Transitioning Counter-Stories: Black Student Accounts of Transitioning to College-Level Writing

Jamila M. Kareem

University of Central Florida

ABSTRACT

Historically, in the field of writing studies, critical conversations around transitioning from secondary to post-secondary academic writing situations have centered on pedagogical and programmatic perspectives. For the most part, student experiences have been absent from these conversations, and voices of racially marked students have remained all but entirely absent. This article details some of the writing and high-school-to-college transitioning experiences of nine Black American students collected from interviews at a predominantly White university in the southern United States. These accounts show what gaps exist in current scholarship and disciplinary knowledge about student writers and transitioning as well as how college educators might create antiracist, culturally sustaining writing pedagogy at the transition level.

"How can you have your mission statement say you strive for diversity and inclusion but most of the content that is taught say the opposite?"

--Interviewee NF2

When students transition from high school to college writing, their success is measured on their ability to meet institutional, programmatic, and cross-curricular outcomes in writing competencies. As most students have had limited exposure to the specific ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing practiced in college-level writing (Bartholomae 1986), they are often, for a period, caught between their primary or previous academic discourses and the academic discourses they have yet to master. Even with this reality, student experiences of transitioning across the high school-college writing threshold are difficult to find. Research and theory on postsecondary writing practices focus on curricular infrastructure from the institutional side of the story, suggesting that before bringing in student voices, the institutions need to get their own houses in order. Where student voices are included (Carpenter & Falbo, 2006; Denecker, 2013; McDonald & Farrell, 2012), the accounts of students whose

experiences are ordinarily diminished within predominantly White spaces, such as majority White research universities, remain unheard.

In particular, to develop more culturally sustainable (Paris & Alim, 2017) anti-racist pedagogies (Condon & Young, 2016), writing programs and teachers at predominantly White colleges and universities need to investigate the transition experience accounts of these Black American students. In an effort to expand the scope of disciplinary knowledge about transitioning from high school to college-level writing for college first-year writing (FYW) instructors and writing program administrators (WPAs), I chronicle the transition perceptions and experiences of nine Black American students, at a predominantly White, metropolitan research university, with a student population of 74% White American and 11% Black American. For these students who have transitioned from one upwardly mobile predominantly White space to another, this study gives authority to their experiences in majority White institutional spaces and counters common conceptions of students of color as underprepared, underdeveloped, and unspoken in academic writing practices. Moreover, the results better prepare educators to help these students succeed beyond the college transition level.

This study uses counter-story to illustrate why racial identities might shape high school to college transition experiences, including the relationship between past literacy education and racialized experiences. Through this examination, I seek to show what educators of writing and scholars of transitioning can learn from racially-subjugated students about "minding the gap" (Farris, 2010; Hoffman, Vargas, Venezia, & Miller, 2007) from writing in high school to writing in college.

A Review of the Literature: Transition Framework

Sullivan and Tinberg (2006) suggest that the field has yet to come to a consensus on what exactly constitutes college-level writing, since the meaning of college-level writing is layered by many contexts outside the classroom and even outside the writing program. Within these layers exists "a whole range of interrelated and interdependent skills associated with reading, writing, and thinking" (Sullivan & Tinberg, 2006, p. xix). Farris (2010) explains that the perceived gap between writing expectations in high school and college derives from unequal rigor across all institutions involved in transition, from high schools to two-year and four-year colleges, because each requires a different degree of rigor (p. 272-73). This gap is perhaps furthered by the lack of student perceptions in college writing scholarship.

College students offer perspectives on transitions through literacy narratives in one section of Sullivan and Tinberg's (2006) *What is "College-Level" Writing?* By comparison, Carpenter and Falbo (2006) analyze "the written literacy narratives of students working as undergraduate Writing Associates at Lafayette College" to consider how students who succeed in transitioning to college-level writing practices construct identities through literacy (p. 92). Denecker (2013) offers an additional perspective by interviewing students in a dual-enrollment program. These firsthand accounts illustrate the significance of including students in our scholarship on secondary to postsecondary transitions. I further these efforts by emphasizing the accounts of students whose bodies are marked but whose narratives are ordinarily marginalized (Royster & Williams, 1999) within predominantly White spaces. Frequently, if race is not ignored entirely in transitioning studies literature, then it is referenced as almost a footnote (Sullivan & Tinberg, 2006; Hansen & Farris, 2010) or associated with remedial and basic writing courses (DiPardo, 1993; Royster & Willams, 1999).

Transitioning studies, a term coined by the creators of the Transitioning to College Writing Symposium at the University of

Mississippi, has generally relied on the experiences of the generic student. Royster and Williams (1999) describe the representation of the generic student in writing studies scholarship. For these authors, "[w]hile this seemingly neutral approach could be thought of as placing all students on equal level, the neutrality often erases the presence of students of color with the resultant assumption that, in not being marked as present, they in fact were not there" (Royster & Williams, 1999, p. 568). The lack of attention to identity leaves a gap in the understanding that the field has about writing movement across academic sites of writing. The accounts of Black American students transitioning across sites of academic writing offer a unique voice of color that may guide WPAs and writing instructors towards more culturally sustainable and life-relevant curriculum early in the college years.

Studying the academic writing practices of students from subjugated raciolinguistic identities helps us rethink our pedagogical practices in the teaching of writing. For example, Balester (1993) interviewed Black American college students for a study that worked towards understanding the dialectical "cultural divide between many composition teachers and their students" (p. 1). Whereas Balester analyzes applications of the Black American rhetorical tradition to examine the approaches that some bidialectical Black Americans take to academic writing expectations, I analyze my participants' attitudes towards high-school- and college-level academic writing to understand how they perceive their fit and potential success within higher education culture.

Kynard (2013) began some of the work of tracing the high-school-to-college "composition-literacies" at predominantly White institutions. While this study specifically looks at how Black American students adapt to the shift between high school and postsecondary written literacies, Kynard examined "Institutionalized Freshman English" as the "longstanding gatekeeper for success in the white, bourgeois literacy codes of college" which plays "an important lens into the ongoing racialized and political boundaries of who can and should have a right to higher education" (p. 8). I draw from Kynard's engagement with current first-year writing courses as historically and ideologically linked to Freshman English with a seeded history of hierarchical academic culture oppression. Just as is the case with broader social culture, academic culture maintains hierarchies of valued identities, and in most cases, introductory college writing courses are designed to enforce these hierarchies through the literacies privileged in the curriculum. Literacy practices and discourses are "stacked" (Delpit, 1995, p. 165), glorifying the dominant literacies preferred by the educated White American middle-class majority and delegitimizing Black, indigenous, and other marginalized literacy practices.

The interview conversations with these Black American students reveal both conformity to these oppressive structures and resistance to these structures as they find their way as college-level writers. Kynard (2013) asserts that examination of racially-oppressive structures within academia must attend to the individual student and institutional histories beyond "the scholarship and theories of college classrooms" (p. 12). Other scholarship considers some of these student (Farris, 2010; Jennings & Hunn, 2002; Sommers & Saltz, 2004) and institutional (Denecker, 2013; Sullivan & Tinberg, 2006) histories, but their analyses overlook the racialized standards within institutionalized writing expectations.

Jennings and Hunn (2002) exemplify how race is an unconfronted factor in much research concerning basic college-level writing in "'Why Do I Have to Take Remedial English?': A Collaborative Model to Solve a National Problem." This chapter within *Teaching Writing in High School and College: Conversations and Collaborations* describes the rate of students from Salem High School who enroll in remedial English at a local community college, Tidewater Community

College. The authors conclude that "aligning instruction, empowering students, decentralizing classrooms, and heightening attention to better serv[e] the needs of the graduation high school student/incoming first-year college student" is critical to writing instruction at both secondary and postsecondary institutions (Jennings & Hunn, 2002, p. 199). However, their analysis omits discussion of the racial identity and racialized experiences of those students.

In the 2015-2016 school year, 60% of Salem High School students were of a racial or ethnic minority, and 37% were considered economically disadvantaged (Virginia Beach City Schools, 2016, p. 2). Tidewater Community College reports that Black students comprised 34% of the Fall 2014 student population, but the authors of the study leave the racialized aspect of their college-remedial-English-bound students unexplored. Per the college's Office of Institutional Effectiveness Quick Facts, the school has the "[l]argest undergraduate African American enrollment in Virginia higher education and 7th largest associate degree producer among two-year colleges for African American students" (The Office of Institutional Effectiveness, 2016). With at least some of the 49% of Black students from Salem High constituting over a third of the student community at Tidewater, the inattentiveness to racialized experiences in Jennings and Hunn (2002) and similar studies (Denecker, 2013; Farris, 2010; Sommers & Saltz, 2004; Sullivan & Tinberg , 2006) leaves wide gaps in any conclusions drawn from the study. I see the inclination of equating American blackness to basic, remedial (Royster & Williams, 1999, p. 571), and underprepared writing carried into transitioning studies research by eliminating Black students' transitional experiences from disciplinary conversations and critical spaces. If the field of writing studies has historically expected the majority of Black American students to enroll in developmental, remedial, or basic writing courses (Royster & Williams, 1999, p. 570), then this common expectation is not worth noting in transition writing scholarship. The focus of this study counters this expectation by using a critical race methodology to highlight the perspectives of Black American students in traditional and advanced FYW courses at a predominantly White university.

Method

Research Questions and Methodology

My research questions for this study included:

1. What is the correlation between positive and negative racialized experiences with past literacy education and current perceptions of FYW courses?
2. How might racial identities shape transition experiences?
3. What do the transition accounts from racially-subjugated students help writing studies teacher-scholars learn about the transitions from high school to college writing?

This project aims to use critical race methodology to centralize Black American student perspectives of transitioning into college-level writing. In conjunction with racial methodology, which I use to interrogate the role of race in writing studies research practices around institutional transitioning, critical race methodology marks racially underprivileged or underrepresented narratives as central. One central tenet of critical race theory argues that in a society ordered in part by racial identifications, racialized experiences may allow writers and intellectuals of marginalized races to communicate issues to the Eurocentric culture (Delgado & Stefancic, 2006, p. 4). I am especially interested in racially-subjugated students, because many Black American students must contend with the lower social status of their racial identity which requires more focused rhetorical writing education

than that for their less racially dominant counterparts.

The racialized other who cannot pass as the racialized norm, historically, has been absent in composition and writing studies scholarship (Prendergast, 1998; Royster & Williams, 1999). Martinez (2014) argues that critical race theory and particularly counter-story can be used as a testimonial method of narrative methodology to bring to light persistent racism in the field of writing studies and the academy itself (p. 34). Critical race researchers see "counter-story [as] also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) clarify that "majoritarian stories … are stories that carry layers of assumptions that persons in positions of racialized privilege bring with them to discussions of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of subordination" (p. 28). Rather than including the unique voice of color to construct a counter-story, I use it here to emphasize how underrepresented racial identities can shape educational experiences in predominantly White spaces.

Data Collection and Analysis

Students in the Cultural Center's Early Arrival Program at this predominantly White, metropolitan research university located in midwestern United States were initially surveyed. The Cultural Center's (2017) website describes that the program was "created to help ease the transition of incoming students of color including African American males, Latin[x] students and Woodford R. Porter Scholars, from high school to college and to teach them the tips and tricks of prospering in their first year of college." Survey questions, found in Appendix A, were sent to nearly 150 students in the program through the web application SurveyMonkey.com, and 37 viable responses that included all contact information were returned. Due to time constraints during the initial round, I contacted 30 students for the preliminary interviews; however, of the 30 participants I contacted, 15 responded, and 6 scheduled interviews. Although the other seven respondents to the survey received invites after the initial round, they declined to participate. All of the self-selected participants identify as Black American or as more than one race including Black American.

The additional three participants came from contacting composition program faculty for students who would be willing to participate as well as contacting my previous students from English 101 Introduction to College Writing and English 102 Intermediate College Writing. I reached out to students regardless of racial formation. Although Black and White American students responded, only Black American students followed through on the interviews. This response scheme could indicate a philosophical investment in this research project by the student population I aimed to give a voice.

The nine Black American students in this study shared their perspectives through semi-structured interviews, and three of the interviewees participated in in-depth interviews. Semi-structured interviews are ideal for first-year college students (Balester, 1993; Selfe & Hawisher, 2012), because participants may be more at ease with the slightly guided format rather than a completely open-ended structure due to their unfamiliarity with me as the researcher and timidity about discussing their writing practices. By applying a racial methodology from my selection of participants through my data analysis and conclusions, I attend to, rather than ignore, race in interview questions around transition experiences.

The survey results, aggregated with SurveyMonkey.com's survey tool, captured an overall depiction of the sample and developed the participant descriptions found in Appendix B. The student participant names were coded by designating the month of their interviews, their gender identities, and the

order of the interview within that month (e.g., A female participant interviewed third in December would be DF3). Using grounded coding, the following classifications emerged from the interview responses and discussions with the participants to understand the responses as they relate to race, academic writing experiences, and transitioning across institutional contexts:

- Experiences with past literacy education,
- Current perceptions of transitioning and FYW courses, and
- Racial identity in the transition to college writing

These categories and their subcategories created the primary structure for the accounts provided in this study.

Results: Counter-stories to Transitioning

Experiences with Past Literacy Education

The participants consider how the academic writing experiences during their time in college match and differ from their high school experiences. The students' literacy education and academic writing histories reveal their thoughts on how they believe college writing compares to past writing experiences, both in and out of school. In the tradition of counter-story, the significance of these accounts is not their dissimilarity to White American perspectives, but their contrast to the stories that popular American culture has constructed about young Black Americans.

How College Writing Practices and Expectations Differ. With the study participants, I wondered what stories from high school teachers and administrators influenced their perceptions about college-level writing. Extended from this, I questioned how and why they approached previous academic writing practices. Second-year student, MM1, explains that "in high school, I would just start writing, and that usually helped me out. But with college courses, they're a little more complex, so I can't just start writing without a focus on where you're going before you start." First-year student, FF1, expresses a similar attitude to MM1. "I make sure I understand what's being asked of me," she says, "and then I always always make an outline--it doesn't matter what I'm writing."

Considering the types of writing and intensity of writing, FF1 explains, "In my [high school] history class, it was just that esearch paper. But in my English class, we did responses, we did essays. The final was a research paper. And then like a few writing assignments for homework, just like reflections and stuff." Compared to the college writing expectations, she adds, "Since I've been in college--I've only been here one semester--and I've written six research papers and a whole bunch of essays." Participants suggest that, in addition to intensity and volume, their preparation for writing assignments in college has changed. OM1 notes how his approach to college papers changed but also extended from practices he learned in high school. "Usually I read the ... grading rubric," he said. "Then I look at the question. And in high school, I was taught to do some type of pre-writing, so it doesn't have to be elaborate, but I usually just write my main points on a piece of paper." For OM1, the invention and pre-writing practices he learned in high school transitioned with him into college-level writing tasks. Both JF1 and FM1 note the importance of outlining as part of their invention practices for college writing assignments. Each convey how this practice has become even more important as college students than as high school students, suggesting that they must give more thought to the process of invention itself.

The significance of invention leads some participants to understand the differences in format that their teachers emphasized. According to DF3, high school teachers stress the three-point-five or three-point-eight essay structure and thesis statements in academic writing. The former is the stereotypical five-

paragraph essay structure with which most secondary and postsecondary writing educators are familiar, but the latter constrains the five-paragraph structure by requiring eight sentences in each of the three body paragraphs. Secondary juniors and seniors are often told by their teachers that college professors want very particular form and structure in their writing (Denecker, 2013; Farris, 2009; Mosley, 2006; Strachan, 2002; Van DeWeghe, 2006). Perfection in style and mechanics takes precedence over analysis and description. One of the instructors participating in Denecker's (2013) study suggests that "an emphasis on format is a distinctive element of [high-school] writing instruction" and "since a five-paragraph essay has typically allowed students to pass" standardized graduation exams, students and teachers have difficulty moving past this format (p. 34).

Many students need less preparation to perform those approaches to academic writing. However, the emphasis on structure and form rather than inquiry, research, and exploratory analysis gives some students a false impression of what college-level writing will entail (Farris, 2009). OM1 shares that his senior English teacher told him "it was going to be a lot longer and a lot more writing, and more papers and things like that." By comparison, FF1 says she heard that "college writing's a lot harder than high school and my English teacher tried to prepare us." These narratives of college writing preparation are common (Jordan et al., 2006; Mosley, 2006; Winalski, 2006).

Challenging the common myth of college rigor, three of the nine participants note that the writing requirements in their high school English courses feels more demanding than their college writing courses. NF2 also detail an experience that counters the common rigor myths. Responding to meeting the writing standards expected of her, NF2 says,

> In high school, they're [stricter] on how your paper's supposed to be. You know like the 3.5. I hated it! I was like, why do we have to do all this? But it was different, because you know here, I don't think professors care about the format or the method that you do, as long as you have the information there. So that's one thing I do like about college. I just feel like if you have all your information there, and it's like in a good range, you got an A basically.

Similarly, one of my former FYW students, FM1 details that "we did really rigid format for research papers, but of course it turns out not to be true at all" of college writing assignments, and OM1 notes that "it turns out my high school teacher gave us a lot more work than my class now." OM1's response suggests that both high school and college writing teachers might better prepare students for adaptable writing skills by preparing them for "lifelong literacy" (Budden, Nicolini, Fox, & Greene, 2002, p. 80) rather than specific types of writing with goals that "may be inherently different" (Denecker, 2013, p. 35).

Confidence and Insecurity in Writing for School. Richardson (2003) contends that "unlike most other American groups, African Americans' experiences … have established a history of mistrust of American institutions" which has led to "oppositional attitudes and behaviors, because their upward mobility" in whiteness-centric American society has required them to intentionally exterminate their linguistic histories (p. 32). Many current college writing professors recognize these complications, but the college academic literacy expectations can be a rough transition for Black American students with closed-minded professors. More than just discussing how writing in high school and college courses differs, I wanted to know how students' psychological connection to academic writing influences their transitions.

Participants described in-school writing situations that made them feel both confident and insecure. According to writing studies scholar Lunsford (2015), in regard to relationships to writing, "In some instances, prior knowledge and experience are necessary

and often helpful; in others [sic] they can work against writers" (Naming What We Know). Examining the psychological relationship between students and prior writing education can help FYW teachers understand some of the choices their students make in writing. As Lunsford suggests, prior experiences contribute to these relationships, and "[f]or many people … prior experience with writing had been negative, and this attitude and these feelings went with them throughout their lives" (*Naming What We Know*). In the case of Black American students, the insecurity is often linked to the irrelevance of the curricular content to their lives and lived experiences.

OM1 explains that he feels most insecure "when I have no connection or relation with the topic at all." However, he feels most confident with "argumentative writing. Ones where we pick sides and you defend that side--I think that usually caters to all. Because then if you disagree, you can switch to another topic--then whether you disagree or not, rather than writing about just disagreeing when you don't really disagree." Research suggests that novice college writers are more comfortable composing argumentative essays than analytical essays, because it closely relates to the kinds of writing they performed in high school (Gentile, 2006; Mosley, 2006; Sommers and Saltz, 2004; VanDeWeghe, 2006; Winalski, 2006). Writing from a student point of view, Winalski (2006) suggests that high school academic writing strongly centers around the argumentative thesis, when, in fact, college writing is more concerned with "the raw qualities of the ideas" (p. 304). Rather than reading OM1's experiences and preferences for connecting with his topic as high-school-level literacy, critical race theorists may read these Black American discourse features of community consciousness, cultural references, and field dependency (Gilyard and Richardson, 2001; Smitherman, 1993), which writing professors should build upon.

When we consider the multiple discourses that students use to compose, we must think beyond morphology, tone, and style. Field dependency (Gilyard and Richardson, 2001, 42; Smitherman, 1993, 13), for example, helps writers connect content between their own experiences and new information. These connections are important for all students, but Black Americans' historical relationship to American dominant culture makes it especially necessary to develop culturally-sustainable curriculum (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 1-2). Per Richardson (2003), many educators continue to neglect culturally appropriate curriculum, because "[f]or the most part, America continues to teach us to accept the status of lower achievement for Black students as the norm" (p. 8). Richardson describes "White supremacist literacy" as "consumption, consent, obedience, fragmentation, singularity (as opposed to multiplicity), and positivism" (p. 9). For example, traditional writing assessment practices encourage student obedience, not only to the instructor's standards but to institutional standards which often prize these White supremacist literacy practices.

These standards and practices privilege meritocracy and falling in line, which key assimilationist approaches apply through literacy and rhetorical education. One assimilationist approach includes what is commonly referred to as process pedagogy, in which students are expected to revise and polish until they shed their native discourses for dominant discourses (Delpit, 1995, p. 164) and the "rhetorical and intellectual traditions" of racial and ethnic groups marginalized in the academy (Kynard. 2008, p. 5).When, after prewriting, drafting, conferencing, and revising, students engage in common Black American literacies such as resistance and survival literacy (Richardson, 2003), they may be penalized.

DF1 did not mention an issue with accommodating academic voice, but she did concur with NF2 about page-length requirements. "I just had to write a seven-

page paper," she said. "I was, like, this is ridiculous. My argument is just diminishing, because I'm just putting stuff in there so I could get to seven pages." The pressures of assessment, evaluation, and general judgment seemed to shape the students' response to insecurity and confidence in academic writing practices. For example, FM1 explains, "When I'm given a rubric that's not so picky or you have to have perfect grammar, or each paragraph needs to be this long and ... more it has to be MLA format and has to be this length, I kind of like that."

The participants often felt more comfortable being assessed when they related to or had some passion for the topics they were assigned, such as MM1, who states, "I like to have structure and kind of have someone help me out--guide me-- and then once I push towards the topic, I find the passion and write about it." These accounts are not intended to suggest that all Black American students have insecurities about academic writing expectations or that their insecurities are any more intense than the White American students in college courses. The honors, dual credit, and AP high school English statuses of most of the interview participants match the academic resources accessed by many middle-class White American students entering the university. As OM1 notes about his experience of being in a predominantly White high school preparing him for a predominantly White university, "I haven't really thought about it. My English teachers have always been extremely nice to me, so I don't know. They were really good teachers." The complexities surrounding the transition from one whiteness-invested academic space to another often involve general socialization aspects involved in rhetorical education.

The Act of Writing In and Out of School. Several interviewees discuss how school affects their personal relationship to writing and how this difference became more pronounced in the move to college-level writing. JF2 describes how writing outside school comes more naturally than writing for school, "because when I do write, it's because I have an idea. If somebody gives me a prompt, I don't have an idea right then. I've have to read it and research." OM1 explains how the struggle with writing for school becomes more pronounced as education progresses. "I think for school writing, the teacher should set less boundaries just to explore the creativity of the student," he recommends "But making someone--making a group of people--write about the same thing is kind of challenging for some of the people in that group, because someone might have a background in that writing," which gives them an advantage and others a disadvantage. He stresses the need for choice in academic writing, because "if it doesn't connect with you, you're obviously not going to put a lot of research or anything like that." FM1 concurs, stating, "It's kind of weird of that someone asks you to write a long paper about something you probably didn't even pay attention to." He describes a preferable situation as "if … you kind of get to choose your own direction, then maybe I'd be a little more interested, but it's hard to keep focus." As shown previously regarding what makes him feel insecure in writing, MM1 agrees with the necessity of choice but discusses its limitations. He would rather be guided through the options, which he finds does not always happen.

By the time students reach our FYW and other writing intensive courses, they already have a toolbox of discursive instruments for composing academic writing. Some of these instruments for Black Americans include the rejection of their home or non-academic linguistic practices. For example, NF2 notes "I like to write how I talk. Even though I know that may not be academic voice. Sometimes I feel like when I write in my academic voice, it's not me." Rejecting her natural writing voice for academic writing tasks, or "fronting" (Canagarajah as cited in Richardson, 2003, p. 17) is a common practice that Black students apply to "make the grade"

(Richardson, 2003, p. 17). NF2 and MM1 describes learning academic voice as one of the outcomes of FYW at this university.

Considerations of students' past literacy education should investigate more than discrepancies in rigor, requirements, and format, because some new college students are not only transitioning across academic sites of writing. They are transitioning across raciolinguistic literacies as well, such as from Black English Vernacular to secondary academic writing and from Black English Vernacular to postsecondary academic writing. Therefore, thinking of writing transitions in terms of literacies transitions could be especially effective. Critical race methodology and counter-story helps teacher-researchers understand the connection between raciolinguistic literacies and transitioning to college-level academic writing.

Both participants who did and did not identify with marginalized raciolinguistic literacies recognize the shift in written literacy practices at the college level. OM1 describes the FYW course he was taking as a themed course and how he had to shift his thinking about writing to succeed in it. "Like for my English class right now, the whole class is based on music, and I'm not very musical," he explains. "I have no rhythm in my body in any way. So, writing about how much I like music is really hard." He describes his solution as "I ended up having to like, I don't want to say lie my way, but I had to stretch a few things." Based on common stereotypes about Black American males and how they might connect to academic content, teachers may not expect this response from OM1. After all, a Black young man with "no rhythm" might as well be an anomaly based on cultural narratives about that group. This assumption is but one majoritarian perspective that studying secondary to postsecondary transition counter-stories can disrupt.

Current Perceptions of Transitioning and FYW Courses

Students perform the identity of academic institutional culture, in part, through academic writing (Williams, 2006), so transitioning to college-level writing means that the space of the university and the university classroom help construct college-student identity. The participants described here made numerous connections between writing and the college-student identity. DF1 notes, in her response, "I think writing helps you clearly communicate what you're trying to say. I feel like if I didn't go to college, that skill would diminish because I wouldn't be writing as much." DF1 sees college-level writing as a key factor in learning to communicate clearly and effectively, whereas FM1 believes the written communication practices he has learned thus far have made him a more critical reader. FM1 clarifies,

> Some of the social issues we were writing about [in English 102], it's kind of like you know what social is and why it's happen, but the page length requirement kind of made you have think a little further. So that's cool, and you can kind of use that a lot more. Whenever I read an article on the internet now, I'm not just reading it; I'm reading it and kind of analyzing it and think deeper about points. Otherwise, I would just read an article and directly take it as it is.

These perceptions of college writing are linked, in part, to the many identities of the participants.

In the next section, I examine the interviewees' responses to conceptions of transitioning by presenting how they perceive the connection between writing and the college student identity, what they emphasize about the teacher-student relationship, and what they reveal about the relevance of writing curriculum.

Writing and College Student Racial Identity in the Transition. As a metropolitan research university, the institution that these participants attend encourages particular ways of being collegiate through writing practices outlined in the

General Education and first-year composition program curriculum. Much of the preliminary conversations with the first-year students focuses on writing practices and preferences rather than issues of race. For instance, OM1 suggests a relationship between evolving in college student identity and adjusting to college-level writing. "Your writing develops as you grow as a college student," he explains. The continuing students gave more attention to the connection between their racial identities and the curriculum. Second-year student MM1 comments that "as I have grown, I have surely begun to love the fact that I am a black, African American male … [a part of] the culture that thrives in America despite the racial profiling and blatant racism that still lingers, even on the [college] campus. I realize the responsibility I have to be unapologetically me, unapologetically black!" Held in conjunction with NF2's challenge in the opening epigraph, the "officialized narrative" (Royster & Williams, 1999, p. 579), formal school curriculum acts as an artifact of white supremacy (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 21), and institutionalized literacy education seldom recognizes the rich cultural history of Black American discourses and rhetorical traditions (Richardson, 2003).

The difficulty of transitioning to college literacy practices from secondary literacy practices entails more than the intellectual aspect of the work. Some participants, like JF2, connect their identity as a college student to writing for nonacademic situations. JF2 states, "I know with my career, I'm going to have to write research papers, so just knowing how to communicate your thoughts effective through writing I think is important." Some of the participants hint at the invisible influence of racial perspectives on their academic and social engagement as well as the influence of stereotype threat on performing academic writing. One first-year academic advisor for STEM disciplines at the participants' university details, "Basically, I want a whole picture of what their life is like right now and that means inside and outside of the classroom, because everything outside of the classroom is going to affect their experience." The changing "contact zone" of not only the classroom but the college campus also places Black American students in close contact with unfamiliar members of the dominant culture. Although all the study participants transitioned from predominantly White high schools, those spaces contained people that they at least knew, if not trusted.

This new space puts higher stakes on adopting whiteness-centric rhetorical behaviors. Even though OM1 remarks that he never felt mistreated by his White teachers in high school, he also explains, "I actually have to think: what can I say, what's the teacher going to think of what I say? I didn't want to jeopardize my scholarship." OM1's concern indicates that because many Black American college students at this university receive acceptance through programs such as Woodford R. Porter Scholars, TRIO, and others (U.S. Department of Education, 2018; Cultural Center, n.d.), these programs shape their approaches to coursework. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argue that teachers and educational institutions have been conditioned to reward "conformity to 'white norms' or sanctioned cultural practices" (p. 59), which scholarship programs promote with their focus on meritocracy. This added pressure means that their relationship to course curricula has a different dynamic from their relationship their high school curricula. The tension between racial identity and school curriculum is further emphasized through the lack of legitimate representation of Black American experiences in the curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Richardson, 2003; Smitherman, 1977). They are less likely to challenge, resist, or question the curriculum or pedagogy, even when their experiences or experiential knowledge urges them to do so. For Black American students on scholarships, transitioning requires learning the difference between high school and college-level coursework as well as networks of relationships that influence that coursework.

In describing how these differences relate to their perceptions of enacting college student identities, most interviewees did not emphasize the impact of racialized experiences directly, but some of their responses denote an invisible influence. For example, racial ideologies in the curriculum are embedded in practices as basic as citations. For example, features of Black American discourses linked to citing sources include incorporating cultural references—some of which their instructors are not familiar with—field dependency, and structural call and response (Gilyard & Richardson, 2001, p. 41-42; Smitherman, 1993, p. 13). FF1 and DF1 discuss grounding part of their success as college writers on their fluency with citation styles and grammar usage. FF1 reflects that her FYW English 101 course "really didn't do a lot of different stuff. It was MLA and that was basically it." She adds, "We didn't do APA and Chicago or any of that. I know Chicago's more like history based. In my history class now, we have to write a paper, and we have to use Chicago. And I've never used Chicago before." Similarly, DF1 notes the emphasis on MLA in her AP English course. At the time of our interview, she felt she was a less successful college writer, because "I still have to look up like MLA or I didn't remember how to do in-text citations, and I still make simple grammatical errors." In addition to being typical of new transitioning students, the focus on citation practices and style conventions eliminates recognition of culture on writing practices such as citing.

Most of the perspectives on race in the interviews arose indirectly. MM1 remarks that "I find inspiration from my experiences to direct that towards a paper or assignment, if it's a paper that we can just write about an argument or something." Those experiences include being a Black American male in the American higher education system. He adds in a follow-up interview, "As I matured and truly started to find myself in college, which I am still doing constantly, I realized who I was as a black man in America and the pros and cons that go along with that identity."

Other participants confront race head-on. Regarding the curriculum in writing and English courses at the university, NF2 notes that most often "no Black, Latino, Asian, Middle Eastern, gay/lesbian authors … get brought up nor read" and neither do the worldviews or lived perspectives of these groups. Although the English department offers courses that focus on these groups and their literary perspectives at the 300 level, chances are that NF2 and her non-English major friends stopped taking the required English courses at the 200 level. They will not have had the 300-level literature courses. She explains her struggles with making connections with faculty and the curriculum and describes feeling forbidden to use her authentic voice to show what she is learning. Nevertheless, NF2 also indicates that writing in academic voice makes writers "sound smarter" but requires her to lose her authentic voice.

This perception of conveying intelligence through writing styles is based in constructions of whiteness. Ladson-Billings (1998) describes some of the traditional constructions of whiteness accepted as "'school achievement,' 'intelligence,' 'middle classness,' and 'science'" (p. 9). Loss of a writer's authentic voice can also be linked to the White supremacist literacy practice of obedience that Richardson (2003) describes. FM1 additionally questions this obedience during our interview. In discussing the literary-analysis assignments common to high school English courses, he suggests, "Even though it was open, there pretty much was a right answer, so it was a little hard to be creative. And even if you were creative, your teacher would go back and say, 'no this is wrong, and this is why.'" Most likely, at least some of the reasons given for the flaws in FM1's and other students' literary interpretations speak to their failure to meet whiteness-centric values in the curriculum. Whiteness-centric interpretations do things

such as fashion Rosa Parks as "a tired seamstress instead of a longtime participant in social justice endeavors" and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as "a sanitized folk hero who enjoyed the full support of 'good Americans' rather than a disdained scholar and activist whose vision … challenged the United States on issues of economic injustice and aggression in Southeast Asia" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, 21-22). As Richardson suggests, in many cases when students do not ascribe to such interpretations—students whose worldviews have not been shaped by discourses of whiteness—they receive negative evaluations of their written work.

Relevance of Writing Curriculum. Even though constructing cultural knowledge through writing practices has been an interest of composition scholars, as explored in the sub-field of community literacy (Adler-Kassner, 2008; Guerra, 2008; Kirsch, 2009; Long, 2008), it has been central to the learning experiences of Black American communities. JF2 chooses her first paper topic for her college Honors Composition course by writing "about a letter that a doctor wrote to the National Organic Standards Board concerning carrageenan," because as an aspiring scientist she "wanted to research more about the effects of carrageenan and if it is actually as harmful as people were claiming it to be." In an extended email interview, JF2 discusses how FYW curriculum relates to her in the long-term. She writes, "I think this class has prepared me well for other assignments that I will have to complete for the rest of my college career and my career in general." In reflecting on whether or not FYW should prepare her for all writing situations, JF2 suggests, "I definitely think that these types of courses should prepare students for writing in the rest of their careers regardless of whether they are English majors or not because I think that writing is an incredibly important skill." Because JF2 notes that she believes a self-taught and well-practiced high-school graduate can write at the same level as many college students, her view on how FYW courses should prepare students is more complex than has been suggested by teachers and public discourse.

NF2 views the necessity of FYW with a practical, almost utilitarian attitude. "When I got here," she said, "you guys[1] talked a lot about using the library like online library sources and stuff to like incorporate into your writing." She uses those skills in her upper-level courses, as she describes:

> You don't forget. Because even currently in my nutrition class, we have to use the EBSCO and CINAHL searches. We have to find diabetes and hypertension and stuff, and literally write a paper about the stuff. [The instructor] says we have to use those links and it's mandatory. I don't know how some people don't use it. I mean, it does help.

This statement indicates that in addition to the practice of writing itself, the ways academic writers select, evaluate, and report information (Bartholomae, 1986, p. 4) should be made relevant as well. FM1, describes the relevance to his personal life of vetting sources and reading critically as part of the research process. As my student in his second-semester first-year course, FM1 had extensive choice in his writing topics, though the topics had to fit within the realm of social criticism. The assignments required him to research and explain the history, cultural relevance, and possible solutions for a social issue affecting the many communities he belongs to—local, virtual, and national. FM1 explains that, as a result of the class, "I feel like I have more critical analysis about things." He learned that experienced academic writers "have to really research who wrote it. I didn't really ever think about [that]." Perhaps, FM1 finds encouragement to follow-through on the research practices that we all try to teach due to his connection the topic and the relevance of the curriculum's content.

[1] Here, NF2 includes me among her first-year writing instructors.

Conclusion: Adding a "Unique Voice of Color" to the High-School-to-College-Writing Transition Tales

To build our knowledge as teachers and program administrators, I offer the results of this study to act as a catalyst for bringing marginalized student voices into critical dialogues on transitioning across sites of academic writing. The voices, and the experiences, of Black American students gives authority to their perspectives. In a space, such as a predominantly White higher education institution, foregrounding the voices of Black American students who physically disembody the whiteness values of the institution provides more critical knowledge about transitioning. Martinez (2014) describes counter-story in writing research as a rhetorical method for investigating dominant racialized ideologies in the field. These ideologies represent the influence of institutional racism on research, pedagogy, and administrative practices within writing studies which we must continue to interrogate and eliminate.

Referencing a unique voice of color affords us a stronger understanding of how race and institutional whiteness might shape transitions from high school to college literacy engagement. The accounts given by my interview participants disrupt the common association of Black American students and other racially-marginalized students with basic and remedial writing curriculum. Most of the interview participants do not recognize the influence of race on their academic success in writing, because it has never been discussed. Some of us American citizens of color may not be aware of how usual racism within academic institutions is because, as suggested by Brandt (1992) and Prendergast (1998), it is so much a part of the way society functions. With the continued disciplinary interest in writing and transitioning, these student perspectives work towards complicating "majoritarian stories" about bridging (Hoffman et al., 2007) and minding (Farris, 2010) the gap from high school to college writing. From these "unique voice of color" accounts, writing teachers and writing program administrators can learn what culturally sustaining, antiracist curriculum at the transition level may look like for this historically subjugated student population.

In my current FYW pedagogy, I challenge these embedded structures in a number of ways. One, I require students to contemplate and respond to the racial ideologies in their own literacy education. We read primarily from scholars of underrepresented, disenfranchised, or derogated racial and linguistic identities. With discussions of authors such as Gloria Anzaldua, Amy Tan, Vershawn Young, and Toni Morrison, I localize the curriculum for the diverse raciolinguistic population at the University of Central Florida. I make race present in an opportunity for many racially-marked students to see themselves in academic writing curriculum and to apply what they learn to real-life issues around race, language, education, and public discourse. These counter-stories link past racialized literacy education experiences to college-level writing practices for students whose voices have traditionally been silenced in writing studies scholarship. With these experiences, writing educators interested in this transitional moment in higher education can develop curriculum and pedagogy that resists majoritarian stories about academic writing transitions.

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Appendix A

Initial Survey Questions

Name:
Email address where you would like to be contacted:

1) Academic major/program (please write "undecided" if applicable):

2) Year in your undergraduate program (select one):
☐ Freshman
☐ Sophomore
☐ Junior
☐ Senior
3) Name of High School and State Located:

4) Please provide your gender identity (i.e., female, male, transgender, etc.) _____

5) Your Racial Identity (please select as many as apply, as *you* identify):
☐ Black/African Descent
☐ Latin@/Chican@/South American Descent
☐ White/European Descent
☐ Asian Descent/Pacific Islander
☐ East Indian/North African/Middle Eastern
☐ Native North American
☐ Mixed or Multi Racial (please specify):

6) Total Family Income Designation, when growing up (please select only one):
☐ Below poverty line
☐ At poverty line
☐ Just above poverty line
☐ Well above poverty line, but still working
☐ Wealthy/Affluent
☐ Uncertain

6) Family Makeup, prior to attending college:
☐ Two-parents (married or unmarried)
☐ Divorced parents, but co-parenting
☐ Single parent female
☐ Single parent male
☐ Extended family parenting (aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc.)
☐ Adopted, including any of the above family makeups
☐ Foster care

Appendix B

Description of participants

OM1

First-year student, Black American male, Mechanical Engineering major, Boone County High School (Florence, Kentucky), single-parent female living in poverty.

NM1

Older second-year student, Black American male, Accountancy major, Central High School Magnet Career Academy (Louisville, Kentucky), and single parent female living in poverty.

NF2

Third-year student, Black American female, Exercise Science major, duPont Manual High School (Louisville, Kentucky), and two-parents in home (married or unmarried) living well-above poverty but still working.

NF3

First-year student, Black American female, Biology major, Montgomery County High School (Mt. Sterling, Kentucky), and single-parent female living just above poverty.

DF1

First-year student, Black American female, Biology major, Bryan Station High School (Lexington, Kentucky), and uncertain of single-parent female income.

JF2

First-year student, mixed race African descent and European descent female, Civil Engineering major changed to Physics major, Atherton High School graduate (Louisville, Kentucky), and co-parenting divorced parents (with single-parent female as primary) living well-above poverty but still working.

FF1

First-year student, Black American female, Political Science major, out-of-state high school (Georgia), both parents in home, and uncertain of income.

FM1

Second-year student, Black American male, Atmospheric Science major, Ballard High School (Louisville, Kentucky), and uncertain of parents' income.

MM1

Second-year student, Black American male, Business Major, Male High School (Louisville, Kentucky), and single-parent female above poverty but still working.

Preliminary Interview Questions:

1. Can you describe your experiences with writing when you were of grade school age? What about the kinds of writing you did for high school?

2. In which high school courses were you required to write? How did you approach writing assignments?
3. How has writing for school made you feel? When have you felt confident or good about things that you've written? When have you felt insecure or discouraged? When have you cared little or sincerely cared about the writing you do for course work?
4. Can you talk about the connection you make between writing and being a college student? Describe your own personal connection between these aspects or how you associate the two
5. What had you been told about college writing prior to attending college (either in school, at home, or by experts)? Who conveyed these ideas to you?
6. How are you approaching college writing assignments? How, if at all, does this differ to how you approached writing for high school courses?
7. What resources in-class and on-campus have you used to help with writing? How helpful have these resources been? Describe your experiences as best you can.
8. For what purposes do you write outside of school? What makes this easier or come more naturally than in-school writing?
9. What are some descriptors or adjectives that you associate with writing or "doing writing" in general?
10. What do you think when you hear the term "academic?" Would you consider yourself to be academic? Why or why not?

Follow-up Interview Questions

How do you think your racial identity has influenced your transition to college from high school? Please let me know whether the influence has been positive or negative. (Also, let me know if you think racial identity has had no influence.)