”). She graduated in 2001 with a degree in Playwriting (Gerstenberger, “8 things You”).

Despite her academic and writing successes, Kaling struggled when she moved to New York to pursue screenwriting and acting, and she experienced major depression and anxiety (Kaling 50; 66-79). Her college internship with Conan O’Brien’s talk show did not lead to further career advancement or any opportunities in New York, and she failed several job interviews (Borden, “Mindy Kaling Has”; Kaling 50; 70-72; 55). To make ends meet, she worked as a babysitter until being hired as a production assistant for a TV psychic (Kaling 67; 72).

Kaling’s writing break came after she and her best friend wrote and performed an off-Broadway comedic play entitled *Matt & Ben*, which was so successful that the creator of *The Office*, Greg Daniels, saw it and offered Kaling a staff writing job on *The Office*’s first season (Borden, “Mindy Kaling Has”; Lang, “Mindy Kaling Created”; Kaling 107-110). At the time, she was the only female of color on the writing staff (Land, “Mindy Kaling Created”). She wrote eighteen episodes, one of which was Emmy-nominated, acted in the show, and later became an executive producer of *The Office* (Land, “Mindy Kaling Created”; Penguin Random House, “Mindy Kaling”). Since that time, Kaling produced, wrote, and starred in *The Mindy Project* (in which the main character is an OB-GYN), acted in several movies, and has produced, written, and/or co-created streaming movies and series including *Late Night*, *Never Have I Ever*, and *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (Bauer, “Mindy Kaling; Borden, “Mindy Kaling Has”; Penguin Random House, “Mindy Kaling”). Many of Kaling’s projects have tackled issues of ethnic representation (e.g., *Never Have I Ever*’s protagonist is a first-generation Indian American), feminism,

sexism, diversity, and body image, and have reimagined several romantic comedy tropes (Baer, “Mindy Kaling”; Lang, “Mindy Kaling Created”).

Despite her successes, Kaling has felt as if people expected her to be “the adorable minority sidekick” both on and off the screen, and she never filled that box, not because she rejected it, but simply because she did not feel like she fit the role (Kaling 74). She has felt that she was on the “outside of the entertainment business” because of her gender, body type, and race (Lang, “Mindy Kaling Created”; Kaling 11-20; Kaling 191-197). Despite much of Hollywood’s seeming insistence on small sizes, Kaling still loves fashion and promotes body positivity and acceptance (Kaling, “Looking back at my Emmys”; “IDK who needs to hear this”).

Outside of work, Kaling appears to have heterosexual relationships, although she mainly focuses on her two young children (Gauk-Roger, “Mindy Kaling Reveals”; Booth, “Everything Mindy Kaling”).

## **2. Audiences and Themes for “Types of Women in Romantic Comedies Who are Not Real”**

The rhetorically analyzed essay was published in Kaling’s 2011 collection of essays, *Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me?: And Other Concerns*. The book is nonfiction, primarily autobiographical, and categorized by Penguin Random House as “humor” and “arts & entertainment biographies & memoirs” (“Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me?”). Part of the book’s kairos includes Kaling writing for, and acting in, *The Office* at the time of its publication, and the show’s popularity (approximately seven to nine million viewers each episode) gave Kaling exposure and ethos as an entertainer (“The Office Nielsen”). As a whole, Kaling’s book contains themes of working hard to

achieve one's dreams, recovering after failure, overcoming adversity, love between a parent and a child, the value of close and loyal friends, and acceptance of one's identity specifically regarding race, body shape, and desires.

Audiences for the book and, by extension, "Types of Women in Romantic Comedies Who are Not Real," are those who are familiar with, and/or are fans of, Kaling or her work. Fans of *The Office* would likely be drawn to Kaling's book because, at the time of her book's publication in 2011, Kaling was best known for *The Office*, so fans of the show may want to read something written by an actress and writer of their beloved show. For the essay alone, audiences likely include those who watch movies, those who are familiar with romantic comedies, and those who are fans of romantic comedies because Kaling focuses on critiquing romantic comedies and some of their caricatures of women. Throughout the text, Kaling tells readers of her love for romantic comedies, and she references several well-known movies to demonstrate her knowledge and adoration for the genre including *When Harry Met Sally*, *Sleepless in Seattle*, *The Proposal*, *The Ugly Truth*, *Elizabethtown*, and *Sweet Home Alabama*. She overtly names these movies, apart from *The Proposal*, *The Ugly Truth*, and *Sweet Home Alabama*, which she references via plot points,<sup>5</sup> and may therefore create insider knowledge between her and fans of the genre who would likely understand her allusions. Additionally, she names well-known thespians for romantic comedies such as Katherine Heigl, Patrick Dempsey, and Josh Lucas to demonstrate her knowledge to romantic comedy fans and to increase her ethos when discussing the genre.

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<sup>5</sup> Part of my analysis of Kaling's text stems from my love of romantic comedies and having seen the movies she names and references.

Interestingly, her essay's audience also includes those with a general interest in movies because she explains her points thoroughly enough to where if readers had not seen a lot of romantic comedies, they would still understand Kaling's logic. Furthermore, Kaling references sci-fi staples such as *Alien*, Ripley (a female character from *Alien*), and Vulcans to tie these elements to romantic comedies in order to tap into sci-fi movies' popularity and broaden her argument's appeal. This also demonstrates her ethos when discussing movies, and likely increases her ethos with her audience members who are not romantic comedy lovers by showing that she watches other genres as well.

Although the audience for Kaling's text includes those who watch movies in general, because her focus is on romantic comedies, her audience is probably mostly women since they make up the majority of romantic comedy fans (Stoll, "Favorite Film Genres in the U.S. 2018, by Gender"). Also, since Kaling focuses on female characters in romantic comedies, her text may appeal mostly to female readers because they can best relate to how those portrayals are, or are not, reflective of their lives as women.

Kaling's audience is also comprised of mothers, feminists, young adults, adults, and Americans. This is because she specifically addresses how mothers are represented in some romantic comedies—something that would probably speak to mothers and would draw them in to her text—and she discusses how working women are oftentimes inaccurately portrayed in romantic comedies, which would likely attract feminists to her text because this group often seeks acceptance, understanding, and celebration for women



in the workplace (Heywood xix; Findlen xiv).<sup>6</sup> Likewise, Kaling's essay appeals to young adults and adults because romantic comedies often deal with themes that appeal to those age groups such as love, sex, and careers (Stoll, "Favorite Film Genres in the U.S. 2018, by Age"). Last, Kaling's audience includes Americans because she asserts that romantic comedies do not reflect "an actual average American woman;" all of her allusions are to American films, and this focus on Americans suggests that her text is primarily geared toward American audience members (103). Additionally, Kaling uses several colloquialisms best known by Americans, such as "JumboTron," "klutz," and "weirdo," that further indicate that she is speaking to American readers (Kaling 99; 100; 101)

"Types of Women in Romantic Comedies Who are Not Real" also encourages the acceptance of one's identity and calls for diverse representation in media. Kaling emphasizes the message that people who do not fit the expected stereotypes are still worthy of attention and of having their stories told. Furthermore, her essay argues that parts of the media, in this case some romantic comedy movies, do not accurately portray real American women, particularly in how they look, how they act, and the challenges they face. Kaling asserts that people, like herself, can enjoy fictional works, but audiences should not necessarily judge themselves and others by romantic comedies' sometimes unreasonable and unobtainable standards. Kaling does not desire to ban romantic comedies as they comprise one of her favorite movie genres. However, she advocates for media, specifically romantic comedies, to reflect more closely real people's

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<sup>6</sup> I studied third-wave feminism in a previous research project, and that work has shaped how I think about feminism. I have referenced this text in my works cited should anyone wish to read it or further see sources that shape how I use feminism in this dissertation.

lives, tell stories that are not dominated by Hollywood stereotypes, and include diversity regarding body types, races, experiences, and ways of life. In sum, the most prominent themes in Kaling's essay are self-acceptance and the need for representation in media that is reflective of real people, which is largely in line with what she endeavors to do in many of her creative projects as a writer, actress, and producer.

### **3. Rhetorical Analysis Results**

After rhetorically analyzing Kaling's text, I found twenty occurrences of audience awareness and twenty-four instances of situated knowledge. There were nine cases in which the text was exemplary of both audience awareness and situated knowledge. My notes on the text are in Appendix F and the examples and corresponding explanations are in table 6 in Appendix G. In order to examine further how Kaling uses audience awareness and situated knowledge in this text, I will discuss in-depth two of the strongest examples of each from her essay.

#### *1. Explanation of Two Instances of Audience Awareness*

Kaling demonstrates audience awareness when she writes, "You know that really horny and hilarious best friend who is always asking about your relationship and has nothing really going on in her own life? She always wants to meet you in coffee shops or wants to go to Bloomingdale's to sample perfumes? She runs a chic dildo store in the West Village? Nope?" (102). Kaling's use of "you" likely addresses readers, asks them to think about this scenario in terms of their lives, and encourages them to follow Kaling's line of thought. Furthermore, the question marks ask readers to recall their knowledge as they read Kaling's text, which may embolden the audience to engage actively with Kaling's argument. Thus, the use of the second person and of rhetorical questions

suggests that Kaling is thinking of her readers and wants to include them in her text as active participants rather than as mere observers.

This instance also likely shows Kaling's awareness of her adult audience since her word choice of "horny" and "dildo" are terms best known to adults. This may demonstrate awareness of her young adult audience as well since these are terms familiar to many young adults. Kaling shows awareness of her adult readers again when she references places that cater to adults, or are at least more familiar to adults than to children, such as coffee shops, Bloomingdale's, and the West Village. These references also exhibit awareness of three groups in her audience—those familiar with New York City, romantic comedy fans, and Americans. Kaling is likely showing awareness of the first group because Bloomingdale's and the West Village are in New York, so they would likely conjure strong images for the New Yorkers in her audience.

In contrast, these New York references also likely demonstrate Kaling's awareness of the non-New Yorkers in her audience. Kaling seems to use this passage to set up romantic comedies' stereotype of "The Sassy Best Friend" as a person who most Americans do not have in their lives and who likely rarely exists. Thus, "The Sassy Best Friend" is not reflective of something in most Americans' lives, and Kaling shows her audience that she acknowledges and understands this by using word choice to emphasize the unlikelihood of "The Sassy Best Friend" mirroring reality. Her word choice of "that" suggests a specific "friend" who must fit this mold, and her repetition of "always" creates an almost impossible template since "always" connotes "without fail," and she pairs the word with actions that humans do not typically "always" do— "always asking about your relationship," "always wants to meet you in coffee shops," and "always" desires "to go to

Bloomingdale's to sample perfumes." The "always" exaggerates the subsequent actions to such a point that few, if any, humans could fit that mold. Additionally, the topper of who must run "a chic dildo store in the West Village" eliminates most people. So, when Kaling asks the reader if they "know" this person and then answers her own question with "Nope? Okay," she speaks to her readers who are "regular," "normal" people who likely do not live in New York City.

By asking her readers this question, she uses logos to create a line of logic that exposes the irony that this is the person who is portrayed onscreen and yet few actually know in real life. She also likely gains ethos by showing her practical understanding of "regular" people's lives, thereby increasing the probability that her audience will trust her and believe her since she is exuding a persona that is not out-of-touch with reality. Indeed, there is sometimes a feeling that those working in Hollywood are disconnected from "the real world," so successful thespians' personas may be tainted by this stereotype and some readers may bristle at actors placing their interpretations of reality onto others. However, by portraying herself as someone who is in touch with reality, Kaling subverts the aforementioned stereotype and may consequently engender feelings of trust with her audience. In sum, Kaling speaks to her audience of Americans by acknowledging what those lives do not resemble, and she encourages them to sympathize with her argument that Hollywood is not reflective of regular Americans' lives (i.e., many of her readers).

This instance of audience awareness also implies that Kaling is aware of her readers who are romantic comedy fans, because her references to iconic New York locations speak to romantic comedies frequently taking place in said city. Additionally, coffee shops are typically businesses that are visited at least once in many romantic

comedies, so this and the references to places in New York City seem to show awareness of the genre's tendencies and tropes that many of Kaling's readers who are romantic comedy fans will recognize. By doing this, Kaling likely increases her ethos with them by demonstrating her knowledge despite her lampooning the genre.

Ultimately, Kaling's audience awareness in this example appears to speak to the young adults and adults in her audience as well as her New York audience, her non-New York and average American audience members, and her romantic comedy lovers. She likely gains ethos with each audience group by referencing elements that they are likely familiar with and, ironically, with which others may have little or no experience. During the process, she may also increase her ethos with each group by implying that she understands them, particularly regarding those in her audience who are average Americans and/or romantic comedy lovers.

Another example of Kaling showing audience awareness occurs when she writes, "Also, since when does having a job necessitate women have their hair pulled back in a severe, tight bun? Often this uptight woman has to 're-learn' how to seduce a man because her estrogen leaked out of her from leading so many board meetings, and she has to do all sorts of crazy, unnecessary crap, like eat a hot dog in a libidinous way or something. Having a challenging job in movies means the compassionate, warm, or sexy side of your brain has fallen out. (101)"

This shows awareness of her audience members who watch romantic comedies, because the eating "a hot dog in a libidinous way" references a scene in *The Ugly Truth* when Katherine Heigl eats a hot dog in a sexy way to demonstrate her seduction skills (Movieclips, 00:01:04—00:02:20). By alluding to, but not naming, the movie, Kaling

reveals her knowledge regarding the genre, which likely helps her gain ethos with those in her audience who watch and enjoy those movies. This is because demonstrating expertise may be the metaphorical key that opens the gates of the romantic comedy fans' group and allows Kaling to enter. Thus, by gaining access and becoming part of the ingroup with her audience, Kaling increases the likelihood that those members of her audience will trust her as well as be sympathetic to, and agree with, her argument.

This instance also likely shows awareness of the working women in Kaling's audience. By using imagery to exaggerate (at least to some extent) Hollywood's image of working women, she reveals the depiction's absurdity and disconnect from reality. She uses "pulled back in a severe tight bun" and having one's estrogen leak "out of her from leading so many board meetings" to speak to working women who likely do not agree with such a portrayal. She again exaggerates the representation of working women in some romantic comedies when she writes, "having a challenging job in movies means the compassionate, warm, or sexy side of your brain has fallen out." This will encourage many working women readers to juxtapose Hollywood's (as put forth by Kaling) portrayal against how they view themselves, and most are likely to side with Kaling's positive depiction of them as opposed to Hollywood's unfavorable interpretation. Thus, Kaling uses pathos to sway these readers to agree with her that characters fitting these descriptions are frequently disconnected from reality.

Additionally, by implying that working women do not need to reclaim their femininity by doing "crazy, unnecessary crap," Kaling speaks to the feminists in her audience. Many feminists assert that a woman's femininity is not mutually exclusive to workplace success, and working women should not have to defend their femininity (Fest

60; Rowe-Finkbeiner 88-89). Kaling perhaps posits this point to gain ethos with her feminist readers and to add to her argument's logos concerning why some romantic comedies do not accurately represent successful working women and that this needs to change. She may even be calling for a societal-wide change in which women's choices, and perhaps even needs, are not shamed.

In addition to being exemplary of audience awareness, this example demonstrates Kaling's use of situated knowledge. She does not situate her own knowledge here, but instead seems to situate Hollywood's knowledge by exposing the biases and beliefs that shape the portrayal of working women in some romantic comedies. By revealing what beliefs underlie the depictions of working women, Kaling reveals to readers where that knowledge comes from, why it is not reflective of most working women, and why the portrayal of women as heartless automatons who have forgotten how to be feminine may be harmful to women. Thus, she exposes the logos behind the portrayal by revealing some of its influences and beliefs thereby situating that knowledge displayed in some romantic comedies.

## *2. Explanation of Two Instances of Situated Knowledge*

Kaling continues to employ situated knowledge in her text by exposing how some romantic comedies portray women and why those illustrations are not accurate. Kaling brings in her experience as a working woman by writing, "I'm not, like, always barking orders into my hands-free phone device and telling people constantly, 'I have no time for this!' I didn't completely forget how to be nice or feminine because I have a career" (101). Indeed, Kaling enjoys traditionally feminine interests, such as fashion, and she had a successful humor writing, screenwriting, and acting career at the time of this essay's

publication. Thus, she traces her knowledge to its origin (her own experience) to show what informs her belief that femininity and workplace success are not mutually exclusive. Using her experiences and unveiling them to her audience likely increase her ethos and make her argument more believable. Furthermore, this may encourage readers to question and reject such inaccurate portrayals of women in other aspects of entertainment, culture, and belief systems.

Another instance in which Kaling uses situated knowledge is when she writes, I enjoy watching people fall in love on-screen so much that I can suspend my disbelief for the contrived situations that only happen in the heightened world of romantic comedies. I have come to enjoy the moment when the normal lead guy, say, slips and falls right on top of the hideously expensive wedding cake. I actually feel robbed when the female lead's dress doesn't get torn open at a baseball game while the JumboTron is on her. (99)

Here, Kaling partly explains what informs her knowledge on romantic comedies, which likely supports her argument by increasing her ethos, because while she critiques the genre, she also shows in instances, such as this passage, that she enjoys these films. She uses the first person followed by a verbal phrase to indicate her feelings about the genre while squarely placing the ownership of these verb actions on herself—"I enjoy watching," "I can suspend my belief," "I have come to enjoy," and "I actually feel robbed." This word choice pattern enables Kaling to reveal her perspective to the audience and portray these verbs as belonging to her as opposed to all watchers of romantic comedies. In this way, she situates her knowledge, which perhaps increases how compelling her argument is and increases her ethos. If she had used the second instead of



first person, the passage may have felt as if Kaling was telling readers how to react, and when critiquing something, readers may not react well to being told how to react and think. Therefore, her viewpoint may feel less threatening to fans of romantic comedies because she owns these thoughts and emotions, and such moves may give her a platform to critique the genre and erroneous mindset (according to Kaling) about women without offending her audience members who are fans of the genre.

Additionally, in this passage Kaling shows her audience of both romantic comedy fans and non-fans that she has positive feelings toward these movies and has knowledge about them. She is not simply a casual watcher of romantic comedies or someone who does not truly understand or enjoy them. Rather, by explaining specific moments as opposed to general tropes, she reveals her expertise on the genre, which likely boosts her ethos when critiquing the films as her persona comes off as someone who loves romantic comedies and is not out to destroy these movies but who still has qualms with some of them and wishes to invoke change by calling attention to what she believes are movies' negative and erroneous portrayals of working women. Ultimately, her persona and ethos increase the odds of her audience siding with her argument as they delve further into her essay.

Last, Kaling situates romantic comedies' knowledge by suggesting that the films are often rooted in illogical scenarios. She states that the situations are "contrived," which implies that they are not reflective of reality, and that they require her to "suspend" her "disbelief." She even states that they "can only happen in the heightened world of romantic comedies." Thus, she exposes the knowledge espoused by some romantic comedies as not being shaped by realistic forces and instead by highly crafted and

perhaps outlandishly imaginative scenarios. This does not necessarily mean that they do not have connections with reality, but Kaling adds the caveat that they only exist in “heightened,” which implies “exaggerated,” versions of the world. Her situating of the films’ knowledge in this instance reveals some of the logos, or lack thereof, behind the knowledge espoused by some romantic comedies and ultimately provides evidence for Kaling’s main argument.

#### **4. Summary**

These rhetorical analyses show that Kaling employs audience awareness and situated knowledge throughout “Types of Women in Romantic Comedies Who Are Not Real.” She frequently appeals to her audience of romantic comedy fans, movie watchers, feminists, and women (particularly working women) by explaining her love for the genre while also critiquing it in ways that would speak to said audiences. By consistently situating her knowledge about the genre, she may boost her ethos with her audience by showing that she is a devout fan of romantic comedies, and this ethos may help her to speak to romantic comedy fans without necessarily offending them with her critiques.

Interestingly, Kaling’s text as a whole attempts to situate the knowledge that Hollywood puts forth in some romantic comedies regarding who women are, what women do, how women act, and how women should act. By revealing the shaping biases and beliefs, Kaling shows how these movies are not necessarily reflective of reality, and she encourages her audience to enjoy the movies as she does but to understand what informs their portrayals of women. She also urges women not to try to emulate the unrealistic, unattainable, and sometimes undesirable personas that are depicted in romantic comedies. Furthermore, such situating of Hollywood’s knowledge may also

reveal its lack of logos in order to call for change within Hollywood and American culture regarding their views of working women.

## **V. Dat Phan: “Dat Phan East Meets West Part 1”**

### **1. Author Background**

Dat Phan was born in 1975 in Saigon, Vietnam, and he immigrated to the United States with his family when he was only a few months old (Biography”; Duck, “Q & A with Dat”; “Dat Phan; Jann, “Dat’s Fine with”). He is the youngest of ten children, has nine sisters, and grew up in a low-socioeconomic area in San Diego, California, that was riddled with gang activity (Duck, “Q & A with Dat”; Bloom, “Dat Phan—From”; “Dat Phan”). Although he was shy, a loner, and battled social anxiety, he still dreamed of being in entertainment and being an influential figure (Sternberg 00:18:42-00:18:49; Duck, “Q & A with Dat”).

Phan enrolled in a California community college but never received a degree (Schulte, “How Dat Phan”; Duck, “Q & A with Dat”). He felt “like a failure” since he was not skilled at stereotypical Asian disciplines such as science and math, but when he enrolled in a speech class and successfully made people laugh in order to reduce his own nervousness, he discovered his talent for humor (Jann, “Dat’s Fine with”; Schulte, “How Dat Phan”). Phan states that comedy is “the only thing that didn’t make me feel like an Asian loser” (Schulte, “How Dat Phan”; Jann, “Dat’s Fine with”).

As Phan pursued his comedic dream, he worked as a doorman and answered phones for a comedy club, but he struggled financially and at one time lived out of his car (Schulte, “How Dat Phan”; “Dat Phan”). Phan’s “big break” came when he auditioned for, and won, the first season of NBC’s *Last Comic Standing* in 2003 (Schulte, “How Dat

Phan”; Jann, “Dat’s Fine with”). Since then, Phan has created and sold a DVD of his standup routine as well as two humor CDs (“Biography”). He has also performed voiceover work for Nickelodeon’s *Danny Phantom* and has appeared in numerous TV shows including *Bones* (2015), *Scorpion* (2016), *NAMCAR Night Race* (2016), *The Last Ship* (2016), *StartUp* (2016-2018), *Hawaii Five-O* (2019), *Magnum P.I.* (2021), and *Stripped* (2021) (“Dat Phan”). Additionally, he has performed work on the following movies: *The Hangover Games* (2014), *108 Stitches* (2014), and *Kong: Skull Island* (2017) (“Dat Phan”). He offers speaking engagements (which include standup comedy routines), does some commercial work, and workshops with aspiring comedians on how to better their comedy writing skills (Sternberg 00:27:47-00:23:02). He was included in the Smithsonian’s “Top 10 Most Influential Vietnamese-American Individuals” exhibit (“Dat Phan Biography”).

Regarding his writing inspiration, he lists the *Dukes of Hazzard*, *Benny Hill*, *Flight of the Conchords*, *Tenacious D*, and *Adam Sandler* as some of his comedic muses (Duck, “Q & A with Dat”; Jann, “Dat’s Fine with”). However, he believes that the best comedy comes from one’s experiences, observations, life, pain, healing, and honesty, and he states that comedy is a process of self-discovery (Sternberg 00:25:14-00:26:16; Jann, “Dat’s Fine with”). Thus, of central importance to his humor writing are his family and heritage. He is proud of his ethnicity, culture, and parents, and he aims to add to a positive portrayal of Asian Americans in mainstream entertainment (“Dat Phan Biography”). Some criticize him for seemingly mocking his culture, particularly his put-on Asian accent, but Phan believes his joking to be celebratory rather than defamatory (Saunders, “Dat Phan On”). His comedic topics, such as Asian parenting and Vietnamese

nail salons, come largely from his personal experiences (HILARIOUS: CONN Don Lemon” 00:03:23-00:03:54; Sternberg 00:10:40-00:10:45).

Additionally, Phan views himself as a “bridge between a minority culture” and the majority culture in America, but he feels pressure to represent the Asian-American community in the entertainment industry (Sternberg 00:21:21-00:21:29). In many ways, Phan still views himself as a loner who has difficulty keeping a girlfriend, feels significant pressure to be a role model when he’s “just a human being,” feels caught between Asian and American cultures, and feels like “kind of a freak show” at times (Jann, “Dat’s Fine with”; Sternberg 00:21:42-00:22:27). Outside of comedy, Phan works with the Jade River Campaign, which assists Asian Americans who have liver cancer or hepatitis B (Bloom, “Dat Phan—From”).

Regarding Phan’s writing process, he takes a methodical and detailed approach, not unlike a rhetorical analysis, by charting and graphing each sentence of his humor writing in a notebook to create jokes and revise them (Bloom, “Dat Phan—From”). He analyzes his writing from various angles and asserts that he is “very obsessed with my techniques as I am writing my material. I analyze where the beats are, the wording, and how many syllables” (Bloom, “Dat Phan—From”). Interestingly though, Phan no longer writes all of his jokes by himself. He now has a group of writers with whom he discusses his ideas and collaborates on jokes, and then they act as his audience to provide feedback as he practices his comedy (Attanasio, “Now Dat’s Funny”). The text that I have chosen to analyze for my rhetorical analysis is from before Phan formed this group of writers therefore, assumedly, he is the only writer of the text.

I am rhetorically analyzing a portion of “Dat Phan East Meets West Part 1” because it is the portion that best reflects concepts of audience awareness and situated knowledge, and it could be reasonably included during an FYC class where time must be used wisely. This is perhaps academic cherry picking, but the time constraints that teachers face necessitate careful selection, not just regarding video clips but in textbook reading materials, outside reading materials, group activities with students, etc. Thus, my selection of part of the video is reflective of, and in line with, the constraints of the FYC classroom. The transcribed clip and my notes are in Appendix H.

## **2. Audiences and Themes for “Dat Phan East Meets West Part 1”**

The analyzed video is from Phan’s comedy show called, “East Meets West Comedy Tour” that took place around 2006 and which Phan cohosted (“East Meets West Comedy”). Thus, part of the kairos of Phan’s text is that he had won *Last Comic Standing* a few years prior in 2003. From the video, the venue looks small with approximately thirty people in the audience.

At the beginning of the video, the camera pans to the audience and shows only adults, a mixture of males and females, and primarily Caucasians. So, the immediate audience for Phan’s humor writing is said demographic. Comedy clubs frequently have an age limit for admittance due to the venues often serving alcohol, so this likely impacts the kairos of Phan’s humor, the topics he chooses in his routine, and the makeup of his adult-only audience.

However, since the video of his routine is posted on YouTube (which is also part of the text’s kairos), other audiences may include young adults and various ethnicities since these groups have access to Phan’s humor writing outside of that moment in time

when Phan originally performed his comedy routine. Additionally, Phan’s writing in the chosen clip probably appeals more to adult and young adult audiences than children since the addressed topics include debt, opium, race relations, and imported versus exported goods. There are also several themes in his writing that would likely appeal to Asians, Asian Americans, and non-Asian Americans.

One of the main themes in Phan’s writing is that not all Asians think, look, or act alike, which consequently fights against racism. Furthermore, Phan espouses that being Asian is not mutually exclusive to being American. He also addresses some Asian stereotypes—such as Asians having good skin, making cheap goods, using opium, and looking similar—for any positive light they may shed on Asians as well as to expose such conceptions for their absurdities.

### **3. Rhetorical Analysis Results**

After rhetorically analyzing Phan’s text, I found eleven occurrences of audience awareness and eight instances of situated knowledge. There were three cases in which the text was exemplary of both audience awareness and situated knowledge. The examples and corresponding explanations are in table 7 in Appendix I. I will now discuss in-depth two of the strongest examples of audience awareness and situated knowledge from Phan’s essay in order to examine further how he uses these concepts.

#### *1. Explanation of Two Instances of Audience Awareness*

Phan demonstrates audience awareness when he says, “America, we’re in debt to Japan 369 billion dollars” (Phan 00:02:33-00:02:37). This shows awareness of his American and adult audience because the topic of America’s monetary debt speaks best to American adults. Additionally, Phan uses the first-person plural (“we’re”) to include

himself in his audience of American adults. This likely helps him to gain ethos with his American audience, because he demonstrates knowledge about America and he portrays himself as being in the ingroup of Americans rather than as someone who is an outsider to them. This may also be Phan using pathos since people may feel more welcoming and positive toward those they consider to be part of their group as opposed to outsiders, and Phan likely desires this since such feelings likely encourage audiences to be open to a speaker and to the speaker's message. Thus, Phan may be using such pathos to ingratiate himself to his audience and motivate them to be open to him as a person and to his messages. The inclusion of himself within his American audience also adds to his text's logos that being Asian is not mutually exclusive to being American—the two identities can exist simultaneously. This may aid Phan in his endeavor to lead people to question racist stereotypes and any othering or exclusionary behavior that may occur simply because of someone's race. Furthermore, knowing his background of viewing himself as both Asian and American, it makes sense that Phan includes himself with his American audience since, like them, he is indeed American. Thus, by including audience awareness in his routine, he raises his ethos, uses pathos to encourage his audience to be open to him and his messages, presents his logos in a largely nonthreatening way, and subtly rejects possible racism that may stem from people believing that being American necessitates being a certain ethnicity.

Additionally, his allusion to America's debt to Japan as opposed to America's debt to another country is the foundation upon which he builds part of his argument's logos that not all Asians are the same. First, there is likely an extension of the ethos that Phan receives from being Asian, so there may be a feeling that he can discuss America's



connection to an Asian country because he is Asian and therefore has credibility. Phan builds upon this ethos to assert later, and expose the lack of logos in the belief, that since all Asians are supposedly “the same” in some non-Asian American eyes, then Phan should be able recoup the “369 billion dollars” debt. However, if all Asians are not the same, then Phan cannot equate himself to being Japanese and to being owed that monetary debt. Taken further, even if Phan were of Japanese ancestry, he could not simply call the debt and collect the money. Yet, it is this perhaps exaggerated lack of logic that Phan uses to demonstrate the erroneous logos in the belief that all Asians are the same and, ultimately, to fight possible racism toward Asians in America. Thus, he exaggerates the absurdity to expose the basic flaws in racist stereotypes and their irrationality to the non-Asians in his audience (thereby showing audience awareness) (Ho 80; 90-92).

Another example of Phan using audience awareness occurs when he says, “My dad, when he’s smoking, he looks like Yoda smoking opium” (Phan 00:03:50-00:03:53). His audience awareness is primarily housed in his references to Yoda and opium. Yoda is a character in the *Star Wars* movies, which is a franchise typically well known by Americans (Cull, “Star Wars: Why”). Thus, alluding to Yoda likely speaks to Phan’s American audience—it is a reference that most of his American adult audience can visualize, so they get the full mental impact of what Phan’s father looks like when he smokes. Furthermore, Phan hunches his back during this part of his routine to mimic Yoda’s hunched stature thereby strengthening the mental image for his audience and demonstrating audience awareness. Phan may also use the Yoda reference to show again that he is part of the ingroup with his audience. As with the previous example, this appeal

to be included in the ingroup may enable Phan to use pathos by generating feelings of inclusion and welcoming in his audience toward him. Referencing a figure in American pop culture could function as a key that opens the ingroup's doors to him, which would likely encourage his audience to view Phan as "one of them" (i.e., American) and to listen and accept what Phan has to say. Such also likely helps to reduce possible distance audience members may feel between Phan and them because Phan may look a bit different from them. Ultimately, if his use of pathos is successful, then Phan may gain ethos with his audience since they will likely feel more as if they can trust him and his credibility compared to if they view him as an outsider.

The opium reference also demonstrates audience awareness because opium is stereotypically associated with Asians, and Phan uses this allusion to address said stereotype (Poon, "Opium Dens are"). Opium has a long history with Asia, which may be the root of its association with Asian people, and Phan likely knows this because he uses the association to create humorous imagery for his audience. It is probably not by accident that he likens his father smoking a cigarette to smoking opium instead of a different drug. Ultimately, Phan's opium reference and imagery of his father reveal a possible stereotype so that Phan and his audience may confront it and any racism informing it, and Phan plays to the stereotype to create a strong visual of his father, thereby heightening the humor for his audience. Thus, Phan leads his audience to laugh while consciously recognizing and grappling with a product of racism. Phan's use of the stereotype and poking fun at it may feel uncomfortable for audiences, but that may be because it is also subversive in a way—by confronting the stereotype and wielding it to

meet his goals rather than allowing it to be used against him, Phan takes control of the stereotype and reveals its ugliness to his audience.

In part, Phan is able to create primarily humor rather than offense with the opium reference because he has ethos to make the joke—he is Asian and the person he is making fun of is his father. His reveal of his experience with his father via the word choice “My dad” allows Phan to situate his knowledge by tracing and revealing to his audience part of his experiences that shapes his knowledge. It is difficult to contradict Phan in this instance because of his ethos, and few probably feel the need to deny Phan’s veracity regarding his own father, because when it comes to his father, Phan probably knows him better than anyone in Phan’s audience. Thus, this moment is exemplary of both situated knowledge and audience awareness. There are other occurrences of situated knowledge in Phan’s text as well, two of which will be discussed presently.

## *2. Explanation of Two Instances of Situated Knowledge*

Phan reveals one of his text’s main messages at the beginning of the clip, and in that moment, he situates his knowledge. He says, “I used to hate the phrase that people said that all Asian people look alike. That really used to bother me, right?” He claims this knowledge as his by using the first-person singular “I.” He does not proclaim this to be true for all Asians, but instead owns the knowledge as solely his. Also, he explicitly states a bias—he dislikes when people say that Asians all look alike—to his audience to reveal what is informing his feelings and knowledge, and the ethos that he gains from being Vietnamese gives him standing to proclaim this as bothersome behavior. Indeed, people saying this sentiment is an aspect of Phan’s experience, and it likely shapes how he views himself as someone in America who is an ethnic minority, who is Asian, and who is

American. He partly reveals this background (and thereby shows what has shaped his knowledge) in his standup routine, because he is on stage so the audience can see that he is of Asian descent. Also, by telling his audience that he “hate[s]” that “phrase,” he insinuates that he has a stake in whether or not people say and/or believe the sentiment, which implies the value of this knowledge to Phan. This reveal may also be Phan using pathos by showing his pain to the audience and attempting to invoke their empathy so that the odds of them aligning with Phan and against said belief about Asians will be increased. Furthermore, by situating his knowledge, Phan sets up the irony of the joke that follows—that if all Asians look alike, then he should be able to claim any monetary debt America owes to any “Asian” since people supposedly cannot tell the difference between Asian individuals. This disconnect in the logos also shows the logical disconnect and resultant racism inherent in believing that “all Asian people look alike.”

He also encourages his audience to follow the logos informing his thought by adding the rhetorical question of “right?” at the end of his statement. “Right?” connotes a request for immediate confirmation, hence why he uses a word to indicate his correctness (“right?”) as opposed to something more flexible and open to interpretation such as, “Do you know what I mean?” With this question, Phan encourages his audience to reach into their knowledge and compare it with his, thereby requesting that they situate their knowledge regarding whether all Asians look alike to them and question any racism possibly informing their knowledge. Phan does seem to push his audience toward his conclusion through his request for affirmation of his point of view via “right?” Yet, the format of a question rather than a statement perhaps renders this move as non-offensive or less offensive than if it were a declarative statement, which would probably feel as if

Phan were commanding his audience to feel the same as him as opposed to him requesting or suggesting that they do. In sum, Phan situates his knowledge in this moment, asks the audience to situate their knowledge, asks the audience to question the racism informing the belief that all Asians look alike, and shows audience awareness by consciously involving the audience in his text.

Another instance of Phan using situated knowledge occurs when he says, “My dad, when he’s smoking, and like he’s always moaned, smoked, and now he moans when he smokes. How creepy is that? At what age does an old Asian man get to walk down the hall going . . .” (Phan 00:03:31-00:03:38). Phan uses his experience with his father to explain and demonstrate his knowledge that he later generalizes to many “old Asian” men. Thus, he shows that his personal experience shapes his knowledge, and he reveals to his audience specifically what biases his knowledge—his father. Since Phan has an Asian father who smokes, he feels that he has credibility to discuss “how creepy” old Asian men smoking and moaning might be. Indeed, out of everyone in the room, Phan likely has the most ethos to speak about his father since he has the most experience with his father.

Interestingly, Phan keeps his claims within Asian communities and does not extend his portrayal of old, smoking men to other races. This is perhaps because Phan relies on his ethos stemming from his ethnicity to have the audience accept his joke and not take offense. Thus, it is through Phan situating his knowledge—this is something in his culture and this is an experience he has had personally—and owning the joke as his knowledge that he is likely able to have enough ethos that enables his text to be received positively as opposed to his audience taking offense. If this joke is told by people who are

not Asian and who do not situate the knowledge as coming from their personal experiences (both on a cultural and familial level), then the joke may not be received as well because there would be a lack of ethos. In a way, then, Phan's ethos and his situating his knowledge increase the probability of his text being successfully accepted by his audience and seen as humorous.

#### **4. Summary**

As demonstrated, Phan uses audience awareness and situated knowledge to create humor through imagery, irony, and allusions. His audience awareness and situated knowledge enable him to assert to his audience of adults, young adults, non-Asian Americans, and Asian Americans that Asians do not all think, act, and look alike and that such racism is illogical. He uses some Asian stereotypes to create humor so that he and his audience may confront the knowledge and lack of logos informing such racist stereotypes and examine their validity (or lack thereof) in a perhaps nonthreatening way. Outside of those stereotypes, Phan's situating and owning his knowledge give him ethos and allow some of his jokes to be successful that otherwise may be received as offensive. Indeed, his ethos stemming from him being Asian American aids these jokes in being received as humorous rather than as offensive, and it is largely because of his ethos that he is able to show the ugliness of a manifestation of racism and encourage his audience to question and reject such "knowledge."

#### **VI. Conclusion**

Through my rhetorical analyses, I examined how each of the selected authors creates audience awareness and situated knowledge through topic, word choice, references, use of first-person singular, and use of first-person plural. In total, I found

seventy-seven instances of audience awareness and eighty occurrences of situated knowledge in the analyzed texts.

Additionally, I found twenty-eight instances in which a portion of text was exemplary of both audience awareness and situated knowledge, which suggests that audience awareness and situated knowledge may have a tightly connected relationship at times. For example, there were some occasions in which audience awareness and situated knowledge helped to form one another such as when Branch writes, “My neighbors are less interested in a good laugh than you might think. This is because my neighbors are scorpions, rattlers, and libertarian survivalists—the latter of which can be dangerous” (113). This is both exemplary of situated knowledge and audience awareness, and the strategies seem to shape one another. Branch situates his knowledge by stating who his neighbors are to show his regional affiliation and resultant bias in his knowledge. In situating his knowledge, he also demonstrates audience awareness, because he references entities that his audience of desert dwellers, westerners, and Nevadans would likely relate to— “scorpions, rattlers, and libertarian survivalists”—which likely boosts his ethos with those audience members since this is him, at least in part, demonstrating that he understands those audience members. Thus, situating his knowledge shows audience awareness, and Branch’s audience awareness helps to reveal his knowledge’s origin.

Kaling has a similar occurrence when she writes, “a Nancy Meyers movie like in *It’s Complicated* is worth five Diane Keatons being caught half-clad in a topiary” (102). Kaling situates her knowledge regarding romantic comedies by referencing *It’s Complicated* to show a movie that shapes her beliefs on what is funny, entertaining, and valuable in this movie genre. Simultaneously, by referencing *It’s Complicated* and Diane

Keaton's scene from *Something's Gotta Give*, Kaling demonstrates audience awareness by using references that speak to her audience of romantic comedy fans. Thus, she gains ethos by alluding to insider knowledge with romantic comedy fans because passionate fans are more likely to know who Nancy Meyers is and to know what movie the unnamed Diane Keaton scene is from than will casual watchers of the genre. Kaling therefore portrays herself as knowledgeable about romantic comedies (thereby increasing her ethos) while revealing what movies shape her knowledge about romantic comedies—a move similar to Branch's aforementioned use of both situated knowledge and audience awareness.

Although I had not anticipated audience awareness and situated knowledge occurring simultaneously and even shaping one another, it is logical that such instances, including Branch's and Kaling's as described above, would occur. Sedaris and Phan also have moments in which they simultaneously seem to employ audience awareness and situated knowledge, and the occurrence of this happening in all four authors suggests that audience awareness and situated knowledge may have a close relationship with one another. Yet, the seeming close relationship may also be a result of the genre of humor writing. Humor writers have limited space to communicate their ideas, address their audiences, build persona, and create humor since they must hold their audiences' attention in order to be successful. Having more than one element occur in a passage is then an efficient use of space. Moreover, authors of various genres frequently mix different techniques in single passages, so it is reasonable that humor writers may as well.

Furthermore, the rhetorical triangle is an equilateral triangle that connects author/speaker, reader/audience, and material/message/purpose in equal ways. So, it is



unsurprising for elements speaking to one point in the triangle to speak to other points in the triangle as well. Situated knowledge mostly focuses on the author as it is the author who primarily does the situating. However, that knowledge is still disseminated to an audience and would thereby likely be influenced by who the audience for the text (material/message/purpose) is, which is what audience awareness largely does, in order to be as persuasive as possible.

Admittedly, my analyzed texts may not be representative of how all humor writers from every country use audience awareness and situated knowledge. However, I am able to ascertain an ample sampling of the genre to use for evaluating humor writing's potential for teaching audience awareness and situated knowledge in FYC because I chose a successful (in terms of their humor publications and/or monetary success) group of American humor writers that incorporates diversity in race, age, geographic affiliation, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic status. This selection enables me to rhetorically analyze different portions of humor writing in order to obtain insight into how humor writers may use audience awareness and situated knowledge.

Audience awareness and situated knowledge's consistency and prevalence in all of my texts indicate that they are staples of humor writing. This speaks to my research questions of: 1) How might humor writing be used as a teaching tool in FYC? and 2) How might humor writing be used to teach FYC students to engage consciously with and analyze audience awareness and situated knowledge? My rhetorical analyses show that humor writing can contain numerous instances of audience awareness and situated knowledge that can be examined via rhetorical analysis. My analyses also demonstrate

how such elements may connect with important issues, such as the importance of ethos, gender inequalities, class differences, racism, power dynamics, social mores, and culture.

After, or even while, teaching FYC students how to rhetorically analyze texts, instructors can choose from multiple instances in humor writing to analyze in class to model rhetorical analysis for their students and to show them audience awareness and situated knowledge in action. Additionally, instructors can assign humor writing to students to look for how audience awareness and situated knowledge function within those texts, which helps students to engage consciously with and analyze those concepts. My findings show that humor writing will likely have numerous opportunities from which students can choose. Thus, humor writing can be used as a source with which FYC instructors may demonstrate audience awareness and situated knowledge. The numerous examples that I found in my selected texts also indicate that humor writing offers FYC students ample opportunities to find and analyze instances of audience awareness and situated knowledge.

Chapter IV of this dissertation offers some classroom activities and assignments that incorporate humor writing, which further speak to the aforementioned research questions. This element also helps instructors to visualize how humor writing may fit into their FYC classes when teaching audience awareness and situated knowledge. Additionally, Chapter IV discusses some of the risks of using humor writing in FYC and how they may be minimized, as well as some other concerns regarding this dissertation's research.

## Chapter IV: Ready, Set, Discuss

*How many PhD students does it take to write a discussion section? Only one, but it may take her two years to do it.*

### I. Introduction

As a reminder, the three guiding research questions for this dissertation are as follows: 1) How might humor writing be used as a teaching tool in FYC? 2) How might humor writing be used to teach FYC students to engage consciously with and analyze audience awareness and situated knowledge? and 3) What are some of the risks of using humor writing to teach rhetoric and composition in FYC, and how can they be minimized?

The results of Chapter III's rhetorical analyses demonstrate the pervasiveness of audience awareness and situated knowledge in the selected humor texts. In order to explore how humor writing may be used as a milieu through which FYC students may learn about audience awareness and situated knowledge, I must show that humor writing does indeed contain audience awareness and situated knowledge and that the instances of these concepts are sufficient enough to lend themselves to analysis for students who are still nascent in their college writing journeys. The prevalence of audience awareness and situated knowledge shown by my rhetorical analyses indicates that humor writing, as a whole, contains multiple instances of audience awareness and situated knowledge. This prevalence logically indicates that humor writing is primed for students exploring those texts with the aim of looking for and analyzing said concepts. Through rhetorical analysis, FYC students may be able to engage consciously with and analyze audience awareness and situated knowledge as they can extract them from texts, examine them,

and explore how they function within texts. My rhetorical analysis results thus show that humor writing can indeed be used as a teaching tool in FYC by functioning as curricular material that has multiple instances of audience awareness and situated knowledge that students may analyze, particularly if they use the method of rhetorical analysis, which, as previously established, is a common skill that is taught and practiced in FYC.

Applied further to the classroom, my rhetorical analyses' findings may function as fodder for instructors who may not know where or how to begin to use humor writing in their FYC courses. My rhetorical analyses can act as blueprints for these and other texts regarding showing students how to find audience awareness and situated knowledge. Also, in my rhetorical analyses, I analyzed the texts regarding audience awareness and situated knowledge at the sentence level to show how they are created and then in terms of how those instances may impact an author's goals and messages. Thus, my rhetorical analyses may also help instructors to demonstrate how to analyze these concepts at the sentence level and then broaden the scope to examine how the concepts function in a text as a whole and with regard to a text's themes and an author's goals.

My rhetorical analyses also suggest that there may be a strong relationship between audience awareness and situated knowledge as evidenced by them sometimes co-occurring. Indeed, there are times in each text in which authors appear to use situated knowledge to build ethos and trust with the audience—all of which speak to audience awareness. Situated knowledge may thus be a tool for audience awareness at times, and this connection should be explored further in research but is outside the focus of this dissertation.

Nevertheless, in addition to the numerous instances of audience awareness and situated knowledge, the co-occurrences of the two concepts likely provide additional options for FYC students to explore what audience awareness and situated knowledge are, how they function, how they may work together within texts, and what effects they may have on writers' personas, writers' messages, audiences, and audiences' receptions of authors' messages. Also, as evidenced by my rhetorical analyses, the numerous instances of audience awareness and situated knowledge in humor writing may offer opportunities for students to investigate how the integral concepts of rhetoric and composition—such as kairos, ethos, pathos, and logos—manifest, function within, and help to create audience awareness and situated knowledge within humorous texts.

In light of my findings in Chapter III, I offer discussions on how I taught Sedaris's and Branch's texts and how students responded to them and on how to possibly teach Kaling and Phan's pieces based upon my research and rhetorical analyses. Additionally, I offer classroom applications for how FYC instructors may use humor writing in their classrooms. When teaching some of my FYC classes, I piloted several materials (other than the rhetorically analyzed texts) using humor writing that sought to teach students principles of rhetoric and composition. I discuss some of those piloted materials (classroom activities, lesson plans, and assignment prompts) in this chapter and examine how they appeared to perform and be received by my students and what I would change in light of my work in this dissertation.

This structure accomplishes several goals: 1) It demonstrates how I prepared students to do rhetorical analyses and analyze texts for audience awareness and situated knowledge. 2) It shows what transpired in my classroom when I taught Sedaris's and

Branch's pieces. 3) It addresses how students appeared to benefit, and perhaps not benefit, from studying the texts regarding their understandings of audience awareness and situated knowledge. 4) It explores how to better future teachings of Sedaris's and Branch's essays and hypothesizes how Kaling's and Phan's texts could be taught. 5) It gives piloted applications on how to incorporate humor writing in FYC to teach audience awareness and situated knowledge. Overall, these discussions bring the theoretical element of my rhetorical analyses into the practical world of teaching by seeing how the information I discover in my rhetorical analyses does/does not reflect what I experienced when piloting my materials as an FYC instructor. Furthermore, the combination of the rhetorical analyses with my classroom experience further aids me in answering the aforementioned research questions, because my rhetorical analyses enable me to look at humor writing from a theoretical perspective and my classroom experience enables me to look at humor writing from a practical, classroom perspective. This format helps me in answering how humor writing may be used to teach FYC students audience awareness and situated knowledge.

After these discussions, I address some of the possible risks in using humor writing in the FYC classroom in light of my rhetorical analysis work in Chapter III, my classroom experience, and much of the existing literature concerning using humor to teach students. This conversation enables me to answer my research question of: What are some risks of using humor writing to teach rhetoric and composition in FYC and how can they be minimized? Subsequent to discussing some of the potential risks, I address some additional concerns regarding this dissertation's research.

## II. Classroom Application: How Do We Do This?

I have taught FYC with humorous texts as curricular materials, and I present some of my piloted materials in this section to show possible ways for incorporating humorous texts in FYC classes and to discuss what worked and what perhaps should be altered for the future.

So that students could make an informed decision on whether or not my FYC class incorporating humor was something they wanted to stay in or switch out of, I wrote the following description for the course at the top of my syllabus, and I read it out loud to the students on the first day of class:

The University of Nevada, Reno, course catalog describes English 102 as “Exploration of essay forms with particular attention to interpretation and argument; emphasis on analytical reading and writing, critical thinking, and research methodologies” (“ENG 102 – Composition II”). This section of English 102 focuses on American nonfiction humor writing. In order to familiarize students with the conventions of humor writing, we will read primarily modern (1960s—present) texts that exemplify different types of humor. Additionally, you will be studying the tools of humor which include, but are not limited to, topic, audience, tone, voice, juxtaposition, incongruity, irony, and hyperbole in order to understand how authors create humor in their writing and in order for students to understand how to analyze humor writing. The main objectives of this class are to improve your critical reading, thinking, writing, research abilities, and knowledge of source documentation, methodologies, and ethics. You will eventually form your own stance on what you believe to be funny, argue your stance in a public

and academic dialogue, and present your ideas during class discussions as well as through your writing. Throughout this course, you will become familiar with (and practice) writing activities, the writing process, and revision techniques in order to strengthen your writing skills. In sum, we'll read a lot, revise a lot, let your poor heart laugh a lot—that's the story of, that's the glory of writing.

I aimed to accomplish several goals with this course description, and my audiences were twofold—my potential students and my administration. Since the English 102 courses at the time were guided by instructor-determined themes as well as departmental learning objectives, I endeavored to show how my course and its focus addressed my department's learning objectives and what its academic purposes were. This sought to help legitimize my course in the eyes of my administration and of my students should there be any question on how humor could be used for academic endeavors. Interestingly, I did not have any pushback against my class's theme from my supervisors. My description also functioned as a disclosure to students so that they could decide whether or not they wanted to engage in the course and its theme or if they should try to find another section with a different theme that may speak to their interests.

In hindsight, I would add terms such as “rhetorical triangle,” “audience awareness,” and “situated knowledge” to help further legitimize my topic for my department supervisors. I would also add a disclaimer about offense being possible regarding the topics that the class may address and how the class aims to look at offense as an opportunity for academic inquiry (an issue that is further discussed later in this chapter). This would likely promote transparency regarding the class, give students agency to decide whether or not they want to stay in the class, and help students prepare



for the class should they wish to remain in the course. Admittedly, the pragmatics of class schedules may not allow some students to switch out of the class if they desire, but that does not fully diminish what I believe are the benefits of transparency. Also, these addendums may make for an overly long description for the course and may require cuts elsewhere, but these additions are likely to be more beneficial than costly regarding transparency with students and departmental supervisors.

In addition to making these changes to the course's description, I would also make other changes to the course. While my piloted materials, lesson plans, activities, and major assignments did end up working very well to teach students about audience awareness and situated knowledge and engage consciously with the concepts, my dissertation and classroom experiences show me that these elements may be altered to be even more effective than when I taught them.

### **1. Materials and In-Class Activities**

I piloted the materials I offer in this chapter during two different semesters to approximately forty students, which I believe is a sufficient amount for me to ascertain and demonstrate patterns, particularly since the students were not all in one single class together.

When I first taught FYC using humorous texts for curricular material, my corpus included one or more of the following elements: 1) "classic" humorists, 2) humorists with whom students may be familiar, 3) humorists whom students may find interesting or funny, 4) humorists whose texts spoke to some element of my lesson plans, and 5) relatively unproblematic humorists, meaning that they are not connected to criminal activity regarding sex and crimes against humanity or animals. This led me to including

texts from Erma Bombeck, Dave Barry, David Sedaris, Mary Roach, and George Carlin among others for homework assignments and in-class activities.

I also incorporated standup comedy clips from YouTube during in-class lessons that included Richard Pryor, Phyllis Diller, Rodney Dangerfield, Chris Rock, Robin Williams, Yakov Smirnoff, and Steven Wright among others. I chose to use clips of standup routines because I believed that such would engage students and would show them another (other than written text) way of creating humor and another form of writing, thereby including multimodality in my classroom. Additionally, I believed that seeing the humorist's face and movements might help students to analyze how persona affects a text and an audience's reaction. Upon reflection, incorporating standups had those desired effects.

Furthermore, I used each video clip to demonstrate a concept that I wanted to teach students so that they could see the concept in action. I also often analyzed part of the clip to show students how to analyze a text with the concept(s) I wanted to teach them in mind, and then together we analyzed the clip for the concept and students could see how their classmates reacted to the comedian and could hear their classmates' opinions and perspectives. Sometimes I wrote discussion questions on the board that were aimed toward the lesson's concepts, and I had students form small groups, discuss the questions, and report to the class as a whole.

Frequently, I asked groups and individual students, depending upon the day's activities and time constraints, who thought the clip was funny and who did not think it was funny. When students volunteered, which they did most of the time (perhaps because I have a participation grade for my FYC classes), I asked them why they felt that way.

Particularly as the semester moved on, students were able to unpack the reasoning behind their claims fairly articulately. When they needed help, I provided that assistance and offered possibilities on why something could be funny or not funny. As students explained their answers, their classmates saw perspectives that were perhaps different than their own, which helped them to understand how various audiences may react divergently to texts. This was particularly helpful for teaching students audience awareness and situated knowledge because the possible audiences were no longer just hypothetical entities. Rather, they were people that students could see, talk to, and ask questions of. In this way, their analyses and audiences came to life.

One aspect that helped students to conduct these analyses was that a beginning concept I taught them was the rhetorical triangle. This was also featured in the textbook I used for these FYC courses, which was Helitzer and Shatz's *Comedy Writing Secrets*. The book is geared toward humor writing and analyzing humor writing, but it relies on many of the same principles of rhetoric and composition that I found in traditional rhetoric and composition textbooks. In particular, Helitzer and Shatz's book presents the concept of MAP, which stands for material, audience, and performer and is essentially their way of presenting the rhetorical triangle to readers without calling it "the rhetorical triangle" (Helitzer and Shatz 13-16). The authors even depict MAP as a triangle (13). Since this is such a foundational concept to the book and to humor, I taught students about the rhetorical triangle and demonstrated how MAP was indeed the rhetorical triangle. Thus, because the rhetorical triangle was one of my class's foundational concepts and was continually referred to in the textbook and during class lectures, most students became comfortable in using it as a tool with which to analyze texts.

Additionally, when I first modelled for students how to approach the question of why something was/was not funny, I continually used the rhetorical triangle to help students analyze each of the texts. I asked students to identify how the time period (kairos) and humorist's persona (ethos and perhaps situated knowledge) may influence why audiences (audience awareness) would/would not find the text funny. While asking, "Why is this funny or not funny?" may seem elementary, it is actually a method of approaching textual analysis that students easily latch on to, and it essentially asks, "Why is this successful or not successful?" Thus, students often analyzed the texts regarding how persuasive (or funny) they were.

This technique of having students view a video and then analyzing the text by using principles of rhetoric and composition is also used successfully by assistant professor of English, Kevin Casper. He describes his approach as the following when using a video clip from comedian George Carlin:

After viewing the clip (a clip that always engages a beginning writing audience because it's thoughtful, intelligent, timely, and funny as hell), students get into small groups and are given a few specific analytic tasks: What's Carlin's central claim? How does he support it? What support did you find most convincing? Describe his ethos. When the whole class reconvenes, we work together towards slowly unpacking and identifying Carlin's central claim in the piece . . . (427)

Casper's approach is similar to how I used humor writing in my classroom for in-class activities. However, I tailored mine more toward what I wanted students to learn for that day. This is not to say that Casper's way is not effective, and he asserts that this method works well for analyzing main claims, supporting claims, and helping students to learn

how to form theses (427). Indeed, Casper's exact approach is likely fitting for FYC students who have learned some of the basics of rhetoric and composition and are ready to move on to analyzing arguments and drafting theses. In other words, it may be appropriate to use after an instructor has worked with students for a few weeks.

However, for students near the beginning of the semester, I piloted the lesson plan and in-class activity housed in figure one. This enabled me to introduce students to the rhetorical triangle by 1) showing some of the importance the rhetorical triangle has to writing, 2) referencing their textbook and homework reading so that they could recall that information and consciously engage with it during class, 3) relating the textbook's information to how rhetoric and composition views and uses the rhetorical triangle, and 4) relating this information back to a past foundational lesson about ethos, pathos, and logos so as to encourage students to make connections between a past class and the current class. Then, I included an in-class activity using a humorous video clip that my students and I analyzed together, which enabled me to model for them how to use the rhetorical triangle to analyze texts while also encouraging them to try it out.

#### **Qualities of a Successful Humor Writer**

- Consistency
  - Demonstrate that making people laugh isn't a one-time coincidence—you can make them laugh repeatedly
- Targeted material
  - Speaks to the necessity for audience awareness
    - The material needs to be right for that audience
  - Speaks to the necessity for writer awareness
    - The material needs to be right for that writer
- Put in another way—MAP
  - MAP = material, audience, and performer
    - **Material** = material must be appropriate to the audience's interests and it must relate well to the persona of the performer
      - material must fit the persona of the writer (or performer) **and** the interests of the audience

- **Audience** = audience must complement both the material and the presentation style of the performer
    - audience = most important part of humor writing
    - Writer must evaluate the majority of the audience
    - Audiences are interested in subjects that involve their activities rather than subjects that are all about, and only about, you and your life
      - You can still make jokes about your life, but somehow, you need to broaden the appeal – some sort of principle that people can relate to
      - What are some examples that you can think of?
    - What special group you are appealing to will dictate what material will appeal to that audience and will work
      - Examples—what kind of jokes do you think would best appeal to the following audiences (WRITE ON THE BOARD)
      - conservative audience
      - liberal audience
      - college-aged audience
      - senior audience
  - **Performer** = the performer must present the right material to the right audience in the right way
    - The audience needs to know who the writer is quickly—we don't want to read fifty pages setting up the author's personality—we want it and we want it now
      - Within the first thirty seconds = audience decides how comfortable it feels with the writer's comedic personality
    - In person, comedians can help this happen through their appearance
      - As readers, we learn who humor writers are quickly through
        - their writing style
        - their topic
        - their voice (who do they sound like to you as you read their text—a nice person, a mean person, a dad, a mom, a student)
      - This persona will need to stay consistent if the writer wants to build on his/her work and have something more than a one-hit wonder
- This is a triangle because each point interacts with the other points in some way
  - Looks very much like the rhetorical triangle
    - 3 parts
      - Writer or speaker
        - Who is doing the writing or speaking?

- How does the writer establish ethos?
- What is the impression the writer wants to make on the audience?
- How does the writer create common ground with the audience? How does he connect with his audience?
- Audience or reader
  - Who is the intended audience?
  - What is the best way to appeal to the audience?
  - What does the audience anticipate in terms of the speaker and of the material?
  - What is the extent of their knowledge about the subject, and do they have prejudices or preferences?
- Purpose or subject
  - What is the purpose of the communication?
    - In the case of an argument, the purpose would be to persuade.
  - What is the communication about?
  - Does the author want to persuade the audience, to make them believe something, or make them do something?
- By the way, a quick English 101 review
  - Ethos
  - Logos
  - Pathos
- Let's practice mapping out this comedy routine
  - John Pinette
  - <https://youtu.be/O7xyO91dizQ> - stop at 4:48 & mute @ 3:04
  - Let's map it out
    - Audience
    - Performer
    - Material
      - What is it about?
      - What broad themes does he address that his audience can identify with?

**Fig. 1.** A portion of my piloted lesson plan introducing the rhetorical triangle to FYC students and an accompanying in-class activity.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> While this lesson plan is admittedly quite detailed, such details help me as an instructor to pinpoint what works or fails and why. This is a style of lesson plan that I find effective and do for all of my classes. FYC instructors can take this piloted lesson plan and tailor it to their unique styles and preferences.

As this was one of my students' first introductions to the rhetorical triangle in my class, I wanted to ensure that I was there to guide them in a hands-on approach and did not include small group exercises with the clip in the lesson plan in figure 1. However, after my classroom experience and rhetorical analyses in this dissertation, I believe that this was a misstep. I missed an opportunity for students to work closely with one another to help them to understand audience awareness through their classmates' thoughts and reactions. For later lessons where I included small group discussions, I found that students used each other to discuss how they themselves reacted differently to texts, and I believe that these discussions enhanced students' understanding of audience awareness, encouraged students to look at texts from different perspectives, and allowed students to bond with one another.

Additionally, at the time I was worried that there would not be more opportunities for students to study audience awareness in that single video other than the example that I analyzed with them. However, the rhetorical analyses in this dissertation indicate that humorous texts have multiple instances of audience awareness from which students may choose and analyze. Therefore, in the future, I would 1) show the video to the whole class, 2) model for the students how to use the rhetorical triangle to analyze an example of audience awareness in the video and incorporate student participation in that first modelling, 3) ask students to form small groups and find other instances of audience awareness in that same video and then share with the whole class, and 4) show another video clip and ask students to do the same tasks in their small groups and share with the class. Having multiple opportunities to analyze videos in different ways—as a class, as a small group, and as individuals—will likely demonstrate to students that there are



multiple instances of audience awareness in humor writing that can be analyzed via the rhetorical triangle, which may partly show students the importance of audience awareness in humorous texts.

In addition to using the piloted lesson plan in figure 1, I also piloted Sedaris's "Me Talk Pretty One Day" and Branch's "What's Drier than David Sedaris?" as curricular texts in my FYC classes. Since these are texts that I both taught and rhetorically analyzed in this dissertation, it is worthwhile to discuss my experiences with these texts as such shows concrete examples of using humorous texts in FYC to teach audience awareness and situated knowledge. Furthermore, I will discuss some possibilities for teaching the texts in the future. Additionally, in light of my rhetorical analyses, I will discuss possibilities for using Kaling's and Phan's texts as FYC curricular materials to teach audience awareness and situated knowledge.

### *1. Sedaris*

I chose "Me Talk Pretty One Day" because Sedaris is one of the most well-known and monetarily successful humor writers alive, and I wanted to expose my students to one of the masters of the craft. Furthermore, I chose this specific piece because I believed that Sedaris's topic of being at odds with his instructor would be something with which students might connect, and that connection could encourage students to be invested in their work with the essay and help students to view themselves as part of Sedaris's audience.

My rhetorical analysis of Sedaris shows numerous instances of audience awareness and situated knowledge. Logically, this supports the assertion that instructors can pull from those instances to teach students about audience awareness and situated

knowledge and that students can find numerous opportunities to analyze the text and see how audience awareness and situated knowledge function in writing. Essentially, students are able to see and analyze audience awareness and situated knowledge in action.

Students are also able to find instances of audience awareness and situated knowledge. I did not show my students the exact rhetorical analysis that I conducted in this dissertation's Chapter III; rather, I encouraged them to rhetorically analyze the text during class in small groups and together as a whole class.

The Sedaris essay was assigned as a homework reading after a lecture on how humorists make use of pain in their writing and after a discussion on how pain in comedy speaks to the human condition regarding humans' fallibilities, limitations, and heartbreaks. I transitioned into discussing Sedaris's text by stating that readers can see pain in his writing, and I gave a background lecture on Sedaris the next class after students had read "Me Talk Pretty."

After presenting Sedaris's background, I instructed students to get into small groups and discuss the following questions, which I put up on the overhead projector:

- 1) Where do you see pain in Sedaris's writing?
- 2) Is it relatable pain?
- 3) How does this affect your view of Sedaris?
- 4) What humor writing techniques do we see in Sedaris's piece?

After students discussed the questions in their groups, they shared their answers with the class. Students were able to point to specific moments in the text in which Sedaris expresses pain, and they were able to explain why those moments showed pain.

Additionally, most students indicated that his pain was relatable because they could

connect moments when they felt like someone did not like them to Sedaris's teacher not liking him. I followed by asking them, "Who here has ever felt like Sedaris and felt like a teacher hasn't liked you? Please, raise your hand." Most of my students raised their hands, and I raised my hand as well. This provided a tangible moment in which students could see who among their peers could connect with Sedaris's feelings and how widely relatable those feelings were—even among their old instructor. This helped to show students who Sedaris's text may speak to and why; thus, it was a moment of making the concept of audience awareness conscious and observable.

The question of "How does this affect your view of Sedaris?" required students to trace their knowledge and see how it may affect their readings and interpretations of Sedaris's work. Most of the students discussed the persona Sedaris created in the text and what kind of person they visualize him to be—someone relatable, down-to-earth, and "normal." This helped to accomplish several important tasks. First, it helped students to think consciously about and analyze how an author creates their persona and search for specific writing moves that create persona thereby speaking both to audience awareness (by seeing how a persona does/does not connect with different audiences) and situating readers' knowledge (by exploring how they see Sedaris through his writing, why they see him that way, what in the writing makes them feel that way, and how their experiences may influence how they view Sedaris). Second, this question and some guidance by me as their instructor helped students to see how Sedaris's background may manifest in and influence what he writes, thereby helping students to situate Sedaris's knowledge in his text. Third, by seeing how an author creates a persona, students may be encouraged to think about how they would create their own personas in different types of writing and

how those personas may change with the genre, audience, and type of document they are dealing with.

The next question of “What humor writing techniques do we see in Sedaris’s piece?” encouraged students to rhetorically analyze the text to understand what moves Sedaris made, why he may have made them, and what effects those moves had on the writing and on the students as part of the text’s audience. Such a close reading of the humorous piece required that students do the kind of close reading and rhetorical analysis that I have shown in my dissertation’s rhetorical analyses, which further supports my finding that humor writing may be a feasible and useful milieu for FYC students to learn about audience awareness and situated knowledge.

In general, Sedaris’s text and my discussion questions encouraged students to see audience awareness and situated knowledge in action. Students practiced their rhetorical analysis skills and actively searched for instances of situated knowledge, explored how Sedaris showed audience awareness, saw how the students themselves were part of Sedaris’s audience, and explored how their past experiences may influence how they view Sedaris’s writing thereby situating their knowledge in relation to Sedaris’s essay.

In light of my experience and of the research and rhetorical analyses conducted in this dissertation, for future iterations of teaching Sedaris’s text, I recommend giving students Sedaris’s background before they read the text so that they will have more time to situate his knowledge on their own and during their first reading of his writing. Additionally, while I would not do as in-depth of a rhetorical analysis on Sedaris’s text in class as I have done in this dissertation because I doubt that time would allow for it, I would pick one instance within his text (perhaps one of the examples I rhetorically

analyzed in this dissertation) and rhetorically analyze that passage for the students so that they can see the process modelled for them. When I taught Sedaris's text, my students were familiar with rhetorical analyses, had conducted several for other assignments, and were reasonably skilled at the process. However, such modelling would still give students practice on how to rhetorically analyze texts and would provide me with more opportunities to show the importance of rhetorical analysis, audience awareness, and situated knowledge.

Additionally, in future iterations, I recommend asking students questions explicitly focused on how they could take what they see in Sedaris's texts—such as writing moves, sentence structures, creation of persona, etc.—and apply it to their writing in order to encourage them to apply what they learn in reading and analyzing texts to their own writing endeavors. Some discussion questions for small groups, the class as a whole, or both that would speak to this include:

- 1) If you were writing a humorous text, what would be the topic and who would you be speaking to? Based on that information, what persona would you want to create and why?
- 2) Who is your audience for writing in this class? How does that audience influence how you write? What kind of persona do you want to create for writing in this class?
- 3) What humor techniques (pick two to three) does Sedaris use that you think you might want to use in your humorous writing? Explain why you would want to use the techniques. Could you use any of these techniques in non-humorous writing such as in blogs, social media posts, emails, or papers for this class?

- 4) What influences how you write for this class (such as experiences in school and outside of school, writing preferences, books you've read, or hopes for the future)? What influences how you write for other classes?

The first batch of questions encourages students to have audience awareness to explore who their audiences could be, see that audiences can change, and trace how audiences may impact how they write and how they portray themselves in their writing. Moreover, working together in small groups or in the class as a whole helps students to realize that audience and genre can vary and have diverse impacts on the writer and content. This also helps students to see how writing takes place within context (including audience, time, place, etc.) rather than inside of a vacuum. The second group of questions encourages students to practice audience awareness for the writing that they are doing in class. It also helps them to see how that audience affects how and what they write for FYC. The third assembly of questions asks students to take what they find during their close readings and analyses of Sedaris, be able to verbalize their findings and be specific, and apply that knowledge regarding their reading to writing that they may currently engage in and writing that they may possibly engage in during their academic careers. The fourth group of questions helps students to trace possible influencing factors on their writing within academia, thereby urging them to situate the knowledge that they may espouse in their writing and the knowledge that they bring to the FYC classroom.

In general, the above questions would likely help to make conscious the connection between reading and writing for FYC students and emphasize that what they see in other writing can be used by them in their own writing inside and outside of academia. Also, the questions may be opportune moments to show that how students

analyze others' writing can also be how they analyze their own writing. All of this helps to show students that the skills they learn in FYC are transferable to writing conducted in college and for other purposes.

Based upon what I observed when teaching Sedaris's texts, students traced an author's knowledge and saw how it may influence what they write and how they write. Additionally, students explored how their experiences may affect how they view and respond to texts, and students analyzed how Sedaris speaks to his audience and appeals to his audience's emotions and logic. By making the connection overt between reading and writing with the above additional discussion questions, it is my hope that students will see that they can accomplish similar tasks in their writing as Sedaris accomplished in his text, thereby seeing Sedaris's text as rhetoric (specifically audience awareness and situated knowledge) in action that they may adapt to their own rhetorical needs and desires.

## *2. Branch*

I chose "What's Drier than David Sedaris?" because many of my students were from Nevada and, specifically, Reno, Nevada. Therefore, I thought that Branch's text would be engaging to my students because many of them could connect geographically. Additionally, I thought that students may be excited to read a published text by an instructor on campus whom they could possibly have as their teacher someday, and I thought that Branch's essay referencing Sedaris would encourage students to make connections between Sedaris's and Branch's texts. In sum, I believed that these opportunities for engagement would help students to care about the texts and increase the odds that they would put effort into learning about, and working with, the texts.

For Branch's text, I presented students with his background before I had them read "What's Drier than David Sedaris?" during class time. I piloted the following small-group discussion questions and prompts for Branch's text.

- 1) What is the target for Branch's hostility?
- 2) Describe his hostility.
- 3) Explain the realism in this piece.
- 4) Are there instances of exaggeration?
- 5) Are there elements of surprise?
- 6) Where are instances of irony? Point out quotes.
- 7) What emotions do you perceive?
- 8) Branch doesn't overtly say it, but there's a veiled claim that people who aren't part of a region shouldn't be criticizing its residents so harshly. How does he communicate that? What is your reaction to that point of view?
- 9) Do you believe that the piece is, overall, successful or not?

The first and second questions encouraged students to engage with situated knowledge by first finding Branch's messages and then tracing their possible coloring biases (i.e., what influences may have generated his hostility and, ultimately, to have the knowledge that causes him to feel hostility). Admittedly, these questions necessitate that students take on some assumptions as readers, but I did this because my lesson plans for that week centered on hostility in humor and I wanted students to hone in on what we had been discussing during lectures.

The third, fourth, fifth, and sixth questions asked students to apply past-learned concepts to Branch's piece through close rhetorical analysis. These questions required



that students actively read and analyze Branch's text regarding its strategies, choices, sentences, etc. Thus, the questions provided opportunities for students to conduct rhetorical analyses and they provided a loose guide to help students conduct those analyses. The seventh question also asks students to take their findings and view them within the broad scope of how the text uses pathos. This helped students to learn how to conduct rhetorical analysis in both narrow (sentence-level) and broad (context-wise) scopes.

The eighth batch of questions has students work with both situated knowledge and audience awareness. I gave students the message that I wanted them to examine, and then work from that point to see how Branch creates that message. This includes determining and exploring what biases of Branch may create that message. This task speaks to students learning how to situate knowledge, because they are being asked to trace Branch's knowledge and show where it is coming from. Additionally, by asking "What do you think of this?" students were encouraged to see how they personally thought of Branch's message and explain why they felt that way. Therefore, this gave students an opportunity to place themselves as part of Branch's audience and analyze themselves as part of his audience, thereby helping them to practice having audience awareness. This also pushed students to verbalize why they felt a certain way about Branch's message and trace their own knowledge and possible biasing influences—thus, they had to situate their knowledge.

The ninth question asked students to think about what moves, strategies, messages, etc. made the piece feel successful/unsuccessful to them. Thus, they put Branch's piece into a broad context of its overall success, but were still asked to justify

their claims with evidence from their rhetorical analyses that they had conducted while answering the previous eight questions.

My students were able to answer the discussion questions satisfactorily, and I felt that the class discussion was robust and students were thoroughly engaged. Students demonstrated competence in justifying their answers with details from Branch's text, and I saw them skillfully practice audience awareness, examine and explain how Branch demonstrated audience awareness, and situate both Branch's knowledge and their own.

I suspected that the positive responses to Branch's piece and the accompanying discussion questions were partly because the majority of my students are frequently native Nevadans. So, I asked my students to raise their hands if they were from Nevada. While I was correct in my assumption that most of them were, I was surprised that some of the most passionate students who were in support of Branch's messages were not from Nevada. I pointed this out and questioned one student about her passionate support of Branch. She said, "Well, I'm from Sacramento, so yeah that's a big city, but I still don't like it when people look down on others because of where they are from." This led to a productive conversation regarding audience and how Branch's audience may not just be people living in Reno and elsewhere in Nevada. Furthermore, this moment and others akin to it allowed my students and I to dissect one of the themes at the heart of Branch's piece, show how that theme connects with multiple audiences (as demonstrated by students literally being able to see some of the different audiences and their reactions via their peers), and examine how people's experiences may influence how they might view a text. It also enabled us to discuss other broad and relatable themes in the piece such as

justice and credibility. Thus, many of my students engaged consciously with audience awareness and situated knowledge during our discussions.

Overall, my students' responses and demonstrated abilities to conduct rhetorical analyses and engage with audience awareness and situated knowledge far exceeded my expectations. For future iterations of teaching Branch's piece, I would consider making the batch of questions under number eight less specific. At the time, I wanted to ensure that my students understood this message and had an opportunity to work from this starting point. However, upon reflection, I am not sure that such "hand holding" is necessary. A group of questions that is less specific but may still accomplish the same goals include, "Other than Sedaris, who does Branch target? How do you know? Why does he target them? What critiques (either overt or veiled) does Branch make? Where do you see these critiques?" With these questions, students are still told that Branch makes critiques and that those extend past Sedaris, but it requires students to find out for themselves what those critiques are and whom else Branch may be lampooning. Thus, students are still guided in their analyses, but they are encouraged to do more of the thinking for themselves rather than having the instructor tell them, which may ultimately help them to practice further identifying texts' main messages, themes, and targets.

In the future, it may be fruitful to have students analyze Branch's piece as my students did, and then free write how they would respond to Sedaris's complaints against Reno. This would necessitate that students explore their influencing biases (such as being from Reno) and their existing characteristics including regional affiliation before and as they write, which would help them to see how to situate their knowledge as writers. They would also need to take into account who they are writing the piece to (such as to Sedaris

himself, to Branch in agreement/disagreement, to the college's student body, to a local publishing venue, etc.) and how such audiences would affect the way that the students write, what they write, and how they build their personas in their texts. Thus, this encourages them to practice audience awareness in their writing. It may even be interesting and productive for students to write such pieces and then analyze each other's texts in terms of situated knowledge and audience awareness.

Additionally, for future iterations of teaching Branch's and Sedaris's texts, it may be productive to ask students more overt questions regarding power relationships and structures. Some of my discussion questions implied that power structures influence how and what each author writes, but it is perhaps better to be more overt with FYC students at this stage so that they will consciously engage with such concepts. The questions could be posed after the students read both Branch's and Sedaris's works and could be answered via individual freewrites, homework assignments, group discussions, or as classroom discussions. The following are some possible questions.

- 1) What power structures are at play in Sedaris's essay? What power relationships are there in Branch's work?
- 2) How do Branch's and Sedaris's texts tackle issues of authority, credibility, and expertise? How is knowledge tied to authority and credibility in these two texts? How is knowledge tied to authority and credibility inside and outside of college?
- 3) Thinking about these two texts, what characteristics do you think enable someone to speak on matters and/or cause that person to be viewed as credible or not credible? What do you think you as a writer can do to establish your

credibility (think in terms of writing for this class, writing for other classes, writing to friends, writing to family, writing to political figures, etc.)?

- 4) How do ethos, pathos, logos, and kairos relate to authority in Sedaris's and Branch's texts as well as to writing in general?

The first batch of questions introduces students to the concept of power in writing by overtly telling students that there are influencing power structures in Sedaris's and Branch's texts. The questions then ask students to explore power relationships within the microcosms of Sedaris's and Branch's works. This may lay the foundation for students later identifying and analyzing issues of power in other writing, in academia, and in aspects of society, culture, and life in general.

The second grouping of questions again explicitly tells students that there are matters in their readings that pertain to authority, credibility, and expertise—all of which may be viewed as having connections to knowledge (and possibly situated knowledge). The questions focus on the issue of knowledge and encourage students to explore the concept of knowledge as it pertains to authority and credibility (ethos) in writing, in academia, and outside of academia. Further, by not giving specific examples of what I mean by “outside of college,” I encourage students to think of their experiences and how such might influence their answer to this question (i.e., encouraging them to situate the knowledge in their answers) and possibly share those with their fellow classmates in order to explore various perspectives.

The third group of questions also pertains to knowledge and credibility, but the questions use different language to help students look at knowledge in various ways and explore what other factors they feel may contribute to building ethos. Additionally, this

batch of questions asks students to place themselves in the spotlight by asking what makes them credible as writers in various contexts and encourages them to think about how they would establish and display their credibility in their writing in different contexts for various audiences. This kind of reflection will likely help students to think about the importance of audience awareness in their own writing, and it may also lead to them practicing situated knowledge as a method of establishing ethos.

The last question encourages students to link past lessons on ethos, pathos, logos, and kairos to issues of power. Authority is, ultimately, connected to power—the power to speak, the power to judge, the power to create change, etc. So, to ask students how elements of rhetoric and composition can empower or disempower writers is to push students to explore power relations and structures within Branch's and Sedaris's texts as well as in the writing process. This particularly helps students to explore how audiences can impact who gets to be in power and thus see the importance of audience awareness in writing.

Overall, the above discussion questions aim to help students use humor writing—specifically that of Branch and Sedaris—to explore how audience awareness and situated knowledge can impact who is allotted power to speak and who is viewed as credible and worthy of that power to speak. Questions such as these will likely help students to become critical thinkers, analysts, and writers, and questions may be safe vehicles for instructors to encourage students to explore issues of power in writing and in society as a whole.

In light of my rhetorical analysis of Branch's text in Chapter III of this dissertation, I find that there are multiple opportunities for students to continue to do

good work in analyzing and working with audience awareness and situated knowledge. Additionally, my analysis found several themes that, as shown by my classroom experience, are relatable for many of my students—regional pride, an aversion to snobbery, the desire for justice, and the importance of ethos. Examples of conducting rhetorical analyses with the foci of audience awareness and situated knowledge could be pulled from my rhetorical analysis and offered to students as possible examples of how to conduct such explorations, but my classroom experience indicates that students may not need such modelling.

### *3. Comparison Between Teaching Sedaris's and Branch's Pieces*

Both Branch's and Sedaris's texts were well-received by my students, and I felt that my students showed increased understanding of audience awareness and situated knowledge after working with the texts. However, after conducting my rhetorical analyses in Chapter III, I now realize that I may have framed Branch's text in a better way than I did Sedaris's essay. I gave students Sedaris's background after they had read his essay, and although it was beneficial that they had the information to trace possible biases before they went into their small group discussions, I missed an opportunity for students to start that work on their own while they read the text for homework before their small group discussions in class. In contrast, I relayed Branch's background to students immediately before they began reading his essay during class time. While I admittedly did not see a noticeable difference in how students were able to look for situated knowledge in Branch's or Sedaris's texts, I still believe that I may have missed an opportunity for learning since repeated exposure to a concept helps students to engage

actively with, remember, and apply such (Carey 72-75; 83-87). Therefore, for future iterations, I would relay writers' backgrounds to students before they read the texts.

A noteworthy difference between Sedaris's and Branch's texts was how well students latched onto the pieces. For Sedaris, students connected with the work, but perhaps not as naturally as they appeared to with Branch's essay. Regarding Sedaris's text, the concept of feeling as if an instructor dislikes you was something that most of my students related to as demonstrated when I encouraged students to bring up their knowledge on this matter by asking, "Who here has felt like you've had an instructor dislike you?" and almost every hand was raised. This question accomplished three goals: 1) It showed students one of the main concepts in Sedaris's piece so that they could trace it and see how it colors what Sedaris says and why, thereby helping students to learn how to analyze a text for situated knowledge. 2) It encouraged students to look at their knowledge and how that may connect with Sedaris's text, which also exposed them to learning how to trace the experiences that shape their knowledge (thus learning to situate their knowledge). 3) It helped to show what readers may connect with in Sedaris's experiences, thereby giving students access to seeing a possible audience for his essay and helping them to engage with audience awareness. Overall, most of the students' small group discussions and reporting to the class demonstrated that the aforementioned three goals had been satisfied.

While students appeared to learn successfully about situated knowledge and audience awareness with Sedaris's text, I felt that my students demonstrated more enthusiasm for Branch's essay and that they more easily grasped onto audience awareness and situated knowledge with Branch's piece than with Sedaris's. As



previously noted, I gave students Branch's background immediately before they read his essay in class, and I had them form small groups to discuss the aforementioned questions and prompts. When groups relayed their findings to the whole class, several students spoke with an enthusiasm and passion that had been missing from Sedaris's discussion, especially when it came to discussing how Sedaris, as told by Branch, looked down upon and criticized those whom he did not feel belonged to his "big city" culture. Some students showed noticeable anger toward Sedaris's seeming arrogance and condescension, and most of the students nodded in agreement when their peers expressed these feelings. This indicated to me as an instructor that students were engaging with Branch's text, and when I continually asked why students felt that way (i.e., asking them to provide support for their claims and engage consciously with situated knowledge and audience awareness), students seemed to explain their justifications more easily than when we analyzed Sedaris's essay.

The different reactions to Branch's text and Sedaris's piece may stem from several factors. The first is that I piloted Sedaris's essay before Branch's, even though they were taught one week apart, so students may have been more unsteady about analyzing texts for audience awareness and situated knowledge with Sedaris's piece simply because the concepts were newer to them than when they encountered Branch's text. The two pieces were taught only one week apart, but that may have been enough time to make a difference. The second factor may be that since the majority of my students were from the American West (although there were some geographic variances such as with my students from Hawaii and the American South, but I notably did not have any students from the East coast), perhaps students were better able to connect with

Branch's piece than Sedaris's because of geographic similarities between Branch and my students who likely tapped into their knowledge regarding the American West, its culture, and perhaps regional pride. Although it is difficult to know for sure, these possibilities may imply that when choosing humorous texts to use in FYC, instructors should keep in mind when they plan to teach texts during the semester and how that may affect their students' reactions and understandings of concepts and those texts. Furthermore, these potentialities suggest that in order to engage students, instructors should keep in mind their students' unique demographics and attempt to find some pieces that speak to those regional identities. This requires flexibility on the instructor's part as oftentimes teachers are not truly able to understand each class's unique characteristics until the teachers get to know better their students, which requires time. Thus, from a practical sense, student-tailored texts may best appear later during the semester after instructors have gotten to know their students to a greater degree.

Overall, my teaching experiences with Sedaris's and Branch's works support my findings in Chapter III that humorous texts contain multiple opportunities for FYC students to learn about, and consciously engage with, audience awareness and situated knowledge. My experiences also point to three important points when using humorous texts to teach said concepts in FYC courses. First, students should be exposed to authors' backgrounds before they read/view their texts. Second, peer discussion about the texts is extremely useful in helping students to visualize various audiences and understand audience awareness. Third, by encouraging students to ask why they feel a certain way about a text (i.e., why they feel that something is funny or not funny, why they feel that something works or does not work, etc.) instructors can help students learn how to situate

their own knowledge and see how it influences their beliefs, which, in turn, helps them learn how to analyze texts outside of themselves in terms of situated knowledge.

#### *4. Kaling*

As stated, I did not pilot Kaling's text. However, my rhetorical analysis shows the potential the text has for showing students audience awareness and situated knowledge in action. For teaching Kaling's text, instructors can pull from my, or their, rhetorical analysis, and they can show students how to start at the sentence level when conducting rhetorical analyses and searching for audience awareness and situated knowledge. Then, instructors can show students how to extend their analyses in order to examine how the instance affects that particular moment in the text, how it affects the text as a whole, how it communicates and/or supports Kaling's main messages, and how that instance reflects who Kaling is, her past, and what she wants to accomplish for the future. The discussion questions that I listed for Sedaris's and Branch's texts would also be useful in these endeavors and could easily be tailored to Kaling's essay.

Kaling's text also gives further opportunities for students to explore how to situate their own knowledge because Kaling has a growing presence and students are likely to have seen some of her shows or movies. An activity to facilitate this kind of work would be to give students questions that they freewrite on during class time, both before and after they read Kaling's text. This could become a small-group exercise or a class-wide exercise, but students may be more comfortable exploring their past experiences, biases, and current knowledge individually and without having the fear of possibly offending other students. The idea of the exercise is to get students consciously working on situating their knowledge about something (in this case, Kaling and her text), and a

milieu (such as via individual work) that is as judgment-free as possible would likely best facilitate this work, particularly since FYC students are likely still nascent with this work.

For this activity, students could first freewrite on the following questions in class and before they read Kaling's text, whether that be before they leave class to read it for homework or before they read the text during class time. However, this freewrite should take place after the instructor has given students Kaling's background information. While assigning the questions below for homework may be an option, it would seem preferable to have students answer them during class time instead because then students are more likely to complete these tasks before reading Kaling's text instead of reading Kaling's essay and then answering the questions as an afterthought.

- 1) Have you heard of Mindy Kaling before? If so, where and what did you think about her before I read her background to you?
- 2) After hearing her background, how do you envision Kaling? What kind of person is she?
- 3) Imagine having lunch with Kaling. Where are you? Why are you there? What is it like? What do you think Kaling would be like during that lunch?
- 4) What do you expect of Kaling's work in general and of her text that we will be reading? Why do you expect that?

The first group of questions asks students to trace the knowledge that they had about Kaling before they have been exposed to her during class. It encourages students to think, "What do I currently know about Kaling? From where did I learn that information?" This helps them to trace where their knowledge is coming from and what has shaped that knowledge. Thus, they are effectively situating their own knowledge about Kaling.

The second batch of questions asks students to consider how their perceptions of Kaling have changed (or not changed if they are unfamiliar with her) in light of Kaling's background. The questions also encourage students to envision who they believe Kaling is and, by extension, who she is as an author. Envisioning who Kaling is and how she would react and respond to each student aims to help students paint a mental picture of her persona and what knowledge and characteristics she brings to the metaphorical table.

The third set of questions may seem abstract, but by requiring students to place Kaling in a rhetorical situation—having lunch with the student—students are able to bring some creativity into the classroom through their imaginations and examine what may have impacted their initial perceptions. Ultimately, this set and the second grouping of questions aim to help students to think consciously about their initial perception of Kaling and then later reflect on how that perception is/is not embodied in her essay.

The last question encourages students to make conscious their knowledge that they bring with them before they even begin to read Kaling's text. In this way, students engage with both situated knowledge and audience awareness because they are examining what they, as readers, bring to Kaling's text. Thus, students are led to recognize that they are part of Kaling's audience because they are reading her text (even if they are not necessarily her target audience—something they can explore later) and they are encouraged to examine what knowledge they as audience members have that may influence how they perceive and interpret Kaling and her essay.

As a whole, the above questions ask students: "What are you bringing with you as you read the text?" This therefore helps students to practice situating their own knowledge and to analyze themselves as part of Kaling's audience. An instructor can ask

that students hold on to their answers and then, after having read and analyzed Kaling's text, return to their answers to see how their knowledge and expectations were/were not reflected in what they read. Instructors could also ask students what they think of romantic comedies and how women are portrayed in that genre and in Hollywood as a whole before they read the text, since Kaling's essay centers on those topics, so that students situate their knowledge regarding said elements. However, this may not be necessary and could be instead accomplished through a freewrite, homework assignment, small group discussion, or class-wide discussion that includes the following tasks and questions.

- 1) Reread your answers regarding Kaling and her text from your previous freewrite.  
What initial expectations and perceptions of Kaling were reflected in her essay?  
Which ones weren't?
- 2) Imagine again having lunch with Kaling. How has that lunch changed? Have you changed venues? How has Kaling changed? What do you think caused you to make those changes? If nothing changed, reflect on why. What about her persona, messages, and writing supported your initial visualization of her?
- 3) How did you feel about romantic comedies before you read Kaling's essay? How do you feel about them now? Was Kaling persuasive to you (think about ethos and authority)? Why or why not?
- 4) What was your perception of how women are depicted in Hollywood? How did your initial perception agree and/or differ from Kaling's assertions of how women are treated and depicted in Hollywood?

- 5) What parts of Kaling's text could you connect with? Why could you connect with those aspects?
- 6) Who is Kaling's target audience in this essay? Explain how you know. How are you part/not part of Kaling's target audience in this essay?
- 7) Think about when and where you read Kaling's text. How could that environment and time have impacted how you reacted to Kaling's messages?

The first set of questions aims to have students reexamine the knowledge that they initially brought with them when reading Kaling's text and to explore what prompted any changes in their perceptions of her from that first visualization of Kaling to their current thoughts about her. This again helps students to situate their knowledge by making conscious what influences shape their beliefs about Kaling and the text. It also shows that knowledge can, and sometimes should, change. Furthermore, it asks students to make claims about their knowledge and support their claims with evidence (i.e., logical reasoning) because they are saying that they thought "A," but then perhaps that changed because of "B" or they thought "A" and that never changed because of "C." Either way, students are still examining their knowledge, exploring what shapes their knowledge, making claims, and then supporting those claims with logos and, hopefully, textual evidence.

The second batch of questions also encourages students to situate their knowledge but through a different lens. It asks students to place Kaling in a rhetorical situation that is largely of their own creation and then examine how that rhetorical situation may have changed and why, or why that rhetorical situation did not change. Thus, students are seeing a semi-concrete effect of their knowledge.

The third grouping of questions asks students to situate their previous knowledge regarding romantic comedies and then trace how that knowledge may have been altered because of Kaling's text and what about Kaling's essay caused that change. Therefore, students are again seeing how biases and experiences shape and influence knowledge and are thereby practicing situating their knowledge. These questions also encourage students to examine the text on at least two levels—on a sentence level to see what words or punctuation caused that change and on a contextual level because they must examine how those words or punctuation function within the larger context of the text as a whole and in terms of Kaling's messages. The third batch of questions also asks students to evaluate the persuasiveness of Kaling's text. It specifically asks about ethos and authority to encourage students to explore how Kaling successfully or unsuccessfully uses her humor writing to promote social change. The fourth grouping of questions gives students additional practice for this work, but focuses them on a different aspect of Kaling's text and helps students to look at "big-picture" elements such as culture and social mores.

The fifth set of questions asks the students to analyze themselves as Kaling's audience while also analyzing their own knowledge. They must look at themselves to see what they as her readers feel, think, and have experienced and then explore how that connection, or lack of connection, influences how they read and respond to Kaling. Thus, students practice audience awareness and situated knowledge with these questions. The sixth batch of questions also gives students opportunities to practice audience awareness by explicitly asking students to identify and explain who Kaling's possible target audience is and why the students are, or are not, part of that target audience. As with



previous questions, these questions also require students to make claims and support those claims with textual evidence and logical reasoning.

The tasks and questions in the last grouping encourage students to analyze the rhetorical situation in which they read Kaling's text—the space, their mood, etc. By doing this, students recognize that exposure to a text may take place in different circumstances—in different rhetorical situations—for different readers. Thus, students will likely become aware of how much of an influencing factor rhetorical situations are on audiences and texts. This will become even more apparent if students share with each other via small group discussions or class-wide discussions the rhetorical situations in which they read Kaling's text and how such may impact them as members of her audience.

The above questions could likely be conducted as a small-group exercise or as a class-wide exercise. Indeed, students would likely benefit from hearing each other's answers and seeing the variability in opinions and rhetorical situations.

As a whole, the aforementioned questions and tasks encourage students to practice audience awareness and situated knowledge primarily from the stance of a reader. The focus of this dissertation is how humor writing may function as a milieu for teaching audience awareness and situated knowledge, and I believe that the above questions demonstrate what this may look like in terms of classroom practice. Should instructors wish students to analyze Kaling's text in terms of their own writing, this can be done as well. For instance, instructors may ask students to do a freewrite or homework assignment in which students pick a movie genre and write a short piece mimicking Kaling's writing and using two or three of her writing techniques, such as exaggeration,

irony, etc. Such imitation would give students practice in writing to a prescribed audience in a pre-set format while allowing creativity, and this is the kind of writing that instructors Maureen McMahon and Colleen Ruggieri have their students perform to practice using various literary techniques (McMahon 71; Ruggieri 56). The feasibility of this type of assignment in terms of FYC are later discussed in this chapter. For now, though, it is enough to say that the demands and curricular requirements of FYC may not allow for this assignment to be expanded to more than a homework assignment.

#### *5. Phan*

Phan's text could also be analyzed via using many of the questions I outlined in my discussions regarding Sedaris's, Branch's, and Kaling's essays. However, Phan's work is unique among my analyzed humor writing because it is a standup routine. While standups are indeed humor texts as previously established in this dissertation, a standup routine has a performative aspect that is missing from written texts. For standup texts such as Phan's, students can watch how comedians add to their words through tone, body language, physical attributes, and even through how they interact with the audience—standup routines can bring written texts to life for students. Interestingly, comedians may even show heightened senses of audience awareness during comedic routines as how they interact with their audiences often adds to creating the comedians' personas. For example, Phan uses manic, machine-gun-like speech that is paired with quick body movements and rapid eye movements. Such physical characteristics give instructors opportunities to discuss how persona is created and how such impacts audiences' interpretations and responses to a writer (a.k.a. the comedian) and a text.

Being able to see comedians perform their texts may also present opportunities for instructors to discuss how what audiences see and where they see it may affect how they respond to the comedian's persona and messages. This again would enable students to practice audience awareness and explore how a rhetorical situation may affect an audience's knowledge. Put into the context of Phan's text, I would ask my students some or all of the following questions for either a class-wide discussion or a small-group exercise, depending upon my time constraints:

- 1) Where are we in the video clip? How do you know?
- 2) Look at the audience. Who do you see?
- 3) Just looking at the space and the audience, how do you feel in the initial moments before Phan does his routine? What impressions are you getting regarding who Phan is and the success of his routine with his audience? How would these impressions change if you were seeing him on a larger stage and on a Comedy Central special?

The above questions ask students to analyze the kairos of Phan's text, to analyze the audience that they see, and to engage in analytical work via rhetorical analysis. This will help students to practice such necessary and valued skills. Additionally, the last question in the third grouping asks students to change the kairos of the text and see how that would affect them as part of Phan's audience and alter the knowledge that they bring with them at the beginning of Phan's comedy routine. Therefore, this question helps students to engage with situated knowledge and see how that knowledge can affect audiences. In a way, then, practicing situated knowledge in this instance would help students to explore the possible connections between audience and situated knowledge.

Standup comedy routines such as Phan's also give opportunities to address what would be appropriate to incorporate into their own performances as students within the university if and when they give speeches and presentations. A feature of many FYC courses is that students give some sort of presentation in order to practice disseminating their research to various audiences, and watching and analyzing standup comedy gives students a chance to see rhetorical concepts in action. Instructors can point out how comedians engage audiences through their body language, and students can also engage their audiences via body language. For example, for the last major assignment of the semester, students were required to present their research, and the prompt was as follows:

In addition to the paper, you will also give a presentation on your research. This requirement corresponds with the university's goal to help students effectively compose multimedia texts to present their research. Your presentation must have a visual element. Please note that standing in front of the class does not count as your visual element. Also, reading your paper will not suffice, or be accepted, for your presentation. Your presentation's visual element may be a poster, a PowerPoint presentation, a video, etc. Whatever you choose will need to be cleared with me by 4/26 (the due date for this paper). You will give your presentation on either 5/3 or 5/10, and your date will be chosen according to a sign-up sheet that will be circulated later in the semester. This presentation should clearly convey the following: your thesis, the claims that support your thesis, a brief summation of the logic and evidence that support your claims, and your conclusion. Your presentation should be four to ten minutes in length.

Watching standup comedy can help students to see various ways to complement their texts through body language. Discussions on what is appropriate for specific audiences would likely be fruitful regarding how to practice audience awareness in academia.

When I piloted my course, I encouraged students to analyze comedians' body language, props, and interactions with audiences to help them understand audience awareness and rhetorical situations, but I missed the opportunity to extend those conversations to discuss what it means to present material as a writer in academia. In the future, I will alter this through class-wide discussions regarding said matters. Such discussions will likely be saved for near the end of the semester so that students already have the foundations for college writing and I can move students into presenting research without overwhelming them.

Overall, the aforementioned discussion questions and activities help students learn about, analyze, and practice audience awareness and situated knowledge in terms of reading texts and in their own writing. However, these questions and activities are subject to the time constraints and curricular demands of instructors' courses and departments.

## **2. Major Assignment**

In addition to the aforementioned lesson plans and in-class activities, I piloted a major assignment entitled, "What's Funny Argument" that used humorous texts to help students understand and engage with audience awareness and situated knowledge. The assignment's prompt is in figure 2. As with my other major assignment prompts, I included a section that exhibited the departmental course outcomes that the assignment addressed and practical applications for the lessons that students would hopefully learn when drafting this assignment.

*What's Funny Argument* (15%, 150 points), 5-6 pages, **Due 4/13**

**Workshop Requirement (due 4/11)**

- Two pages of your What's Funny Argument paper

**Course Outcomes Satisfied**

- Be able to explain the writing process: prewriting, composing, revising, responding, editing, attending to language and style, and writing with audience and purpose in mind.
- Engage in critical reading and interpretation of a wide range of texts.
- Be able to summarize, analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and apply what [students] read—both orally and in writing.
- Use writing as a means of understanding, organizing, and communicating what [students] read.
- Frame complex research questions or problems.
- Produce a coherent, well-supported argument that shows critical thinking about the student's own and alternative viewpoints.
- Recognize, evaluate, and use a variety of information sources: expert people, publications of information agencies, popular and specialized periodicals, professional journals, books, and electronic resources.
- Conduct research that shows evidence of the ability to synthesize, use fairly, and credit the ideas of others using the appropriate citation style.
- Write coherently and observe the standards of academic English.

**Real-World Applications of the Assignment**

- It will help you to “dissect” and to respond critically to texts, behaviors, and/or situations.
- It will help you to apply what we have learned in class to texts, behaviors, and/or situations.
- It will help you to practice forming a clear, coherent thesis.
- It will help you to practice supporting your arguments with logic and evidence.
- It will help you to learn how to integrate outside texts into your argument.
- It will help you to practice how to cite correctly and attribute information to outside sources using MLA 8<sup>th</sup> edition formatting.
- It will provide you with practice for your large research paper due at the end of the semester and will help you to identify any areas of your writing that need your attention.
- It will help you to practice writing five-to-six-page research papers, which is a common paper length in college for a variety of classes in multiple departments.

**Overview:**

As you read this prompt, think about what is funny to you. Why is it funny? How is it funny? Would others think that it is humorous?

You have two options for this assignment, although both are along the same lines. One option is to research something that you find funny and to make an argument about it. Two is to explore why something is funny and make an argument saying why it is funny. Whatever you choose, you must support your claims with outside sources, logic, and clear analysis. For this assignment, you may go outside the world of modern humor writing for your topic, but you still must stick to humor. Nevertheless, it will likely be beneficial to you to at least use humor writing examples to analyze and to bolster your claims.

You may find that some of your claims are subjective, but your opinions should still be supported by using logic and evidence. Moreover, your focus should be on why something is funny as opposed to why something is not funny. For example, if you are studying irony, then you should focus on successful, humorous examples of irony as opposed to unsuccessful examples. Unsuccessful instances could be used to support your claims, but they should not be your paper's focus.

This paper should be five to six pages long (the works cited pages are not included in the page count, but they must be included in your paper). You must use the following sources in your paper: Mel Helitzer and Mark Shatz's *Comedy Writing Secrets*, at least one scholarly source, and at least two additional sources (which may be primary or secondary, and they may be popular or scholarly). Keep in mind that your additional two sources must have adequate ethos. For example, an unpublished paper from a high school student found on a personal blog lacks ethos and should not be used as a source for your paper. You **must** use parenthetical citations in your paper. Failure to use any parenthetical citations will result in a deduction of points.

For this paper, I will be particularly focused on how well you support your thesis and claims (you need evidence as well as logical connections between your claims and your evidence), how well you integrate your sources (introducing quotes and paraphrases, analyzing quotes and paraphrases, and using quotes and paraphrases to support your claims), how well you define the terms that are integral to your argument, and how well (grammar-wise and flow-wise) you write your paper. Moreover, I will focus on how well you format your parenthetical and bibliographic citations. At this point, there should be no missing italics, no errors in indentation, no missing databases, etc.

### **Requirements**

- Your paper must be five to six pages long and double-spaced as well as formatted using Times New Roman font, 12 pt. font, and 1" margins.
- Your sources must be cited correctly using MLA 8<sup>th</sup> edition formatting, and you must have a works cited page that uses MLA 8<sup>th</sup> edition formatting.
- You must use parenthetical citations to cite any outside information that you use whether that be in the form of a quote, statistic, paraphrase, etc.
- You must use a minimum of **four** (although you are free to use more) sources in your paper that include the following:
  - Mel Helitzer and Mark Shatz's *Comedy Writing Secrets*.
  - At least **one** scholarly source.
  - At least **two** additional sources.

- You must provide all necessary background information and definitions for any abstract and/or subjective terms (such as “funny,” “successful,” “effective,” “pain,” “satire,” “irony,” etc.) that you use.
- You must support your thesis with claims that are supported by evidence and logic, and you must have logic connecting your evidence to your claims.
- You must keep your focus on why something is funny and successful as opposed to why something is not funny and is unsuccessful.

**Fig. 2.** The prompt for the major assignment entitled, “What’s Funny Argument.”

This assignment was the second-to-last major assignment of the semester, so students had been exposed to, and had opportunities to practice, elements of rhetoric and composition including audience awareness and situated knowledge. Overall, the assignment successfully helped to encourage students to engage consciously with audience awareness and situated knowledge and relay their analyses in this assignment.

However, I found that multiple students would rather discuss what was not funny to them rather than what was funny. I held steadfast to the “funny” requirement because, at the time, I thought that requiring students to put a positive lens (i.e., they must argue for something) on their papers would push and encourage them to expand their analyses as that path seemed more rigorous from my perspective. Upon reflection and in light of my rhetorical analyses in Chapter III, I think that this was a mistake and that future iterations of the assignment should allow for the negative “this is not funny,” as I am not sure that there was realized gain in taking that option away regarding students’ demonstrated comprehension and uses of audience awareness and situated knowledge. Additionally, it may be beneficial for students to investigate what they view as not funny, dissect it, and understand their feelings and others’ feelings. Also, by investigating what is perhaps not funny to them, students may be able to understand better what knowledge informs those beliefs and perhaps what is reasonable and what is unreasonable—a skill



that may be warranted in order to check and balance current “cancel culture” in America in which people’s voices and lives are seemingly “cancelled” in social media and even academia by others because of real or imagined offenses or mere misunderstandings/different interpretations (Kato, “What is Cancel”; Lewis, “How Capitalism Drives”; Darbyshire 2786).

In sum, this assignment accomplished its goals. Moreover, it helped students to engage consciously with audience awareness and situated knowledge in texts that I had not exposed them to in class and with which they personally connected, such as the TV shows of *Friends*, *Seinfeld*, *The Big Bang Theory*, and *The Office*, various comedians including Louis CK (which was at a time before accusations against him came to light), Jon Stewart, and Sebastian Maniscalco (Izadi, “Louis C.K.’s Sexual”). Still, this assignment likely could be improved if students were able to investigate what was either funny to them or not funny to them.

There was a pattern in both of the aforementioned major assignment and studied materials that students tended to connect and engage better with materials that had a personal connection to them. Therefore, I would suggest that those instructors who wish to incorporate humor writing in their FYC courses try to use texts that students may connect with and writers that they may know. This could be accomplished by, at the beginning of the semester, instructors assigning students a low-stakes homework assignment in which they list two or three comedians or humorous texts (written or otherwise) that they like. Instructors can then aggregate these lists and preview the texts to see which ones may be incorporated into lectures and in-class activities. While this may result in a bit more work for instructors, it invites students to participate in class,

adds a variety of perspectives to studied materials, and perhaps creates a memorable experience for students. Indeed, as a freshman college student, seeing your instructor use a text that you listed is likely welcoming, ingratiating, and may boost the instructor's ethos with that student.

Included texts should also address one or more of the following characteristics to help engage students when learning about audience awareness and situated knowledge: relatively new humorous texts and comedians so that the material will feel relevant to students, humorous texts that speak to largely universal feelings, works that lampoon those in power, pieces that may speak to students' struggles, and texts that address struggles and perspectives that the instructors may feel are important and that FYC students may not have been exposed to. Including such a diverse range of texts will likely increase the number of different audiences for texts that students may encounter in FYC, expand the perspectives that students are exposed to through curricular texts, and give students a variety of biases and coloring experiences to analyze and trace when studying about situated knowledge.

### **3. Writing Humor**

Throughout my piloted classes, there were times in which I asked my students to write humor. For instance, during one class I asked students to get into small groups and write three funny examples of at least two techniques that we had learned, such as double entendre, malapropism, oxymoron, pun, etc. This encouraged students to practice what they had been studying in their text, what we had been discussing in class, and what they had seen other humorists do in published works. Thus, they were taking what they were reading and putting it into practice in their writing. These group exercises allowed for

creativity within the classroom, promoted peer bonding since they had to work collectively, and often reinforced to students that they could have fun with writing. However, I did not find this same level of success when I asked students to write humorous texts on their own.

During one class toward the end of the semester, I asked students to create their own small pieces of satire during class. My reasoning behind this was that students were familiar with what went into satires, we had read satires, we had discussed satires, we had analyzed satires, and they appeared to be enjoying the genre. We had also created a brief satire as a class in order to work with the genre and put into practice the writing techniques that we had learned thus far. So, I thought that it would be logical to give students the chance to create satires on their own.

I gave students approximately twenty minutes to create a satire about whatever they wanted, and they carried out the activity, although I saw considerably more consternation on their faces than when we drafted the satire together as a class. Upon completing the twenty minutes, I asked if any of them would like to share. To my surprise, no one wanted to share. Even my student who did standup comedy as a hobby and was part of the college's comedy club did not volunteer. I did not want to make any students uncomfortable, so I did not cold-call on them to share their writing. This occurred in both classes in which I piloted humor writing as curricular material, so I am left to assume that there was something amiss with the activity, the way it was presented, and/or the context in which it was conducted.

What I believe is preventing students from sharing their satires is that there is more at stake in sharing a piece of writing that is heavily audience-dependent and that

students must own as theirs (i.e., the text's ownership is not shared among their peers or with the me as the instructor). Conversely, with the collectively drafted satire, students could share the onus amongst themselves and their instructor. Should there be anyone who took offense to something, the students likely knew that I would diffuse the situation and redirect the lesson as necessary. Without those safety nets of sharing onus and of the instructor taking on part of the burden, perhaps sharing the assignment—one that is not thoroughly revised and polished—felt like too much of a risk to students. Indeed, even professional humorists frequently revise their texts and jokes before they publish or present their material to audiences (Bloom, “Dat Phan—From”; Duck, “Dinner at the”; Kaplan 5; Vorhaus 163-173). So, it may be unreasonable to ask FYC students who are still in the beginnings of their writing journeys as young adults to write satire in twenty minutes that they feel will be humorous to their peers, not embarrass them as writers, and not offend anyone.

This is not to say that students writing humor is not potentially beneficial. As stated, small group writing exercises and class-wide collective writing activities provide fruitful opportunities to apply learned concepts, express creativity, and have fun with writing. Also, instructor McMahon finds that having her high school students write their own satires helps them to learn about literary devices such as hyperbole and mixed metaphors and helps them to engage with poetry and classic works of literature (71). Likewise, Ruggieri finds that assigning her high school students to write humor helps them to learn about writing techniques, such as irony (56). Instructor and humor theorist Seitz also asserts that requiring students to write humorous parodies allows them to

experiment with writing and to learn how to use and explore elements of rhetoric, including the impact of audience on a text (388).

However, Seitz discusses students writing humor in the context of an “upper-level undergraduate rhetoric course” (388). At this level, students have already gone through the introductory courses of college writing and assumedly have the basic writing tools necessary for college-level writing. Therefore, students in upper-level undergraduate courses may be better equipped for trying out different genres of writing and may feel more comfortable sharing experimental writing with their peers than FYC students who are still being introduced to the conventions of college writing and the etiquette of peer feedback. Admittedly, FYC students probably have experienced peer workshops or feedback, but perhaps the context of a college classroom may feel more intimidating to them than does a high school classroom.

This also leads to an interesting point regarding McMahon’s and Ruggieri’s research—their assertions are regarding high school students. FYC students are perhaps not far removed from high school students developmentally—indeed a mere summer separates a graduating high school senior and a college freshman. However, the contexts of the FYC classroom and high school classroom have noticeable differences. For example, college instructors do not see their students as often as do high school teachers. There is also oftentimes a higher level of independence required from college students than from high school students. Thus, although many beginning college students are not necessarily cognitively that different from their former high school selves, the learning environment in which they find themselves is different. This difference may feel

intimidating to students, so to ask them to engage in an experimental form of writing whose success is highly audience dependent is perhaps too much to ask of FYC students.

This is not to say that writing humor cannot or should not be done in FYC.

However, there are several important caveats to note. The first is that, as shown by my in-class assignment's failure, a twenty-minute, in-class free write will likely not be sufficient time for students to write humorous texts that they feel comfortable sharing and that they can feel proud of. A better alternative may be having students apply techniques discussed in class via a homework assignment in which they are required to use two or three techniques to write a humorous text. This would enable students to spend more time on the assignment and not feel as pressured as an in-class assignment may make them feel. To lower the stakes for students, this homework assignment can be submitted to the instructor and not shared with the class. This enables students to worry about one audience member (the instructor) rather than multiple and diverse audience members (their peers).

A third caveat is that the time spent on writing humorous texts must be balanced with FYC's existing curricular requirements. Departments may require FYC instructors to teach certain major assignments and do not give flexibility in changing or adding to those assignments. There is also much expected of FYC instructors, so time for additional assignments, such as students writing a polished satire, may not be available. For these cases, the homework assignment I have outlined would likely be feasible and low enough stakes that students could enjoy such writing. Additionally, small-group and class-wide humor writing may also be possible and beneficial for students to practice what they read, learn about, and have been taught during class time. However, anything requiring more

time, such as a major assignment in which students write a polished satire of their own, may not be doable given the time constraints and departmental requirements placed upon FYC teachers. Indeed, such may best be saved for upper-level undergraduate courses or graduate writing classes in which the students already have the basic foundation for college-level writing, the students have experienced peer feedback on their college-level writing, and instructors have more freedom to design their courses and assignments.

The possibilities for students creating their own humor writing in these contexts are exciting, but they are not the focus of this dissertation and likely warrant their own study. This dissertation's focus concerns how humor writing may function as a vehicle for FYC students to learn about audience awareness and situated knowledge. Thus, an in-depth inquiry of students composing humor and the resultant effects is perhaps best saved for a future research project.

### **III. Risky Business**

Although there are exciting and great benefits to including humor writing in FYC for teaching students audience awareness and situated knowledge, there are some risks as well and a few of them were mentioned in Chapter I of this dissertation. In light of my experience in using humor writing in my FYC courses and of my findings in Chapter III, I identify three primary risks: 1) Some humorous texts may contain topics and language that instructors may not be comfortable with or that may not be in line with their desired personas. 2) There could be a downplaying of the seriousness of rhetoric and composition

and perhaps the instructor and/or class as well. 3) Students may feel offended by some of the material or may misunderstand the material.<sup>8</sup>

### **1. Topics, Language, and Instructor Persona**

As stated in Chapter I, some instructors may fear not being able to maintain a balance between humor and seriousness in their classes should they include humor writing in curricular materials (Morreall, *Comic Relief* 23). Indeed, some may worry that failing at that balance will damage their ethos with their students and that they cannot be standup comedians for their students. However, including humorous texts in class for the purposes of demonstrating and teaching principles (such as audience awareness and situated knowledge) of rhetoric and composition and helping students to understand and consciously engage with those concepts do not necessitate that an instructor be funny, because the focus of the FYC class is on the analysis of texts and the writing of arguments. A prompt such as, “Choose something that you think is funny and explain why it is funny” involves many academic tasks that students must tackle, including: 1) crafting strong theses, 2) defining terms (such as “funny” and what makes for “effective” humor, thereby urging students to explain and crystallize their thoughts), 3) making claims, 4) supporting claims with evidence from texts, analyses of text excerpts, and logic that ties evidence to a student’s thesis. These tasks likely necessitate some degree of audience awareness and use/analysis of situated knowledge, and they enable students to

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<sup>8</sup> Some of the material from this section of my dissertation is built from work that I created for my PhD comprehensive exams and from several conference presentations I have given. I have cited these materials in my works cited should anyone wish to reference them. However, while some of the basic ideas in this section were formed in past works, my analysis and current understanding of them are largely informed by my work and research for this dissertation.



engage in and practice logos, ethos, and perhaps pathos. An instructor may even require students to use scholarly sources (of which there are many regarding humor) in their papers, which helps students to incorporate outside, scholarly sources into their arguments to practice using those texts in conversation with the students' thoughts and logic.

None of these academic tasks require an instructor to be funny because the focus remains on the writing, not on the teacher. Instead, by including humorous texts in FYC, instructors allow students to interact with writing that they may enjoy and that may be entertaining, but the teachers compel students to view those texts through scholarly and critical lenses. It is unlikely that instructors risk their ethos in this manner. Instead, they give students the opportunity to study something that they may find enjoyable and connect with, which may encourage students to care about their writing and discover how texts may demonstrate audience awareness in various ways, and what biases, assumptions, philosophies, and power structures may shape those texts. As Minchew writes, instructors do not have "to be comedians to create an enjoyable" and productive "classroom environment" (Minchew 67). Also, by keeping the tasks academic, instructors emphasize seriousness in their courses and likely maintain their desired balance of seriousness and humor in their classes. Thus, the risks to instructors' ethos when including humor writing in FYC may be minimized by keeping lectures and assignments academic and leaving the task of being funny to the humorous texts.

Some instructors may worry that if students do not find a text funny (indeed, not all students are likely to view texts the same way and perceive them with the same level of hilarity) after an instructor presents the work as a "humorous text," then that may

reflect poorly on the instructor and reduce the teacher's ethos with students. However, even failed humor within texts gives students opportunities to analyze those documents in terms of audience awareness and situated knowledge. In fact, failed humor may be perfect for investigating where an author may have failed in balancing the requirements of the rhetorical triangle—perhaps the audience could not connect well with the message; perhaps the author did not present the message in a way that seemed clear and genuine; perhaps the context for the document did not allow the elements of the rhetorical triangle to work harmoniously with one another, etc. Failures within humorous texts may also present students with opportunities to see how the text may have failed regarding audience awareness or in its use of ethos, pathos, or logos. Thus, even when humor fails for students, humorous texts can still offer opportunities for students to learn about and practice principles of rhetoric and composition.

Instructors may also be concerned with how the inclusion of humorous texts may affect their classroom persona—meaning the perceived character or mask that instructors don while teaching (Carter 504-505). With the wide range of diverse perspectives and voices in humor writing, it is likely that there will be some texts that may not reflect instructors' desired personas. However, the numerous options within humor writing should be seen as beneficial as instructors can select which ones they are comfortable with and that they feel best mesh with their classroom personas. Additionally, as with any other genre of writing that may be used in FYC, instructors oftentimes have control over what texts they include in their curricular materials. Thus, humor writing in this respect is similar to other genres. FYC instructors are guardians of their classrooms, and, as with other genres of writing, they choose curricular texts that 1) they think help satisfy their

schools' and departments' standard learning outcomes, 2) they think help them teach their students certain concepts (such as audience awareness and situated knowledge), 3) they think may speak to their goals for their classrooms (such as the inclusion of diverse voices and perspectives), 4) what they think may speak to their students and their experiences in the hopes of engaging them in their work in FYC, and 5) they feel comfortable with as readers themselves.

This last element is particularly important to note in selecting humorous texts for curricular inclusion because it takes into account diversity among FYC instructors. Instructors should include texts that they feel comfortable with and that fit with their classroom and teaching styles. For example, as an individual, I am not personally comfortable with sexual jokes. Therefore, as an instructor I steer away from texts that center on humor about sex.

Additionally, part of my persona as an FYC instructor is that I do not use curse words, and I require that students refrain from their use as well. To some, this may seem prudish or as if I am denying my students access to part of the English language. To me, I feel that this helps to maintain a certain level of respect in my classroom that I am comfortable with. Moreover, I feel that it encourages my students to become creative when expressing frustration, which often leads them to fun and interesting uses of English that they may not otherwise explore. The point is that my persona as an instructor does not mesh well with texts that contain curse words. Yet, numerous humorous works contain curse words. So, when I piloted humorous texts in my FYC classes, I provided students copies of texts with the curse words blacked out. This allowed me to use those texts while staying true to my instructor persona.

Interestingly, some of my students have pointed to the fact that I censored curse words. One student said, “Ms. Preston, you know that we know what the blacked-out words are, right?” My reply was, “Yes, I do. However, I don’t curse in class, and I expect students not to curse in class, so it seems unfair to give you texts that have curse words in them.” The student nodded in a seemingly appreciative, rather than skeptical, manner.

This moment demonstrates that my censorship is not wholly effective. Some students can ascertain from contextual cues what the words probably are, which is good because that likely means they are looking for contextual cues by examining sentence structures, and I encourage such close reading skills in my class. Furthermore, the feeling of the curse words is there in spirit, so while my censorship perhaps diminishes the words’ effectiveness in the texts, it does not wholly take away from the writing and an author’s intent still remains. To me as an instructor, this minimal reduction in an author’s intent is worth keeping my instructor persona intact, and I do not believe that such mild censorship negatively impacts students’ understanding of rhetoric and composition in meaningful and impactful ways.

My experience shows that instructors have a wide selection range in humor writing. They may even be able to tailor the texts to their personas in some ways as I did with my humorous curricular materials. Admittedly, even if the risk of humorous texts negatively impacting instructors’ ethos is reduced, some teachers may worry that the genre’s curricular inclusion may downplay the seriousness of rhetoric and composition. This fear can perhaps be assuaged by, ironically, situating the knowledge informing this fear.

## **2. Seriously?: Possible Downplay of the Seriousness of Rhetoric and Composition**

In Chapter I, I introduced the concept of the work/play bifurcation and how such may erroneously render anything entertaining or humorous as anathema to serious and valuable work. The work/play bifurcation is at the basis of the fear that studying humor writing and including humorous texts in the FYC classroom will not be viewed as serious work. Yet, as Rouzie espouses, it is a misnomer that play is work's opposite in education. Rather, play "exists within and transforms rhetorical situations, at its best combining ludic and serious purposes through sophisticated rhetorical strategies and effects" (Rouzie 53).

Rouzie believes that "playful work" is the answer to opening education back up to accepting humor and to reducing the feeling of alienated labor (meaning works devoid of ownership and emotional investment from the works' creators) in academia, particularly as it pertains to the labor that college students produce in composition classes (Rouzie 31). Thus, he proposes a "serio-ludic" rhetoric, which can be defined as a theory of rhetoric that maintains that play works within, and can transform the rhetoric of, a situation. Serio-ludic rhetoric meshes both work and play "in rhetorical writing and communication situations," because "play of this kind connects writers and audiences in novel ways by closing the work/play gap and its parallel split in English studies between rhetoric and poetic" (Rouzie 54). He writes,

Although play may appear to exist outside the realm of rhetoric, limited to "creative" or "expressive" writing, I argue that forms of play that I call "serio-ludic" are highly rhetorical and that an emergent form of literacy must include fluency with the play element in composition . . . . Furthermore, in discussing

play in the context of critical postmodernism, I argue that play does not have to be apolitical, that its dialectical qualities can make it a powerful force for resistance and change. (27)

Writing instructor Gibbs affirms Rouzie's assertions by stating that humor and gravitas are not mutually exclusive. Gibbs admits that including humor writing in curricular materials may entertain students, which seemingly detracts from the seriousness of humorous texts in FYC (Gibbs 130). Yet, while FYC instructors' main goals are not to entertain, Gibbs states that entertainment during class time is unlikely to hurt students or the instructor. He writes that "it is likely that entertainment in the form of humor is highly appropriate" as "students will undoubtedly need periodic breaks from the pressure generated by the acquisition of new ideas," and students undoubtedly acquire new ideas and ways of thinking in FYC (Gibbs 130). This form of entertainment can manifest as studied humorous texts and, as discussed previously, need not come in the form of a clown as an FYC instructor.

Humor theorists Nilsen and Nilsen continue this line of thought by claiming that the instructor's primary "goal is not to entertain students, but to help them understand why they laugh at David Letterman's 'Top Ten' lists and at the Budweiser frogs and lizards, and then help them develop appreciation for increasingly subtle forms of humor" (Nilsen and Nilsen 34). Additionally, if FYC students see that writing can be enjoyable and entertaining, then such will likely draw them into the work and encourage them to put effort into their writing rather than push them away from writing—all of which is desirable.

Rouzie's serio-ludic rhetoric is part of the basis for the curricular inclusion of humor writing, and as long as FYC instructors keep that in mind, then they will likely understand that, although the work may be fun for students, it is, nevertheless, work. With this knowledge, instructors may be able to explain the seriousness and usefulness of humor writing in FYC to their students, colleagues, and superiors at their colleges so that they may dispel the erroneous division between work and play in the academy and in FYC. Admittedly, this is not perfect and instructors may need to intervene. Two of my teaching experiences speak to this point.

When I piloted my FYC classes while using humorous texts, I anticipated needing to intervene at some point with the topics that students chose for writing. Therefore, like with my other FYC courses that did not use humorous texts, I checked in with my students via worksheets and in-class discussions regarding what topics they were choosing for their major assignments. This enabled me to help them narrow their topics' scopes if necessary, model for the class how to narrow topics and tease out the various elements that students could tackle within topics, model for my students how to brainstorm, and check and see if the students' topics were manageable and appropriate for class.

One of my students turned in a worksheet meant to help students plan their "What's Funny Argument" (which was outlined previously in this chapter), and he chose the topic of why flatulence is funny. While on the surface the topic seemed the opposite of scholarly, I searched it and found a few scholarly articles addressing it. Still, I had the student meet with me after class to discuss his choice and to ascertain if he did indeed wish to research this topic with an academic and critical lens. Before I could address this

though, the student blurted that he did not know what to do for his essay and that was the only topic he could think of at the time to finish the homework assignment. He was neither passionate toward the subject nor did he think that he could meet the assignment's requirements with that topic. Together, we brainstormed and came up with a different idea that he felt excited about, and he did very well in his analysis and argument regarding why the character of Joey was funny on his favorite TV show, *Friends*.

At first, it seemed as if this student did not take my class and rhetoric and composition seriously. However, upon further investigation, the homework assignment was less a product of this student treating my class and the topic flippantly than him simply feeling lost regarding what to write about. Moments like this are, admittedly, when instructors must intervene in order to ensure that students keep examining texts with critical and academic lenses even if the texts themselves are humorous. In my experience, this was the most extreme instance, and it was remedied by meeting with the student and having an open discussion. It is likely that future occurrences along this spectrum can also be remedied by simple conversations with individual students.

Another instance in which I worried about how seriously students were viewing my class and rhetoric and composition was when a student wanted to analyze the movie *Sausage Party* for the "What's Funny Argument." To get an idea of the movie, some of the film's plot keywords include "adult animation," "orgy," and "adult humor" ("Sausage Party"). The student asked me if she could use that text to show why it is funny. As an instructor worried about her students taking the material seriously, I cringed at her request, but I asked her to elaborate so that I could better understand her perspective. The student explained that the movie's use of nihilism allowed viewers to face their own



immortalities and purpose/lack of purpose in their existences, and that certain scenes enabled audiences to treat such concepts with humor and even acceptance rather than with revulsion or fear. For a college freshman, that was an impressive thesis. So, I suppressed my worries and approved her topic. In the end, the student used many of the rhetorical analysis strategies that I utilized in Chapter III of this dissertation to analyze *Sausage Party* and successfully supported her thesis. This experience demonstrates a moment when I feared a student was not taking my class and rhetoric and composition seriously. However, because I treated humorous texts with academic and critical lenses and required the same from my students, the aforementioned student was able to analyze a seemingly anti-intellectual movie in an academic manner that demonstrated understanding of rhetorical analysis strategies, logos, audience awareness, and situated knowledge.

This is all to say that instructors should not let the fear of not being taken seriously scare them from using humorous texts and possibly stymie their students' explorations of humorous texts. Indeed, my *Sausage Party* student was perhaps the perfect embodiment of Rouzie's claim that play can facilitate understanding of a text's rhetorical situation. Indeed, if students are encouraged to look at humorous texts through academic lenses, then they will likely be able to conduct rhetorical analyses and create academic arguments by using humorous texts. Additionally, if there should be an issue where a student does not seem to take the material seriously, this can likely be remedied by having a conversation with the student to understand why the student chose a certain topic and if and why that student may be struggling with the material or the class.

### 3. What Do You Mean by That?: Misunderstandings and Offense

In addition to there being risks of downplaying the seriousness of rhetoric and composition and/or FYC courses, there may be a risk of students misunderstanding the humor in humorous texts and, consequently, the teaching value of the texts may be reduced. Indeed, the rhetorical analyses that I conducted in Chapter III and rhetorical analyses that students could conduct on humorous texts may hinge on students understanding certain references, idioms, and words. Part of this is on the onus of the student—if students do not know a word or phrase, then, as with other non-humorous texts, they are often expected to look up the word or phrase or ask their instructors to explain. Still, the frequency of misunderstanding or lack of understanding may be increased with international students whose native language is not English. This was my experience in teaching FYC courses piloting humor writing, and there is one experience with a student, George, that is particularly worthy of note.

George was an international student from South Korea, and his native language was Korean.<sup>9</sup> I presented what I call “the moth ball joke” in class in which the joke’s setup and its punchline are interrupted by numerous stories and asides in order to build tension within the audience and make the punchline either more surprising or groanworthy, depending on how long the speaker makes the audience wait. Thus, the joke and accompanying analysis aimed to teach students about audience awareness and timing. A shortened version of the moth ball joke is as follows:

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<sup>9</sup> George’s name has been changed from its original to protect the student’s identity.

A father gives his eight-year-old son a fur coat and tells the boy that if he takes care of the coat and it is in perfect condition when the boy turns twenty-one years old, then the father will give the boy one million dollars. For years, the boy kept the coat in a closet and took care of the coat, brushed it daily, and treated it with tender loving care. The day before his twenty-first birthday, the boy was excited to receive his million dollars since the coat was in perfect condition. But when he opened the closet to get the coat, he found a man-sized moth eating holes in the fur coat. The boy cried out that the moth had ruined his life and asked the moth why he did not show any remorse. The moth shrugged and said, “Have you ever seen a moth bawl?”

As expected, some students laughed at the joke while some groaned. However, George was perplexed and said that he did not understand the joke. I explained the punchline and setup and some of George’s classmates tried explaining it, but George did not understand. Even his classmate who spoke Korean explained the joke to George in Korean, but George still did not understand. His main point of misunderstanding was the play on words regarding “bawl” and “ball”—that they were homonyms and that word within the joke’s context meant both to cry (“bawl”) and referred to a mothball that wards away moths from clothes.

Interestingly, scholar Nancy Bell, who specializes in research regarding students who are English language learners (ELL), states that humor can help ELL individuals learn about culture, communication expectations, social nuances, and may help them to understand humor that they encounter outside of academia (Bell, “Humor Scholarship and” 152). Scholar Catherine Evans Davies also states that humor may present ELL

students with “an opportunity not only to learn how to engage in the joke activity, but also to experience its social meaning in American society” (1382). Thus, including humor writing in FYC may give ELL students opportunities to learn about English and American culture and social interactions. Additionally, as in George’s case, misunderstood humor may give students chances to interact with one another. Also, as they try to explain moments in humorous texts to their ELL classmates, native English speaking (NES) students likely verbalize (i.e., make conscious) English idioms, rules, and/or quirks that they have internalized. This likely enhances the abilities of NES students to think consciously about the language they use and give them practice with that language, and it provides students with opportunities to learn from each other.

However, Bell claims that word play, such as that in the moth ball joke, may be particularly difficult for ELL students (“Learning about and” 244). For George, the moth ball joke was perhaps a failed learning opportunity since he stated that he still did not understand the joke at the end of class. Yet it should be stated that George did successfully learn about other idioms and word plays throughout the semester via other humorous texts. Thus, one failed joke did not prevent George from learning from other humorous material.

Nevertheless, some instructors may feel that the inclusion of humor writing could possibly put the spotlight on ELL students in a negative way and may cause ELL students to feel as if they are outside of the group of NES students in a class (Bell, “Learning about and”). Yet, Bell maintains that composition classes are safe spaces for students to test, question, and experiment with language (“Learning about and” 250). She even asserts that composition instructors have a responsibility to expose ELL students to

humor in order to safeguard them from possibly being embarrassed outside of class. Bell writes, “rather than leave learners to struggle along to discover the nuances of . . . humor, it is the responsibility of instructors and textbook writers to take advantage of the growing research base on humor in native English speaker interaction to help their students as they grapple with this aspect” of English language learning (252). Therefore, humor writing as curricular material for FYC is an opportunity to help ELL students to learn about English and explore culture and communication in a safe space.

In addition to humor writing possibly generating student misunderstanding of texts, there may be a risk of offending some students. Some instructors may feel that the possibility of offending even a single student is not worth risking their careers and potentially putting them in a position to become victims of cancel culture. Indeed, “cancel culture” has seemed to complicate matters as even academics, who frequently work under the banner of intellectual freedom and whose work perhaps explores difficult and uncomfortable elements of society in order to better understand them and even promote tolerance, may have their research criticized and misunderstood to the point of dire consequences. Some scholars have found themselves blackballed from publishing because of what they feel is others’ misunderstandings of their research (Fazackerley, “Sacked or Silenced”; Darbyshire et al. 2786).

Admittedly, “cancel culture” may have benefits in that it could shine light on injustices, invoke change, and call for personal responsibility through public outcry, although some debate its efficacy to affect real and stable change in problematic institutions and systems (Freedman, “Critics of ‘Cancel’”; Darbyshire et al. 2786; Andrews 905-906). However, the values and consequences of “cancel culture” are not at

the heart of this dissertation, and discussing their intricacies may require its own dissertation. The point of addressing “cancel culture” is to determine how it may affect instructors should they use humor writing in FYC and how any risks may be mitigated.

There is a key here that I believe will help instructors to protect themselves and their students—situated knowledge. As ironic as it may be, situated knowledge may be part of both humor writing’s foundation and saving grace. By encouraging students to look at humor writing through the lens of situated knowledge, students are guided to see how writers own or do not own their knowledge’s biases and shaping influences. My rhetorical analyses in Chapter III imply that humor writing may often situate its knowledge, therefore any ideologies are likely owned repeatedly by the authors themselves. In other words, humor writing may lend itself to students seeing that the ownership of the words and ideas in texts belongs to the writers themselves rather than to their FYC instructors. In turn, this may protect instructors from being “cancelled” by their students because much of the onus is on the writers as opposed to the instructors.

Instructors may also be comforted in knowing that current scholarship finds that the majority of the population does not take part in “cancel culture.” As feminist scholar Penny Andrews states, “the general public aren’t actually engaged with these attempts at culture war. . . but the noisiest fragments are the ones that get the most traction in the media” (Andrews 905). Also, instructors should keep in mind that, as Casper states, there are few “universally offensive utterance[s]” (429). Casper asserts that this is in part because language, practices, behaviors, meanings, and even offense are “situated in deeply historical contexts . . . some acts that would be considered unthinkable crude in our contemporary cultural moment were conceptualized much differently in other eras”

(429). I encountered an instance of this when I was teaching FYC piloting humor writing, and it is worthwhile to discuss in order to show how instructors may address humor that perhaps has evolved to feel offensive to students.

As I have previously stated, I often showed short clips of standup comedians to my students in order to demonstrate principles (such as audience awareness and situated knowledge) of rhetoric and composition, help students to engage consciously with those principles, and aid students in practicing their rhetorical analysis skills. In one lesson, I played a Rodney Dangerfield clip in which he says the following, “I’ll tell you. I’ll tell you. When it comes to girls, I don’t think like other guys. I mean a lot of guys, they want to go out with a girl who’s fast, a girl who’s been around. Not me. I want to go out with a good girl, a girl who’s never played around. I figure she’s due” (00:00:00—00:00:15). In both of the semesters in which I taught this video, not one student laughed at this joke, and I asked them why. Some replied that they did not understand the joke and, after I questioned them further, I found that some students had difficulty understanding what a “fast” girl is and what it means when Dangerfield says, “I figure she’s due.” After I explained, the students still did not find the joke funny, and I encouraged them to explain. Some individuals expressed that it felt “wrong” to talk about women like that. This led to discussions about kairos, how culture informs texts, how culture influences audiences’ reactions to texts, and how culture concerning women and female sexuality had changed since Dangerfield made that joke in 1970.

As an instructor, students dubbing Dangerfield’s joke as “wrong” suggests that some of them felt at least some degree of offense from the text. However, the students’ offense led to productive conversations about kairos, culture, and audience awareness,

and we as a class situated the students' knowledge regarding female sexuality and sexual choices as they explained and explored their reactions to Dangerfield's text. Students could also see kairos in action—when the kairos was opportune (hence the audience's laughter at Dangerfield's joke in the video) and how kairos could change over time. Offense, therefore, led to academic discussions and analyses of important aspects of rhetoric and composition. Another instance of student offense is worthy of note to show further how offense can lead to academic inquiry for students.

I had a student, Jay, who was from Georgia, was fairly quiet in class, and wore a cross around his neck every day.<sup>10</sup> For one class, I had students read excerpts from George Carlin's *Napalm & Silly Putty* as part of an in-class, small-group activity. As usual, I asked who thought the author was funny and who did not think the author was funny, and I encouraged students to explain their stances. Jay sat looking noticeably bristled, and he stated that Carlin was not funny, because Jay felt as if there are some topics that should not be joked about, such as religion, and he felt that Carlin's joking about religion was disrespectful. I nodded and acknowledged that perhaps there are some topics that we as audiences feel that people should not joke about, and this led to discussions about what topics may be off limits and why and how audiences can dictate what is un/acceptable material. In essence, we discussed topics that centered around audience awareness.

Jay took this further and used Carlin for one of his argumentative papers, even though he had the freedom to choose whatever text he wanted to for the assignment. In

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<sup>10</sup> Jay's name has been changed from its original to protect the student's identity.



his pre-planning stages, Jay took the stance that religion is a topic that should not be treated with humor because such is disrespectful. So, I was surprised when I received Jay's final draft and his stance was that it is acceptable to joke about religion to varying degrees depending on the audience.

This complete change prompted me to ask Jay about it before class one day. In response, he shrugged and stated that after some research, he changed his mind. Perhaps I should have pushed Jay further for my own understanding of his writing process, but I did not because class was about to begin.

Jay's story sheds light on instructors' possible fear of offending students with humorous curricular material. My understanding was that Jay was indeed offended by curricular material that I had included in my class. However, there are two important takeaways herein. First, Jay did not seem to attribute that offense to me personally. His behavior did not change toward me throughout the semester, and he continued to be positive and respectful toward me. If Jay had transferred his offense felt from Carlin to me as his instructor, one would think that I would have likely seen or felt it in some way from Jay, yet I did not. This suggests that Jay centered his feelings of offense toward Carlin with little or none toward me. Second, Jay used his offense as a way to enter Carlin's text and examine it with a critical and academic eye. This led him to moving past his initial emotion of offense to understanding what offense may mean for him, for other audiences, and for the author, and why authors may use offensive humor. In sum, Jay's experience demonstrates how students can feel offended at curricular materials but then use that offense as a way to examine texts in academic and critical ways. Not every offended student may react as Jay did. However, although I had students respond

similarly to Jay regarding various topics, I had no instances of students coming to me and expressing their offense toward me as their instructor because of any curricular materials that I included.

In addition to using offense to begin one's academic inquiry, offense could show students how humor writers may purposefully offend audiences in order to push people to examine and question their beliefs, cultures, and mores. Helitzer and Shatz write that comedian Chris Rock "deliberately uses material guaranteed to offend everybody" in order to challenge "the established order" (188). Rishel states that satire that employs "grotesque humor," which aims to criticize society by shocking and causing discomfort to audiences, may purposefully provoke in order to spark reformation within audiences (174). She also claims that what she dubs as "sick humor" also purposefully violates taboos in order to challenge "proper conventions of what we're allowed to think and feel" (175). Thus, offense caused by humor writing could be used in academia to help students explore what may impact societal acceptability and, consequently, power relationships. However, advanced courses may be a better venue for studying extremely offensive material as such requires nuanced thinking and complex analysis skills to which FYC students may be still nascent.

Thus, even though offense may be used as an opportunity for students to engage with texts and begin their academic inquiries, it is understandable that instructors may want to reduce the possibility of student offense as much as they can. One way in which student offense from a text may be mitigated is by instructors being aware of the targets of each text that they teach before they assign the reading and then balancing out those texts with other source materials with differing points of view and also providing

explanations and disclaimers. For example, when assigning a piece of humorous writing from Dennis Miller (a political conservative), instructors should be aware that the target (meaning the receiver of the hostility in a joke or piece of humor) is politically-left-leaning people (Helitzer and Shatz 39). Instructors could expose Miller's bias when they give students Miller's background prior to students reading his work. Additionally, teachers could include a text that targets conservatives in order to balance out Miller's viewpoint. This would ensure that both conservatives and liberals are targeted, and FYC students may not necessarily see bias in instructors toward a certain ideology, because the instructors include texts that lampoon both right and left politics. This balance would be particularly apparent if the conservative- and liberal-targeting texts are taught within a short time span of one another, because such would imply that the texts are being equally represented and are purposefully meant to balance one another.

If students see their instructors at least attempt to balance what targets are being hit by their studied texts, then students will be unlikely to feel as if their beliefs are being attacked by the instructors themselves. Teachers may also communicate this endeavor of balance to their students by stating, "I am trying to include texts that hit everyone just to give you a range of topics. I am not trying to target some more than others, and I try my best to balance things. I may fail, but know that I'm trying." Such a disclaimer perhaps shows students that instructors are committed to diversity of thought and to equal representation and are not trying to vilify any person, philosophy, creed, etc. Moreover, students will likely view the attacks in their assigned texts as originating from, and being owned by, the authors instead of viewing them as condemnations on students by

instructors. In this way, possibly offensive material may be viewed as learning opportunities rather than as personal attacks on students.

I piloted Miller's work following the guidelines I have outlined above—I provided the aforementioned disclaimer, exposed his biases prior to students reading the material, balanced it with a left-leaning text, and taught Miller's piece within the same class period as I taught the countering text. I found that students seemed to appreciate the balance of viewpoints, and I detected no animosity from the students toward me while they analyzed the texts in small groups and then reported their findings to the class. Admittedly, students may have had some animosity toward me and I simply did not feel it, but either way they collectively engaged with, and demonstrated increased mastery over, audience awareness and situated knowledge when analyzing those texts.

If instructors are still fearful of risking offense, then, when eliciting student participation, they should avoid “embarrassment, sarcasm, and ridicule” toward students during their analyses of texts and their contributions to class, which is actually no different from how instructors should ideally treat students in most, if not all, classes (Wallinger 32). Instructors may also stick to “safer” topics and targets, such as “celebrities, places, products, and ideas” (Helitzer and Shatz 38). Moreover, as with FYC classes that use genres other than humor writing, instructors should be deliberate and intelligent in their choices of texts for curricular inclusion, and those inclusions should be in line with what instructors are comfortable with and what reflects their desired personas. Additionally, selected texts should lend themselves to teaching the standard learning outcomes of instructors' schools and departments. Teachers may also avoid including authors and comedians who are centers of controversy or have committed

crimes that the instructors themselves are uncomfortable with. For example, although I had several students enjoy and analyze Louis C.K. in their papers and I included a clip of him during lectures for class analysis before his sexual misconduct came to light, I would no longer include him in my material because I am uncomfortable with his actions (Sharf, “Louis C.K. Accuser”). In the future, should I have students choose to analyze the comedian for an assignment, I would have a one-on-one discussions with the students about the humorist’s background and then ask the students if they are still comfortable with using the comedian for the assignment. If they are indeed comfortable, then I would allow the students to use the humorist for their assignments. As my *Sausage Party* student showed me, there are times in which students can positively surprise instructors.

This brings up a valid point though—what if a student is comfortable with a topic and humorist but their peers are not? Oftentimes in FYC, students do small group work, so they use each other to learn, bounce ideas off of, and receive feedback on their papers. There are several options to help mitigate this risk. First, instructors may establish early on, and throughout the semester, that the class looks at humorous texts through critical and academic lenses, which, as demonstrated with Jay, may help to use moments of offense in positive and productive ways. Second, instructors can encourage students throughout the semester to choose texts that they would be comfortable sharing with their peers, which may help them to think about audience awareness when it comes to their papers and their fellow students. Third, instructors can offer the opportunity to move them to different small groups if they feel uncomfortable with certain topics or humorists that other students may have chosen.

I have never encountered this challenge when piloting humorous texts in FYC. I have, however, encountered it when I was teaching FYC while not using humorous texts. The short story is worth telling as it demonstrates that it is unlikely that teachers can completely safeguard their classes from some students feeling offended, uncomfortable, or upset. At the time, I was modelling on the whiteboard how to brainstorm for a research topic with my FYC class. I asked for a topic, and a student chose airplanes because she was fascinated with them. As a class, we began brainstorming on the board, and after a few minutes, another student raised her hand and asked to be excused because the topic bothered her and I saw that she was starting to cry. I nodded and transitioned quickly to another topic, and the student chose to remain in the class. The student later emailed me that her brother had recently died in a plane crash, which is why the brainstorm on airplanes had greatly upset her.

My vignette demonstrates that even a topic as seemingly neutral as airplanes may be upsetting to students. Non-humorous and humorous writing carry the risk of upsetting students or making them feel uncomfortable. As Casper asserts, “risk is a positive condition of possibility in all communication” (431). Furthermore, students feeling uncomfortable at times may simply be part of the learning process. Casper claims that there is no way “students can be protected from uncomfortable experiences in the classroom without also sanitizing the classroom and neutralizing spontaneous exigence” (431). Burke also states that “the materials incorporated within the frame are never broad enough to encompass all necessary attitudes” (40). Scholar Kaelin B.C. Alexander even suggests that it is erroneous to equate student happiness with pedagogical success, because student discomfort may “inspire readings and attachments that are surprising,

pushing students to foster worldviews that are complicatedly considered” (69). Thus, discomfort may be unavoidable at times, but it may lead to learning as demonstrated by Jay’s story.

This is not to say that instructors should not aim for student happiness and enjoyment in classes. Rather, this discussion should function as reassurance for instructors that student discomfort may not always be a negative and dire situation, so it should not be feared to the point that it keeps teachers from using possibly useful curricular materials.

In sum, offense may not be something to fear, because such could offer students opportunities to delve into why a text may be offensive. Offense often necessitates that students investigate biases inherent in a text and in the offended audience (whether or not that includes the students themselves) as well as the social and cultural mores and expectations that may dictate whether or not something is offensive. All of this involves students thinking from various perspectives, situating knowledge, practicing audience awareness, understanding claims, and discovering and questioning the evidence and logic behind those claims. Offense may also provide FYC students with occasions to question and critique the cultural and societal norms in a text. In these ways, such offensive pieces provide learning opportunities to practice skills of rhetoric and composition that many instructors desire to instill in their FYC students.

If instructors eschew humorous texts because some of the perspectives may possibly offend students, then teachers risk, as Casper puts it, encouraging “a backlash against free expression of thought vis-à-vis the increasing institutional embrace of trigger warnings, warnings that—while empathetic in their intentions—produce the paradoxical

effect of limiting rhetorical invention and discouraging creative exploration of some of the most tendentious issues of our historical moment,” which may result in “an intellectual death sentence” (Casper 431). Additionally, instructors may risk supporting “the infantilization of the American undergraduate” in which a student behaves as “a consumer, someone whose whims and affectations (political, sexual, pseudo-intellectual) must be constantly supported and championed” (Flanagan 71).

If instructors are too afraid (or are not allowed) to expose students to multiple perspectives in order to encourage students to broaden their horizons, critically examine ways of thinking other than their own, and encounter various ways of being, then I must ask: What is the point? If we are not allowed to teach various perspectives, then we may risk teaching one singular perspective to our FYC students, and whose perspective will that be? What power structures and biases will we be forcing on our students? More to the point, *whose* power structures and biases will we be forcing on our students? As situated knowledge demonstrates, there is no knowledge that is bias free. So, whose knowledge will we be professing in our classrooms? Are we willing to sacrifice diversity in FYC in the name of not offending? To me, the possibility of promoting mono-thinking by eschewing teaching multiple perspectives in the name of not offending students may have more grave consequences than potentially offending students and then having open, and likely productive, conversations about those offenses.

#### **4. Other Concerns Regarding this Research**

Despite my careful review of current literature and endeavor to have a systematic methodology, there are three main possible concerns regarding this dissertation’s research—my methodology’s use of pronouns, whether the chosen authors consciously



use audience awareness and situated knowledge, and if the analyzed authors are genuine in their writing.

First, I separate pronouns often associated with authors from pronouns typically associated with audiences and then use them to enter texts and begin my rhetorical analyses. I do not include “they” as referring to the author, and this could perhaps be seen as exclusionary. However, while researching my chosen authors, I found that none of them used “they/them/their” for their preferred pronouns. Thus, including “they” as referring to the author would serve no practical purpose in my analyses—the authors simply do not use “they” to refer to themselves. The choice is therefore out of practicality and not of exclusion.

For future research, it may be wise for investigators to ascertain writers’ preferred pronouns before the researchers begin their rhetorical analyses of those texts. If a writer has the preferred pronoun of “they,” then “they/them/their” should be included as words possibly referring to the author.

This line of logic can be extended to classroom practice. Instructors can provide students with the authors’ preferred pronouns when discussing the writers’ backgrounds. This enables students to know, rather than assume, what pronouns to look for when searching for words associated with the author versus words associated with possible audiences during their rhetorical analyses. Also, there are other ways of entering texts to conduct rhetorical analyses aside from looking for author-related and audience-related words, such as looking at the conceptual level for ideas that speak to audience awareness and/or situated knowledge rather than looking for specific words that may connect to said

concepts. Instructors may encourage their students to explore this method as well as others to determine what works best for them.

Another possible limitation of my research is whether or not it matters if authors consciously use audience awareness and situated knowledge in their texts. As much of rhetoric and composition now accepts, process and product are not wholly separate—the process influences the product and should be taken into account when writing, teaching writing, and analyzing writing (Flower and Hayes, “A Cognitive Process”; Emig).

However, since students cannot observe authors’ writing processes, they must infer those processes (including intention) via what they see in writers’ texts (Warnock 561). This is where the analyses of texts’ audience awareness and situated knowledge are particularly useful because, as shown in Chapter III’s rhetorical analyses, said concepts reflect what is present in texts to show authorial intentions. Thus, to some degree, authors’ conscious use of audience awareness and situated knowledge matters in that such frequently shapes how audience awareness and situated knowledge are manifested in texts.

However, students also bring their intentions, biases, and backgrounds to their analyses, which influence how they view and interpret texts (Warnock 561). If a student finds an instance of audience awareness that an author did not intend to create when drafting, the student’s finding is not worthless. The student still learns how to look for and analyze audience awareness in that moment, and this is the point: for students to consciously engage with and learn about audience awareness. An author’s conscious use of audience awareness, or lack thereof, has no bearing upon that students’ mastery of audience awareness.

This is akin to whether or not fiction writers intend to put symbolism in their texts and if that matters to students studying those texts. For example, one student wrote to famous authors asking if they meant to insert symbolism into their writing (Reilly, “Famous Novelists on”). Joseph Heller, who wrote *Catch-22*, responded that he does consciously place symbolism in his work, but that “there are inevitably many occasions when events acquire a meaning additional to the one originally intended” (Reilly, “Famous Novelists on”). For readers who have found symbolism in his work that he had not originally intended, Heller states, “I have been able to learn something about my own book, for readers have seen much in the book that is there, although I was not aware of it being there.” Heller’s words can be extended to whether or not authorial intention matters for analyzing humorous texts for audience awareness and situated knowledge—yes, it does matter, but it also does not. Ultimately, an author’s intention shapes a text, but it does not determine student understanding of audience awareness and situated knowledge and students’ abilities to use said concepts

The possible effects of authors’ genuineness perhaps make for a more complicated discussion than the effects of an authors’ intentions. For the humorous texts that I have chosen to analyze in this dissertation, there are two whose authenticities are seemingly more questionable than the others—those of Phan and Sedaris. Phan has admitted to using a group of writers to help write his jokes. Sedaris has admitted to fictionalizing at least a portion of many of his essays. Does this matter? Yes and no.

If what authors write is not written solely by them and may not be reflective of what actually happened or who they are in reality, then can the authors really situate their knowledge? Yes, they are indeed situating knowledge because they are essentially giving

approval to the material since they are attaching their names to it, even if the personas they create in their texts are not wholly reflective of who the writers are in reality. By placing that metaphorical stamp of approval of their name, they are effectively owning that knowledge whether or not it originated with them and whether or not it was actually what happened. Moreover, students can still learn about how writers situate knowledge and how to analyze such in texts such those by Phan and Sedaris. Furthermore, it may be fruitful for students to explore how authorial personas may change in response to rhetorical situations and audiences. For instance, Phan states that he tailors his jokes to his audience's demographics before he goes onstage, such as taking out any curse words if his audience is primarily older adults (Duck, "Dinner at the"). This shows an author actively changing his persona and text to appease an audience, thereby demonstrating how audience awareness can influence writing. Such a discussion could then be extended to academia and how to whom students are writing (i.e., their audience) may alter how and what they write. In this way, and as with authorial intention, genuineness may not matter much and a changing persona may render beneficial discussion with students.

Nevertheless, writers' genuineness is significant in that it gives instructors the opportunity to invite students into discussions regarding authenticity in writing and how much it does, or does not, matter in writing and in other aspects of life. It could also lead to discussions on topics that address what "ownership" looks like when it comes to creative ideas and within academia, such as how much researchers truly own of their academic papers if the majority of the experiments they write about were done by their graduate students; where the line may be between collaboration and plagiarism; and if writers must believe in what they write in order to have the ethos to write it.

#### **IV. Summary**

This chapter discussed much of the significance of my rhetorical analyses' findings—specifically that the chosen humorous texts offer students numerous opportunities to consciously engage with, analyze, and practice audience awareness and situated knowledge. The texts also provide students with possibilities for investigating foundational concepts to rhetoric and composition, including kairos, ethos, pathos, and logos. These findings suggest that humor writing in general can provide students with useful and engaging opportunities to study audience awareness, situated knowledge, kairos, and the aforementioned Aristotelian appeals.

In light of the rhetorical analyses' findings, my research on the current literature, and my classroom experience in piloting FYC courses that included humor writing, I have offered a piloted lesson plan, in-class activities, discussion questions, and a major assignment that centers on using humor writing to teach FYC students about audience awareness and situated knowledge. These materials demonstrate tangibly how instructors may include humor writing in their FYC courses to teach audience awareness and situated knowledge. The proposed discussion questions and activities have great potential to help students learn about, analyze, and use audience awareness and situated knowledge in terms of their reading skills and possibly in their writing endeavors as well. The materials were successful in my piloted courses, and they may be tailored to instructors' preferences and likely be similarly successful.

In this chapter, I also delineated some of the possible risks of including humor writing in FYC classes such as potentially lowering an instructor's ethos with students, downplaying the seriousness of rhetoric and composition and/or the class, having

students misunderstand the material (particularly ELL students), and possibly offending students. With each risk, I discussed how such may be mitigated through careful and thoughtful selection of texts, avoidance of possibly problematic authors, encouragement of viewing texts through academic and critical lenses, and open and honest conversations with students. While the risks may feel intimidating at first to instructors, my classroom experience demonstrates that they can be largely mitigated and that to avoid humor writing because of such fear means possibly taking away valuable learning opportunities from students. Admittedly, the risks may not be completely eradicated, but the possible benefits of humor writing in FYC seem to outweigh the risks.

Last, I addressed possible concerns regarding my research including my use of pronouns and the possible significance of authorial intention and genuineness on student understanding and conscious engagement with audience awareness and situated knowledge in texts. I found that the pronoun usage to begin rhetorically analyzing texts can either be avoided or tailored for other authors and their chosen pronouns. Further, I discussed how authorial intention and genuineness may provide fodder for classroom discussions, but they do not necessarily obstruct student understanding and engagement with audience awareness and situated knowledge in humorous texts.

In sum, this chapter has explored what my findings and literature review mean for the FYC classroom, offered tangible ways of incorporating humor writing into FYC, identified some of the risks of including humor writing, offered ways to mitigate those risks, and explored how other concerns (such as pronoun usage and authorial intention and genuineness) may be changed for future research and use when conducting rhetorical analyses and possibly function as doorways to productive conversations in FYC. For this

dissertation's final chapter, I offer paths for future research and revisit my guiding research questions.

## Chapter V: Conclusion

*It's all over but the crying.*

### I. Journey and Growth

This dissertation began as an investigation into phenomena that I observed during my FYC classes when I piloted humor writing as curricular material. During these classes, I saw students often enjoy learning about principles of rhetoric and composition as they worked with humorous texts. Also, my students collectively showed a high level of audience awareness and the abilities to recognize and use situated knowledge when analyzing texts. My perpetual questions of “Why was that funny?” and “Why wasn’t that funny?” elicited responses in which students appeared to engage consciously with elements of rhetoric and composition. The success of my students seemed linked to the material that they were studying, and since FYC instructors are often charged with the task of finding engaging and useful curricular materials, I thought that humor writing could be a possible solution to this challenge. Thus, three research questions have guided me in my investigation. 1) How might humor writing be used as a teaching tool in FYC? 2) How might humor writing be used to teach FYC students to engage consciously with and analyze audience awareness and situated knowledge? and 3) What are some of the risks of using humor writing to teach rhetoric and composition in FYC, and how can they be minimized?

The first chapter of this dissertation laid the foundation for these questions to be asked by providing context for my interest in the topic and identifying an important issue in the field—the necessity for many FYC instructors to locate and use engaging curricular materials that lend, and even encourage, students to practice and hone



principles of rhetoric and composition. Chapter I provided integral definitions, established the importance of audience awareness and situated knowledge to FYC education, and explored how humor is currently viewed in higher education. A survey of the current literature indicated that there has been some research on how humor affects student retention of material, student-instructor rapport, and student understanding of literary devices such as irony. However, little research has directly addressed how using humor writing in FYC may enable students to engage consciously with and analyze audience awareness and situated knowledge—two key principles of rhetoric and composition. Thus, while disheartening to see a lack of research in this area, the gap did provide me with an opportunity to add to the current literature.

I then engaged in an exploration of humor's historical dance with rhetoric and composition. My investigation showed that humor has been used to teach students rhetoric and composition by some of the "greats," including Aristotle and Quintilian, but its use largely fell out of educational favor due to student population pressures on academia and changing societal attitudes. The work-play bifurcation that emerged during the Industrial Revolution was particularly damaging to humor's reputation in education because under this bifurcation, anything eliciting joy and amusement was frequently seen as anathema to serious and valuable work. This work-play bifurcation and other aspects of humor led me to explore some of the perceived risks of using humor in education—some of which I have enumerated in this chapter, but I discussed most of them in depth later in Chapter IV. Nevertheless, as some of the academy increasingly, to varying degrees, accept popular culture within the ivory towers, humor is making a comeback.

In this dissertation's second chapter, I laid out my methodology for examining humorous texts to see if I were indeed correct in my initial hunch that humor writing employs audience awareness and situated knowledge, which would explain, at least in part, why my students seemed to do so well in latching onto, understanding, and using audience awareness and situated knowledge when they analyzed humorous texts. If my intuition were incorrect, then there would be few if any instances of audience awareness and situated knowledge in the humorous texts that I would analyze. However, if I my suspicions were correct, then perhaps those concepts would not only be there, but they also may be abundantly present.

The best method for my investigation was rhetorical analysis guided by ideological criticism, as rhetorical analysis is known for being useful for examining texts with a fine-toothed comb while not necessarily leaving out the importance of context. Also, rhetorical analysis is a frequent tool of rhetoric and composition and one that FYC students are often taught. In fact, I taught, and continue to teach, my FYC students how to rhetorically analyze texts. Therefore, it was logical for this dissertation to use both a tool that is prevalent in my field and one that is frequently taught to FYC students. Also, although I did not realize it at the time, perhaps the best way to appeal to an audience and to demonstrate my logic is to use the audience's "language," and certainly rhetorical analysis is part of the language of rhetoric and composition.

Also in Chapter II, I explained what texts I chose to analyze and why. Two of the texts—those of Sedaris and Branch—were works that I had taught in FYC. Two of the texts—those of Kaling and Phan—were materials that I had not taught before. I included Phan's standup comedy routine because I saw many of my students doing the same great

work with comedic videos as they were doing with humorous written texts, and I wanted to investigate this phenomenon.

Analyzing two texts I previously taught allowed me to examine further what I saw in my classes, while having two works that I had not taught enabled me to conduct analyses on texts without having past teaching experiences possibly influence my analyses. This helped me to investigate if, and to what extent, the phenomena I saw in the taught texts were also in the non-taught texts—indeed, I needed to know if I simply got lucky with my chosen texts in class or if this was indeed phenomena frequently used in humorous writing. This, I hoped, would give me a solid data set to rhetorically analyze humor writing with the aim of ascertaining to what extent and in what ways humorous texts employed audience awareness and situated knowledge.

Upon reflection, I am satisfied with the balance of taught and “new” works in my chosen texts. I am also content with the geographic, racial, economic, and background diversity of my chosen authors. However, my findings regarding Phan would likely have been further supported by analyzing more comedic standups in this dissertation. In my future scholarly work, I will investigate more comedic standups to continue to examine if what I have found in Phan’s text and what I have seen in my own FYC courses when using standup routines still holds true for other humorous performances. For instance, perhaps verbally-focused routines such as Phan’s may be more apropos and productive for curricular use in FYC than performances that are more focused on physical comedy, such as those of Robin Williams. These future investigations, I hope, will lead me to creating and providing more guidelines, activities, and assignments for FYC instructors to help them in their curricular endeavors.

In this dissertation's third chapter, I carried out rhetorical analyses on my chosen texts and provided necessary background information on the authors of those texts. In addition to recording each instance of audience awareness and situated knowledge that I found, I explored each occurrence with regard to its purposes in the moment, its possible connections to audiences, its possible relations to authors' backgrounds, and its possible intentions within the text as a whole. This, I hoped, would show to what extent audience awareness and situated knowledge were employed in the texts, where those occasions were, and what each occurrence was doing within the moment and within the text as a whole.

I found numerous instances of audience awareness and situated knowledge during the course of my rhetorical analyses. These findings support the claim that humor writing may be used as a milieu to teach FYC students about audience awareness and situated knowledge. Furthermore, I found many examples—ranging from overt to subtle—thereby indicating that such texts enable FYC instructors to choose from the plentiful examples, demonstrate for students audience awareness and situated knowledge in action, and encourage students to engage consciously with such concepts via rhetorical analysis (conducted individually, within small groups of their classmates, and/or within a class as a whole) and through verbalizing and/or transcribing their findings.

Upon reflection, I believe that I accomplished what I set out to do in this chapter, and I was pleasantly surprised at how prevalent audience awareness and situated knowledge were in my analyzed texts. Additionally, I believe that my in-depth discussions of two instances of audience awareness and two instances of situated knowledge for each of my chosen texts worked well to show what I as a reader,

instructor, and researcher saw was going on in the texts. The discussions also functioned as places to begin should instructors want to incorporate humor writing in their FYC classes and show students how to conduct rhetorical analyses on humor writing.

Although these rhetorical analyses supported my initial hunch about humor writing, I felt that they were not enough. In order to help FYC instructors use humor writing in their courses and reap the possible benefits of using humor writing to teach audience awareness and situated knowledge, I needed to outline and discuss practicable ways to implement humor writing as curricular material in FYC, which led me to Chapter IV.

The fourth chapter of this dissertation used a combination of the results from my rhetorical analyses and my classroom experiences to explore how humor may be used in FYC to teach audience awareness and situated knowledge. I offered a lesson plan, a major assignment prompt, and several discussion questions to show FYC instructors how humor writing may be used as curricular material. Also, I analyzed my classroom experiences to communicate what happened in my classes, explore why such occurred, and express what I hope can happen in future iterations of FYC.

Chapter IV also explored some of the risks that may come with the curricular inclusion of humor writing. For example, there could be a lowering of an instructor's ethos with students and/or downplaying of the seriousness of rhetoric and composition and/or the instructor's class. There could also be student misunderstanding of humorous writing thereby reducing the texts' effectiveness to teach audience awareness and situated knowledge. Additionally, there is a risk of some students being offended by a perspective espoused in a humorous text.

With regard to an instructor's ethos, I emphasize once more that an instructor need not be a standup comedian in order to include humor writing in curricular material. The spotlight of analysis is not on the instructor but is instead on the material itself—the texts are to be analyzed, not an instructor's comedic prowess (or lack thereof).

Also, if instructors are uncomfortable with texts or topics that students have chosen for analysis, then instructors should have conversations with those students to understand why they have chosen those texts or topics to ensure that students are looking at the material through academic and critical lenses, and that students' choices are not the result of students feeling confused or overwhelmed. Instructors should remain open to students' choices, but it is within instructors' powers to request that students pick something else, redirect students, and include/exclude material that may or may not be in line with instructors' personas and levels of comfort.

Although misunderstandings of material may be a particular concern for ELL students, humor writing still presents useful opportunities for ELL students to learn English, be exposed to English idioms, and practice and analyze English in a safe space. A misunderstood joke can also present students with an opportunity to interact with one another and for students to explore and verbalize English guidelines and quirks that they have perhaps unconsciously internalized. Also, instructors should understand that one failed joke does not preclude ELL students from learning about English, culture, communication expectations, and social nuances from other jokes and humorous texts.

With regard to the risk of offense, endemic to much of humor writing, and humor in general, is taking a side on an issue. In doing so, the risk of offending in some fashion may be unavoidable at times. Currently, FYC instructors teach in an age in which

students have access to massive amounts of information, and some of this information may be misinformation that could lead to predilections for offense in students. However, examining humor writing in FYC can help students learn how to analyze information, particularly regarding audience awareness and situated knowledge, and such may lead to them questioning the information/misinformation that they come into contact with. Satire particularly has a long history of using offense to lampoon entrenched and powerful institutions and beliefs, provoke enlightenment, alert and invigorate societal awareness, and promote social change. Thus, it is likely that, despite the risk of offense, satire and other humor writing have much to offer FYC.

Indeed, my research and experience have demonstrated to me that offense and feeling uncomfortable cannot be completely avoided for every student in every class. Furthermore, offense could also present students with meaningful moments for them to be exposed to and examine different perspectives, beliefs, cultures, biases, and power relations. Offense may also offer students occasions to examine ethos, pathos, logos, and kairos. Additionally, offense can make for a significant opportunity for students to study how writers may push audiences to think or change by purposefully offending audiences and/or making them feel uncomfortable.

Extremely offensive material is perhaps not suitable or feasible for being FYC curricular material at this moment in time. Yet, it may find a place in other classes, such as more advanced undergraduate writing courses and even graduate writing classes. Indeed, the FYC classroom is not a free-for-all when it comes to curricular texts. Still, a combination of choosing works that adhere to school and departmental standard learning

outcomes and that abide by instructors' goals and classroom personas may mitigate the potential for offense.

At the beginning of my research, I postulated that humor can be a possible answer to FYC instructors' challenge of including engaging material that lends itself to students practicing and honing their reading, analytical, and writing skills—I believe that my dissertation and its findings support this hypothesis to be true. Although seemingly simple, the questions of “Why is this funny?” and “Why is this not funny?” encourage students to make conscious what they may have internalized and to support their claims with analysis and evidence. Indeed, my rhetorical analysis results, in conjunction with my classroom experience, support the claim that humor writing is a possible answer to FYC instructors' challenge of including engaging material that lends itself to students learning about and practicing their uses of audience awareness and situated knowledge.

As a researcher and instructor, this dissertation has emboldened my stances that 1) humor writing can be used as a pedagogical tool; 2) humor writing can provide engaging texts to be studied; and 3) humor writing presents useful and engaging opportunities for students to study principles of rhetoric and composition, particularly audience awareness and situated knowledge. Although there are some risks to using humor in education, my research and teaching experience have shown me that those risks can be greatly mitigated and that they do not outweigh the benefits that students can reap from studying humor writing in FYC.

This project has also shown me that perhaps audience awareness and situated knowledge are more intertwined than I had originally anticipated. When I first began my research, I thought that they were somewhat separate. However, my rhetorical analyses



have demonstrated that they may be tools of one another—situated knowledge functioning to show audience awareness and audience awareness informing how and why authors situate their knowledge. I am unsure of whether or not this is because humor is frequently a condensed form of writing so words and sentences often carry out more than one purpose, or if this is audience awareness and situated knowledge's co-occurrence extending beyond humor writing, but I believe that such may warrant further inquiry.

## **II. A Path Forward: Suggestions for Future Research**

I piloted humor writing and the materials I offered in Chapter IV in two different FYC courses during different years. Future research may include duplicating such materials and curricular texts with a different instructor to ascertain how much an instructor is a shaping influence on how students respond to humorous texts and on students learning about audience awareness and situated knowledge through those works. Thus, I would like to see this research conducted in more FYC classes with different instructors.

Additionally, I would like to pilot humor writing as curricular material in other undergraduate writing courses. There are some courses that focus on satire, but the analysis and writing of satire does not appear to be broadly taught as undergraduate writing curricula, and perhaps it and other types of humor writing should/could be. Thus, another research opportunity is to examine how some humor writing may be used in undergraduate composition courses to show how humor writers may provoke audiences to make them uncomfortable in order to cause audiences to question their perspectives, cultural practices, beliefs, and social mores. Humor writers may also intentionally offend so as to demonstrate and question boundaries of social acceptability and create

commentary that seeks to promote social change. This aspect of humor writing could further aid students in learning about situated knowledge since such requires students to examine intentions, biases, balances of power, social dynamics, and experiences that inform writers to take such a tactic as intentionally communicating “offensive” knowledge. The benefits of having students study this element of some humor writing should be examined, and the parameters of how to include such work should be studied and delineated so that instructors may decide if and how they include humor writing in their courses. The possible constraints and downsides of including such potentially offensive texts should also be further explored in order to understand if this is a viable possibility for teaching undergraduate students about situated knowledge or other elements of writing and rhetoric, or if such lessons should be saved for more advanced courses (such as in graduate classes), or if this is not a current and practicable possibility for writing instructors during this time of “cancel culture” in which intellectual exploration and freedom may be threatened.

Also, although my experiences in having FYC students independently write humorous texts did not prove observably beneficial for my students, there may still be a possibility that students writing humor could help them to become sensitive readers and analysts of texts. Writing and reading often positively influence and build upon one another, so I do not discount the potential of students enhancing their reading and analytical skills via writing humor. Future research may examine how this could be accomplished in FYC or if there are too many circular requirements and time constraints to make this endeavor an efficient use of FYC class time and is perhaps best saved for more advanced composition courses.

Future research may also include conducting similar rhetorical analyses to my own using other humorous texts, which would demonstrate if the pattern that I ascertained in my research continues in other texts—I strongly believe that it would. This is research that I wish to pursue, and I invite the FYC and rhetoric and composition community to join in as well as such would add various perspectives and help to assess how much bias (if any) there may be in my current rhetorical analyses. Indeed, while I aimed to make my rhetorical analyses methodical and replicable, I have conducted enough research on situated knowledge to know that my findings come from a human and may embody some of my beliefs and perspectives. Thus, having different viewpoints on rhetorical analyses of my currently-chosen texts as well as other humorous works would help to compare and contrast findings and further establish patterns in humor writing that may be useful to FYC in teaching students audience awareness and situated knowledge.

Additionally, my dissertation's research indicates that there may be a close relationship between audience awareness and situated knowledge, and future research should further explore this possible connection. Such an examination will likely deepen rhetoric and composition's understanding of audience awareness and situated knowledge and may enable instructors to teach said concepts in new and interesting ways to FYC students and perhaps to students in more advanced writing classes. It may even deepen our understanding of how to use audience awareness and situated knowledge as writers ourselves.

Another path for future research may be to examine what other elements of rhetoric and composition are housed in humor writing and thus may be taught to FYC

students through humorous texts. This dissertation demonstrates that persona is an important aspect of humor writing, so future research may inquire into just how significant of a role persona has in humor writing and what lessons FYC students could take from that, both regarding their skills as analysts and as writers. In addition, my previous research suggests that irony, juxtaposition, and exaggeration are prevalent throughout many humorous works, and those texts may be useful for teaching students said literary elements. It would likely be advantageous to build upon this foundation to explore what practicable applications humor writing may have for teaching these and other literary elements to FYC and other collegial students. Furthermore, it would likely be productive to examine further how humor writing uses kairos, ethos, pathos, and logos. This dissertation's research has touched on the aforementioned elements, but a full examination of said elements will likely be productive, and this is a research endeavor upon which I hope to embark.

An additional path for future research, and one that I hope to pursue, is to rhetorically analyze more comedic routines to ensure that my findings with Phan's standup hold true for other comedians. Indeed, comedic routines' performative aspects could be fruitful for teaching FYC students about kairos, ethos, author persona, and audience awareness. This research could give instructors more guidelines concerning how to choose and use the most beneficial standup routines for their classes when teaching FYC. Similar rhetorical analyses could be extended to other humorous texts including movie and television clips, as I found that many of my students gravitated toward rhetorically analyzing such modes of humor.

Another possibility for further research may be to ascertain writing department administrations' attitudes toward using humor writing in FYC. Are they largely accepting, or do they fear many of the risks that were outlined in this dissertation? Since instructors, particularly nontenured faculty, are at least partly reliant on their administrations to support and protect them and their work, then the administrations' attitudes toward using humor writing in FYC may be integral to humor's full comeback in academia. Further, if administrations are not supportive of humor in the academy, then how could their minds be changed? How could the information that I have communicated in this dissertation be packaged in a way that would be persuasive to such bodies? Are there scholarship and inquiries that would be more persuasive to them than my research? Indeed, writing department administrations may be key to humor's academic and pedagogical acceptance as well as to combatting potentially corrosive features of cancel culture. So, researching and understanding how to appeal to such administrative powers is likely critical.

Last, I encourage researchers and instructors to develop FYC textbooks that use humor as texts to be studied by students. As shown by rhetoric and composition's history, writing handbooks can be integral in obtaining academic sanction for ideas and practices. Kirk Boyle's *The Rhetoric of Humor* is a start toward developing textbooks that use humor to teach FYC students. His reader was printed by Bedford/St. Martin's in 2017 and is categorized as "A Bedford Spotlight Reader" (essentially a "themed reader") (Boyle v). In his preface to instructors, Boyle even acknowledges, although perhaps implicitly, the problematic work-play bifurcation in much of academia by stating, "This book wagers that students can improve their academic writing skills by honing their sense

of humor and that their enjoyment of the latter will make the former less difficult. It presupposes that educators need not choose between teaching and delighting” (vii). However, his book relies on works by theorists, such as John Morreall and Simon Critchley, rather than on humorous texts. There are a few humorous works from which students may work directly in Boyle’s reader, and most are satirical in nature and the book does not offer other forms of humor writing. Nevertheless, for the most part in this reader, students receive their information about humor writing from other people interpreting humor and humor writing for them rather than doing that work themselves. This likely does not allow for much of the good work that FYC students studying humor writing can yield and that has been discussed in this dissertation.

This is not to say that theoretical work conducted on humor does not have a place in FYC. Students reading about and seeing theorists model how to analyze humor writing can be beneficial since such can function as a place from which students may begin their academic inquiries and students may look to theorists’ models to understand how to conduct their own analyses. However, there is a balance of curricular demands and time in FYC, thereby likely causing humor theory to have a somewhat curtailed role in FYC. For my class, I taught students about a few humor theories—such as the superiority theory, incongruity theory, psychoanalytic theory, and cognitive theory—but this was condensed into two lessons and was referred back to only in terms of how students could go about analyzing and understanding writers’ moves and purposes within humor writing. Thus, humor theory acted as a framework for analysis, but it was not the focus of the class. Rather, I aimed to teach my students principles of rhetoric and composition and I did so through the milieu of humor writing. This is an important point to note for the

teaching of rhetoric and composition, for future textbooks that use humor writing to teach FYC students, and for this dissertation—the focus is not on humor theory. Instead, humor writing is used as a venue through which to teach FYC students about rhetoric and composition and assist them in practicing and honing reading, analytical, and writing skills that will likely be key to their success in college. Thus, I call for textbooks that use and focus on humor writing as texts to be analyzed by students for said purposes rather than primarily using texts of others analyzing humor writing.

These possible paths for future research are particularly important because the more research that is conducted on humor writing with the lens of teaching FYC, the more the universe of humor writing as curricular and academic material will be broadened, explored, and perhaps increasingly accepted by the academy. Indeed, humor writing as a tool for teaching FYC is still nascent despite humor's historical connection to rhetoric and composition. Further research is needed to continue to legitimize humor writing in the academy's eyes and to find additional texts that are engaging for students and may even welcome diversity of being and thinking into the FYC classroom.

### **III. Concluding Thoughts**

When I began this journey, it was to investigate phenomena that I saw in my FYC classes. So, I moved through my research asking if humor had been used before to teach students about writing, why it is not seemingly widely used, and if there is even anything really there in humor writing that makes it worthy of curricular inclusion or if it were just my imagination. Thankfully, as my literature review and rhetorical analyses demonstrate, there is indeed much in humor writing that makes it worthy of inclusion in FYC. Humor seems to be particularly equipped to present students with examples of how audience

awareness and situated knowledge can function in writing as these concepts are frequently prevalent throughout humor writing, and humorous texts allow students to see these rhetorical concepts in action. Humor writing lends itself to students engaging with the materials by watching, hearing from, and analyzing how different audiences (including themselves and their classmates) react to texts. Indeed, the benefits of humor writing in FYC are more than I had anticipated at the beginning of this dissertation, and the risks that I feared in using the material can be mitigated more than I had originally thought. These supposed risks, such as offense, may even be used as important learning opportunities, which is a possibility that I had not yet fully realized at the start of this project. I do not claim that humor writing is *the best* way to teach FYC, but I am confident in asserting that humor writing is *a fruitful and effective way* to teach FYC.

I implore instructors not to let the fear of offending students dissuade them from using humor writing in their FYC courses, because offense can be an opportunity for students to enter texts and begin their academic inquiries into understanding why something is offensive to them and how other audiences may respond to those texts. Ultimately, instructors may have a duty to expose students to multiple perspectives—an endeavor that can be supported by the curricular inclusion of humor writing in FYC. The more teachers who embrace that, remind our students of that, remind our departments and superiors of that, and remind our field of that, the more we may be able to encourage freedom of thought and exploration within FYC and academia as a whole.

In sum, this dissertation supports the claims that humor writing can act as a milieu to teach FYC students principles of rhetoric and composition, and its curricular inclusion can help FYC students to learn about, practice, and engage consciously with audience



awareness and situated knowledge. This is perhaps a long-winded way to say “ha-ha” can lead to “ah-ha!” for FYC students.

## Appendix A

## Research Regarding Rhetorical Analysis in Textbooks

My definition of rhetorical analysis as it is used in FYC comes from the following textbooks: *A Guide to College Writing* by Chris Anson, *Beyond Words: Cultural Texts for Reading and Writing* by John Ruszkiewicz, Daniel Anderson, and Christy Friend, *Composition Currents* by Therese Arenas et al., *Envision: Writing and Researching Arguments* by Christine L. Alfano and Alyssa J. O'Brien, *Everyday Writing* by Gregory R. Glau and Chitralekha De Duttgupta, *Nexus: A Rhetorical Reader for Writers* by Kim Flachmann and Michael Flachmann, *Rhetorical Writing Habits* by Carol Lea Clark, *The New Humanities Reader* by Richard E. Miller and Kurt Spellmeyer, *The Write Stuff: Thinking Through Essays* by Marcie Sims, and *Write Now* by Daniel Anderson. Each textbook is geared toward FYC students and approved by my current FYC program. However, the books come from different perspectives and/or format their information in divergent ways. This diversity among the texts is worth briefly discussing so as to understand their definitions of, and viewpoints on, rhetorical analysis.

*Rhetorical Writing Habits* is based on Carol Lea Clark's *Praxis: A Brief Rhetoric* and is largely rhetoric based. This means that the textbook leans more toward discussions on rhetoric (rhetorical strategies/elements that go into writing) than on exploring the details of the composing process. I acknowledge that analyzing and using rhetoric is part of the composing process; my distinction is based on balance and is not meant to suggest that either is mutually exclusive to the other. Other more rhetoric-focused texts include *Beyond Words: Cultural Texts for Reading and Writing*, *Envision: Writing and Researching Arguments*, and *The New Humanities Reader*.

In contrast, the following are composition oriented: *A Guide to College Writing*, *Everyday Writing*, *Nexus: A Rhetorical Reader for Writers*, and *The Write Stuff: Thinking Through Essays*. These resources lean more toward discussing the composing process than to discussions about rhetorical theories.

The texts most focused on the analysis of rhetoric (as opposed to the composing process) are *Beyond Words: Cultural Texts for Reading and Writing* and *The New Humanities Reader*. *A Guide to College Writing* also provides copious work on textual analysis, but this analysis is in terms of determining genre conventions rather than looking for rhetorical strategies. *A Guide to College Writing* is also unique in that it is frequently science oriented, as when Anson compares dissecting a text to dissecting a body by writing, “You’ll sketch the skeleton, find and label the major organs, note how the connecting tissues hold it together, and subject parts of it to microscopic analysis” (Anson 239).

Texts focused on the forms of delivery for writing are *Everyday Writing*, *Nexus: A Rhetorical Reader for Writers* and *The Write Stuff: Thinking Through Essays* (Thaiss and McLeod 284). These textbooks frequently organize their sections according to (or similar to) the following: “description,” “narration,” “illustration,” “division and classification,” “comparison and contrast,” “definition,” “cause and effect,” and “argument.”

*Composition Currents* is unique among my sources because it is a compilation of FYC assignment prompts (some of which include useful definitions) and rubrics from FYC instructors. Each prompt is accompanied by a corresponding student essay. *Composition Currents* may function as a supplementary text, but since it is still

encouraged in my department to be used as curricular material, I include it within the category of “textbook.”

Analyzing all of the possible implications for the aforementioned texts’ choices are beyond the scope of this project. I only include such short summaries in order to explain briefly the ideological diversity among my sources.

I chose the aforementioned textbooks because they are offered and supported by my current first-year writing program, a well-established and large program at a reputable, land-grant university. Instructors are encouraged to choose among these textbooks, which suggests that the books have been vetted and earned a “seal of approval” from my department. Indeed, textbooks often reflect the types of texts that are welcomed and sanctioned by an institution, since purchasing or requiring students to purchase a book implies that the book’s contents are worthy of study. These chosen textbooks are also relatively fresh, having been published within the last decade (ranging from 2012 to 2019), which indicates that they are relevant to today’s rhetoric and composition scholarship and current FYC.

There are possible benefits and downsides that come from using this textbook selection. Since they all come from a first-year writing program, one benefit is that, as stated, they have been vetted in some way and are deemed worthy, thereby taking the theoretical (what could possibly be used) into the practical realm (what is used). However, since they are from one school’s department, the choices undoubtedly reflect the values of that department and school. Thus, any possible biases that went into the department’s choosing these texts might influence my rhetorical analysis.

Another double-edged sword is the texts come from three publishing companies: Pearson, Wadsworth, and Fountainhead Press. On one side, these are often recognized and respected publishers and authorities of academic texts, and it is likely that many FYC instructors use textbooks from these publishers. On the other side, the information within the texts may not be as nuanced and varied as is truly representative of FYC pedagogy and rhetorical analysis practice. This is an issue that I acknowledge but cannot rectify as I do not have privileges to “behind-the-scenes” details of each textbook to trace possible biases that may influence how each textbook is written and published. Moreover, such would take the focus away from my dissertation’s main research questions. Thus, despite the lack of publication diversity, I believe that using these textbooks—ones that are in active use in an actual first-year writing program—to generate a basic idea of rhetorical analysis in terms of FYC and to explore its relevance and importance in FYC is still valuable and practical.

To accomplish this work, I read and selected specific language from the aforementioned textbooks regarding foundational explanations and definitions of rhetorical analysis. Some of the authors specifically used the term “rhetorical analysis.” Others, such as Flachmann and Flachmann, Miller and Spellmeyer, Sims, and Glau and De Duttgupta discuss rhetorical analysis under a different concept/label, such as “analysis” (Anson), “critical thinking” (Miller and Spellmeyer), “critical analysis” (Miller and Spellmeyer, Sims, and Glau and De Duttgupta), “reading critically” (Flachmann and Flachmann), and “critical writing” (Glau and De Duttgupta). Despite the labelling differences, the authors are still discussing what I believe is rhetorical analysis in FYC. The point of this survey is not to generate a definitive, end-all-be-all

concept of rhetorical analysis. Rather, it is to create a general working idea of rhetorical analysis reflective of the aforementioned FYC textbooks in order to ascertain how rhetorical analysis is viewed and taught in FYC classrooms.

I inputted definitional quotes from the aforementioned sources as a group into a word counter on the internet (*databasic.io*) to ascertain any patterns (see table 3). The results show the following verbs being the most frequent— “make,” “involves,” “go,” “ask,” “read,” and “reading” (which is used as both a noun and a verb in the definition sampling). These verbs imply doing, searching, and/or creating. Since “read” and “reading” are frequent, this suggests that the focus of the doing, searching, and creating is on some type of reading—a “text.” Indeed, when looking at the rhetorical analysis definitions as a whole, there is a pattern of questioning and of students (often referred to as “you”) taking an active role in that questioning. The frequency of the word “critical” supports this idea of a student actively reading, since critical reading is staying “fully engaged and involved with the reading material” (Flachmann and Flachmann 5).

Table 3

Frequency of Words in Rhetorical Analysis Definition Samples <sup>a</sup>

Top Words for Frequency	
Word	Frequency
rhetorical	11
analysis	9
text	9
reading	6
critical	4
parts	4
make	4
writer	4
strategies	3
involves	3
go	3

read	3
sentence	2
meaning	2
fact	2
choice	2
readers	2
context	2
audience	2
ask	2

- a. Note: I created the chart using *DataBasic.io*, and “stop words” including “and,” “that,” “this,” and “but” were ignored for the compilation.

(<https://www.databasic.io/en/wordcounter/results/5de4b0aba8de6100f7cbcf6f>)

The frequencies of the nouns “writer,” “readers,” and “audience” within the selected passages are also telling. Writer and reader/audience are two points of the rhetorical triangle (sometimes referred to as a rhetorical situation), and it is logical that a rhetorical analysis would involve these two points of the triangle. The other point of the triangle, “purpose,” is seemingly missing; however, one could argue that “meaning” is a synonym for “purpose.” Thus, all three points of the rhetorical triangle—writer/speaker, reader/audience, and material/message/purpose—are taken into consideration when conducting a rhetorical analysis.

The frequency of “analysis” is unsurprising given what the authors are defining (rhetorical analysis). However, other nouns that frequently appear reveal what is being analyzed—“parts,” “strategies,” “sentence[s],” “meaning,” “fact[s],” “choice[s],” and “context.” This may suggest that rhetorical analysis is, at least in part, a process in which a reader dissects “sentence[s],” “parts,” and “strategies” used in a text with the intent of understanding what is “fact” or “choice” within a given “context” so as to explore how authors make “meaning” out of the world around them. Overall, the analyses of the

selected texts aid in helping me to generate an understanding of how rhetorical analysis is defined and used in teaching FYC.



Appendix B

David Sedaris Essay and Corresponding Notes

Me Talk Pretty One Day

AT THE AGE OF FORTY-ONE, I am returning to school and have to think of myself as what my French textbook calls "a true debutant." After paying my tuition, I was issued a student ID, which allows me a discounted entry fee at movie theaters, puppet shows, and Festyland, a far-flung amusement park that advertises with billboards picturing a cartoon stegosaurus sitting in a canoe and eating what appears to be a ham sandwich.

I've moved to Paris with hopes of learning the language. My school is an easy ten-minute walk from my apartment, and on the first day of class I arrived early, watching as the returning students greeted one another in the school lobby. Vacations were recounted, and questions were raised con-

SK - nontraditional older student ①

SK - American expect ②

ME TALK PRETTY ONE DAY

"Ahh." The teacher went to the board and sketched the letter a. "Do we have anyone in the room whose first name commences with an ahh?"

Two Polish Annas raised their hands, and the teacher instructed them to present themselves by stating their names, nationalities, occupations, and a brief list of things they liked and disliked in this world. The first Anna hailed from an industrial town outside of Warsaw and had front teeth the size of tombstones. She worked as a seamstress, enjoyed quiet times with friends, and hated the mosquito.

"Oh, really," the teacher said. "How very interesting. I thought that everyone loved the mosquito, but here, in front of all the world, you claim to detest him. How is it that we've been blessed with someone as unique and original as you? Tell us please."

The seamstress did not understand what was being said but knew that this was an occasion for shame. Her rabbit mouth huffed for breath, and she stared down at her lap as though the appropriate comeback were stitched somewhere alongside the zipper of her slacks.

The second Anna learned from the first and claimed to love sunshine and detest lies. It sounded like a translation of one of those Playmate of the Month data sheets, the answers always written in the same loopy handwriting: "Turn-ons: Mom's famous five-alarm chili! Turnoffs: insecurity and guys who come on too strong!!!!"

The two Polish Annas surely had clear notions of what they loved and hated, but like the rest of us they were limited

① Very AA

Me Talk Pretty One Day

cerning mutual friends with names like Kang and Vlatnya. Regardless of their nationalities, everyone spoke in what sounded to me like excellent French. Some accents were better than others, but the students exhibited an ease and confidence I found intimidating. As an added discomfort, they were all young, attractive, and well dressed, causing me to feel not unlike Pa Kettle trapped backstage after a fashion show.

The first day of class was nerve-racking because I knew I'd be expected to perform. That's the way they do it here — it's everybody into the language pool, sink or swim. The teacher marched in, deeply tanned from a recent vacation, and proceeded to rattle off a series of administrative announcements. I've spent quite a few summers in Normandy, and I took a monthlong French class before leaving New York. I'm not completely in the dark, yet I understood only half of what this woman was saying.

"If you have not *meinselp* or *legdmurct* by this time, then you should not be in this room. Has everyone *apzkiubjzow*? Everyone? Good, we shall begin." She spread out her lesson plan and sighed, saying, "All right, then, who knows the alphabet?"

It was startling because (a) I hadn't been asked that question in a while and (b) I realized, while laughing, that I myself did not know the alphabet. They're the same letters, but in France they're pronounced differently. I know the shape of the alphabet but had no idea what it actually sounded like.

Me Talk Pretty One Day

in terms of vocabulary, and this made them appear less than sophisticated. The teacher forged on, and we learned that Carlos, the Argentine bandonion player, loved wine, music, and, in his words, "making sex with the womens of the world." Next came a beautiful young Yugoslav who identified herself as an optimist, saying that she loved everything that life had to offer.

The teacher licked her lips, revealing a hint of the sauciness we would later come to know. She crouched low for her attack, placed her hands on the young woman's desk, and leaned close, saying, "Oh yeah? And do you love your little war?"

While the optimist struggled to defend herself, I scrambled to think of an answer to what had obviously become a trick question. How often is one asked what he loves in this world? More to the point, how often is one asked and then publicly ridiculed for his answer? I recalled my mother, flushed with wine, pounding the tabletop late one night, saying, "Love? I love a good steak cooked rare. I love my cat, and I love..." My sisters and I leaned forward, waiting to hear our names. "Tums," our mother said. "I love Tums."

The teacher killed some time accusing the Yugoslavian girl of masterminding a program of genocide, and I jotted frantic notes in the margins of my pad. While I can honestly say that I love leafing through medical textbooks devoted to severe dermatological conditions, the hobby is beyond the reach of my French vocabulary, and acting it out would only have invited controversy.

On your teacher that is a good question. SK - Meinselp? war?

③ A feeling like an outsider

SK - connection

topst

leaps about class, also connects to his seeming comprehension toward Americans

SK ⑦

SK ⑧

SK ⑨

SK ⑩

⑭ SK - Post - Post - Alephic number

⑮ SK - I like to see if I can understand on all levels. I'm not an all-american

When called upon, I delivered an effortless list of things that I detest: blood sausage, intestinal pâtés, brain pudding. I'd learned these words the hard way. Having given it some thought, I then declared my love for IBM typewriters, the French word for *bruise*, and my electric floor waxer. It was a short list, but still I managed to mispronounce IBM and assign the wrong gender to both the floor waxer and the typewriter. The teacher's reaction led me to believe that these mistakes were capital crimes in the country of France.

16 SK  
Correction: I was in past

"Were you always this *palicmkrexis*?" she asked. "Even a *fiuscrzsa ticwelmun* knows that a typewriter is feminine."

I absorbed as much of her abuse as I could understand, thinking — but not saying — that I find it ridiculous to assign a gender to an inanimate object incapable of disrobing and making an occasional fool of itself. Why refer to Lady Crack Pipe or Good Sir Dishrag when these things could never live up to all that their sex implied?

19 AA  
Very American since we do not have a lot of water language SK → was not

The teacher proceeded to belittle everyone from German Eva, who hated laziness, to Japanese Yukari, who loved paintbrushes and soap. Italian, Thai, Dutch, Korean, and Chinese — we all left class foolishly believing that the worst was over. She'd shaken us up a little, but surely that was just an act designed to weed out the deadweight. We didn't know it then, but the coming months would teach us what it was like to spend time in the presence of a wild animal, something completely unpredictable. Her temperament was not based on a series of good and bad days but, rather, good and bad moments. We soon learned to dodge chalk and protect our

AA & SK  
AA → we do not have a lot of water language SK → was not

22 AA - us versus her

ignored it. If someone asked me a question, I pretended to be deaf. I knew my fear was getting the best of me when I started wondering why they don't sell cuts of meat in vending machines.

My only comfort was the knowledge that I was not alone. Huddled in the hallways and making the most of our pathetic French, my fellow students and I engaged in the sort of conversation commonly overheard in refugee camps.

31 AA → Who can't relate to feeling like this or really to hear this?

"Sometime me cry alone at night."  
"That be common for I, also, but be more strong, you. Much work and someday you talk pretty. People start love you soon. Maybe tomorrow, okay."

Unlike the French class I had taken in New York, here there was no sense of competition. When the teacher poked a shy Korean in the eyelid with a freshly sharpened pencil, we took no comfort in the fact that, unlike Hyeyoon Cho, we all knew the irregular past tense of the verb to *defeat*. In all fairness, the teacher hadn't meant to stab the girl, but neither did she spend much time apologizing, saying only, "Well, you should have been *vkhdyo* more *kdeynfulh*."

33 AA - students being stronger against the teacher

Over time it became impossible to believe that any of us would ever improve. Fall arrived and it rained every day, meaning we would now be scolded for the water dripping from our coats and umbrellas. It was mid-October when the teacher singled me out, saying, "Every day spent with you is like having a cesarean section." And it struck me that, for the first time since arriving in France, I could understand every word that someone was saying.

heads and stomachs whenever she approached us with a question. She hadn't yet punched anyone, but it seemed wise to protect ourselves against the inevitable.

AA  
23 AA

Though we were forbidden to speak anything but French, the teacher would occasionally use us to practice any of her five fluent languages.

"I hate you," she said to me one afternoon. Her English was flawless. "I really, really hate you." "Call me sensitive, but I couldn't help but take it personally."

24 SK → to create humor

After being singled out as a lazy *lefdimym*, I took to spending four hours a night on my homework, putting in even more time whenever we were assigned an essay. I suppose I could have gotten by with less, but I was determined to create some sort of identity for myself. David the hard worker, David the cut-up. We'd have one of those "complete this sentence" exercises, and I'd fool with the thing for hours, invariably settling on something like "A quick run around the lake? I'd love to! Just give me a moment while I strap on my wooden leg." The teacher, through word and action, conveyed the message that if this was my idea of an identity, she wanted nothing to do with it.

25 SK → connects to past needs to be a good student, needs to be funny the teacher

My fear and discomfort crept beyond the borders of the classroom and accompanied me out onto the wide boulevards. Stopping for a coffee, asking directions, depositing money in my bank account: these things were out of the question, as they involved having to speak. Before beginning school, there'd been no shutting me up, but now I was convinced that everything I said was wrong. When the phone rang, I

AA  
27 Correction: to pass to pass out of place?  
AA → the outside SK

Understanding doesn't mean that you can suddenly speak the language. Far from it. It's a small step, nothing more, yet its rewards are intoxicating and deceptive. The teacher continued her diatribe and I settled back, bathing in the subtle beauty of each new curse and insult.

34 AA → Shows that he knows I'm not going to learn the language

"You exhaust me with your foolishness and reward my efforts with nothing but pain, do you understand me?"

The world opened up, and it was with great joy that I responded, "I know the thing that you speak exact now. Talk me more, you, plus, please, plus."

## Appendix C

## David Sedaris Rhetorical Analysis Chart

Table 4

List of Each Example of Audience Awareness and Situated Knowledge in Sedaris's Text with Corresponding Details, Explanations, and Justifications

Instance	Quoted Example	Audience Awareness or Situated Knowledge & Corresponding Notes	Possible Audience(s)	How Instance Appears Tailored to Audience(s)	Possible Connection to Author's Background	Possible Message with This Instance/ Effect on Overall Message(s) of the Text/ Other Notes
1	"At the ages of forty-one, I am returning to school" (166)	situated knowledge - shows where he is coming from at that point in his life/what life stage he is at	- students and former students -nontraditional older student	- he sets himself in one of the age groups of his readers, thereby trying to identify with them (I am one of you)	- he was an older student, and he did go to France and return to school to learn French → shows his history	- background knowledge - situated his knowledge and shows the audience where he is coming from in this story
2	"I've moved to Paris with the hopes of learning the language." (166)	situated knowledge - shows the intention with which he came to France → the why behind his actions	- travelers		- showing his history - what he actually did and why	- background knowledge
3	"Regardless of their nationalities, everyone spoke	situated knowledge - saying "what sounded to me" shows that it's his	- travelers - maybe those who do not speak very well the native	- speaks to travelers → travelers can relate to this - that feeling of being out of place speaks to those who	- shows his background	- background knowledge - saying "what sounded to me"

	in what sounded to me like excellent French.” (167)	perspective and his truth, which situates his knowledge	language of the country that they’re in - those who feel like outsiders	have felt like, or feel like, outsiders → language is a marker of who is in-group and who is out-group		shows that it’s his perspective and his truth, which situates his knowledge
4	“I found intimidating” (167)	audience awareness - helps him to identify with his audience situated knowledge\ - use of first person shows that this is his truth, not necessarily everybody else’s truth	- anyone who has felt like an outsider - anyone who has felt like they’re not good at something but everybody else seems to be	- helps to portray himself as an outsider and as not the best in the room → something many people can identify with		- identifying with audience
5	“As an added discomfort, they were all young, attractive, and well dressed, causing me to feel not unlike Pa Kettle trapped backstage after a fashion show.” (167)	situated knowledge - bias that he brings with him from his past into his present text - doesn’t necessarily say where this bias came from, but if you know his background, then you can trace it	- anyone who felt like an outsider - anyone who feels out of place - anyone who has felt like they don’t belong - Americans	- Americans are probably best going to understand the reference to “Pa Kettle” and what that means	- connection to past upbringing & fears about class - father & mother didn’t want him to act like the southerners he was raised around (“You Can’t Kill the Rooster”) - connects to his seeming condescension toward American culture	- identifying with audience - putting himself down → self-deprecation - explains how he was feeling
6	“The first day of class was nerve-racking because I know I’d be	audience awareness	- educated adults	- usually, educated adults (one of his audiences) are expected to perform at something during the course	- was a performing artist - got a college degree so he	- helps to identify with his audience and align himself with them

	expected to perform.”			of their lives so this speaks to their experiences	understands how school works	
7	“I’ve spent quite a few summers in Normandy, and I took a monthlong French class before leaving New York. I’m not completely in the dark, yet I understood only half of what this woman was saying.” (167)	situated knowledge - situates/shows where he is coming from → his perspective - shows where he has travelled so as to give himself credibility and portray himself as worldly - tries to help show that he’s not entirely ignorant when it comes to travelling, other cultures, and other languages - maybe helps him to avoid the “ignorant American” reference	- travelers - educated adults	- helps to portray himself as a traveler and as educated, which helps him to relate to his audience	- shows his travelling background → his worldly resume	- background information - increase his credibility with the reader
8	“If you have not meimslxp or lgpdmurct by this time, then you should not be in this room. Has everyone apzkiubjxow? Everyone? Good, we shall begin.” (167)	audience awareness	- outsiders - those who have felt lost - those who have felt less than other people in the room	- self-deprecation - identify with audience → he’s not perfect and he gets lost like so many people have at some point in their lives	- shows what his expertise was → shows level of skill	- helps to align himself with his audience - helps to seem like a likable person through that aligning

9	“I hadn’t been asked that question in a while” (167)	situated knowledge - connects to his age to show that he is a non-traditional, older student - shows that he is a little out of the loop	- older people who have been out of school for a while	- maybe a bit of self-deprecation - puts himself in the position of older people who are going back to school or who can imagine going back to school and feeling a little out of place	- he did go back to school as an older adult and he did do this → background information	- background information
10	“I realized, while laughing, that I myself did <i>not</i> know the alphabet.” (167)	situated knowledge - shows that he is out of his element → tries to help put himself down in order to get the audience to like him and laugh with him	- people who have felt lost or out of their elements even with seemingly simple tasks or knowledge	- self-deprecation - get the audience to like him (we tend to like and not be threatened by others who are like us or who are less than us)	- shows what level of skill he had when he first started	- helps the audience to identify with him - background information
11	“Playmate of the Month” (168)	audience awareness	- Americans - people who are old enough to know what a Playmate is - males (since that’s usually who will be familiar with that) - oddly, straight males since they are the biggest consumers of <i>Playboy</i> material, but Sedaris is gay → so, maybe it’s also a time/culture thing	- this is something very American and that Americans would likely be familiar with, particularly older Americans before the internet became in vogue	- he’s an American in a foreign country trying to learn a foreign language, so this connects to his position	- connect with American audience specifically and to those who are older and may be more familiar with Playmate of the Month
12	“but like the rest of us” (168)	audience awareness	- those who are not in power	- we like to make fun of those in power (Helitzer &	- he was in a class with other people	- background information

			ordinarily (like the rest of us) - students and former students	Shatz), so this is aligning himself with the audience and with the other poor students trying to learn French		- it's starting to create an us vs. them dichotomy with the teacher character
13	"hint of a sauce-box we would later come to know" (169)	audience awareness	- those who are not in power - students and former students	- who hasn't at one time had a teacher that most of the students disliked? - is tailored to the majority of the population that did have a disliked teacher	- he did have a French teacher	- us vs. teacher setup - starts to set up the stage where the teacher is the bad guy as someone we can all laugh at and point to - starts setting up the teacher as the target for his humor
14	"I recalled my mother, flushed with wine, pounding the tabletop late one night, saying, 'Love? I love a good steak cooked rare. I love my cat, and I love . . .' My sisters and I leaned forward, waiting to hear our names. 'Tums,' our mother said. 'I love tums.'" (169)	situated knowledge	- appeals to those who may have not been totally adored and loved by their parents - appeals to those who have struggled with their parents - offspring of alcoholics and addicts - adults who may have grown up with a dysfunctional relationship with a parent	- writing "wine" tailors this to those audiences - also tailored by hinting at the pain but trying to laugh at it or make sense of it as an adult → something that others may do themselves who have experienced such trauma	- mother was an alcoholic - lauds his mother as a very funny person	- situates his knowledge by showing part of his background → that he did come from a family where a parent was an alcoholic - shows his familial dysfunction so that others who have experienced that as well can relate to it, identify with him, and possibly laugh at that pain
15	"I jotted frantic notes in the margins of my	situated knowledge - showing a bit about his likes in	- anyone who thinks that they're a little odd or	- by showing himself to be sort of odd and unique, he appeals to people who feel	- he does like to do this	- helps for audience to identify with him and thereby laugh

	pad. While I can honestly say that I love leafing through medical textbooks devoted to severe dermatological conditions, the hobby is beyond the reach of my French vocabulary, and acting it out would only have invited controversy.” (169)	order to show his weirdness and that he comes from a sort of weird place when viewing the world  audience awareness - he’s speaking to more of the oddballs of the population, which are likely those who gravitate toward his work or at least find his work entertaining (in truth, everyone fancies themselves as a bit of an oddball)	unique (which is pretty much everyone) - those who feel like outsiders	like they are a bit odd and unique → in a way, he’s mirroring an element that people wish to see in themselves		with him (and even at him)
16	“I’d learned these words the hard way” (170)	situated knowledge - shows that he comes from a place of experience	- appeals to people who have messed up in the past → so, probably teenager and up since those are the ones who would have enough life experiences to have learned something “the hard way” - Americans	- this is usually a very American saying, so it would see that he is tailoring his writing to Americans through using American colloquialisms	- he’s an American, so he would be familiar with this saying	- creates humor by hinting at odd and/or embarrassing stories without revealing everything about them
17	“I then declared my love for IMB	situated knowledge - shows the audience some of	- appeals to older audience	- makes a reference that older people who were around typewriters more	- connects to his age and the era in which he grew up	- shows more of his background so that the audience can



	typewriters” (170)	his likes so that the audience can see where he is coming from and how he views the world - shows that he is a little dated/older because most younger people are not going to be familiar with IMB typewriters		than computers while growing up would be familiar with		feel like they know him as a person and can identify with his feelings → can picture the narrator better with little details like this
18	“my electric floor waxer” (170)	situated knowledge - shows that he does come from a working background - he’s someone who at least knows how to use an electric floor waxer, so he’s not necessarily part of the privilege class and he’s showing that here to readers to show them where he is coming from	- working class and middle-class adults (probably not teenagers because they probably haven’t used an electric floor waxer)	- references a machine that the working class and middle class would likely be familiar with - references a machine that adults are likely familiar with	- he was a janitor at one point	- probably to add to the oddball persona - get audience to identify with him - help audience view him as a person when he is narrating - maybe show that he’s not one of the upper crust (people tend to want to laugh at the upper crust → Helitzer & Shatz)
19	“I absorbed as much of her abuse as I could understand, thinking—but not saying—that I find it ridiculous to	audience awareness - very American since English doesn’t gender words like most other languages - also appeals to sort of the	- Americans - English speakers working class to middle class	- appeals to sort of the stereotype of American’s claiming that their language/culture/way of living are the best → so tailored to American audience by embodying that	- he was a drug addict for a while	- helps audience to identify with him - helps him to align with his audience so that they will laugh with him

	assign a gender to an inanimate object incapable of disrobing and making an occasional fool of itself. Why refer to Lady Crack Pipe or Good Sir Dishrag when these things could never live up to all that their sex implied?	stereotype of American's claiming that their language/culture/w ay of living are the best situated knowledge - shows that he is coming from a place of common experiences (dishrag) - also hints at his past of being an addict since he references ("Crack Pipe")		stereotype without really making fun of it - references a cleaning tool ("Dishrag") and those of the upper class are probably not as familiar with it as those in the lower and middle classes → so they would appreciate the irony of a dishrag bringing pleasure more than the upper class		
20	"Italian, Thai, Dutch, Korean, and Chinese—we all left class foolishly believing the worst was over" (170)	audience awareness - appeals to those have felt tricked into thinking that things were going to get better (which is everyone at some point) situated knowledge - shows that not only was this his truth, but it was other people's truth as well (so, it helps to situate the knowledge by showing where this feeling came from and who felt it)	- travelers - people other than Americans → everyone was in the same situation all together	- by listing the different nationalities and bringing them together with "we all," he is showing that everyone was in the same situation and therefore tailors it not just to Americans but to other nationalities and travelers who may read his book	- the class was difficult for him and for others - BookTube interview → said that everyone in the class found the teacher difficult, so at least probably some grain of truth in that	- show that the experience was not just his own, but that others had that experience as well

21	“We didn’t know it then, but the coming months would teach us what it was like to spend time in the presence of a wild animal, something completely unpredictable.” (170)	audience awareness - speaking to those not in power	- those not in power - students	- the “we” and “us” may create a feeling of bringing his audience in with him, but other than that it doesn’t seem very tailored to those audiences		- adds to the us versus them (the person in power) effect
22	“We soon learned to dodge chalk and protect our heads and stomachs whenever she approached us with a question. She hadn’t punched anyone, but it seemed wise to protect ourselves against the inevitable.” (170-171)	audience awareness	- speaking to those not in power - students and former students - probably older students since this behavior is no longer tolerated from teachers - those scared that they may be wrong in a public forum - those who may be scared to make a mistake for fear that something bad will happen	- shows behavior that is not tolerated among teachers anymore, so it is tailored to those who were students during a time when this was acceptable → so tailored to older, adult readers	- seems to date himself because teachers of the past could sometimes do this	- adds to the us versus them atmosphere - adds to the fearful picture that he’s painting
23	“Though we were forbidden to speak anything but French, the teacher would occasionally use	audience awareness - those not in power and not in control but may have to bear the burden of	- those not in power - maybe those who feel like they are forced to speak a language that they are not		- this is what happened (at least some version of it) according to Sedaris	- adds to the us versus them feeling - may be sending a message that English speakers should be more tolerant and

	us to practice any of her five fluent languages.” (23)	unfairness by those in power	comfortable with yet → maybe English language learners - students and former students			understanding toward those who do not have English as their first language
24	“Call me sensitive, but I couldn’t help but take it personally.” (171)	situated knowledge - states that he may be sensitive in order to present this as his perspective rather than everyone else’s perspective and to create humor (understatement)	- those not in power - those who have felt like they have bene verbally abused in the past		- in his interviews, Sedaris tries to portray himself as not particularly sensitive, so the connection to his background would be ironic and may create humor if the reader is familiar with his interviews and interview persona	- creates understatement to create humor
25	“I suppose I could have gotten by with less, but I was determined to create some sort of identity for myself. David the hard worker, David the cut-up.” (171)	situated knowledge - shows what is driving his actions → shows the desires behind his actions and his beliefs	- those who have gotten knocked down and have tried to get back up - those who have tried to prove others wrong - maybe the oddballs		- connects to his past in needing to appease his father through hard work and a good salary - connects to his need to always be funny like his mother	- shows the reader what is driving his actions and why he is choosing to not quit - may be giving an encouraging message that you can make your enemies angrier if you do even better rather than quit
26	“The teacher, through word and action, conveyed the message that if this was my idea	audience awareness - appeals to those who no matter how hard they try are still not liked by	- students and former students - oddballs - those not in power			- conveys the message that sometimes you can’t please everyone no matter how hard you try

	of an identity, she wanted nothing to do with it.” (171)	the person they’re trying to appease	- those who have a desire to be liked by others			
27	“My fear and discomfort crept beyond the borders of the classroom and accompanied me out onto the wide boulevards.” (171)	situated knowledge - explains why he was starting to act oddly outside of the classroom - shows the biases that were instilled in him (and where they came from) and how they were starting to affect other actions → so he is situating his knowledge	- those who have been traumatized in some way - students and former students - teachers → shows them how not to be to their students or what the consequences could be	- uses some of the same language of those who have faced dealing with trauma like “fear,” “discomfort,” and describing how it follows him	- maybe connects to past of feeling out of place a little bit	- shows that we don’t just walk away from trauma - tells teachers how not to be - commiserates with students who have had difficult teacher experiences
28	“Before beginning school, there’d been no shutting me up, but now I was convinced that everything I said was wrong.” (171)	situated knowledge - showing how experience is informing his behavior → shows what formed his bias that now influences his actions and how he views the world audience awareness	- students who have had some negative/traumatic experience at school and/or with teachers - students and former students - speaks to the outsiders - speaks to those who feel insecure about who they are and what they say and do - maybe talks to teachers as well	- shows some of the same feelings that those who have had negative/traumatic educational experiences can relate to		- shows that we don’t just walk away from trauma - tells teachers how not to be - commiserates with students who have had difficult teacher experiences - shows an experience that altered his worldview and impacted how he acted within the world

29	“I was not alone.” (172)	audience awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- those who have felt alone in an experience → may actually have been a shared experience and they didn't know it at first</li> <li>- shared trauma</li> <li>- students and former students</li> <li>- to those not in power</li> </ul>			- adds to the us versus teacher feeling
30	“Huddled in the hallways and making the most of our pathetic French, my fellow students and I engaged in the sort of conversation commonly overheard in refugee camps.” (172)	audience awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- those who are politically aware → those who are away of refugee camps</li> <li>- adults and young adults → kids don't usually know about this</li> <li>- students and former students</li> </ul>	- references an adult matter & one that educated people are usually aware of and care about		- is mostly meant to paint an exaggerated picture to create humor
31	““That be common for I, also, but be more strong, you. Much work and someday you talk pretty. People start love you soon. Maybe tomorrow, okay.” (172)	audience awareness - who can't relate to feeling like this or needing to hear something along these lines?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- those who have ever felt like they have failed or that they are failing</li> <li>- students and former students</li> <li>- those not in power</li> <li>- those who have bonded with others or who</li> </ul>	- has many of the same sentiments that a group of students or those not in power may feel when it seems like they cannot please their superiors		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adds to the us versus them feeling</li> <li>- helps Sedaris to have the audience relate to him and his feelings → identify with him so that they both cry and laugh with him</li> </ul>

			want or like the kind of friendships created by trauma			
32	“I had taken in New York” (172)	situated knowledge	- maybe implies that he is of high culture in the US since New York is usually associated with high culture and fanciness		- was born in New York - lived in New York when he was an adult	- gives background - gives off the feeling that he’s not an uncultured and uneducated American
33	“When the teacher poked a shy Korean in the eyelid with a freshly sharpened pencil, we took no comfort in the fact that, unlike Hyeyoon Cho, we all knew the irregular past tense of the verb <i>to defeat</i> .” (172)	audience awareness	- those not in power - students and former students	- the “we all” speaks to that feeling of banning together against a higher power (such as a teachers)		- further the us versus teacher feeling
34	“Understanding doesn’t mean that you can suddenly speak the language. Far from it. It’s a small step, nothing more, yet its rewards are intoxicating and deceptive.” (173)	audience awareness - shows that he knows not everyone reading this will know what it’s like to learn another language because he’s telling them what it’s like	- those who have never tried to learn another language - those who have tried to learn another language - those whose native language is not the native language of the country they reside in			- explain why his win of understanding the teacher is so important to him (even if what she said was mean and cruel) - illicit compassion for those who are learning a new language

						- illicit compassion for those whose first language is not the native language of the country in which they reside or are visiting
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Appendix D

Michael P. Branch Essay and Corresponding Notes

-originally appeared in High Country News

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### WHAT'S DRIER THAN DAVID SEDARIS?

Like me, David Sedaris is a literary humorist. Unlike me, he has sold around eight million copies of his books, which have been translated into twenty-five languages and counting. (Several of my essays have been translated into Estonian. I may not be big in Japan, but the Estonians find me hilarious.) As any insanely jealous fellow writer would, I have been busy finding reasons (which Eryn unkindly refers to as excuses) why Sedaris has been a bit more successful than I have. Why do I reckon Sedaris is outselling me?

Well, though raised in North Carolina, he writes from an estate in England, while I write from a remote hilltop in a sparsely inhabited western desert. His neighbors are intelligent, cultured, literate people with beaucoup leisure time and disposable income. My neighbors are less interested in a good laugh than you might think. This is because my neighbors are scorpions, rattlers, and libertarian survivalists—the latter of which can be dangerous.

An actual incident involving David Sedaris visiting my town bolsters this theory while also supporting my corollary assumption

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SK -> says positive he's coming from even though he's been in progress for... SK -> where does he live?

that Sedaris, who must certainly be fearful of competition from me, is out to discredit those of us here in the Intermountain West. It all started after Sedaris did a reading in Reno while on a sixty-city book tour. Soon after his stop here in northern Nevada, Sedaris appeared on the satirical television news program *The Daily Show*, where host Jon Stewart inquired about the many cities he was visiting. "Which one did you hate the most?" quipped the host. Sedaris replied with a story about his observations at a recent reading in Reno. The humorist observed, wryly, that "the icebreaking question when I was signing books was, 'Why did you choose that T-shirt?'" He went on to criticize the Nevadans' attire, which he claimed included sweatpants and cut-off shorts. The punch line of the anecdote concerned a woman in her sixties who approached Sedaris to have her book signed. "Is that your good Count Chocula T-shirt?" Sedaris asked the woman. "I didn't think anyone was going to notice," she replied. The anecdote was masterfully calculated and timed, and Sedaris had Stewart and his New York City audience in stitches. So that's the story. It made the usual cyber-rounds and was soon enjoyed by folks across the nation.

I generally subscribe to the ageless principle that there is no such thing as bad publicity, but the Sedaris-in-Nevada incident went largely without scrutiny, and so I feel the need to examine it more closely. First, let me say that I do not blame Sedaris for stooping so low to get a cheap laugh, since this is something I do at every possible opportunity. Second, I have no interest in defending the informal dress of Nevadans, because it strains my imagination to think of anything less interesting or important. Finally, I certainly will not spill any ink speculating about the veracity of Sedaris's anecdote, because, as a humorist myself, I know very well that whether any of this actually occurred is immaterial.

No, my objections are different than you might suspect. First, I believe a person should know what the hell he or she is talking about when making fun of something. As a single example, consider this gem from the late Robin Williams: "Do you think Count Chocula gets stoned once in a while? Look at the platypus. I think so. If you know, as Williams clearly did, that the duck-billed platypus is an egg-laying mammal—that is to say, a total oddball in the animal kingdom—then this joke will be funny to you, even if you aren't stoned. Sedaris, by contrast, clearly doesn't know Reno from his other fifty-nine whistle stops. Exhibit A: in chatting with Stewart, he doesn't even pronounce the name of the state correctly (it's NevAda, not NevAHda). Equally egregious is the comic who offers this exhortation of how our dress has chosen, for his national television appearance, thick horned-rim glasses that make him look uncannily like that cartoon dog, Mr. Peabody, a shirt in a bright pink reminiscent of cheap cotton candy, a tie the color of dung, and, as the pièce de résistance, black dress shoes worn with white socks. Seriously? Sweatpants would have been a clear improvement on this get-up. Apparently, though, the outfit is to Jon Stewart's taste. "You look terrific," he tells the humorist. "Very nice suit." Sure, so long as it's Halloween, and you're costumed as a pseudo-intellectual Woody Allen. Stewart's (acum) is on further display when Sedaris describes folks at the event wearing cut-offs. "Was it a particularly hot and humid environment?" asks Stewart, without a whiff of irony. "I went to college with Jon, and he is the smartest funny person (or funniest smart person) I have ever met. That said, humid in Nevada? He was never that daff around here, freshman dorm."

Even if I could get past the idea that a comic, of all people, would be so pompous as to imagine there should be a dress code at his gigs, I am still deeply insulted on behalf of the truly innocent victim in this story: Count Chocula. In this Halloween season, it seems only right that I should stand up for this slandered hero. General Mills debuted Count Chocula, Franken-Berry, and

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Boo-Berry (the "Monster Cereals") back in 1977, which put me at just the right age to love them, and to join the ranks of kids who experienced a condition actually called "Franken-Berry Stool," in which the heavy red dyes in the strawberry-flavored cereal turned out feces the color of David Sedaris's shirt, when they would, under normal circumstances, have been the color of his tie.

Nineteen seventy-one was none too placid a year. The Charles Manson murder trial was nightly news, Ku Klux Klansmen were arrested for bombing school buses, Lt. William Calley was found guilty of the My Lai massacre in Vietnam, and the Nixon administration arrested thirteen thousand antiwar protestors during a single three-day period. Closer to home, Operation Grommet proceeded apace, as the United States spent the year continuing a decades-long program of attacking Nevada (which they probably pronounced NevAHda) with nuclear weapons. It was a moment in which some unnameable innocence was being lost, which is another way of saying that we needed Count Chocula. TV commercials even reassured our parents that the cereal was "so full of nutrients, it's scary!" (Not as scary as the A-bomb, or even the fuchsia poop induced by Franken-Berry, but you get the point.)

As for the count himself, he could hardly have been less frightening. He was, in fact, a sweet little vampire, with his single fang (like a kid who has lost one of his front baby teeth), huge doe eyes, comically pointy ears, long puppet nose, and friendly, silly grin. (Actually, I detect a slight resemblance to Sedaris.) One of the unique personality traits of the cartoon vampire was that, although he had the power to scare the other cereal monsters in his posse, he was often terrified when he came face to face with children. Yes, you heard that right. We children, in an age of fear, had the power to scare a vampire! It was a delicious feeling, knowing that we could turn the tables on terror simply by lifting our spoons.

Now that I am a father, the proposition that children are more terrifying than vampires seems obvious enough. Each fall, when the monster cereals are sold for a short time leading up to Halloween, I become unapologetically nostalgic. [That the cereals have been successfully rereleased in special edition retro boxes suggests I am not alone in this.] Count Chocula? Come on, Sedaris. He's one of the good guys.

So here is a summary of how the notorious incident with David Sedaris and the Reno T-shirt lady appeared to the national audience of *The Daily Show*: Sedaris hilariously satirizes Nevadans' attire, building to a punch line in which the sixty-something T-shirt lady is comically exposed as ignorant and provincial. Indeed, she is figured as doubly stupid, first for wearing the shirt, and then for failing to realize the humorist's joke is at her expense.

Here, instead, is how I characterize the incident: While dressed like a cross between an editor at *The New Yorker* and a boozed-up birthday party clown, a comic who is raking large coin in our community mispronounces the name of our state on national TV while failing to answer the host's inane query as to whether it is unusually humid in the high desert. Finding it amusing to insult an older woman who has paid handsomely to see his show, purchased his book, and waited in line to meet him, he delivers a sarcastic crack about a T-shirt bearing the image of sweet old Count Chocula, whom anyone who was a kid in 1977 would now support for president.

As a humorist, myself—which is to say, as a person for whom irreverence must be understood as my stock-in-trade—I do not have a problem with any of that. But here is what chaps my hide: Sedaris fails to realize that it is not he but instead the Reno woman who delivers the punch line, of which Sedaris himself is the butt. I didn't think anyone was going to notice," she replies, without missing a beat. The irony in this exchange belongs not to

AA -> irony links to irony

33 -> shows where he is in life & shows part of the location of his knowledge

34 -> shows a reason for why he thinks or has felt

35 -> AA -> educated

36 -> AA -> very

37 -> AA -> includes his audience

38 -> AA -> includes his audience

39 -> AA -> includes his audience

40 -> AA -> includes his audience

41 -> AA -> shows that he knows most of his audience is westerners

42 -> AA -> includes his audience

43 -> AA -> speaks directly to audience

44 -> AA -> addresses audience & includes himself to align him with them

45 -> AA -> includes his audience

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the humorist for observing the idiosyncrasy of the woman's informal attire but rather to the woman, who knows perfectly well what Sedaris is doing and bests him by turning the joke around with the kind of graceful, self-deprecating irony that is the hallmark of genuine wit. (And can there be any doubt that she is a person of good humor if she has chosen to wear her Chocula colors to a performing arts center?) Every desert rat knows that this brand of dry humor is a signature characteristic of those of us who dwell in this dry place.

Sedaris is right that this is an amusing anecdote. He is simply wrong about why. So hope one of you reading this will let him know that black socks go with black shoes and teach him how to pronounce Nevada. (You might also mention to Jon that Nevada is the driest state in the Union.) Most important, please tell David Sedaris—whom I consider the most gifted literary humorist working today—that it is we who consider him the unwitting provincial. You think *The New Yorker* has cornered the market on irony? Out here in the desert West, irony is so damned dry that it's scary. Bluh! Bluh! Bvaaa baah! baah!

Themes

- US vs. them -> westerners vs. easterners, upper class vs. everyone else
- those in power vs. those not in power, big city versus everyone else
- identity

41 -> AA -> shows that he knows most of his audience is westerners

42 -> AA -> includes his audience

43 -> AA -> speaks directly to audience

44 -> AA -> addresses audience & includes himself to align him with them

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RANTS FROM THE HILL

## Appendix E

## Michael P. Branch Rhetorical Analysis Chart

Table 5

List of Each Example of Audience Awareness and Situated Knowledge in Branch's Text with Corresponding Details, Explanations, and Justifications

Instance	Quoted Example	Audience Awareness or Situated Knowledge & Corresponding Notes	Possible Audience(s)	How Instance Appears Tailored to Audience(s)	Possible Connection to Author's Background	Possible Message with This Instance/ Effect on Overall Message(s) of the Text/ Other Notes
1	"Like me, David Sedaris is a literary humorist." (113)	situated knowledge - right away says the location of his knowledge → helps to show what his perspective is and where he is coming from - helps to show that he has expertise and knowledge in this area, which gives him credibility to critique Sedaris and to understand Sedaris (and possibly Sedaris's point of view)	- those who read humor - those who know of Sedaris	- conversational tone	- shows his role as a humorist - has published multiple humorous pieces	- helps to establish ethos
2	"Unlike me, he has sold around eight million copies of his books, which have been	situated knowledge - shows what position within the literary world Branch is coming from	- those who know of Sedaris - adults → adults tend to understand what being translated into	- uses a value of measurement that adults would understand better than kids	- shows an indicator of his book's success → shows part of his background	- shows that he is successful → establishes ethos - shows that he has the credibility to critique Sedaris

	<p>translated into twenty-five languages and counting. (Several of my essays have been translated into Estonian; I may not be big in Japan, but the Estonians find me hilarious.)” (113)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- portrays himself as successful but still relatable</li> <li>- shows that he knows about Sedaris’s sales success versus his sales success, which further helps to show where his knowledge is coming from and from what point of view he is seeing the world</li> <li>audience awareness</li> <li>- says who some of his readers are</li> <li>- shows that he is aware that his audience is not as big as Sedaris’s audience</li> </ul>	<p>different languages implies, whereas kids probably don’t understand that as well</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adults → most kids have not heard of Estonia whereas many adults have even if they don’t know where it is</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- references a place that adults would likely be familiar with</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- shows that he is not as successful as Sedaris monetarily or fame wise, which also helps the audience to be more open to him and see him as more relatable compared to Sedaris</li> </ul>
3	<p>“As any insanely jealous fellow writer would, I have been busy finding reasons (which Eryn unkindly refers to as excuses) why Sedaris has been a bit more successful than I have. Why do I reckon Sedaris is outselling me?” (113)</p>	<p>situated knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- shows is perspective and feelings</li> <li>- brings part of his world in (Eryn) to show that his perspective may not be “Truth” but is instead his truth</li> <li>- labels himself as a writer (which also further connects himself to Sedaris)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- other writers</li> <li>- those who have felt jealous of others before adults</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- has that same humble feeling that would appeal to his audience of adults and humble people</li> <li>- speaks to the feeling of jealousy that writers have for each other sometimes and that many of us feel toward people who are being more successful than us</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- shows that he is a writer → shows part of his background</li> <li>- brings his wife (Eryn) into the story, which also shows his background and perhaps an aspect of their relationship with one another</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- motif of us versus them a little</li> <li>- motif of lampooning those we view as superior in society (very common in humor writing)</li> </ul>
4	<p>“Well, though raised in North</p>	<p>situated knowledge</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adults</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- language choice → “estate”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- just setting up the contrast that</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- tries to place Sedaris as superior</li> </ul>

	Carolina, he writes from an estate in England” (113)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- is actually situating Sedaris’s knowledge here → shows his regional affiliations</li> <li>audience awareness</li> <li>- is aware that most of his readers are not like Sedaris (are not part of the upper-crust of society), so he’s exposing that side of Sedaris in order to encourage the audience to be on his (Branch’s) side</li> </ul>			happens in the next portion of the sentence between him and Sedaris	to him so that he can use that to knock him down → setup to lampoon the superior party (very common in humor writing) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- starting to get the audience to identify with Branch more than Sedaris, which helps to get the audience on Branch’s side</li> </ul>
5	“I write from a remote hilltop in a sparsely inhabited western desert.” (113)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>situated knowledge</li> <li>- shows his regional bias</li> <li>- shows that his perspective is coming from a western perspective and from a remote desert perspective</li> <li>audience awareness</li> <li>- the original website/magazine (High Country News) that this was published targets people who live in the west, and Branch is showing that here</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- those living/have lived in the west</li> <li>- those living/have lived in remote areas</li> <li>- those living/have lived in the desert (specifically high desert)</li> <li>- adults</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- speaks to audience’s places of residence</li> <li>- speaks to adults because of the diction (“sparsely inhabited”)</li> </ul>	- shows where he currently lives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- helps to show comparison between him and Sedaris</li> <li>- helps to align himself with his audience and encourage his audience to align themselves with him since he comes from their perspective</li> <li>- helps to build his authority on the west since he lives in the west</li> <li>- helps to create his persona</li> </ul>
6	“His neighbors are intelligent, cultured, literate people with beaucoup leisure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>situated knowledge</li> <li>- situates Sedaris’s knowledge and reveals what lenses Sedaris views the world through</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- those who are not of the upper crust like Sedaris is</li> </ul>		- opposite of Branch’s background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- helps to set up the contrast between Sedaris and Branch with regard to place, affiliated people,</li> </ul>

	time and disposable income.” (113)					and socioeconomic status - setting up Sedaris as part of the elite, out-of-touch upper crust, which is setting him up to be looked upon with disdain by the members of Branch’s audience that don’t belong to those demographics
7	“My neighbors are less interested in a good laugh than you might think. This is because my neighbors are scorpions, rattlers, and libertarian survivalists—the latter of which can be dangerous.” (113)	situated knowledge - shows regional affiliation and resultant bias  audience awareness - his neighbors make up part of his audience because he is largely writing in defense of his neighbors - Branch is showing that he knows who his neighbors are, so he knows who he is writing to and in defense of	- Branch’s neighbors - fellow westerners - Nevadans	- these are the people he is defending against Sedaris’s snobbery, even if Branch does poke a little fun at them	- connects to where Branch lives	- helps to further set up the juxtaposition between Sedaris and Branch as writers and as humans - helps to show that Sedaris is out of touch whereas Branch is grounded
8	“my town” (113)	situated knowledge - says straight out that this is his town that Sedaris is talking about and lampooning	- Reno residents - Nevadans	- incorporates himself as part of the target of Sedaris’s humor—as part of Reno since he is showing that he	- shows where he lives and who his loyalty is to	- helps to show that he is aligned with the audience - helps to show that he has a person investment in the place

				belongs to the town		- helps to show that Sedaris making fun of Reno residents is a personal matter for him→ which may help the audience to identify with Branch, root for him, and be more welcoming to his message as oppose to Sedaris
9	“my corollary assumption that Sedaris, who must certainly be fearful of competition from me, is out to discredit those of us here in the Intermountain West” (113-114)	situated knowledge - says perspective he is coming from even though he’s being humorous and exaggerating his - feelings here - shows his regional affiliation - shows where he believes is his place within the literary realm in comparison to Sedaris is an ironic and humorous way	- those who live in the Intermountain West	- says his regional affiliation and uses “us” to indicate that he is part of that portion of his audience	- is where he currently resides	- helps audience to identify with him
10	“Reno” (114)	situated knowledge - explicitly states the city in which he lives, which shows a possible positive bias toward the place and bias against Sedaris’s comments	- Reno residents - Nevada residents		- is where he currently resides	- states specifically the city in question
11	“here in northern Nevada” (114)	situated knowledge - the “here” shows that Branch includes himself at this location since	- northern Nevadans		- is where he currently resides	- is bringing a feeling of being on the side of northern Nevadans since

		<p>“here” in this context feels like he is saying his location in northern Nevada</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- shows a possible bias that influences how he views Sedaris’s comments</li> </ul>				<p>there is a feeling that he is including himself part of the group of northern Nevadans</p>
12	<p>“Sedaris had Stewart and his New York City audience in stitches”</p>	<p>situated knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Branch is, in a way, situating Sedaris’s knowledge and showing that his knowledge comes from a big city perspective and speaks to an audience of that same regional affiliation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adults</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- usually adults (including young adults) know who Jon Stewart is, but kids probably don’t</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- went to school with Jon Stewart</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- seems to be setting up an image of a big-city audience laughing at the bumpkin folk of Northern Nevada, which helps to inflame Branch’s audience’s emotions and further encourage them to be on Branch’s side</li> </ul>
13	<p>“I generally subscribe to the ageless principle that there is no such thing as bad publicity, but the Sedaris-in-Nevada incident went largely without scrutiny, and so I feel the need to examine it more closely.” (114)</p>	<p>situated knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- show’s his usually perspective and then explains why he is going against it now → shows where his knowledge is coming from</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adults</li> <li>- Nevadans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the cliché of “no such thing as bad publicity” is likely known by most adults rather than kids</li> <li>- explicitly states “Nevada,” and this may indicate that he’s trying to show that his audience of Nevadans is not forgotten by him</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- he lives in Nevada</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- reveals that Branch does not agree with Sedaris lampooning Nevadans</li> <li>- further tries to get the audience on his side</li> <li>- shows why he is going to look more into the Sedaris incident instead of letting it go</li> </ul>
14	<p>“I do not blame Sedaris for stooping so low to get a cheap</p>	<p>situated knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- shows where Branch is coming from and his perspective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adults</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- most adults would see the irony in this joke and find that</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- he is a humorist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- both pokes fun at Sedaris for “stooping so low to get a cheap laugh”</li> </ul>



	laugh, since this is something I do at every possible opportunity.” (114)			humorous—so this shows adult-targeted humor		and puts himself in that same category to infuse humility into his text and to create humorous irony
15	“I have no interest in defending the informal dress of Nevadans, because it strains my imagination to think of anything less interesting or important.” (114)	situated knowledge - shows his perspective and what he does not necessarily value	- adults - Americans	- most Americans know that Nevada is a state and that Reno resides in it, but those outside of America may not know that Reno is a city in Nevada	- he is a Nevada resident	- shows what he values - in a way puts down Sedaris for picking on something so trivial in Branch’s eyes - shows that he does understand typical Nevadan dress → maybe helps his audience to identify with him since they see that he can relate to them and understands them
16	“as a humorist myself, I know very well that whether any of this actually occurred is immaterial” (114)	situated knowledge - shows his perspective (as a humorist) - situates Sedaris’s knowledge in a way because he’s showing that what Sedaris is saying may or may not be true	- adults	- diction → “immaterial”	- he is a successful humorist, so he has some authority on talking about what humorists do	- shows that Branch has authority to talk about this - jabs at Sedaris
17	“I believe a person should know what the hell he or she is talking about when making fun	situated knowledge - presents it as his personal truth by saying “I believe” - shows where his irritation with Sedaris comes from → helps to	- adults	- diction → “the hell” → usually used for adults, but could also be used for young adults		- jab at Sedaris - shows where his anger is coming from

	of something.” (114-115)	trace why Branch is taking on Sedaris like this and where Branch’s anger is coming from				
18	“If you know” (115)	audience awareness - shows that he is thinking about readers of his text because he talks directly to them	- adults	- topic → context is him talking about Robin Williams and drugs, so that is more of an adult topic		- brings audience into his text and, in a way, engages them in his text - creates an inner club that Branch and his readers are a part of, but Sedaris may not be → creates an in-group and out-group, which helps with the “us vs. them” dynamic
19	“then this joke will be funny to you even if you aren’t stoned” (115)	audience awareness - directly addresses readers, thereby showing that he is thinking about them/is aware of them → brings them into his narrative	- adults	- topic → drugs		- brings the audience into his text - continues to set up the in-group dynamic to create us (Branch and his audience) against them (Sedaris and the big city, upper crust people)
20	“he doesn’t even pronounce the name of our state correctly (it’s NevAda, not NevAHda).” (115)	audience awareness - Nevadans are very sensitive about this, and this speaks to that sensitivity  situated knowledge - he is also showing that he views Sedaris’s comments from the lens	- Nevadans	- sensitivity about how Nevada is said - use of “our” includes himself with audience so he is bringing them into his text and tailoring his argument to	- is a Nevadan	- creates an us versus them dynamic with the in-group being Branch and Nevadans and the out group being people like Sedaris who don’t seem to care enough to learn how to pronounce a

		of someone who lives in Nevada and does include himself in the state's culture and cares about the state (otherwise, he wouldn't care how the state's name is pronounced by others)		something that he feels would appeal to his audience of Nevadans		state's name correctly - helps to point out the ironic ignorance of Sedaris
21	"egregious" (115)	audience awareness	- educated adults	- tone → word choice indicates that he is tailoring his text to educated adults here	- reflection of his background as an educated scholar	- counteracts Sedaris' portrayal of Nevadans as ignorant and dumb
22	"excoriation" (115)	audience awareness	- educated adults	- tone → word choice indicates that he is tailoring his text to educated adults here	- reflection of his background as an educated scholar	- counteracts Sedaris' portrayal of Nevadans as ignorant and dumb
23	"cartoon dog Mr. Peabody" (115)	audience awareness	- older adults	- this is an older cartoon, so usually older adults would be able to get the reference here	- reflects his age	- build connection with older adults in his audience
24	"you're costumed as a pseudo-intellectual Woody Allen" (115)	audience awareness	- educated adults	- Woody Allen mostly does films for adults, so the reference would be one that adults would understand - tone → word choice of "pseudo-intellectual" is a term that would	- a reflection of his background as an educated person	- counteracts Sedaris's portrayal of Nevadans as ignorant and dumb

				be most readily understandable to educated adults		
25	“acumen” (115)	audience awareness	- educated adults	- tone → word choice indicates that he is tailoring his text to educated adults here	- reflection of his background as an educated scholar	- counteracts Sedaris’s portrayal of Nevadans as ignorant and dumb
26	“I went to college with Jon, and he is the smartest funny person (or funniest smart person) I have ever met. That said, <i>humid in Nevada?</i> He was never that daft around our freshman dorm.” (115)	<p>situated knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- showing that he personally knows Jon Stewart, so he has some credibility to discuss him</li> <li>- shows that he did indeed know Stewart well</li> </ul> <p>audience awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “<i>humid in Nevada</i>” → anyone who lives in Nevada or has visited it knows that Nevada is very dry</li> <li>- “daft” → word choice → educated adults</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adults</li> <li>- those familiar with <i>The Daily Show</i></li> <li>- educated adults</li> <li>- Nevadans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- reference to Jon Stewart, while pertinent to his argument here, is something most adults or young adults would know of → kids probably wouldn’t know this show</li> <li>- use of italics helps to emphasize the ludicrous nature of this statement and speak to his audience of Nevadans (kind of like an inside joke almost)</li> <li>- “daft” → word choice that speaks to educated adults</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- reflection of his background as a college-educated person</li> <li>- reflection of his background experience with Jon Stewart</li> <li>- reflection of his experience as a Nevadan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- establishes credibility for Branch to talk about Stewart</li> <li>- helps to set up the last sentence to show the irony of Stewart’s ignorant remark</li> <li>- helps to exaggerate the remark’s ridiculous nature to increase the humor and further speak to his audience of Nevadans</li> <li>- helps to show the ironic ignorance of Stewart seeming to agree with Sedaris on Nevadans being ignorant and backwoods when he himself has said an ignorant remark</li> <li>- raises up Nevadans while bringing down those in power</li> </ul>

						(Stewart, Sedaris, and their big-city cronies)
27	<p>“General Mills debuted Count Chocula, Franken-Berry, and Boo-Berry (the ‘Monster Cereals’) back in 1971, which put me at just the right age to love them, and to join the ranks of kids who experienced a condition actually called ‘Franken-Berry Stool,’ in which the heavy red dyes in the strawberry-flavored cereal turned our feces the color of David Sedaris’s shirt, when they would, under normal circumstances, have been the color of his tie.” (115-116)</p>	<p>situated knowledge - shows where he is coming from in his perspective on Count Chocula and Sedaris’s comments - reveals age to show where his knowledge is coming from and give himself some credibility here</p> <p>audience awareness - use of “our” indicates that he’s including himself in with someone else, and, for older adults, maybe this would speak to their experiences as well and help to continue to make an in-group between Branch and his audience</p>	<p>- adults, perhaps older adults who would remember such cereals and were kids in the 1970s like Branch was - middle to lower socioeconomic levels → these are cereals that “regular” people ate and were probably not cereals that kids of the high socioeconomic levels ate</p>	<p>- shows his age in order to relate to those older adults who are part of his audience - he’s not necessarily of the upper-crust like Stewart and Sedaris despite Branch’s education because Branch grew up like most people and shares a common experience with them - talking about feces usually helps to portray someone as down-to-earth</p>	<p>- reflection of his childhood - reflection of his penchant for research as a scholar</p>	<p>- helps Branch to come off as knowledgeable (speaks to his background as a scholar) - helps Branch to come off as a person of the people → relatable, humble, someone who understands and values people who are not necessarily of a high socioeconomic status - further puts him and his audience as part of the in-group and Stewart and Sedaris as the outgroup → helps in lampooning them and creating an “us versus them” motif</p>
28	<p>“Nineteen seventy-one was none too placid a</p>	<p>situated knowledge - shows where his perspective is coming</p>	<p>- older adults who would remember these incidents</p>	<p>- references events that older</p>	<p>- reflects his age and past experiences</p>	<p>- helps to show where he is coming from so that his</p>

	<p>year. The Charles Manson murder trial was nightly news, Ku Klux Klansmen were arrested for bombing school buses, Lt. William Calley was found guilty of the My Lai massacre in Vietnam, and the Nixon administration arrested thirteen thousand antiwar protestors during a single three-day period. Closer to home, Operation Grommet proceeded apace, as the United States spent the year continuing a decades-long program of attacking Nevada (which they probably pronounced NevAhda) with nuclear weapons.” (116)</p>	<p>from regarding his love for Count Chocula and what events shaped that love for the character → is showing how and why his bias for Count Chocula was shaped and came into being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- shows some of the influences and events that made him conclude that Count Chocula is important</li> <li>- shows partly where his defense of Nevada comes from and partly explains why he is sensitive to Nevada being attacked → because it has been attacked by nonresidents and people who don't care about the state in the past</li> </ul> <p>audience awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- knows that a lot of his audience are Nevadans, so he brings Nevada into his argument to appeal to his audience and empathize with their struggles, thereby aligning himself with them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- younger adults who may not have been aware of all of these incidents happening almost all at once</li> <li>- Nevadans → particularly older Nevadans who remember the testing and/or may have been affected by it</li> </ul>	<p>adults would likely remember</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- explains events in ways that people who weren't there would understand to some extent the significance of each event</li> <li>- specifically references something that is unique to Nevada and western America</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- is a bioregional scholar, particularly regarding Nevada, so he knows about Nevada's history</li> </ul>	<p>attachment to Count Chocula can be understood rather than treated as merely silly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- helps to show his knowledge and understanding to further show Sedaris and Stewart's ignorance</li> <li>- further aligns himself with his audience of Nevadans so that they see that he is on their side and that they should listen to him</li> </ul>
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29	“Not as scary as the A-bomb, or even the fuchsia poop induced by Franken-Berry, but you get the point.” (116)	audience awareness - reference of the A-bomb again speaks to some of the struggles that Nevadans and other westerners have faced - use of “you” is a direct addressment of his audience, thereby demonstrating that he is aware of his audience	- Nevadans - adults	- reference of the A-bomb is something that most adults and adult Nevadans would be aware of - use of “you” overtly incorporates his audience into his argument	- reflects his past experience with the cereal - reflects his knowledge about Nevada and the atomic bomb	- does an understatement in order to create humor and to relieve some of the heavy and depressing events he just discussed
30	“I detect a slight resemblance to Sedaris.” (116)	situated knowledge - situates this as his perspective and opinion as opposed to Truth that Sedaris looks like Count Chocula	- adults - Nevadans	- adults are usually the ones who are going to remember what Count Chocula looks like because they at the cereal as kids and buy the cereal now as adults - word choice → “resemblance” is more of a word in an adult’s vocabulary than in a child’s vocabulary - those who have been lampooned by Sedaris (Nevadans) are probably the ones who will get the most enjoyment from this comparison that		- makes fun of Sedaris to further ingratiate Branch to his audience of those who are opposed to Sedaris’s comment (particularly Nevadans) - helps to create an “us versus them” motif

				makes fun of Sedaris		
31	“Yes, you heard that right.” (116)	audience awareness - includes his audience in his narrative, which shows that he is aware of them and is even talking to them	- adults	- he uses this to help create irony, which although children do understand irony to some point, it’s already been established that Branch’s audience is mostly adults, and irony frequently speaks to humor that adults like		- helps to set up irony - incorporates audience by directly speaking to them
32	“We children, in an age of fear, had the power to scare a vampire! It was a delicious feeling, knowing that we could turn the tables on terror simply by lifting our spoons.” (116)	situated knowledge - shows why and where his feelings/bias for Count Chocula comes from and shows why he further feels that Sedaris is being pompous and ridiculous  audience awareness - “our” → builds off of himself including his audience of Baby Boomers in this experience and reminding them of this experience and how important/special it was	- adults - older adults (Baby Boomers) who lived through those times and understand that kind of fear	- uses “our,” which incorporates him into the audience → builds off of himself including his audience of Baby Boomers in this experience and reminding them of this experience and how important/special it was	- reflects the age and time he grew up in	- aims to show the importance of Count Chocula and further work to lampoon Sedaris and portray Sedaris as ignorant
33	“Now that I am a father, the proposition that children are	situated knowledge - shows where he is in his life and shows part of the location of his knowledge	- adults - parents	- reference to parents being scared of kids is probably more	- reveals part of his life and experiences that color how he sees the world	- creates irony



	more terrifying than vampires seems obvious enough.” (117)	→ he’s coming from the perspective of being a father		understood by adults and parents than children or young adults		
34	“That the cereals have been successfully rereleased in special edition retro boxes suggests that I am not alone in this.” (117)	situated knowledge - shows a reason for why he thinks others feel this way - shows his logic that caused him to arrive at this conclusion	- adults	- word choice → “rereleased” and “retro”	- reveals his logic and thinking	- tries to garner support for his claims by showing that other people agree with him → bandwagon technique
35	“provincial” (117)	audience awareness - word that speaks to his audience of educated adults	- educated adults	- word choice	- reveals his background as an educated person	- hammers home again that Nevadans are not ignorant or dumb
36	“Here, instead, is how I characterize the incident.” (117)	situated knowledge - shows that he is locating his knowledge as opposed to presenting this as the all-encompassing Truth of the matter	- educated adults	- word choice → “characterize the incident” is educated adult language with some formality to it	- word choice and resultant tone are reflective of his background as an educated individual and scholar	- places what he is about to say as his opinion
37	“While dressed like a cross between an editor at <i>The New Yorker</i> and a boozed-up birthday party clown, a comic who is raking large coin in our community mispronounces the name of our	audience awareness - uses language and image that he thinks will appeal to his audience of Nevadans - “our”  situated knowledge - shows that he is part of his audience’s community and his knowledge is coming from a place within that community →	- Nevadans - adults - educated adults	- image that would appeal to adults’ senses of humor → “boozed-up birthday party clown” - reference to <i>The New Yorker</i> , which is a publication that is aimed toward educated adults	- he is a Nevadan - reflects that he is educated because he references <i>The New Yorker</i>	- points out, and even exaggerates, the irony and ridiculousness of the situation to create humor and lampoon Sedaris - raises up Nevadans while bringing Sedaris and Stewart (the host with the “inane query”) down

	state on national TV while failing to answer the host's inane query as to whether it is unusually humid in the high desert." (117)	shows that he is viewing this scene of Sedaris on Stewart's show through the lens of someone who belongs to the community that they are making fun of		- uses "our" to include himself in with the audience of Nevadans and to directly speak to that portion of his audience - word choice → "inane" and "query"		- "us versus them" motif
38	"As a humorist myself myself—which is to say, as a person for whom irreverence must be understood as my stock-in-trade—I do not have a problem with <i>any</i> of that." (117)	situated knowledge - locates his knowledge and shows how he views the world	- adults	- word choice → "irreverence" and "stock-in-trade"	- he is a humorist	- helps to give him credibility when analyzing this and seeing what is acceptable in the field of humor writing and what is crossing the line
39	"chaps my hide"	audience awareness - western terminology that refers to the American west's history with ranching and cowboys - speaks to Nevadans because there are still many ranches and horse owners here	- American west inhabitants - Nevadans	- references the cowboy, which is part of the American west, and certainly Nevada's, history, culture, and mystique	- he does know how to ride horses (Hauserman, "Author Hilariously Recounts")	- further aligns himself with westerners and Nevadans - provides the down-to-earth language and humility that reminds the audience that he is one of them →creates a juxtaposition with his other language to show him as both intelligent and as

						down-to-earth, which is appealing to his audience who are probably similar to that or would like to think of themselves as similar to that
40	“Every desert rat knows that this brand of dry humor is a signature characteristic of those of us who dwell in this dry place” (118)	situated knowledge - shows the location/bias that justifies how he feels about that woman’s humor - shows why he thinks that woman actually went a higher level than Sedaris and made fun of him right back	- desert dwellers - Nevadans - high desert dwellers adults	- word choice → “dwell” - references		- helps to further lampoon Sedaris and show him why his making fun of this woman was ridiculous and ironically ignorant on Sedaris’s part
41	“Every desert rat” (118)	audience awareness - shows that he is aware that most of his audience is westerners - aligns himself with his audience	- desert dwellers - Nevadans - adults	- reference → “desert rat” → desert inhabitants understand that being called a “desert rat” is not an insult but can actually be taken as a compliment - includes himself in with his audience by saying “every”	- lives in the high desert and views himself as a desert rat	- builds up the importance of the inhabitants’ knowledge in order to build them up and bring Sedaris down
42	“those of us who dwell in this dry place” (118)	audience awareness - includes himself with the audience thereby helping to align with them and them with him	- desert dwellers - Nevadans - adults	- word choice → “dwell” - “dry place” → shows that Branch does know this place		- “dry place” → juxtaposes with Stewart’s earlier question of if Nevada was humid, which helps to show

						that Branch does know this place
43	“I hope one of you reading this” (118)	audience awareness - directly addresses the audience to show that he is aware of them and is including them in his narrative	- adults	- he knows that he is being read, directly addresses the reader via “one of you”		- brings his audience into his narrative - gives a call to action to audience in order to engage them in a way
44	“teach him how to pronounce Nevada” (118)	audience awareness - speaks to something that really irks many Nevadan inhabitants	- Nevadans	- Nevadans are the ones who know best how to pronounce their state	- Branch is a Nevadan and can say the state’s name correctly (meaning how the majority of the state’s inhabitants say it)	- places Nevadans as smarter than Sedaris because they know how to say their state’s name, but Sedaris cannot even accomplish this simple of task - us versus them motif - irony → Sedaris thinks that Nevadans are ignorant, but he cannot even say the state’s name correctly
45	“You might also mention to Jon that Nevada is the direst state in the Union.” (118)	audience awareness - speaks to knowledge that Nevadans would know	- Nevadans - adults	- Nevadans know this information very well - directly addresses and engages with the audience by using “you”	- Branch is a Nevadan and is a bioregional scholar who focuses on desert, so he knows this information	- raises up Nevadan audience and puts down Stuart - us versus them motif - gives a call to action to audience in order to engage them in a way
46	“whom I consider the most gifted literary humorist	situated knowledge - shows his perspective	- adults who know of Sedaris’s work		- Branch is a literary humorist himself	- gives Branch credibility in a way because he’s not coming off as an

	working today” (118)					extreme hater, so his argument that Sedaris is wrong (even though Branch likes his work) comes off as more believable and reasonable than if Branch refused to acknowledge Sedaris’s success
47	“that it is <i>we</i> who consider him the unwitting provincial” (118)	audience awareness - includes himself in here with Nevadans	- Nevadans - educated adults	- word choice → “ <i>we</i> ” → includes Branch in with his Nevadan audience - word choice → “provincial” and “unwitting” → word that is usually only incorporated into someone’s vocabulary if they have a higher education	- Branch is a scholar and “provincial” reflects his level of education	- builds up Nevadan audience and brings Sedaris down → lampoons the one supposedly in power (Sedaris) - aligns Branch with his audience of Nevadans - us versus them motif - to create irony→ Nevadans are supposedly the dumbs ones, but the word “provincial” and “unwitting” to contradict that
48	“Out here in the West” (118)	situated knowledge - shows what geographical perspective and cultural perspective Branch is coming from  audience awareness	- westerners	- word choice → “here” indicates that he is including himself in with his audience	- Branch lives in the American west	- us versus them motif - Branch aligns himself with his audience - gives Branch credibility to talk about things having

		- includes himself in with his western audience				to do with the American west
49	“our irony” (118)	audience awareness - includes himself in the audience addresses them	- westerners - Nevadans - adults	- word choice → “our” includes himself in with his audience and their geographic location and western culture	- Branch lives in the American west	- us versus them motif - Branch aligns himself with his audience and aligns his audience with him

Appendix F

Mindy Kaling Essay and Corresponding Notes

Types of Women in Romantic Comedies  
Who Are Not Real

DSK → reveals her background so that readers see where her thinking on romances is coming from; Kuroo → VHS

WHEN I WAS a kid, Christmas vacation meant renting VHS copies of romantic comedies from Blockbuster and watching them with my parents at home. Sleepless in Seattle was big, and so was When Harry Met Sally. I laughed along with everyone else at the scene where Meg Ryan fakes an orgasm at the restaurant without even knowing what an orgasm was. In my mind, she was just being kind of loud and silly at a diner, and that was hilarious enough for me. I love romantic comedies. I feel almost sheepish writing that because the genre has been so degraded in the past twenty years or so that admitting you like these movies is essentially an admission of mild stupidity. But that has not stopped me from watching them. I enjoy watching people fall in love on-screen so much that I can suspend my disbelief for the contrived situations that only happen in the heightened world of romantic comedies. I have come to enjoy the moment when the normal lead guy, say, slips and falls right on top of the hideously expensive wedding cake. I actually feel robbed when the female lead's dress doesn't get torn open at a baseball game while the jumboTron is on her. I simply regard romantic comedies as a subgenre of sci-fi, in which the world

*Handwritten notes:*  
 ② Most classic romances are from the 70s-90s. I think I should give more credit to the genre from that time.  
 DSK → how she thought about it.  
 her + VHS  
 DSK → reveals her truth.  
 DSK → reveals how unrealistic & feels → for perspective to place it thinking when it comes to the genre it's tropes 90s (as) plot points why the lack of logic often doesn't bother her

created therein has different rules than my regular human world. Then I just lap it up. There is no difference between Ripley from *Alien* and any Katherine Heigl character. They're all participating in the same level of made-up awesomeness, and I enjoy every second of it.

[So it makes sense that in this world there are many specimens of women who I do not think exist in real life, like Vulcans or UFO people or whatever. They are.]

**THE KLUTZ**

When a beautiful actress is in a movie, executives wrack their brains to find some kind of flaw in her that still allows her to be palatable. She can't be overweight or not perfect-looking, because who would want to see that? A not 100-percent-perfect-looking-in-every-way female? You might as well film a dead squid decaying on a beach somewhere for two hours.

So they make her a Klutz.

The 100-percent-perfect-looking female is perfect in every way, except that she constantly falls down. She bonks her head on things. She trips and falls and spills soup on her affable date.

Josh Lucas. Is that his name? I know it's two first names. Josh George? Brad Mike? Fred Tom? Yes, it's Fred Tom. Our Klutz clangs into Stop signs while riding a bike, and knocks over giant displays of expensive fine china. Despite being five foot nine and weighing 110 pounds, she is basically like a drunk buffalo who has never been a part of human society. But Fred Tom loves her anyway.

**THE ETHEREAL WEIRDO**

The smart and funny writer Nathan Rabin coined the term *Manic Pixie Dream Girl* to describe a version of this archetype

after seeing Kirsten Dunst in the movie *Elizabethtown*. This girl can't be pinned down and may or may not show up when you make concrete plans. She wears gauzy blouses and braids. She decides to dance in the rain and weeps uncontrollably if she sees a sign for a missing dog or cat. She spins a globe, places her finger on a random spot, and decides to move there. This ethereal weirdo abounds in movies, but nowhere else. If she were from real life, people would think she was a homeless woman and would cross the street to avoid her, but she is essential to the male fantasy that even if a guy is boring, he deserves a woman who will find him fascinating and pull him out of himself by forcing him to go skinny-dipping in a stranger's pool.

**THE WOMAN WHO IS OBSESSED WITH HER CAREER AND IS NO FUN AT ALL**

Mindy Kaling, basically have two full-time jobs. I regularly work sixteen hours a day. But like most of the other people I know who are similarly busy, I think I'm a pleasant, pretty normal person. I am slightly offended by the way busy working women my age are presented in film. I'm not, like, always barking orders into my hands-free phone device and telling people constantly, "I have no time for this!" I didn't completely forget how to be nice or feminine because I have a career. Also, since when does having a job necessitate women having their hair pulled back in a severe, tight bun? Often this upright woman has to "re-learn" how to seduce a man because her estrogen leaked out of her from leading so many board meetings, and she has to do all sorts of crazy, unnecessary crap, like eat a hot dog in a libidinous way or something. Having a challenging job in movies means the compassionate, warm, or sexy side of your brain has fallen out.

**THE SKINNY WOMAN WHO IS BEAUTIFUL AND TONED BUT ALSO GLUTTONOUS AND DISGUSTING**

Again, I am more than willing to suspend my disbelief during a romantic comedy for good set decoration alone. One pristine kitchen from a Nancy Meyers movie like in *It's Complicated* is worth five Diane Keatons being caught half-clad in a topiary or whatever situation her character has found herself in.

But sometimes even my suspended disbelief isn't enough. I am speaking of the gorgeous and skinny heroine who is also a disgusting pig when it comes to food. And everyone in the movie—her parents, her friends, her boss—are all complicit in

**THE FORTY-TWO-YEAR-OLD MOTHER OF THE THIRTY-YEAR-OLD MALE LEAD**

If you think about the backstory of a typical mother character in a romantic comedy, you realize this: when "Mom" was an adolescent, the very month she started to menstruate she was impregnated with a baby who would grow up to be the movie's likable brown-haired leading man. I am fascinated by Mom's sordid early life. I would rather see this movie than the one I bought a ticket for. I am so brainwashed by the young-mom phenomenon that when I saw a poster for *The Proposal*, I wondered for a second if the proposal in the movie was Ryan Reynolds suggesting that he send his mother, Sandra Bullock, to an old-age home.

**THE SASSY BEST FRIEND**

You know that really horny and hilarious best friend who is always asking about your relationship and has nothing really going on in her own life? She always wants to meet you in coffee shops or wants to go to Bloomingdale's to sample perfumes? She runs a chic dildo store in the West Village? Nope? Okay, that's this person.

**THE SKINNY WOMAN WHO IS BEAUTIFUL AND TONED BUT ALSO GLUTTONOUS AND DISGUSTING**

Again, I am more than willing to suspend my disbelief during a romantic comedy for good set decoration alone. One pristine kitchen from a Nancy Meyers movie like in *It's Complicated* is worth five Diane Keatons being caught half-clad in a topiary or whatever situation her character has found herself in.

But sometimes even my suspended disbelief isn't enough. I am speaking of the gorgeous and skinny heroine who is also a disgusting pig when it comes to food. And everyone in the movie—her parents, her friends, her boss—are all complicit in

this huge lie. They are constantly telling her to stop eating and being such a glutton. And this actress, this poor skinny actress who so clearly lost weight to play the likable lead, has to say things like "Shut up you guys! I love cheesecake! If I want to eat an entire cheesecake, I will!" If you look closely, you can see this woman's ribs through the dress she's wearing—that's how skinny she is, this cheesecake-loving cow.

You wonder, as you sit and watch this movie, what the characters would do if they were confronted by an actual average American woman. They would all kill themselves, which would actually be kind of an interesting movie.

**THE WOMAN WHO WORKS IN AN ART GALLERY**

How many freakin' art galleries are out there? Are people buying visual art on a daily basis? This posh, smart, classy profession is a favorite in movies. It's in the same realm as kindergarten teacher or children's book illustrator in terms of accessibility: guys don't really get it, but it is likable and nonthreatening.

**ART GALLERY WOMAN: Dust off the Warhol. You know, that Campbell's Soup one in the crazy color! We have an important buyer coming into town and this is a really big deal for my career. I have no time for this!**

The gallery worker character is the rare female movie archetype that has a male counterpart. Whenever you meet a handsome, charming, successful man in a romantic comedy, the heroine's friend always says the same thing. "He's really successful—he's... an architect!"

There are like nine people in the entire world who are architects, and one of them is my dad. None of them looks like Patrick Dempsey.



## Appendix G

## Mindy Kaling Rhetorical Analysis Chart

Table 6

List of Each Example of Audience Awareness and Situated Knowledge in Kaling's Text with Corresponding Details, Explanations, and Justifications

Instance	Quoted Example	Audience Awareness or Situated Knowledge & Corresponding Notes	Possible Audience(s)	How Instance Appears Tailored to Audience(s)	Possible Connection to Author's Background	Possible Message with This Instance / Effect on Overall Message(s) of the Text / Other Notes
1	"When I was a kid, Christmas vacation meant renting VHS copies of romantic comedies from Blockbuster and watching them with my parents at home." (99)	situated knowledge - reveals her background so that readers see where her thinking regarding rom coms is coming from - shows that she had at least a somewhat close relationship with her parents	- women - lovers of romantic comedies ("rom coms") - adults	- paints a picture that readers who are fans of romantic comedies may identify with - references VHS and Blockbuster, which are entities that young people today may not be familiar with, but everyone else (adults) probably remembers	- she does love romantic comedies and references that elsewhere in her book and in other interviews - she did have a close relationship with her parents	- reveals her feelings toward romantic comedies - building ethos as a rom com fan - building ethos with audience members that are fans of rom coms - reveals kairos (time of when she first started developing this love for the genre)
2	" <i>Sleepless in Seattle</i> " and	audience awareness - references classic rom coms that fans	- avid fans of the rom com genre	- references two classic and	- she is a rom com watcher and fan	- builds ethos with rom com fans

	“ <i>When Harry Met Sally</i> ” (99)	of the genre would know - both are also written by Nora Ephron → so, maybe a nod to those who are familiar with who Nora Ephron is and her importance to the rom com genre	- women since that is mainly who watches rom coms	foundational rom coms		- shows that, even though she is about to critique the genre, she does like the genre - helps the audience to identify with her and align with her
3	“ <i>Sleepless in Seattle</i> was big, and so was <i>When Harry Met Sally</i> .” (99)	situated knowledge - shows from what time period she is coming from	- fans of the genre - those around Kaling’s age	- speaks to avid fans of the genre who remember when they first watched these foundational films - those around her age would probably remember watching (or at least hearing about) those movies	- she is a rom com watcher and fan	- builds ethos → grew up during a time when the foundational movies to rom com were big - helps audience to identify with her if they were around for that time - shows kairos → when and under what circumstances she formed her love of the genre
4	“In my mind, she was just being kind of loud and silly at a diner, and that was hilarious enough for me.” (99)	situated knowledge - shows the kind of innocence under which she started exploring the genre and formed her love for it → shows part of the circumstances under which her knowledge was originally shaped	- adults - rom com fans - those who have watched <i>When Harry Met Sally</i>	- adults would think that this kind of innocence is probably cute and funny - adults would understand what that scene is actually about	- she was a kid (around 10 years old) at the time <i>When Harry Met Sally</i> came out	- shows her background - shows how and around what age she was introduced to the genre - probably portrays her as a narrator that is relatable for audiences

5	“I love romantic comedies.” (99)	situated knowledge - directly states her bias going into her argument in this essay	- fans of rom coms	- fans of rom coms will like that she feels as they do in this regard	- she does like the genre → a lot of her later work is rom com or rom com adjacent	- shows where her knowledge is coming from - helps to set up herself as a fan of the genre, so she has ethos to critique the genre
6	“I feel almost sheepish writing that, because the genre has been so degraded in the past twenty years or so that admitting you like these movies is essentially an admission of mild stupidity.” (99)	situated knowledge - explains her feelings about rom coms—both positive and negative and why she feels negatively about it - shows some of the biases that inform why she may feel negatively toward admitting that she likes rom coms  audience awareness - shows that she understands the same that some of her audience may feel about liking the genre - many members of her audience will be able to relate to what she is saying	- fans of rom coms	- many fans of rom coms will likely be able to relate to feelings both ways like Kaling does	- reflects how she feels about the genre	- shows what biases are shaping how she feels about rom coms - aids in getting the audience to identify with Kaling and side with her because Kaling seems to understand the opposing forces that many rom com fans feel → shows that Kaling “gets it” and is on the side of her rom com fan audience
7	“But that has not stopped me from watching them.” (99)	situated knowledge - reveals her truth → shows that she is aware of how rom	- fans of rom coms - those who approve of pushing back against	- like those fans of rom coms, societal pressures do not stop	- she is a rom com fan and has been since she was a kid	- helps to demonstrate that Kaling is aware of the biases and feels that pressure, but she

		com fans are portrayed sometimes, but that she does not let this negative stereotype stop her from enjoying the genre	societal norms and judgments on others	Kaling from watching the genre		does not let it stop her from doing what she wants in this regard -portrays her as kind of a rebel because she is not giving in to societal norms, even though it's ironic because she is liking a very popular and frequently norm-influenced genre of movies - helps her rom com fans to align with her, cheer for her, and be on her side as they delve into her argument going forward in the essay
8	"I enjoy watching people fall in love on-screen so much that I can suspend my disbelief for the contrived situations that only happen in the heightened world of romantic comedies. I have come to enjoy the moment when the normal lead guy, say, slips and falls right on top of the hideously	situated knowledge - reveals how she thinks and feels → shows her perspectives and her place of thinking when it comes to the genre and its frequent illogical plot points - explains her knowledge in order to help the reader understand why the lack of logic in the movies often does not bother her	- fans of rom coms - those who are not fans of rom coms and may not understand why someone would enjoy watching something so illogical at times	- connects with how some fans of rom coms probably feel - speaks to those who may not understand so that they can still relate to Kaling	- she is a fan of rom coms in real life	- explains her knowledge - situates the knowledge that informs many rom coms

	expensive wedding cake. I actually feel robbed when the female lead's dress <i>doesn't</i> get torn open at a baseball game while the JumboTron is on her." (99)	- also, in a way, situates some of the knowledge of the rom com genre → this does not usually happen in real life, this; shows the ridiculousness of these listed situations in order to reveal the ridiculousness of similar situations that are frequently depicted in rom coms				
9	"I simply regard romantic comedies as a subgenre of sci-fi, in which the world created therein has different rules than my regular human world. Then I just lap it up." (99-100)	situated knowledge - shows her thinking and perspectives on rom coms - uses "my regular human world" to show that this is her perspective rather than everybody's "regular human world" and thus everybody's Truth  audience awareness - by using another genre (one that is very popular) to explain her perspective, she shows that she is likely aware that not	- those who may not watch rom coms - sci-fi fans	- specifically references "sci-fi" and creates a connection between those who have at least watched sci-fi and those who watch rom com		- helps her to connect with those in her audience who may not be rom com fans - further explains why she thinks/feels the way she does - makes sure to portray this as her knowledge, but puts it in terms for others to understand

		everyone in her audience is a fan of rom coms or has watched many of them				
10	“There is no difference between Ripley from <i>Alien</i> and any Katherine Heigl character. They’re all participating in the same level of made-up awesomeness, and I enjoy every second of it.” (100)	<p>situated knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- shows her bias/place of where she is coming from</li> </ul> <p>audience awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- uses another popular genre to legitimize rom coms → helps one part of her audience to understand another part of her audience → shows that she is aware that her readers may not be fans of</li> <li>- alludes to famous female sci-fi character to show her sci-fi fans that she understands that genre as well → she’s not ignorant on either genre, so the audience can trust her</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- sci-fi fans</li> <li>- those who have seen <i>Alien</i></li> <li>- those who are aware of and/or like strong female characters like Ripley</li> <li>- rom com fans</li> <li>- movie watchers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- uses a classic sci-fi movie reference to speak to her readers who are familiar with that genre and/or movie and who enjoy or are passionate about that genre</li> <li>- uses a strong female character in <i>Alien</i> to create a positive connection between sci-fi and rom coms</li> <li>- uses a corollary to explain her position</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- build ethos with her rom com loving audience and maybe even the sci-fi audience</li> <li>- uses the possible passion of part of her audience to explain the passion of another part of her audience</li> <li>- perhaps helps to legitimize rom coms</li> <li>- uses a strong female character from a sci-fi film to borrow that ethos and give it to female characters in rom coms</li> <li>- building trust with audience</li> </ul>
11	“So it makes sense that in this world there are many specimens of women who I	<p>situated knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- frames this as her belief (“I do not think”) rather than Truth for everyone</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- sci-fi movie watchers</li> <li>- sci-fi movie fans</li> <li>- rom com fans</li> <li>- rom com watchers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- references “Vulcans” to show that she does know some aspects of the genre as Vulcans</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- helps to show readers why she can logically feel two varying ways about the rom com genre</li> </ul>

	do not think exist in real life, like Vulcans or UFO people or whatever.” (100)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- shows how she can logically feel two seemingly opposing ways about rom coms</li> <li>- shows that she is not truly passionate about sci-fi like she is about rom coms because she uses “or whatever” to downplay her knowledge of sci-fi and show that she is not an expert on the sci-fi genre</li> </ul>		<p>and the TV series and movies that contain them (Star Trek) are foundational to the sci-fi genre</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- still reminds her rom com fans that she’s not passionate about the genre like she is about rom coms</li> </ul>		- reminds her audience that she is not a sci-fi expert
12	“When a beautiful actress is in a movie, executives wrack their brains to find some kind of flaw in her that still allows her to be palatable. She can’t be overweight or not perfect-looking, because who would want to see that? A not 100-percent-perfect-looking-in-every-way female? You might as well film a dead squid decaying on a beach somewhere	<p>situated knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- shows the biases informing “the klutz” stereotype</li> <li>- is essentially situating Hollywood’s knowledge about women</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- feminists</li> <li>- women</li> <li>- adult women</li> </ul>	- word choice → “palatable” perhaps speaks to an educated audience, or at least an adult audience because kids would probably not know what “palatable” means	- Kaling has always been a little overweight→ she has never been that “perfect-looking” actress according to Hollywood standards	- situates Hollywood’s knowledge by showing the ridiculousness of how they portray women in rom coms

	for two hours.” (100)					
13	“She can’t be overweight or not perfect-looking, because who would want to see that? A not 100-percent-perfect-looking-in-every-way female? You might as well film a dead squid decaying on a beach somewhere for two hours.” (100)	audience awareness - presents an image that many women can relate to as frustrating→ that the average woman is not typically shown in rom coms	- feminists - women - women who do not necessarily fit this “perfect-looking” mold, which is just about every female	- speaks to how women are stereotypically portrayed in rom coms, which would appeal to women in her audience → may also appeal to men, but since it’s women she is talking about, then it would probably be most relatable to the women in her audience	- Kaling has always been a little overweight→ she has never been that “perfect-looking” actress according to Hollywood standards	- used to garner support and trust from the women in Kaling’s audience → ethos for Kaling
14	“(Josh Lucas. Is that his name? I know it’s two first names. Josh George? Brad Mike? Fred Tom? Yes, it’s Fred Tom).” (100)	audience awareness - aware that her rom com loving audience will know who Josh Lucas is, so the humor appeals to them and is directed toward them	- rom com watchers - those who know who Josh Lucas is - those who have watched <i>Sweet Home Alabama</i> (a classic rom com) in which Josh Lucas stars opposite Reese Witherspoon	- insider knowledge that is shared with the audience, so Kaling is creating an ingroup with her rom com audience	- Kaling likes to watch rom coms, so she’s probably watched, or is at least aware of, <i>Sweet Home Alabama</i>	- kairos → is in the pocket for the time in which rom coms were pretty big (2000s) - creating a relationship with the audience - portraying Kaling as goofy and funny→ someone you could relate to because she feels approachable and like someone who is down-to-earth
15	“Our Klutz clangs into Stop signs while riding a bike, and knocks over giant displays of	audience awareness - includes a direct address to the audience to get them to relate to what she is saying and see	- rom com watchers - women - adult	- word choice → “expensive fine china” makes more of an imagistic impact with adults than with children	- Kaling is a fan of rom coms	- is bringing the audience into her head and it is like she and her audience are looking at the same thing → trying to get



	expensive fine china.” (100)	that Kaling and the audience are on the same side		- this image will make an impact with rom com watchers because they can recall movie characters, they have seen that fit this stereotype, thereby relate clearly to what Kaling is saying		the audience to see her perspective and agree with her
16	“Our Klutz clangs into Stop signs while riding a bike, and knocks over giant displays of expensive fine china. Despite being five foot nine and weighing 110 pounds, she is basically like a drunk buffalo who has never been part of human society.” (100)	situated knowledge - shows the biases that inform/shape this stereotype and exaggerates the characteristics that rom coms do often use for their heroines in order for Kaling to show how ridiculous this is - situates Hollywood’s portrayal of women→ the women on the screen are not representative of most real women	- women - adults - feminists	- tears apart Hollywood’s unrealistic portrayal of women on the silver screen, and that concept is appealing to many women who feel like they are accurately represented in movies or who feel like they don’t measure up to that standard - perhaps is tailored to feminists because feminists often want women to be celebrated for what they are rather than having them portrayed as something that they’re not and creating a standard that could be detrimental to how	- Kaling was klutzy and unathletic growing up according to her first book - Kaling has described herself as always being a little chubby in her first book	- ethos building → shows that Kaling is aware that Hollywood isn’t depicting women as they are in real life, and she’s battling for real women by exposing the ridiculousness of the fictional portrayal of women

				society views women and how women view themselves		
17	“This girl can’t be pinned down and may or may not show up when you make concrete plans.” (101)	audience awareness - addressing the reader with “you” to engage them and help them recall their own experiences so t that they can relate to what she is discussing	- adults	- usually, the issue of flighty friends is something that adults face more than children		- the “you” acts as bringing the reader into the text and asking them to participate → helps to keep the reader engaged and to encourage the reader to follow along with Kaling’s line of logic
18	“This ethereal weirdo abounds in movies, but nowhere else. If she were from real life, people would think she was a homeless woman and would cross the street to avoid her, but she is essential to the male fantasy that even if a guy is boring, he deserves a woman who will find him fascinating and pull him out of himself by forcing him to go skinny-dipping in a	situated knowledge - shows the biases informing the “ethereal weirdo” stereotype - reveals the underlying characteristics of this portrayal in order to show what goes into Hollywood’s creation and portrayal of such a character  audience awareness - reference that indicates that she knows that her readers are primarily young adults or	- feminists - those who are familiar with the trope that Kaling outlines → probably adults or young adults since they would know what skinny-dipping is, and most children probably do not	- speaks to feminists because it points out where women are subservient, in a way, to men → how rom coms can use women as tools rather than portray them as real, feeling, and thinking people - skinny-dipping reference is probably something young adults and adults would be aware of (or an experience that they have done), but is probably not something most children are familiar with or have done		- tries to show the ridiculous assumptions and claims that Hollywood must accept and promote in order to have this kind of character - shows the forces that influence the portrayal of women in this context

	strangers pool.” (101)	adults rather than children				
19	“I, Mindy Kaling, basically have two full-time jobs. I regularly work sixteen hours a day.” (101)	situated knowledge - shows from what place she views the world - shows why she has credibility on what actual businesswomen and working women is like	- women - working women - adults	- discussing having two jobs is something that adults can relate to more than kids - man working women understand having a busy schedule like the one Kaling describes	- Kaling is an actress and a screenwriter and was doing both of these jobs when she wrote this book	- gives herself ethos to set up her claims about why Hollywood’s portrayal of businesswomen is misguided and incorrect
20	“But like most of the other people I know who are similarly busy, I think I’m a pleasant, pretty normal person.” (101)	situated knowledge - how she views herself  audience awareness - connects with the audience that is busy and works, which is most people	- adults - working people - people who work but consider themselves “pleasant” and “normal” for the most part	- being busy and still maintaining a “pleasant” personality and being “normal” is more of an adult and young adult topic than a children’s topic → adults and young adults are going to be the ones who can relate to this the most - this speaks specifically to a challenge/aspect that people who are working probably think about	- Kaling does view herself as a pleasant person most of the time	- uses her own knowledge and experience to give herself ethos when talking about what real-life people who are busy with jobs act like - juxtaposes what is typically real-life versus what is portrayed in rom coms (and by Hollywood) in order to show how the movie portrayal is not an accurate representation of real life and is even ridiculous
21	“I am slightly offended by the way busy working women my age	situated knowledge - how she views herself places this as her viewpoint and her	- women who work - women in their 20s, 30s, and 40s (the main ages that	- addresses part of her audience (“busy working women”), so they likely feel	- at the time of writing this book, she is around the age that rom com	- builds ethos → Kaling is not some out of touch Hollywood starlet living a life of luxury

	are presented in film.” (101)	knowledge instead of saying that this is offensive to everyone → she is owning her feelings by using “I” and “my”	women are super busy)	included and “seen” by Kaling	protagonists typically are	- identifying with her audience → she is just like them in that she is busy working like them
22	“I’m not, like, always barking orders into my hands-free phone device and telling people constantly, ‘I have no time for this!’ I didn’t completely forget how to be nice or feminine because I have a career.” (101)	situated knowledge - shows that her experience shapes her knowledge and how she views this stereotype in rom coms - traces the biases that inform this stereotype in rom coms to situate Hollywood’s knowledge and show that it’s not an accurate reflection of reality	- feminists - women who work	- speaks to feminists in that feminists typically like to combat such negative stereotypes of women, and that is what Kaling is doing here - many women who work are probably able to relate to what Kaling is saying here	- Kaling does like feminine things and does have a successful career	- builds ethos with her audience - uses her experience to give her credibility and critique rom coms’ stereotype of working women
23	“Also, since when does having a job necessitate women have their hair pulled back in a severe, tight bun? Often this uptight woman has to ‘re-learn’ how to seduce a man because her estrogen leaked out of her from leading so many	situated knowledge - trying to situate Hollywood’s knowledge and portrayal of women in rom coms in order to show what biases inform/shape it and to point out the ridiculousness of it - reveals biases that are informing this stereotype	- rom com fans - those who have seen The Ugly Truth - feminists - working women - adults	- reference to a rom com without saying the name, so those who are fans will understand the allusion - appeals to feminists in that feminists frequently don’t like women being forced into a box and saying that women are necessarily forced to	- Kaling works and likes traditionally feminine things like fashionable dresses	- Kaling uses this to point out the biases that go into creating this stereotype in rom coms (i.e., something that is put forth as knowledge) in order to show where it comes from, why it isn’t really accurate of real working women, and why it is actually ridiculous and even a

	board meetings, and she has to do all sorts of crazy, unnecessary crap, like eat a hot dog in a libidinous way or something. Having a challenge job in movies means the compassionate, warm, or sexy side of your brain has fallen out.” (101)	- by revealing biases, Kaling’s audience can see why it is not an accurate portrayal of a lot of working women  audience awareness - reference to eating “a hot dog in a libidinous way” is a reference to <i>The Ugly Truth</i> with Katherine Heigl doing that in a scene when she is re-learning how to seduce a man and be in touch with her sexiness as a woman		give up their femininity if they decide to enter the workplace and are successful in it (at least third-wave feminism says that from my research on it in the past)		harmful portrayal of women - using the insider reference to <i>The Ugly Truth</i> helps her rom com fan audience to see that she is knowledgeable on the genre → may encourage them to trust Kaling and sympathize with her argument
24	“If you think about the backstory of a typical mother character in a romantic comedy, you realize this:” (102)	- audience awareness direct address of audience to encourage them to follow Kaling’s line of logic	- rom com fans - women who are mothers	- Kaling points out the “typical mother character,” which would likely pique the interest of mothers reading this because it connects with their lives since they are mothers	- Kaling was very close to her mother all throughout her childhood and adult life (her mother had not yet died at the time of this story’s publication)	- brings mothers into the conversation, so this topic speaks to the mothers in Kaling’s audience and likely they will naturally start a comparison between their lives as mothers and how the “typical mother character” is portrayed according to Kaling
25	“I am fascinated by Mom’s sordid early life. I would	situated knowledge - showing her thinking and	- rom com fans - mothers - average adult	- the idea that the average person’s messy and imperfect		- Kaling trying to gain the average person’s trust by appealing to

	rather see this movie than the one I bought a ticket for.” (102)	demonstrates why she thinks the realistic, not-perfect story would be more interesting  audience awareness - appeals to the average person by saying that		story is more interesting than what is in the movie theaters is appealing to the average person		their egos (your story is just as interesting, if not more, than what is shown in movies) - gives the reasons why she feels this way, thereby situating her knowledge
26	“I am so brainwashed by the young-mom phenomenon that when I saw a poster for <i>The Proposal</i> , I wondered for a second if the proposal in the movie was Ryan Reynolds suggesting that he send his mother, Sandra Bullock, to an old-age home.” (102)	situated knowledge - shows that she is aware that her thinking is being shaped by movies that portray mothers as extremely young (even illogically so) → traces the biases that inform her thinking about what mothers look like  audience awareness - reference to <i>The Proposal</i> (which is a rom com)	- rom com fans - mothers - those who know who Ryan Reynolds and Sandra Bullock are	- topic of what mothers actually look like is likely something appealing and relatable to the mothers in Kaling’s audience - reference to a rom com, <i>The Proposal</i> , so rom com fans will be able to conjure this up in their minds		- explains how a bias from rom coms has shaped her knowledge about the world - ultimately helps to garner sympathy for her and encourages the audience to align with her argument because she is not above being influenced by these biases → she is just like a normal person despite being a rich and successful actress
27	“You know that really horny and hilarious best friend who is always asking about your relationship and has nothing really going on in her own life? She	audience awareness - direct address of the reader - brings the reader into thinking about this and to join Kaling on her line of logic - asks the reader to bring in their own	- adults - young adults	- word choice deals with topics best known to adults and young adults → “horny,” “dildo” - reference to places that cater to adults or that are more familiar to adults than children →	- Kaling lived in New York for a while after she graduated from college	- encourages the reader to bring in their knowledge to start a comparison between their experiences and what Kaling is about to bring up in order to show how the rom com stereotype or the

	always wants to meet you in coffee shops or wants to go to Bloomingdale's to sample perfumes? She runs a chic dildo store in the West Village? Nope?" (102)	knowledge as they are reading Kaling's text - question marks act as addresses to the reader to bring them in - punctuation encourages audience to actively engage with Kaling's text and line of logic		coffee shops, Bloomingdale's, the West Village,		"sassy best friend" is not reflective of reality (102)
28	"Again, I am more than willing to suspend my disbelief during a romantic comedy for good set decoration alone." (102)	situated knowledge - reveals that she is willing to suspend her disbelief, which is one reason why many rom coms are enjoyable for her - shows from what place her knowledge is coming from and the choices that go into forming that knowledge	- rom com fans - those who do not understand the appeal of rom coms	- helps to explain partly why Kaling can enjoy rom coms to those who don't really understand rom coms' appeal - may also be a feeling that rom com fans can relate to		- may help rom com fans to further identify with Kaling - explains where her knowledge is coming from and what is informing it
29	"Nancy Meyers movie like in <i>It's Complicated</i> is worth five Diane Keatons being caught half-clad in a topiary or whatever situation her character has found herself in" (102)	situated knowledge - shows Kaling's background knowledge on rom coms → shows that her knowledge and feelings have been shaped in part by watching these movies → helps to boost her ethos  audience awareness	- rom com fans - those who know who Nancy Meyers is and/or have watched <i>It's Complicated</i>	- reference to a classic rom com scene that many rom com fans will know and be able to conjure up in their minds	- Kaling is a rom com fan	- increase Kaling's ethos with rom com fans

		- references to rom coms and a classic rom com scene with Diane Keaton, which will connect with the rom com fans in her audience				
30	“But sometimes even my suspended disbelief isn’t enough.” (102)	situated knowledge - shows that she does like the genre, but there are still things that personally bother her	- rom com fans - people who are not rom com fans	- shows that she understands both sides of the argument (why rom coms are great and why they may not be so great), which would appeal to people belonging to both sides of the argument—fans of rom coms and those who are not	- she is a rom com fan	- ethos building by using the “but” and “even” → she is a huge fan of rom coms (which gives her ethos), but even she can’t abide by some of the illogical portrayals (which gives credibility to her argument) - shows that she understands both sides of the argument → why rom coms are great and why they may not be so great
31	“If you look closely, you can see this woman’s ribs through the dress she’s wearing—that’s how skinny she is, this cheese-cake loving cow.” (103)	audience awareness - directly talks to the reader using “you” to encourage the reader to engage with Kaling’s argument and align with Kaling’s viewpoint	- adults - young adults	- touches on the topic of body image, which is primarily a challenge that young adults and adults face	- Kaling has admitted to having body image issues in a separate essay in this same book	- encourages the reader to agree with Kaling
32	“You wonder, as you sit and watch this movie, what	audience awareness - addresses the reader with “you” to	- women - adults - Americans	- reference to “average American woman” suggests	- Kaling is closer to the “actual average” than to the skinny	- encourages audience to align with Kaling



	the characters would do if they were confronted by an actual average American woman.” (103)	encourage the reader to follow Kaling’s line of logic that rom coms sometimes don’t portray women in ways that reflect reality		that she is speaking to Americans since Americans (particularly adults) are going to have an idea of what the “actual average American woman” looks like - women → many of Kaling’s readers are “actual average American” women	stereotype of the rom com character	- encourages the audience to follow along with Kaling’s logic since “you” is being used as a reference to her audience
33	“Whenever you meet a handsome, charming, successful man in a romantic comedy, the heroine’s friend always says the same thing.” (103)	audience awareness - direct address of audience with “you” that puts the audience in that situation	- those interested in love and romance - rom com fans - adults - young adults	- word choice → “successful” is usually a quality that adults, and even young adults, look for in partners as opposed to something that children think about - speaks to those who are interested in a romantic tale and can imagine themselves in a romantic tale		- encourages the reader to follow along with Kaling’s line of logic
34	“(say it with me)” (103)	audience awareness - direct address and invitation/command to audience to encourage them to actively engage with the text	- rom com fans - adults - young adults	- sentence structure → comes across like a command - even though it is offset in the text, it still plays off of the last line, which speaks to rom com		- brings in the audience into the situation that Kaling is presenting so that they follow her line of logic and hopefully agree with her - setting up for the punchline

				fans, adults, and young adults		- tries to portray Kaling as being on the “same wavelength” with her audience, thereby aligning her with them and them with her
35	“There are like nine people in the entire world who are architects, and one of them is my dad. None of them looks like Patrick Dempsey.” (103)	<p>situated knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- uses her experience to show what has shaped her knowledge in order to show why she believes this</li> </ul> <p>audience awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dempsey reference shows awareness of rom com fans in her audience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- rom com fans</li> <li>- adults</li> <li>- young adults</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- reference to Patrick Dempsey speaks to rom com fans because Dempsey has acted in at least six rom com movies, so fans would likely be familiar with him in at least one of those movies</li> <li>- humor in the irony of architects being handsome and sexy is more appealing to young adults and adults than to children</li> </ul>	- her dad is an architect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- gives Kaling ethos to say why some rom com movies do not reflect reality, especially with regard to what people look like in real life</li> </ul>

## Appendix H

## Dat Phan Transcribed Routine and Corresponding Notes

Title: "Dat Phan East Meets West: Part I"

Analyzed Clip: 00:02:22 – 00:04:02

① AA → directly addresses the audience in away that asks them to identify with their feelings at the moment

You know, I used to hate the phrase that people said that all Asian people look alike. ② SK → claims this knowledge as his; doesn't claim it to be true for all Asian people; explicitly states a bias to situate what he is going to say next

That really used to bother me, right? But then I just found out recently that America, we're in debt to Japan 369 billion dollars. Can you believe that? Like I want to take advantage of it and just go down to city hall, "Hello. Hello, I'm Japanese. I'm here to collect my money. We all look alike. Fifteen million dollars? Fifty dollars? Bus pass? Paper clip? I'm gonna go to Walmart now."

③ AA → includes himself in with his American audience to show that this is part of his burden too because he is an American & views himself that way

④ AA → asks a rhetorical question to ask audience to involve them

⑤ AA → direct address of audience to involve them in what he is saying & engage them

⑥ AA → includes himself in with his audience of Americans

⑦ AA → direct address of audience

⑧ AA → includes himself in with his audience of Americans

⑨ SK → places this as his knowledge rather than truth

Oh yeah, you know what I just found out? I found out in America we opened a hundred Walmarts in China. Did you guys hear that? We opened a hundred Walmarts in China and uh, I think it'd be really ironic to have the customers walking around right, they're like, "Wait a minute. I made this. I made this. I made that. I made the whole row. We're selling all this stuff to ourselves."

⑩ SK → shows the place from which he is speaking and viewing the world

⑪ AA → asks a rhetorical question of the audience to involve them & get them to agree

⑫ AA → direct address of audience; connects his knowledge to audience; tells them what to think here maybe to put them in that situation & relate to them

⑬ SK → uses his experience to explain/demonstrate his knowledge that he generalizes to many "old Asian" men

⑭ SK → shows that his knowledge regarding this comes from his experience in being Asian himself

⑮ SK → uses his experience (bias) to show what his truth looks like; AA → references entities that speak to his audience & provides strong imagery

So, I saw my dad recently, right, and I love my dad but like he's getting older, right? I can tell you can tell that Asian people are getting older when they're making weird noises around the house, weird body noises. My dad, when he's smoking, and like he's always moaned, smoked, and now he moans when he smokes. How creepy is that? At what age does an old Asian man get to walk down the hall going, "Dat Phan just" [moaning noise while inhaling imaginary cigarette smoke] and Asian people, we look young our whole life until we're fifty. And then once we're fifty, we look like we're five-hundred years old. My dad, when he's smoking he looks like Yoda smoking opium. He's walking down the hallway going, "Dat Phan" [inhales imaginary cigarette smoke] "mmm, young Jedi in fear me is of Filipino you are."

⑯ SK → shows the knowledge in his family that all Asians do not act or look all alike, which ties back to his opener of "all Asian people look alike"

## Appendix I

## Dat Phan Rhetorical Analysis Chart

Table 7

List of Each Example of Audience Awareness and Situated Knowledge in Phan's Text with Corresponding Details, Explanations, and Justifications

Instance	Quoted Example	Audience Awareness or Situated Knowledge & Corresponding Notes	Possible Audience(s)	How Instance Appears Tailored to Audience(s)	Possible Connection to Author's Background	Possible Message with This Instance / Effect on Overall Message(s) of the Text / Other Notes
1	"You know"	audience awareness - directly addresses the audience in a way that asks them to identify with Phan's feelings at this moment	- adults - Asians - Americans - Asian Americans	- use of second person		- trying to bring in audience and encourage them to engage with him by calling up their own knowledge regarding what he is about to say - helps his routine to feel like a conversation, even though it is a monologue
2	"I used to hate the phrase that	situated knowledge	- adults - Asians	- topic → race relations, such as	- says how he actually feels	- reveals his feelings and knowledge to set

	<p>people said that all Asian people look alike. That really used to bother me, right?"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- claims this knowledge as his</li> <li>- doesn't claim it to be true for all Asian people</li> <li>- explicitly states a bias to situated what he is about to say</li> </ul> <p>audience awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the "right?" asks a rhetorical question of the audience in order to involve them</li> <li>- in a way, it encourages the audience to reach into their knowledge and compare it with what Phan is saying</li> <li>- it also encourages them to agree with Phan by saying, "right?" which essentially asks for confirmation → hence why he uses a word that would indicate that he is correct ("right?") in order to engage the audience instead of something else like, "do you know what I mean?"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- those aware of race relations</li> </ul>	<p>thinking that people of a race all look alike, is an adult and young adult topic—it's not really something that kids would understand</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- he is bothered by racism and views himself as Vietnamese and also a regular American male</li> </ul>	<p>up the irony of the joke that is to follow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- engages audience</li> <li>- brings audience in to try and help them to identify with his point of view</li> <li>- helps his routine to feel like a conversation, even though it is a monologue</li> </ul>
3	<p>"that America, we're in debt to Japan 369 billion dollars"</p>	<p>audience awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- use of second person plural enables Phan to include himself in with his American audience to show that he is part of his audience (he is part of the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Americans</li> <li>- adults</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- topic of monetary debt speaks to adults</li> <li>- use of "we" speaks to Americans and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- his is an American → he lives in the US, went to school in the US, works in the US</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- helps to get audience to see that he is American and he is Asian → the two are not mutually exclusive → logos</li> </ul>

		ingroup and is not an outsider to them) - this is part of his burden too because he is an American and views himself as American		includes Phan in that audience	- he may have been born in Vietnam, but he immigrated when he was just a few months old, so American life is really all that he has been consciously aware of	- helps audience to view him as “one of them”
4	“Can you believe that?”	audience awareness - direct address of audience to involve them in what he is saying - engage audience	- Americans - adults	- still on the topic of financial debt, which speaks to adults		- trying to bring in audience and encourage them to engage with him by calling up their own knowledge regarding what he is about to say - helps his routine to feel like a conversation, even though it is a monologue
5	“Oh yeah, you know what I just found out?”	audience awareness - direct address of audience to involve them in what he is saying - engage audience	- Americans - adults	- topic that follows is about opening up Walmarts in China, and this is a topic that would likely appeal to adults as opposed to children or young adults		- trying to bring in audience and encourage them to engage with him - helps his routine to feel like a conversation, even though it is a monologue
6	“in America we opened a hundred	audience awareness - use of second person plural enables Phan to include himself in with	- Americans - adults	- topic appeals mostly to adults - treats Walmart as an American	- does view himself as a “regular, American guy”	- places him in the ingroup with his audience, who are Americans

	Walmarts in China”	his American audience to show that he is part of his audience (he is part of the ingroup and is not an outsider to them)		creation (hence the “we” instead of a “they”)	(from the podcast interview)	- so, he is portraying himself as American here because he is part of his audience of Americans - helps to reduce the audience perhaps feeling like he is not American or is more Asian than American (Phan sees them as equal—he is both in equal amounts)
7	“Did you guys hear that?”	audience awareness - direct address of audience - checks for understanding (without expecting an answer) to engage his audience and make sure that he is following his line of logic (logos)	- Americans - adults	- context → topic appeals mostly to adults		- trying to bring in audience and encourage them to engage with him - trying to make sure that the audience is engaged and following his line of thought (logos)
8	“We opened a hundred Walmarts in China”	audience awareness - use of second person plural enables Phan to include himself in with his American audience to show that he is part of his audience (he is part of the ingroup and is not an outsider to them)	- Americans - adults	- topic appeals mostly to adults - treats Walmart as an American creation (hence the “we” instead of a “they”)		- repetition of this concept helps to ensure that the audience is following his logos and is engaged with him - places him in the ingroup with his audience, who are Americans - so, he is portraying himself as American here because he is

						<p>part of his audience of Americans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- helps to reduce the audience perhaps feeling like he is not American or is more Asian than American (Phan sees them as equal—he is both in equal amounts)</li> </ul>
9	“I think it’d be really ironic”	situated knowledge places this as his knowledge rather than as Truth	- adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- context → topic appeals mostly to adults</li> <li>- irony is not really a concept that children really understand yet, so this is probably not aimed toward children</li> <li>- it could appeal to young adults, since they could be watching Phan on YouTube (where the video is from), but his audience within the video is likely adults since he is in a comedy club (which usually has an age limit of 21 or older)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- setting this up as his opinion</li> <li>- conveys his message without telling the audience what to believe or think</li> <li>- sets up Phan to lampoon the stereotype that cheap things are made in China</li> <li>- also sets up Phan to expose the irony that an American company (Walmart) is mostly stocked by, and dependent upon, Asian goods</li> </ul>
10	“I love my dad but like he’s	situated knowledge	- adults	- having aging parents is a topic	- has said in interviews that he	- reveals his feelings and knowledge to set



	getting older, right?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- shows the place from which he is speaking and viewing the world and viewing his dad</li> <li>audience awareness</li> <li>- asks a rhetorical question ("right?") at the end to engage the audience, get them involved in what he is saying, and encourage them to agree with him → hence why he uses a word that would indicate that he is correct ("right?") in order to engage the audience instead of something else like, "do you know what I mean?"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adults with parents who are aging</li> <li>- young adults</li> </ul>	that speaks to adults and young adults (children do not usually think about their parents aging)	loves his parents and is proud of his parents, who his parents are, and of their culture → so he has a close relationship with them and does love them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>up the irony of the joke that is to follow</li> <li>- engages audience</li> <li>- brings audience in to try and help them to identify with his point of view</li> <li>- helps his routine to feel like a conversation, even though it is a monologue</li> </ul>
11	"I can tell"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>situated knowledge</li> <li>- owns the knowledge that he is about to present as his and does not portray it as Truth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adults</li> <li>- young adults</li> </ul>	- context → talking about aging parents, which would likely appeal mostly to adults and young adults	- his parents are aging and he is close to his parents	- conveys his message without telling the audience what to believe or think
12	"you can tell"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>audience awareness</li> <li>- direct address of audience</li> <li>- connects his knowledge to audience's knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adults</li> <li>- Asians</li> <li>- young adults</li> </ul>	- context → topic of aging, smoking Asian parents mostly likely speaks to the experiences of some adults and young adults		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- tells the audience what to think here maybe to put them in that situation and help them to relate to the knowledge that Phan is espousing</li> <li>- engages audience</li> <li>- brings audience in to try and help them</li> </ul>

						to identify with his point of view
13	<p>“My dad, when he’s smoking, and like he’s always moaned, smoked, and now he moans when he smokes. How creepy is that? At what age does an old Asian man get to walk down the hall going”</p>	<p>situated knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- uses his experience to explain / demonstrate his knowledge that he later generalizes to many “old Asian” men</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adults</li> <li>- young adults</li> <li>- Asians → many Asians who are senior citizens smoke or have smoked at one time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- talking about aging parents smoking and putting that in a negative light is a topic that would most likely appeal to adults, adults with aging parents, and young adults (it probably wouldn’t appeal to children)</li> <li>- smoking has typically been prevalent among older Asians, so that speaks to the experience of Asians who have parents or grandparents who currently smoke or have smoked</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- he is close with his parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- shows that his knowledge is shaped by his personal experience → traces biases that inform his knowledge here</li> <li>- also helps him to gain ethos on discussing parents and something that is prevalent in many Asian communities</li> <li>- keeps this example within Asian communities and does not extend it to other races</li> <li>- shows his ethos because he is Asian and because he has an Asian, gaining father who smokes, he feels that he has the credibility to make this claim → both his race and his experience give him ethos</li> </ul>
14	<p>“and Asian people, we look young our whole life until we’re fifty. and then once we’re fifty, we look like</p>	<p>situated knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- shows that his knowledge regarding this topic comes from his experience in being Asian himself (hence the “we”)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adults</li> <li>- Asians</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- topic of aging most likely appeals to adults</li> <li>- presents this almost like he’s revealing insider knowledge, and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- he is Asian</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- oddly puts him in an outgroup compared to his audience (since he does not include his audience in the “we”), which perhaps shows that he can be</li> </ul>

	we're five-hundred years old."			this knowledge is something that many Asians are likely to identify with		both Asian and American simultaneously→ they are not mutually exclusive to one another - puts Asians both in a positive light and in a negative light - perhaps uses this stereotype of Asians having good skin to praise it and critique it → to dispel a stereotype and dispel some of the historical mysticism that has surrounded Asians
15	"My dad, when he's smoking he looks like Yoda smoking opium."	situated knowledge - uses his experience (bias) to show what his truth looks like in his family  audience awareness - references → Yoda and opium	- Americans - Asians - Asian Americans - adults - young adults	- Yoda is a reference to a staple of much of American pop culture—Star Wars - opium is a reference to something that has frequently been associated with Asians - opium is usually something that adults and young adults would know about, but perhaps not children		- uses allusion to something (Yoda) very American to speak to his audience - uses allusion to something (opium) typically associated with Asians - tries to create strong imagery for his audiences so that they can understand his knowledge and what he sees → so that they can understand and visualize his truth

16	“mmm, young Jedi in fear me is of Filipino you are”	situated knowledge - shows the knowledge in his family that all Asians do not act or look alike, which ties back to Phan’s opener of disliking people claiming that “all Asian people look alike”	- adults - young adults - Asians	- this kind of race issue is more likely to be understood by adults and some young adults - this speaks to Asians’ knowledge that they do not all look, act, and think alike	- Phan is ethnically Vietnamese	- shows the message again that all Asians are not alike in looks, culture, thinking, or actions - uses his experience to give himself ethos on this matter - uses his experience to support his main argument of all Asians not being indistinguishable
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