

STRIVING TO BE UNIQUE, THE SEARCH FOR VOICE: IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION
AND PERFORMANCE AMONG CREATIVE WRITERS AND THE NAVIGATION OF A
HEGEMONIC SYSTEM

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Abstract

This thesis examines the Academic Creative Writing Economy (ACWE) as a hegemonic system and how its members navigate the governing rules of this system. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with 25 ACWE members and were later transcribed following Strauss and Corbin's (1990) grounded theory methodology. To analyze the 188 single-spaced pages of transcripts, a cultural-critical rhetorical lens is employed, viewing the data through Butler's (1999) identity theory and Foucault's (1965, 1972, 1977) theory of dominant discourses. The analysis produced four emergent themes: the hegemonic nature of the ACWE, the rules of the hegemonic system, voice as central to writers and what is at stake in the face of governing rules, and online publishing outlets as resistive shelters and forces against the ACWE. The rules of the system are enforced via system sanctioned stages (i. e. workshops and publications) and therefore inform system members' voices with or without the system members' knowledge. Despite this hegemonic, cyclical effect, the system aids writers as it provides an economic shelter. This shelter coupled with the resistive structures within the walls of the ACWE, prevent a total conversion to stagnant writing. In addition to outlining these governing rules, this thesis also examines the performance and construction of voice among system members; and how these performances and constructions are changing in the face of both a technological boom and a rise in the number of programs within the ACWE. I argue for further study of creative writers by Communication scholars focused on identity theory, as creative writers have always had mediated identity performances via their work and now the general population is adopting these mediated performances through social media.

List of Abbreviations

ACWE	Academic Creative Writing Economy
AWP	Association of Writing Programs
CV	Curriculum Vitae
FTA	Face-Threatening Act
MFA	Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing
TT	Tenure-Track

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“The only reason I ever wanted to be a writer and cared about literature at all is because I felt like it saved my life and it was about saving people. But now it just seems about people saving themselves.” (Fiction Editor, Prospective Student)¹

Chapter One: Introduction

The importance of a culture’s art cannot be understated. In historical repose the artists of a given culture and era are examined as synecdoches to understand the underpinnings of that particular culture (Levinson, 1989; Kranzberg, 1984; Gowans, 1981). In the present, one of the tasks artists are charged with is critiquing society by means of their work (Greenberg, 1989; Gowans, 1981). Creative writers are a large part of a culture’s art, and since their medium is accessible to a mainstream population and lends itself to both surface and deep interpretations they are at the forefront of social critique and, perhaps, social change (Raglon & Scholtmeijer, 2001). A lot of these artists are trained, published, and curated in the academy, which as a cultural institution, unfortunately, enacts the “governing rules” (Foucault, 1972, p. 41) of culture. Studying in a cultural institution makes honest and deep critique of society difficult for the writers who inhabit this space since they do not have the luxury of distance from their object of critique. The academy is a hegemonic system, making its creative writing students system writers, which limits their view of complex social issues. System writers therefore enact the governing rules of the academy, specifically accountability. Accountability forces system schools to document how they are furthering scholarship and therefore marks certain publishing venues as system approved and therefore countable to writers. The presumed requirement to

¹ Each respondent’s current rank in the Academic Creative Writing Economy (ACWE) will either be noted in the sentence preceding his/her remarks or in a parenthetical following the remarks.

publish in only countable venues alters writers' abilities to perform a voice that is outside the acceptable range promoted in said venues and therefore the academy itself. Although countable journals may exist that allow for heterogeneous voices, the fact remains that the writers I spoke to still feel pressure to write in a certain, system-approved, way, even if that pressure is not completely valid. While, on the one hand, these writers are charged with finding their *voice*, a unique and durable identity performance acted out on the pages of their work, in order to remain in the academy; on the other hand, the system steers writers to act out certain codes within their voice, making the central defining feature of voice, uniqueness, difficult, if not impossible, to obtain and enact; therefore constraining their ability to critique society (Morton & Zavarzadeh, 1988).

Although, according to some respondents, online publications do not count toward academic accountability rules, to resist the homogeneous voices of the pre-established tradition, many writers turn toward online publications anyway. The explosion of online communication has acted as an outlet for those writers who wish to perform voice and identity outside of the acceptable codes of the academy. But as online communication has grown, so has the academy's interest in these online outlets and the interest in the academy of those who participate in these online outlets. This thesis argues that online publishing and social networking outlets for writers disrupt the rules established by the academy by providing more space for writers to express and find a voice not accepted by the academy and therefore allowing these writers to remain societal critics. In turn the academy is forced to co-opt these outsider expressions and ultimately systematize this outside space and the writers who inhabit this space, again restricting the construction of identity and therefore its performance and communication thus, perpetuating the hegemonic cycle.

An Explosion of MFA Programs: The Birth of a System

What I call the *creative writing world* consists of all writers who are seeking publication in fiction, poetry, or creative non-fiction. This is a large and diverse population rife with dominant discourses. It is too large to study as a whole in any cogent way (McGurl, 2009). Therefore, this study looks at what I call the *Academic Creative Writing World*.

The *Academic Creative Writing World* is made up of creative writers who either have a terminal degree in creative writing or are working toward a terminal degree in creative writing.² This group of writers and the university programs that these writers inhabit create what I call the *Academic Creative Writing Economy* (ACWE). It is an economy in that most of these writers do not make a living by selling their creative work; instead they make their living by teaching at these programs. The students they teach then become eligible to teach in these jobs, thus creating an economic cyclical effect within the ACWE (Leahy, 2005).

Academic creative writing programs are relatively new in western academia, starting in the late 1800s or early 1900s depending on which history one believes (Myers, 1993). Recently, this world has begun to expand at an extraordinary rate (McGurl, 2009). The Association of Writing Programs (AWP)³ started in 1967 with 13 member institutions and has since grown to include over 400 programs in 2010. The growth of this field has been particularly pronounced since 1994 when there were 64 institutions that granted Master of Fine Arts degrees in creative writing, while in 2009 the number had swelled to 153 (AWP, 2010). This rapid growth has forced the ACWE to model itself after other academic programs and in turn adopt these other programs' hegemonic structures. At the same time, the programs within the AWCE strive to be unique in the academy, promoting collaborative learning and individual expression. The outcast

² A terminal degree in creative writing is a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) or a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) per the 2011 AWP Handbook. In creative writing either degree is sufficient to be hired into a tenure track position (AWP, 2010).

³ AWP is a coalition of academic writing programs.

stature of these programs draws artists who wish to critique society into them, while the following of the other academic units causes many of these same writers to enact system rules, thereby creating acceptable, homogeneous voices, and a tension between incoming artists' expectations and actuality.

Identity Construction, Performance, and the Search for Voice

Writers have tangible public and private selves, making them a unique study of identity, identity construction, and identity performance. Additionally, the literature on creative writing and the writers I spoke to often point to the construction of *voice* as a central goal of burgeoning writers; voice is the unique, durable features that each writer brings to their work (Morton & Zavarzadeh, 1988). As both the literature and my participants' indicate, each writer's voice should be distinct from all other writers' voices and therefore the search for voice is a primary focus of both the MFA system and writers themselves (Morton & Zavarzadeh, 1988). Viewing the construction and performance of voice through the lens of identity performance allows for a fresh view of identity construction. While most studies on identity that follow Judith Butler's path view identity performance as subconscious and a product of social construction, this study allows for both this unconscious look and a conscious look at performance (1999). With writers aware of the need to find a unique writerly voice, they are aware of the construction of voice and the performance of voice on the page. At the same time, this voice may be separate from, or commingled with, the construction and performance of their other identities, even their other writerly identities. Writerly voice is conflated with the idea of voice in terms of power (i. e. agency). To be successful, one must find one's own voice, which is to say that one must declare their uniqueness and then gain the benefit of his/her uniqueness, which is agency within the ACWE.

In addition to the dual layered performance outlined above, writers are performing multiple identities within other arenas of writing aside from their published work (e.g. blogs, social media, writers' communities). These performances can be viewed as acts of active self-branding and this study looks at how writers choose to enact these identities and build and communicate their brand; and how writers negotiate their multiple identities and how these identities are affected by both the governing rules of the ACWE and the governing rules of the resistance to the ACWE.

Hegemonic Ordering

In many ways art can act as a catalyst or barometer for social change (Gowans, 1981; Monroe, 1934). However, sometimes art acts as a tool of a dominant discourse instead of change (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2007); in turn art can reinforce “governing rules” (Foucault, 1972, p. 41) of a dominant discourse. This reinforcement can be of a political nature with art as propaganda or that of the artistic kind, where art becomes stagnant (Lubin, 1994; Monroe, 1934; Adorno & Horkheimer, 2007). It is easy to see that much of the creative writing world has become stagnant (Genoways, 2010). All you have to do is walk into the fiction section at a local bookstore and browse the mainstream genre fiction. What you will find are books that are not original and that play the same tropes again and again. Of course, this is just one subset of creative writing. The books tagged with the genre label mostly consist of books crafted solely for commercial aspirations, and therefore with little-to-no social consciousness (Greensberg, 1989). It would be unfair to say that all creative writing is stagnant (or for that matter that all genre creative writing is stagnant)⁴ but I use this to illustrate the point that a dominant discourse (in this

⁴ Alan Gowans offers a thorough exploration into why popular culture art is in fact art and should be viewed through the same lens as what he terms “High Culture” art in his book Learning to See: Historical Perspective on Modern Popular/Commercial Arts (1981, p. 2). Additionally, Mary Klages points out that today’s genre fiction might in fact be tomorrow’s classic fiction (2006).

case what I would call *commercialism* or *capitalistic art*) can render a form stagnant. This danger lies within all subsets of art, even those that pride themselves on being outside of consumerism. The ACWE has traveled the path from that as a resistive force to capitalistic art, to an art that enacts many of the same governing rules that homogenized capitalistic art. Additionally, the current resistance to the ACWE is now at risk for following this same path to homogeneity in voice.

As outlined above, the ACWE is relatively new and has co-opted governing rules from at least two different dominant discourses: the mainstream creative writing world and the academy. These governing rules have manifested into a system that seeks to keep the work produced within the ACWE at certain publishing venues, and may in turn render the work stagnant and without critical edge.

The academy's governing rules are many and since the ACWE is willingly a part of the academy it has had to accept most of these rules (Burton, 1983). The rules of interest to this thesis are those associated with counting publications and in turn tenure and hiring practices. These rules are part of a larger discourse which can be termed "accountability" (Mathison & Ross, 2002, Section 2.1). Since the governing figures of the academy must report progress to their constituents (be it the state or a board of trustees) they look for easily packaged statistics to show the success of their institution (Mathison & Ross, 2002). The ACWE must package its results like any other department and this uniform treatment of programs within the academy causes problems with the ACWE as it does not have the same end goals as many other departments (grant money in the hard and soft sciences, academic publications in all fields, job placement in business, law, and medicine; Kerridge, 2004). The ACWE has developed a system where certain journals count, and these journals are typically older journals housed at universities

or major presses. With the explosion of new publishing methods, both online means and print-on-demand, there has been an explosion of new journals.⁵ This has created an environment where not all journals count in the academy (in fact, most journals do not). This results in a two-pronged effect with those writers interested in resisting the governing rules of the ACWE having an outlet for such resistance and the ACWE being forced to adapt to and adopt some of this system to co-opt the resistance.

The Rise of Online Publishing: An Opportunity for Resistance

In the realm of ACWE, technology is shifting how business is being conducted, with new literary magazines popping up every day and old print publishers dying or refusing to publish work from outside the ACWE (Pearson, 2007). In a world where technology becomes more and more integrated into how we communicate we are also seeing huge changes in how we present ourselves to the world and how, in turn, the world accepts these presentations (Lemke, 1999). With the rise in online publications and in turn some established members of the ACWE publishing online, we are at a crossroads where some of the governing rules of the ACWE are under attack and may, in fact, be changing. Online publications and writing communities offer outlets for those who wish to resist the governing rules of the ACWE. As online publications gain respect and age they become threats to the ACWE as they continue to run afoul of the governing rules of the ACWE. The writers who have made their names through these outlets and writers from within the ACWE who have turned to these outlets give these outlets credibility and cultural capital in the creative writing world and in turn the ACWE. While online publications

⁵ Print-on-demand (POD) is a relatively new innovation in the world of publishing, starting around the year 2000 (however, libraries had the capability to POD books from other libraries as far back as 1993) (Davis, 2009). Instead of running a certain number of copies of a book, print-on-demand publishers only print books that have been ordered. These type of presses are associated with self-publishing and are not considered prestigious in the field, as there is no review system. Since anyone can publish via print-on-demand, self-publication of a book via these means does not carry any weight (Rohn, 2008). However, some journals use this method and still review for acceptance into their pages.

offer a means of resistance, it seems this resistance and its strategies have not been wholly accepted by the dominant discourses in the ACWE to date. And, what progress has been made is being threatened by the co-opting of the online model by these dominant discourses and the appropriation of the dominant discourses' governing rules by the resistance itself. Additionally, the dual layered performance inherent for a writer is especially susceptible to these governing rules, threatening creativity and innovations within the field.

Many writers have now turned to the internet through these new publications, collectives, or personal web space to actively brand themselves. Branding is nothing new, as any publication on a writer's Curriculum Vitae (CV) can be viewed as a writer performing a specific identity toward their overall brand, but with new means and more exposure the pace of these acts are accelerating. This allows for a freedom from the restraints of the gate-keeping system seen in publishing and the ACWE. At the same time, these additional forums for identity performance can cause writers to further fracture their selves; where writers must juggle their voice, their brand, and their everyday self, the former two being conscious constructions. While this branding does not necessarily (and most of the time does not) lend itself to cultural capital in the ACWE, as more writers turn to its methods, branding gains power. The inverse is also true as it acts as a space where the enforcement of the system rules can be enacted by system writers.

Précis

Through qualitative interviews with system writers of various ranks, this study focuses on how writers are managing their identities and their performances of these identities as the ACWE changes at a staggering pace. Methodologically this study uses Strauss and Corbin's (1990) grounded theory model to code the transcripts and furthers the analysis with a critical cultural unpacking.

The explosion of online outlets has allowed for more space/freedom for expression. Therefore there is more room to craft voice and in turn identity outside of the academy. However, the academy still requires cultural capital via one's CV in order to continue participating in the academy and since the ACWE provides economic shelter, outsider writers still inhabit it with the aim to remain untainted by its rules. This infestation allows for online outlets to gain cultural capital within the ACWE. There is a two-way give and take, wherein online outlets are appropriating governing rules from the academy while at the same time the academy is co-opting online methods. Additionally, many online publications and spaces are still rebellious forces against the hegemonic system, creating spaces for resistance. This leaves writers with a fractured self, communicated through multi-layered performances (self, voice, brand) on the digital stage of a new community which has its own rules.

As the MFA system grows, the need for more countable publications grows. This rise coincides with the rise in online outlets, which, at the beginning, were strictly resistive spaces or outlets unengaged with the academy. As the MFA system co-opts online outlets, co-opts online outlets' methods, and co-opts online writers; online outlets appropriate the hierarchical structure of the academy; writers face a multi-faceted world where they must perform in multiple arenas (both online and physical); the construction and performance of identities and voice in system writers are at risk of becoming stagnant and the resistance to hegemonic system rules is susceptible to becoming a separate and equally dangerous hegemonic system.

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter Two is a literature review that explores the rise of the MFA system and the rise of online literature; how voice is commingled with identity and specifically how identity is constructed and performed; and finally hegemonic ordering and how governing rules are created, communicated, and enforced. This chapter

outlines the major theoretical lenses that will be used for the analysis, Foucault's (1965, 1972, 1977) hegemonic ordering and Butler's (1999) identity theory, while also providing background on creative writing, MFA program structure, and the history of both MFA programs and online publishing. Additionally, this chapter delves into the secondary analytical lens of Face-Threatening Acts (Demeure et al., 2009) and poses four distinct research questions.

Chapter Three outlines the methods of the study, first explaining why Corbin and Strauss's (1990) grounded theory is the appropriate method to address the proposed questions. Next I explicate how the method was developed and implemented.

Chapter Four moves on to the analytical work, where I break down the transcripts into the emergent themes, unpacking the forces beneath my respondents' words. I begin with an overview of the primary emergent themes. I then unpack each of these four emergent themes, starting with the hegemonic nature of the MFA system. In this section I use Foucault's (1965, 1972, 1977) lens of hegemonic ordering to illustrate how participants conceptualized the MFA system as a hegemonic system. I follow this with the second emergent theme, which centers on the rules of the system. This section, again, uses Foucault to outline the governing rules known by my participants. Additionally, this section looks at how these rules are fluid and changing due to the rise in online spaces. The third emergent theme moves from the macro view of the MFA system to the effect this system has on the system participants. I couple the hegemonic ordering of the system with a micro level analysis of individual voice. This analysis views voice as identity through the lens of Butler (1999), while maintaining an eye toward the hegemonic forces and the effects they have on voice and identity. The final emergent theme focuses on resistance to the hegemonic system, tying up the analysis from the first three themes by exploring how

writers operate within this system as autonomous beings while still holding onto certain rules of the hegemonic system to remain valued within the ACWE.

Chapter Five offers implications, limitations, and future directions for research in this field. I explore future research options while explaining how this research contributes to the field of communication as a whole. Specifically, I outline the contribution this research has to identity theory.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In Chapter One I described this study's two primary theoretical lenses, Foucault's (1972) archeology and Butler's (1999) identity theory, through which I look at an emerging field in the academy, creative writing. In this chapter I begin by tracing the beginning of creative writing in the academy and then move on to the exploration of hegemonic ordering, voice, and identity.

Explosion of MFA Programs/System

As discussed in Chapter One, academic creative writing programs are a new addition to the western academy (Myers, 1993). For much of its first hundred years the ACWE was not much of a force in the academy, as it did not have many programs across the country, but in the last decade and a half this world has grown at a staggering rate (McGurl, 2009). This rapid growth threatens the unique facets of the ACWE, since in order to sustain such growth the ACWE has had to model itself after other academic programs. By following established models in the academy the ACWE has accepted these other programs' hegemonic structures while maintaining its other status via its instructional methods and publishing venues. This creates a tension between the ACWE and the academy that is only relieved as the ACWE takes more and more governing rules from the academy. Of course, accepting more governing rules from the academy takes away from the unique features of the ACWE, which creates tension between the ACWE and its participants.

What defines creative writing in the academy today is the workshop with its round-table collaborative structure (Myers, 1993). The workshop is a small group meeting, in which

students' texts are handed out to be read closely and critiqued each week. Each participant gives a written critique for homework and then participates in a group oral critique during the next class. Typically, the role of the student being critiqued is to listen and take notes to improve his/her text, staying true to his/her own vision for the text (Mayers, 1999; Gray, 1999; Green, 2001). This very structure makes the creative writing MFA program an *other* within the academy because the onus for instruction falls on the members of the class as well as the professor, instead of just the professor (Kalamaras, 1999).

The proliferation of academic creative writing programs has led to their ingratiation into the academy, since in order to thrive in a system an outsider must adopt some of the system's governing rules. As I stated in the introduction, I believe this ingratiation has come about due to the adoption of governing rules from multiple hegemonic systems. Others argue that this proliferation is at root of their perceived decline in literature: "in which the plaintiff conflates a perceived decline in the quality of contemporary poetry with the spread of creative writing programs" (McFarland, 1993, p. 28; Michel, 2010; Genoways, 2010; Gay, 2010; Menard, 2009).⁶ Or, as Genoways puts it in his article titled "The Death of Fiction?":

Graduates of creative writing programs were multiplying like tribbles. Last summer, Louis Menand tabulated that there were 822 creative writing programs. Consider this for a moment: If those programs admit even 5 to 10 new students per year, then they will cumulatively produce some 60,000 new writers in the coming decade. Yet the average literary magazine now prints fewer than 1,500 copies. In short, no one is reading all this newly produced literature—not even the writers themselves. And with that in mind, writers have become less and less interested in reaching out to readers—and less and less encouraged by their teachers to try.

Genoways's argument rests on readership, a countable measure, of individual journals. It is also rooted in a time when literary magazines were scarce, not in a world with an exploding number

⁶ I want to make it clear that I am not making this argument. While some of my views may seem to imply this argument (for example, as I stated in Chapter One, I believe that said adoption of governing rules can lead to stagnant art), I do not believe that literature, or art, is dying. I believe that the resistance to these rules is strong and that the size of this system (the ACWE) is so encompassing that great literature and art is still being produced daily.

of academic creative publications and academic jobs (Borkowski, 2010). Of course, 1,500 subscribers times thousands of journals is still a lot of readers compared to 15,000 subscribers times a few dozen publications and does not lead me to conclude that fiction is dead or dying, as Genoways suggests.

Aside from this belief that literature is dying due to the rise in MFA programs there have been tangible benefits and an economic boon for creative writing MFA students in the form of more jobs. Despite this functional quality of giving writers an avenue to make a living through a terminal degree, creative writing programs still differ greatly from other programs in the academy. In addition to the format of the classes, the differences can be seen in how students and teachers view themselves in creative writing programs versus other academic programs. In creative writing programs students and teachers are writers first and students and teachers second (Bizzaro, 1998). The implication is that being a writer defines this population, and while it can be argued that all scholars can be defined as scholars or writers, the fact that creative writing publications do not ground themselves in citations (research) sets creative writing apart from their peers in the academy. These differences are what make the co-opting of governing rules from the traditional academy so jarring. As I will explore in a later section, by appropriating these rules, creative writing programs stand to lose what makes them unique.

Research question 1. As the MFA system continues to grow, age, and become more embedded in the academy, how does said system keep its “other” status while complying with academy rules?

Research question 2. What are the governing rules of the MFA system and how are they communicated?

Identity Construction and Performance and the Search for Voice

The ideal workshop is a collaborative effort between every member of the group, a true “pluralism” (Morton & Zavarzadeh, 1988). The purpose of the workshop is to allow writers a safe space to find their unique voice (Morton & Zavarzadeh, 1988). This ideal workshop gives each workshop member a voice and leaves the critiqued author with a better sense of his/her work so s/he can improve upon his/her unique vision. As Rakow and Wackwitz (2004) explain, voice is more than just the opportunity to speak, but also the ability to be heard and listened to. Both the opportunity to speak and the ability to be heard require a level of respect from the audience and if the speaker has respect then s/he has some level of power (Rakow & Wackwitz, 2004). The workshop is supposed to offer this respect while the authors attempt to find their true voice. Voice is a central goal/theme of MFA programs, as Pateman articulates:

Why is finding a voice so important? ... finding a voice is important in just the same way as is *speaking with a full word* sincerely, authentically, and for oneself. Not to speak with a full word is always to speak with the voice of others or another-society, party, church, one’s mother, one’s father. (1998, p. 87)

Because of the need to find voice, MFA programs, and more specifically workshops, act as a testing ground for voice. When a student turns in a piece of her/his writing, s/he hears feedback the next week that indicates whether or not s/he has found, or is on the right track to finding, not only personal voice, but a voice that works for the audience.

Finding one’s voice can be viewed as acting out different roles on the page, making this search for a true voice ideal to look at through Goffman’s (1959) framework of the presentational self (Beams & Pike, 2008). These performances are the authors negotiating with their projected selves, or self-presentations, with social norms, or frames. In other words, the

author negotiates their projected self until s/he is in compliance with the governing rules of the dominant discourse. In the case of the workshop, an author's projected self is the voice s/he uses in their writing (which is fluid) and the frame is derived from the expectations originating from current literature and from the other workshop members' writings and critiques. Each critique, both as the writer and as a reader, allows for the author to reread the situation and in turn change his/her self-presentation in the next piece s/he submits for critique (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005).

As time passes, the authors' personas become more fixed until they define who s/he is as a writer; authors perform many different personas in their writing until s/he finds his/her own true, hopefully unique, voice. In Goffman's (1959) framework the author presents many different selves in his/her writing, rereading the situation with each enacted drama (the voice in their piece being critiqued) until s/he understands the framework and settles on a suitable presentational self and in turn has face, or voice (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005; Beams & Pike, 2008). In order to have a suitable self in the academy, the voice must follow the dominant discourse's governing rules.

For the complexity of decoding the performances of writers whom operate in multiple hegemonic arenas, this thesis follows Judith Butler's (1999) identity performance framework. While Goffman's (1959) performativity is a good starting point to look at writerly voice, Butler's deeper exploration of how systems impact identity performance in realms outside of interpersonal communication is needed when studying writers. While the workshop creates situations conducive to Goffman's framework, Butler's strategies encompass workshops and the nebulous spaces of the hegemonic discourses of the ACWE and the publishing world in general. In Butler's framework, the act of cultivating a voice is an identity performance (1999). Writers are unique in that they are more conscious of their identity performances, and are aware of both their on stage and an off stage persona. This consciousness sets up nicely for Goffman's (1959)

presentational self theory, but the privacy of the act of writing distances this consciousness from the interpersonal analysis employed by Goffman. What we are left with is a group of people who must navigate private, interpersonal, and hegemonic system spaces to construct and perform their writerly voice or identities. Butler's (1999) unpacking of gendered identity allows for this type of complexity, providing a roadmap for analysis as she unravels the discourses, narratives, and identity performances of gender through the decoding of historical precedents, narratives, and hegemonic systems.

As with gender, writerly voice has well established historical precedents. Where gender's cultural narratives are unseen, but powerful due to their continued use, writerly voice's cultural narratives are seen in the stacks of the libraries. The acceptable voices are constantly reified as the canon is passed on from generation to generation. New writers are charged with developing and cultivating their onstage persona, or writerly voice, through their publications. Like gender, writers look to accessible models to determine how to perform their voice (Butler, 1999). And, like gender, writers have the pressure of the culture (in this case the ACWE) to conform to acceptable performances (Butler, 1999). The voice developed through this process, then, does not and many times is not the same as the writer's actual persona. This discrepancy makes writers conscious of maintaining a performance, as they try to continue to publish with an acceptable voice. While this consciousness is unique, it is not unique to have an on and off stage persona. Quite the contrary, we all perform different identities for different audiences everyday. The difference is that performances off the page are typically sub-conscious and do not have the benefit of careful crafting and editing (Butler, 1999).

It is not surprising that authors must adapt their voice to the aesthetics of publications. The disturbing aspect is that the countable publications are almost static in their wants as are

many of the creative writing programs. They are static in that they continue to publish the same names and the same style of literature, staying away from experimental forms. A good example of this happens at what is universally considered one of, if not the, best literary publication, *The New Yorker* (Michel, 2010; Genoways, 2010; *Every Writer's Resource*, 2010). *The New Yorker* keeps certain writers on a retainer of first refusal (Armstrong, 2010). Put another way: *The New Yorker* pays authors to see all of their stories first with the right to publish them before any other outlet (Armstrong, 2010). This ensures that the number of new slots for new authors is limited and also keeps the literature published in *The New Yorker* relatively static, since they publish the same authors over and over again (Armstrong, 2010). In turn, these types of practices and the static nature of other top magazines does not allow all authors to express their true voice or experiment with new voices if they wish to participate in this system and seek publication. The system then plays a large role in the identity an author eventually settles on. This pressure to conform is enacted through a discreet face-threatening-act (FTA) in the form a written rejection.

As articulated above, the collaborative goals of workshops are what make creative writing programs unique in the academy community (Morton & Zavarzadeh, 1988). Ideally, these workshops also serve as a sanctuary from the FTAs authors encounter in the publishing arena (Green, 2001). Of course, workshops in the academy are inherently full of FTAs, due to their very foundation, the critique (Demeure et al., 2009). Workshops use criticism as a tool and this criticism is supposed to be used in a nurturing way (Williams, 1990; Montgomery, 1975). And while rogue workshops bring obvious FTAs and can leave the author devastated and other group members silent, even the constructive critiques of a well-functioning workshop have FTAs (Demeure et al., 2009).

During a critique both the author's positive and negative faces are on the line. The author has submitted a piece of writing that s/he believes presents an effective voice (even if s/he still has not found his/her true voice) and that s/he believes works within the frames of creative writing (voice, plot, scene, dialogue, character).⁷ If any other member of the workshop does not think the piece is effective in any of these frames, than that member has a duty to the workshop to air those concerns (Williams, 1990). By airing these concerns s/he is attacking the writer's positive face, through illustrating that s/he does not fully approve of the writer's piece. If the critic then describes how certain frames could be performed more effectively within the piece, then the attack is also on the writer's negative face as s/he is intruding upon the writer's methods. The critic could attack the author's negative face without giving prescriptive advice, as just by airing concerns the author might feel his/her authorial freedom is limited for their future writing and submissions (Sabee & Wilson, 2005; Littlejohn & Foss, 2005). In a standard workshop authors are not given the opportunity to respond to these FTAs except by changing their writing and with their own critiques for their fellow group members.

As illustrated above, since the writer cannot respond to his/her critiques s/he is voiceless, the irony of the voiceless author in a workshop extends to the author when s/he is trying to get published. This is especially true when s/he send to countable journals which are notorious for sending form rejections.⁸ In both the workshop setting and the act of submission, the writer is being molded by the dominant discourse to conform to the governing rules of the dominant discourse.

⁷ An assumption is being made here about the nature of workshops: for the purposes of this article I am looking at standard workshops, which consist of authors submitting close to finished pieces of work for critique (Gray, 1999).

⁸ Form rejections are pre-printed letters that tell the author that the work was rejected and that the publication does not have time to give them any feedback.

In the same way that the ideal workshop is supposed to negate the impact of FTAs, the ideal workshop would not have students retaliating from FTAs through their own critiques, as workshops are collaborative communities (Morton & Zavarzadeh, 1988). The ideal workshop acts as a safe space where, although the author's ego is on the line, authors hear constructive feedback to better understand their own writing. Workshops "liberate students from social constraints (and audiences) that have silenced them... [they] are a necessary shelter" (Green, 2001, p. 165). Put another way:

Class members come to know each other and form a community as they gain trust and intimacy through offering their work to class for consideration and take on the responsibility of thoughtfully critiquing the work so offered. Students learn what they are ready to learn, they learn a lot, and they love it. (Green, 2001, p. 158)

By becoming familiar with the other workshop members' work, students build a schema for each of their peers' writing. When a student violates this schema by turning in a piece that is not consistent with the previous work then an expectancy violation has occurred. Given the range of voices in the program, an expectancy violation can be both positive or negative and may in fact be both to two different members (Burgoon & Hale, 1988; Littlejohn & Foss, 2005).

Workshops function as proving grounds for the dominant discourse (Halahmy, 2009). The schema that the students hand down to one another comes from the invisible structure of the ACWE. If a program is on board with the governing rules of the discourse, then the professors are on board with these rules. The professors then pass these rules on to the students (McGurl, 2009). Those students who resist are viewed as bad writers and either adapt their identities or fail to secure praise, awards, and publications. This speaks to one of Donald Morton and Mas'ud Zavarzadeh's (1988) contentions, the belief that the academy has penetrated the workshop so much that it has "become a collaborator with the ruling regime of truth and thus an apparatus of oppression in the academy." (p. 172)

Research question 3. How does the academic system communicate its own social scripts to system writers' identities and system writers' voices?

Hegemonic Ordering

Despite the differences (or because of the differences) between creative writing academics and other academics, creative writing programs have co-opted the same hegemonic systems as the rest of the academy. These systems are alive in both academic creative writing publishing and academic creative writing jobs (ACWE). When I speak of hegemonic systems, I am referring to the invisible dominant discourse that controls a certain group through governing rules (in this case people who choose to participate in the ACWE). These rules are not enforced in an overt way with a rigidly defined hierarchical system. Instead they are the invisible codes that one must submit to (and learn when they come into a system) that govern who will be successful and how the system runs and self-sustains (Foucault, 1972; Foss et al., 1990). Furthermore, I concur with Condit's (1994) view that these rules are established by multiple ruling groups and that they form a "plurivocal... public discourse" (p. 215) that does not exclude participation, but instead wills participants to submit by not completely excluding minority groups from participation within the system, but instead dominates them through "public vocabularies" (p. 215).

Since this system is unseen and unheard it is what Foucault (1972) would call a regularity. A regulatory is something that is taken for granted, but is actually in charge of how the construct it operates within functions (Foucault, 1972). The rules or codes of this type of discourse are concerned with "the ordering of objects... as practices that systematically form[s] the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). In order to participate in a system run by a dominant discourse, one must learn the rules of the discourse. If the rules of the discourse

are violated then the violator is reprimanded and ultimately cast out from the system if they continue to violate the said rules.

It is in the best interest of the system to keep as many people within the system as possible. Therefore the codes are not meant to be exclusionary, instead they are meant to bring more people into the system so that the system may perpetuate itself (Foucault, 1977). To understand power in this way, we must understand that there is no top-down mechanism at work, no figurehead to overthrow. Instead, the power is microscopic, omnipresent, and working through other systems that are embedded within our consciousness, (e. g. language, cultural customs; Foucault, 1977). For the AWCE I believe that two of these systems (or the models for two systems) are at play and are mainstream publishing and the academy. As discussed above, for writers, these systems operate most destructively on their writerly performances. The customs of the community make it so the rules of these systems are enforced through both subtle/invisible means and overt means.

The academy's governing rules are many and since the ACWE is willingly a part of the academy it has had to accept most of these rules (Burton, 1983). The rules I have identified are those associated with counting publications and in turn tenure and hiring practices. These rules are part of a larger discourse which can be termed "accountability" (Mathison & Ross, 2002, Section 2.1). Since the governing figures of the academy must report progress to their constituents (be it the state or a board of directors) they look for easily packaged statistics to show the success of their institution (Mathison & Ross, 2002). The ACWE must package its results like any other department and as I mentioned above, this uniform treatment of programs within the academy causes problems with the ACWE as it does not have the same end goals as many other departments (grant money in the hard and soft sciences, academic publications in all

fields, job placement in business, law, and medicine; Kerridge, 2004). These accountability codes adopted from the academy have forced the ACWE to adapt its publishing industry. What this means is that certain venues have become countable in the academy, giving them cultural capital while other venues are not countable and therefore have no capital.

As creative writing has moved from a non-field in academia to a full-fledged field in the academy, some adoption of the academy's hegemonic systems is inevitable. In other words, since the academy is a system that is traditionally hierarchical and runs with many hegemonic policies, and creative writing is willingly entering the academy, then creative writing must adopt some (if not all) of the hegemonic systems innate to academia or risk not be accepted (Burton, 1983; Mathison & Ross, 2002; Kerridge, 2004). The ACWE has also been attacked by the academy for lack of rigor (Ramey, 2007). Recently, calls have been made to standardize the workshop process. In particular, people want to include literature-driven discussions and readings from the academic canon (McFarland, 1993; Green, 2001). These attacks and calls for standardization are an example of the enforcement of the governing rules of the academy. Since the ACWE is an outsider in the academy in terms of goals and didactic methods, it has been forced to co-opt accountability codes in a way that ensures the ACWE will be accepted by the greater academy. This co-opting of rules has come mainly in the form of countable journals coming from a small circle of publications, which are typically older venues. This longevity allows some countable publications to have published creative writers who are now studied in other academic departments, and therefore gain capital in the greater academy. Additionally, to keep the outsider tactics of the workshop model and non-citation driven publications, creative writers in the ACWE have written numerous apologies in academic journals of other more traditional field (Radavich, 1999; McFarland, 1993). These apologies defend the ACWE models

of teaching and publishing while drawing parallels to the greater academy methods, thereby solidifying the greater academy's position as the proper and standard way to learn while at the same time highlighting how the ACWE adheres to the governing rules of the greater academy in its own way (Radavich, 1999; McFarland, 1993).

These apologies ensure that the ACWE complies with all other governing rules of the academy, since they are essentially asking for leniency on the norms addressed in the apologies. In order to participate within the ACWE (i.e., first get hired into a tenure-track position and then get tenure in the academy) one must have a degree from a system school and meet certain thresholds in publishing. In a typical academic field the publications one must garner are well documented where certain journals count toward the total threshold required to obtain the job or tenure. These journals are normally peer-reviewed, anonymously read, known by those in the field, and might even be documented by the hiring department (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). These publications are also somewhat finite with the starting up of a new journal rare.

These general rules do not apply to the AWCE. Journals that count toward an academic creative writing CV are not documented in any public way, making them a mystery and allowing countable publications to vary from institution to institution. This stems from the fact that not all countable journals are academic journals and not all academic journals are countable.

Additionally, creative journals can be started by anyone with little to no capital. *Duotrope Digest*, a website devoted to databasing literary journals, lists over 3100 markets and 1475 literary fiction markets⁹. Furthermore, since the number of journals is so high, the threshold for publishing is very high as well. This means that there is considerable pressure on participants within the system to publish prolifically (Unsworth, 1992).

⁹ "Duotrope's Digest is a free resource for writers that primarily offers an extensive, searchable database of current fiction and poetry markets" (www.duotrope.com) Data from 10/12/2010.

The explosion of new journals has been particularly pronounced with the advent of online publishing and print-on-demand publishing houses. With the abundance of journals, the onus of what is countable rests mainly on reputation, and due to the volume (thousands) it is impossible for anyone to be familiar with all the available journals. Many times the reputation is based on history, the editorial board, or what school or publishing house the journal is attached to (Michel, 2010; Genoways, 2010; *Every Writer's Resource*, 2010). As shown above, the attackers of creative writing MFA programs are quick to cite the explosion of literary journals as part of the decline in literature. In turn, these new journals are viewed as lesser journals because they are not established (McFarland, 1993; Michel, 2010; Genoways, 2010; Gay, 2010).

While other academic programs might have a hierarchy of journals based on reputation, the difference lies in how these reputations are built. In the social sciences and hard sciences, journals can be ordered based on their impact. These impact scores and the methods to derive these scores can be debated and do share some hegemonic qualities, but the fact that people are citing from these journals is a strong indication that the work within their pages are strong (Garfield, 1999). In creative writing, there is no citing. The impact of a journal rests solely on the nebulous *reputation*. This construct is one that is communicated via word of mouth, awards, and general branding techniques (Yang, 2005; Michel, 2010; Garstang, 2010; *Every Writer's Resource*, 2010). Mostly though, reputation for literary magazines is tethered to age: "The best literary magazines, we feel, are not that difficult to identify. They are the magazines that have been publishing consistently for many years" (*Every Writer's Resource*, 2010, Section "Top 50 Literary Magazines"). This creates a system where new magazines are stigmatized and this stigma is difficult to change because the word of mouth and awards are rooted in history and self perpetuate the reputation of the old guard.

Above, I have illustrated the co-opting of governing rules from the academy into the ACWE. In the next section I will outline the codes I believe have been co-opted by the ACWE from the mainstream publishing system and introduce how identity performance affects the adoption of these rules and helps to shape the ACWE.

Rules of the Discourse

Academic creative writing straddles the world of the academy and the world of mainstream publishing. Mainstream publishing has long been a hegemonic system that relies heavily on gatekeepers (Maloney, 2010). The governing rules adopted from the mainstream publishing community are those found in the old-boys' network and gate keeping publishing practices. In order to get a book published at a mainstream press you must have a manuscript submitted through an agent (Thompson, 2007). Therefore writers do not have direct access to publishers, as publishers will not take unrepresented manuscripts. These agents are the gatekeepers, with their own system of governing rules. Not everyone has access to these agents, as many of the best agents and agencies do not accept unsolicited manuscripts.¹⁰ What that means is that a writer must be referred by a client to even be considered by some agents; put another way this is the old-boys' network. The power systems at play in mainstream publishing are more overt than those in the ACWE, but the unfortunate thing is that gaining access to the system in mainstream publishing has hugely positive impacts in the ACWE, as a publication at a major publishing house is CV gold, and countable everywhere.¹¹ Even without the desire to gain access to this system, members of the ACWE are still under the influences of the governing rules within this system, as many of these rules of this system have been co-opted in the ACWE.

¹⁰ This information comes from searching <http://agentquery.com/>, a searchable internet database of literary agents.

¹¹ Looking through the academic jobs wiki page for creative writing jobs, a common feature in each posting is that applicants are preferred to have a book published at a "nationally recognized press" (Academic Jobs Wiki, 2010, section "University of Oregon").

This gatekeeper system may not be in place on the surface of academic creative publishing, but it is definitely part of the culture. Many journals publish mainly through soliciting manuscripts. Therefore they are bolstering the careers of those who have already made it, those who they know, or those who know important players within the field.

As noted above, countable publications are determined solely by each MFA program due to the journal's reputation and the MFA program's familiarity with the journal. From the outside, it seems that countable publications are normally safe publications. What I mean by a safe publication is one that has been around for years and has published award-winning authors for many generations. Another hallmark of a safe journal is where it is published. Most countable publications are either glossies¹² or print journals published by university presses (Shivani & G'Schwind, 2010; *Every Writer's Resource*, 2010). James English (2005) calls the prestige of the prize system "symbolic capital" (2005, p. 8) and it works the same for the journal system. The established journals have "symbolic capital" (English, p. 8) that translates to countable status is the ACWE.

Some journals may even count against a writer. These journals are ones that are part of the underground writing scene or the pop writing scene (specifically genre writing) or new journals or online journals. For example, Robert Boswell, a highly-regarded academic writer, uses a pseudonym, Shale Aaron, to write his science-fiction so that he does not besmirch his good name (*World Without Ends*, 2010).¹³ Michael Martone (2010) sums this sentiment up nicely in a satirical interview he wrote where he claimed Shale Aaron for himself:

¹² Glossies are magazines that you would find in your local bookstore on the magazine rack. They are called glossies because they have glossy covers. These magazines typically have mainstream appeal and are distributed nationwide. Some of the best known glossies are *The New Yorker*, *Harpers*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Playboy*, and *Esquire* (Genoways, 2010).

¹³ He began this practice in 1994 when he was not a power-broker within the academic system (he is now a full professor) and at the time his pseudonym was unknown (*Worlds Without Ends*, 2010).

Aaron was a nom de plume for publishing my more speculative fiction. Speculative meaning sci-fi: I don't want to tarnish my good standing with the literary community, so anytime I write a story about a robot or cloning or a planet with four suns, I publish it under Aaron's name. (p. 66)

The underlying feeling is that some in the academic literary world believe that publishing in a certain place, or in a certain style, does more harm for a writer's standing in the ACWE than good since these publications or styles go against the governing rules of the ACWE's dominant discourses. This type of behavior illustrates the management of identities that writers have to deal with, which was explored above. Despite these rules, new publications pop up daily and have ACWE members who populate their pages. Based on the fact that many of these publications are not countable, research question four looks at the resistance to the governing rules of the system.

Research question 4. How has the explosion of online spaces in the writing community impacted writers in their development and communication of voice and identity?

Summary

Literature on the ACWE as a hegemonic system is non-existent. Instead, most of the literature focuses on the solidification of the ACWE within the academy. As illustrated above, this solidification is rife with dangers as the further entrenched the ACWE becomes, the more at risk are the unique aspects of the ACWE. As explicated by Foucault (1972), hegemonic systems gain their power via willing participation and the ACWE is becoming more and more willing of a participant in the hegemonic academy. This trickles down to inform the cultural norms of the ACWE; in Foucault's (1972) terms, as the ACWE becomes a willing participant in the hegemonic academy, the governing rules of the academy inform the governing rules of the ACWE. What was once a resistive institution within the academy is now part of the hegemony as

it was co-opted by the hegemony and it appropriated the governing rules passed down by the dominant discourse (Foucault, 1972). For participants within the ACWE, the range of available behaviors and identities are restricted by the rules of both the ACWE and the academy.

However, as with any system, there is still means for resistance, which comes in the form of new online outlets. This resistance allows for more stages to perform identity as these stages are not constrained by the system, since they do not define themselves by the system (Butler, 1999). The hope of resistance is tempered by the cyclical nature of hegemonic power, as the current resistance is at risk of being co-opted.

In Chapter Three I will explain the methods used for the development and implementation of my interview protocol. Additionally, I will walk through the steps taken to code the transcripts using grounded theory, as well as the reasons behind my selection of grounded theory as the methodological center of this thesis.

Chapter Three: Methods

This thesis uses grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) as its methodological guide. Grounded theory is a qualitative method of analysis allowing for constant comparison of data to identify emergent themes that speak to the research questions. My use of grounded theory involves loosely directed interviews with the respondents guiding the interviews. Additionally, grounded theory focuses on multiple close readings of the data to identify and link emergent themes with the goal of answering the research questions and building a theory from the data. Grounded theory was selected due to both the broad nature of the theory itself and the novelty of the research area. Grounded theory provides adequate space to explore a relatively unexplored topic. While identity theory is well established (e. g. Butler, 1999; Goffman, 1959), its use on creative writers is non-existent. Additionally, by adding Foucault's (1965, 1972, 1977) framework to my theoretical stance, a straight-line analysis of creative writers through the lens of Judith Butler's (1999) identity theory would not be possible. Grounded theory provides a structure where a comprehensive theory that incorporates identity theory, hegemonic ordering, and creative writers can be developed. The broad viewpoint that grounded theory affords is especially important since this study aims to explore how the system in which the study's participants function is an active actor in the development of both these participants and the system itself; and conversely how the study's participants are active actors in the development of both the system and the participants of the system.

An interview protocol (see Appendix) was developed around four major areas of interest: MFA programs and their function, the academic system these programs reside in, the rise of

online literature, and writerly identity (or voice) construction or performance. I began each interview by relating a little bit of my background to the participants as a way to put them at ease. I then moved into demographic questions centering on which schools in the ACWE they had had experience with. Based on the flow of the conversation I moved into different hubs of questions. The first hub focused on writerly identity and primarily served as a way to get at research question three. An example of a question from this hub is: “How do you view your writerly identity?” I asked this question before describing what my conception of writerly identity is to give the respondents authority in their own constructions of this concept.

The rise in online literature hub focuses on research question four. An example question from this hub is: “Do you submit to/participate in online forums, collectives, blogs within the literary world? If so, why and where? If not, why not?” Again, my intent was to allow the respondents to dictate the meanings of the constructs and adjust my own meanings accordingly. An example of an academic system hub question: “What place does an MFA program have in the way its students develop their writerly identities?” This hub focuses on research question three. And finally an example question from the MFA programs and their function hub is: “How would you characterize the identity of the school that you are affiliated with?” This hub focuses on research questions one and two.

While I have outlined what question hubs match up with what research question, all the question hubs folded into all the research questions. Therefore the protocol was developed to serve as a broad guide with touchstone questions, allowing each participant’s answers to guide the interviews. Additionally, participants were given space to follow themes not initially conceptualized in the protocol and spontaneous, relevant follow-up questions were employed. The genesis of the questions and themes came from the research for the literature review and

research questions. The protocol was further honed via two pilot interviews with system writers.¹⁴ IRB approval of the interview protocol was obtained through the University of Alabama's Office of Compliance and the approval number for this study is 11-OR-0026 (dated 1/26/2011).

I conducted 25 total interviews with members of the ACWE. Of these interviews, 19 were administered at the MFA system's annual conference in Washington, DC (AWP Conference – February 2-5, 2011) and six were conducted at participants' home institutions in the weeks following AWP. The interviews at AWP were conducted in an upstairs lobby, which provided a quiet and private space, allowing for easy recording and privacy. The interviews conducted at participants' home institutions were all conducted in each participant's office. The interviews were relatively short and focused, due to the inherent time restraints of meeting at a conference, ranging from 26 minutes to 94 minutes and averaging just over 45 minutes to complete. The participants were selected through snowball sampling which was started through a call for participants that was sent to the top 25 MFA programs (based on 2010 PW rankings) and posted on Zine-Scene.com, a site devoted to promoting online literature (Mocarski, 2010). The programs in the top 25 were selected because they typically are tied to countable journals. Additionally, participants were recruited at AWP between scheduled interview times at the onsite AWP book fair.

The sample is varied in the demographics of gender and experience and rank in the ACWE. Of the 25 participants 11 were female and 14 were male. In terms of experience, two were prospective students, nine current graduate students, nine post graduates, and five tenure-

¹⁴ Pilot interviews were not included in the analysis.

track faculty. Of the nine post graduates, three did not wish to participate in the academic system, while six were actively seeking tenure-track jobs. Of the 25 participants, 10 were editors in some form or another, with five of these editors editing for countable publications; only four participants (all students) did not have any publications.

Each interviewee gave written consent before the interviews started, as well as consent to be recorded. I transcribed each recording within 30 days of the date recorded and all recordings were destroyed after transcription. No names or identifying data were included on the transcripts and they were stored on a secure computer with no identifiable data. The average transcript totaled seven and a half single-spaced pages, for a total of 188 pages of transcription.

To code the interviews I followed Corbin and Strauss's (1990) ground theory method. Thirty-one themes were identified during open coding that related to the research questions. "Open coding is the interpretive process by which data are broken down analytically" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 12). To identify these themes I read through each transcript three times, highlighting recurring themes with different color highlighters. After each full read through, I documented the identified themes in an excel spreadsheet. This documentation included a description of the identified theme, a count of how many times each theme occurred, and a count of how many participants touched on each theme. The tally of the theme saturation worked as a constant comparison devise, a way to sort out saturated themes versus aberrant themes. The second and third readings done during open-coding served as quality checks, where I made sure each highlighted instance was consistent with the documented archetype, each instance was highlighted, and each instance was counted. Additionally any needed adjustments to the archetypes were made during the second and third readings, with a final tally being taken after the final reading.

Four of the themes identified during open coding were considered umbrella themes and were carried over into axial coding. Umbrella themes were decided on based on saturation and their relation to the research questions. In other words, to be considered an umbrella theme, a theme must have been touched on by most of the participants (all four were touched on by at least 22 of the 25 participants) and had to be talked about extensively (this was judged based on the number of total instances each theme occurred, with each of the umbrella themes having over 250 total occurrences). “In axial coding, categories are related to their sub-categories” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 13). For the axial coding process, I read through fresh copies of the transcripts with four different colored highlighters, one for each umbrella theme. During my first reading I highlighted the four umbrella themes with different color highlighters. During my second reading I underlined sub-categories within each umbrella theme, annotating each sub category in the margins of the transcripts. I then input the umbrella categories and their subcategories into four excel worksheets, with each sheet representing an umbrella category and the first column of each sheet holding the relevant sub-categories. On my final reading I quality checked my previous coding while inputting full quotations under the appropriate sub-categories in my excel spreadsheet.

I finished my coding with selective coding which “is the process by which all categories are unified around a ‘core’ category, and categories that need further explication are filled-in with descriptive detail” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 14). My selective coding served as my analysis and is displayed in chapter four. The lens through which I examine the participants’ identities/performances is critical cultural with my theoretical disposition is largely influenced by Butler (1999) and Foucault (1965, 1972, 1977). I use Butler’s (1999) identity performance framework to conceptualize how individuals in the ACWE are performing identity within and

outside the ACWE (1999). In the analysis I will look for how the participants work within the dominant discourses of both the ACWE and the resistance to the ACWE to craft their identities. This part of the analysis shifts toward Foucault's (1965, 1972, 1977) framework of dominant discourses and the governing rules they use to control.

Chapter Four unpacks the four emergent themes, using a critical cultural analytical style. I treat the gathered quotations as my primary document and explore this document through Butler (1999) and Foucault (1965, 1972, 1977).

Chapter Four: Analysis

The Hegemonic Nature of the MFA System

Research Question One asked how, as the MFA system continues to grow, age, and become more embedded in the academy, does the system keep its *other* status while complying with academy rules? The ACWE has kept its *other* status in the academy by remaining a discipline that has a collaborative didactic center and non-citation driven publications. While retaining this *other* status, the ACWE has complied with certain system rules to further integrate into the academy. Specifically, the ACWE has countable journals, where the status of the journals are tied to prestige, and keeps journals without prestige not countable; thereby complying with the academy's accountability codes via hegemonic ordering of ACWE journals.

In this section, respondents describe the way that the ACWE keeps its outsider status through the system members' own desires to remain outside the academy and the ACWE's unique features. Participants also explain the integration that the ACWE is/has going/gone through via the appropriation of governing rules from the greater academy. Despite this appropriation, respondents were quick to point out that their own programs are different from the other programs in the ACWE and therefore resist the greater academy, meaning other system programs are becoming academy insiders. Finally, participants talk about their own place on this border between the academy and the ACWE, overtly deflecting the influence of the academy while at the same time displaying the influence of the academy. In sum, the ACWE keeps its *other* status by holding onto a couple of unique features and by willing its members to submit to its culture and rules, and therefore turn a blind eye to its integration into the academy.

Outsider status. The MFA system is an outsider in the academy and as such its members are wary of the academy. “I try not to worry about the academic system too much. I don’t trust the academic world, my relationship is complex, I don’t like being in it” (MFA Fiction, Interviewee for TT). The discomfort displayed by this participant coupled with his desire to gain permanent admittance to the system (he was interviewing for tenure-track jobs at AWP) illustrates the double-bind of the ACWE. On the one hand the programs in the system are not guided by what drives other academic programs: grant money is not realistic, national rankings are not brochure worthy material, and placement of graduates is not cut and dry. On the other hand, the academy provides needed shelter via financial support to the ACWE and its members. Despite this support, the goals of the ACWE center around the otherness of the MFA programs, specifically cultivating unique voices in authors: “The tagline for the MFA program is that we help you to find your unique voice” (Full Professor, Fiction MFA, PhD). Trying to foster unique voices allows the system to differentiate itself from the greater academy. “It’s not like your last semester recruiters come to campus and pick out which MFAs they want for the writing jobs. Oh you’re going to be a professional writer, come on. It’s not like law school or business school” (Post-MFA Fiction, Editor of a Countable Journal, Non-TT Lecturer). The participant’s description of how a system degree is not equivalent to other system degrees shows the heart of the difference. While not all lawyers or businessmen are the same, there are abundant opportunities within their fields where following a model or navigating with the compass of system rules is both expected and rewarded.¹⁵ Writers are always supposed cut their own path and by operating within the academy, the ACWE and its members lose some of their ability to

¹⁵ For MBA recipients it is possible to secure employment running economic simulations and for lawyers it is possible to practice law that focuses on the filing of repetitive reports. In both cases the training from the system is used. And while there are creative writing jobs, they are few and far between, and due to their nature as creative are not repetitive.

cut this path. Instead, the ACWE must have standards that fall in line with other departments, which focus on quantifiable measures and therefore limit the options available to ACWE members.

ACWE integrates into the academy. Despite these differences from other academic programs, the MFA system is still a hegemonic system rife with rules that seeks to control its member institutions, the performances of the writers in these institutions, and in turn the content which these writers produce. As a system initially (and to some extent still) treated skeptically by the academy has carved out its place in the academy, it has become both a viable system and a true party-line toting system:

It [MFA] has become an official degree... It gives you a little seriousness. When you dedicate two years living in some college town... it does say that yeah you've dedicated this much time to it. Not every MFA [graduate] goes on to write books, teach, and publish. (Post-MFA Fiction, Editor of a Countable Journal, Non-TT Lecturer)

As this system writer states, the MFA has now become an “official degree,” which I interpret to mean that an MFA is sanctioned and promoted by the university. This sanctioning is backed up by other participants with similar thoughts, the system’s scholarly organization (AWP) that runs like other academic discipline’s organizations (complete with national conference), and the economy created by the system. This dichotomy, where MFA programs are different from the academy in how their graduates are placed, but are the same in regard to what the participants who stay in the system are expected to produce, maintains the MFA system’s “other” status while allowing it to remain in the academy. But those who stay in the system will participate via its governing rules and in turn the governing rules of the greater academic system and can do so due to their “official degree.”

Being unique: Voice as a primary goal. Even as the ACWE has swelled, the system has maintained its other status in the academy. As illustrated in Chapter Two, this outsider status is

reinforced by both the academy as it seeks greater compliance with general academy's governing rules from the ACWE under the guise of rigor, and the ACWE itself. The ACWE stakes its other status through its core focus on the cultivation of unique voices, as this cultivation folds into its more democratic style of teaching and its citation free publishing arena. Voice, the unique and durable marker of a writer, is the writers' public identity (Morton & Zavarzadeh, 1988). For burgeoning writers, this identity is fluid and the development of this identity is the goal of their schooling. One participant described the transformation of her identity that occurred during her time in her program: "My identity changed very fast based on who [the professors and students in my program] I was with. I was a year out of college and very impressionable" (MFA in Poetry, PhD in literature, Small press publisher, Countable magazine editor). This furthers the idea that the system has become run by the governing rules of hegemony. Judith Butler (1999) argues that identity is an illusion that is retrofitted to behavior as a type of sense making. In her paradigm, performances of identity are shaped by cultural norms and limited by these norms (Butler, 1999). Here someone gives herself to the program and as she moves through the program the self that she gives changes based on the culture of the program. This participant illustrates the balancing act of the ACWE, as the uniqueness of voice remains a central focus, but as a participant moves through the system the participant is confronted with the culture of the program, which is the communication of the governing rules of the ACWE. As will be explored in the coming sections, the forces that help to shape system members' identities are governing rules which are communicated and enforced through peers, professors, and journals.

When dissecting a system this complex, there are, of course, opposing views. While many participants repeated this idea that their identities were malleable and dynamic during their time in school, some explained that their identities did not undergo change. A good example of

the middle ground between these two views came from a participant with an MFA in poetry and book arts who is now a small press publisher:

A lot of the MFA talk, about the problems with programs, does not match my own experience in the program. I do feel like my writing changed a lot while I was there, but in a lot of ways it changed because I found the kind of writing I didn't know existed... Self-discovery. My conception of my audience didn't change to the people in my workshop and the people who were professors, but it did change to this new stuff [kind of writing].

This middle ground highlights the way in which hegemonic power functions. As Foucault (1972) articulates, the power of a regulatory is its ability to remain unseen. The respondent admits to changing her identity but qualifies this change under the guise of self-discovery. This self-discovery is part of the public vocabulary that wills system members to submit to its governing rules (Condit, 1994). While it is true that one function of education is to open up new avenues of self-discovery, many times these avenues are the well-tread roads that lead to stagnation. Of course, there is no way to verify or falsify whether or not this participant followed the road laid by the hegemony, or a different road, perhaps one of resistance, but this quotation highlights the complexity of the system and the danger of following advice and criticism blindly. This runs against the outsider position of the ACWE. As I will explore in the next section, participants view their programs as both insiders and outsiders.

ACWE academy insider status. This idea that MFA programs are outsiders or interlopers within the academy was an emergent theme. Many participants echoed the fact that they felt like their program was “different” or “unique” from other programs in the academy (Second Year Poetry Student, Second Year Fiction Student). In addition to the feeling of being different from other academic programs, some participants also expressed the belief that their program was different from other programs in the MFA system:

My MFA program is different from others, in that there aren't that many classes required and there is very little direction given to you. For me, it was just having space, time, and monetary support to do my work and to figure it out. I think people who do that are the ones that are successful. It's not that there is no direction at all, but people with ideas and projects already will succeed. Other programs I know that you do take a lot of classes, there's more specific demands made about what you write. (MFA Fiction, Interviewee for TT)

This feeling of uniqueness is another way that hegemonic power operates. By making system participants feel as if they are outside of the system, the system is able to keep these participants in check. Traber (2007) articulates this trick of hegemonic system by explaining a thought from Foucault's (1978) *History of Sexuality*: "When a subject attributes distinctions of what/who one is it only serves to subjugate the self further through the requirements of a social role. The very desire for liberation feeds self-domination by incorporating distinctions already chosen for us" (p. 8). In other words, the role of other is just another role established by the dominant discourse. This role is in some ways more powerful than the roles occupied by those unaware of the system because those who inhabit the role of other believe themselves to be separate or above the system, when in fact they are still operating within the system. For the current study it can be stated as follows: if all system writers feel they are outside of the system, then the system operates without any of these writers or any of the writers unaware of the system knowing that the system is indeed operating on them. This extrapolation comes from more than just this isolated quotation, as many of the differences this respondent points to that make his program unique (e. g. money, little direction, small course load) were echoed by other participants who went to different programs about their own programs. This line of thought, that each participants' program is different from every other program, is an admission that the ACWE produces homogeneous programs. In other words, by defining programs as different from the norm, the norm is reified and gains power as the accepted standard.

Despite this feeling of otherness, many of my respondents also spoke at length about how their school meshed with the academy and how that clouded their view of MFA programs in general. A prospective fiction student who is also an editor and published writer expressed this sentiment explicitly:

It's a little weird to me that literature has become so departmentalized... [MFA programs] are now bound by these... co-modifying forums. Literally a departmentalized fragmented, you fit here in this system, you must produce in a way that we the university, or we the state system requires of you to produce, and you are our employee, and we pay you a wage for your human labor and resources. Your resource to our system is this academic product and if you don't produce enough of it then we're not going to recognize you with higher salary, or even a job.

This participant went on to explain that these feelings are what keeps him from applying to school because he views his writing as a way to save people, and this departmentalization gets in the way of his freedom. Despite this trepidation, he is now moving forward with applications in order to support himself. This is a prime example of the double-bind that authors face and it illustrates how powerful and entrenched the system has become. Octavi Comeron (2009) cites a Foucault lecture to articulate what a classic double-bind is; Foucault speaks on a free society and how it remains free, Comeron, quoting Foucault, says: "it needs to consume those freedoms, and to consume them it has to produce and organize them" (p. 2). This future ACWE student is following the same path outlined in this quotation, as he gives up his freedom to produce with no ACWE input or output to become the product of the ACWE, to be organized by this system. The power of the system is underscored by the fact that even an author aware of the system's destructive forces before getting into the system is still forced to participate in the system so that s/he may self-sustain. Another participant explained his view of the capitalistic side of writing and the MFA system: "by career I mean that thing where you get to keep writing" (Post-MFA

Fiction, Editor Indie Print). The conflicted pre-MFA student has now decided to do “that thing where” he gets “to keep writing,” which is entering into the system.

On a deeper level, the idea of governing rules of a hegemonic system controlling its members is about communicating a system approved aesthetic. As will be discussed later, this system approved aesthetic is communicated and reinforced through the awarding of jobs and tenure via countable publications. In other words, if a system writer has followed the rules, then said writer will have the countable publications to get a job in the system and therefore stay in the system. Logically following this premise is the idea that system schools communicate this system approved aesthetic to its students. These rules are communicated via workshop, journal rejections, competition, and other system approved venues. Illustrated above and in the literature review, the most impressive aspect of a hegemonic system is its ability to hide in plain sight. Foucault (1972) outlines different types of governing rules and these particular governing rules fall under the category of those that establish institutional bodies. Since the institutional bodies of the ACWE, individual MFA programs, countable journals, and workshop culture are sanctioned by ACWE members through participation, then the aesthetic passed down in these institutions are regulatories. Therefore, if these rules are being transmitted to the students successfully, they should not be aware of said transmission: “With any MFA program it’s so much what you want to get out of it and what you make happen” (MFA fiction, Indie Print Editor, Former Countable Editor). Of course, it is not that simple. The system is so vast that two writers can have vastly different styles of writing and both be rule abiding writers. As this respondent shows, the system gives its respondents the belief that they have control. This false sense of control goes back to the larger discourse of free will.

Blind to surroundings. As shown above, some participants are able to see the double-bind of the system puts them in. Other participants either do not see the double-bind or believe they are beyond it:

My MFA program is focused on realism. It's the accepted standard... But the students didn't necessarily fit that, but the faculty did... I think best through opposition, so this worked out with me... Desire toward playing with the text as text and creating mirrored spaces... Having to argue against realism, trying it, working with it but fighting against it. This helped me." (Post-MFA Fiction, Editor Indie Print)

This participant again displays the reach of the ACWE's governing rules as he is a willing participant who believes himself to be fighting against the system. As shown above, this type of belief reifies the power of the hegemonic system and the believer plays an unwilling role within the system. He sees the governing rules of the ACWE as things to fight against. Despite his acknowledgment of his program's place as a regulatory within a regulatory, he does not see the double-bind of being within this regulatory and wishing to remain a resistive force. Other strategies to distance programs from governing rules include the narrative of a program is outside the aesthetic steering ACWE:

This is a hot house environment or a greenhouse environment. The metaphor is the seedlings come in and there are many different kinds of air, water, nutrient nourishing things, which might mean that you go take voice lessons. I mean, we have a very broad conception of what it means to become a writer... We are a safe place. (Full Professor, Fiction MFA, PhD)

Here the participant believes that the governing rules of the ACWE are not enacted in her school. She chooses a garden metaphor which calls to mind Eden while also reifying the idea that aesthetics are organic, and to some extent innate. I intentionally chose two quotations where the participants had the same understanding of themselves and their take on aesthetics, but where they were diametrically opposed in their views of their program's take on aesthetics. It is clear from these quotations (and the rest of my participants) that system participants do not believe

that their view of aesthetics is system approved or static, whether or not they believe their programs have a system approved aesthetic. This, again, illustrates the underlying power of the system, the ability to blend into nothingness. Both participants are operating under the assumption that they are fighting against the system, one through head-on confrontation and another through a hands off approach to program building. The resistance to the system is manifest through different strategies, but neither participant is outside of the system.

Research question one set out to explore if the ACWE is now a full-fledged member of the academic hegemony, while still purporting to be different from the academic system merely as a guise, or if the ACWE still remained outside this academic system to some extent. While it is not possible to answer this question declaratively, my participants detail how the answer is somewhere in the middle. The ACWE is clearly a hegemonic system; however even though many of the governing rules of the ACWE are appropriated from the academy, there remains unique facets of the ACWE to stay separate. As long as voice is central to the mission of the ACWE, workshops and non-citation publications will remain prominent. This creates separation from the academy, or at least the appearance of separation. Despite this separation, the ACWE is a large hegemonic system and as such enforces and communicates governing rules that restrict the freedoms of its members.

In the next section I will expand on the rules of the discourse, starting with the known rules and moving through to how this sets up the system, and finally how the system is changing in the face of the internet. I will then move onto voice and the performance, construction, and manipulation of voice; as well as how face-threatening acts and expectancy violations play into these performances and constructions. Finally, I will take an in depth look at how online spaces

are changing both the MFA system and the ways and places that system writers have to communicate their identities.

Rules of the Discourse

My second research question asked: What are the governing rules of the MFA system and how are they communicated? The governing rules of the MFA system are communicated via workshops, journals, journal rejections, and contributors' notes; all of which contribute to social norms of the system. The rules of this hegemonic discourse center around the greater academy's rules of accountability and include the need for a terminal degree, no genre writing, and finally countable publications. Countable, and in turn non-countable, publications are constructed via system rules, creating a hierarchy of journals and also creating an exclusionary system that wills participants to follow the ACWE's governing rules. Respondents speak about how the system rules are changing due to the realities of online publishing.

With any institution there are rules one must follow. These rules can be written or, as is the case for governing rules, unwritten. In the ACWE the governing rules are unwritten, but that does not mean they are unknown. As one tenure-track assistant professor described:

Really early on it was impressed upon me that the goal was a tenure track faculty position. The real goal was a tenure track job at a research one institution. That's what we worked for... There was a lot of discussion, and a lot of help about how to go about getting that job... Publishing as a means to the job... You come here and we'll churn you out of this machine with a book and a job. (PhD Fiction)

The imagery of a machine is apt and telling. It is apt in that it shows an awareness of MFA programs as a large system, where each student and teacher is simply a cog. It is telling because it shows that this particular participant has a handle on how he fits in the world he inhabits. The most telling aspect of this quotation, though, is the fact that this participant was the only participant I talked to the selected this imagery. He was also the only participant who talked

about system rules being clearly laid out by his professors. In a way, this quotation, while a perfect microcosm for the whole system, is actually an outlier. The awareness displayed makes this participant's experience pretty unique. Even though this participant had a roadmap to follow, many of the guidelines that undergird the rules he so clearly laid out are unspoken even to him. Informing someone where to publish to build a good, countable, CV does not impart the rules that go into writing a manuscript that is publishable by those places. Though these rules might be laid out in workshop, there is still a level of uncertainty to following a set of rules when invention is part of the process, and really the core of the process.

Unspoken rules. The governing rules of the system may not be, and typically are not, as concretely laid out for most system members as they were for the above participant. The hidden nature of governing rules goes back to the foundation of Foucault's framework. By first labeling his methods an archeology and later revising this label to genealogy, Foucault points to the hidden from of governing rules (1965, 1972, 1977). Both of these terms imply a need for searching, as archeology literally culls the image of digging and genealogy culls the image of physically tracing out invisible connections (Foucault, 1965, Foucault, 1972, Foucault, 1977). Most of my participants have a less concrete source for their understanding of the governing rules of the ACWE than the participant quoted above, however they still are able to outline or allude to these unspoken rules, which makes it possible to chart the system rules through Foucault's theories. For example a first-year poetry student and small-press editor said:

When I graduated in 2006 with an MA and couldn't get a job, that didn't surprise me because the MA is not a terminal degree... The next step was to get an MFA... I've got the requisite two books and then in three years I will have the degree, instead of the other way around.

This participant sums up two of the rules that were continuously brought up by my respondents; first, in order to participate in the system you must have a "terminal" degree and second, in order

to participate in the system you must publish books. The first rule is one that has grown out of the entrenchment of the MFA program and institutionalization (AWP) of the ACWE that has taken place in the last two decades. The second rule she highlighted is a bit more complex than what she presents. The two book rule was mentioned by many participants, but some participants made sure to add that these books must come from university presses or major publishing houses. The fascinating aspect of this quotation is the confidence that the participant has in her own analysis of the system. To her, she has got it figured out and she is just going down a checklist. This seems contradictory to one of her identities, that of a small press publisher, which communicates a resistive stance to the system. Nevertheless, this participant illustrates that the system is communicating its rules to its members, and it is up to the members to comply with the rules in order to advance in the system.

Terminal degree. A terminal degree is one of the checkmarks that a system participant must gain. The checkmarks act as enforcement for the governing rules of the system: “In order to become a fully accredited practitioner in these disciplines, individuals must negotiate the various institutional hurdles (a relevant degree, for instance) which continually test their ‘fit’ with the discourses, logics and ways of thinking of that particular discipline” (Danaher et al., 2000, p. 22). In other words, governing rules may not be recorded, but their enforcement is constantly monitored through various “institutional hurdles.” The need for a terminal degree is an entrenched rule that used to be more relaxed. This shift in adherence to this rule is displayed by another of my participants who is a tenured full professor at a highly respected system school with only an MA; he confirms that this would not get him a job today, but that he was grandfathered into the system.

People still look down on me because I don't have an MFA. I'm past that now, but for a while that was real. There were jobs I would apply for where they would say, you have to

have an MFA or a PhD. Because it matters in their statistics, because an MA is not a terminal degree... I would explain myself in my cover letters and then I also had a letter from the chair at [my graduate school] explaining what the situation was. (MA, Full Professor of Poetry)

As the system has established itself, the rules about terminal degrees has become more firm. This participant, who now sits on hiring boards and has acted as the department chair and therefore worked with general administration, confirms that accountability is a driving force in establishing governing rules when he mentions statistics. Even two-decades ago, when he was on the market and there were far fewer system schools, having good publications and name recognition without the terminal degree made it difficult to participate in the system, as demonstrated by his cover letter and letter from his former department chair. Additionally, now the system is seeing more and more PhDs being granted, which threatens the MFAs status as terminal.

No genre work: A look at the dominant aesthetic. Another rule brought up by multiple respondents was the rule that genre fiction is not part of the academic system and may in fact hurt system writers within the system if they dabble in genre work. Genre fiction consists of fiction written for particular sub-categories of writing that have well-defined tropes, such as science fiction, romance, and horror. This type of fiction is looked down on in the academy for reasons one respondent could not fathom:

A lot of departments are inexplicably against genre fiction and I don't understand why. It's almost a fast unreflective dismissal of anything that smacks of genre... If you're interested in becoming a professor in the system, it's probably in your best interest to conceal your dabblings in genre work... I also identify as a genre writer, a science-fiction writer. That's something that puts me in a certain position with regard to academic world. (MFA Fiction, Interviewee for TT)

This participant furthered the power of this rule via anecdote:

Even Brian Evenson [a full professor at Brown] expresses worry about it. He's been writing more genre stuff and is like 'am I torpedoing my career?' and I'm like come on

man you're Brian Evenson. I think that he is wrong to worry about it, but the fact that he is worried about it says a lot. (MFA Fiction, Interviewee for TT)

This rule of anti-genre is tied-up in the idea of a dominant aesthetic dictated by the system. As shown in the literature review, some writers go so far as to create a nom de plume to escape the stigma associated with non-dominant aesthetic writing. This participant illustrates how deep the dominant aesthetic runs as he speaks about an untouchable professor (tenured full professor). A little digging reveals that Brian Evenson publishes his genre work under a thin nom de plume (BK Evenson) and does not include these books on his Brown directory listing.¹⁶ This behavior and the communicated trepidation validates the governing rules of the ACWE and specifically the rule that deems that there is something wrong with genre fiction. As a person in position to challenge these rules, Evenson instead reifies these rules, basically admitting to the idea that the dominant aesthetic is superior to other aesthetics.

Genre fiction was mentioned by other participants as well, but even more subtle variances in the dominant aesthetic were also touched on. These subtleties center around differences in style and are the more telling aspect of the dominant aesthetic works in the ACWE because the subtleties display the reach of the dominant aesthetic. "I read for the [Countable Publication], and when I see an Iowa poem. I know what it's going to be. I don't have to read it" (Second Year Poet). This belief that there is some marker of certain programs speaks to the idea that there is a dominant aesthetic. It is especially telling since Iowa is considered the best program in the country (Abramson, 2010) by many people and is one of the oldest programs in the country. Therefore, if Iowa produced writers write a certain way, then that way is a window into the ACWE aesthetic.

¹⁶ <http://research.brown.edu/research/profile.php?id=10194>

Countable publications. The governing rule that underpins the whole system is a natural outcrop of the dominant aesthetic and was articulated by participants as countable publications, the idea that some publications are worth more than others. When I put worth into the context of the academy, I am speaking directly to the idea that some publications count on a CV and help the writer get a system job and obtain tenure, while others do not. As discussed in the literature review, a publication becomes countable through its cultural capital. This capital is gained via who the publication has published, who is on their masthead, where they are published, and how long they have been around. Put simply: “there are still journals, and most of them are print, that are pretty prestigious... you want to get into those” (MFA Fiction, Non-TT Faculty, Countable Editor). This rule was echoed by many participants: “Having recognizable print journal names when I apply for academic jobs down the line would probably be something that would be useful to me” (MFA in Poetry and Book Arts, Small press publisher). This is the backbone of the system, as publishing is a part of the writing life of both system writers and non-system writers alike. For system writers or aspiring system writers, getting the right publication means the difference between staying in the system or being forced to leave: “It was really useful for me when I was just starting submitting having some recognizable publications. Getting a poem in the *Boston Review* and the *Denver Quarterly* got me into other places” (MFA in Poetry, PhD in literature, Small press publisher, Countable magazine editor). This participant highlights the interconnected dynamics of countable publications. They are interconnected since they share a status level. Basically, journals that have enough cultural capital are the upper class. By being associated with an upper class journal, a writer has more access to other upper class venues; in other words, the name cache of a journal communicates the worth of one of its published authors to other journals. This is illustrated by a reader for one such countable journal:

When I am reading for the [Countable Publication] and I get a story, we don't read cover letters first, and I'm half way through and I'm like not sure, and I will turn to the back and look at the cover letter, if the person is really well published, I will give them more weight, then I do to somebody who has no publications. (Third Year Fiction, Assistant Editor Countable Print)

Her action, giving a longer look to a story that is failing, is based on the cultural capital communicated via the cover letter shows the reach of this rule. This type of exchange is the underlying mechanism of discursive formations that Foucault outlines in his work (1965, 1972). As Danaher, Schirate, and Webb explain: "Much of what is accepted as legitimate disciplinary knowledge is organized around, 'names'" (2000, p. 22). In this case, the "disciplinary knowledge" is what journals are countable and the "names" are the journals. To further their argument they bridge Foucault's (1972) theory to Bourdieu's (1986) "cultural capital": "These 'names' [of established academic authors] hold a privileged place in the discipline... [they] carry what the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls 'cultural capital', and practitioners continually reinterpret their works, [making their capital] ad infinitum" (Danaher et al., 2000, p. 22). In the case of giving authors published in countable journals longer looks, the participant is perpetuating the cultural capital of the journals represented in the cover letter and legitimizing the discursive formation that values cultural capital bestowed upon journals due to age. This also illustrates the gate-keeping nature of the system, since in order to get this longer look you must have already made it into the system.

One of the underlying goals in getting published is building a CV, and therefore it only makes sense that the idea of cultural capital exchange is tied up in publishing. Basically, the system has become a capitalistic system, whereby following the governing rules of the system a writer is rewarded with countable publications that gives him/her cultural capital on his/her CV,

allowing them to secure a job in the system. One of my participants started an anonymous journal while in graduate school, and his experience highlights this capitalistic undercurrent:

No one gets anything from getting published anonymously... Without any sort of compensation or any sort of credit, people wouldn't do it. We would beg and plead with our friends to get enough people to fill an issue. So now it's not anonymous anymore. (PhD Fiction, Non-Fiction, TT Faculty)

His main goal for the journal was to get writing read in a different way, to see what happened when the names were stripped from the work. This noble goal is clearly a resistive act to the system, since one of the core rules of the system is cultural capital, or what he calls credit. He went on to explain that they published 18 issues over 18 months and only published six authors who they did not know and beg to be in the journal. Those numbers display the power of credit and therefore the hegemonic power embedded in the ACWE.

Non-Countable publications. It stands to reason that journals with ties to the ACWE aim to be countable. However, the majority of new journals are online,¹⁷ a medium that is rarely countable since age is tied to reputation. The reality that online journals are not countable in the ACWE is one that some of my participants expressed:

There's a hierarchy, I mean the online journals weren't taken seriously by a lot of people who taught me about journals, so it was hard for me to do that originally. And I had to be convinced, this isn't just another website... That there's some kind of lasting effort that is going on with this. (MFA Fiction, Non-TT Faculty, Countable Journal Editor)

This participant displays a distrust of online magazines. This distrust is rooted in the fact that his professors did not believe in online publishing; put another way, this distrust was embedded in the participants worldview via the communication of the governing rules that keep online publications as *other* communicated via his professors. Further, this illustrates the wide-shared belief that online publication is somehow more fleeting and therefore less real than print. This is a particularly interesting aspect of this rule since most of my participants spoke about the

¹⁷ Duotrope lists 1196 online publications and 953 print publications (5/21/11).

permanence of online as one of the reasons the system has to change, as will be explored below. To this participant, since online journals do not take as much effort to produce (which is debatable) and start, and they therefore have less investment from the founders and are therefore fleeting endeavors.

The *other* status of online journals is permeated throughout the ACWE and, as demonstrated above, in order to become part of the countable echelon a publication needs markers that establish cultural capital. Markers not associated with the academy (i. e. place of publication) are associated with gatekeeping (i. e. names on the masthead, who is in the first issue). The functional side of this reality trickles down even to those who prefer online publications, a group which will be explored in the next section, as they still face the realities of building a CV suitable for the ACWE. “Yes [I make a distinction between what I send to online and what I send to print] This is a tricky answer. I’m trying to build up some print fiction publications” (First Year MFA Poet, MA Fiction, Small Press Editor). This particular participant already has a slew of online publications, so her shift to print is a strategy to remain in the system. In her case, the rule goes onto her checklist, but not into her subconscious. She is basically building up her CV and at the same time submitting to system rules. Another participant outlined this same strategy but explicitly stated the reasons for this strategy: “Slight distinction [between online and print] I mean it depends on if you want something on your CV that will be impressive to a committee or if you want the largest readership possible” (MFA, TT Faculty, Online Editor, Former Countable Editor). Here we also see the reason that many participants gave for publishing online, readership, which will be discussed in the coming paragraphs. Other participants shared this multi-sided strategy:

I’m aiming for a mix of publications that I find interesting, publications that have some traditional cache, and often those will pay you, which is nice, and publications that have,

for lack of a better term, and this is a terrible term, publications that have some sort of indie cred. (MFA Fiction, Editor Indie Print)

Here we see a participant who is trying to keep his CV viable through publications that have “traditional cache.” But, he is also publishing in places that do not have traditional cache, and instead have another sort of cache, that of “indie cred.” This participant is then following the governing rules of two systems. The indie lit scene is a resistive system that is often co-mingled with the online system. And, as any system, resistive or not, has its own rules (Foucault, 1972). This participant is a publisher in the indie lit system, so must maintain a writerly presence within the indie lit scene to keep his publication’s credibility. He shows how the resistance to the MFA system is not necessarily inhabited by people who do not wish to operate within the MFA system and does not exclude participation in both systems.

Exclusionary system. As illustrated above, a system runs via governing rules with the compliance to these governing rules supplying with cultural capital within the system. As systems grow and these rules and capital become more present in all interactions, the system becomes an almost impenetrable space. With the ACWE we see how the gatekeepers have become more entrenched with age and the rules have become stricter, therefore making the system exclusionary on some level. A prospective student and editor explains:

Sort of the little circles of publishing: to get a CV, they’re writing for markets. They’re publishing in these places to get their jobs to secure their places in the world to feed themselves to stay alive and to save them... I see [this system] as closed circuit of literary production. When you see people at AWP, it’s a weird thing because these are all the consumers and the producers of their own product and it’s sort of an incestuous relationship. But to me literature was always to save someone else. It was never to save yourself.

The incestuous relationship outlined above is one that is counter to the artist spirit that MFA programs and writing in general is founded on. As this participant demonstrates with the end of this quotation, writing is not supposed to be about other writers and jobs, writing is supposed to

be about communion. This exclusionary system is not exclusionary in that there are x number of people who may participate, so the system must refuse people at the door. As is the way of hegemonic systems, anyone can participate (to an extent) but everyone who does participate must abide by the governing rules to continue participation. This speaks to Condit's (1994) view of hegemonic systems, where people are willed to submit to the rules by the system making the rules norms and also easy to follow. So this incestuous, exclusionary system is actually about excluding those who do not wish to submit to the governing rules of the ACWE; in other words, this illustrates the regulatory nature of the ACWE.

As with any successful hegemonic system, most participants are not aware of the governing rules and their enforcement. This is displayed in the ACWE by other participants who outlined this same incestuous system but came away with different impressions:

I think it's fine. There's a lot of complaints about how incestuous the creative writing world is. Like you get a degree to teach other people to get a degree and you publish people so you can get jobs and you get those jobs to publish other people so they can get. I mean it's a cycle. So, but I think it's good. I think there is stuff that slips outside of that that other people like, like non-writer people get into. (Post-MFA Fiction, Editor of a System Journal, Non-TT Lecturer)

By alluding to the fact that "a lot" of people complain about this closed circuit, this participant shows how reaching this belief is within the community. Unlike the previous participant, he sees the functional quality of this system as "fine" because there is a chance that art will still "slip outside" the system to effect outsiders, and in turn commune as art should. This more positive view of the system was the more popular among my participants, as it takes into the account the ability to change the system and communicate outside the system, which many participants found possible due to the internet. Of course, this belief in autonomy may or may not be actuality.

Ground shift: The co-opting of online spaces. The overwhelming majority of my participants explained how the old rules, specifically that a publication must be a print publication to count, are changing, have changed or will change. A second year fiction student said:

[L]ike anyone who came from the outside I always thought that print publishing was it. Online publishing was second. I'm find more and more that it is perfectly respectable [to publish online], and there are perfectly respectable online publications, many of which I'd [like] to be a part of.

This demonstrates both the hold of the old way of thinking and the way the tides are shifting. First, we see that outsiders to the system are still under the impression that online publishing is either non-existent or less respectable (and therefore less countable) than print. Second, we see how in just two short years this student's beliefs have changed and how he has opened up to the idea of online publishing. This two-step awareness of online literature as first lesser than print and then viable and respectable underscores both the fact that the system values print more than online publications and that a shift to where that is not always the case is inevitable. Despite the fact that these authors see this shift coming, the fact remains that online is the other, as it is defined by print. Like any construct that is the unseen, print remains and will remain powerful because it is that which everything else is defined and judged by. Foucault (1965) outlines the power of being the standard in *Madness and Civilization*, going into the fact that madness is stigmatized because it is not the norm. Instead, the norm, sanity, is the goal, therefore anything that is not the norm is inherently less valuable (Foucault, 1965). For the ACWE, print is the norm and this is especially true since the old guard is not willing to accept or adopt the new methods:

I was raised in print culture. And right now, if Agni accepts my piece and they put it in the print version, that's an entirely different feeling for me than saying we're going to put this online. I also don't read anything online. For me, I'm still distrustful, print is still king for me. (Full Professor, Fiction MFA, PhD)

The power of what one is reared in is displayed in this quotation. Here a full professor confesses that even getting an online publication in one of the most distinguished print publications would be a disappointment. She lays out the under-girding for these feelings as the fact that she was raised in a print only world, making print still king for her.

The power of print is seen by the fact that it is still around and powerful even today, when there are hundreds of online outlets for writers. “Inevitable change [moving from primarily print publications to online publications]. But I remember hearing 10 years ago that print would be dead by now and you look here and print is still alive, is still king” (Post-MFA Fiction, Editor of a System Journal, Non-TT Lecturer). The belief that the change is coming is almost unanimously shared by my participants, but as this participant points out, belief does not actually signal change all the time. However, given the rise of some online journals to the countable status and the fact that certain countable journals have closed *their* print magazines to focus on online efforts (*Shenandoah* and *Triquarterly* specifically), this change seems imminent. This imminence can be seen by the confusion that this known stigma causes in some respondents: “I don’t understand why online journals are less favored than print. It’s changing” (Third Year Fiction, Assistant Editor Countable Print). While this change might be coming or already is here, the system will work to co-opt online spaces and make them part of the regulatory as has already happened with the above examples and will be explored further in a final section of the analysis. This co-opting of resistive spaces is not part of this participant’s worldview, and speaks to the vast nature of the internet, which will allow resistive spaces to continue even as some are co-opted.

This change is coming about due to space and economics; and readership and brand control. It is necessary to migrate toward online publications due to space limitations. In other

words, since there are so many system slots for faculty due to the exploding MFA system and there are only a finite number of slots available in print journals, in order for the slots to get filled by system approved people (people with countable publications) some of the countable publications must be online:

There's a problem of economics in our world and this system. We've got... 200 plus actual MFA programs, some 800 odd different programs that offer some kind of creative writing program at the undergrad, PhD, or masters level. And we're churning out a lot of graduates who write... and like there's so much demand for space. There's so many people that need space. They need to get published to get a job. They need to get published to keep a job. They need to get published to get the tenure... There's this massive need for space that print cannot supply. (Second Year Poet)

This poet articulates the massive problem the system is running up against in very simple terms:

there are simply not enough countable print journals to supply enough credentialed writers to populate the system jobs. It can be argued that print journals could simply produce more issues or larger issues, but the problem with that logic is costs. As we watch established journals migrate to online due to costs, it is clear that journals are not making money, instead they are subsidized by their programs. So producing more pages is not realistic. When members of the system can identify the cracks in the current systems rules, then the system is sure to change.

This change involves the system co-opting practices from the resistance and in turn the resistance appropriate rules from the system. A good illustration of the co-opting of rules from the resistance is *Tri-Quarterly*, Northwestern University's literary journal. *Tri-Quarterly* published exclusively print issues for the first 52 years of its existence, becoming one of the most respected, and clearly countable, journals in the system. In 2010 they published their last print issue due to funding cuts and moved online. Since their move online they have been named the runner up for best new online journal by *storySouth* Million Writers Awards (Sandford, 2011). A countable journal has had to lower itself to the level of online publishing, but they are sheltered

from the stigma due to their countable pedigree, and just to affirm this shelter and their lasting pedigree, the journal is runner-up for an award meant for “new” online journals. While they loosely fit the definition of a new online journal, they do not fit the spirit of the award since they had published for 52 years prior. Additionally, other countable journals have begun to maintain both an online journal and a print journal. This structure co-opts the strategies of the resistance while maintaining the power of print. An editor of a countable print journal explains how this system of maintaining both an online and print presence creates a hierarchy intra-journal:

I don't want to do online and print, like the same work, some magazines are doing that... You have to do one or the other... I'm not willing to do some work in print and some online, I'm not for that model because I think a lot of journals that do that put the B work online. (MFA Fiction, Non-TT Lecturer, Countable Editor)

This hierarchy is felt by the authors, as illustrated above with the example of *Agni*. Another respondent, a former editor of a countable-journal, put it like so:

I feel like journals that have both online and print, do create a hierarchy. Online only, print only, don't. It's a question of economics and space. You have to have a hierarchy. If you have two print issues and 12 online issues, there is no way to make it that the print journal is not more exclusive, by definition it's more exclusive. (MFA Fiction, Editor Indie Print)

There is a distrust of countable journals co-opting resistive strategies, especially when the journal does so without leaving behind their own established structure. This dual structure is perfect for countable venues because it allows them to maintain the mystique of print, while also infiltrating the resistive space.

The second reason that emerged to explain this ground shift was that of visibility and brand control. Participants spoke about how online publications were a way to build a readership since links can be exchanged and posted on the participants' own websites. Online journals are also searchable and the archives are always right at the reader's fingertips:

I think how you conceptualize that [online place in this world] is how you view your career as a writer... It's opened up a lot of space. Writers now are potentially being read by more people than they were 10 years ago... As far as that, being able to publish a story online, you can link to it, you can load it up on Facebook, you sort of a possibility of an immediate audience. (Post-MFA Fiction, Editor Indie Print)

This is a clear illustration of communicating your brand by creating networks with other writers. Another participant echoes this sentiment: "I think online publishing is vital... It's so easy to tell people to go check stuff out online" (First Year MFA poet, MA fiction, Small Press Editor). The visibility and ease of access of online literature lets other people judge you as a writer instead of as a list of credentials. These participants are clearly not just piling up publications to get a job, instead they want to commune with readers, to connect with them.

I like it when somebody looks up my name and has something to read. I think that's important: If somebody looks you up and then reads something of yours and likes it, they are going to remember you ten times more than they did if they just saw your list of publications. (Third Year Fiction, Assistant Editor Countable Print)

This participant articulates how online spaces provide stages for writers to display their work and in turn communicate their writerly self through writing as opposed to through the reputations of the journals they have been published in.

Coupled with this visibility is a larger readership and lasting space. For example, the University of Alabama library does not even have a periodical room anymore and the local *Barnes and Noble* only carries a dozen or so literary magazines, therefore, if a writer publishes outside of those dozen magazines or are in an archived version of a journal, this writer is no longer visible:

There's the idea of access readership, immediacy. When you have print, it's sort of like not there. It like, online literature, it's sort of there. It's there ambiently, to any person who's looking at a computer, in principle, just as much as anything is on the internet. (Fiction Editor, Prospective Student).

This thereness is what all my participants spoke too when they spoke about online literature. The thereness allows for greater control over their self-presentations since they can link back to the stories they wish to on their own personal webpages, which will be discussed later in the branding section. The thereness adds a layer to the hiring process that makes it more complex than just looking at someone's CV for countable journals. It is impractical to search through the library stacks to read stories from archived journals for job candidates; it is not impractical to go to a candidate's website and read linked stories. Therefore the thereness should actually make the hiring process fairer. Of course, this thereness is not something that everyone believes in: "More people are reading print journals or at least are aware of them" (MFA Fiction, Countable Editor). The power of print is still alive and well. This power flies in the face of statistics and the general consensus among my respondents who were editors: "You know, more people are gonna read the online version than the print version. You know, just the economics of it are such that probably 50 or 100 times more people will read the online" (MA, Online and Indie Publisher).¹⁸ The fact that some participants still believe print has a larger readership than online, despite statistics that show the contrary, demonstrates the embedded nature of print as the norm in the ACWE.

Even within the print journal world, not all magazines are created equally, nor should they be. Reputations are built over years of publishing excellence and continuity. What this thesis points out is that as the system has grown, the established reputations have been left unquestioned while other journals have been unfairly unevaluated for countable status do to their affiliation (or lack thereof), their medium, their aesthetic, or some combination of factors. This seems to be changing with the current generation of writers: "Every time I find a magazine that I like, I will bookmark it" (MFA Fiction, Interviewee for TT). The most telling piece of the

¹⁸ Pank, an online and print journal, posted its reader stats for 2010 to show that their web journal had received just over 75,000 unique readers. The print journal prints 750 copies. (<http://www.pankmagazine.com/about/>)

quotation above is the assumption that the journal he likes will be online, since he is “bookmark”ing it. If one thing is clear, it is that there is no finite list of publications that count. Instead, the list of what counts is nebulous, fluid, and person-to-person specific. While the fact that there is the perception of hierarchy and countability within the members of the system does influence the content created by the members of the system, the system is so big that this influence is relatively broad. As one participant put it: “But, the good thing about that is, whatever you do, there’s a publisher for you. I truly believe that” (First Year Poet, MA fiction, Small Press Editor). Since the size of the system is so large and the demands for space so great, perhaps other journals will become countable or are countable to some institutions. Basically, the size of the system allows for pockets of resistance that operate in conjunction with the system. This speaks to Foucault’s (1965) conceptualization of power as power always breeds resistance. Danahjer, Schirato, and Webb (2000) summarize this paradigm:

Foucault does not suggest, however, that biopower has completely regulated bodies and behavior. Because there are so many competing ideas, institutions and discourses, no single authorized truth ever emerges to dominate a society. And, in a sense, biopower is never able to completely control things because it always produces resistance. (p. 80)

Circling back to the participant’s idea that “there’s a publisher for you” and we can see how that statement can be validated. No matter the material being produced, system approved or not, there will be an outlet for it. However the outlet may not count toward cultural capital within the ACWE.

If this is the case, that writers can find their niche, then perhaps the system is not wrapped up in hegemonic codes that stagnate content. The reason I am interested in this topic is not because the system is already impenetrable, instead it is that the system is heading toward being impenetrable as it further ingratiates itself to the academy. There is an overwhelming consensus among my participants that some system schools (specifically Iowa) produce a certain type of

writer. That these schools steer their students toward a traditional type of writing that is both universally countable and stagnant. Couple this (arguably the most prestigious system school) with the fact that most incoming MFA students have only the data of the Poets and Writers rankings (Abramson, 2010) to lead them to their school choice, and you can project that this stagnation will spread and co-opt the pockets of resistance.¹⁹

The hope that I have for the system is hope that is shared by my participants. They are not participating in a system they view as evil; they are participating in a system that allows them to do what they love. As one respondent put it:

I mean you might do it as a living, but the way in which we conceive of it now as a living I find a little offensive, but it's offensive to me in almost a very sort of embarrassing way, in a sense that I know that other people don't think this, to me writing is loving, it's communicating, it's trying to be authentic, it's trying to help. The only reason I ever wanted to be a writer and cared about literature at all is because I felt like it saved my life and it was about saving people. But now it just seems about people saving themselves. (Fiction Editor, Prospective Student)

There is hope in this quotation. There's resistance in this quotation. And interestingly enough, none of my participants claimed to be a system writer. Instead, they all claimed to either be outside the system, an interloper within the system, or did not believe the system was detrimental to content. As I will explore in the final section of the analysis, the newer independent publications and online publications offer a means of resistance that was not available in the system's childhood. Perhaps the system has not penetrated deep enough to make it all about CVs and countable publications, perhaps it can still be "about saving people."

This section uncovered the governing rules of the ACWE and how these rules are communicated to system members. These rules restrict the acceptable spaces for members to display their work and therefore restrict the work. While these rules are oftentimes unspoken,

¹⁹ The Poets and Writers rankings are methodologically flawed (only taking into account self-report data of incoming students) and favor schools based on money, which is coupled with age, which is coupled with reputation.

they are known because they are the norms of the culture. Some participants have fled from these acceptable spaces, creating resistive spaces, but these resistive spaces are at risk of being co-opted by the ACWE or appropriating from the ACWE. In the next section I look at voice and how the ACWE fosters voice.

What Defines a Writer: Voice, its Place in the System, and How it is Developed

As I have explained in multiple places above, the search for voice is a central goal of the ACWE and its participants. Each participant is instructed either explicitly or via governing rules, or both, that they need to find what makes them unique as a writer and develop that into their unique voice (Morton & Zavarzadeh, 1988). Whether or not this pursuit is pure or even obtainable is inconsequential since it is believed to be both by the ACWE and its members. The ACWE is a system and as such has a systemized way for its participants to find voice. This path involves workshops as the foundation. While workshops separate the ACWE from the greater academy, as shown above, they still enact governing rules through the airing of cultural norms. In sum, to be unique one must follow the path of many. This contradiction leads to research question three: how does the academic system communicate its own social scripts to system writers' identities and system writers' voices? The social scripts of the ACWE are communicated to its members via institutional structures such as the workshop, journals, and rejections. In turn, the system members perceive FTAs that they either deflect or try to deflect. These FTAs, deflected or not, still enact the system's social scripts on system writers' voices and identities.

As illustrated in the literature review, the main aim of the MFA program is for students to find and cultivate their voice (Morton & Zavarzadeh, 1988). Voice, in this context, refers to a unique expression of self that is laced into the prose or poetry of the author. One respondent defined as so:

The technical definition of voice, where voice is your unique marker... Combination of diction, tone, point of view, syntactical choices that you make, what kinds of inflection you're getting from your immigrant forbearers... I think of voice as a technical thing. (Full Professor, MFA, PhD)

This professor offered this definition after explaining how voice is a driving force in the ACWE: "The tagline for the MFA program is that we help you to find your voice." In her description we see a contradiction, as she explains that voice is a unique marker, but at the same time outlines what goes into voice. If you can chart voice, breaking it into its parts, how can it be completely unique and therefore innate? This fissure between the innate nature of voice and the ability to manipulate voice will be explored later in this section as one point of entry to resist the governing rules of the ACWE (Phillips, 2002).

In this section, participants first define voice and then move onto their personal construction of voice. These personal constructions include voice as a conscious performance and voice as an innate aspect of the writer, and therefore not malleable, only discoverable. The discrepancy between these two views manifest not only between respondents, but also within individual respondents. This highlights a fissure in the way the ACWE defines and communicates voice. Respondents talk about the different ways which the system communicates voice constructions and/or discovery through FTAs in the workshop, through publications, and through cultural norms. The system steeps participants in both overt and covert FTAs, willing them to submit to system rules.

Voice defined. This goal, to cultivate a unique voice, was an emergent theme, with many participants asserting that voice is both the goal of the MFA system and also the goal of each individual writer. Voice is the manifestation of the writer on the page; in other words, voice is the performance the writer communicates via his/her work. Therefore, in order to stand out from

other writers, voice needs to be unique. Communicating a unique voice is not that simple and neither is the construct of voice. As one participant said:

One medium is the written word, written word, no matter if it's on the internet or on the page or whatever, is this sort of inert version of myself, sort of frozen in time, you can change with it in terms of how you're interpreting it, I wrote it at a certain moment feeling a certain way, and you know the certain plurality of my being, goes on afterward. It sort of frees it, in this what we tend to think truthful way, when you write. In another sense, in that sense it's both a real version of myself and not a real version of myself. It's not real because myself continues on and changes, but it's very real because it's an honest expression of me, of who I am in the moment. (Fiction Editor, Prospective Student)

This participant dives into the complexity of voice and how that voice is communicated. He explicates that voice is the impression of author communicated via published work. But this impression is somehow fleeting since it changes with the temporal space of both the author and reader. While the particular voice of one piece is captured permanently, the author is able to change as he continues on. This shows how voice is a constructed identity that is performed and therefore malleable and adaptable. However, this participant also illustrates an unawareness of this malleability; while he admits that his voice might change he calls the expression of self in each piece of work “an honest expression of me.” That speaks to the idea that voice is something innate and personal that cannot be honed. The layered nature of voice fits with Judith Butler's (1999) description of gendered identity. For Butler (1999) gender grows from social norms that are not innate but reproduced and performed and therefore “intentional” even if the performer is unaware of the origin of the performance (p. 380). In Butler's (1999) paradigm, this participant is unaware of the social norms he is acting out and added to this unawareness (which could be called unconsciousness) is the process of editing and the permanence of the published work.²⁰ Therefore writers in programs are actively and interactively playing with social norms through

²⁰ The uniqueness of writers having a permanent record of their performances via published work is clearly in flux. With the advent of Facebook and other self-broadcasting or publishing venues that are now mainstream, everyone is leaving their snakeskins for future reference.

their voice, adjusting as they go along, many times these adjustments are made in very public venues (i. e. publications, blogs, Facebook). Circling back to the belief that voice is innate, we see how the system is hiding in plain sight. By purporting the innate nature of voice, the ACWE is obfuscating paths to non-system approved voices. To bring Butler's study of gender back in as a corollary; society comingles biological sex and gender to limit the approved choices for gender to just the (supposed) binary of sex. Therefore there are only two system approved genders and they are tied to sex (Butler, 1999). In the paradigm of the ACWE there are only certain system-approved *unique* voices and they are tied to innate ability and therefore cannot be developed. This belief that voice is innate is what underlies the MFA system. But really the system is not necessarily as interested in honest expressions of voice as it is in system approved expressions of voice; and the focus on innate voice is a way to limit choices and weed out those who wish to express voice outside of the system's comfort zone. This weeding out comes via rejection and system rebukes (i. e. failure to get into a program, FTAs in the workshop) and has the benefit of the fall back excuse: *he just didn't have it*.

Voice as performance. While the belief that voice is innate runs deep with many of my participants ascribing to it, others view voice as something to be manipulated. This viewpoint positions voice as a performance on the page, the act of crafting something uniquely their own. This performance, to some, is conscious and carefully selected and honed: "Voice is another element to be manipulated" (MFA Fiction, Editor Indie Print). This awareness brings voice further into Butler's (1999) identity theory as it directly links voice to performance. But it also pushes it further away as it morphs voice into something to be controlled instead of something that controls. From this participant's view, voice is presumably outside of the system norms since it can be manipulated and viewed from afar. As shown in section one of the analysis, just

because a person deems him/herself in control of a process does not mean the person actually has control. As Butler (1999) illustrates, cultural norms run so deep that we do not consciously perform masculinity or femininity even if we are aware of these constructs as performances. The same can be said in the case of voice, even as this participant manipulates what he deems to be voice, he is still under the governing rules of the system, which inform his manipulation. This double-bind was clear to some participants who viewed voice as a performance.

These participants spoke of the worries that this consciousness creates: “If you identify with someone else, then do you not have your own voice? If I write like Russo, then do I have my own voice?” (Third Year Fiction, Assistant Editor Countable Print). The “anxiety of influence” (Bloom, 1973) speaks to the idea that voice must be unique, and that if it is not unique it deems you a failure as a writer. This participant does not believe in the consciousness of voice, and admitted that the reason for underlying her belief in unconscious constructions centered around “What’s me and what’s what I read?” Being conscious of her influences makes her question how she can reconcile her influences with the construction of her voice. Another participant feels that voice is a conscious act describes the process in a bit more depth: “The first thing that comes onto the page is spontaneous and once it’s down I will think more logically about crafting it” (MFA Fiction, Interviewee for TT). Here again we see the dual-sided nature of voice, where it comes from some unconscious place, but then is there to manipulate. This two-step process accounts for the governing rules and the resistance to the governing rules as the participant seeks the standard *uniqueness*, while trying to manipulate this standard.

Most of the participants feel like voice is something that comes from the subconscious: “I feel like voice is something you’re born with” (Third Year Fiction, Assistant Editor Countable Print). This view of voice as being what is essentially you, just put on the page, makes it difficult

to think about influence. It also makes it difficult to change, however many respondents point out how “voice is ever changing...but at the same time everyone who reads my work says, yes, this is definitely you, my story has that mark on it, my mark” (Third Year Fiction, Assistant Editor Countable Print). This quotation illustrates the layered nature of voice construction. On the one hand, voice is changing, but on the other it remains the same since readers can identify the respondent by her voice over time. Another participant feels the same way, but instead of readers identifying her voice, she identifies herself: “I feel like I have my own voice... I’m finding now that I will go back and read stories that I wrote that I felt like weren’t as strong and not special, but then I read them and think, well that was a good line or I’m proud of that or that does sound like me, actually” (MFA Fiction, Indie Print Editor, Former Countable Editor). Again, this view of voice takes the writer out of the process and instead relies on magic or birth to determine who has a unique and countable voice and therefore who makes it. In reality, this view allows the governing rules to dictate how voice is developed and therefore to dictate who is successful based on the compliance or non-compliance to the governing rules.

Voice: Communicated me. Participants did not have a difficult time speaking about voice, but in their descriptions, they were often contradictory or wandering. Nevertheless, most respondents feel that voice is who they are as a writer. One respondent did admit difficulty talking about voice, but this did not change the importance she put on the construct:

I don’t like to talk about my voice. I have a hard time putting that into words... I enjoy reading people’s take on what I am. Like when I read reviews of my work, I’m like oh that’s what I am. They put it that way. I just have a hard time saying what it is I do. I don’t think about it... I think I do have a unique voice... I’ve published under my real name a couple times and people have figured out the link. (Pre MFA, Non de Plume)

In this case we see how voice is the communication of who you are as a writer. And here, this communication and reader's interpretation of this communication is what defines the writer.

This, again, shows the importance and complexity of this construct.

Voice: A fissure in the ACWE. The majority of my respondents saw voice as coming from some innate place and therefore something that cannot be manipulated. But, then they speak about crafting their stories and poems to hone their voice. These beliefs are in contradiction. The construct of voice would be pretty cut and dry if there were two camps with each claiming one of these positions, but these sides were presented alongside one another by respondent after respondent. As will be explored in the coming paragraphs, the participants talked at length about how FTAs from workshops and journals help shape their voice. This contradiction is at the heart of the MFA system and is the fissure by which the system can be resisted (Phillips, 2002). Since the system emphasizes unique voice, the system guides it participants to construct authorship as solitary. Lewis Hyde (2010) traces the history of authorship as a solitary act in this country to the founding of copyright in the constitution. Hyde demonstrates that the founding fathers did not view copyright as a way to keep ideas and writing as solitary, but more as a way to give incentives for invention and new ideas. Even with this capitalistic move, the founders, specifically Jefferson and Franklin, were weary of the clause and therefore kept copyright limited to seven years (Hyde, 2010). As the country has aged the laws have changed and now copyright is life plus seventy years. This lengthening of copyright essentially has made the belief of single authorship sanctioned by the country and it has thus trickled down into academia. As the ACWE members view their authorship as solitary, they are bombarded by influence whereby their voice is changed against their will, as described earlier in reference to the Anxiety of Influence (Bloom, 1973). These changes can be conscious, through

careful editing and experimentation or personal boundary pushing, or unconscious through FTAs. The online publishing world views authorship through more of a collaborative lens, which is fostered via writing forums, writing collectives, and dialogue via these forums, collectives, and online journals with comments activated. So participation in the online writing community shifts the understanding of authorship and in turn voice. However, the hold of authorship as singular is very strong, which is why we are seeing contradictions in respondent answers.

As stated above, voice is the backbone of the MFA system. An author must find a unique voice to gain cultural capital and remain in the system. The other common aspect of MFA programs shared by all system schools is the workshop. Workshops, then, act as a space to hone voice. “Workshops are places to try out voices.” (First Year MFA Poet, MA Fiction, Small Press Editor). Many participants shared this idealist view of the workshop, a view that deemed workshops (and in turn MFA programs) to be a safe space, where true voice is cultivated. As a full professor put it:

For a lot of people what happens in an MFA program is, they have this sense, right or wrong, that’s what’s supposed to happen over time is that they start out trying a lot of different things but by the end they’re supposed to do one thing well. Namely they’re supposed to develop a voice or make themselves into a brand. Developed something that is uniquely their own. (MA, Full Professor of Poetry)

This view of MFA programs shows the contrast of voice as unique and therefore static, versus voice as malleable. By culling the theme of self-discovery up, the professor is implying that voice is innate, but on the flipside he brings up the trying on of different hats, which implies that voice is editable.

As with any hegemonic system, the power lies in the system’s ability to exert power through willing acceptance of power (Condit, 1994). “My poetry is personal and violent. A lens to my soul” (Second Year Poetry). Many respondents reported that they put a part of themselves

in the writing. These writers said or alluded to the personal side of their writing as being what makes them invested in their work, and what make their ego at risk in a critique. If students shy away from advice, then they are not willingly accepting power. However, if students believe that they are discovering parts of themselves that they did not know before, then they submitting to the system. “You know imitation exercises and stuff like that to kind of stretch your register and you know see if you find something that is you that you did not know, or see if you identify with something that you didn’t plan on doing” (Second Year Poet). This quotation shows the methods employed by which discovery of innate voice occurs, mainly imitation. Other participants echoed this type of learning outlining their “favorite exercises” that are designed to “mimic” great writers, or just opining on the idea that writers “mimic what we read” (MFA Non-Fiction, Non-TT Faculty ; MFA, TT Faculty, Online Editor, Former Countable Editor). How are you to find what is truly you if that is simply a copy of someone else? Again, this is difficult to nail down, who is to say what is genuine discovery and what is false, system produced discovery. Either way, this demonstrates the double-bind of attempting to be wholly unique while incorporating influences.

FTAs enact governing rules on voice. The power of the system to influence something as personal as voice is that it does so from all fronts, making the line between genuine and false discovery blurred at best and non-existent at worse. Some respondents spoke about how the MFA program you choose is important based on the professors there because the fingerprints of the professors are all over the program:

Cause I mean, so much, professors tend to want to cultivate people who write in their styles, I feel like others are no so interested in that... It’s helpful if you know what you want going into it... Seek out what you want, rather than just waiting for it to happen around you. (MFA fiction, Indie Print Editor, Former Countable Editor)

Cultivating students in their image is a way to cultivate students into the preferred system style. The image of cultivation is telling as it implies both innate input, the seeds, and external care, water, soil, and pruning. For students, the image is a familiar one, the innate talent they possess must get system input in order to be displayed properly. Since professors have made it in the system, they are typically an approved voice of the system. Even when the professors do not exert their own voice onto students, the other students are there to pick up the slack for the system:

I feel like the demands, the criticism, was coming from the other students more so than the professors... In my particular class there seemed to be dominant sort of aesthetics that were being sort of promoted and supported by the other students. (MFA fiction, Indie Print Editor, Former Countable Editor)

While students are not indoctrinated to the system as thoroughly as professors, they are still part of the system. They are still getting their preferences from system nodes since the system nodes are impossible to escape. They then exert this approved style via critique.

This exertion of aesthetics or cultivation of students are examples of FTAs. “If I leave the workshop and know what to do, then it’s still a success” (Third Year Fiction, Assistant Editor Countable Print). Here we see an example of a negative FTA. The respondent gets instruction on what to do in order to make the failing story a success. Extrapolating from this circumstance, we can assume that the story in question is operating outside the workshop’s governing rules for aesthetic, which following the roots of said aesthetic to their logical genesis would be the governing rules of the system. Additionally, the respondent is happy to have a roadmap to follow. Instead of being affronted by the FTA the respondent is willingly and happily submitting.

Not every respondent reported such a positive outlook after workshop. Workshops act as a negative space where defense mechanisms manifest for some respondents:

I didn't view myself as a writer while in my program, instead I thought of myself as an editor. Part of the reason for this is that my work wasn't well received in workshop so I had a bit of crisis of confidence... It's weird to be in a program where sort of everyone is a quote writer, to see how different people manifest that. I think part of it was growing into feeling comfortable with that and feeling like my work measures up [on the fact that post MFA she has identified as a writer]. (MFA fiction, Indie Print Editor, Former Countable Editor)

This respondent questioned her worth to the extent that she did not identify as a writer. Her confidence in herself only came after she left workshop culture and the FTAs that come with workshop culture. To survive her time in the system, where everyone was "quote a writer" she adopted an identity that was system approved, but a lesser identity than that of a writer. Most editors are also writers, so to just identify as an editor, while going to school as a writer, is to admit a lesser standing than your peers. Her willingness to inhabit this position because of FTAs in workshop illustrates the power of the FTAs and the power of the dominant aesthetic.

While no participants linked these instances of FTAs to some system approved voice, the implication is clearly there. If you are to hone your voice in a way that fits within the scope of what your workshop mates and leader deem acceptable based on positive and negative FTAs, then you are essentially complying with some set of governing rules that these FTAs are communicating to you. Whether or not the governing rules you are complying to are those of the countable publishing venues is up for debate and most likely varies from institution to institution. "Absolutely [the system] is informing my work and I think anyone who says otherwise is lying. But, the good thing about that is, whatever you do, there's a publisher for you. I truly believe that" (First Year MFA poet, MA Fiction, Small press editor). This blunt quotation is refreshing for its frankness in admitting system influence. However, the later portion of the quotation impossibly erases boundaries, by claiming there is a venue for all writers. While that may be true, it does not account for the fact that not all venues are system approved and countable. This

may not matter to the speaker of this quotation or all writers, but to a writer who aims to participate in the system, it certainly does.

Deflecting influence. On the opposite end of the spectrum from admitting influence transmitted via workshop, were a number of respondents who claimed no influence or deflected influence. For example: “I don’t feel like my voice has changed since I started my MFA program” (Third Year Fiction, Assistant Editor Countable Print). Here the ACWE has done a masterful job as it has hidden itself completely from the participant. This participant does not believe she is influenced by her program and therefore whatever influence does occur, if any, is done so without her knowledge and therefore without resistance. Another respondent put it like this: “I don’t think the program informed my voice. I think the program helped with structure, exploration, freeing up ideas of subject matter. My writing has gotten better but my voice has been consistent” (MFA Fiction, Indie Print Editor, Former Countable Editor). Here we see a distinction made between voice and what I call apparatus. The difficult aspect of this quotation is that with voice being innately tied to all apparatuses of writing, it is bound to adapt with said apparatus. This again illustrates a major fissure in the system where aspects of writing are not clearly defined; a system writer needs a unique voice and therefore should not imitate voice, but at the same time can imitate apparatus.

This type of deflecting of program influence again illustrates the power of the system to remain hidden. It manifests in more extreme ways as well, with authors developing defense mechanisms in order to temper FTAs from workshops, or not feel them at all. “I don’t write for the workshop. Just cause they don’t get something does not mean it’s bad” (Second Year Fiction). Another author takes this defense mechanism even further: “I’m not submitting things to workshops that I’m seriously working on. [Me: You’re not submitting work you care about?]

Not for workshop” (First Year MFA Poet, MA Fiction, Small Press Editor). Another respondent says: “If I don’t [have a positive critique], then it’s that one story, and not me as an author and I move on to the next one” (third year fiction, Assistant Editor Countable Print). A fourth year prose writer told me that with so many varied opinions and voices in the program, there was never a consensus as to what was wrong with a piece: “They all might hate it. But they all hate it for different reasons.” Which she says helps to temper some of the disappointment and keeps her from changing to a “program approved” style. These authors choose to separate themselves from the FTAs by not caring, thereby sheltering their writerly selves. These defense mechanisms admit system influence and therefore validate its power. While these writers look to empower themselves by removing themselves from the system, they are still system participants. So, if they have checked out mentally from their programs, they are not a part of the system and not taking in the governing rules. I could argue they are resisting the system from within, but the fact remains that they are still following some of the governing rules (turning in work to workshop) and therefore may be influenced whether or not they want to be or choose to believe they are.

Indirect system tactics. Another avenue which communicates governing rules is the correspondence of countable journals. While the journals themselves present examples of system approved work, the rejections from these journals are direct FTAs to authors. Rejection from a countable journal definitely enact and communicate these governing rules. “[Rejection from journals] has caused me to integrate and change my approach as a writer” (Fiction Editor, Prospective Student). And: “Rejection still sucks, but it does not rip me to shreds like it did before, not like before” (Pre MFA, Non de Plume). An assumed outsider of the system delivers the FTA that is both more stinging and less stinging at the same time than FTAs from workshop. First, the sender of the rejection is an assumed outsider because journal submission processes are

billed as fair and democratic, where only the work matters. Of course this is not true, as the majority submissions are not anonymous and include cover letters. In addition, many journals solicit for some or most of their pages, meaning that slush pile submissions have less room in the journal and therefore less chance to be published. This person is also seen as an outsider because s/he is outside the author's program, providing the distance to make said editor into an outsider. The rejection is more stinging because it has a direct relation to the author's CV and before the rejection is received the submission is tied up with the hope of acceptance. It is less stinging because it is not face-to-face and not delivered by someone the author has a personal investment in. Additionally, since the general rejection is pre-printed, the communication of governing rules is cutting, showing the author that they are nary worth the time for a nice note. When a note accompanies the rejection, the rejection is elevated (to positive rejection status! There is an oxymoron) and general praises the author for their compliance to system rules, with encouragement to send more.

Journal rejections seem as though they would be clear FTAs with no shelter, but some respondents provided strategies for shelter. "This is what I tell my students, your not being publish is not saying you're not good enough, it's just saying you haven't sent it out enough places" (PhD Fiction, Non-Fiction, TT Faculty). This strategy for shelter echoes what another participant says about every piece of writing having a home in the section above. Another participant explained his process:

I have a dream list of magazines... A lot of irons in the fire and then you fail regularly. I mean there will be weeks where I get a rejection everyday and that's just normal. And that's ok, that's check, check, check, moving on. And for every rejection I receive I try to send something else out. (MFA, TT Faculty, Online Editor, Former Countable Editor)

Here the participant is actively performing the narrative by keeping the process moving, each rejection is followed by a submission, as well as highlighting the idea that there is a place for

everything. Additionally, he is culling up a theme discussed earlier about having a “to do” or checklist; in other words a way to grapple with the realities of the pressures to publish. This is a narrative that is part of the MFA system and serves as a way to keep people in the system by keeping them from discouragement. Hegemonic systems seek to keep people in the system, and strategies passed down from officials (faculty) serve as one of the system tools to keep its numbers high.

It logically follows that if rejection is a type of FTA, acceptance is the opposite. However, even if acceptance is not a direct FTA it is communicating a congratulations for following system rules, therefore effecting future writing. Additionally, one participant described her interesting relationship with acceptance:

And so when you send something out to that top tier and then you get something accepted in the bottom tier of that tier, then all I can think to myself is aw shit why didn't I just send to the top of that tier. I don't know why I do that. (Third Year Fiction, Assistant Editor Countable Print)

The second guessing displayed by this quotation illustrates how countable venues are encoded into an arbitrary hierarchy that informs system writers' world view. The happiness of being accepted is tempered by the thought of what could have been, what more countable journal could this story have been published in?

One final way that journals impart governing rules are through the contributors notes.²¹ I think early on I was very much like, let's have some good publications. I think contributor's notes are interesting. Like, what made the cut, what journals am I going to tell you I'm in, what's going to impress you. So you do keep that kind of in the back of your mind. I mean, there are journals you really like, has a really good name, and it's like, oh, I want to be in there. (MFA Non-Fiction, Non-TT Faculty)

²¹ Contributors' Notes are the short bios (usually under 100 words) that each contributing author submits. While there is no format for these notes, normally they include where the author is living, where they went to school and/or currently teach, and a list of other publications.

This respondent demonstrates how these notes communicate governing rules. If the notes are in a countable journal, then it would follow that many of the contributors have been in other countable journals. By looking at what other places the authors have published, the respondent is able to get a read on other countable journals. This is especially “interesting” because with the limited space provided by contributors’ notes, authors can only list a handful of publications. Logically, the authors typically pick the publications they are most proud of and therefore the most likely to be other countable venues. These notes can be counted as FTAs because they act as spaces of bragging; calling the reader’s own merits into question.

This section outlined the importance of voice to the ACWE. Voice acts as the value which the ACWE organizes around and in turn something that writers desire to gain, their own voice. This desire creates power for the system as the search for unique voice via the ACWE roads is bound to fail since they are well tread and therefore not unique. This also creates a fissure where the ACWE can be attacked, as writers in the system view voice as both innate and something to be manipulated. This fissure has been kept intact since manipulation of voice outside of system approved ways was a non-starter with no publishing outlets that would accept these manipulations and be countable. As I will explore in the next section, this is changing with the growth in online spaces coupled with the growth of the system itself and therefore the need for more countable venues so that enough writers are accredited to populate the system jobs. Since online venues started as outside of the system, some venues were able to gain enough cultural capital for the ACWE before they were co-opted by the system or appropriated from the system. This allows writers to gain ACWE cultural capital outside of the ACWE. In other words, resistive writers are able to populate the system due to resistive publications gaining cultural capital in a resistive space before the space was co-opted by the ACWE.

Resistive Spaces: How Online Spaces Allow for Resistive Performances

As with any hegemonic system, the ACWE has spaces for resistance (Danahjer et al., 2000). With both the ACWE and online literature exploding, everything is changing. And while it seems from my results that the coming change is keeping the old rules, there are signs that there is also change coming from resistive pockets. Research question four goes to the heart of this matter by focusing on the ACWE's core in this time of change. How has the explosion of online spaces in the writing community impacted writers in their development and communication of voice and identity? This explosion has led to writers in the ACWE having resistive stages to perform voices and identities that fall outside of the accepted rules of the ACWE.

Online spaces such as journals, blogs, communities, and forums provide platforms for writers to display their work and ponderings. In addition to providing space and, as outlined above, readers these spaces also provide immediacy. While print journals take time to layout, print, and send, online spaces have the ability to be almost instantaneous. If someone has a blog that is already set up, they can post their thoughts as soon as they have been typed into wordpress. This immediacy creates stages that feel as if the players on these stages are alive. Pieces can be written in response to other pieces, and they can be published in close proximity (time wise) allowing a dialogue to be created. Forums can host live arguments. Twitter and Facebook can be stream of conscious. All this adds up to a living entity being displayed online with many stages on which this entity may perform.

This section begins by looking at writing as a private act until it is published, thus making the instantaneous capabilities of online mediums an affront to some writers. Despite the encroachment that instantaneous publishing has on writing as private, many respondents describe

online spaces as places to be authentic. This authenticity unbinds them from the constraints of the ACWE, as most online spaces are resistive structures. Another angle participants look at is that of branding. In other words, the ability to publish instantly and also maintain other online personas (i. e. blogs, social media) allows writers to develop a brand. Most respondents view online spaces as resistive stages that allow for more freedom in voice construction and performance and in turn a more authentic community building platform.

The act of writing is private. This immediacy allows writers to communicate with readers as their true selves. This is the new frontier for writers, as writing is, by nature, a private act:

Writing is such a private thing... It's just you in the computer or you and yourself. Then of course with a thing like AWP or a publication or an MFA program. All the sudden your writing is public. And you're perceived as a public writer. (MFA Non-Fiction, Non-TT Faculty)

As this participant explains, the act of writing is private, but the ends of writing are public.

Another respondent says:

The act of writing is a private act, the act of revision, the act of making something out of nothing. But as soon as I've put it down on the page and you know I've had that interaction with myself, and there's a point at which I make a decision about making that thing public, and then that separates for me. (Full Professor, Fiction MFA, PhD)

At some point a writer decides that the communication they have been having with herself is ready to be shared with the world. Before online venues were available, this sharing was a delayed and very belabored process. Almost all writing, pre-internet, was filtered through journals, meaning that it was consciously edited by someone other than the author. This type of editing and delay allows voice to be directly influenced by an outside presence, stripping some of its authenticity away. The temporal distance also distances the voice displayed in the work from

the current voice of the author. As shown above, a piece of writing captures the voice of an author for a particular moment.

This is not to say that online spaces take away the editorial elements of being a writer. The point is that online writing allows the products of a solitary act to mimic the way we perform in our everyday life:

I think every writer is crafting a persona. If you sit and watch people walk around in here for a few hours [AWP] you'll see the degrees of image sculpting going on, without even talking to anyone. Um, you know and I think you know the online self is an extension of that. You wear different clothes online, maybe it's more personality driven. And I guess in some sense that's a little more real than some of this. I mean, I think it's unavoidable. (Second Year Poet)

This student is able to see AWP as a stage to perform. He also makes the link to online being more real than the performances on the floor of a system conference. Perhaps this realness comes from the control over online communication. In a conference setting, you are forced to interact, and you are forced to interact with people that you should network with. Being forced into this causes performances that might be more defense mechanisms than reality, while the protection of your computer allows the space necessary to be real.

Online spaces allow for authenticity. Other participants also talked a great deal about how online spaces allow them to be real or authentic in a way that print venues did not.

My online presence is a projection of my true self... There is the aspect of editing and crafting when you're talking about Facebook and email, it's sort of socializing and writing in that sense. I try to project pretty true to what I am as an individual. (MFA fiction, Indie Print Editor, Former Countable Editor)

Here we see an admission of crafting, but still the insistence that this is a true self. The crafting, in this case, is a way to be more real. Again, the realness is available as an option because of immediacy. Where before, and in other venues, writers are forced onto a system stage, online

allows writers a stage that is not necessarily system approved. Of course, some of these non-system approved stages also act as resistive spaces.

While the immediacy of online allows for a less mediated version of a writer to be displayed to the world, that does not mean all writers treat this space as unmediated. Even when speaking about Facebook, one writer talked about editing and the product of that editing: “Is a smarter version of me. I’m conscious of it” (Third Year Fiction, Assistant Editor Countable Print). Another participant fell along these same lines with his blog: “It’s crafted” (MFA Fiction, Interviewee for TT). These participants admit to crafting their online work, just as they would their usual work. The difference comes back to gatekeeping. While authors may put as much care into their online oeuvre as they do their print oeuvre, they do not have to get approval for the online work. This is why online can act as a resistive space.

Online spaces: The resistive stage. The FTAs of the system and the perceived structure/hierarchy/traditionalism leads some of my participants to online venues for their publications. Most of my participants view online communication as a must. My participants did not articulate the idea that online communication is a resistive act. Despite this lack of articulation, the mere act of printing outside the academy approved journals is resistance, whether or not the participant is aware of the resistance. The fact that these authors would choose to put their work and effort into things that do not count toward their CV is resistance. This is resistance because it builds a community outside of the system, it builds a support system for those who do not adhere to the ACWE’s governing rules. While participants might not view online spaces as resistance, they did view it as community:

I think doing online interaction well is to figure out a way to A not drive yourself crazy, which is a huge danger of the entire enterprise, B it’s ultimately, yeah it’s possible to be really cynical about it and try to be manipulative and all of that, but I think you know, the more fun and interesting and probably ultimately more effective way of looking at the

whole thing is that you're trying to build relationships with people, you're trying to meet people... At its best, it's a way of building communities and relationships. (MFA Fiction, Editor Indie Print)

By being real, this respondent is able to build his own community. A community that, presumably, is like minded and publishing online. As I will discuss in the coming paragraphs, online spaces also provide an easy way to brand oneself. This branding is a way to build a non-traditional cache that can, and has in some cases, been parlayed into a spot in the ACWE. With a community and a brand, the academic system can be and has been broken into by non-governing rule following participants.

Branding. Being a brand is not new to the literary world. Being able to tell a Shakespeare play without knowing it is his play, shows that branding has been around as long as there has been writing. "Branding is about a uniformity of form and content" (MFA in Poetry, PhD in literature, Small press publisher, Countable magazine editor). As this respondent says, branding is about uniformity, which, looking back at the last section, is tied to voice as a writer's marker. Of course, the other major aspect of branding is quantity. While a writer may have a distinct style or voice (as much as that is possible), if a writer has never been published, then said writer has no brand. What the internet has done is allowed everyone to become a brand. Now writers can use social media and blogs to enhance their brand by putting out more content than the print publishing enterprise would allow, or even the writer was capable of with just their stories or poems.

Branding is a way to get the eye of readers and editors, and the internet is the tool of branding:

I'm my own publicists. I want this book to lead to another book and to readings and maybe a situation where I can do more writing... I do do Facebook and try to promote myself, like I have a reading tomorrow I publicize that. Cause I want people to go, and it's out there. (MFA Fiction, Non-TT Faculty, Countable Editor)

As this respondent puts it, online allows for self-promotion. While this author does not speak directly about branding, the promoting of his work via online means is a way to get his brand seen. In the world before internet there would be no need to promote yourself outside of a book publication. Print journals had/have small runs and were/are cost-restrictive. Now, authors promote themselves to drive people to their work, online, live, or in print. As this respondent points out, once the brand is there, the system capital will follow:

In the last couple years it's interesting. Like people you know who are just building their resumes through online stuff. And there's like a real community of that. You know, people like Matt Bell. And their getting really good print deals because of it, because they have these built in followings. It's them too, it's not just them sending out stories, someone like Matt who's all over the place online, all the social networks and doing a really good job of it too. He's not just tweeting nonsense, he's talking about his process and people find that interesting. I think a generation ago you didn't get much of that. Especially writers are interested in other writer's process. So for some to have all that accessible it builds interest in them for sure.

Aside from illustrating how being an online brand allows editors and publishers to know you, this quotation shows the community accompanied with that knowing. On top of that, this quotation shows the array of tools at the disposal of writers who wish to brand themselves and the vast nature of the landscape.

Moreover, branding is another way to talk about identity performance. As Butler (1999) explains about drag queens, their performances are no less real than anyone else: "The drag show is the moment when the performance is rendered explicit" (p. 253). Conscious branding is the explicit performance of a writer's voice. I have talked about the careful editing of writing as a conscious performance and branding is the next step. Branding includes writers actually choosing what about their writerly (and non-writerly) self they display and communicate to the world. Their writing functions in the same way, but if they are trying to publishing their writing in an edited venue, then they have little control over when it is displayed. With personal

webspaces, blogs, and Facebook, writers have complete control and therefore are making the performance explicit. Another participant tackles the vast nature of the landscape and the multitude of tools through his own experience adapting to it:

It's complicated... I'm still learning, how is a tweet different from a Facebook status update... The whole idea is to drive people to the homepage so they buy the book... I'm happy to play the game, sure I will whore myself out. It's a total performance, the pictures, the status, it's all grooming. So there are certain pictures people will take of me and tag and I will be like no, and I will have to remove the tag because I have this need to groom and control that profile. And I have lists, to filter who sees what. (PhD Fiction, Non-Fiction, TT Faculty)

By using the metaphor of a game, this participant shows the manipulation associated with brand control. This is especially telling coming from a respondent who already has a tenure track system job and a book forthcoming from a major New York press. In fact, this illustrates how the system is co-opting resistive strategies. A system writer is learning how to brand himself in the mold of resistive writers in order to further himself in the system.

It is not just system writers who see branding as a carefully controlled performance: “[Do you censure yourself] Sometimes I think about that. I mean, I’m supposed to be this online, edgy indie writer, maybe the cute picture of my kid isn’t the thing to put up” (MA, Online and Indie Publisher). In addition to censoring, authors are also finding strategies to get reactions and more exposure: “A lot of times I will post a certain thing because I know it will get a reaction. Someone will find this funny, or insightful, or clever, or whatever. So I do consider that [performance]. The audience, I keep in mind” (MFA Non-Fiction, Non-TT Faculty). This again shows how branding is a performance. And while the audience may be one of resistance, it is informing the writer’s choices just like the system does to the system writer.

Branding creates expectancy violations. Branding has become something that happens to writers who publish prolifically as well as those writers who actively brand via social media.

Whether or not a writer wants a brand is irrelevant if they are an active publisher, since their brand is being communicated via this published work. One writer who does not like the idea of brands, but knows he cannot avoid it says:

Yes, there is a [name redacted] brand, I wish there weren't... The difficulty I have with the brand is that it creates expectations, it tends to cut into your freedom. I published an experimental science fiction novel, if now I want to publish a traditional spy thriller, I'm put in a weird position because people who enjoyed my previous work will be freaked out by it... I would rather have works coming out with no names on them where you could just write what you want. Given that I can't do that, I don't do anything to manage my brand. I have my blog, but I think of that as a business card. (MFA Fiction, Interviewee for TT)

This respondent details how expectancy violations work. Just as with FTAs, pressure is exerted to conform. To have a brand, one must be successful and therefore to change that brand, one would be violating the governing rules that s/he was in compliance with before. Of course, the brand may be outside the system, but then it would be following the rules of a different system with the same implications for change.

As illustrated above, online spaces allow for more control over content from authors, as well as more content in general. This, then, can allow authors to brand themselves. Successfully branding can lead to cultural capital in both resistance and the system itself. In turn, people who consider themselves outside the system can gain access to the system and benefit from its financial shelter while remaining uninfluenced by its governing rules for content.

The system is untrustworthy, it's hard to say what makes it that way, it's not really clear to me that creative writing belongs in the university. It's not clear to me that the way creative writing is taught is a good way to produce good writers. The system is here so I'm willing to take advantage of it... If I were directing civilization I would question why the system is where it is. (MFA Fiction, Interviewee for TT)

This particular participant was interviewing for tenure track jobs the day I spoke with him. His system capital had largely come from online journals and independent presses. He seeks to be an intruder in the system. And maybe that is the point. In a system as vast as the MFA system,

which is part of an even larger system, there is room for many different voices, even those counter to the system. Online spaces have allowed for more outsiders to gain access to the system. And while the system is co-opting online means, the resistance will not die because there is always another space to open up in cyberspace.

Summation

In this chapter I outlined the evidence that supports the idea that the ACWE is a hegemonic system. I then illustrated the governing rules that are communicated to my participants via system means (i. e. workshops, publications, jobs). Tangled within these governing rules is the construct of voice and the underlying ACWE beliefs that voice is innate, yet somehow teachable; in other words, that voice need be unique, yet follows system rules. I explored this tangled mess by diving into how system members view voice, view voice construction, and view voice performance. This moved into the final section which charts online spaces, showing how they form both spaces for resistance and means for branding. In the final chapter I will outline the limitations of this study and future directions for this research. I then move into the implications of this research to the ACWE, identity studies, and hegemonic system studies.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Implication, and Limitations

Discussion

This thesis set out to gain a greater understanding of how the ACWE functions as a hegemonic system and how its members navigate the governing rules of this system. Qualitative interviews were conducted with 25 ACWE members, who ranged in experience and rank within the ACWE. The interviews used a semi-structured protocol that follows Strauss and Corbin's (1990) grounded theory. This method was chosen due to the flexibility it affords, as the population in question is under studied and the ACWE is at a crossroads with both the explosion of online spaces for writers and continued rise in the number of MFA programs within the system. The interviews yielded 188 single-spaced transcript pages, which were analyzed through a three-step coding process. The final coding step, selective coding, used Butler's (1999) identity theory and Foucault's (1965, 1972, 1977) dominant discourses theoretical lenses for a critical cultural analysis. The analysis produced four emergent themes: the hegemonic nature of the ACWE, the rules of the hegemonic system, voice as central to writers and what is at stake in the face of governing rules, and online publishing outlets as resistive shelters and forces against the ACWE. Each of these themes related back to one of the four research questions.

Research question one explores the ACWE's attempts to remain an "other" within the academy while complying with the academy's rules. The ACWE is a hegemonic system with its own governing rules, but it does resist select governing rules from the greater academy. The resistance to these rules allows the ACWE to maintain its core philosophies that foster community and uniqueness. This resistance manifests in the collaborative didactic style of

workshops and journals that are not citation driven. As long as voice is central to the mission of the ACWE, these strategies will remain prominent. Despite this resistance to the greater academy and its governing rules, the ACWE is, in its own right, a large hegemonic system. As a hegemonic system it enforces and communicates its own governing rules that restrict the freedoms of its members.

In the next section, the analysis uncovered the governing rules of the ACWE to answer research question two. This section explores the means used by the ACWE to communicate the governing rules to system members. The rules discovered restrict the acceptable publication venues for system writers, creating a network of publications that are worthy of cultural capital within the ACWE and a network of publications that are not worthy and therefore resistive. These rules are communicated via ACWE institutions such as workshops, publications, and word of mouth since they are the cultural norms of the ACWE. As with any hegemonic system, members of the ACWE who do not wish to submit to the ACWE and its rules have created resistive pockets. These pockets include outsider journals and communities, which allow for freedom from the ACWE rules. As these resistive spaces grow, they are at greater risk of being co-opted by the ACWE or appropriating from the ACWE. This resistance is looked at in greater depth in the final section of the analysis.

This third section of the analysis focuses on the importance of voice to the ACWE and how the ACWE communicates its own social scripts to system writers' identities and voices. The ACWE core beliefs center on the search for voice, where voice is the unique, definable aspect of a writer. By placing such focus on voice, system writers then organize their worldview around this construct. As such, these writers are constantly looking for ways to be unique and many of these ways are the ways of the ACWE (i. e., workshops, journals). Not all respondents believe

voice is crafted, instead most believe that voice is innate and the ACWE's job is to help writers uncover or find this innate trait. Nevertheless, these same respondents altered their voices based on FTAs or protected their voices through deflective strategies. While the system enacts governing rules on voice, there are outlets outside of the system, mainly online.

The final section of the analysis explores the explosion of online spaces and the impact this explosion has had on writers' development and communication of voice and identity. These outlets are mainly online journals and collectives that do not have cultural capital in the ACWE and therefore act as resistive spaces, but do provide stages for resistive work. However, as the ACWE continues to grow, these spaces gain cultural capital within the ACWE. These gains come from the ACWE co-opting some resistive spaces, some resistive spaces appropriating ACWE rules, and system members who straddle these two worlds. Participants view the merging of these two spaces as inevitable.

In this coming sections I will highlight the limitations and implications of this thesis. In the limitation section, I will offer suggestions for future researchers who wish to use this population to better account for mitigating factors. The implications will offer insights into what this thesis does for the ACWE, for identity theory, for theories of power and liberation, and finally for culture in general.

Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

Identity theory. Creative writers have not been studied by identity theorists. Judith Butler (1999) looked to drag queens to explode gender performance, for good reason, and later theorists have turned to various other populations to explore different facets of identity performance. Many studies that hope to glean an understanding of identity performance via a population that is more in tune with performance than the general public, have turned toward

actors. I contend that creative writers are the more nuanced and better suited population than actors to study in today's environment. While pre-social media studies were right to look to actors, who inhabit both their own identities and the identities of their characters, with the rise in social media use the general population now has a mediated public identity, making creative writers the ideal parallel. Actors do edit their characters, but the editing of a Facebook post is more analogous to editing a short story than it is to editing behavioral performances.

I propose that writers are an ideal group to study identity due to their public displays of self being mediated and constrained (for the most part) by the page or screen. By looking at writers, their work, and their social media we are able to dissect the social norms manifested in their identity performances. As discussed in the analysis, some writers are aware of their work and social media outlets as performances and this awareness brings social norms into focus for the performer. While many groups straddle the fence between private and public self presentations, writers bring a level of consciousness to crafting their public performances. Expert crafting of mediated performances, the editing of work to be published and of social media to comply with writerly voice, is unique to writers. While many, if not all, people self-edit their self-performances on social media, these edits are not practiced as part of their craft. Editing is writing, and therefore writers are expert editors. As shown in the analysis, when writers edit, they do so to fit external expectations for the public self they have created in their work. They do this with a calculated, practiced hands. Looking to these calculated and practiced editors we gain insight into the editing that the general public does on their social media performances.

In other words, I argue that the editing displayed in the work and social media performances of creative writers translates to the editing that non-creative writers perform in their social media interactions. The editing of the non-creative writers are not locked to a specific

hegemonic system like the ACWE, instead they are editing social norms of the greater societal systems (e. g. capitalism, Americanism). Creative writers have always had a mediated public identity through their published work and they now have additional mediated identities through social media, making them even a better population to study. Through creative writers, who are more conscious of the mediated selves they publish (via journals and social media) than other groups, identity theorists can learn the way in which social media changes the ways non-writers construct and perform identity via their own mediated selves (i. e. social media).

While there is not enough data to posit a theory, the results point to a theory of identity construction and performance that includes more self-awareness due to the space provided by our mediated means of communication. In other words, while identity construction and performance has always been about doing identity and following social codes, with new means to express ourselves, we now have more autonomy and control in choosing which codes to follow. Creative writers show that uniformity in performance can be achieved through careful crafting of mediated-public identities, and now social media provides a platform where this careful crafting is available for all.

Hegemonic power and liberation. The ACWE is full of contradiction; from its desire to be in the academy while maintaining its outsider status through alternative didactic and publishing styles, to centering a field around the search for unique voice by ushering all those in the field down the same path to find uniqueness. As Phillips (2002) illustrates, contradictions allow for power to be resisted or dissolved. Phillip's view of contradictions builds on Foucault (1977) recognition of the idea that with power comes resistance and vice versa. More specifically, power invents resistance and resistance reifies power. While Foucault failed to give any explicit means to manifest resistance in systems we study, he outlined the cyclical nature of

knowledge, power, and control which later theorists turned into resistance theories (Phillips, 2002). Using the Panopticon²² as an example of how power works, Foucault (1977) explains how the restriction of communication between system members (restriction can even come in the form of available language) and the monitoring of members by authority figures with the threat of discipline is how knowledge creates power. Knowledge, in this case, is the knowledge of the system and its governing rules. As system members live in the system and therefore watch the system, they gain knowledge of how the system works and live as system members should, therefore perpetuating the system and giving the system its power. If system members do not like how the system runs then it seems like they would not comply with the rules of the system. This is where surveillance and the threat of rebuke come in; system members also learn that their actions are monitored and can be punished and therefore comply with system rules to avoid punishment. The key is that the surveillance does not have to be constant; instead the threat of surveillance has to be constant and therefore the surveillance is internalized by the system members. In sum, as members learn to internalize this surveillance, they gain knowledge into how the system works and therefore reify the power of the system (Foucault, 1977).

For the ACWE the surveillance is the CVs of system members. When a member goes on the market, the member must produce a CV to be reviewed by an authority²³ who will deem whether the member has followed the governing rules of the ACWE well enough to gain a faculty position in the ACWE. The constant, internal, surveillance comes via the CV worry placed on system members as they write and then publish their work. System members have

²² A Panopticon is a prison designed in the late 1700s that allows for guards to monitor prisoners and does not allow for prisoners to interact with one another (Foucault, 1977). Modified versions of this design are still prominent in our current prison system.

²³ When I say authority, I am not referring to a person who has power or a hierarchy, as hegemonic power does not work in such a top-down way. Instead I am referring to a gatekeeper who has gained the privilege of enforcing governing rules by his/her own compliance to said rules.

learned the governing rules by watching other system members and therefore pick up the dominant aesthetic so that they may gain cultural capital in the system. The danger for the system is when the governing rules have contradictions, since contradiction brings the apparatus of power into question. As Phillips (2002) puts it: “both freedom and thought exist at a point between the present and the possible. Additionally, both freedom and thought require a displacement from the present in order that objects and actions might be problematized before alternatives are proposed” (p. 338). Displacement from the present comes via contradiction, as contradiction allows for a consciousness of the governing rules one submits to, thereby making resistance possible.

Phillips (2002) builds onto how these types of contradictions are exactly what are needed to change hegemonic systems:

the emergence of a contradiction within discourse concomitantly involves the opening of a space of freedom. As such, the space of dissension and the space of freedom are, effectively, the same—an opening within the relations of power/knowledge that allows for the invention of new discourses and new relations. (p. 336-337)

System writers can look to the ACWE’s systematic uniqueness or hypocritical status in/outside the academy as spaces of freedom or dissent. To resist through these contradictions writers can choose not to participate on the ACWE approved stages (countable publications) and instead display their work via non-approved stages (i. e. many online journals, blogs, social media, small press publications).

As shown above, the manifestation of resistance creates a new set of governing rules. Therefore as soon as a writer chooses to resist, s/he is choosing to adhere to another set of governing rules:

it is important to note here that freedom does not consist of the implementation of new relations of power, but in the moment of possibility which precedes such reform; hence Foucault’s reluctance to engage in advocacy. ‘Concrete freedom’ exists in the fractures

within existing relations of power, at the points of contingency within which no clear path can be prescribed. (Phillips, 2002, p. 336)

As soon as organization begins, freedom is lost. However, the resistive structures still offer alternatives to the structure in power and as the need for more accredited ACWE members rise, so too does the ability for those who participate in the resistance gaining access to the benefits of the ACWE (i. e. tenure-track jobs).

The great benefit of the ACWE is that it funds writers who would otherwise need day jobs outside of writing. Phillips describes the benefit of power like so:

In Foucault's thinking, as many have observed, power is enabling as well as limiting; thus, we ought not think of notions like domination and freedom as separate, opposed entities. Indeed, the dual function of power, allowing us to do as well as limiting our actions, leads some scholars to urge that domination and freedom be seen as unified concepts. (2002, p. 334)

Writers can use the ACWE to improve their lives and enable them to write. And if the ACWE was not here, then writers would submit to other hegemonic systems without the benefit of being able to make their livelihood of writing.

This thesis contributes to the study of systems of power because it views a hegemonic system in flux. The ACWE has grown at a fantastic rate over the last fifteen years and there is no evidence that it will slow any time soon (AWP, 2010). This growth has coupled with the dwindling of funds for print magazines and has made accrediting enough ACWE members to populate the system's jobs a daunting task going forward. The explosion of online publications, which has coincided with the rise in MFA programs, allows the ACWE new venues to fill the gap. With the reality of not having enough countable journals setting in and online journals gaining longevity the ACWE has begun to co-opt these spaces. Given these factors, this thesis contributes a fresh look at hegemonic systems as it is able to capture a system that is on the precipice of change. Lemke (2000) posits that in today's world, all systems are changing, as

interaction between man and machine becomes more meshed: "We therefore need a theory of self-organization in 'ecosocial systems', in which both material-interaction couplings and meaning-mediated interdependencies in the action of (human, and so also nonhuman) constituents are taken into account" (Lemke, 2000, p. 205). This thesis aims to address this call for research in the realm of social media and identity. Additionally, this thesis highlights the trepidation that comes with change, the excitement that comes with change, and, as outlined above, the contradictions that precede change.

While again there is not enough data to posit a full theory, the data does suggest that the introduction of new communication tools like social media makes for change in hegemonic systems. The data suggests that technology is the great democratizer in organizations, giving individuals the ability to gain autonomy. This autonomy is gained through the building of resistive structures via technology.

ACWE. This thesis highlights the fact that the academy holds no special place for the ACWE. Instead it wills the ACWE to submit to its governing rules. This is evident by the repeated apologies sent to various academic journals from ACWE members (Radavich, 1999; McFarland, 1993). Therefore, I propose the ACWE address this power struggle in a few ways: first, stop apologizing and instead trumpet why the unique features of the ACWE are better serving for not just ACWE students but all students (Beams & Pike, 2008). Second, untangle the ACWE from home departments, as some system schools have done.

This first step, trumpeting the didactic style of the ACWE, attacks the governing rules of the academy head-on. The collaborative nature of the workshop, where the power to instruct falls to both the teacher and the students, is novel in the academy (Green, 2001; Morton & Zavarzadeh, 1988; Demeure et al., 2009). Traditional classrooms use a power structure where the

professor has all the power as s/he makes and enforces all the rules. The workshop structure grants autonomy to its students, as students collaborate in the construction and enforcement of classroom rules (Green, 2001). An additional benefit to this structure is the investment that workshop members make in the class (Green, 2001). By investing in their classmates, workshop members are investing in themselves. In other words, if a class becomes about the community of the class instead of about pleasing a solitary teacher to get a grade, then it stands to reason that the students of the class will expend more effort because there is something greater at stake.

This second step is a little trickier because to become standalone departments, MFA programs need money. Fiscal concerns make this unrealistic, but the production of literature should not be in the same department as those who critique literature. Critics strive to understand why different moves in literature work and what literature means. This type of research is harmful to the very core of what this thesis hopes to save when it is thrust upon the producers of literature. By charting how literature works, critics are laying out a guide to follow for literature producers. While this may not bleed into the ACWE right now, as programs are forced to add more rigor (MacFarland, 1993) and, in turn, more literature classes, the students of the ACWE are more exposed to these guides. Then literature production is pressured by the rules of the canon instead of the discovery of the new. While I do not agree that literature is dying (Genoways, 2010), I do believe it is at risk. One potential solution to this concern is providing distance between the ACWE and the academy.

Limitations

This thesis uses a qualitative approach with Strauss and Corbin's (1990) Grounded Theory as its methodological guide. After coding the transcripts, the data was treated as a primary document for a critical cultural rhetorical analysis. This blended approach is a strength

of the study as it ensures a deep analysis of the available data. However, it also assumes a finite nature to the respondents' answers. While writers are constantly editing their work, they are rarely asked to vocalize about the process and the apparatus that surround the process. It would serve future studies to set up the interviews for longer time periods (i. e. not at a conference) and over multiple sessions. By stretching out the protocol, there would be a natural check for contradictions in respondents' answers, a chance to follow up on said contradictions, and a chance for the respondents to think about how their writing is a product of a system in between interviews.

Other limitations stem from the same source: sampling strategies. The first limitation due to sampling is that only 20% of the participants were tenure-track ACWE members. While AWP plays host to ACWE faculty, these faculty are generally busier than their students. I only had two interviewees cancel and both were tenure-track and both gave time-constraints and scheduling shuffles as their reasons. The second sampling limitation is that 24% of my participants came from the same school. No other participants came from the same school (meaning there were 20 schools represented in this thesis) and the participants from the over-represented school varied in system rank, mitigating some of this limitation. However, for future studies more effort should be put into sampling a wider variety of schools and more tenure-track faculty.

While there was a relatively even gender distribution, 11 females and 14 males, the split is still worrisome. As the 2010 VIDA (King, 2011) statistics highlight, woman are grossly underrepresented in ACWE publications despite the number of woman writers being greater than that of male writers. In addition to the limitation of the gender split favoring males, the thesis did not look into gender dynamics within the ACWE. Future studies should include a gender dimension, as it would add to the intricacy of the data and also tackle an important issue within

the field. Additionally, a gendered look at the ACWE would fold in perfectly with Butler's (1999) identity theory allowing for greater corollaries between the population of the ACWE and Butler's theory.

Race, ethnicity, and class also need to be included dimensions for future studies. This thesis did not ask race, ethnicity, or class questions so hard statistics on the respondents' demographics are not available. However, based on casual interactions with some respondents it is clear that there were at least two respondents of different races and two of different sexual orientations. These numbers are not representative and do a disservice to the ACWE. For future studies, emphasis should be placed on gaining a diversified sample. This is especially true since this thesis deals with power issues and people of different races and sexual orientations may be under even greater restrictions than others in the ACWE.

One final limitation is that this thesis did not consider, or ask about, program structure. Program structure refers to how a program is situated within the academy. Most MFA programs are part of the English department, but there are some programs (i. e. The University of Iowa, Johns Hopkins University) that are standalone programs. Since much of my argument ties the ACWE to the academy, this is an important factor to explore. Do standalone programs have more autonomy and therefore follow fewer of the governing rules of the greater academy? Or is the inverse true, since they do not have the shelter of the larger department? Any study looking at the ACWE in the future should be sure to address this issue.

Summary and Conclusion

This thesis questions our culture's art and its production. By looking at how hegemonic rules govern art production I question whether or not a culture and its major underpinnings (specifically capitalism) is risking the ruin of art. I argue that the corporatization of the academy

trickles down to the ACWE which takes away the shelter from commercialism that the ACWE claims it provides. The ACWE may seem like it is doing its participants no favors, so why should anyone participate? It all comes back to the comfort that the system affords its participants: “The whole reason I got into teaching is so that I could have my day job and do what I wanted and not live by the book. Not having to sell out like a Pat Conroy or something” (Full Professor, Fiction MFA, PhD). The ACWE acts as a shelter from the truly capitalistic system of mainstream publishing. While ACWE members must publish in countable journals, and therefore must comply with certain governing rules, even those that dictate aesthetics, they are sheltered from living book sale to book sale. The reality is that the mainstream publishing world has its own codes that govern style, includes a rigorous gate-keeping component, and is even more exclusive than the MFA system.²⁴ The MFA system may have its aesthetic codes, but they are broader than the alternative and allow for a sense of, if not the reality of, autonomy and creative license. Additionally, it allows for resistive stances within its walls, as the academy is still a proving ground for new thoughts and technologies. As one of my participants said, the system gives writers “career[s] and by career[s] I mean that thing where you get to keep writing” (Post-MFA Fiction, Editor Indie Print). In the end, the system is funding literature in a way capitalism failed to do.

²⁴ On fictionfactor.com (Ranta, 2010) Jessica Faust, a founder Bookends literary agency (an agency which represents commercial fiction authors), estimated that only 10% of her agency’s authors do not keep a day job.

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Appendix

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol for project “Identity management in the Academic Creative Writing World: How the proliferation of online communication effects the performance of identity in writers”

A. Demographics

- a. What type of degree do you have or are you working toward?
- b. What genre/s do you identify with?
- c. If you are employed in the Academy, how long have you been employed and what is your current rank?

B. Identity

- a. How do you view your writerly identity? How do you express and communicate this identity/ these identities? What are your outlets of communication for these expressions?
 - i. How much do you think about how to communicate these identities? Do you actively construct this/these identity/ies? If so, how? If not, how is it constructed inactively?
 - ii. What effects of other people have on the construction of your identity?
- b. Do you see your writerly identity as different from your academic identity? Why/why not? How?

C. Migration toward online

- a. Has the recent rise in online communication within the literary world changed any of your writerly behaviors?
 - i. Do you submit to/participate in online forums, collectives, blogs within the literary world? If so, why and where? If not, why not?
 - ii. How do you view this rise in online communications?
- b. Where do you see the literary world in five years?
- c. Do you view a print publication differently than an online publication? Why/why not?

D. Academic system

- a. What place does an MFA program have in the way its students develop their writerly identities?
 - i. What do schools/faculty do to encourage this development/ or shelter students from influence?
 - ii. Is there a similar cultivation or lack of cultivation for the faculty?
- b. What place does the traditional academy and its rules have in the cultivation of identity?

E. MFA programs and literary magazines as organizations

- a. How would you characterize the identity of the school that you are affiliated with? It's literary magazine?
 - i. Do you identify with this organizational identity?
 - ii. Do you try to influence this identity? Why/ Why Not? How?

Is there anything else you think I need to know about writers and identities?