



Teaching grounded audiences: Burke's identification in Facebook and composition

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Abstract

More college students than ever are participating in social networking sites such as Facebook and are engaged in composing messages to their virtual audience through these sites. Composition scholars have continued to stress the potential these sites have in their use in composition and analysis. Many have responded to this call in expanding the pedagogy about Facebook's uses in composition, but more research is needed regarding the theory of "transfer" to use students' previous experience and prior knowledge with audience in social media to help them learn audience awareness in academic writing. Therefore, because Facebook and other social media sites demonstrate so much user generated text that students are familiar with, students can transfer their prior knowledge with audience awareness and appeal on social media to formal and academic writing. Facebook users consciously or unconsciously appeal to a specific audience, their friends. Rhetorician Kenneth Burke described this interaction as *identification*. He described how individuals will persuade their audience by "identifying" with them in certain ways. I claim Facebook can be used in composition to accomplish "high road" transfer with what students already know about friends and user profiles to teach them about audience awareness and appeal through Burke's identification theory. By implementing strategies of Kenneth Burke's rhetorical identification, students can better understand, analyze, and appeal to their potential audiences in both their social networking, in their academic writing, and in their everyday communication.

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Perhaps the reason I study social media is because of the inordinate amount of time I end up spending on Facebook browsing my news feed or connecting with friends. But I notice that Facebook seems to cultivate its users in rhetorical practices as they maneuver in it, expanding its ability to be mined for pedagogical applications. I see social media's potential in pedagogy growing with the wide expansion of social networks. Facebook itself has "announced that by the end of 2011 there had been 100 billion friend connections, and in recent months users had been registering 2.7 billion Likes and Comments per day" ("Facebook," 2014, Description, para. 10). To me, these daily connections constitute the rhetoric and composition, multimodal or textual, that users are exercising to very real audiences. Composition scholars have called for more focus on this digital rhetoric to take place in order utilize the potential found within this digital communication (Lanham, 1995; Faigley, 1997; Selfe, 1999; Wysocki, Johnson-Eiola, Selfe, & Sirc, 2004; Hawisher &

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Selfe, 2004; Clark, 2010; Maranto & Barton, 2010). Kathleen Yancey (2009), a past president of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), asserted, “We can and should respond to these new composings and new sites of composings with new energy and a new composing agenda” (p. 7). There is a need to research the potential this online community has of encouraging the transfer of rhetorical principles within Facebook using students. These students routinely compose messages to and identify with specific audiences. Facebook’s compositional and rhetorical content can open doors for new methods of writing instruction and new ways to integrate new media in the classroom.

Specifically, research into the transfer of rhetorical concepts within Facebook to academic writing still needs development. Many scholars, such as Deborah Balzhiser et al. (2011), David Coad (2013), Jane Fife (2010), Courtney Patrick (2013), Jennifer Swartz (2013), Lindsay Sabatino (2014), and Stephanie Vie (2009) as well as others, have responded to this call in expanding the pedagogy about Facebook’s uses in composition. Within the academic journals *Computers and Composition*, *Kairos*, *Computers and Composition Online*, and *Pedagogy*, as well as others, there have been articles on teaching persona creation, rhetorical analysis, and critical thinking in the composition class. Nevertheless, the pedagogy of transfer with students’ previous experience and prior knowledge of audience in social media requires more scholarly analysis. Many students already have much transferable experience with rhetorical interaction on Facebook. This “transfer” is essential within pedagogical practices. The National Research Council’s volume of *How People Learn: Mind, Brain, Experience, and School* (2000) argued that all “new learning involves transfer based on previous learning” (Bransford, Pellegrino, & Donovan, p. 53). Specific ways to enact transfer sometimes need detailed praxis. Perkins and Salomon (1992), for example, explained that dynamic “high road” transfer can occur when students abstract principles and skills from one context and apply them to another (p. 25). Such a pedagogy would enable composition students to utilize the principles they are practicing on Facebook in other communication scenarios. This paper establishes a rhetorical theory as a framework for transferring students’ audience awareness and appeal from Facebook to academic discourse. With this theoretical foundation, Perkins and Salomon’s “high road” transfer can enable more students to apply Facebook’s skills to composition.

I argue that because Facebook and other social media sites demonstrate so much user generated text and communication that students are familiar with, these sites can be used as a bridge to rhetorical analysis, particularly with audience awareness and appeal. Recent research has demonstrated the various and detailed kinds rhetorical practices that Facebook users engage in (Grosseck, Bran, & Tiru, 2011). Facebook users consciously or unconsciously appeal to various specific audiences, including their friends. Lindsay Sabatino (2014) has asserted that “These digitally literate people quickly move between various mediums knowing how to present different information through these mediums to best reach their desired audiences” (para. 1).

Kenneth Burke described this interaction as *identification*. He explained how individuals will persuade and connect to their audience by “identifying” with them in certain ways; as a result, his theory is of particular relevance among networking Facebook users. I claim that Facebook can be used in teaching composition to transfer what students know about friends and user profiles to teach them about audience awareness and appeal through Burke’s identification theory. By identifying Burke’s identification within their own social media uses, students will be able to apply those principles within their academic writing.

By implementing strategies of Kenneth Burke’s rhetorical identification, students can better understand, analyze, and appeal to their potential audiences in both their social networking, in their academic writing, and in their everyday communication. I will discuss the rationale behind using Facebook as a rhetorical platform, demonstrate the digital imperative, and explain how Facebook can transfer audience awareness through Burke’s identification theory to composition, giving some practical classroom activities.

1. Description and rationale: Facebook as an integral part of the digital imperative

1.1. The digital imperative

While composition and computer scholars (Lanham, 1995; Faigley, 1997; Selfe, 1999; Wysocki et al., 2004, Hawisher & Selfe, 2004; Yancey, 2009; Clark, 2010; Maranto & Barton, 2010) have long called for greater study to take place within digital rhetoric, the inclusion of transfer theory and identification creates new pedagogical methods using these computer mediated spaces for teaching students writing and rhetoric. Citing this lack of pedagogical study within computers and composition literature, Selfe (1999) argued, “We. . . need additional research on how various technologies influence literacy values and practices and research on how teachers might better use technologies

to support a wide range of literacy goals for different populations” (p. 431). Echoing Selfe’s argument ten years later, Kathleen Yancey (2009) asserted:

Today, in the 21st century, people write as never before—in print and online. We thus face three challenges that are also opportunities: developing *new models of writing*; designing a *new curriculum* supporting those models; and creating *models for teaching* that curriculum. . . . It is time for us to join the future and support all forms of 21st century literacies, inside school and outside school. . . . This is a call to action, a call to research and articulate new composition. (p. 1)

Although this call to action includes all kinds of technology-mediated writing, Yancey specifically noted social networking sites. Within the report Yancey used an example of high school students who used Facebook to enormous persuasive effect. She said that “these students understand the power of networking. . . . [T]he students understood the new audiences of twenty-first century composing. . . . [W]e can imagine the ways we might channel this energy for a cause more serious, for a purpose more worthy” (p. 6). Yancey’s report dealt with digital rhetoric in general, but her example shown here demonstrated that Facebook specifically is recognized as having great potential to teach composition.

Yancey’s call has emphasized the expediency of new pedagogies within digital rhetoric. Elizabeth Clark (2010) expounded on Yancey’s report, “This publication marks a distinctly new era of computers and composition—a challenge to articulate how technology is radically transforming our understanding of authors and authority and to create powerful new practices to converge with this new digital world” (p. 27). She went on to describe that the future of our composition shall be based on the worldwide, collaborative, and public nature of our texts, and that this should construct a “‘digital imperative’ that should include technology within composition teaching practices.” She asserted, “Today the composition classroom should immerse students in analyzing digital media” (p. 28). The inclusion of transfer theory and identification within computers and composition realizes this call and implements the rhetorical analysis of this digital composition.

Within digital media research for composition, social networking sites such as Facebook have specifically received attention. Composition scholars (Grosbeck et al., 2011; Sabatino, 2014; Maranto & Barton, 2010) have noticed how these sites provide much that can be made use of within the classroom. Stephanie Vie (2008) has explored the use of sites such as Facebook and Myspace:

I argue that composition instructors must continue to attend to the radical changes in writing and writing instruction wrought by networked computers. . . . students are already engaged in production activities in online social networking sites, and if we hope to assist students in significant ways with their writings, we must engage in their production methods. . . . The time has come, then, for us to pay attention to online social networking sites so that we can effectively teach technological literacy in the writing classroom and attend to the deepening digital divide between Generation M students and their instructors. (p. 11)

Scholars such as Vie have also recognized the potential that Facebook and other social media sites have in teaching students about rhetoric and composition. Even though these technologies have not been around for long (Facebook since 2004 [“Company Info,” Timeline]), the demand for in-depth research has been made known.

1.2. Why Facebook?

Statistics show that Facebook is a major communication and composing source not only among millions of the general public, but more specifically among the college student population. Facebook (2014) has announced that they now have more than “1.35 billion monthly active users. . . . [and more than] 864 million daily active users” (“Company Info,” Statistics). A study done among college undergraduates in the United States found that over 90% of students use Facebook as a communication tool. Also most undergraduates (58%) use Facebook more than once per day (Dahlstrom, de Boer, Grunwald, & Vockley, 2011, p. 13). These statistics demonstrate the relevance that Facebook has in students’ life, making it a model artifact for analysis that more students would be already familiar with. Consequently, this social media site will be able to serve more students in learning audience awareness and appeal by being more accessible and well known.

Facebook’s uses are widespread, but it especially includes written and multimodal communication. Even Facebook (2014) declared its mission to be “to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected.

People use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what’s going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them” (“Company Info,” Mission). Facebook users “express” in various multimodal forms, creating incredible sums of digital communication. In fact, the user-generated material amounts to over ½ a petabyte, or 500 million gigabytes per day (Sharwood, 2012). This composition of messages provides much of the interaction that occurs on Facebook. With so much creating and interpersonal contact taking place, Facebook is an artifact worthy of rhetorical analysis.

But teaching composition with Facebook requires more than just explaining the digital imperative and demonstrating Facebook’s accessibility and popularity. The question of “how” needs addressing. As Yancey (2009) wondered, “In other words, these students know how to compose, and they know how to organize, and they know audience. How can we build on all that knowledge? How can we help them to connect [their skills] to larger issues?” (p. 6). Here is where the pedagogy of transfer can use Kenneth Burke’s theory of identification to show how Facebook can transfer composition students’ prior knowledge of Facebook to teach audience awareness in academic writing.

2. Validation: The pedagogy of transfer

To successfully build upon student’s prior knowledge within social media, transfer theory must serve as a basis for pedagogical practices. Thus, the second theory that informs my work is Perkins and Salomon’s (1988) pedagogical “high road” transfer. They described high road transfer as depending on “deliberate mindful abstraction of skill or knowledge from one context to application in another” (p. 25). Within composition studies, much of the discussion about transfer revolves around transferring what the student learned in composition to other fields, disciplines, and careers (Smit, 2004; Rounsaville, 2012; Wardle, 2007, to name a few). However, a pedagogical step prior to transferring knowledge *from* composition is making sure that students are transferring knowledge and experience *to* composition. Without students learning from composition, there will be no knowledge or skills to transfer to any future contexts; prior knowledge and practice is then what must be focused on to help students learn compositional practices. Robertson, Taczak, and Yancey (2012) defined their view of transfer as “a dynamic activity through which students, like all composers, actively make use of prior knowledge as they respond to new writing tasks” (p. 1). With the overwhelming amount that students compose in social media, these sites serve to provide transferable knowledge and praxis that students already have to composition and rhetoric.

Because transfer theory is such a broad pedagogical method, there are many different avenues of application. For example, Perkins and Salomon (1988) made the distinction between “high road” and “low road” transfer and the implications both have upon teaching. Low road transfer can be exemplified by one person learning cooking skills at home and then applying them in a new context such as a restaurant or in a college dorm. Low road only requires the automatic superficial response of being put in a slightly different scenario. In contrast, Perkins and Salomon explained that high road transfer “always requires reflective thought in abstracting from one context and seeking connections in another” (p. 26). In other words, if the scenario one is transferring knowledge to is different enough from the prior scenario, it requires a metaphysical understanding for transfer to occur.

Applying identification to transfer knowledge and skills from social media to academic writing must involve specifically high road transfer. Because Facebook and the college essay are too different of contexts to use low road transfer, students must identify and abstract identification concepts within Facebook to apply them to the different context of more formal composition. When using social media in the classroom, transfer should serve as the pedagogical theory upon which instruction is based. By applying the concept of high road transfer, students can activate the prior knowledge they have from social media in order to apply it to academic writing. Without transfer, social media becomes just another information source, disconnected from any prior skills developed in its sphere.

3. Facebook in the composition class and Burke’s Identification Theory

3.1. Research on Facebook in the composition class

Though many computers and writing scholars have provided ways in which to use Facebook, none directly applied the theory of transfer. The sources that do detail practical uses of Facebook provided an adequate beginning for classroom use, some implied transfer theory, but without its full inclusion. David Coad (2013), Stephanie Vie (2009), Courtney Patrick (2013), Jennifer Swartz (2013), Deborah Balzhiser et al. (2011), Lindsay Sabatino (2014), and Jane

Fife (2010) in particular have discussed the pedagogical use of Facebook in practical detail. Most of them brought up persona creation and audience awareness as possible applications in their classroom practices.

Although it is generally acknowledged among these scholars that students learn useful skills from Facebook, transfer's direct implementation has not been realized. However, its traces are often embedded within the practices that these scholars explain. David Coad (2013), for example, argued that “[interacting on Facebook] helps students see how communication works in real, live rhetorical situations. . . . I found [my instructional practices] useful for helping them acknowledge the skills they are building in these writing spaces” (Students’ Critical Thinking, para. 2). Building upon the idea that Facebook is a rhetorically engaged platform, Courtney Patrick (2013) defended the notion of audience awareness taking place within Facebook:

With their particular audience and the chosen values in mind, student-users of Facebook decide what information to post and make present on a daily basis in an effort to accept and adhere those values. Whether through a status update, a photo upload, or a list of favorite movies, student-users are constantly choosing between what to show and how to show it in order to gain approval from their particular audience. (Part II, para. 1)

These scholars understood the importance that Facebook has in building rhetorical knowledge and skill. A common thread that all of the mentioned articles shared was the use of Facebook to serve as a platform for rhetorical analysis. As I will show later in this article, Facebook, being a communication rich environment, engenders the application of many different rhetorical principles and styles. Both Jennifer Swartz (2013) and Jane Fife (2010) mentioned this applicability and argued that such application is one reason why Facebook is good to study in composition. In mentioning her motivation for using Facebook, Swartz explained, “To help students see the ways in which writing is relevant to their everyday lives. . . . I introduce Facebook and MySpace to the classroom where we look at these social networking sites as rhetorical texts” (Introduction). Facebook not only allows students to practice rhetorical analysis, but it also provides connections between what students are learning in the classroom and what they are writing outside it.

An element still needed in most of these articles is the application of a theoretical background that would show students what to look for and transfer from Facebook to their academic writing. Also needed is more study regarding the how transfer can help tap into students’ prior knowledge. The theoretical framework is the necessary abstraction required in “high road” transfer, helping students to bridge the gap from social media to formal writing. In applying a theoretical framework the rhetorical analysis would lead to actual rhetorical practice of applicable principles and skills. Therefore, I will show how Kenneth Burke’s identification theory provided such a theoretical framework from which students can transfer specific elements of audience awareness and appeal, namely the techniques of identification, from Facebook to academic writing.

3.2. *Burke’s Theory of Identification*

Kenneth Burke’s identification theory restructured communication with the focus on connecting with the audience. Burke (1951) called his ideas the “new” rhetoric as opposed the rhetoric proposed by the classic philosophers such as Aristotle. He argued, “the key term for the ‘old’ rhetoric was ‘persuasion’ and its stress was upon deliberate design. The key for the ‘new’ rhetoric would be ‘identification,’ which can include a partially unconscious factor in appeal” (p. 203). Identification has always remained a key term in Burke’s explanations of rhetoric. Without this approach, understanding the importance of audience appeal and awareness would be less realized. Dennis Day (1960) argued that “Burke’s approach is significant not because he regards identification as a means of achieving persuasion, but because he regards it as the *only* means of achieving persuasion” (p. 273). Thus said, identification remains significant in teaching composition students about audience because of how crucial audience is to this method in communication and persuasion.

Identification, according to Burke (1953), revolved around a rhetor “identifying” with an audience. He described that because we are all divided into separate beings, and because our language makes us further divided, we seek to identify one with another and bridge this division. This identification involved finding “substance” that the two parties have (or assume to have) in common. This substance can be any kind of properties that may exist among people. As this common substance is revealed, Burke said that the parties are “consubstantial.” The more an individual can show that they and their ideas and arguments are consubstantial with their audience, the more identification occurs and the more persuasive that individual is. Therefore, identification is persuasive because it bridges division (Burke, 1953, pp. 20–22, 55).

In basic terms, this identification is a way of looking at audience awareness and appeal. Because persuasion centers on communication to a known and specific audience, the rhetor must find a way to appeal to them. Burke's method of identification demonstrated how appealing to an audience by identifying with them results in persuasion. [Burke \(1953\)](#) described his theory further:

Here is perhaps the simplest case of persuasion. You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his. . . . And you give the "signs" of such consubstantiality by deference to an audience's "opinions." For the orator, following Aristotle and Cicero, will seek to display the appropriate "signs" of character needed to earn the audience's good will.

True, the rhetorician may have to change an audience's opinion in one respect; but he can succeed only insofar as he yields to that audience's opinions in other respects. (pp. 55-56)

Burke showed the importance of audience awareness in persuasion, and how identification is the key for addressing audience. What is necessary then is to understand how individuals can "talk [their audience's] language" and "display the appropriate 'signs' of character." An audience is more likely to go along with and be persuaded by an idea that is aligned to their own interests, values, and goals. When rhetors identify their message with their audience, they can encourage the audience to accept what is being given because what is offered already fits what the audience might want.

Identification does not have to be conscious or even true to occur; the audience needs only to assume the identification is real. [Burke \(1953\)](#) explained that through "ingenious" identification individuals might identify with their audience without realizing it, "there is a wide range of ways whereby the rhetorical motive, through the resources of identification, can operate without conscious direction by any particular agent" (p. 35). [Brooke Quigley \(1998\)](#) reasoned that "Burke encourages us to look at processes that are semi-conscious, less than obvious, mundane, and representative" (p. 1). Individuals are not always fully aware of the identification that they do, but identification still occurs on a subconscious level. Also, cunning identification occurs when the individual attempts to identify in false ways. This idea was developed by Lawrence [Rosenfeld \(1969\)](#): "The identification is cunning because it does not actually exist, but is only created to achieve a desired end" (p. 182). Persuasion can still be effective in these instances because the audience believes the identification is real. Rosenfeld argued, "In the. . . case mentioned by Burke, where A *assumes* he shares a common interest with B, there is still a sharing of a common element. Whether A does contain the element of interest or whether he assumes he contains the element, the effect of sharing an element is the same" (p. 178).

Within identification, there are several overlapping sources from which identification is pulled from. [Stephen Littlejohn \(1992\)](#) explained three of them in his study of Burke: material, idealistic, and formal. He explained that "Material identification results from goods, possessions, and things." This source drew from the physical things and statuses of the parties. He continued, "Idealistic identification results from ideas, attitudes, feelings, and values." Standards and beliefs that a party had also are included in this source. The final source stemmed from different associations: "Formal identification results from the form or arrangement of the act" (p. 180). This "act" can usually be drawn from association from the same groups or events that the parties shared. As individuals drew from these sources, they could use them to show they are consubstantial with their audience and persuade them with their message. These sources can take a variety of shapes as will be shown later.

The strategies for associating the shared elements to achieve identification include the comprehensive list of classical rhetorical methods that most compositionists are familiar with, but they can fall under larger categories that are specific to identification. [George Cheney \(1983\)](#) argued that there are three main strategies that can be derived from Burke: "1. The common ground technique. . . . 2. Identification through antithesis. . . . 3. The assumed or transcendent 'we'" (p. 148). The first strategy involved the basic method of locating what the two parties have, believe, or think in common. The second method required the "act of uniting against a common enemy" (p. 148), or that the individual located an entity or idea that both find to be against them or their beliefs. The third technique covered the use of the word "we" to connect disparate parties. "We" and its other forms, along with "they" identified the individual with their audience in some common group with the same goals, values, and such. These strategies encompassed many others, but as a framework they served to implement identification well. They do not replace the classical argument strategies, but they are meant to enhance the direct appeal to the audience. When identifying with an audience, these tools will function to persuade that audience of the consubstantiality between the individual and their audience.

Although Kenneth Burke's theories are several decades old, his discussion of identification remains particularly relevant, especially today in a world with so much online social media. Organizations such as the Rhetorical Society of

America used Burke's identification as the theme of its 2012 conference and asked presenters to ponder identification "as a place of perpetual reframing that affects who, how, and what can be thought, spoken, written, and imagined" (as qtd in Ballif, 2014, p. 1). It is apparent that identification remains a structural piece of contemporary rhetoric, and as such, it becomes a principal method for students to learn and practice. Gregory Clark (1997) has also emphasized the importance of teaching composition students the theory of identification in his article "Kenneth Burke, Identification, and Rhetorical Criticism in the Writing Classroom." He explained that by teaching students to use this rhetorical method, they would become more understanding of the way that appeals are made to audiences, and that this method "suggests the shape of a pedagogy that embeds writing in reading and reading in writing and, as it does so, holds writers and readers alike accountable for what 'follows'" (para. 13). Identification remains a useful tool for students to use in rhetorical analysis and practice.

Though there are other rhetorical theories of audience awareness, this theory is already heavily incorporated in social media. In relation to Facebook Mackey (2012) declared "the community of Facebook. . . validates Kenneth Burke's theories of dramatism, symbolic action, and the concept of language as the key to creating the world as we know it" (para. 1). The communication happens here and Burke's identification is particularly relevant as people connect to each other and post content for their audiences. This validation is apparent as Facebook users consciously or unconsciously use identification in their daily online interaction with this website. The following section outlines how identification exists within the communication many students do on Facebook.

3.3. Facebook as a locus of identification

The application of the principles of identification can be demonstrated and taught within the confines of Facebook. As a source for community interaction and discourse, there is persuasion that takes place, both consciously and unconsciously, and that persuasion happens through identification with an individual's friend group. I will discuss the impact of Eli Pariser's (2011) "filter bubble" and will explore the how identification can occur within Facebook before proceeding towards a few practical ways in which this theory may be used to transfer Facebook knowledge to audience awareness.

Similar to identification, Facebook itself promotes the reception of like-minded ideas. Eli Pariser (2011) described this as the "filter bubble" or basically the algorithms that Facebook uses to track user interests in order to display the most relevant posts and uploads. Facebook analyzes the "likes," "comments," and "shares" that users do as well as everything and everyone they click on. After that, the algorithms work to display the things they think are most relevant to their interests in their news feed. The flip side is that if a user is not posting and uploading content that their friends like, then they might start to disappear from their friends' news feeds. In a way, the "filter bubble" is what students live with as they use Facebook, and Eli Pariser suggested that because Facebook alters the users' reception of information, the now-personalized filter may distort what is actually important to see (20). This in turn may affect audience awareness that students already have. Because of their filtered experience on Facebook they could be unaware of the complexity it takes to appeal to an audience. The difference with identification is that students learn how to identify an audience's interests with a message that might differ more than what an algorithm would normally allow. This is where transfer theory applies. Although Facebook programs to only show the messages where there is shared interest, and this is where students' previous experience understanding may start out, students will learn identification in the classroom. They will then transfer and adapt their basic skills in audience awareness to identifying more complex messages with their audience within academic writing.

Within Facebook, each person consciously or unconsciously tries to identify with their friend group. They post, comment, share, or "like" things that are assumed to be shared with their friends. Although not everyone who posts something to Facebook automatically thinks about how to identify with their audience, the thoughts of producing material that is appealing to their friends do occur. In any case, Burke (1951) discussed how an individual can be unconscious to their rhetorical moves.

Facebook's mission statement, mentioned earlier, implied Burke's identification. Within the statement the only words repeated were "share" and "connect." These two words automatically involve more than one person. Obviously, a Facebook user will "connect" with their friends (their audience), and will "share" with and "express" to that audience. Implicit within this mission is the idea of identifying with an audience. As Burke argued, because all individuals suffer from division—he called it "guilt"—they seek out consubstantiality, which means "shared" properties, and this occurs as they post, upload, comment, and "like" with each other on Facebook. Facebook users seek to present a profile that

appeals to their friend group. Not every instance of identification is a means to persuade an audience to an end, but often identification is an end itself. Identification may not happen in a hyper-rhetorical mindset, and each person's profile might not be entirely truthful, but those profiles still represent the attempts of identification.

3.4. Facebook Identification Examples

The ways in which an individual can identify using Facebook are many. However, in order to get a better idea of how such identification can occur, I will show an anonymous example Facebook user, John Doe (name has been changed), and his public posts. John Doe used Burke's strategy of finding common ground a lot on Facebook. When looking at his cover picture, there was an image of a popular Mormon temple in Manti, Utah. This image coincided with his timeline that showed that he had several posts from acclaimed leaders as well as other popular religious images from that organization. By using the pictures and posts of his religious affiliation, John identified with his friends who were predominantly part of the same religion. He was using his idealistic identification to show how he espoused the same ideals, values, and doctrines as those friends, creating common ground with them.

Also with common ground, John uploaded specific photos and personal artwork on Facebook. Because John shared an interest in fantasy with many of his friends, he posted images based on the kinds of things his friends identified with that interest. Many of his pictures were of wizards, dwarves, and adventurers from fantasy stories. He also referenced fantasy role-playing games and Tolkien/Jackson portrayals of hobbits. His profile picture was of Vitruvius, a wizard from the new and popular *Lego Movie*, which showed his fantasy connection to a stock mentor/wizard from popular culture. His source for this consubstantiality was material identification, which was identified based on the physical items that he liked. His friends responded to these with their own "likes" and comments of his photos and artwork.

Another method that John used to identify with his Facebook friends was that of "antithesis." Many people from his friends group had strong views on mandated health care, and so to respond to this common dislike, John posted a status update disparaging recent healthcare legislation. Sure enough, his friends responded with "likes" and comments about how they found the post well-timed. John used his shared dislike to unite with his friends against the "common enemy." This form of interaction also demonstrated idealistic identification because the persons involved had the same values and beliefs in regards to health care.

John sometimes used the transcendent "we" as an effective strategy to identify with his friends on Facebook. He posted a status update referencing NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month) and his desire to follow some of his friends who were also participating in writing their own novels. Through this post, he reached out and identified with his friends who were also participating in the month-long event. His post, though not actually using the plural pronoun "we," implied that his readership was familiar with the subject of the message, which created a sense of communal knowledge that transcended his friends on Facebook, who identified him as a connected member of this group. This kind of consubstantiality also drew from formal identification by using as its source an event that John and some friends were mutually interested in.

John Doe's Facebook profile had many more posts, shares, uploads, and likes that were also highly invested in the concept of identification, but for the sake of space I have only included these few instances. From these, we get a feel for a few means of applying identification theory within Facebook. Facebook provides many more ways than the ones demonstrated within this anonymous page to identify with an audience. These methods are used all the time by Facebook members, and within Facebook, friends are always trying to identify with each other.

As we can see, our composition students who are Facebook members are already using strategies of identification in persuasion. They understand who they are writing to and produce material that appeals to and identifies them with this audience. These strategies and this mindset are also important within academic writing. Audience awareness and knowing how to appeal to them are a major part of composition and academic writing. As I have pointed out, Kenneth Burke describes identification to be the key to persuading an audience, and because students already have prior experience in identification, we can transfer that to help students to fully comprehend audience awareness and utilize identification within the composition class.

4. Pedagogical implications: Facebook within the composition class

Within a composition class, it is important to teach Kenneth Burke's theory of identification. The concept of audience awareness and appeal is as old as classic rhetoric, and many rhetoricians have sought to explain this concept and theorize

how an audience can be persuaded. Kenneth Burke's identification was one of the leading modern theories of audience awareness, and his process had a straightforward application. Because identification relates to both academic writing and Facebook, concepts taught about identification can be demonstrated on Facebook and then applied in academic writing contexts. The Facebook Unit could be taught close to the beginning of the semester in order for students to apply identification in their later academic writing assignments.

As students learn about identification strategies and sources, they could begin to study how these sources take form in the familiar environment of Facebook. By looking at examples and their own Facebook profiles, they can begin to link their previous knowledge of appealing to their Facebook audience to the concepts of identification. They can examine their friends group to analyze what sources of identification draw them together, and they can discover how the strategies of identification are already at play within their own profiles to identify them with that Facebook friends audience. The understanding of how formal audience appeal functions begins to take place. The teacher can explain how fundamentally these principles are effective at persuasion and argument. Students can even analyze the effectiveness of using identification intentionally within their social media by simulating the experience of modifying their profile to identify with a specific boss or company of employment.

From social media, students can begin to branch out to connect these principles to academic writing. Having the backing of identification at work within Facebook, the leap to academic discourse is the next step. This step is where the teacher and the students abstract their previous knowledge to bridge to using those abstracted tactics in the new contexts. Students start studying professional and academic texts to find principles of identification. Students would also start applying these principles into their own writing exercises. They would first analyze their audiences of their academic papers to locate sources of consubstantiality and then formally implement the strategies of identification within their writing as persuasion methods to appeal to that audience. As the teacher assigns formal writing assignments, students would reflect on their use of identification and its effectiveness within academic composition.

When I conducted these activities within my own class the students responded well to using a medium that most of them were already familiar with. Because the artifact for analysis was their own Facebook profiles and friends, my students could critically reflect more deeply because of that level of familiarity. These students also enjoyed analyzing an artifact that had real-world significance to them. They could see the applicability of identification better because of how well they could see it operating within Facebook. The identification with an employer exercise (adapted from [Vie, 2007](#)) was a big hit and allowed my class to see how identification's strategies could be turned to a more formal and specific audience for a specific purpose. It was crucial, however, to thoroughly explain the theory of identification, because if a student did not know what he or she was looking for, then they had a hard time transferring the concepts to a different context.

By applying the principle of transfer, students engage in abstracting the strategies of identification from their Facebook and social media to new writing environments. This transfer starts with academic discourse and ultimately leads to application of identification in any rhetorical contexts that students find themselves in.

5. Conclusions and further research

As I scroll through the posts and comments made by my Facebook friends, I like to imagine myself chatting with them over the rhetorical choices they have made. The complexity of their identifications astounds me. When I talk to my students over their social media uses, the rhetoric of their communication stands out as fertile grounds for research in its application to composition. More inquiry must be done to analyze the utility of these social networking sites. Gina Maranto and Matt Barton (2010) explained, "As rhetoricians, we cannot afford to ignore the opportunities for learning, for social and political engagement, that online networking affords." They continued, "For [information specialists, linguists, librarians, compositionists, rhetoricians, and others], technologies such as Facebook and Myspace are seen as not only essential but almost inevitable for 21st century education." These and many other scholars have reinforced the idea that digital rhetoric and technology are influential for pedagogy, and as a major part of those areas, social networking sites like Facebook are crucial to the field of composition research. These technologies need to be addressed because they are the way of the future. Teachers need to converge with students in the realms of composition that those students are already engaged in. By following the principles I have discussed in this paper, teachers will connect and even learn from their own students in allowing them to discover and apply the principle of identification.

The transfer of Facebook's audience awareness and appeal to entering critical dialogue and professional discourse is not the only implication of this method. By teaching students the principle of transfer we can train them to further utilize identification in rhetorical contexts not limited to academic writing. Transfer of identification in other contexts will also engender the ability to apply transfer to other methods and for other purposes. Students will have the experience of metacognition and will be able to employ transfer as they are faced with needing to adapt their skills and knowledge to new contexts.

Facebook as a tool for rhetorical and compositional learning is being discussed in various ways by various scholars, but there still exists a lack of discussion regarding how effective the proposed strategies are. There are not enough articles explaining the empirical effects Facebook and social media sites have. More teachers need to implement these practices and publish their findings on the effectiveness of Facebook as a rhetorical teaching tool. Further research and implementation will be needed by teachers to analyze how Facebook, as well as other social networking sites, can be used to teach identification and audience awareness. The principle of transfer in regards to students' prior rhetorical knowledge from social media also needs more analysis and investigation from teachers and scholars.

Kenneth Burke's theory of identification has been proved effective by other scholars. Because this theory applies so readily to Facebook and social networking, identification can be used to transfer what composition students know about appealing to audience in Facebook and social networking to appealing to audience in academic writing. The call for new models of writing, curriculum, and teaching addressing these new compositional spaces has been made. Kenneth Burke's identification theory, when merged with that giant community base, Facebook, provides such a model to "help our students compose often, compose well, and through these composing, become the citizen writers of our country, the citizen writers of our world, and the writers of our future" (Yancey, 2009, p. 1).

Appendix A. Sample Classroom Activities and Assignments for the Facebook Unit

The following activities are samples that could help students to learn about identification, learn about how it works, and apply it themselves.

A.1. Classroom Discussion

Classroom discussion about the method would be important to begin with. Following initial discussion, the first three individual assignments would help the students to understand and apply the method to Facebook. The final assignment (a polished analysis essay) would help students to make the transition from applying this method to Facebook to applying it to academic writing and everyday communication.

As the composition teacher explains and defines the terms of Burke's identification, outlined above, they would model how these concepts function in a space the students already understand: Facebook. Students could be introduced to the method with explanation and discussion about identification and audience awareness and appeal. This would then be expounded to cover identification sources and identification strategies. The class would also discuss how each aspect also relates to and can be applied to academic writing. If the teacher has a computer hooked up to a projector, they can get on Facebook and show some solid examples of Burke's three strategies of identification and also point out the sources of identification. The class would engage in a discussion of how well they believe certain attempts at identification are working. After modeling the analysis, the teacher would take the class to a computer lab and have the students work in small groups or pairs. Each group would be logged into Facebook and would look for examples of the identification aspects and strategies on their own. They could take screen shots where they thought certain aspects of identification were at work. On a separate piece of paper they would define the examples and analyze how well those examples work. They would afterwards turn in both papers to the teacher for assessment of comprehension.

After modeling identification to Facebook, ask the students how they can apply this method to academic writing. How can they discover their audience and the properties that they audience has or would find appealing? Organize students into groups to discuss how the principle of identification works in their own Facebook profiles. As the class would progress through writing different essays, the teacher could model how students could identify with their particular audiences.

A.2. Individual Writing Assignments

The following assignments are written as if as a prompt to the student for the assignment.

The first short analysis would function to help students begin audience analysis with identification on Facebook. By looking at a familiar audience, students would be able to characterize that audience and understand their qualities and attributes in a way as to help the students be aware of who their audience was and to think about how that audience could be appealed to. The second analysis would help students identify aspects of audience appeal that they naturally use within their Facebook profiles. This would allow them to study how well they already used identification and to give the strategies of identification a real significance. The third analysis would help students apply identification, both in audience awareness and appeal, within the confines of Facebook but with a more specific and professional audience and with a specific purpose. At this juncture, students would practice the strategies, but still within the format that they were accustomed to, and allow them to consciously use identification for persuasion. The fourth and final assignment of this unit would be a polished analysis essay that would cover and draw from their previous analysis to explain identification both in its uses in Facebook as well as its application to academic writing. At this point, students would start considering how identification could be integrated into the formal writing they will be doing in college and in future composing encounters.

A.2.1. Assignment #1: “Who Are My Friends?” Analysis of Personal Audience

Imagine you are writing a book to incoming composition students titled *Identifying with Your Audience*, helping those students understand and know how to use audience awareness and appeal. This assignment would be a chapter titled “My Facebook Friends: An Example Audience.” You will explain your own Facebook friends with their sources of identification, giving your fans an understanding of your general Facebook audience.

Using Burke’s strategies and sources of identification, write an analysis (400–600 words) on your Facebook friends’ general identification and common substance. Write at least a paragraph describing the kinds of common substance for each identification source. This will give a description of just who your friends are to your audience. Use specific examples from Facebook in your writing. Attention to correct use of terminology of the kinds of sources and strategies and correct application is a requirement.

Make sure you discuss all the sources: material identification with physical possessions and things as well as status and position etc.; idealistic identification with beliefs, values, standards, ideas, attitudes etc.; and formal identification with groups that people share or events people have gone to, such as classes, clubs, jobs, workplace, concerts, dances, etc.

Consider the following issues. There will be overlap among the sources, and not every friend you have will fit generalities of the whole. Reflect on what kinds of consubstantiality exist within your friend group. Are there friend requests that you have turned down? For those that you can remember, explain why you rejected the friend offer and how it relates to identification.

Write at least one lengthy paragraph about what your observations mean. Observe and reflect on what patterns you see. What interesting connections have you made with this analysis? How might you describe your Facebook audience as a whole? Use specific examples from Facebook in your writing.

A.2.2. Assignment #2: “Who am I?” Analysis of Personal Identification

Imagine you are still writing that book to incoming composition students titled *Identifying with Your Audience*, helping those students know how to use audience awareness and appeal. This assignment would be a chapter titled “How I Identified on Facebook.” You will explain how you have identified with your own Facebook friends. This will give them a solid example of how the method of identification works.

Using Burke’s strategies and sources of identification, write an analysis (500–600 words) of your own identification to your Facebook friends. Use as a source your “Who are my Friends” analysis. Attention to correct use of terminology of the kinds of sources and strategies and correct application is a requirement.

Write at least one lengthy paragraph about your use of each strategy: common ground, antithesis, and the assumed “we.” Use specific examples from Facebook in your writing. If you don’t think that you use a strategy then explain why. Use the following questions to help you write these paragraphs: Why did you choose the profile picture and cover photo you did? What strategies have you used consciously or unconsciously in your status updates, media uploads, sharing,

and commenting? How do your “likes” reflect your identification? How does your “About” page reflect identification to your friends? Are there instances where you try to not identify? Justify your actions.

Write at least one lengthy paragraph about what your observations mean. Observe and reflect on what patterns you see. What interesting connections have you made with this analysis? Reflect on the consubstantiality that you have created with your friends. Use specific examples from Facebook in your writing.

A.2.3. Assignment #3: *Employers and Identification Analysis*

Again, you are still writing that book to incoming composition students titled *Identifying with Your Audience*, helping those students know how to use audience awareness and appeal.

This assignment would be the chapter titled “How I Would Identify My Profile with My Boss.” You will explain how you would identify with an employer and company of your choosing. This will give your fans a better understanding of how identification works in a more professional context.

Write another analysis (500-600 words) of how you would change your profile to identify with a certain employer, as if that employer was going to go through your Facebook profile. Do not falsify (make up) information. Attention to correct use of terminology of the kinds of sources and strategies and correct application is a requirement.

Choose a specific company with a specific occupation. Explain in detail who you are trying to identify with, otherwise your fans will be confused about how you are identifying. Explain what kinds of media uploads, “likes,” comments, posts, shares, and so forth you would use to identify with that employer. This will be your evidence. Justify these choices by explaining which identification sources and strategies you are using. Use specific examples of things you would change on your Facebook profile. Sum your analysis up with a paragraph explaining why your identification would work and why identification is significant in applying for a job.

A.2.4. Assignment #4: *“Bringing it Together” Transferring to Academic Writing*

Now, you are finishing that book to incoming English composition students titled *Identifying with Your Audience*. This assignment would be the introduction to the book. You should choose a title that is grabbing to your audience. This analysis would be focused on teaching the future composition students about the importance of audience awareness and appeal (aka “Identification”) in academic writing. You will instruct them in this principle by describing identification and demonstrating how it works with a medium like Facebook using your own analyses as examples.

This would be a polished essay (1200-1700 words) containing three main parts. (1) An introduction of the method: what identification and audience awareness and appeal is, what the sources and strategies are, and why this principle is important both in everyday communication and academic writing. (2) An example of identification with Facebook: this includes the material from all three of your previous analyses. This example should detail what it takes to analyze an audience and come up with methods to identify and appeal to them. (3) A discussion of how this method can be applied to and made to work for academic writing with audience awareness and appeal: How do you feel identification applies in academic writing? What things would be the same or different compared to identification on Facebook? Use specific examples. How will identification look in academic writing? What steps should someone take to identify with their academic audience when writing a paper? How have your perceptions about audience awareness and appeal changed? What principles will you take to future rhetorical situations?

Remember to focus your essay to helping incoming composition students understand and know how to apply identification for academic writing. These future students should know how to use the rhetorical principle of audience awareness and appeal.

A.3. *After the Facebook Unit*

From this point on, students and teachers could discuss how identification would fit into their other writing assignments. As students prepared to write other essays for the class, the teacher could discuss with the students who their audiences were for each assignment. Students would continue to analyze those audiences in order to prepare their essays to identify with them. Once essays were finished, or perhaps as the essays were being drafted, students would write evaluations on what they were doing to identify with each audience in each essay, and the students would reflect on how well they would imagine such identifications would work.

Classroom workshop and discussion would continue to polish students’ ability to identify with their audience, and students would be given greater liberty to decide how to identify with their audiences. Students could then take such

skills with them as they entered into new composition encounters both in their college classes, in their professions and careers, as well as in their everyday composing.

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