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## Neither Teacher nor Scholar: Identity and Agency in a Graduate Teacher's Life

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NEITHER TEACHER NOR SCHOLAR:  
IDENTITY AND AGENCY IN A GRADUATE TEACHER'S LIFE

by  
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of Writing and Rhetoric  
in the College of Arts and Humanities  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how graduate student teachers (GTA's) employ agency in order to establish and perform professional identities. Understanding agency as interactional, performative, and acting in a way “unintended by power” (Butler, 1997, p. 15), this thesis examines the spatial practices and performances of a graduate student teacher through a mixed methods approach combining video recordings with autoethnography.

This project begins by using Lefebvre's (1991) social imaginary to examine the potent arguments being made to and about GTA's from their shared office, using visual rhetorical analysis to examine how this space communicates ideas of identity and place that work at rhetorical purposes counter to the performances GTA's are employing within that space.

Exploring how GTA's respond to the social imaginary within space, this thesis conducts an analysis of the tactics employed, using De Certeau (1984) as a framework. Graduate student teachers use spatial practices and performances to *make do* with the space and the power allotted to them; however, they employ key tactics such as altering body position and vocal tone to turn interactions with students and with each other into dynamic moments for the production of agency.

Finally, this thesis argues that, while GTA's use tactics and spatial practices to negotiate the performances and spaces allotted to them, their agency is temporal and limited. Departmental investment in relationships with GTA and integrating them further into the life of the department through apprenticeship can bolster the tenuous agency of the GTA.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In 2015, I was 27-years-old and working 29 hours a week at a small state college as a writing tutor in two different departments. I had graduated with a B.A. in writing in December 2008, at the height of the financial crisis, at 20-years-old with no internships or professional experience. Subsequently, I engaged in part-time work and full-time entry level positions for seven years. I was able to amount a good savings, which was decimated by back-to-back health issues. I needed a more stable income that would protect me from future expensive surprises. After nearly a decade in the workforce, it occurred to me that shifts in literacy rates (Brandt, 1998) had rendered my degree functionally useless, although I couldn't quite name the phenomenon at the time. So, I decided to get a master's degree and change my economic situation.

Because I was an adult who had already spent time in the work force, the transition into being a graduate student was difficult. My cohort, as well as the surrounding cohorts, were populated by 22- or 23-year-old newly-minted graduates from undergrad. Learning how to align with my cohort was a challenge, but what struck me most in my first year back in school was the lack of ownership I was allowed to have. I had anticipated graduate school to be an open forum for discussing theory and pedagogy, for one-on-one help with practical and analytical skills. I had pictured and understood master's level schooling to be about opening and expanding my mind, what I knew and what I understood. What I did not anticipate was the degree to which the realm of decisions I was allowed to make suddenly closed in on me. I was still able to make decisions for myself, but for the first time I entered a professional environment that resisted

personalization or modification. My relationship to authority and institutional agency looked different from the relationships I had had with any employer previously.

In previous jobs, I was always at the bottom of the institutional chain, but if I had an idea for how to do my work more efficiently or improve something about my immediate surroundings, I was allowed to implement it. As an office manager at a non-profit, I taught myself how to clean and service small office appliances and was encouraged to continue this. I took training classes in how to more efficiently work our database. As accounts manager and front of house in a small IT company, I created new processes and procedures for managing accounts in collections and took the initiative to write two training manuals for new employees when work was slow. These projects were suggested, planned, and executed by me on behalf of my company and were rewarded. But my first semester in a full-time MA program was a reversal of this experience. In one particular moment while discussing emotional labor in writing as a potential paper topic, I was told, “This may be something you experience, but this is not something we deal with to need your writing on it.” While this professor did nothing wrong in limiting the scope of what I could discuss and in framing for me what might be a useful discussion of composition concepts for my audience, this discussion also made me aware of a new facet of academia I had not anticipated when I joined it—there is a “we,” and I am not part of it.

This recognition, born in my first semester and cemented through my three years in a master’s program, that students like myself have a limited say in the forces that shape their professional lives due to a lack of professional identity, has prompted my research on agency. This thesis explores the ways that graduate student teachers (GTA’s) attempt to assert agency in

order to establish individual and collective professional identities—to claim a place in academia even while they are denied it. Ultimately, my research will demonstrate how these attempts are only partially successful when made without departmental support.

In seeking to explore issues of agency, this research utilizes a two-part definition of agency. The foundations for this understanding is Campbell's (2005) definition, stating that agency:

(1) is communal and participatory, hence, both constituted and constrained by externals that are material and symbolic; (2) is 'invented' by authors who are points of articulation; (3) emerges in artistry or craft; (4) is affected through form; and (5) is perverse, that is, inherently, protean, ambiguous, open to reversal. (p. 2)

So, agency is a material reality and a symbolic position for graduate students who are “points of articulation” for this agency. In order to understand how agency emerges through their craftiness, along with its reversal, this research also will foreground agency's relationship to power:

“agency is the assumption of a purpose *unintended* by power ... that operates in a relation of contingency and reversal to the power that makes it possible, to which it nevertheless belongs” (Butler, 1997, p. 15).

Power is a theme in current research on graduate students, but it is often in the background, not the focus of the conversation. This research ranges from practical discussions of the labor market and unionization (Lafer, 2003; Bousquet, 2002; Loeb & Page, 2000; Singh, Zinni, & MacLennan, 2006) to examinations of graduate student writing and skills (Micciche & Carr, 2011; Tauber, 2016) to reviews of graduate student teaching preparedness and anecdotal experiences (Taylor & Holberg, 1999; Nyquist, Manning, Wulff, Austin, Sprague, Fraser,

Calcagno, & Woodford, 1999; Grady, Touche, Oslawski-Lopez, Power, & Simacek, 2014). This research seeks to add to this body of research by theorizing about an undertheorized experience and by providing an embodied understanding of graduate life, including how GTA's make sense of their own rhetorical agency. Through conducting an autoethnography and utilizing an embodied methodology, this thesis contributes to the field of rhetoric by exploring the roles agency and structure play in the formation of graduate student teacher identity. In particular, this study adds to the literature on graduate student teachers by explicitly examining power and GTA's navigation of and negotiation with it.

The following research questions, literature review, and methods seek to lay the ground work for interrogating how graduate student teachers claim their own agency and make strategic choices on their own behalf.

### Research Questions

Given the complex issues surrounding agency, the discussion surrounding the topic, and this project's social and material exigencies, the central research questions that this study intends to address are the following:

- How do graduate student teachers exercise their own agency—act towards “a purpose unintended by power”—within programmatic and institutional constraints?
- In what way do these constraints foist identities on GTA's that are bi-furcated or hybrid?
- How do graduate student teachers navigate the multiple roles and performances they are required to perform: student, teacher, and business professional?

- How does the space of the location communicate/transmit these constraints and provide the terrain for GTA's to resist?
- What can a combined method of close reading and autoethnographic story teach institutions about the lived experiences of their members?
- How can autoethnography and GTA accounts enrich the research process on GTA experiences?

### Review of Literature

Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's (2005) thorough definition of agency addresses multiple critical conversations surrounding agency: those of structure and interaction, performance, and tenuousness. This literature review will examine, in brief, how Campbell's definition situates itself within these conversations, along with how cultural geography, particularly theories of space and place, provide a framework for researching GTA agency.

### Structure

Agency "is communal and participatory, hence, both constituted and constrained by externals that are material and symbolic" (Campbell, 2005, p.2). Contemporary discussions of agency come from thinkers working to locate agency as it arises from these "externals that are material and symbolic." Sewell (1989) and Giddens (1979) understand this as a discussion of structure, which "tend[s] to appear in social scientific discourse as totally impervious to human agency, to exist apart from, but nevertheless to determine the essential shape of, the strivings and motivated transactions that constitute the experienced surface of social life" (Sewell, 1989, p.2). This is the power that Butler references in the definition for agency that this research utilizes: that of "a purpose *unintended* by power ... the power that makes it possible, to which it

nevertheless belongs” (Butler, 1997, p. 15). All four scholars acknowledge a critical part of agency: that agency has a reciprocal relationship to power. Without power, there is no need to discuss agency. Agency only arises in contexts of power.

Both the terms *power* and *structure* are vague. Both Sewell (1989) and Giddens (1979) work to unpack these terms, particularly structure, analyzing the social structures that scholars mean when they use the term. As Sewell (1989) states:

Those features of social existence dominated as “structures” tend to be reified and treated as primary, hard, and immutable, like the girders of a building, while the events or social processes they “structure” tend to be seen as secondary and superficial ... like the layout of offices on floors defined by a skeleton of girders. What tends to get lost in the language of structure is the efficacy of human action. (p.2)

While Butler’s definition of agency refers to power, she continues examining both the constructive and constraining role of what she calls norms, similar to what Giddens (1979) would call rules; however, Butler looks at individuals in culture, while Giddens’s (1979) structuration theory looks at individuals within businesses/agencies.

As Campbell’s definition states, agency is also “communal and participatory,” reflecting another discussion in the literature on agency: the subject-object binary. This binary arises in discussions of agency attached to the idea of agency as a possession. Subjects have; objects are had. Subjects act; objects are acted upon. Contemporary scholars of agency (Cooper 2010; Miller 2007; Kerschbaum, 2014), moving away from agency as object, focus on agency as performative and interactional—occurring within the exchanges between two or more agents. Interactions can be between non-human actors, human agents, and any combination of actors and agents.

Carolyn Miller's (2007) article looks at the role of audience in rhetorical agency, how agency comes from the potential to impact the audience and from the audience's response, how agency then becomes a performance and an interaction. Miller's (2007) research views agency within these interactions as "kinetic" agency, similar to kinetic energy. Viewing agency as kinetic, versus potential, emphasizes the interactional quality while also foregrounding it in action. Miller's understanding of kinetic agency that is interaction dependent provides a unit of measure to this research project: the interaction.

### Performance

Agency is "'invented' by authors who are points of articulation" and "is affected through form" (Campbell, 2005, p. 2). A significant conversation surrounding agency is its performative nature. Dwight Conquergood (2002) looks at performance as an embodied way of knowing, an "active, intimate, hands-on participation and personal connection: 'knowing how,' and 'knowing who'" (p. 146). Judith Butler explores how individuals need norms, a choice limiting structure, in order to be productively creative and exist within communities (Butler, 1993; Butler 2010; Vasterling, 1999). However, she looks at how individuals, through performing these norms, subtly alter them through the reiteration of them. This alteration holds the potential to erode the performance to an extent that the erosion is then a new thing to perform. Butler (1993; 2010) and Veronica Vasterling (1999) unpack this erosive type of performance.

Marilyn Cooper (2010) provides a more specific image of agency as a performative erosion of norms through her discussion of quantum physics and complex systems theory. Particles vibrating in close proximity irritate and eventually shape surrounding particles, a process Cooper (2010) calls "perturbation" (pp. 437). While Cooper (2010) does not emphasize

the performative aspect of agency or the role of norms in her discussion of agitation, her discussion of individual agents as engaging in the action of perturbation or agitation evokes performance without naming it. Cooper's (2010) agitation is inherently performative and reinforces that agency arises from the interaction between two actors and is not an item, object or property to be held by an actor. Interactional agency complicates the use of agency for a GTA, who must negotiate with other students, faculty, and administrators to gain agency. The key here is performance.

A distinction to note is that all performances are not performances of agency. Agency can be performed alongside of and on top of other performances, but the two cannot be conflated as the secondary performance does not require agency in order to be performed. For example, gender is performative, as is agency, and both can be performed together; however, performance of gender is, in no way, inherently a performance of agency. It is only a performance that doesn't restrict the additional performance of agency. For GTA's, these performances show up in their own performances around the department and within the classroom. If agency is performative, then, to be an effective teacher and respected worker, part of the GTA's performance must encompass the performance of agency. While agency is a performance not at odds with the performances required of a graduate student teacher, agency still complicates existing performances, requiring students to negotiate interactions in real time through an ecology of weighing actions and potential perceptions of agency, deciphering "agent" identity markers, and adding the right kinds and degrees of these into the performance.

### Tenuousness

Agency that is “perverse, that is, inherently, protean, ambiguous, open to reversal” (Campbell, 2005, p. 2) is tenuous and difficult. If agency is an interactional performance, what of the other person in the interaction? If someone needs to see him or herself as an agent in order to be one, does a person *need to be seen as* an agent in order to be allowed the role of one within a community, speech act, or performative moment? These are some of the many “perverse” elements to agency—that in order to generate it within an interaction, all participants need to perceive it as there.

Amy Vidali’s (2007) and Stephanie Kerschbaum’s (2014) work on disability disclosure and narratives also frame agency as interactional. A vital element in both of their works is their emphasis on the role of audience and how rhetorical strategies position the writer or speaker to create adherence (Downs, 2017) between themselves and their audience—rhetorical agency arising through rhetorical interaction. Kerschbaum (2014) looks at listeners misinterpreting moments of disability narrative, while Vidali (2007) looks at asserting agency through disclosure of invisible disabilities. Both of these scholars look at moments when an individual attempts to assert agency, but the other participant within the interaction does not perceive him/her as an agent or as having agency. So, while agency of the rhetor is present in the interaction, the reversibility of agency comes into play. It is both present and limited, receding at the misinterpretation of the audience.

## Space & Place

In order to examine GTA agency in establishing institutional identities, I use theories of space and place as a framework for examining how these GTA's respond to the identities placed on them by the institution. Examining space and spatial practices provides a means for identifying what these identities are and how they are produced by the department.

Theorists of space and place, such as Lefebvre (1991), Massey (1994), and Certeau (1984), examine how space is socially created and defined. For all three, place is the unstructured physical dimension; however, these places become spaces when they are identified by people. For example, a patch of land is a place, until it is a *field* or a *town* or "*the wild*"—a space. The spaces encountered in daily life are socially constituted; social groups establish relationships with spaces and circulate them.

More recent critical geography theorists and spatial rhetoricians examine space as an intentional bi-product of cultural production, particularly sub- and counter- cultures. Enck-Wanzer (2011) examines how a Puerto Rican community in New York City (colloquially known as Nuyorican) uses rhetorical agency to establish both citizenship and difference through material and visual argument. Raka Shome's (2003) work on the United States' border examines the role of place, space, and identity in politics and individual agency, particularly as individuals move through contested spaces. Both Shome and Enck-Wanzer explore how cultural minorities create alcoves of space in order to conduct cultural spatial practices counter to the dominant culture. Mountford (2001) too looks at contested spaces and their role in power dynamics, examining the pulpit and female pastors in order to better understand the pulpit within a church as both a literal and symbolic space of masculine power. Ruddick (1996) continues this tradition

looking at how homeless teens in Hollywood orient themselves in communities and come to establish subcultures within a space that they are socially perceived as not belonging to. Her study examines how these youths, unexpected in the landscape in which they appear, must negotiate their positions within the social imaginary in order to establish identities for themselves.

For this thesis, these theorists provide an understanding of the rhetorical power of space and how marginalized groups use it towards their own ends. To understand the rhetorical potential of spaces and their impact on identity, Lefebvre (1991), Ruddick (1996), and Mountford (2001) look at what Lefebvre called the *social imaginary*. Rooted in Benedict Anderson's (1983) imagined communities, the social imaginary is a socially constructed conception of who belongs in which particular spaces and who participates in certain spatial practices. So, spaces communicate powerful messages of identity and belonging to individuals either assigned to or moving through specific spaces. In response to these preset meanings behind assigned spaces, Certeau (1984) examines spatial practices and everyday behavior in to understand how individuals produce new understandings of the world around them, even while they are consumers of it. Certeau similarly looks at subversion of dominant dynamics; however, Certeau takes the position that these little *tactics* happen by default as part of how individuals move through the world—with the potential for subversion but not guaranteed.

### Thesis Argument

Master's students, particularly graduate student teachers (GTA's) exist in a liminal space in which they are neither full professors nor fully academics. They are not fully professors

because they are still receiving training as teachers by the department; they are not fully academics as they are still master's students and just beginning to position themselves within the discipline. As with other tenuous relationships with the department, such as adjuncts and non-tenured faculty, this bi-furcated identity—both authority and not, both student and teacher—creates a need for GTA's to make sense of such a prolonged transition state. Employing their agency through craftiness via making do, GTA's seek to establish individual and collective identities for themselves. However, departments need to work together with GTA's to create stronger departmental incorporation and support, while encouraging the GTA's to participate productively in the department culture beyond their labor.

### Methods & Methodology

Grounded in the individual experiences of one person situated in a specific context, autoethnography is a unique qualitative method for examining embodied experiences. As Wall (2008) details, autoethnographies differ based on “their emphasis on *auto-* (self), *-ethno-* (the sociocultural connection), and *-graphy* (the application of the research process)” (p. 39).

Autoethnography relies on record keeping, memory, and reflection for pulling data from personal experience (Wall, 2008). This emphasis on lived experiences allows an up-close view of a context, coupled with deep reflection. It is Haraway's (1991) “view from a body” instead of the “view from above (p. 196) or Certeau's (1984) “down below” in the city (p. 93).

Autoethnography allows a very close examination of the minutiae of GTA daily living, coupled with reflection, that allows a fresh perspective on the phenomena being studied—an opportunity for defamiliarization in order to better examine. It is through combining autoethnographic

research with critical geography that I bridge the personal and social—demonstrating the ways structural and institutional issues permeate the identity-building process of the individual.

My desire was to look at the individual's experience with the institutional, so autoethnography foregrounds on the individual. The use of autoethnography, instead of ethnography and interviews, has some limitations in that the individual experience detailed does not necessarily represent the lived experiences of the whole group studied. However, the choice to use autoethnography was an intentional decision based on programmatic constraints. This project had a timeline of twelve months to complete, coupled with a lengthy and rigorous IRB process, which did not leave enough time for multiple rounds of coded interviews and embedded ethnographic observation. However, autoethnography—story—provides a meaningful method for understanding space as stories about space “play the everyday role of a mobile and magisterial tribunal in cases concerning their [spaces'] delimitation” (Certeau, 1984, p. 122). In the following chapters, autoethnography appears in small, personal moments, illustrating how the surrounding analysis impacts the individual and providing a more embodied understanding of the conclusions the analysis describes.

### *Data Collection*

This project is combined research and reflection from two years of teaching and working as a graduate teaching assistant at the University of Central Florida, an R1 university. I collected autoethnographic data in two phases. The first phase is a combined guided reflection and stimulated recall note taking process. Using artifacts written during each semester, I took notes on sights, sounds, memories. The second phase of data collection was a reflection stage of

looking back over the data from the first phase and recording ideas, impressions, memories attached to factual data about the past.

In order to better catch specific nuances and details of physical performance, I video recorded interactions with individuals within the professional space of my office during the spring 2018 semester. Within this office space work fourteen GTA's from two different departments, two degree-tracks, and four different disciplines. This space is neither nice nor special, but its significance lies in that it is the site for these fourteen individuals to negotiate, garner, share, lose, barter for, sacrifice, and create professional identities through the exercise of rhetorical agency. As Shome (2003) explains, "identities occur not just anywhere, but *somewhere*; social agency is derived not just anywhere by *somewhere*" (p. 42, emphasis in original). The amount of time spent in the office makes it the ideal setting to examine how a graduate student teacher builds identity through the performance of business professional and teacher, acting as an institutional agent, and also how this student subverts requirements and expectations.

All interactions within a two-week period-of-time were recorded, including any time I spent alone in the office, to document interactions with both human and non-human actors in this particular space. This includes interactions with co-workers and students, along with any time spent alone in the office. While the autoethnographic data looks at general graduate experiences, this data is hyper-contextual. It provides a snap shot into the mundane details that can slip through retrospective accounts or personal reflection. It both ensures that my data truly catches all the details of daily GTA living in order to describe and analyze them, and it also provides an

added layer of data to my autoethnographic accounts, both methods reciprocally supporting one another.

### *Theoretical Framework: Space, Place, & Rhetoric*

The theoretical framework for this project comes from a combined rhetoric and critical geography approach. Space is “rhetorically constituted (at least in part),” so a critical geographical approach to spatial rhetoric allows for consideration of spatial conditions (Porter, Sullivan, Blythe, Grabill, and Miles, 2000, p. 622). In the words of Porter et. al. (2000), “institutional change requires attention to the material and the spatial conditions of disciplinary practices inside a particular institution” (p. 620)

### *The Social Imaginary*

The analytical framework for chapter two will utilize Lefebvre (1991), Ruddick (1996), and Mountford (2001) to examine the social imaginary and symbolic messages within the space. The social imaginary is the answer to the question “How do we know who belongs here?” Similarly to Benedict Anderson’s (1983) imagined communities, the social imaginary is the socially constructed understanding of the use, ownership, and population of a space—even when the space is, in fact, not used nor owned nor populated by the imagined ideal. So, an analytical framework utilizing the social imaginary interrogates what values a space advocates through layout, materials, history, and appearance (Ruddick, 1996) in order to decipher what these values say about who belongs in that particular space.

Chapter two examines the rhetorical claims the layout of my office makes to those who use it. According to Lefebvre's spaces can “sugges[t] symbolic associations” and can encourage

certain types of relationships to form (Mountford, 2001, p. 49), which this project understands as the result of visual and material rhetorical arguments. In order to explore the spatial and visual rhetorical claims, this chapter engages in a walk-through of the GTA system, from acceptance to teaching, daily life in the office, and the space of the office itself. I analyze all of these elements, looking for key moments of power and persuasion.

### *Every Day Life & Resistance*

In order to explore how GTA's respond and *make do* with the identities and the space allowed them, the following chapter, Chapter Three, utilizes Michel de Certeau's 1984 publication, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Certeau's critical work provides a discussion of making do. For those with little institutional power, such as GTA's making do through uses and tactics, discussed in detail in chapter three, making do is the daily, mundane process of navigating the structures of power than impinge upon the individual. Certeau's making do provides a set of analytics for examining how individuals modify or rebel against these constraints.

Chapter Four discusses the way that GTA's attempt at exercising agency does successfully help them make do with their complicated performances within the department. Relying on Wanzer-Enck and Certeau, I argue that departments need to take the lead in establishing stronger relationships with GTA's in order to both reify their agency and improve conditions.

## CHAPTER 2: VIEW FROM BELOW

To understand the role of agency and the expectations placed on the graduate student, this chapter unpacks the context the GTA works within, the programmatic elements that restrict agency, the performances required of the GTA, and how the office space itself communicates expectations of identity performance and GTA value to the department.

### Context

#### *The GTA*

The graduate student teaching assistants are MA or MFA students from the Rhetoric, English Literature, and Creative Writing degree programs. GTA's are selected from a pool of students teaching ENC 5705: Theory and Practice of Composition. ENC 5705 is taught by the Writing Program Administrator. For myself and the GTA's who taught with me, this class was an intro to Composition Studies topics class, providing us with some of the theoretical understandings of composition that occupy the field. The majority of GTA's in this program have no teaching experience at the college, and often very little teaching experience of any kind. Of the fourteen GTA's during my time at UCF, only four had any teaching experience, and two of these four were PhD students.

Each student is assigned to classes two teach per semester, Fall and Spring. Literature and Creative Writing students teach for one year, while Rhet/Comp students teach for two. Accompanying this position is a tuition waiver (provided by the department to which the student belongs) and a \$10,000 yearly stipend provided by the department of Writing and Rhetoric, which is parceled out in weekly checks over the two semesters of teaching. While finances are

not a condition for having agency, the stipend, coupled with the expectation the GTA's do no other work for pay, requires the GTA's to live below the poverty line. So, which this does not limit their agency, it does magnify the economic consequences behind decisions, limiting the types of decisions they can make with comfort.

It is unclear to us how we are selected to be GTA's. The process for deciding who of the ENC 5705 students gains one of the coveted tuition waivers from their department is not a transparent one. When I received my teaching contract, I was one of nine in a class of seventeen.

*Our professor walked through the room at the beginning of class and handed the nine of us papers without saying anything. I looked down and saw my name on it and a class schedule below with a place to sign my name. I quickly looked around and saw that not everyone had one.*

*Before anyone around me could see what I had, I flipped it over and slid it into my bag.*

The next year, almost the entire class received waivers and were notified via email only. What complicates this dynamic is that the PhD students and the DWR students are guaranteed a teaching position upon entering the class—everyone else is not. So, the Literature and Creative Writing graduate students are competing with one another to meet a standard that is never articulated, while everyone else will get a job in the end. This process's lack of transparency undermines GTA agency. Instead of having the ability to see the position and work for it, GTA's must maneuver and labor with no clear idea of what precisely these maneuvers should accomplish or who to please. With no clear sense of the decision-making process, prospective GTA's have no clear sense of the audience for their performance of agency.

### *Relationship to the Department*

After GTA's are chosen, they are all assigned mentors to work with during their first year of teaching. These mentors look over the initial course schedule before the semester starts in the fall and are available for help, if needed, during the semester. The composition committee, made up of four professors, is the overseeing committee for the GTA's. One member of the composition committee runs a bi-weekly meeting for them called "Teaching Circles" in which GTA's are asked to reflect on their teaching and share ideas with one another. This meeting and its administrating committee member are the main points of the support for the GTA's for the first year of teaching. Each member of the committee has office hours and is available via email; however, anyone beyond the administrating member is to be contacted only in an emergency or serious need. The administrating member is also charged with observing all GTA's teaching once a year and giving feedback.

Some of the lack of contact between GTA's and the composition committee and mentors is due to the teeter-totter of maintaining professional relationships versus having needs met. As previously established, many GTA's do not have the level of experience necessary to move easily through the teaching process, requiring encouragement, new ideas, suggestions, and support. The composition committee members have each expressed their desire to assist the GTA's; however, GTA's have to balance their problems in need of solutions against the possibility of irritating, inconveniencing, or even alienating an important member of their sole support system. So, GTA relationships with authority figures and support personnel correspond to their abilities to either move beyond this tension or their own assertiveness in meeting their needs.

Beyond these relationships, the GTA's have no interaction with the department. Their behavior is on display in the hallways, common areas, and within their communal offices, where they can be seen and heard. But GTA's have little to no formal communication with any member of the department beyond the Composition Committee, making it difficult to exercise any agency within the planning and organizing of their position and training. The Rhet/Comp GTA's have contact with their professors while taking classes. The Literature and Creative Writing GTA's have nothing.

The lack of relationship between the department and the GTA, coupled with the lack of clear expectations and evaluation, is potent. The silence speaks. Because of the lack of communication between most faculty and staff, any departmental values, beliefs, needs, ideas, problems, opinions are broadcast through visual rhetoric—through performances and spaces. These provide the framework through which GTA's determine their successes and failures. These communicate goals, values, expectations to the GTA more frequently and convincingly than any bi-weekly meeting.

### Performances

What the social imaginary helps GTA's see is the identities they are expected to perform within specific spaces. These identities can be blended together in hybrid form. They can be split off from one another, requiring the performer to shuttle between the two, depending on context. While chapter two will unpack how some of these identities are articulated through the space itself, the following section will explain the different identities and performances expected of the GTA.

### *Student*

First and foremost, the GTA is a student. The performance of student requires the performance of orientation towards information, understanding of hierarchy, and access. This type of performance is almost always required of the GTA but not desired by them. Professors require the identity of student from their students, but underlife (Brooke, 1987) signals students' desires to be more than this one identity. This is the same for GTA's; they are seen as students, but they would like to see themselves as more than this.

First, the GTA must demonstrate knowledge of the field but must also demonstrate a lack of knowledge. This is often done through asking questions of professors and other faculty. This orientation towards knowledge is inextricable from hierarchy and access. Students must perform a combination of knowledge and lack of knowledge in order to affirm their position in a hierarchy of access to knowledge. Because they are accessing a different type of information in academia, any outside knowledge is not relevant in this context and should not come to bear on how the student performs knowledge or access to it.

The hierarchy of knowledge-wielders is an x/y axis of time and authority. The higher-paid the position, the higher an individual is in the hierarchy. Position in the hierarchy is not connected to teaching, so often graduate students are performing deference to individuals who have no vested interest in the graduate students' success.

Access is also performed, not always actual. While it is possible to gain knowledge and understanding of a discipline on one's own, the department serves as an escort into the discipline or a position within the department through synthesis of information and the potential for connections. Regardless of connections within the discipline or the workforce already held, if

any, the GTA is required to perform as if they do not have any access and display unconcern with the lack of access they are required to perform, asking questions and seeking assistance from the professors they are required to defer to. This performing lack of access is similar to performing lack of agency. Despite any ability GTA's have to gain information or connections on their own, they are required to relinquish it and let the department make these decisions and provide these things for them.

### *Teacher*

While GTA's are expected to perform student, they are also expected to perform teacher, regardless of whether they are interested in teaching as a career. The identity of teacher is the inverse of the student. Where the student must perform ignorance, deference, and lack of access, the teacher must perform expertise, authority, and access. There is an added component when the teacher is female. Based on cultural expectations surrounding care work, female college professors must "be warmer and more supportive" than their peers and will feel the effects of frustrated students and faculty "more harshly" if they do not (Guy, 2004, p. 294).

The performance of teacher is a point of conflict for many GTA's, namely because it is in direct competition to performing student. These performances overlap and cause friction in key moments. For example, a GTA technically has the authority and agency to manage her own class. But, when a student is failing in the GTA's class, the GTA must inform the Composition Committee of the student who will fail, including why and what they have done to work with these students. Another example is the curriculum. Instead of designing their own curriculum, GTA's are required to teach five major assignments given to them by the department. These are small examples of the department's requirement that GTA's justify all major decisions to the

committee. This makes sense, as they are learning to be teachers, but it simultaneously undermines the agency they would normally have as teachers of their own classes.

### *Business Professional*

The identity of business professional relies on focus and concealment. The business professional focuses on the job at hand, on the work at hand, with efficiency. Such single-mindedness results in the concealment of other aspects: emotional and personal factors. A way to think of the business professional is of eliminating distraction from the work. The business professional downplays attributes that allude to anything other than the job/field/work/department, while maintaining a benign politeness that downplays any negative or significant emotions.

There are two different ways GTA's perform the identity of business professional, and they are connected to the aspirations of the GTA. The first is the benign politeness described earlier. The GTA moves through the department, attends meetings, meets professors, and makes absolutely no waves. This is for the GTA who either wants to work for the department in the future or need an outstanding letter of recommendation in the future. This type of behavior is an investment. However, the GTA who can rely on other departments for letters of recommendation, usually literature or creative writing students, do not need to ingratiate themselves to Rhet/Comp faculty. The only consistent factor between these two positions is the need for both groups of GTA to not attract any negative attention. So, the GTA, not needing anything from the department beyond employment, moves cautiously through anonymity. The fewer professors who know her name, the better. While it may not initially seem this way, the constant need to avoid negative attention is a type of emotional labor. It is the GTA constantly

assessing the mood of those around them and ensuring their contribution to what others feel. This is emotional labor: “the effort, planning, and control needed to express organizationally desired emotion during interpersonal transactions” (Guy, 2004, p. 294).

All three of these performances are required of the GTA in different combinations and to different degrees based on the type of interaction and the desired result. The fact that some of these are contradictory identities is a consequence that requires a significant amount of negotiation on the part of the GTA. GTA’s have no agency when deciding whether or not to perform these identities. If they do not perform one of them, they are no longer GTA’s. The remainder of this chapter explores the ways that these identities are placed on the GTA’s by the space they are required to work in, further limiting their agency.

### The GTA Space

GTA daily life looks different for each student; however, there are some consistencies amongst the students. Each student is assigned two courses of freshman composition, either ENC 1101 or 1102 to plan and teach, according to curriculum. Classes assigned primarily occurred on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, with one student per semester being assigned one to two Tuesday and Thursday classes. Monday/Wednesday/Friday classes could start as early at 8:30 a.m. and as late as 3:30 p.m. Other than the one Tuesday/Thursday student, all GTA’s taught during those times and days. Because graduate and doctoral classes don’t begin until 6 or 7:30 p.m., this means that, outside of office hours, GTA’s spend a considerable amount of time within the offices. Last spring, I spent over twelve hours in the office on Wednesdays, arriving early to teach an 8:30 a.m. class and taking a class that started at 6p.m. which ended at 8:50. When faced

with gaps like this, GTA's can go home and come back. However, based on traffic patterns and the struggle to find parking on such a busy campus, many stay in the office and fill the time with homework, reading, socializing, grading, meeting with students, and attending professional development events and departmental meetings. GTA's often spend between an average of 20-40 hours in the shared GTA offices.

### A Social Space

*My first day working in the office, I remember feeling proud, like I was a “real” teacher and an adult. I remember taking a canvas bag and filling it with all the office supplies I had on my desk at home: a silver fox-shaped cup of pencils and pens, a clear plastic box of paper clips, two reams of paper still in their packaging, a tiny purple stapler, stacks upon stacks of post-it notes. As I was filling my half, the right-hand side of the desk, with my belongings, I encountered my first conundrum in this space—I would never see my desk mate. As, I hung a small printed sign for my office hours over my desk, I noticed that my chosen hours were at a time when most of the other GTA's would be present in the office. My desk-mate would have nowhere to sit during my office hours. So, she wouldn't be there. There was no room for her.*

The office is a functional space but also a social one. When I first entered my office, the larger of the two, I noticed all these pieces of furniture, but the most eye-catching elements in the room were the desks. All the furniture in each room is arranged in a circle around the perimeter of the room. So, when I entered the large office for the first time, my eye was immediately confronted by three of the five large brown desks. Each desk is made primarily from metal with a faux-wood laminate surface. They have three drawers on the right and two on the left, with one

in the middle. These desks all have a monitor on them, with the corresponding computer sitting on the floor under the desk.

The number of desks also shapes GTA and student experiences within the office. Each large desk in either office is shared by two GTA's, and two of the small desks in the smaller office are orbited by three students. The positioning of the desks in the large room gives between two to four feet between each office chair. This means that where students sit in relation to their GTA when they visit during office hours is dependent on how many GTA's are in the office at that time. Often, students end up sitting in the rolling chairs that belong to other GTA's, so when a new GTA enters, there is a chair shuffling and the student pulls a chair from another missing GTA. The GTA and students' use of the same chairs and their huddling around a desk together to make more room for other students and GTA's is a boundary breaking behavior. Mountford's (2001) use of the *social imaginary* explains how this sharing of seating and sitting together is a visual and material expression of sameness or equal access to power. Within the social imaginary, students have expectations for professors that are different from themselves, but the chairs make an argument against that difference. The assertion of sameness has to be mitigated by how well the GTA performs teacher in front of the student in that space. The chairs have performance consequences.

When more than one GTA is meeting with a student at the time, GTA and student, both, have to shuffle chairs and move around to accommodate the presence of each other. The sound of conferences dominates the office. The more students meeting with GTA's, the louder the noise becomes, driving some GTA's to retreat into the privacy of headphones or the lower volume of the café. In order for GTA's to navigate the close quarters, they must maintain a

healthy working relationship with the other GTA's who share the office while they are there. The space itself creates a need for continual interaction with other GTA's, what Fleckenstein (1999) describes as a "eighteenth century family parlor where Jane Austen wrote" (302). The lines between work and leisure become blurred, and the connections between GTA's blur as well.

While the office space creates a hyper-social environment, it also devalues the behavior that it encourages. Because the desks are in a circle, with their backs to the wall, GTA's must, by necessity, sit with their backs towards the middle of the room and each other. The circle shape of the desk positioning is one of the ways that the space undermines the activity and relationships that it requires. Because of the circle shape, GTA's meeting with student have to be careful of space, often bumping into other seated GTA's at their own desks. So, GTA's have to turn away from their work in order to fully look at each other, creating a binary between working and conversing that wouldn't exist in a different room layout.

If social understandings of space contribute to a social imaginary for understanding who belongs within a space, the office layout says quite a bit about who does and who does not belong within the office. The placement of the desks, their proximity to one another and their orientation away from the center of the room, makes a potent argument for the identity of its occupants, while simultaneously making that identity difficult to perform. As each GTA is assigned a desk, the desk is the focal point of GTA work within the office. So the desks being turned away from one another denotes that the user of the desks should be someone who limits social interaction or, at least, that speaking with other GTA's is not work. The motion of having to turn away from the computer or printed work on the desk in order to speak with other GTA's

reinforces this sharp separation of social interaction from work, reinforcing the idea of to whom the desks should belong. This reinforces the performance of *business professional*, work-oriented and socially disengaged, as the appropriate imagined inhabitant of this space.

However, GTA's work in close proximity, so performing *business professional* is complicated by the need for greater interpersonal connection to ease the social burden of sharing a small amount of space. For Fleckenstein (1999), this is ideal as it resolves the tendency of academic work to be disembodied through reliance on silence and privacy for writing. But the mixing of the personal with professional is frowned upon within the university system (Fleckenstein, 1999). So, the behavior encouraged by the space itself is behavior at odds with professional life. This creates a tension within the space and injects tension into the performances of the GTA's as they seek to establish professional identities. They must find ways to *make do* (Certeau, 1984) to settle this unease.

### Space as Hierarchic Symbol

The shared office space describes the low status of the GTA's within both the department and academia as a whole. Status within the department is directly proportional to the amount of privacy afforded by the allotted workspace: "A mark of prestige is possession of a private office, one with walls instead of partitions, one with a door that can close" (Fleckenstein, 1999, p. 300). The social nature of the office, as discussed in the previous section, allows GTA's to create a meaningful network of support; however, this support system is emblematic of the GTA's lack of privacy. Solitude is a luxury (Fleckenstein, 1999) signifying the institutional value placed on the work being done; tenured professors publishing work in A-level journals have corner offices

with windows. This spatially articulated lack of value placed on the products of GTA work and, in a product-driven industry such as academic publishing, subsequently on the work itself frustrates the performance of both *teacher* or *academic* and *business professional*. GTA's work to produce scholarly and professional work in an environment that articulates the worthlessness of that same work.

The number of GTA's sharing one office communicates an added hierarchic element: the enforcing of a student identity. There are roughly seven GTA's in each of the two offices, which ensures that the door remains open for most of the day as someone is, invariably, holding office hours at any given time. But the open door also creates a panoptic effect (Foucault, 1978). Not only are GTA's of low position, but they are also in need of observance, monitoring. The panoptic nature of the open-door has a two-fold effect. The primary impact is that GTA's must police themselves for appropriate office behavior, reinforcing the performance of *business professional* via the fear of any faculty member watching at any time. But while the panopticon encourages self-regulation, it also infantilizes its subject. Adult teachers do not need to be monitored, but young students do. A room with an open door is a room for students, not for teachers. Thus, the desk is for the business professional, the office space in general is for the social non-academic, but also for the student. But within this space, GTA's must perform *teacher*. Through having the identity of student foisted on them while trying to perform teacher, GTA's must work to negotiate away from perceived ignorance and deference towards knowledge and authority.

### Space for Cast-Offs

*The lights turned off while meeting with a student again. We were getting some good work done, checking the alignment of his research questions to his methods. He was startled at the sudden darkness and looked to me. I had to explain that this happens all the time, that the metal lockers block the motion sensor, so when I sit at my desk, the motion sensor doesn't register my motion within the room. I got up and waved my arms in the middle of the room, and the lights returned. "Why don't you just take the lockers out?"*

*"We've put in a formal request for them to be removed. We're not allowed to take them out or move them ourselves. We'll see what happens." I didn't mention to him that I'd put in the request last semester.*

The GTA offices bear everywhere the signs of age. Both have the same type of furniture, the same brown-gray carpet and white walls. The carpet is worn with stains in places. The desks are several decades old and unwieldy. For example, both desks I used as a GTA had a middle drawer above the gap to place my legs. If I bumped the drawer, it would push in that drawer a little, which auto-locked all of the desk drawers. On many occasions, I rushed to grab materials quickly and was unable to open the drawers. This was especially difficult if I needed to grab something while I was still seated, which required me to ask my student or co-worker to back up, back my own chair away from the desk, pull out the middle desk drawer, then open the desired drawer to retrieve the item I needed. While the desks could be in the GTA office for numerous reasons, it is easy to assume, based on their functionality, that they were surplus desks; no one else wanted them. The same can be said for the other items of furniture, a dusty metal bookcase

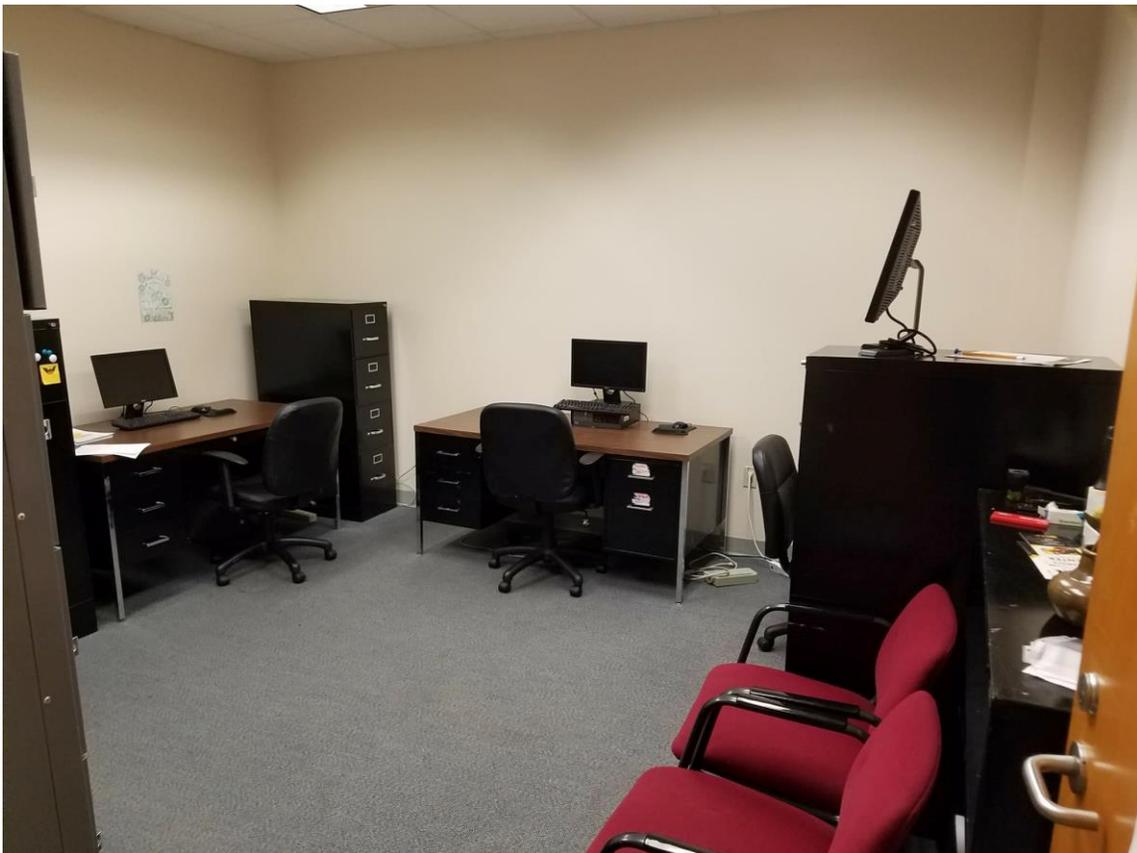
filled with outdated editions of composition textbooks, empty file cabinets, a set of metal storage lockers with no locks.

The age of the furniture and the carpet, the lack of care taken in its upkeep all reinforce the GTA's lack of status within the department, despite GTA's exercising their agency to be otherwise; however, the building itself is old. Other members of the same department work in an environment with old musty carpet and doors that lock by accident; however, their position in the department allows them to have other spatial experiences as members of the department to supplement and subvert the messages their tired offices broadcast. Nedra Reynolds's (1998) work on the social imaginary and material conditions of academic labor examines how the grand yet comfortable conditions of many academic conferences create a certain understanding of academic labor that obscures the true conditions of that labor. GTA's cannot afford these conferences, with most GTA's only attending one conference a year. GTA's do not feel comfortable in faculty meetings with free coffee and doughnuts or at holiday parties with catered food. Any material or spatial benefit of the department dangles out of reach of the GTA who must perform *business professional* and, if in the presence of these benefits, cannot indulge. So, this masking of conditions doesn't occur for GTA's in the way it would for faculty. There is never an opportunity for the "palatial structure" to "inflate" their understanding of their labor (Mountford, 2001, p. 50). They work in the offices together. It is the only space they can really claim for themselves, and even then, it is not theirs.

This old, unwieldy, furniture in the GTA office—furniture the department does not know what to do with— makes an uncomfortable equivalence to the department's attitude towards

GTA's. Does the department know what to do with them? Does the department understand its relationship to these individuals?

The “heuristic power” of spaces over their uses shapes how individuals understand the spaces and themselves (Mountford, 2001, p. 50). For GTA's their understanding of their professional identities is predicated on their navigation of the tensions of their office, tensions surrounding mixed messages of value, status, social expectation, value of work, privacy, and relationships. GTA's must leverage their agency in order to navigate these circumstances. The following chapter examines the ways that GTA's respond to and make do with these tensions through performance and spatial practice.



*Figure 1: View of GTA Office from Doorway*



*Figure 2: View from My Desk in GTA Office*

The “heuristic power” of spaces over their uses shapes how individuals understand the spaces and themselves (Mountford, 2001, p. 50). For GTA’s their understanding of themselves is predicated on their navigation of the tensions of their office, tensions surround mixed messages of value, status, social expectation, value of work, privacy, and relationships. The following chapter examines the ways that GTA’s respond to and handle these tensions through performance and spatial practice.

## CHAPTER 3: MAKING DO IN INTERACTION

### Practices

The previous chapter's analysis of spatial communications of the social imaginary, coupled with the context and constraints discussed in chapter one, leave the graduate student teacher in tangled position. In order to accomplish tangible, concrete work, GTA's must shuttle between performances, negotiate performance and spatial boundaries, and craft hybrid performances. To inhabit these liminal and hybrid performances—teacher-in-training, student professional, well-educated trainee—GTA's must *make do* with the circumstances and resources they are provided; they must “play on and with a terrain imposed on it” in order to “make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open” (Certeau, 1984, p. 38). For this project in particular, Certeau provides a perspective for looking at how individuals push back against constraints in daily life. A significant number of studies on agency, including ones covered in the literature review in this document, look at the agency and action of individuals with some amount of institutional power: orators (Kerschbaum, 2014), presidents (Cooper, 2010), published authors (Campbell, 2005), teachers (Miller, 2007). However, Certeau examines how the regular, no-name individual *makes do*, exercises agency, within ordinary circumstances. As a GTA, Certeau's work appeals to my desire to make sense of the uncomfortable banalities of my GTA work, the tedium overlooked by most theorists.

In his book, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, theorist Certeau (1984) examines the ways individuals leverage daily life into the “resistant activity of groups which, since they lack their own space, have to get along in a network of already established forces and representations. People have to make do with what they have” (p. 18). This *making do* comes in two types of

behavior: uses and tactics. Uses are similar to cultural traditions. They are the repetition of norms but with individual influence added. Use is similar to Butler's performative agency; the action cannot be perfectly performed, so repeated performance itself becomes a type of erosion and of the performance and agentic movement away from the norm being performed (Butler, 2010). However, tactics are more individual in nature. They are the intentional movements of individuals to make do in order to make use of the "terrain" available. Certeau (1984) uses the metaphor of language to illustrate how, if practices are language, tactics are rhetorical strategies. They are "surreptitious and guileful" (p. 34).

Making do is an assertion of agency as the individual makes do by using the conditions placed on them for purposes other than the conditions were originally intended for. As two types of making do, both uses and tactics are assertions of agency. Uses are coopted from set conditions by minority cultural groups. However, tactics are individual or group oriented and do not have the same staying power of uses. As Certeau (1984) explains, tactics cannot gain ground. They are temporal and operate "in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of 'opportunities' and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings" (p. 38). Examining the tactics GTA's engage in reveals their struggle for agency in a system that denies it, while also revealing the contingent and fragile nature of the agency they attempt to exert of their performances and lives.

This chapter will examine how GTA's "play on and with" the terrain of the communal office space through conducting a Certeauian reading of use and tactics in my interactions within the office in order to explore how GTAs make do. In order to examine identity, I chose to look at performance. In particular this analysis utilizes the interaction at the unit of analysis, looking at

the moments when daily life and work have to be conducted from within the performance. This chapter is a thick description of the types of interaction GTA's engage with regularly. This description of the mundane allows for an understanding of the immediate and small ways that GTA's push against structural constraints. With uses and tactics as analytics, the process of analysis entailed identifying moments when GTA's interactions were simply cultural practices with an individual spin—uses—or were strategic attempts to navigate the identities placed on them by the space and the institution—tactics. Examining the interactions through a Certeauian lens illuminates the ways that I, as a GTA, engage in making do and poaching, along with other tactics, to negotiate the bifurcated identity of GTA life.

#### Sitting with Students

*It was the last time we'd meet before spring break. We spent the fifteen minutes of her appointment, plus an additional fifteen working together to make claims from her coded data and to craft those mini-claims into a thesis.*

*"When do you head home for break?"*

*"I'm not sure. I don't want to lose participation points on Friday. So either Friday night or Thursday morning."*

*"You know most professors offer extra credit the day after spring break. I do."*

*"Yeah, no one wants to go to class then. They're barely awake for class anyway"*

*"Check the syllabus and Webcourses to see. But yeah, no one wants to be there. I don't want to be there."*

*She laughs, "You must be tired of watching everyone sleep in class."*

*“So many people. They think I can’t see them, but I do every time.”*

Working with students, sitting beside them in the office, is a combination of performing teacher, avoiding any performance of student, and employing tactics to either re-appropriate pieces of the performance or to engage in other performances simultaneously. Working with students within the office is a vital component to teaching writing. Mandatory conferences, open office hours, and appointments allow GTA’s, and writing teachers in general, the opportunity for individualized, one-on-one instruction and support. The affective dimension and many individual interventions can be difficult to implement in a classroom of twenty-five eighteen-year-olds. So meeting with students is essential for handling any exceptionalities, from students lacking skill to students not being challenged. Because the very nature of these meetings is one-on-one, GTA’s have the opportunity to layer other performances on top of their performance of teacher, allowing for the creation of more nuanced and complicated interactions and relationships with students during this time. Tactics create these nuances. The shift between performing *teacher* and employing a tactic is signaled through body position.

Body position looks dramatically different in interactions with students than it does when sitting alone or sitting with a student in the room. For example, the level of movement while sitting at the desk facing a student remains is half of what it is when I am alone; however, that amount decreases even more when I am turned away from my desk to face a student. My body positions can be separate into the three body positions used for the majority of office hours with students.

I use the first bodily position (BP1) when engaging with the student and an assistive item, such as a computer, a textbook, class notes, or a printed essay. The document is laid on the desk top, or the computer is set back half way on the desk with the screen turned slightly toward the student. During the time, the student sits in a chair to my right or left parallel to the desk. My legs stay under the desk, crossed at the ankle. Both of our bodies face the desk or turn slightly, torso and/or head only, towards each other. During this time, the student and I are engaging with online grades, assignments, online journals or articles, or the student's own writing. This is the performance of *teacher* for the student. The use of the body points towards the informational item, directing the student to interact with it as well. For Certeau, this is a *use*. The interaction with the student in the process of teaching may be individualized to my context—the layout of my desk requires us to sit side-by-side; I have certain learning objectives I need to assess verbally—but that individualization resides within the larger pattern of behavior, the terrain, set for me by the department. I am just a teacher here.

The second bodily position (BP2) occurs when talking to the student one-on-one, but while I am giving advice, explaining an idea, or discussing a low grade or student's struggle. This position requires the student to be sitting a few feet back from my desk. My left or right side is against the desk, but I cross my leg over my knee at the ankle. The crossed leg will depend on which way I am turned, ensuring that the upraised thigh is touching the edge of the desk. This position requires some micro movements to use. Two simple examples are that the shoe of the upraised foot cannot touch the chair, so the foot is continually readjusted, and the skirt is pulled over the edge of the upraised leg, if longer, or a sweater is spread on the legs. BP2 is shorter than the others and is often a transition between the two. This is another *use* of teaching performance.

This body position works as a signal for the kind of interaction the student and I are having together, but the work conducted while we are together is solely in the interest of the institution.

One striking feature of BP2 and BP3, described below, is the masculine aspect of having my legs open. BP3 requires a more masculine use of space with my legs spread a good distance apart. However, BP2 is also a masculine use of space, even with my legs crossed, as placing the left ankle on the right knee results in a significant gap spreading between the thighs. In a space that is highly gendered, this is clearly a rhetorical choice linked to performance; however, the skirt or dress, and often a pair of high heels, moves these types of body positioning away from direct gender performances into gender evocations—performing aspects of a gender to appropriate some of the social capital of that gender. While most of the interaction with my students is a *use* this particular leg position, this attempt to leverage cultural symbols of power in my favor, is one small *tactic*.

The third main position (BP3) requires students sitting further away from the desk or in a small group, for one-on-one or group conferences. BP3 involves me sitting forward on the edge to middle of the seat with my back to to the desk. I then lean forward with my legs hips' width apart and my hands or forearms on my knees or the arm rests and my feet flat on the floor. During this time, I am often engaged in explaining or describing assignments. Students during office hours commonly come with a particular need or question, and BP3 is the position I most often address these types of meetings from.

The second two features of this type of interaction are sequenced with one another: conversation content and vocal tone. What is significant about these two being coupled together is that one is an activator for the other. Conversation content triggers shifts in vocal tone. A key

example of this is a meeting with a student I've worked with for two semesters during a scheduled conference about a research project. The initial moments were used to discuss the class in general, the semester as a whole, progress in other classes, and new friends made in classes. The student sat near my desk, while I was positioned in BP3, leaning forward towards the student. After three minutes, I moved from BP3 to BP1, beckoned the student to sit next to me, and transitioned the student to discussing the research project and the assignment directions on the computer. Once I transitioned to course content and began to shift to BP1, my vocal pitch dropped approximately three pitches lower, remained even in a mid-range volume, and became almost monotone with minimal pitch variation—not completely flat but significantly decreased from the previous conversational tone. One purpose for the leveling out of pitch and tone is the desire to obscure or ease any loss of ethos via age and gender. Sounding lower and more monotone softens impact my voice has on the listener. And while it does not obscure that I am, and thus sound like, a woman in her late 20's, it does ease the degree to which those facts are emphasized via my voice. The switch back to discussing non-course related information at the end of the conference was accompanied by the first tone pattern, higher, lighter, with more pitch variation.

The significance of this shift in content, tone, and body position is the signaling of a tactical performance. Course content requiring the performance of teacher is clear; however, the second performance requires a closer look. This performance is a basic issue of audience. Very basic rhetorical theory recognizes that audience and exigence are drivers for rhetorical interaction (Consigny, 1974; Grant-Davie, 1997). Each performance shift is not just a shift in the way I would be rhetorically framing myself for my student. Each performance shift is a

refiguring and reimagining of the audience/student in that moment to establish different relational boundaries and achieve different and myriad ends. In this example moment, I sit back into BP1 and drop pitch and tone, I perform *teacher/professor* and cover content. Then, when I inquire after the student's feelings towards work load and classes, I am performing a tactic—addressing the affective and engaging in care work—and inviting the student to join me (hence, *co-conspirator*).

As already mentioned, this is an issue of intention and an issue of audience. In order to shift away from the performance of *teacher*, I am required to see my student as more than a student. Moments like the one detailed with my student, are the employment of a tactic for subversion. During the performance of *co-conspirator*, my vocal tone, body position, and conversational content changed. This is a compatible performance with *teacher*, making the performance easy to slide in and out of, particularly as *co-conspirator* involves teaching students about inter-university intricacies. So, there is some teacher-esque performance work here. However, this performance is a tactic, using university space and teacher time to teach students how to withstand the stressful, unfriendly, and often dehumanizing practices of higher education through encouraging self-care. This performance is not in opposition to institutional desires, but it is unintended by them, echoing Butler's definition of agency.

### Together with Students

Another type of interaction, which I call *together*, emphasizes the social aspect of interaction. This is not the presence of a colleague but the active participation of a colleague with me in a mutually constructed interaction. By and large, these tended to be positive interactions

between co-workers. There are different types of performance inside of this which can then combine with or be part of other performances. GTA's in this space can, together, perform *teacher*, *business professional*, and many other types of performance. These performances can be split into *with students* and *without students*, bearing similar qualities but differing in degree and intensity.

The first set of interactions is *with students* in the room. As with *alone with students*, the behaviors here are around conversations about teaching, students, or school or business items, such as forthcoming meetings, assignment due dates, or paperwork to fill out. These topic categories make up approximately 50 percent of conversation. The other 50 percent is purely social conversation. These conversations are conducted while a student is present, but not directly in front of the student, again a side-display instead of direct spectacle.

During this time, groups of teachers turn their bodies towards each other in clusters with their backs towards students in the room. This visual wall of bodies also assists in maintaining that reduction in distraction. This is a visual tactic of spatial repurposing. When I and a GTA friend met in the office while a third GTA met with a student, the two of us did not keep conversation directed towards work appropriate topics. Conversation was hushed, but content did not change. Instead, we turned our back towards the other GTA (S) and the student, usually congregating around a desk. This desk-orbiting cluster occurs regardless of the number of GTAs talking together. While conscious of the potential spectacle, turning away from the others in the room partitions the space, creating a visual and symbolic wall to delineate between the professor (S)'s space and ours (R & C). It is claim staking as a tactic—an establishment of space linked to an identity, being separate from the space the student is in, and being free from performance

requirements and spatial practice expectations of the surrounding office. The GTA's literally quadrant off space for themselves to repurpose, where they can perform student or business professional without interfering with the other GTA's (S) performance of teacher.

While the intensity and degree of the interaction GTA's changes while others' students are present, the content of their interactions does not. GTA's use as many jokes, irreverent comments, and profanity when students are present as without students. However, as mentioned above, the tone and volume are significantly decreased, and the GTA's use their body to create visual barriers within the office. The tactic of using the body to create this separation is a repurposing of spatial practices. If the GTA's can create micro-spaces within offices, using their bodies as walls, they can transform the practices they are expected to participate within—they are, effectively, in a new space.

However, despite GTA's use of tactics to delay the performance of teacher in front of others' students, the performance does need to happen. So, even though the conversations GTA's hold during this type of interaction display their agency through subverting assumptions of their use of space, they are not free to use it however they choose. They can say what they please, but they must be quiet, and they cannot position their bodies with impunity. The visual barrier of bodies has to be maintained. So, even while using a tactic that requires them to not need to perform teacher, they still support other GTA's performances of teacher through minimizing distractions for the students present, which is essential to the ethos building of any GTA meeting with student.

### Together with Door Closed

When the office door is closed and GTA's are alone together, the use of the space and of materials transforms. All materials are used as if they belong to us, and the space is used as if it is ours. Various performance-altering activities engaged in include changing clothes, playing games on phones, laying or sitting on the floor, a holiday cookie swap and other various food sharing events, food preparation, and using various types of office equipment as toys. Three tactics stand out for discussion: playing, sleeping, and complaining.

The first tactic can be described as play. This is unstructured time with more than one GTA in the room and the door closed. While GTA's can engage in work-related activities during this time, the closed door usually signals the time to break performance, and the break in performance revolves around leisure and relieving stress. GTA's swap stories, eat food, gossip, complain about students/classes/the department, tell jokes. Many physical objects are used counter to their institutional design, with GTA's using their agency to establish new definitions for the items associated with their work. During one recorded moment, a GTA, after a particularly long day of conferences, picked up a garbage can and attempted to wear it as a hat; this is an extreme example, however. Daily activities span from spinning desk chairs to making patterns with file cabinet magnets. Within the boundaries of the institution, GTA's make time in order to participate in no required or expected performances, to subvert the prescribed roles. The physical space and the objects in it are defined and redefined as GTA's poach the space, blending work and leisure (Certeau, 1984), a moment of relief from the emotional labor of performance.

GTA play is a type tactic, as is sleeping within the office. While a rare occurrence, happening an average of three times per semester, pairs of GTA's sleep within the office. The activity usually involves students bringing blankets to the office, pulling two chairs together to sit on and prop up the feet, turning on desk lamps and the overhead light off, and each student setting alarms for each other to ensure they both arrive on time for their next class.

Sleeping in the office can be interpreted as an act of defiance or avoidance of performance, a rejection of an institutional identity similar to the play tactic GTA's employ. However, most GTA sleeping is motivated by the amount of time GTA's are often on campus and the physical toll performance fatigue takes on the body. Unable to go home, GTA's make do with the space and resource available. This tactic is reinterpreting the space to address a need. Similar to desire lines in a field of grass, GTA's sleeping in the office is a desire/need-related reinterpretation of the space before them (Certeau, 1984). In a system that prizes their labor, GTA's using university resources to reenergize themselves is an attempt at agency, pushing back against a system that would devalue their bodies.

A third tactic is complaining. Complaining within the GTA office serves multiple purposes but has two main effects: to provide an outlet for frustration and to engage in meta-critique. During this period of time, GTA's swear and raise their voices, while keeping in mind that the walls are thin. There is little non-traditional engagement with materials in the office as there is with play and with sleeping. Instead, the whole of this tactic is verbal engagement in expressing negative emotion towards the department, the degree programs, teaching, or specific faculty and staff. This process is similar to play in that it provides moments of relief from performance; however, complaining does something more. The complaining provides support

and provides an opportunity for GTA's to learn from each other's tactics. While not all GTA's understand their own tactics, regardless, these conversations are invaluable for GTA's to learn from each other. This tactic then becomes productive, allowing for more agentic tactic usage in the future.

### Agency

This chapter uncovers ways that GTA's use tactics to make do with terrain pre-established for them by the department. In order to assert individual agency, GTA's use these tactics to not only have agency but to navigate the multiple identity performances required of them by the department, along with the performances they choose for themselves. GTA tactics are diverse: using body language and vocal tone to compress multiple identity performances into an interaction, creating micro-spaces out of existing space through body position, repurposing space as a site of play, privileging self-care through sleeping, and participating in meta-critique through collective complaining. In order to understand how GTA's exercise agency, examining these moments is vital as it moves the discussion of GTA agency away from what they cannot do (Grady, Touche, Oslawski-Lopez, Power, & Simacek, 2014) to what they are actively doing to negotiate their complicated predicaments.

## CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

*It was a profitable meeting with my student. After going over my comments on her paper, we worked together to make a plan for revision that took into account her busy work schedule.*

*We sat side-by-side and talked about how to reverse outline and how to break the task into pieces, accomplishing a little bit each night. I had to cut our meeting off there. I had another to go to. I entered a curriculum meeting and sat in the back. I knew that we would break out into groups, but I was hoping to sneak out before then. In the last meeting, I'd been grouped with one of my bosses and spent the whole meeting wondering if everything I said made me sound dumb. We were asked to build a backwards course design together. Both of the professors in my group had been teaching for decades. They had all sorts of little ideas for how to build the class—fun lectures, games, resources—while I sat. Finally, I suggested the only assignment I'd created that I'd already had feedback on from a full-time professor. Sitting with them, I felt that while I had entered the room from the position of a teacher, I was not one—I was a student. I had entered as one person and had left as another.*

### Implications of Tactics for Agency

When looking at GTA agency, the use of tactics instead of uses matters. Tactics have implications for the overall agency of the GTA and the relationship between the GTA and the department. The liminality of tactics illustrates the “perverse” nature (Campbell, 2005, p.2) of agency and highlights the need for further conversations about GTA agency.

One of the best ways to understand the impact of tactics is through looking at what they do not accomplish—through looking at uses. In his 2011 article, Darrel Enck-Wanzer explores

how Puerto Rican residents of East Harlem in New York City use materials and spaces, including flags and gardens, to establish a collective sense of neighborhood identity. The community uses visual and material elements to disidentify with the surrounding communities, exercising agency to engage in symbolic actions with material consequences in order to build a rich and complicated community culture. Enck-Wanzer's (2011) analysis uncovers how the Nuyorican community is built through evoking a feeling of difference, of harkening back to another place through iconography and symbol, while also transforming the place itself through gardens and *casitas*. The goal of both of these is to merge two disparate identities of New Yorker and Puerto Rican. Even the name *Nuyorican* demonstrates the creation of something new through standing on the border between two cultures, claiming them both.

The repurposing of space within the city that the Nuyorican community engages in is not a tactic. Instead, it is a use, a cultural adoption of an enforced norm that is riffed off of and shifted in the practice. Through practicing both Puerto Rican and New Yorkian practices in the overlapping spaces of city streets and gardens and store fronts and homes, the Nuyorican community makes do through these uses. These uses are supported by the community as a subculture, the collective efforts gaining purchase for the whole community.

Tactics, however, do not gain purchase, do not acquire any of the terrain they seek to negotiate. The protean nature of tactics means that, while GTA's can work or work together, they are not able to exercise their own agency beyond the disconnected and desperate tactics they already engage in.

In discussions of GTA conditions (Nyquist, Manning, Wulff, Austin, Sprague, Fraser, Calcagno, & Woodford, 1999), questions of GTA agency become lost. However, essentially

issues of condition are issues of agency. For this thesis GTA's have little input in their own conditions. And these conditions, the material space for their labor, argues for the identities they should perform within those spaces. In order to negotiate these complicated and often contradictory identities, GTA's exercise their own agency through making do via engaging in tactics. These tactics allow the GTA's agency; however, they do not produce any results outside of the immediate.

For any material consequences to arise from the exercise of GTA agency, the GTA needs two things: a receptive audience for their performance and a culture to make do within. The literature review in the introduction of this thesis reviews significant sources in the conversation surrounding rhetorical agency. One facet of agency that they all have in common is the need for the agent to perform agency before a receptive audience. This receptivity does not necessarily mean receptivity to the message or the overall performance. Instead, the audience needs to identify the agent's agency. GTA's need the audience of their tactics to identify them as tactics, to reify and affirm GTA agency through identification and receptivity.

The second essential for GTA agency is the inclusion of the GTA's into the existing departmental culture. Inclusion into the preexisting culture formed by department members allows GTA's access to uses of making do that department members are already engaged in. In order for this to happen, the department needs to consider the agency of the GTA and examine the ways in which it is subverted or undermined, acknowledging the tenuousness and scarcity of agency GTA's currently have.

### Establishing Apprenticeship

Discussing implications for any programmatic change that would aid in the working conditions of GTA's is a difficult task. Doing so will not net any money. From my own experience, I have been told numerous times that GTA work is a "rite of passage" and necessary to maintain the existing hierarchy. This response is unsatisfactory because it does not actually interrogate why the GTA experience must be dehumanizing. Improving conditions for GTA's will not damage departmental hierarchy—quite the opposite. Recognizing and making room for the complex life worlds of GTA's and allowing for the customization of identities based on desire and need provides a baseline of treatment. Caring for the least vital members of the department makes a statement about how other, more essential members of the department should be treated. If GTA conditions improve, all conditions improve. This is good for everyone.

A way to include GTA's within the department culture while not undermining institutional hierarchy and tenured professor authority is the intentional establishment of a new, hybrid identity that they are encouraged and aided in performing: apprenticeship.

The goal of setting up GTA-ships as apprenticeships is to provide one clear institutional identity for the GTA that encompasses the skills and addresses the exigences of the three identities the current GTA's are asked to navigate between. The secondary goal of an apprenticeship system would be to provide room for the GTA to individualize and modify the identity to some degree. As social identities are complicated, the apprenticeship would need to be a one-on-one or two-to-one relationship between the GTA and one member of faculty. The two individuals would be responsible for negotiating what this apprenticeship looks like within set guidelines.

The current mentor program for GTA's relies on the GTA to make contact with a busy faculty member. Ideally, an apprentice program would have the apprentice teaching her own classes but in close proximity to the lead scholar. The lead scholar would provide feedback and help as the apprentice worked; however, the apprentice would also take on some of the lead scholar's workload. For tenure track professors, this could mean research assistant duties. For an instructor, this could mean the GTA serves as a coach for the instructor's students in one class, similarly to how the HIP Coach system functions. The hope is that the department and the GTA's would develop a symbiotic relationship, mutually enriching and mutually educational.

*I would like to end this thesis speaking directly to the reader as my GTA self. Academic writing and most other academic labor have the propensity to obscure the individual doing the work. So, I would like to end this document foregrounding the laborer.*

*This thesis discusses institutional and spatial constraints on GTA identity and agency, examining the ways GTA's employ tactics to reconstruct their identities and reclaim their agency. As this chapter discusses, departments can make relational changes to incorporate GTA's into the department. However, this is not the only way GTA's can assert their agency and negotiate their own identities within their departments and the academy. This thesis you are reading is just such a work, a conscious merging of multiple identities in a manner that alleviates some of the tension and anxiety provided by specific ones. It is a research project fulfilling all formatting, IRB, and university requirements—a document performing business professional—and an academic work of analysis and theory application—the work of a burgeoning scholar. This thesis is also an institutional critique that incorporates story, a*

*document that performs the disciplinary and institutional identities of its author while creating a space to talk about, more importantly, her lived experiences. As Certeau (1984) states, “in the art of telling about ways of operating, the latter is already at work” (p. 89). I have already put my hand to the work.*

**APPENDIX A:  
APPROVAL LETTER**



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

### Approval of Human Research

From: UCF Institutional Review Board #1  
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: Caitlin Pierson

Date: June 14, 2018

Dear Researcher:

On 06/14/2018 the IRB approved the following human participant research until 06/13/2019 inclusive:

Type of Review: UCF Initial Review Submission Form  
Expedited Review

Project Title: An Ecological Framework for Graduate Student Teacher Agency

Investigator: Caitlin Pierson

IRB Number: SBE-18-13832

Funding Agency:

Grant Title:

Research ID: N/A

The scientific merit of the research was considered during the IRB review. The Continuing Review Application must be submitted 30 days prior to the expiration date for studies that were previously expedited, and 60 days prior to the expiration date for research that was previously reviewed at a convened meeting. Do not make changes to the study (i.e., protocol, methodology, consent form, personnel, site, etc.) before obtaining IRB approval. A Modification Form **cannot** be used to extend the approval period of a study. All forms may be completed and submitted online at <https://iris.research.ucf.edu>.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 06/13/2019, approval of this research expires on that date. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

Use of the approved, stamped consent document(s) is required. The new form supersedes all previous versions, which are now invalid for further use. Only approved investigators (or other approved key study personnel) may solicit consent for research participation. Participants or their representatives must receive a copy of the consent form(s).

All data, including signed consent forms if applicable, must be retained and secured per protocol for a minimum of five years (six if HIPAA applies) past the completion of this research. Any links to the identification of participants should be maintained and secured per protocol. Additional requirements may be imposed by your funding agency, your department, or other entities. Access to data is limited to authorized individuals listed as key study personnel.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

This letter is signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gillian Morien". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "G" and a long, sweeping tail.

Signature applied by Gillian Morien on 06/14/2018 04:11:31 PM EDT

Designated Reviewer

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