

## 5

### ARGUING

Although I hesitate to adopt all features of critical thinking as goals in my required writing classes, I want my students to know that their knowledge is situated, which is a precondition of being able to see from multiple perspectives, allowing writers to read their texts (and themselves) with other readers' eyes. If I were asked to focus on one writing skill that marks the transition from high school to college writing, it would be this ability to see one's own text/self with others' eyes.

Linked to the ability of seeing from multiple perspectives is the ability to recognize the social context within which claims are interpreted as either self-evident (see Bartholome's [1985] notion of commonplaces, 42-43, and Skorozewski's [2000] refreshing article on academic clichés) or in need of substantiation. Because of their limited exposure to multiple perspectives, young writers tend to be locked into circumscribed social groups within which a set of claims are treated as irrefutable truths, such as "freedom is our god-given right" or "competition encourages higher achievement." At the university level, students are confronted with a kaleidoscope of social groups as well as with the new demands of various academic discourse communities, many of which bring with them new sets of assumptions. By being able to see with others' eyes, students gradually come to understand the contingent nature of assumptions they once believed were stable. Students who learn how to question their own assumptions will not only write more effectively but also learn how to accommodate diversity. In addition, the search for data and warrants substantiating challenged claims trains students to think more clearly, to require reasons for their beliefs and to require the same reasoning of others.

Because of their connection with effective writing, I make these features of critical thinking a fundamental part of our required writing courses. But I am less willing to adopt other features of critical thinking associated with argumentative writing—not because they are undesirable

but because when they are uncritically integrated into instruction, they may function as another weeding-out mechanism acting against working-class students. By uncritically, I mean adopting them as if they were class neutral rather than loaded with attributes that make them more accessible to middle-class than working-class students.

### SOCIAL CLASS AND ARGUMENT

Required writing programs commonly sequence instruction by having students work in various forms of personal writing in the first semester and then “graduating” to the more impersonal argumentative writing in the second.<sup>1</sup> This progression is homologous to a move from the working classes, associated with the personal or subjective, to the middle and upper classes, associated with the impersonal or objective. The depersonalization of discourse demonstrates one’s distance from things, which is to say, distance from necessity—enabling, Bourdieu (1984) argues, the aesthetic disposition (53-54). One becomes distanced from one’s self—i.e., nothing is taken “personally.” By taking an impersonal stance, one is more capable of appealing to logic rather than emotion—and logic is what higher education is presumably about (Fish 2008).

Although sometimes introduced in the first semester writing courses, the controversial issue or position paper typically dominates second semester required writing courses, for which reason both the ACT and SAT have made it the model for their timed writing assessments, claiming it as the central kind of academic discourse (ACT 2003, Table 1.8; College Board 2004). The genre is reality-focused insofar as the writer is not supposed to distort information for persuasive purposes; on the other hand, the writer should carefully consider readers’ responses, arranging the information and arguments, such as putting the most significant reasons last or delaying the position statement if the writer anticipates readers who would initially be offended by the writer’s beliefs. The prototypical controversial issue essay, with its roots in

---

1. I looked at the Web pages of 114 universities for whom composition requirements were readily available. Seventy-four of these were non-liberal arts schools. Of these, 61, or 82%, made argument the focus of their second writing course. With 43 of these, argument was the clearly stated focus. Others described their courses in terms like writing about literature, thinking critically and backing up your arguments, or clearly stating and defending a controversial thesis; from descriptions like these, I inferred argument as the central genre. The notable exceptions were courses that emphasized discipline-based writing. Also, courses that were portfolio-based tended to be more catholic in the genres in which they had their students write.

Sheridan Baker's *The Practical Stylist* (1962), usually focuses on some issue with a thesis that is worth writing about only if the writer can imagine an antithesis that some readers would support. The essay is framed by an introduction with a specific thesis at the bottom of a triangle, a paragraph or two acknowledging oppositional points of view with rebuttal and several paragraphs presenting the writer's reasons for promoting the thesis, with each claim being supported by evidence and logic linking the evidence to the claim. The writer then restates her thesis in the conclusion and broadens out to implications or the need for further investigations. The formulaic nature of this genre, only slightly more diffused than the five-paragraph essay, is most likely the reason behind its popularity. It gives teachers and young writers something to hold on to.

Although the formulaic nature of this genre might appeal to students with working-class origins, several central features of this argumentative genre conflict with the working-class ethos. These are objectivity, multiple perspective, explicit language, stance, and dialogism. I will explore in this chapter the class biases of these features and conclude with an analysis of working-class resistance to argument, based on a misinterpretation of the genre.

### Objectivity

The relationship between social class membership and objectivity is as old as Plato's parable of the cave. According to Plato's parable, the working-classes—or any colonized social group (women and slaves, in particular)—are dominated by subjectivity. They are chained to their points of view from which they can see only the stories cast on the wall. The middle classes are more likely to understand the shadows are cast by actors because members of these classes have access to the scene of manipulation. Members of these classes turn their eyes from the wall to the ledge behind them where the scenes are being staged. The higher social classes have found their way out of the cave to where they are able to see the things in themselves, the modernist *ding an sich*. These are of course the scientists and New Critics. But the truly elite social classes, dramatizing Bourdieu's (1984) thesis on distancing, are not beguiled by things, that is, by the particulars; instead they cast their eyes to the heavens, where they see the Forms. This is the paradigm of a social class hierarchy, at the upper reaches of which form is everything. Reference to the self and one's concerns—e.g., through expressive discourse—are in poor taste, a betrayal of one's lower-class heritage (Bourdieu 190-200).

The objectivity associated with the higher social classes is key to the argumentative genres that Kinneavy (1969) classifies as referential discourse with an obligation to render external reality faithfully. The best essays in these genres appeal to reasoned discourse with a balanced tone. When writers slip into pathos as an appeal, academics will be irritated by the writer's attempt to draw the reader into the emotional game. Emotional discourse, with its origins in epideictic rhetoric, may work well in political rallies but not in academic settings. The pose of objectivity, in fact, lay behind the injunction against use of the first person pronoun through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although the first person is now admitted in most writing classes at the college level, it must still be an objectified "I," the writer in possession of her reason, language, and stance. If Bourdieu's thesis on the relationship between social class and the distancing effect is accurate, then one's attitude toward objectivity corresponds to the social class level of the writer. Students from the higher social levels will more readily accept the objective pose because it is more a part of their ethos and language codes than it is for working-class writers.

In an analysis of his own upper-class ethos, Nelson Aldrich (1996) calls sublimation the key "operating principle of the upper-class aesthetic" (214). The upper-classes are socialized in their primary culture into sublimating their emotions, desires, and needs because they are born into the condition of being *above* it all. In their desires to be like the upper-classes, members of the middle classes pretend to the sublimation naturalized in the upper-classes. For middle-class members, the struggle for sublimation marks their primary Discourse—it is what they are born into, the *pretense* of distance through an objectified "I" (Bourdieu 1984, 253).

Academics have adopted an unnaturally naturalized tone to their objectified discourse. It's a superficially distanced tone that may seem natural to those who have been raised in the parlance, but to a working-class sensibility, the tone rings false. Here is Lynn Bloom's (1996) paradigmatic middle-class discourse:

Most of the time, the middle-class orientation of freshman composition is for the better, as we would hope in a country where 85% of the people—all but the super-rich and the very poor—identify themselves as middle class (Allen). For freshman composition, in philosophy and pedagogy, reinforces the values and virtues embodied not only in the very existence of America's

vast middle class, but in its general well-being—read promotion of the ability to think critically. (655)

Bloom's prose is a model for the tone rewarded by college teachers. Although Bloom is close to her subject here (social class and writing instruction), her tone is balanced and cool. One simply has to parse the first independent clause to see this:

Most of the time  
the middle-class orientation  
of freshman composition  
is for the better

Her prose reads smoothly because of this control and balance—in this case, we have four lines with two strong stresses each, the second and the third lines having third secondary stresses (tá tion and sí tion) that create a rhyme. The rest of the sentence unrolls with the same balance and control to end with two dimeters

identify themselves  
as middle-class

repeating her initial noun and subject with the final stress directly on the word she is emphasizing—"class." Throughout these two sentences (which I pulled almost at random from her writing—my eye having been caught by her reference to critical thinking), she uses parallel elements:

the super-rich and very poor  
in philosophy and pedagogy  
the values and virtues  
not only in the very existence . . . but in its general well-being

She uses formal language when she has a choice: ("for" instead of "because") and the self-conscious appositive "—read promotion." This is good writing, the kind that gives academic readers confidence in the writer. But from a working-class sensibility, that appearance of control (like being carefully dressed) makes the writing and writer suspect, or as Lindquist (1999) puts it in her analysis of the barroom regulars,

“they hold in suspicion those performers who are obviously adept at the game—the better one speaks, in other words, the less he or she can be trusted” (236). Working-class writers write ragged. Their words spew out, an eruption of thought and emotion, which is perhaps, as Ong argues, the consequence of being raised in a primarily oral culture, of not being used to the objectification of the self as text, of being “out there” where one can be re-seen and revised.

While reviewing a textbook proposal a few years ago, I came across a striking example of student writing in the distanced style—perhaps the kind of prose Lynn Bloom may have written when she was in high school, prose that wears a tightly buttoned, Peter Pan collar. Here’s the introduction to that student essay:

In his poem “Sonnet,” Percy Bysshe Shelley introduces us to a bleak world that exists behind veils and shadows. We see that although fear and hope both exist, truth is dishearteningly absent. This absence of truth is exactly what Shelley chooses to address as he uses metaphors of grim distortion and radiant incandescence to expose the counterfeit nature of our society.

The writer is clearly distanced from her text. We don’t see her in it at all—in fact, one gets the feeling of the writer overworking each line to get the balanced tone and ornate style we saw in Bloom’s writing: “bleak world that exists behind veils and shadows”; “although fear and hope both exist, truth is dishearteningly absent”; “metaphors of grim distortion and radiant incandescence to expose the counterfeit nature of our society.” The writer self-consciously steps back to choose words like “dishearteningly” and parallel phrases like “grim distortion” and “radiant incandescence.” These are prose words, words that appear only in an overly written piece of writing. They are certainly not words the writer would speak, that is, if she valued her friends. This prose is also the kind her teachers probably taught her to write and that will gain points in her liberal arts courses, which is why the author of this rhetoric, whom I very much admire, chose to use it as an example of strong student writing.

Readers with different social class trajectories might read this style differently. College teachers who were either born middle-class or worked hard in school to achieve middle-class status may like this kind of writing, but working-class academics—at least those who have not rejected their working-class backgrounds—may be more inclined to dislike it, or at least respond ambiguously to it. On the one hand, the academic part

of me says, if this style will help writers fight their ways through the academy, then I'll teach it. The working-class side of me, however, shrinks from this kind of overly self-conscious prose, particularly when I find myself writing it.

Although I resist the necessity of teaching my working-class students how to distance themselves from their texts, the ability to objectify oneself (or one's text) is necessary both for a better understanding of one's place in the world and for improving one's writing skills. We need to understand, however, that because their primary Discourses may be in conflict with this pose of objectivity, working-class students may be inclined to resist it. We might attribute their resistance to their uneducatability but we could more accurately understand it as a contradiction between the essential features of their primary and secondary Discourses.

### **Multiple Perspectives**

Working-class students may also be less likely than middle-class students to see events from multiple perspectives. Being able to see events from multiple perspectives is in part the consequence of being able to step back from one's subjectivity. This step-back is enabled by two socio-economic factors. The first follows from Bourdieu's (1984) thesis of elites having the leisure to step back. Bourdieu plays with the "ease" in leisure—the ability to feel at home in one's situation, which Bourdieu equates with the elite's ownership of what counts as culture (2, 255-56).

The second factor links to Bernstein's (1971) thesis on the social class differences in role-playing and social experiences. Bourdieu, Bernstein, and Lareau (2003) document the relative closed-role system in the working classes as opposed to the open-role of the middle classes. In essence, the higher one's social class, the more varied the roles one is required to play, simply because members of the higher social classes find themselves in more varied social circumstances than members of the working classes do.<sup>2</sup> As well as being exposed to varied social situations in their everyday lives, higher social class members travel more, are exposed to

2. As in almost all generalizations about social class hierarchies, they bend back on themselves when they approach the extremes. The elite, or the upper one percent of our social system do not mix, very much as lower working class do not mix. It is no accident that their habitus are closer to each other than to the middle classes, for instance, the different emphasis on seeming and being. Both the elite and working-classes emphasize being. The middle-classes, intent on moving upward, emphasize seeming at the expense of being.

different languages, different environments, and different modes of being. In Lareau's study, the contrasting travel experiences between the fourth grade, working- and middle-class children couldn't have been more explicit: the urban working-class kids rarely travel outside the safe zones of their neighborhoods; the middle-class kids travel all over the city on a weekly basis, out-of-town, out-of-state, and occasionally to different countries—travel habits that are frequently modeled by their professional parents, some of whom fly to other cities two or three times a week in their normal course of business. Lareau cites Garrett whose father averages three nights a week out of town. Garrett's own participation in sports and other competitive activities frequently takes him out-of-state for various tournaments (42-44).

Elements of their habitus such as travel habits and multiple social positions naturalize for higher social class members the condition of being able to see from many different points of view, a central feature of academic argument. In my introduction to this chapter, I noted that first-year students' experiences are circumscribed, but the degree of circumscription is a function of one's social class origin.

The postmodern assumption of evanescent subject positions presents an additional unacceptable framework for the working-class student. Because of their circumscribed experiences, working-class students tend to resist the notion of shifting identities—for them, changing who you are to respond to the social context is what middle-class people do (Bourdieu 1984, 252-53; Seitz 2004, 55). For the working-class person raised in circumscribed environments, identity is fixed. For the middle-class students, whose parents have to learn how to respond to varied rhetorical situations, identity and meaning are contextualized. This latter notion of shifting, contextualized perspectives is what we reward in student writing.

### Dialogism

Dialogism is the bedrock of academic argumentation. Not only does the writer have to imagine alternative perspectives, but she also has to be able in her discourse to speak to representatives of these different perspectives. The writer has to construct the appearance of presenting oppositional perspectives fairly and answering their arguments with more persuasive arguments of her own.

This dialogic strategy, emphasized in Rogerian rhetoric, is compatible with the middle-class habitus in which argument as reasoned discourse



is encouraged, a consequence of parents who are constantly negotiating with others in the workplace and who bring this way of seeing the world home with them. Parents who are generally in non-negotiating situations in the workplace internalize a monologic way of seeing the world and reproduce it in their homes. At the dinner table, middle-class parents might attempt to engage their children in dialogic conversations in which ideas, politics, and public policies are discussed, listening carefully to their children's positions and encouraging them to make their ideas explicit and explore alternative possibilities. Lareau (2003) writes that Alex's middle-class parents frequently work to develop his political awareness by discussing political events with him at dinner (119), a highly unlikely dinner table conversation in a working-class home, where, as Mueller (1973) remarks, "children are to be seen and not heard" (59).

The correlation between dialogism and social class is documented in Anyon (1989), Bernstein (1971), Bourdieu (1974), Brice Heath (1983), Lareau (2003), and Mueller (1973). Brice Heath documented the differences between working-class and middle-class parental habits while reading stories to young children: the middle-class parents encouraged dialogue with the children and, in effect, with the text, as opposed to the working-class parents who taught their children how to sit and listen, often far beyond the point at which they had any interest in the story (225-26). Brice Heath claims the parents were replicating in their home their different interpretations of their own schooling experiences. If Anyon's research is indicative of a general trend, the parents in Brice Heath's study are in fact correctly interpreting what their children need to know—at the lower grades, at least. Anyon's research, although limited in scope, indicated that the different social class home orientations are reproduced in the primary schooling years. The working-class schools are role-driven, authoritarian, complete with bells. As the social class membership of the other four schools was higher, so was the amount of freedom, participation, and student self-direction. In schools dominated by children of the executive elites, there were in fact no bells.<sup>3</sup> The dialogic nature of the executive elite was exemplified in the math class in which there was no notion of "right" answers. The supposedly "right" answers could always be challenged, which the teacher encouraged the students to do. In the following classroom dialogue while reviewing answers, the teacher said,

3. My wife is a librarian in the most exclusive private school in Baton Rouge. No bells.

“Raise your hand if you do not agree.” A child says, “I don’t agree with 64.” The teacher responds, “OK. There’s a question about 64 (to class). Please check it. Owen, they’re disagreeing with you. Kristen, they’re checking yours.” The teacher emphasized this tactic repeatedly during September and October with statements like, “Don’t be afraid to say if you disagree. In the last (math) class, somebody disagreed, and they were right. Before you disagree, check yours, and if you still think we’re wrong, then we’ll check it out.” (Anyon 1989, 84)

Soon, the students weren’t talking in terms of right answers but in terms of whether they agreed. This pedagogical strategy encourages a dialogic attitude toward school, authority, and society in contrast to the working-class school in which rote learning was the rule. The teachers in working-class math classes taught the children how to follow certain textbook-dictated steps to solve problems. Their work was evaluated on the basis of how well they had followed the steps. One girl in the working-class school, for example, said in response to one problem “that she had a faster way to do it and the teacher said, ‘No, you don’t; you don’t even know what I’m making yet. Do it this way, or it’s wrong’ (Anyon 1989, 74).

The working-class children learn in their homes and schools that the world is a fixed order (Freire [1970] 1995, 73) to which they have to accommodate themselves, muttering, perhaps, under their breath; but the middle-class kids learn that reality is malleable, that people in their condition can in fact effect change by speaking to the world, which in turn speaks back. Their parents speak to political representatives, to doctors, to lawyers, to store owners and expect to be heard. The higher your social class, the more you are heard (Bourdieu 1975, 405-406). It might well be the case that the more you are heard, the more you hear.

### Explicit Language

The relationship between one’s language and one’s social and working environments includes not only grammar, words, and syntax but also kinds of words, use of modifiers, specificity, tone, rhythm, rhyme, structure or genre of utterance, and assumed knowledge constituting gaps within the text. Bernstein (1971) aligns these differences along an implicit/explicit continuum with the working classes oriented toward the less privileged member—the implicit. Explicit language depends

on having a large vocabulary allowing one to make distinctions and the syntactic versatility to make clear the relationships between linguistic elements. By privileging explicit language, we are unsurprisingly undermining the probability of scholastic success for working-class children, who grow up in homes with fewer linguistic resources and little need to make themselves understood by strangers.

Research has shown that linguistic experiences are significantly determined by our social class membership. At a basic level, Hart and Risley (1995, 32) documented the average number of words spoken each day to children at ages 13–36 months in the classes: professional (2,153 words), working (1,251 words), and welfare (616 words). By age three, the average child from a professional-class family had twice the vocabulary of a child from a welfare-class family (164-165). If this relationship between social class origin and language development continues, we can speculate that by college level, the student from a professional-class family has a much richer linguistic resource to draw on than a welfare-class student to make his or her meaning explicit.

Moffett (1968) theorized that language development is dialogic, a process of internalizing others' speeches and making them one's own (see Bahktin 1981; Vgotsky 1962). Moffett explains that an utterance by an interlocutor can become internalized and replayed in the child's speech as an embedded phrase or clause (72-83). On a more abstract level, dialogues are internalized and replayed as monologues within new dialogues. In essence, Moffett claims that our current linguistic resources are a consequence of previous linguistic experiences, our monologues the result of previous dialogues.

Lareau (2003) convincingly documents the degree of the differences in linguistic resources among middle-class and working-class families. Ms. McAllister, a working-class mother, uses language in a predominately functional capacity. She sees no need, Lareau points out, to spend time trying to enrich her son Harold's language (139). When the adults and children in the McAllister home were together in a room, Lareau reports, "Short remarks punctuate comfortable silences. Sometimes speech is bypassed altogether in favor of body language—nods, smiles, and eye contact. Ms. McAllister typically is brief and direct in her own remarks" (146). Her children are told to do things, frequently with one word directives. She "sends the children to wash up by pointing to a child, saying, 'Bathroom' and handing him or her a washcloth" (147).

We see this abbreviated, working-class discourse again when Harold and his father are shopping to prepare Harold for church camp. “Harold picks up a plain blue [beach towel] in the bottom rack. He holds it up. His dad says, ‘You want a plain one?’” Harold nods. This one-way conversation is followed by an exchange in which Harold’s father tries to get Harold to accept a good buy on a peach color towel set, to which Harold “shakes his head. ‘Them girl colors.’” In the subsequent exchange, the father utters short sentences, to which Harold either nods or shakes his head. The ethnographer reported that through the entire exchange Harold used fewer than ten words (Lareau 2003, 148).

In contrast with the brief directives and responses observed in the working-class families, Lareau (2003) writes that the middle-class families she and her researchers observed rarely issued directives or corrected disobedience with physical threats, the common modes of socialization in the working-class families.

Instead we observed them repeatedly, systematically, and determinedly use verbal negotiation to guide Alex through the challenges in his life. As Basil Bernstein has noted, rather than using authority based on positions (e.g., that of being a parent) middle-class parents prefer negotiating interactions with their children in a more personalistic fashion. They use reasoning to bring about a desired action, and they often explain *why* they are asking children to do something. (116)

Lareau (2003) uses as an example a dinner table conversation in which Alex’s father is trying to argue his son into eating string beans, he says,

“How are you going to beat up Fritz if you don’t eat your vegetables?” Alex shook his head as he picked up a string bean with his fork, “I am not going to fight him!” Terry, smirking: “Are you going to let him bully you like he does the other kids.” Alex, alternating stares between his father and his plate: “I’ll fight him if I have no other choice, but I’ll tell one of the teachers so he can get suspended.” (118)

Not only is Alex allowed to counter his father’s argument, his logic is supported by his mother who says, “That’s right, baby. You do not have to fight. There are better ways to resolve conflict” (118).

This kind of negotiation and acknowledgment of the child’s superior logic (at least in the mother’s eyes) would rarely be tolerated in a working-class family. The working-class parent would far more likely resort to position-authorized authority, the logic being supported by the parent’s

interpretation of his or her responsibility to punish disobedience. When Ms. McAllister is faced with similar resistance at the dinner table, she resorts to argument through volume. The ethnographer reports: “Mom yells (loudly) at him to eat: ‘EAT! FINISH THE SPINACH!’” (147). In my home, the culinary etiquette was the same: we ate what was on our plate, or else . . . (as Bill Cosby [1968] memorably put it in “To Russell, My Brother, Whom I Slept With”) THE BELT!<sup>4</sup>

The effect of these different modes of socializing children is dramatically asymmetrical language development. Lareau (2003) says that through the consistent negotiation of behavior, middle-class children like Alex developed extensive, adult vocabularies. When his father chides him for changing his mind about his favorite cars, Alex can reply, “This is America. It’s my prerogative to change my mind if I want to.” Alex’s parents are constantly inserting words like prerogative into their conversations with the implication that Alex should take them up in his equally constant negotiations and arguments with them (130), a middle-class pattern that accounts for Moffett’s (1968) observation from his research that “white middle-class fourth-graders [were able to] write rings around the ninth-grade ghetto children in sensory and memory writing” (34-35).

In brief, the working-class children are trained to communicate with gestures, using as few words as possible, emphasizing an economy of expression. The middle-class children are taught to use sophisticated words. They learn to play with language and take pleasure in that play, exploring double entendres (Lareau 2003, 45) and irony (119), both markers of higher social class membership (Bourdieu 1984, 34). If language is play to the middle-classes, it is work to the working classes, and the less of it, the better.

### Stance

In their “Preface” to one of the most popular books on argument, Bartholomae and Petrosky (1993) recommend the following to students: “To take command of complex materials like the essays and

- 
4. I am conscious of the values associated with the differences between social classes and modes of parental control. The researchers observed (and Billy’s mother reported) the use of “the belt” on the average of once a week (228-229). For various reasons, physical punishment or threats of physical punishment as a form of parental control is a function of social class membership. The higher one’s social class, the less the use of physical punishment. Now that I am a middle-class professor married into the intellectual fraction of a middle-class family, I disparage parents hitting their children. In fact, the sight of a working-class mother yanking or slapping her child in the grocery store upsets me. This reaction is situated.

stories in this book, you need not subordinate yourself to experts . . .” (10); and again, “It is up to you to treat authors as equals. . . [a] reader takes charge of a text” (11). Legions of composition teachers have taken up this heady directive to teach their students to read and write against the grain without considering how this advice privileges middle-class children, who are trained to assume precisely this stance.

Reading against the grain of one’s parents would be considered “talking back” in the working-class homes Lareau (2003) studied; but the middle-class parents clearly understood that by training their children to challenge them, they were preparing them for the academic and professional worlds in which “talking back” is a sign of competence. When Alex’s father tells him that if he copies a riddle to complete his riddle assignment, “Someone can sue you for plagiarism. Did you know that?” Alex responds as few working-class children would ever dare do, “That’s only if it is copyrighted” (119). Rather than feel challenged, Mr. Williams, a lawyer, may have felt he had a young lawyer on his hands, an interlocutor who was able to spot a broad generalization and challenge the claim by noting that the generalization applied only to a limited set of situations—and that the case in point did not fall within that range. It is worth noting that Alex, a fourth grader, has made “copyright” his own word (Bakhtin 1981, 293), a word that Harold, a working-class child, had probably not heard.

Alex’s challenge to his father, Lareau reports, is far from uncommon in the Williams family—in fact, the parents seemed to encourage Alex to speak out whenever he disagreed with something either of them said. Lareau’s researcher reported, “They seemed delighted with his overall development and they were unperturbed when he periodically used the skills they had taught him to challenge their authority. For them, the benefits of ‘developing’ Alexander outweighed the costs” (129). The benefits lay in the future—they know Alex with his sense of entitlement will be professionally successful. In the upper-middle class themselves, they know the world for which they are training Alex.

Lareau (2003) gives a striking example of another middle-class parent modeling an empowered ethos after her daughter had had an emotionally upsetting class with her gymnastics teacher. Rather than respond by telling her daughter to work harder, as working-class mothers would do (see Brice Heath 1997, 348), Ms. Marshall confronts the teacher about the teacher’s overcorrecting behavior. When the teacher says the daughter just has to learn more of the terminology, Ms. Marshall replies, “Look, maybe it’s not all the student.” After she gets home, Ms. Marshall

further demonstrates her empowerment—with her daughter watching, she calls the owner of the gymnastics school and convinces him to start another class of advanced beginners in response to her daughter's inability to cope with the demands of the teacher in the intermediate class (171). The mother is clearly teaching through her example that her daughter should not accept situations—if she is dissatisfied with them, she should take steps to change them, confident that she has the authority necessary to intervene and negotiate change.

Similarly, Alex's mother uses a visit to the doctor's office as an opportunity to train Alex to interact with the doctor from an empowered position. Ms. Williams tells Alex in the car, "Alexander, you should be thinking of questions you want to ask the doctor. You can ask him anything you want. Don't be shy. You can ask anything" (Lareau 2003, 124). As a consequence of Ms. Williams' preparation, Alex readily engages with the doctor, asking questions about the doctor's interpretation of Alex's height, interrupting, and correcting the doctor when he says that Alex is 10 (Alex is only nine [Lareau 2003, 124]). When the doctor asks whether Alex has any other concerns, Alex freely explains that he is worried about some bumps in his armpits, assuming control of the direction of the conversation. Lareau notes that the transition of the conversation's direction "goes smoothly. Alex is used to being treated with respect. He is seen as special and as a person worthy of adult attention and interest. . . . He is behaving much as he does with his parents—he reasons, negotiates, and jokes with equal ease" (126).

In contrast, working-class parents train their children *not* to take "charge of a text" (Bartholomae and Petrosky 1993, 11), that is, of a rhetorical situation in which the working-class person feels he or she is expected to defer to authority, reproducing the parent's rhetorical situation in the workplace. Harold, a fourth-grader like Alex, learns this deference through the example of his working-class mother's behavior. Although Ms. McAllister is described as an athletic woman who in the home has "a highly developed sense of humor and a booming voice," she turns into another person in the doctor's office. Lareau (2003) describes her as "quiet, sometimes to the point of being inaudible." When the doctor tries to make eye contact with Ms. McAllister, she looks either at the piece of paper in her hand or down to the floor and mumbles monosyllabic answers like "Yeah." Harold is watching—and learning. Like his mother, he answers the doctor's questions with monosyllables and in a low voice (157), most unlike Alex who has been trained to treat the doctor as an equal.

When Harold's mother meets with his teachers, Lareau's (2003) researcher reported that "[t]he gregarious and outgoing nature she displays at home is hidden in this setting. She sits hunched over in the chair and she keeps her jacket zipped up." Ms. McAllister is surprised when the teacher tells her that Harold has not been turning in his homework. Ms. McAllister says he has done it at home, but "she does not follow up with the teacher or attempt to intervene on Harold's behalf" (157). Echoing Brice Heath's (1983) remarks on the working-class whites in her research, who "turn over to the school their child's education" (148), Lareau says that Ms. McAllister felt that "it is up to the teachers to manage her son's education. That is their job, not hers. Thus, when the children complain about a teacher, she does not ask for details" (157)—as if the children have been shipped to an alien world where they have to learn to sail on their own. This disassociation is an effect of social class alienation: as Marx argued the working-classes were alienated through industrialization from their labor, so are the working-class parents alienated from their children's educational processes. Education is closed off in urban working-class schools as if by a steel fence. The fence stands like Ellis Island as the sign of a world isolated from the working-class community in which it is placed. The school is a transition point, a moment, as Bloom (1996) trenchantly claimed about freshman English, of disinfection. To the working-class parent, the teacher is the middle-class representative in control of that "other" world—and of the child after she passes through the fence or disinfecting pool.

If we assume that the logic governing the relationships between social classes governs the interpretations of one's own power to effect change, we can see how Lareau's (2003) research predicts the problems working-class students have when they walk into college writing classes in which the power to intervene is consistently privileged over the working-class ethos of skin-level accommodation. Lareau claims that the middle-class children in her study learned their sense of place, their right to protest and correct. The working-class children learned to be silent, reserving their protest for the sanctity of the home where they might bitterly complain about teachers (163) as working-class parents complain about their bosses in the home—or in the bar.

### **The Place of Argument**

One reader of this manuscript challenged my claim that working-class children are not trained to argue in their homes and working-class



schools. He cited Julie Lindquist's (1999, 2002) auto-ethnography of barroom "working-class rhetoric" (2002, 3) as evidence of the place of argument in working-class discourse. Lindquist interprets barroom arguments as an index of the mechanisms through which working-class people establish their identities (vi, 16-17, 41). She analyzes a plethora of instances in which the Smokehouse regulars bait each other—and Lindquist, a bartender—into social and political arguments. In contrast with the implications of Lareau's (2003) and Bourdieu's (1984) research (see 405-406, 427), Lindquist claims that political arguments, in particular, are central to working-class identity (10).

I take Lindquist's research seriously. Although I didn't hang around working-class bars as an adult, much less as an ethnographer, I spent more time than I should have in my late teens in them. Even through the refracting lens of time and the different perspective of a teenage participant, I recognize the regulars, the social structures, and the barroom banter Lindquist documents in her auto-ethnography. I question, however, Lindquist's claim that the barroom is a valid microcosm of working-class culture. As Lindquist points out, the barroom culture is predominately male with a few of the men's partners and some of the female employees, Lindquist among them, admitted to the group of regulars; one would be hard-pressed, therefore, to see the barroom culture as a fair representation of working-class culture as a whole, which also includes women, children, and a fair portion of both men and women who would bristle at the notion that the group of men who habitually hang around the bar after work represent their culture. We should also note that this is an urban, working-class bar, a space, as Lindquist describes it, where the working men can gather to create powerful social identities, perhaps to counter their underling identities in their work situations (see Freire [1970] 1995, 48), re-establishing their self-authority through drinking.

In answer to my reader, I am reframing Lindquist's research as a special rather than a general case. As a special case, barroom discourse may very well reveal a suppressed imperative of working-class culture, but we need to acknowledge that this discourse represents only a part, and quite possibly a minority, of working-class adults. Literature frequently normalizes the bar as a site of the working-class male, but it's quite possible that this narrative of the working-class bar, usually written by middle-class observers or cross-overs like D. H. Lawrence is another marginalizing strategy told by the outside culture. When viewed against the working-class homes Lareau documents, the Smokehouse (Lindquist

1999, 2002) seems like another country. My reader's caution against over-generalizing is, however, well-taken. I acknowledge that people in working-class culture argue, but there is a notable difference in the rhetorical situations in which children from the different social classes learn to argue.

In Stephen Garger's (1995) account of his struggle to adapt to academic notions of argument, he writes that any brief arguments with his parents would end with "because I said so. . . . My parents never listened," he says, "and after a while, neither did I" (49), a lesson that is the antithesis of what academics need to do. Garger also associated argument with the kinds of arguments in which he and his friends engaged on the street, generally over who had done what in pick-up basketball, punctuated by shouts, name-calling, swearing, and face-offs that led either to fights or "do-overs." He and his friends didn't argue by citing evidence and linking their evidence to their claims; rather, "might made right" and "the only response to a fellow ignoring or contradicting an explanation three times is to yell and go for the throat" (49).

The might-makes-right logic of argument in the working-class home and on the street may account for cross-overs' rejection of argument in the classroom, a consequence of their inability to distinguish a difference in kind. In a presentation at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in 2000, Nancy Mack said, for instance,

I hate argument. My mother and father, before me, hated arguments. I guess that it runs in the family. In our working-class home when I was growing up, to be accused of wanting to argue about something was worse than cursing. It was considered an abusive practice used to brow-beat someone until you got your way.

Alfred Lubrano (2004), a journalist who wrote a book on the sound barrier through which working-class kids have to pass, summarizes the relationship between argument and social class like this: "In blue-collar homes, there's rarely such a thing as a civil argument. Working-class people have two speeds: silence and rage. It's the middle class that debates things, able to conduct an argument without becoming emotional; working-class people yell" (65).

By linking argument with shouting and the threat of violence, working-class students and academics tend to handicap themselves by meeting argumentative situations with silence, which is precisely how Garger met a challenge to his claim in a faculty discussion that he was leading.

Rather than listen carefully to the faculty member who was questioning his claims and answering the challenge with reasons supporting his position, he clammed up and went into an inner boil, furious at the faculty member who had questioned Garger's assumptions. His intractability marked him as someone who did not yet belong.

Garger recounts how one of his friends helped him see argument from the middle-class, academic perspective. While they were walking to another faculty meeting,

[William] said he was looking forward to the gathering because there were sure to be some good arguments this time. I was surprised and asked, "You're actually looking forward to arguing?" His reply surprised me even more: "I like arguing. It's a good way to compete intellectually and have fun. The issue doesn't have to matter." He held the door open for me as we entered the meeting room, gave me one of his rare smiles and said, "Academics like to argue." (50)

William was opening the door to membership in this more privileged community in which argument is game, a game middle-class children are trained to play as much as working-class children are taught to avoid it.

After his conversation with William, Garger analyzed argument as a discourse form distinguishing his home community from the one he was joining. He did not treat one form as deficient and the other as competent; they were merely different, distinguished by the social groups that used them. In their arguments over theories, middle-class professors, Garger points out, were doing what his blue-collar playground buddies were doing when they got into shouting matches over the value of different players on professional baseball teams—creating a space within which the speakers were able to show off their knowledge. The real difference lies in which discourse form is valued by the people in power. The people in power argue like William; the people out of power argue like the people in Garger's home community: they shout, replacing logic with volume—and, significantly, only among peers, never against people in superior positions of authority, reinforcing Bernstein's (1971) distinction between the working-class position and the middle-class person ethos. The working-classes are trained to grant authority on the basis of the social position of the person, while the middle-classes are trained to grant authority on the basis of the arguments they make.

Working-class kids certainly do learn how to argue—but in a mode and rhetorical situation that is at odds with the kind of argument we teach in our writing courses. Working-class argument is governed by volume, invectives, and physical gestures; or as Bernstein (1971) would put it, by implicit rather than explicit language. In addition, it is practiced—and to me this is the salient point—among institutionally sanctioned peers. Kids can argue with kids *outside*, but they cannot argue with adults or in the home (see Lareau 2003, 142, 154). Kids can argue *only* in the space marked off for kids only. I interpret a corresponding logic underwriting Lindquist's claims. The bar is the place marked off from the workplace, marked off from the structures that govern social relationships determining who gets to say what when it counts. In the bar, you drink, and the alcohol puts you outside the *normal* discourse relationships. You can make your point by shouting, as the kids on Garger's playground made theirs. The bar, that is, is a playground, a carnival (Bakhtin 1981, 23-25), in which the normal discourse and social conventions are turned upside down. But the sun comes up, the streets are swept, and a little bit later, everyone goes back to school.

EBSCOhost