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Voices From On High: Rhetorical Education in a Jewish Women's Writing Center

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VOICES FROM ON HIGH:

RHETORICAL EDUCATION IN A JEWISH WOMEN’S WRITING CENTER

BY

ANDREA ROSSO EFTHYMIOU

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,

The City University of New York

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Andrea Rosso Efthymiou

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
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dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

VOICES FROM ON HIGH

RHETORICAL EDUCATION IN A JEWISH WOMEN’S WRITING CENTER

by

Andrea Rosso Efthymiou

Adviser: Professor Jessica Yood

This ethnographic dissertation looks at how the mission statement at one institution of higher education—Yeshiva University (YU)—establishes rhetorical education for its undergraduate students. The research site for this study of rhetorical education and institutional mission is the college writing center at YU’s women’s campus, Stern College for Women. This study defines rhetorical education as the way an institution authorizes written, spoken, and behavioral communication, with the goal of developing its students as civic beings, through its institutional mission. My findings demonstrate how undergraduate writing tutors disidentify with institutional rhetorical education to subvert, resist, and revise institutional rhetorical education, offering alternatives for their undergraduate peers. As an ethnographic study of undergraduate writing tutors, this dissertation looks at the work of young teachers outside of traditional classrooms for the rhetorical education they model for their students. The results of my ethnographic study reveal how undergraduate writing tutors disidentify with institutional rhetorical education predominantly through their civic engagement, but also within the writing center. A further finding of this study demonstrates that undergraduate writing center tutors at YU embody and perform multiculturalism, despite the institutional mission, which does not specify a commitment to multiculturalism.
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My colleagues at the Graduate Center have contributed to this work in ways for which I am grateful. Thank you to Amanda Licastro for organizing writing groups at the lovely lobby of the Ace Hotel. Silently typing alongside Amanda and Andrew Lucchesi got me through many stages of drafting, and offered a warm sense of support throughout this process. I’d also like to thank Ben Miller, who, almost in passing while I was still taking courses, noted that writing tutoring is a lot like Jewish religious learning, thus keying me into a world of interests that inspired and have sustained my research. I am grateful to the entire GC Composition Community for demonstrating to me that there really are collaborative and supportive spaces in graduate school.

Thank you to my parents, Robert and Elaine Rosso, who encouraged me to value education and have been proud, regardless of the size of the my success, for all of my 38 years. For as long as I can remember, they have nurtured my identity as a writer, an act to which I owe completing this dissertation. To my husband, Steven, who has only known me as a graduate student, thank you for curating a life, especially during these past crucial months, that has felt supportive and forward-looking, even when I didn’t feel that way myself. I am grateful to our daughter, Reena, who even at four-years-old, inspires me to be my best every day.

I extend my final thanks, to the women who tutor at the Beren Writing Center, who have shown me daily what it means to listen, to complicate, to learn, to collaborate. Over the years, these young educators have inspired my teaching and involvement within the institution, and have shown me the true meaning of community through their transformative civic engagement. Thank you all for showing me the teacher I want to be.
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Introduction

“Do you wish THIS was you?!?!”

(More Than) Cross-dressing in Jewish Orthodox Rhetorical Education

This has always been a project about rhetorical education, even before I had fully settled on what that term “rhetorical education” meant for my research. Feminist and rhetorical education scholars Cheryl Glenn and Jessica Enoch offered me compelling and nuanced understandings of the possibilities of rhetorical education; yet, at the beginning of this project, I struggled to put into words—my own words, at least—the ways that rhetorical education was at work in the writing center I wanted to study (even though I could feel that it was). So in the early stages of this research, while drafting my dissertation proposal and institutional research board applications, I tried naming something that seemed more concrete: literacy practices. I remember thinking that I could look at the active use of language, non-scripted and in real-time, during writing center sessions, during staff meetings, in various pieces of tutors’ writing. In fact, a number of my interview questions in Appendix A reflect this interest in looking at non-scripted communication; so by the time those questions were approved by my advisor, an English department, and two institutional research boards, I had committed myself to the idea of a project about rhetorical education and literacy practices. Yet, once I started talking to tutors, scripting their communication to some degree by asking a list of questions, I realized that the project I had in front me wasn’t one exactly about literacy practices. Sure, I was learning about communication within a particular discourse community, but I really wasn’t observing extended, non-scripted tutoring practices or a series of staff development meetings with tutors in the writing center. Rather, I was interviewing tutors, listening to them about their
relationship to their institution; I was noticing how that relationship manifested in the writing center; and I was (and still am) interested in what tutors do with that institutional experience when they move beyond the boundaries of their college. In short, I wasn’t tracing literacy practices, the development of writing and speech, as I had once claimed I would.

Understanding this flaw (or false-start or evolving research interest) wasn’t so much a disappointment as it was a realization about research design, about how undertaking a qualitative dissertation—my first real attempt at ethnographic research—involves more than I had once imagined.

Looking back, my desire to grasp and hold onto “literacy practices” as a researchable topic reflects my desire—or maybe my need, as someone new to qualitative research—for moments, objects, and artifacts that seemed concrete. The way tutors speak to students, a basis for naming “literacy practices” in the writing center, is an activity that an onslaught of writing center scholars before me have looked at. This felt safe and real, literacy practices between tutors and students were not the kind of interactions I noticed when I looked at my data. Tutors talking to each other, while also a kind of concrete interaction, is an activity much harder to document than the one-to-one work in a writing center session between a tutor and student, since the conversations between tutors are not scheduled like tutoring appointments; they happen as tutors pass each other moving through the center, between tutoring sessions, and before-during-after staff development meetings. Yet these were the exchanges that fascinated (and continue to fascinate) me the most: the way these novice writing teachers, and still students, working in higher education communicate with each other as they circulate through the writing center and the institution. While these conversations between tutors felt
difficult to pin down, beginning a conversation about rhetorical education, which I now understand as grounding almost all communication in higher education, and tutors’ relationship with institutional mission was about as elusive as I could get. So having traced my own move as a researcher away from studying “literacy practices” to studying “rhetorical education” allows me to offer something concrete about these abstractions.

The challenge in concretizing conversations between tutors is somewhat offset by looking at tutors’ acts of civic engagement. I turn to civic engagement because my research with undergraduate writing tutors defines rhetorical education as the way an institution authorizes written, verbal, and behavioral communication, for the explicit goal of developing civically engaged individuals. In the pages that follow, I identify how the institutional mission of Yeshiva University (YU) authorizes communication for its undergraduate students, highlighting the institution’s commitment to the Jewish Modern Orthodox community, with which it identifies itself. YU’s writing center on its women’s campus, where I serve as associate director, was my research site for documenting writing tutors’ engagement with the institutional mission that undergirds YU’s rhetorical education. Tutors’ engagement with institutional mission is evident in their writing center work and institutional lives; however, my research draws attention to tutors’ civic engagement outside of the institution to punctuate the far-reaching effects of rhetorical education. Looking at tutors’ civic engagement also highlights undergraduate writing center tutors’ as rhetorically savvy, civic beings.

YU’s Stern College for Women, where the writing center in my research is located, may not ostensibly be committed to offering students a thing called “rhetorical education,” in that there is no course titled “Rhetoric 101,” nor an explicit commitment in curricular materials to
develop students’ rhetorical awareness in any systematic way. Yet, rhetorical education occurs in latent, unnamed ways throughout the institution. In fact, my research demonstrates that rhetorical education is found in undergraduate students’ extra curricular activity and in their civic engagement, rather than scripted within institutional curricula or disciplinary boundaries (such as composition and rhetoric, writing studies, or first year writing). Since I began working as a writing center administrator in the center at YU’s Stern College for Women’s campus, time and again I see the women who tutor there take up the institution’s rhetorical education and happily turn it on its head. Taking Jessica Enoch’s lead, when tutors offer alternative performances of institutional mission, I name these acts as revising rhetorical education.

Here I offer an example of undergraduate women revising rhetorical education through my reading of a document that circulated across campus in the Fall 2012 semester. The document, a poster titled “Do you wish THIS was you?!?!” (figure 1)1 advertising a women’s religious study group, was posted just beyond the walls of the writing center on a bulletin board around the corner from the writing center’s door. This poster was also disseminated throughout campus on similar bulletin boards, in front of the elevator entrances on other floors and in other campus buildings. In other words, this poster advertises some aspect of American college life among a sea of other posters with a similar intent. I pause on this particular poster because it offers a specific script for Jewish religious and cultural life at Yeshiva University. I will return to this script in later chapters to highlight how the institution authorizes dominant ways of communicating at YU. The “Lounge and Learn” poster in Figure 1 represents certain aspects

1 Figure 1 is a replica of the text that circulated on campus; however, I have removed the contact information of the event’s organizers to maintain the anonymity of those individuals.
2 Chapter Two offers more specific details on the central of the Torah and other religious texts
of the institutional ethos, the world in which tutors live during their time at YU’s women’s campus.

Figure 1: TAC “Lounge and Learn” poster

Allow me to take a little time to do some rhetorical framing of this text in order to pursue a central term of this dissertation: rhetorical education. In the chapters that follow, you will learn more about YU’s single-sex women’s undergraduate college, but for now, it is important to keep in mind that the poster advertising “Lounge and Learn” religious study group circulated at the all-women’s campus. The text’s author is the student group TAC, or Torah Activities Council, also an all-women’s group on campus. The audience for the text is the
undergraduate women who spend their day-to-day lives on this campus where the text circulated freely. In fact, the text beckons its audience very directly, asking undergraduate women at YU the question that runs in large print at the top of the image: “Do you wish THIS was [sic] you?!?!?” The “THIS” of the question implies the image below the title that represents three men huddled together gazing over and touching a large folio, with an individual man to the left of center reading alone. Based on the men’s dress and appearance—all figures are wearing head coverings and shawls, and have long beards—along with the religious identity of the Jewish audience, I identify the figures in this text to be religious Jewish men pouring over the Torah, the Hebrew bible. The text advertises a weekly event called “Lounge and Learn,” inviting undergraduate students at YU’s women’s campus to learn Parsha, or the weekly Torah portion, in the Brookdale dorm lounge, the largest dormitory on the women’s campus, which for the purposes of the occasion is being renamed the Brookdale beis midrash, or Brookdale study hall.

When I pair the image of men learning the Torah with the written text around the image, I feel invited into a normative reading of gender, one that tells me men are privileged, and indeed, I should wish to be a man studying Torah. My quick dissatisfaction with this reading, and the way that it just doesn’t jibe with the students I know, invites me to see the possibility for queering this text. For example, the poster presumably offers an answer to the question in the title: Do you wish this was you? ... Yes! After all, the written text below the image of these men offers a message of such promise and potential: “Well, [this] can be [you]!!!!!” The smaller print description of the event, detailing the time and location, describes this weekly study

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2 Chapter Two offers more specific details on the central of the Torah and other religious texts to the community of tutors at this research site.
group as “a chance to learn” with peers and “even speak yourself” (my emphasis) about the weekly Torah portion. The language of this description—offering the chance to learn and even speak—on the one hand, places the female audience in a fairly non-dominant position in relation to a male dominated religious tradition (more on that in Chapters One and Two), and particularly in relation to the men in the image. On the other hand, there is a compelling interpellation of identities that is happening in this text. TAC, the author, offers their exclusively female audience the possibility of identifying with men’s learning, a compulsory learning in Modern Orthodox Judaism, and the strand of observance with which the institution (and all of the participants of this study) identify. On YU’s women’s campus, students are offered the option to engage in rigorous religious study with a peer, a kind of collaborative learning referred to as chavruta; whereas on YU’s men’s campus, chavruta learning—or studying with a peer—is a compulsory part of all students’ Judaic curriculum so chavruta practice is built into men’s daily education at YU. The image then, asks the women of YU to imagine a world in which they too, like the men on their brother campus five miles north, have the luxury of seemingly indefinite chances to learn and speak in relation to religious texts. The image offers a kind of metaphorical cross-dressing, an invitation into the skin of the dominant gender identity and into normative rhetorical educational practices at YU. Yet, the image also subverts male-

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3 As explained to me by a tutor in YU’s women’s writing center, the root of the Aramaic word chavrusa is the Hebrew word chaver, which means friend, partner, or partnership.
4 Writing center scholar and director of YU’s writing center on its men’s campus Lauren Fitzgerald offers a careful consideration of the tradition of Orthodox Jewish education for men in her article “‘Torah Is Not Learned But in a Group’: Collaborative Learning and Talmud Study.” Fitzgerald identifies how men’s compulsory chavruta learning prepares YU’s male tutors for the one-to-one work of tutoring.
dominated rhetorical education by invoking a culturally recognizable image of men’s learning in the context of women’s learning.

In queering TAC’s “Lounge and Learn” poster, though, I want to offer more than a way of seeing this text as a kind of cross-dressing, as women metaphorically passing as men to find themselves within male discourse. Rather, the text serves as a disidentification, a term I take from queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz and that influences my analysis of much of the data in the following chapters. In Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics, Muñoz reads drag star Vaginal Cream Davis’s performances as disidentifications. According to Muñoz, “disidentification is a performative mode of tactical recognition that various minority subjects employ in an effort to resist the oppressive and normalizing discourse of dominant ideology. Disidentification resists the interpelling call of ideology that fixes a subject within the state power apparatus” (97). In Muñoz’s presentation of how Davis disidentifies with straight-white-male culture, Muñoz offers language to understand how disidentification signifies activity that simultaneously identifies with and resists “dominant ideology.” In terms of the “Lounge and Learn” poster that circulated at YU’s women’s campus in 2012, the women who authored this text identify the dominant space men occupy in terms of Torah study in Jewish Orthodoxy. Yet, the image that gestures towards this dominant ideology—men studying together crowded over a religious text—is somewhat cartoonish, drawn in muted colors, and displaced in time; this is not a jpeg of YU’s male students in 2012 interpelling intellectual and religious identity for the undergraduate women of YU. Rather, this is sort of a coloring-book sketch of fifth-century men. Although the women authors use an image that broadly represents normative discourse (men studying religious texts) to elicit audience identification, the text
invites its exclusively female audience to disidentify, as well, offering a decidedly different representation of what men studying religious texts could look like seen through the eyes of Jewish women at this particular liberal arts college. This queering of TAC’s poster, then, performs what feminist writer Helene Cixous claims happens when women occupy the signifier “man,” from “‘within’ the discourse of man” (1532). In Cixous’ terms in her essay “The Laugh of Medusa,” the female speaker must “dislocate this ‘within,’ to explode it, turn it around, seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of” (1532).

TAC’S text and my queering of it serve as precursors to one of my more surprising findings: that, like rhetorical education, a multicultural pedagogy can occur exclusive of institutional authority and, rather, as a result of undergraduate students’ rhetorical activity and civic engagement. In the same way that rhetorical education is not explicitly scripted in YU’s institutional mission, curricula, or programmatic spaces (such as first-year-writing), YU does not include “multiculturalism” or “diversity” as keywords in its institutional mission or curricular goals. Despite the institution’s sidestepping of multiculturalism, undergraduate students, specifically writing center tutors, on YU’s women’s campus perform a kind of multicultural pedagogy that this image intimates. Scholars of composition and rhetoric Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes, in their recent article “Flattening Effects: Composition’s Multicultural Imperative and the Problem of Narrative Coherence,” argue that a “multicultural pedagogy must proceed with both a recognition of our common humanity and a strong critical sense of our radical alterity, of the critical differences that exist among different people’s and different

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5 I address multiculturalism and mission statements in Chapter One and take up tutors’ multicultural pedagogies in my Conclusion.
groups’ experiences of the world” (431). Alexander and Rhodes critique what they call the “flattening effects” of multiculturalism at many institutions of higher education in the United States; namely, they claim that attempts at multicultural curricula and assignments often fall short of productively engaging sexual difference and rather uphold normative narratives of experience that are “tolerant” or “respectful” of the other. While categories of difference that are evident and often politicized at public institutions—categories like religion, race, and sexuality—are sometimes overlooked at YU, my research at YU is striking in that undergraduate students enact the kind of multiculticultural pedagogy that Alexander and Rhodes encourage. TAC’s poster represents the “radical alterity” of students at YU’s single-sex, Jewish campus through its public invocation of gender difference and disidentification with institutional rhetorical education.

I use TAC’s poster to demonstrate that there is a precedent at YU’s women’s campus for revising the institution’s rhetorical education. TAC’s image represents men’s paired learning of a religious text as a dominant form of rhetorical education. This chavruta learning is an extension of YU’s institutional mission, in that it is an explicit part of the religious curriculum on the men’s campus. Yet TAC’s use of this easily recognizable image rewrites the space of traditional male homosocial learning as a generative (and transgressive!) space for women’s learning within the Jewish Orthodox tradition. The tutors who participated in this ethnographic study show that a transgressive rhetorical tradition happens regularly at YU.

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6 I offer a rhetorical reading of YU’s institutional mission in Chapter Two and present data from fieldwork to demonstrate how tutors on the women’s campus understand YU’s institutional mission.
Chapter One, “Rhetorical Education: Obstacles and Opportunities,” reads particular Greek and Roman conceptions of rhetorical education in order to frame my definition of rhetorical education suited to twenty-first century institutions. Here I define rhetorical education to signify how institutions authorize and instruct written, verbal, and behavioral communication, with the specific goal of preparing students as participants for civic life. I further theorize rhetorical education in terms of institutional mission and identify the writing center as a location to understand how rhetorical education operates within a religious-driven institution of higher education. In placing undergraduate writing tutors’ rhetorical activity at the center of this study, I figure tutors not only as they are commonly understood—as one of many stakeholders in the writing center—but also as institutional stakeholders who play an active rhetorical role in negotiating institutional mission.

“Rhetorical Education: Obstacles and Opportunities” also defines my ethnographic methodology. On the one hand, the conceptual framework of my research involves theoretical inquiry, as I draw on theories of rhetorical education, identity construction in writing centers, and institutional mission in higher education to make sense of my local institution and writing center. On the other hand, the empirical basis of this dissertation involves descriptive inquiry of my local context, where I examine the culture, behavior, artifacts and events in and around one writing center. While this study focuses on a limited number of tutors, as case studies would, the multi-layered nature of my inquiry and the study’s extension to rhetorical education within the institution lend themselves to classifying this project as an ethnography, as “ethnographic inquiry attends to the whole environment with researchers observing, participating in, and interpreting data from multiple sources” (Liggett et. al. 70). In addition to ethnographic
fieldwork, I take a “theory-driven” approach to interviewing (Pawson), having framed for tutors my definition of rhetorical education within the interview questions themselves.

Chapter Two, “Reading Yeshiva: Understanding Institutional Mission in Undergraduate Writing Tutors’ Lives,” identifies how scholars of composition and rhetoric traditionally read the relevance of institutional mission alongside the mission of writing programs. Writing center scholarship likewise exports the impact of writing centers to institutional locations like first-year writing programs or WAC/WID programming. My research, however, challenges such exporting of writing center work to look more closely at the rhetorical activity of tutors in the center, and to further understand the affects of tutors’ rhetorical education outside of the writing center. I rhetorically read YU’s institutional mission to demonstrate how a religious-driven mission statement begins to establish rhetorical education. I further offer data from interviews with two writing center tutors to show how YU’s institutional mission, and thus rhetorical education, is translated in the daily activities of tutors’ lives.

Chapter Three, “Writing Center as Public: Tutor-Rhetors Within the Institution,” identifies the various publics whom writing center tutors address through their rhetorical activity. I show how tutors’ work in the writing center extends well beyond the one-to-one support of student writers. Specifically, tutors constitute publics within their one-to-one sessions with students, but also with tutors as well as with communication throughout the institution (such as tutors’ articles in the school newspaper). Tutors’ ability to constitute publics provides a self-sponsored form of rhetorical education that is not formally a part of the college curriculum. My data collected from interviews with tutors further demonstrates how tutors disidentify with YU’s institutional rhetorical education. The result of tutors’ disidentification is
that tutors authorize alternatives to the rhetorical education disseminated by the institution.

This chapter reframes the writing center, as I figure the space not as a center of student support, but as one that constitutes a particular institutional public where tutors rehearse rhetorical roles that are relevant both inside and outside of the institution.

In Chapter Four, “Coming Out of the Center: Tutors Disidentifying through Civic Engagement,” my research takes readers out of the writing center and into tutors’ communities to name and read the civic engagement that tutors’ undertake outside of the institution. I triangulate ethnographic fieldwork from two tutor-self-sponsored civic events—a panel of queer Jewish women writers and a co-educational prayer group—with interviews to claim that tutors’ rhetorical activity disidentifies with YU’s rhetorical education. Tutors’ civic engagement offers a counterpublic outside of the institution with which wider Jewish Orthodox audiences can identify. This data further situates the writing center as a middle-space in the institution where tutors’ dress rehearsal for civic engagement begins. Like previous chapters, Chapter Four shows that when tutors’ disidentify with institutional rhetorical educational in civic spaces outside of the institution, tutors subvert institutional mission to authorize alternative rhetorical practices for their public audiences.

My Conclusion, “How Did a Curriculum Like You End Up in a Writing Center Like This? The Multicultural Curriculum of a Jewish Women’s Writing Center,” takes up an urgency that I present here and in the first chapter: namely, how can a writing center, particularly one at a single-sex, religious, private college, develop and implement a robust multicultural rhetorical curriculum? My dissertation ends with this question, not necessarily to answer it, but to authorize it as a valid question for me to ask working in and researching this seemingly
homogenous private institution. This question though clearly has implications for public institutions, as well. I conclude this dissertation claiming that it is YU’s homogeneity—its very commitment to a specific discourse community, much like the missions of HBCUs—that successfully avoids the “flattening effects” of multiculturalism (Alexander and Rhodes). Alexander and Rhodes use the idea of multiculturalism’s flattening effects to critique the kind of false inclusion that is enacted in most institutional gestures towards multiculturalism and diversity. Alexander and Rhodes encourage those of us in writing studies to “move beyond perhaps even leave behind the multicultural imperative” that simply names a category of difference without attempting to engage with that category in some way. My research demonstrates that tutors do the work of productively engaging with and blurring categories of difference, in the writing center, throughout the institution, and in their civic lives. Therefore, I ultimately suggest creating a rhetorical, multicultural curriculum for writing center tutors with the goal not only of supporting student writers, but also of encouraging civic engagement to further develop tutors’ rhetorical practices within and outside of the institution.
Chapter 1

Rhetorical Education: Obstacles and Opportunities

Rhetoric always inscribes the relation of language and power at a particular moment, even as it concerns itself with the audience for and purpose of literate acts, with the actual effects of discourse, and with real possibilities rather than ideal certainties. (x)

--Cheryl Glenn, “Rhetorical Education In America (A Broad Stroke Introduction)

In her introduction to *Rhetorical Education in America*, Cheryl Glenn identifies the goal of rhetorical education since the fifth-century Sophists as preparing individuals for active participation as citizens. Glenn’s point reflected in the epigraph here—that, historically, rhetorical education disseminates discursive practices of the dominant culture in a situated context—is echoed by scholars of rhetorical education ranging from Jessica Enoch (176) to Walter H. Beale, who defines “the purpose of rhetorical education [as] twofold: to cultivate both the character of the individual and the success of a culture” (cited in Glenn, “Rhetorical Education” vii).

Glenn’s and Beale’s claims are constructed from a Classical Western conception of rhetorical education, therefore, I turn briefly to fifth-century BCE Greco-Roman constructs of rhetorical education that serve as a foundation for current work on rhetorical education in writing studies and composition and rhetoric. In his *Antidosis*, Isocrates argues for rhetorical education as he simultaneously defends his own values as a teacher and citizen-rhetor:
I do hold that people can become better and worthier if they conceive an ambition to speak well, if they become possessed of the desire to be able to persuade their hearers, ... the man who wishes to persuade people will not be negligent as to the matter of character; no, on the contrary, he will apply himself above all to establish a most honorable name among his fellow citizens. (77) Isocrates’ emphasis on a citizen-speaker, one who is “honorable” and heard by “his fellow citizens” demonstrates his view of educating his fellow citizens—other Athenian men—as public speakers committed to upholding certain repute in their communities.

If we conceive of Isocrates as committing his work to defining the role of the citizen-rhetor in fifth-century BCE Greece, Cicero’s De Oratore performs this author’s definition while simultaneously invoking the institutions in Roman society that influence the citizen-rhetor. When Cicero asks who “would not place the general above the orator?” (290), he suggests that the orator’s place in Roman society, while not equal to military leaders, is worthy of comparison. Cicero’s very thesis, demonstrating “the importance of oratory to society and the state” (293), further institutionalizes the view that communication in the civic sphere, and educating citizens for such communication, is a social value, one on par with military and political leadership.

I use this brief overview of classical rhetoric to shape how I define rhetorical education for my project: rhetorical education identifies how particular institutions and specified communities authorize and instruct written, verbal, and behavioral communication, with the specific goal of preparing citizens (or students, in the case of my research) as participants for communal engagement.
My research looks at how the mission statement at one institution of higher education—Yeshiva University (YU)—works to define a communal understanding of dominant written, spoken, and behavioral practices, thus establishing a rhetorical education for its students. And—as rhetoric is always situated in a particular time, space, and cultural context—this study specifically turns its attention to YU’s community of undergraduate Jewish women to better understand 1) how education is inscribed in gender and sexuality, 2) how an institution of higher education’s public representation of itself through its mission translates on-the-ground practices into rhetorical education in students’ lives, 3) how students participate in institutionally-sanctioned rhetorical education, yet do so in institutional locations not often associated with rhetorical education, and 4) how students subvert, resist, or revise that rhetorical education to offer alternatives for others in their civic lives.

The composition classroom and the college curriculum more broadly are clearly no strangers to conversations about rhetorical education, and this study joins the work of scholars who’ve looked both inside and outside of traditional locations of rhetorical education to identify such work. In his call for strengthening rhetorical education in American colleges, William Denman historicizes the teaching of written and spoken rhetoric in American college classrooms—specifically in English and public speaking courses—in his article “Rhetoric, the ‘Citizen-Orator,’ and the Revitalization of Civic Discourse in American Life.” Similarly, in marking “the simultaneous rise of rhetorical theory and continued decline of rhetorical education” (Fleming 169), David Fleming identifies that the definition of “little” rhetoric is “the ubiquitous first-year course in written composition, a course which claims to impart a universal method for writing [...]. It is a rhetoric doomed to educational marginalization” (172).
So while this study certainly echoes the call of Denman’s and Fleming’s respective works for strengthening curricula of rhetorical education in college classrooms, this scholarly examination looks at the work of teachers outside of traditional classrooms—in this study, I look to tutors in a writing center—for the rhetorical education they model for their students. In Jonathan Alexander and Susan C. Jarratt’s recent look at students’ “completely self-sponsored public protest, organized and designed to violate codes of civility and place itself outside the conventional genres of deliberative democratic discourse that composition and rhetoric teachers most commonly theorize, teach, and subscribe to” (526), the authors offer fieldwork from interviews with the “Irvine 11,” students involved in organizing Pro-Palestinian protests at University of California-Irvine in 2010. Through their interviews, Alexander and Jarratt discover “how little of [their rhetorical] education the students attributed to learning acquired or even encountered in the classroom” (540). Like Alexander and Jarrett, my research presents fieldwork, including interviews, highlighting undergraduate college students’ civic engagement, and connects this engagement to students’ rhetorical education outside of traditional classrooms. While it is certainly useful for us in writing studies to consider the role, or lack thereof, that students’ classroom education has in preparing them for civic life, my work considers how institutional spaces outside of classrooms in fact do generative work that informs, shapes, and reinforces rhetorical education.7

Jessica Enoch’s archival study *Refiguring Rhetorical Education: Women Teaching African American, Native American, and Chicano/a Students, 1865-1911* further shapes the way my

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7 For more on how rhetorical practices and artifacts originate and circulate far beyond classroom walls, see Anne Ruggles Gere’s *Intimate Practices* and Deborah Brandt and Katie Clinton’s “Limits of the Local: Expanding Perspectives on Literacy as a Social Practice.”
research conceives of the relationship between institutional spaces beyond classroom walls and the rhetorical education these institutional spaces offer students. Enoch profiles five women teachers who, working for institutions whose missions defined investment in maintaining dominant social power structures, “created new forms of rhetorical education as a means to shift the distribution of power in their cultural and civic communities” (7). Enoch’s case study of Native American Zitkala-Sa presents three elements crucial to my ethnographic study: a mission-driven institution dedicated to the production of a specific category of American student, the student (Zitkala-Sa herself) who for a certain time embodies the category of student that the educational institution wishes to produce, and the teacher (Zitkala-Sa again) who works actively and publicly to offer a counter-narrative to that of her educational institution. Enoch’s reading of the Carlisle School offers a model for understanding institutional mission’s role in shaping an institution’s rhetorical education. Analogous to Enoch’s archival work, my ethnographic study presents narratives of undergraduate women who tutor at one of YU’s writing centers, located at the Stern College for Women (Stern College) campus. Like Zitkala-Sa’s relationship with the Carlisle School, the women tutors at YU’s Stern College embody the role of student and teacher; but as tutors, they do so simultaneously. This identity position of being concurrently a student in one space and a teacher in another, within the same institution, is one of both dependence and agency. Further, in the same way that Zitkala-Sa’s civic engagement—for example, her writing for The Atlantic Monthly critiquing the Carlisle School—puts into question Native American education alongside gender, I examine Jewish religious and secular education alongside the teaching of women who exist within that tradition.
Extending Enoch’s emphasis on the boundaries of communication that rhetorical education defines, my research reads institutional boundaries to identify the space of rhetorical activity that those boundaries create. According to Enoch, the education offered by the Carlisle School was “a violent form of cultural erasure that not only extinguishes valuable Indian practices, languages, and social codes but also inhibits participation in both Indian and white worlds” (96) despite the school’s claim to provide “the very best” education for young Native American men and women. The paradoxical relationship between what the school articulated that it offered and what Zitkala-Sa, a student-turned-teacher at the school, perceived it offered is emblematic of the kinds of obstacles that are inherently part of rhetorical education. Building on Enoch’s work, my dissertation demonstrates how the language of a hegemonic structure—an institutional mission—can also offer terms that students appropriate, reclaim, and redefine for their own use. In particular, in my work, I demonstrate how undergraduate women who tutor at the writing center at YU’s Stern College view the language of YU’s institutional mission as material that serves in revising the rhetorical education offered by the institution. In other words, the undergraduate women who are writing tutors at YU transform the very boundaries established by institutional rhetorical education into opportunities for civic engagement.

Rhetorical education operates by fostering particular identifications (Burke 55) among an institution’s students; in this way, YU’s Stern College for Women is a site where identification works in two significant ways. First, Judaism, as we could suggest for perhaps most religions, functions through group identification of language, ideas, ritual, and texts. And second, YU’s institutional mission, as it applies to Stern College for Women, attempts to amplify
communal identification through the project of Torah Umadda, a phrase that is foundational to YU’s institutional mission. I would like to extend Burke’s definition of identification, as Krista Ratcliffe does in *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, and Whiteness*, beyond a seamless understanding of commonality. According to Ratcliffe, rhetorical listening functions “by theorizing identification as metonymic places of commonalities and differences,” where discourses “converge and diverge” (32). Similarly, this study finds that rhetorical education operates at Stern College through moments where writing center tutors intimately identify with and strongly push against a perceived definition of YU’s religious-driven institutional mission.

In fact, it is tutors’ rhetorical listening to the discourses that circulate within the institution that provide an opportunity for this alternative understanding of “identification” and the exigency for this study in and around the writing center itself. As a result of tutors’ careful listening to the discourses within the institution, the writing center is a space that simultaneously engenders identification and disidentification. In his work *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, queer theorist Jose Esteban Muñoz defines disidentification through the work of drag queens and performance artists of color who identify with gay culture, yet *disidentify* with white gay culture. Minority subjectivities within dominant culture characterize these acts of disidentification. It is for this reason that Muñoz’s work on gay culture resonates with my research on this community of Modern Orthodox Jewish women. As a subculture within Judaism, Modern Orthodox Jewish women represent not only a minority

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8 Translated from Hebrew literally as “Bible and the world,” the implication being the “secular world,” Torah Umadda is common language at YU, as it is the cornerstone of the institutional mission. Chapter Two offers my reading of Torah Umadda as institutional mission, tutors’ interpretations of Torah Umadda, and problematizes Torah Umadda through the lens of rhetorical education.
gender but also a minority sub-culture within Jewish culture. Muñoz’s theory of disidentification is influenced by, but also departs from, an antiassimilationist agenda: “disidentification negotiates strategies of resistance within the flux of discourse and power. It understands that counterdiscourses, like discourse, can always fluctuate for different ideological ends and a politicized agent must have the ability to adapt and shift as quickly as power does within discourse” (19). As Muñoz suggests, disidentification, in both its resistance of assimilation and departure from antiassimilation, is a performative process of negotiating resistance to dominant and non-dominant discourses. So while the undergraduate women tutors’ who participated in this study for all intents and purposes have devoted their lives to upholding the discourse of YU and Torah Umadda, these women constantly find ways to subvert that discourse, sometimes subtly enacting their agency for a small public (like within the space of the writing center) while upholding institutional discourse, and sometimes ostensibly upending institutional power through offering counterdiscourses to wider public audiences.

Since rhetorical education has historically accommodated and cultivated access and exclusion, it was not until “Others made their way into the academy” (Glenn, “Rhetorical Education” viii) that rhetorical education began to concern these Others at all. Rhetorical education presents a variety of obstacles to those traditionally left out of the dominant discourse community. But as Glenn has identified, “teachers and students in these traditional and alternative settings continue to search for ways around the obstacles and towards the

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9 When I point to “Jewish culture” here, I mean the multiple ways Jews identify as religiously observant: Ultra Orthodox, Modern Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, unaffiliated, or even atheist. This short list is certainly not representative of all categories of Jewish religious identity. All participants in this study identify as Jewish Modern Orthodox.
opportunities that rhetorical education presents” (x, “Rhetorical Education,” my emphasis). Echoing Glenn’s optimism, this study traces the way women in a Jewish Modern Orthodox institution of higher education encounter obstacles of institutional mission and rhetorical education, transforming those obstacles into civic opportunities through revision their institutions rhetorical education.

Reading the Writing Center as a Location of Rhetorical Education

Writing center scholarship has long positioned writing centers as potentially insulated from [hegemonic and hierarchical] tensions—we often conceive of our spaces as safe houses, for example—and some fear the dissolution of community that might result from acknowledging tension; but avoiding this kind of work [...] denies the potential of such tension—a tension that is dynamic, necessary and ever present. (7)

—Geller et al. The Everyday Writing Center: A Community of Practice

While much writing center scholarship—and indeed on-the-ground institutional narratives of writing center work—exports the impact of writing centers to institutional locations like first-year writing programs or WAC/WID programming, my research challenges such exporting of writing center work to look more closely at the rhetorical activity of tutors in the center, and to further understand the affects of tutors’ rhetorical education outside of the writing center. The focus of much of writing scholarship is intended to have an impact on pedagogy invested in the teacher-student or tutor-student relationship. Consider, for example,
Muriel Harris’ oft-cited “Collaboration is Not Collaboration is Not Collaboration: Writing Center Tutorials vs. Peer-Response Groups” as emblematic of ways that tutor and teacher subjectivities are constructed in relation to students. Alternatively, when writing center scholarship moves away from tutor-training-style discourse, such scholarship has covered productive ground in labor concerns and historicizing the field (Boquet; Grimm “Rearticulating”; Lerner). Understanding relationships among tutors-teachers-students and figuring writing centers’ in their institutional contexts over time provide important knowledge about the writing education and literacy support our centers and writing classrooms offer students.

But my research shifts the important concern for student-centered learning and labor issues to understand how the writing center and the tutors who work there are overlooked as institutional agents of rhetorical education. As Harry Denny identifies in Facing the Center: Toward an Identity Politics of One-To-One Mentoring, “looking into the everyday work of one-to-one tutoring represents a local and intense pedagogy that produces not just writers and the texts that capture their words; everyday writing center practice reflects the challenges and tensions with learning that can be (and must be) taken up elsewhere in the academy” (100). By considering how tutors, as non-traditional teachers of writing, engage with and enact institutional mission within the institution and in their civic lives, my work offers an understanding of the civic and rhetorical impact that teaching writing has within and outside of the institution, particularly when undergraduate students are doing that teaching of writing as writing center tutors. Therefore, I investigate tutors’ rhetorical actions—not only with students in the center, but with other tutors and with their communities outside of the center and outside of the institution—to identify that 1) tutors are writing teachers and active rhetors who
engage with institutional mission, the very discourse that develops institutional rhetorical education, 2) tutors work within the discourse of institutional mission to uphold and maintain particular notions of identity and community, and 3) tutors revise institutional discourse, thereby revising rhetorical education.

This dissertation’s placement of writing center tutors as agents of rhetorical activity within and outside of the institution departs from writing center research in ways that refigure writing center narratives. In moving beyond the writing-center-as-safe-space metaphor, as Geller et al. suggest in my epigraph to this section, my research takes up tensions between undergraduate students and the education their institutions claim to offer them. Institutional concerns in writing center studies historically follow a narrative of marginality and financial crisis: “[writing center administrators] need to continue the dialogue between writing center professionals and [...] those who control our budgets. [...] Writing center directors still face a struggle to move out of positions of relative powerlessness” (Simpson 58). While this narrative has shaped important advocacy within and from the space of writing centers, this dissertation shifts the narrative in important ways. On the one hand, I figure tutors as prominent rhetorical actors within the writing center and outside of the institution. On the other hand, like Lerner, I view the writing center as a “site of possibility” (4), one that has implications for understanding the writing center as a research site within the institution, and one that places undergraduates at the center of understanding the role of rhetorical education and higher education, more broadly.

In placing undergraduate writing tutors’ rhetorical activity at the center of this study, I figure tutors not only as they are commonly understood, as one of many stakeholders in the
writing center, but also as institutional stakeholders who play an active rhetorical role in negotiating institutional mission. By considering the role tutors have within and beyond the institution, this dissertation adds to the work of scholars who have considered writing centers’ and tutors’ contributions to higher education more broadly, scholars like Kenneth Bruffee and, more recently, Brown, et al. in their article “Taking on TurnItIn: Tutors Advocating Change.” In disrupting the characterization that writing center theory often assigns tutors, my research shows that writing centers can, as Nancy Grimm suggests, move beyond the motto that writing centers “make better writers, not better writing,” to a topos that advertises the writing center “as a place that makes a ‘better institution’” (87). Hughes, et al. figure the important role tutors have in institutions in their article “What They Take with Them: Findings from the Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project.” In presenting their research findings based on surveying tutor alumni, Hughes, et al. conclude that “collaborative learning gives tutors a sense of themselves as active participants in higher education who can contribute to the goals of a liberal education” (39). The results of the Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project longitudinally and cross-institutionally demonstrate the dynamic influence that working as a peer has on tutors themselves, positioning “writing centers [as] more than sites of service to their institutions” (39). Like Hughes, et al., I understand writing centers as “play[ing] a transformational role in helping student tutors advance their educations” (40); this dissertation builds on their work by demonstrating specifically that student-tutors at a small, urban, all-women’s, religious-driven liberal arts college are rhetorical actors, with their own subjective positions, who then engage with and revise their college’s institutional mission beyond the institution itself.
Drawing our attention to the rhetorical activity in and around the writing center also highlights and challenges the way writing center scholarship locates the effect of writing center work in programmatic institutional spaces outside of the writing center itself. In her keynote address at the 2012 International Writing Center Association Conference, YU professor and writing center director at YU’s men’s campus Lauren Fitzgerald encourages writing center administrators to see a need to mentor undergraduate tutors’ research on writing centers. In reviewing undergraduate research in the journal Young Scholars in Writing, Fitzgerald studies 27 articles authored by undergraduate peer writing tutors to argue that peer tutoring authorizes tutors as writers and scholars. Indeed, as Fitzgerald states, “tutoring as a possible exigence is overlooked, except curiously enough, insofar as the benefits of peer writing tutoring might be exported elsewhere” (“Undergraduate Writing” 24), to such institutional locations as the writing major or first-year writing. While such “exports” of peer tutoring can certainly be positive and necessary, Fitzgerald points to the need in writing center studies to encourage the rhetorical activity of our tutors by valuing the work that tutors do through mentoring undergraduate research and publication in composition and rhetoric. My work extends Fitzgerald’s call for understanding the exigence of tutoring by pointing to tutors’ civic engagement as evidence of institutional rhetorical education outside of obvious programmatic spaces like first-year composition, WAC/WID programs, or the English major. And while service-learning institutional missions can certainly be credited for “turning a writing center into a center for civic engagement” (Wilkey and Dreese 180), I document tutors’ civic engagement inspired by an institutional mission that does not have a service-learning imperative.
Through documenting undergraduate tutors’ civic engagement within and outside of the institution, my research demonstrates that the writing center is one space where undergraduate students develop rhetorical awareness, both in practice and in theory. The writing center is an institutional space that exists “outside classes yet remain[s] intimately related to them, [offering] rich opportunities for communicating with worlds outside of the academy” (Gere, “Kitchen Tables” 1090), such as the one Gere describes in her work on extracurricular literacy practices. As a result of its curricular in-betweenness, the writing center at Stern College is a rare space within this religious institution where the secular and religious can explicitly, although not necessarily, intersect and conflict. However, this study is not interested in writing centers strictly as sites of extracurricular intellectual labor in the way that Gere’s text frames writing centers. My interest is in undergraduates tutors’ rhetorical roles of agent and audience of rhetorical education as developed by YU’s institutional mission. The following chapters read tutors’ civic engagement that is the result of tutors’ rhetorical activity within or outside of the institution, and theorizes such activity to understand how tutors revise institutional rhetorical education in their civic lives.

**Jewish Women as Rhetorical Educators & Implications for Higher Education**

Our University serves as a platform to bring Yeshiva’s collective wisdom to the world through community outreach, publications, seminars and a broad range of academic programs. (Yeshiva University, “Mission Statement”)

To fully understand the writing center as a location of rhetorical education, it is necessary to also include the larger institutional context where this specific writing center is
situated. As evidenced by the excerpt from Yeshiva University’s mission statement above, the institution makes public claims that speak to its investment in civic engagement. The institution’s commitment to “bring Yeshiva’s collective wisdom to the world through community outreach” has implications on the undergraduate women’s campus that are distinctly different than the implications for such commitment on the undergraduate men’s campus, for civic engagement in Modern Orthodox Judaism has a history that places men at the center of civic activity and woman at the center of the private sphere. So while this dissertation situates itself within the field of rhetoric and composition, rather than Jewish Studies, we must take into account how Orthodox Judaism, like the Classics, has been shaped by men’s voices. Yet understanding Stern College for Women as one location of rhetorical education, particularly within the context of a gendered religious tradition, emphasizes women’s roles as rhetorical educators within a community with a long history of commitment to civic engagement.

To frame the way YU authorizes and instructs written, verbal, and behavioral communication, consistent with the way my research defines rhetorical education, it is necessary to contextualize Orthodox Jewish education and observance to understand women’s roles within Modern Orthodoxy. In her edited collection *Judaism Since Gender*, Miriam Peskowitz characterizes the goal of the Judaic tradition as “a recording of Jewish pasts [that] has transmitted the texts and experiences of male actors and authors. [...] This narrative has no room for new information about Jewish women” (22). This patriarchal view of textual transmission in the Judaic tradition is analogous to a patriarchal perspective on Jewish education. As recently as twenty-five years ago, at the “Colloquium on Teaching Talmud to Women” in 1988, Rabbi Hershel Schachter, Distinguished Professorial Chair of Talmud (oral law)
at Yeshiva University, took the position that women should “only study those areas of halakha [Jewish law] immediately relevant to their lives,” as “the presumption of the comprehensive equality of both men and women is inherently a Christian rather than a Jewish idea” (qtd. in Bieler 20). Shachter’s position reflects that some Modern Orthodox religious leaders of the later twentieth century viewed equality between men and women as an idea that was not fundamental to Judaism. In fact, this male rabbi’s positing of what a woman should study performs patriarchy in the way Peskowitz defines.

While the position of preventing women from receiving an education that is available to men is clearly an act that marginalizes women, it is helpful to understand the religious and historical context of Schachter’s statement to further situate classical rhetorical education alongside Jewish education. Similar to the classical presentation of women’s use of “language persuasively in the private [rather than public] sphere” (Glenn, Rhetoric Retold 18), halakha too defines a woman’s realm as distinctly private. In Andrea Lieber’s study of Jewish women bloggers, she identifies:

The model of female piety envisioned by Orthodox Judaism hinges on a strict dichotomy between public and private. This theoretical distinction is pivotal to an understanding of gender roles as defined by Orthodox halakha (Jewish law). Halakha, enhanced by customs, locates women’s realm of power within the private sphere, symbolized by the home as the locus of their religious duties.

(623)

Understanding halakha’s restrictions on women’s roles as primarily bound to the home gives historical, textual, and cultural context for further understanding the source of women’s
restrictions in other religious practices, like leading public prayer or being counted as a quorum in prayer groups.

Jewish feminist scholarship further illuminates both the religious tradition of excluding women from particular forms of Jewish education, like halakha, and the need for continued scholarship on women’s rhetorical education within Orthodox Judaism. In Expanding the Palace of Torah: Orthodoxy and Feminism, Ross reads the halakhic tradition specifically to explain the explicit and implicit expression of inequality between women and men in Jewish law. Ross indicates that while the negative commandments, i.e., restrictions outlined by the Torah, apply equally to men and women (except those related to biological differences, like trimming the beard), rabbinical sources deliberate as to whether or not women must perform positive commandments in the Torah. Rabbinical sources read women as exempt from fulfilling many commandments, therefore classifying women with other marginalized groups, such as children and slaves (Ross 16). Ross goes on to say:

Of particular significance is also the fact that women are exempt (and according to the dominant traditional position, even deliberately distanced) from the central religious activity of studying Torah. [...] Although there is no ban in principle on women functioning as halakhic authorities, [women] have had no official part to play in the tradition’s legislative and interpretive process. Because of their lack of proficiency in oral law [Talmud], women have been virtually excluded from any participation in halakhic discussion and its formulations. (16)

This explains contemporary rabbinic perspectives like that of Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, who, like Rabbi Schachter, is also an appointed Chair in Talmud at Yeshiva University, and states, “I
have no objection to teaching girls Talmud. From a practical point of view it is somewhat difficult, as there is little motivation for this among girls” (qtd in Weiss 63). Considering Lichtenstein in light of Ross, Lichtenstein presumably references those commandments in Jewish law that are not expressly directed to women, further punctuating the lack of access Modern Orthodox women have to Jewish rhetorical education. The exclusion of women from textual transmission and from certain facets of education, like *halakha*, that are available to men lends itself to understanding how women in Judaism, particularly in more observant segments like Modern Orthodoxy, are analogous to the characterization of Athenian women in Classical Greek civic life. In other words, there is a remarkable parallel between the Classical notion of a rhetorical education intended for Athenian men and that of a traditional religious education in Jewish law.

Yet consistent with my project’s expanded view of rhetorical education, women’s education in Orthodox Judaism, specifically in terms of Torah learning, has expanded considerably in the past thirty years. In her chapter “An Army of Women Learning Torah,” Leah Shakdiel notes that, since the late 1980s, “religious women have pushed for new positions of religious leadership; institutions for top-level Torah learning for adult women have been established; [and] Torah scholarship by women has come out, a new phenomenon in the history of Orthodox Judaism” (160). Shakdiel’s work explores the ways Orthodox women’s learning has expanded within religious Zionism in Israel. Specifically, Shakdiel presents narratives of Israeli Modern Orthodox women who serve in the Israeli Army. Shakdiel ultimately claims that these women challenge historically restrictive gender roles in Orthodoxy in their combining of “Torah study with military service with rabbinical supervision” (Shakdiel 161).
Similar to Shakdiel’s focus on women’s religious learning, Ruti Feuchtwanger, in her article “Knowledge Versus Status: Discursive Struggle in Women Batei Midrash,” studies women who teach and study in women’s study halls—or batei midrash—devoted to Torah learning. Feuchtwanger is specifically interested in Modern Orthodox women’s lived experiences studying Torah in Israel: “women’s batei midrash aim to develop a student who has confidence in her abilities and a sense of belonging to the world Torah” (174). Together, Shakdiel’s and Feuchtwanger’s texts represent a growing interest in the communal ways some Jewish Modern Orthodox women in Israel are mobilizing for a kind of education traditionally associated with men in the Jewish Orthodox tradition.

Like Shakdiel and Feuchtwanger, my research takes up the civic role of women in Modern Orthodoxy, particularly in relationship to institutions that have not historically accommodated women, but explicitly through the lens of rhetorical education in America. P. Joy Rouse’s conception of “rhetorics of citizenship,” in her article “Margaret Fuller: A Rhetoric of Citizenship in Nineteenth-Century America,” is useful in understanding women as rhetorical educators. Rouse reads Fuller’s civic engagement as a teacher, editor, writer, and community organizer as “a rhetoric of citizenship because [Fuller] was engaged with issues of immediate concern to her local communities” (116). Fuller herself, and the women with and for whom she worked, was not officially a citizen in nineteenth-century America, yet these women were “citizens” of their own communities. Fuller’s civic work among Christian women, characterized both by white privilege and women’s marginalization, offers a way to contextualize a twenty-first century institution and the women rhetoricians whose subjectivities are both privileged and marginalized within it. As students at a private and nearly exclusively white institution of
higher education who have received private education their entire academic lives, the participants of this study are racially and economically privileged, particularly in relation to their counterparts who study at public, secular institutions. However, as women in Modern Orthodox Judaism and as undergraduate students, these same participants are religious minorities in America and gendered minorities in Judaism and in the tradition of rhetorical education. By positioning undergraduate writing tutors at YU alongside Fuller, who like the participants in this study, was “committed to providing her students with alternatives for their future” (122), this dissertation includes previously excluded women rhetors in the canon of rhetorical education.

Having interviewed participants who are all women and who share similar religious identities and communal values, the research site for this project is an institution that is vocally not multicultural, as the institution seeks to develop its undergraduate students as civic beings characterized by their commitment to a specific religious community. The undergraduate religious curriculum of YU self-selects the institution’s undergraduate student body, as only students committed to the endeavor of a dual Judaic and liberal arts curriculum—a course of

\[\text{\underline{10}}\] While I have taught students at YU’s women’s campus that attended public schools for some part of their educational lives, all ten participants in this study attended exclusively Orthodox Jewish institutions before coming to college at YU.

\[\text{\underline{11}}\] This study further moves for inclusion of the Jewish tradition in the rhetorical cannon, furthering the work of Andrea Greenbaum and Deborah Holdstein in their edited collection *Judaic Perspectives in Rhetoric and Composition*.

\[\text{\underline{12}}\] I want to emphasize that Stern College for Women, my research site, is one of two undergraduate campuses with a dual religious-secular curriculum under the larger umbrella of YU. Of YU’s nine graduate schools, five of them offer secular graduate education preparing students for professions in business, medicine, law, psychology, and social work. Although YU’s larger institutional mission (Torah Umadda) theoretically encompasses its undergraduate and graduate campuses, the secular graduate and professional schools attract Jewish and non-Jewish students alike.
study that typically involves seven to nine classes each semester—apply to the undergraduate women’s and men’s colleges. Yet this dissertation asks us to consider how a religiously and racially homogenous undergraduate institution can be defined as both multicultural and representative of the liberal arts. According to Professor Robert N. Sollod in his *Chronicle of Higher Education* article “The Hollow Curriculum,” the brand of multiculturalism that defines many North American universities is one devoid of religious consideration. In current discussions of multiculturalism, Sollod claims:

> It is hardly arguable that an educated person should approach life with knowledge of several cultures or patterns of experience. [Therefore,] implicit in a multicultural approach that ignores spiritual factors is a kind of critical and patronizing attitude. It assumes that we can understand and evaluate the experiences of other cultures without comprehension of their deepest beliefs.

In his argument against a curriculum void of religious studies, Sollod suggests that the inclusion of religious studies is a defining factor of multiculturalism. This dissertation heeds Sollod’s call and pushes for the inclusion of religious identity into a consideration of multiculturalism in higher education.

Yet understanding YU as an institution with a multicultural imperative is in tension with the institutional mission and rhetorical education developed at YU. Specifically, and unlike public and/or secular institutions of higher education in the United States, YU represents a vision of higher education that does not characterize itself in its institutional mission with terms

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13 I return to this question in the Conclusion to encourage revision of tutor training curriculum.
like “multiculturalism” or “diversity."¹⁴ YU’s undergraduate population is “exclusive” in as much as the religious boundaries that define the undergraduate curriculum are those that identify a religious minority in America. The research for this dissertation finds that undergraduate writing tutors, despite attending an institution that does not maintain multiculturalism as an imperative of its rhetorical education, enact a multicultural pedagogy within the writing center, throughout the institution, and in their civic engagement. Tutors’ pedagogy within the institution and in their civic engagement outside of YU reflects the kind of critical multicultural pedagogy that Alexander and Rhodes advocate in their article “Flattening Effects: Composition’s Multicultural Imperative and the Problem of Narrative Coherence.” Throughout the chapters that follow, my data shows that tutors’ engagement within and beyond the institution “represent[s] and contend[s] with difference, multiplicity, [and the] unknowability” (Alexander and Rhodes 449) of a multitude of categories of identity. Tutors’ enactment of a multicultural pedagogy is an extension of their disidentification with institutional rhetorical education that may not necessarily exist at YU’s public, secular counterparts.¹⁵ In other words, my research reveals that it is the very specificity, the seeming homogeneity, of the religious and secular institutional mission that encourages both rhetorical education and multiculturalism.

¹⁴ In their article “Mission Statements: A Thematic Analysis Across Institutional Types,” a reading of institutional mission statements in higher education, Morpew and Hartley note that “the notion that an institution is committed to diversity [appears] frequently across institutional types and control groups” (462).
¹⁵ Chapter Two looks at YU’s institutional mission alongside institutional missions of Catholic institutions of higher education and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to understand how specialized missions define rhetorical education through their commitment to developing civically engaged students.
The Study: Design Rationale, Research Methods, & Anxieties

As an administrator in this writing center at YU, I am a participant-observer in this ethnographic study of writing center tutors’ rhetorical activity inside and outside of the institution; yet as a Christian with a distinctly different educational narrative than the tutors who work in the center, I am an outsider to this Jewish Orthodox community. Unlike the undergraduate tutors who participated in this study, I was educated in public schools in a region of Central California that, at the time, was neither totally rural nor completely suburban. The public schools I attended were always co-educational, and I was the first in my family to attend a four-year college and earn a bachelor’s degree (also from a public university), let alone advanced degrees beyond the BA. While I did have a kind of religious education during Sunday school at the local Greek Orthodox Christian church to which my family belonged, and while much of my cultural identity was defined by belonging to that church community, my experience in a Greek Orthodox Christian community gave me more of a cultural identity than a religious one. Through the church, I belonged to youth groups, went to a Greek-language after-school program, practiced Greek folk dances, and was acculturated with religio-cultural practices, not necessarily in terms of how those practices were connected to sacred texts but in terms of how those practices were shaped by tradition. In short, I always considered myself Greek-American, not necessarily Christian-American.

I share the above to punctuate not just how I am different than the women who participated in my study, but also to say something about my lens as a researcher and human who lives in the world. Based on my experiences, I see the community of Modern Orthodox Jewish women who invited me to their civic events and allowed me to talk to them about those
events, their education, and their work in the writing center as women who had very different educational experiences than I had. All of the women that I feature in this study had exclusively private school educations in urban areas, often (but not always) exclusively single-sex. All of their parents had been to four-year colleges, and many of their parents have advanced degrees. So while in many ways, I can characterize the participants in my study as privileged, it is our religious differences that complicate that privilege.

In fact, I think it is how we—the participants in this study and myself—identify ourselves in opposition to privilege that undergirds this project. As women, we have all, at different times in our lives, defined ourselves in opposition to men; for participants, this gendered position is inherent to Judaism, a characterization Jewish Orthodox women are well aware of from the beginning of their education. For me, rather, it has been something I’ve felt towards the end of my formal education, in graduate school, in my career as an academic, and have become more aware of as a woman married to a man and as a mother of a daughter. Further, the participants in this study, and working at YU in general, have taught me about diversity and minority positions in ways that I never heard or understood in my years attending public schools and working in public institutions. The experience of working in a religious, gendered, and culturally defined space—a space that appears more or less homogenous—demands rhetorical listening; differences that I somehow overlooked or were likely silenced elsewhere (perhaps as a result of the “hollow” notion of multiculturalism which Sollod identifies) became heightened at this very culturally specific institution in ways that required me, as a researcher-educator-person, to hear.

To document both my hearing of my data and tutors’ rhetorical listening to the institutional mission (which is itself, the data), I situate this project within qualitative writing
center research methods. I use the word *data* to mean the many forms of information that I read and from which I made meaning for this study, including institutional documents (both electronic content and hard copy), my personal interviews with tutors, conservations between tutors, tutors’ writing, and my own observations within the institution and at public events in the form of fieldnotes.¹⁶ My study uses both conceptual and empirical research methods, as defined by Liggett et al. in “Mapping Knowledge-Making in Writing Center Research: A Taxonomy of Methodologies.” On the one hand, the conceptual framework of my research involves theoretical inquiry, as I draw on theories of rhetorical education, identity construction in writing centers, and institutional mission in higher education to make sense of my local institution and writing center. On the other hand, the empirical basis of this dissertation involves descriptive inquiry of my local context, where I examine the culture, behavior, artifacts and events in and around one writing center. While this study focuses on a limited number of tutors, as case studies would, the multi-layered nature of my inquiry and the study’s extension to rhetorical education within the institution lend themselves to classifying this project as an ethnography, as “ethnographic inquiry attends to the whole environment with researchers observing, participating in, and interpreting data from multiple sources” (Liggett et al. 70). This study does not aim in scope to something like Shirley Brice Heath’s landmark ethnography of education and literacy in the towns of Trackton and Roadville. But like Heath’s *Ways With Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms*, my ethnography indeed attends to a local context: in the case of my research, one writing center at a particular

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¹⁶ I obtained written consent prior to participation in this study and verbal consent during interviews to use any written documents I collected or conversations and events I referenced in conversations with participants.
institution. Like Sondra Perl and Nancy Wilson’s seminal ethnography of writing teachers in the Shoreham-Wading River Central School District Through Teachers’ Eyes: Portraits of Writing Teachers at Work, I too am invested in capturing the picture of an educational organization, not of one writing teacher or her classroom. Similar to Perl and Wilson’s interest in the lived-experiences of writing teachers, I turn to experiences of novice writing teachers (e.g. tutors), who are also students at my research site. Yet unlike Perl and Wilson’s interest in the composing process, my focus on writing teachers presents an understanding of the institution’s cultural reach in the civic lives of undergraduate writing tutors, and the recursive affect tutors have on the institution.

In addition to ethnographic fieldwork, I take a “theory-driven” approach to interviewing (Pawson), having framed for tutors my definition of rhetorical education within the interview questions themselves (see Appendix A). The goal of framing my interviews through this theoretical lens, as sociologist Ray Pawson indicates in his article “Theorizing the Interview,” is “to involve the respondent in a closer articulation and clarification of these theories” (311). I should note, however, that the discussion points and questions reflected in Appendix A reveal that, in designing my interviews at the onset of this project, I thought part of my project involved studying religious literacy. As the project progressed, I limited my focus to study rhetorical activity and rhetorical education. But through this re-conceptualizing, I also came to a fuller understanding of how I was defining the actual theories that inform this study, theories of rhetorical education, institutional mission, and writing center work.

My initial outreach to potential participants was through a recruitment email that went out to individuals who worked as undergraduate tutors in the Beren Writing Center during the
Fall 2011, Spring 2012, and Fall 2012 semesters. The reason for identifying these semesters in particular was to help maintain the confidentiality of all participants by selecting the semester when I began observing patterns in tutors’ rhetorical actions while ending with a semester that would ensure all participants would have graduated from the college by the time the data was written up in Spring 2013. I sent a recruitment email\textsuperscript{17} to fifteen individuals who were either currently working in the writing center or recent graduates, and based on responses to that email, conducted eleven interviews with ten participants. (I ended up scheduling two interviews with one participant, Tara, because the richness of her responses necessitated more time than we had in one meeting.)

Of the ten participants I interviewed, this study features narratives from four of them: Charlotte, Edith, Shulamit, and Tara (all participants chose their own pseudonyms). While all participants had rich and valuable stories to tell, I realized in transcribing the data that my research questions involved not only my own witnessing of the importance of institutional mission in the lives of tutors but their awareness of that importance as well. As I listened to the digital recordings, transcribed the data, and determined coding units while reading my transcripts, three categories emerged that led to my selection of data (and ultimately my selection of participants) that are featured in this dissertation: tutors who connected institutional mission to their verbal communication in the writing center, tutors who connected institutional mission to their verbal communication outside the writing center, and tutors who connected institutional mission to their written communication.

\textsuperscript{17}See Appendix A for the recruitment email and interview questions.
While I wholly agree with Keith Grant-Davie’s assertion that “coding is interpretive, and no interpretation can be considered absolutely correct or valid” (281), I also want to emphasize the distinction Grant-Davie makes between coding for syntactic units and episodic units. Also advocated by H.L. Goodall, Jr. in his text *Writing the New Ethnography*, Grant-Davie describes the episodic unit as varying “in length from a single word to half a page or more, lasting for as long as the [participant] continues to make the same kind of comment” (276). This way of treating “division and classification” (Grant-Davie 276) of data worked particularly well in my analysis in that participants spoke individually and at length about, for example, their engagement with institutional mission in the writing center, or alternatively, engagement outside of the writing center. Furthermore, I was able to transfer the episodic units I had determined in reading transcripts of participants’ interviews to my reading of fieldnotes and participant-authored artifacts, such as articles for the student newspaper. Still, I aspire to assert my identity as a coder as Rebecca Moore Howard does in a recent Forum in *Research in the Teaching of English*, where she states, “Preexisting theory can be used to drive the coding, but the coding is an important intervention between theory and interpretation” (80). Alas, in this, a dissertation that represents my first foray as a coder, I often felt ill at ease, wondering if I allowed theories to dictate my coding practices and my interpretation, or if, as Howard indicates, I found “theory emerging from the coding” (80). I end this project without resolving that discomfort.

I learned after having gone through the interview data that I was also interested in tutors’ actions or interpretation of institutional mission involved both maintaining that mission and resisting (and ultimately revising) it, identifying with the mission while concurrently
disidentifying with it. It was therefore relevant that the tutors’ narratives featured here reveal a strong identification with Jewish Modern Orthodoxy—as implicitly set out by the institutional mission (see Chapter Two)—as a function of the institution’s perpetuation of rhetorical education, and reveal a tension with the mission or with Modern Orthodoxy that seeks to revise the mission or communal religious practices as a way of revising rhetorical education.

Beyond tutors’ interviews, fieldwork for this study involved three spaces that further shape the way I theorize rhetorical education and institutional mission functioning at this institution: the writing center, specifically, conversations during staff meetings since this study reads tutor-to-tutor interactions, as opposed to tutor-to-student interactions; virtual institutional spaces, specifically, the parts of the institutional website that define the institutional mission to its public; and public spaces that are religiously affiliated with the institution but that exist beyond “official” institutional reach (in that administrators representing the institution do NOT create such spaces), spaces like the student newspaper, prayer groups, and Jewish Modern Orthodox organizations not affiliated with YU. As we will see in upcoming chapters, such spaces are relevant for identifying how this study conceives of the terms public, civic, and communal in tutors’ lives.

Considering that I analyzed two sets of data—interviews and fieldwork—for each participant in this study, it might seem like an obvious choice to situate the narratives of the four participants as case studies. After all, Beverly J. Moss’s A Community Text Arises: A Literate Text and a Literacy Tradition in African-American Churches and Katherine Kelleher Sohn’s Whistlin’ and Crowin’ Women of Appalachia: Literacy Practices since College are two ethnographies employing, at least in part, case study presentations of data that have been
formative in many ways to the design and presentation of my own research. Yet, I’ve made a deliberate choice to side-step case studies here, as I could not easily isolate each participant’s experiences into one individual story. Rather, as categories of my data emerged, this study revealed how the institution informs students’ (and in this case, undergraduate writing tutors’) rhetorical education, instead of offering an individualistic experience of rhetorical education for each of the four participants. For this reason, I have chosen to present my data not according to individual participants’ experiences, but according to how rhetorical education is functioning within institutional spaces and outside of institutional spaces. Indeed each of the participants in this research offer a unique lens through which to view the institution and civic engagement, and their narratives overlap in ways that lend to a richer reading of rhetorical education than case studies would present.

Conclusion

As individuals who are quite literally a part of the curriculum as students, and individuals who are also outside of that curriculum in that they provide labor as young teachers at YU, undergraduate tutors are positioned particularly well to speak the varied ways how institutional mission circulates in students’ lives. As we will see in Chapter Two, undergraduate tutors, as one audience of their institution’s mission, draw from their own experiences navigating institutional mission to define how that mission affects their lives. Chapter Three explores how tutors constitute publics through their tutoring, their interactions with other tutors, and in their communication across the institution. Through their acts that constitute various publics, tutors disidentify with YU’s rhetorical education, thereby authorizing alternatives to the rhetorical
education disseminated by the institution. Chapter Four punctuates how tutors’ rhetorical activity through disidentification with the institution serves as a dress rehearsal for tutors’ civic lives.

While part of this dissertation reads one institution with an eye towards the way it discursively defines boundaries that develop students’ behavior, language, and lives, this dissertation considers these boundaries for the potential that they open up for students, specifically for undergraduate writing tutors at Yeshiva University’s all-women’s college, Stern College for Women. This study documents the rhetorical acts of undergraduate writing tutors who create spaces for public negotiation and revision of institutional rhetorical education. I also document examples of female writing tutors whose civic engagement performs a multicultural pedagogy, one that urges writing center administrators, and writing program administrators more broadly, to consider the role of rhetorical education and a multicultural curriculum in staff development for writing center tutors and all teachers of writing. How can writing program administrators encourage revisionary acts, ranging from interactions with students, to assignments, to designing curriculum? How can we mentor the civic concerns of our tutors and staff members that will lead to productive civic engagement? How can we enact and facilitate the civic and multicultural pedagogies that our tutors and teachers perform in every aspect of their work? While this study may not offer answers to these questions, my role as a writing center researcher has positioned me to formulate them. Researching a writing center, a space whose very placement within the institution intellectually between curricula and disciplines, positions those who work there, particularly the undergraduate women who tutor in the center,
as independent rhetorical actors invested in institutional rhetorical education and civic engagement.
Chapter Two

Reading Yeshiva: Understanding Institutional Mission in Undergraduate Writing Tutors’ Lives

I believe that what Torah Umadda means is that every individual has a [...] responsibility within the Jewish community, and then a larger [...] responsibility to the world as a whole. [...] It’s really, really important for people to be active members of their community, invested in the continuity and progression of the Jewish community, ensuring that it continues to be a meaningful, authentic experience.

—“Shulamit,” Beren Writing Center Tutor, interviewed Feb 22, 2013

In the previous chapter, I historicized rhetorical education, beginning with its roots in the Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition and leading to how rhetorical education is represented in the current field of Composition and Rhetoric. This current chapter builds upon my presentation of rhetorical education to theorize how institutional mission functions in establishing rhetorical education. I further connect rhetorical education to institutional mission to specifically investigate the relationship between the institution and writing center tutors’ lives.

To define how rhetorical education is connected to institutional mission, I first look at how institutional mission has been taken up in the field of rhetoric and composition as related to writing program administration. In the second section here, I argue that the institutional mission of Stern College for Women of Yeshiva University (YU), authorizes and instructs written,
verbal, and behavioral communication, with the specific goal of preparing students as participants for public life. As an institution with a religious-driven mission, YU’s mission puts forth specific language to understand how the institution authorizes communication and civic engagement for its students. This work situates YU’s institutional mission within the context of other mission-driven institutions of higher education, like Catholic colleges and Historically Black College and Universities (HBCUs). Finally, this chapter turns to fieldwork with undergraduate writing center tutors at YU’s Stern College for Women’s campus to understand the effects of institutional rhetorical education on tutors’ lives.

Institutional Mission in Composition and Rhetoric

Composition and rhetoric scholars have noted the benefits of using institutional mission in development of college writing programs. In their chapter “What is Institutional Mission?” Elizabeth Vander Lei and Melody Pugh encourage writing program administrators (WPAs) to participate in discussions and negotiations about institutional mission. Vander Lei and Pugh claim that writing programs can benefit from considering institutional mission in writing program administration by developing “a rich understanding of the institution’s ongoing purpose, and [WPAs] find opportunity to better align the mission statement of the institution and the mission of [the] writing program” (108). In their presentation of the challenges involved in aligning writing programs with institutional mission, Vander Lei and Pugh call institutional mission “a constantly moving target” (106), institutional discourse that is always changing based on the demands and pressures of various stakeholders, “people who are already invested in the long-term success of the institution and [...] those considering such investment, such as
prospective students, parents, donors, and faculty members” (107). Vander Lei and Pugh punctuate how mission not only defines the purpose of an institution, but also attempts to publicly address the expectations of institutional stakeholders. This awareness of the discursive and rhetorical nature of institutional mission demonstrates the necessity of defining institutional audiences, since it is these audiences that potentially have the authority to affect institutional mission. Further, if institutional programs, like writing centers or first-year writing, are invested in aligning their programs with institutional mission, students-as-audience of institutional mission are a particularly relevant public.

As Lauren Fitzgerald and I encourage in our chapter “Negotiating Institutional Missions: Writing Center Tutors as Rhetorical Actors,” WPAs, and indeed institutions, should listen to students as stakeholders in our institutions and writing programs. In particular, this dissertation extends the work of composition and rhetoric scholars on institutional mission by connecting institutional mission to establishing students’ rhetorical education. In her essay “‘Torah Is Not Learned But in a Group’: Collaborative Learning and Talmud Study,” Fitzgerald, a faculty member at YU and the writing center director at YU’s undergraduate men’s campus, takes up the oppositional nature of this religious and secular institutional mission, one she calls an “institutionalized (false) binary” (“Torah U’Madda” 143). Fitzgerald historicizes the contentious history at YU between Torah and Madda to theorize how students bring religion into their roles as tutors in the writing center and students in the composition classroom. Fitzgerald’s essay contributes to our understanding of how a religious and secular institutional mission shapes tutor-student and professor-student relationships; this dissertation extends Fitzgerald’s work on institutional mission to document undergraduate students’, specifically women writing
center tutors’, rhetorical acts, not in terms of the students they support, but in terms of their community of fellow tutors and in tutors’ civic lives.

**A Rhetorical Analysis of One Institutional Mission**

Yeshiva University (YU)—and by extension, Stern College for Women and the other schools and colleges that fall under YU’s umbrella—aims to publicly define itself through its institutional Mission Statement available on its website, as many institutions do (Abelman; Firmin and Gilsen; Morphew and Hartley). Yet YU’s mission serves to also define the exact public that the institution is addressing. Participants in this study defined the foundational concept of YU’s institutional mission, “Torah UMadda,” as “Bible and Science,” yet this translation of the Hebrew phrase is not present on the institutional website. Instead of a translation, YU offers a broad iteration of Torah Umadda in its mission statement: “our mission, Torah UMadda, is to bring wisdom to life through all that we teach, by all that we do and for all those we serve” (Yeshiva, “Mission”). In the mission’s grammatical presentation of Torah Umadda, it is not the institution that delivers something, or “brings wisdom to life”; rather, it is Torah Umadda itself, the Hebrew term, that actively frames what the institution delivers in three categories: teaching, action, and service. As a framework for any one category, it is not obvious what either Torah Umadda or “bringing wisdom to life” means, particularly to an individual who is an outsider to the discourse of Modern Orthodox Judaism and YU.

The use of Torah Umadda in the institutional mission, and the lack of language to define it, signals its relevance to a particular discourse community and lack of relevance outside of
that community. As James Paul Gee writes in “Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics: An
Introduction”:

Discourses are ways of being in the world; they are forms of life which integrate
words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes and social identities as well as gestures,
glances, body positions, and clothes.

A Discourse is a sort of “identity kit” which comes complete with the
appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as
to take on a particular role that others will recognize. (6-7)

Gee’s theory of Discourse identifies the multiple locations that characterize discourse
communities, many of which—like dress, prayer ritual, and language patterns—are particularly
visible at a religious-driven institution like YU. Gee’s terms also imply that these various social
locations, which function to communicate messages within a discourse community, must be
addressed to a specific audience or public that has access to such communication with
recognizable messages. Torah Umadda is a phrase that serves to establish boundaries between
those who are a part of YU’s discourse community and those who are not. Central to Modern
Jewish Orthodoxy, and even more specifically to YU, the phrase Torah Umadda circulates freely
and often at YU, as participants in this study credited prominent leaders within the institution
as having popularized the phrase.¹⁸ The presentation of Torah Umadda in the institutional

¹⁸ Participants in this study refer often and with deference to Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik,
“Distinguished Professor of Talmud and Jewish Philosophy for over 40 years” (Yeshiva, “Rabbi”),
and some participants directly cited his work Lonely Man of Faith as formative in their
understanding of Torah Umadda. Further institutional sources on Torah Umadda have been
written by Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, president of YU from 1976-2003, who calls his work Torah
Umadda “the beginning of an articulation of Torah Umadda in a systematic fashion at Yeshiva
University.”
mission suggests that this Hebrew phrase does not need translation for those who are a part of YU’s discourse community, identifying a collective audience and excluding those who do not have the linguistic referent, religious background, or experience with the institution to understand the Hebrew term foundational to the mission. This is consistent with bonnie lenore kyburz’s definition of institutional audience as context for institutional discourse around religion (138).

Understanding its relationship with institutional audiences, the phrase Torah Umadda in YU’s institutional mission serves to discursively establish rhetorical education. In its first subsection “For Undergraduate Students,” the institutional mission attempts to provide a concrete example of Torah Umadda as it applies to undergraduates. “We bring wisdom to life by combining the finest contemporary academic education with the timeless teachings of Torah. It is Yeshiva’s unique dual curriculum that teaches knowledge enlightened by values that helps our students gain the wisdom to make their lives both a secular and spiritual success” (Yeshiva, “Mission,” my emphasis). I’ve noted in my emphases the parallel structure that the mission creates with terms that define its dual curriculum: academic education and teachings of Torah; knowledge and values; and secular and spiritual. I identify the first set of terms in each pair—academic education, knowledge, and secular—as signifying the liberal arts focus of the curriculum, while the second set of terms—teachings of Torah, values, and spiritual—signify the Judaic core curriculum. On the one hand, these terms suggest that the institution values both the secular and the religious in its curriculum; in fact, the way the institutional mission prioritizes terms with secular signification before religious terms could even convey that religious studies are secondary to secular studies. On the other hand, the use of the Hebrew
Torah Umadda complicates this prioritization. As an unfamiliar term in American secular education, the very use of this Hebrew phrase, without an accompanying translation in the institutional mission and as a framework for the curriculum, puts forth a particular rhetorical education characterized strongly by Torah and a Jewish Modern Orthodox understanding of how religion and secularism come together. Further, the repetition of “bringing wisdom to life” in the two moments I’ve read here are used to modify Torah Umadda; Torah Umadda and “bringing wisdom to life” have somewhat synonymous significations throughout the mission statement. Some version of the phrase “bringing wisdom” is presented seven times throughout the mission statement, and although abstract in ways similar to Torah Umadda, the presumption on the part of the institution is that its audience—Modern Orthodox Jews or members of a discourse community familiar with Modern Orthodox Judaism—have access to a constellation of meanings for how Torah UMadda “brings wisdom to life” through a dual curriculum. Combining the un-translated Hebrew term Torah Umadda and the ostensibly secular phrase “bringing wisdom,” Yeshiva University’s institutional mission carefully uses language to authorize communication around Torah Umadda, and, thus, to forward religious rhetorical education. While institutional missions by and large make general statements about institutional philosophy, ideology, and education (Firmin and Gilson; Morphew and Hartley), my research connects institutional mission to rhetorical education to demonstrate that

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19 I want to be clear that I’m not putting forth my own definition of Torah Umadda or YU’s institutional mission; rather, the rest of this dissertation shows how a slice of the undergraduate student population, namely women writing center tutors, define institutional mission and Torah Umadda in relationship to their lived experiences at this institution, and in relationship to their civic lives beyond the institution.
undergraduate tutors participate in rhetorical education alongside and against institutional mission.

**Institutional Mission as Establishing Rhetorical Education**

Since we could potentially identify any mission-driven institution, particularly those with religious underpinnings, as forwarding rhetorical education, it is important to take stock of the distinctions between Jewish institutions of higher education in the United States and their non-Jewish counterparts. Doing so adds to the relatively little research that exists which treats American Jewish institutions of higher education, and also how YU’s institutional mission, and its concept of Torah Umadda, respond to the historical exclusion of Jews from secular institutions in America. Seemingly analogous to the Jewish tradition of Yeshiva University, the history of Jesuit education in this country “is rooted in a liberal arts curriculum coupled with spiritual development” (Feldner 69) grounded in Catholic Christian observance. This pairing of the liberal arts and spirituality is not unlike the religious and secular signification of Torah Umadda at Yeshiva University. In fact, Jesuit institutions of higher education likewise frame their missions in religiously specific terms; for example, a Jesuit institution like Loyola University Maryland articulates its social justice mission, historically in line with Jesuit founders Society of Jesus, in the Latin term *cura personalis*, “education of the whole person” (Loyola).

Yet despite both relying on religiously specific language, there is generalness to *cura personalis*—a gesture to spiritual development, not necessarily religious learning—that does not exist for Torah Umadda. Specifically, the word *Torah* is Hebrew for bible and more generally signifies the learning of sacred Jewish texts. The Torah then is not simply a sacred text to study
(which is no simple matter at all), but representative of Jewish identity more broadly. In his work *Orthodox Jews in America*, Jeffrey Gurock documents how immigrant Jews, particularly in New York City after the nineteenth-century onset of non-sectarian education, worked to resist assimilation through the establishment of religious schools. Additionally, in *How Jews Became White Folks*, Karen Brodkin identifies how post-World War II Jewish enrollment in American colleges increased, both with the creation of the GI bill and within a “broader prospective on institutional whiteness” (41). Jews, along with other working poor immigrants prior to World War II, “were all held back until they were granted—willingly or unwillingly—the institutional privilege of socially sanctioned whiteness” (Brodkin 41). So as one strand of the American Jewish community moved towards inclusion in education, another strand, identifying as Modern Orthodox, made efforts counter to this perceived assimilation, as in the case with the development of YU as a Jewish Modern Orthodox American College. Considering a twenty-first century Jewish institutional mission in the context of historical exclusion from dominant institutional culture, YU’s mission (and Torah Umadda) does more than simply indicate that students undertake a dual Judaic and liberal arts curriculum at YU. YU’s institutional mission functions to develop rhetorical education in the way it authorizes communication within two categories—Torah and madda, the religious and the secular—with the specific goal of preparing students as participants for public life. In this way, public life for which YU prepares its students is one that the institution envisions as committed to strengthening Jewish Modern Orthodoxy in America, and perhaps Jewish American identity more broadly. In the case of YU, rhetorical education works as a response to assimilation, an effort to develop a community of civic beings committed to cultural and religious preservation.
YU’s commitment to strengthening Jewish identity is a distinctly different move than that which some Christian Catholic colleges make. For example, according to Beth McMurtie writing for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, many Catholic colleges “are defining themselves in ways that focus not on traditional measures of Catholicity, such as the number of theology classes they offer or daily mass attendance. Instead, they are connecting their religious missions to topics of broad interest, like developing a meaningful philosophy of life or pursuing social justice.” In McMurtie’s article, Catholic institutions look outward to make their religious missions, their “Catholicity,” readable to members outside of the discourse community of Catholicism and easily generalizable beyond religious identity. However, at YU, institutional mission functions in the opposite way. Torah Umadda defines boundaries of institutional discourse and subsequently defines certain terms of communal identity. Unlike the flexibility that some Catholic missions of higher education imply, the value of communal religious identity is a core of the institutional mission of YU. YU’s commitment to cultivating students’ civic engagement within the Jewish community illustrates one difference between Judaism—which does not seek to bring non-Jews into the religious fold—and Catholicism—which does.

While institutional missions at some Catholic institutions of higher education in the United States do not define religious identity for their students, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the United States, which like YU, developed as a result of historical and cultural exclusion from the dominant culture, share parallel emphases with YU, in that these institutions explicitly address development of strong communal identity and commitment to civic life. In “Classics and Counterpublics in Nineteenth-Century Historically Black Colleges,” Susan C. Jarratt presents archival research of three HBCUs shortly after their inception in post-
Civil War America. Jarrett presents students’ voices to articulate how these universities served a role in developing “personhood” for students who lacked a historical place in American citizenry: “In the words of Atlanta University student O. A. Clark, the nation faced the task of ‘the freeing of those who had once been slaves, the reception of them into citizenship, [and] the attempt to adjust the relations of those who served and those who were served’” (135). Jarrett emphasizes students’ testimonies in her research to demonstrate that a traditional rhetorical education, involving:

- reading and translating text from ancient Greece and Rome ... contributed a sense of enfranchisement for several generations of young writers and new citizens who, despite the flourishing of a black rhetorical culture in national and religious spheres, were after reconstruction barred from decision making in southern legislatures and courts, and from white public discourse more generally.

(140)

Jarrett presents the value within the dominant white public of a traditional, secular rhetorical education for black students in the nineteenth century; according to Jarrett, such education served to authorize black students as they entered domains of white culture, while the religious sphere of students’ lives were formative for black communal identity.

Jarrett demonstrates that HBCU’s have complex categories of stakeholders to whom they are accountable, parallel to my reading of YU’s institutional stakeholders. In terms of institutional mission, Vander Lei and Pugh confirm:

- Colleges with specialized constituencies, such as historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-serving institutions, tribal colleges, women’s
colleges, and religious colleges, are all accountable to both internal and external constituencies in ways that differ significantly from the accountability patterns of public colleges and universities. (109)

In its effort to affirm and strengthen a non-majority identity—namely, Modern Orthodox Jewish womanhood—through its Judaic curriculum, while integrating a traditional liberal arts curriculum, YU’s Stern College for Women, like HBCUs and other specialized institutions, has a complex constellation of stakeholders that serve as audience to institutional mission. YU’s mission founded upon Torah Umadda, a term relatively unreadable to an audience that is not affiliated with Modern Jewish Orthodoxy, is the public face of the institution. My research with undergraduate writing tutors in and around the writing center demonstrates that Torah Umadda’s constellation of unspoken and unwritten, yet communally understood, codes of communication (written, oral, and behavioral) clearly deliver their rhetorical message to students, prime stakeholders within the institution. Many of YU’s Modern-Orthodox Jewish students have lived lives that involve implicitly, if not explicitly, negotiating Torah Umadda as part of their day-to-day experiences. The undergraduate dual-curriculum then is designed to provide a constant way to buttress students’ religious education at an American liberal arts institution, while furthering observant students’ understanding of the institutional mission. Institutional mission is a discursive extension of a specific community, a subculture identified both by religious affiliation and by the community’s status as undergraduate women. My research with undergraduate women tutors in the writing center further names how institutional mission affects, appears in, and is translated in students’ educational lives.
Writing Center Tutors Reading Institutional Mission

My reading of Torah Umadda and YU’s institutional mission demonstrates that institutional mission functions to develop rhetorical education, one with which students identify and disidentify. As a discursive extension of a community, the mission intends to authorize particular kinds of communication for students receiving an education at YU. Additionally consistent with my definition of rhetorical education, the institution’s authorization of communication through its use of the term Torah Umadda in the mission statement extends into students’ public lives, in that Torah Umadda is readable beyond the institution’s curriculum and into the religious communities that exist outside of the institution. Undergraduate writing center tutors are particularly involved in institutional rhetorical education in ways that differ from their non-tutor counterparts. Tutors, through their one-to-one support of student writers and their reflection on that work with writing center administrators and other tutors, have access to diverse representations of institutional rhetorical education in their roles as tutors.

In this section, I highlight the narrative of two tutor-participants, Shulamit and Edith, and fieldwork around an event that Shulamit organized to show that Torah Umadda, as part of students’ rhetorical education, has material implications in students’ lives. To begin to understand how YU authorizes written, oral, and behavioral communication, I asked participants simply to tell me what Torah Umadda means to them. The data I present here

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20 Chapter Three offers data from one-to-one tutoring sessions and writing center staff meetings to demonstrate the rhetorical activity that occurs in these instances.
21 As I indicate in Chapter One, all participants selected pseudonyms for themselves.
reflects how undergraduate writing tutors understand Torah Umadda as formative in their education and as informing personal choices that have rhetorical, public consequences.

At the time of our interview, Shulamit had graduated only three months earlier and was pursuing a Master’s Degree in Bible at YU’s Bernard Revel’s Graduate School of Jewish Studies. Shulamit is the daughter of Eastern European immigrants, one an engineer, the other a lawyer. Two years before our interview, relatively early in her undergraduate tutoring career, Shulamit founded the Torah Umadda Club (unbeknownst to me at the time that I recruited Shulamit as a research participant). Shulamit, in founding the Torah Umadda Club, was interested in asking one of the same questions that I took up in my research: what does “Torah Umadda mean at YU?” Or to frame the question in my own terms: how do stakeholders at YU understand Torah Umadda? Shulamit and her fellow Torah Umadda club members organized a three-part panel discussion that invited YU’s religious leaders, administrators, and student leaders to exchange definitions, philosophies, and challenges of Torah Umadda. In an interview she gave with the school newspaper staff, Shulamit indicated her purpose for spearheading the club and this event:

I have heard people conjecture about the term Torah Umadda, often coming to different conclusions regarding its nature. [...] I wanted to provide a range of different speakers, each involved in varying aspects of the Jewish community to address concerns many students have raised about Torah Umadda’s relationship to Yeshiva University, and to the Modern Orthodox community as whole.

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22 While the article that quotes Shulamit is available online, I do not cite it here in an effort to protect participant confidentiality.
An impressive undertaking in its organization and civic engagement, Shulamit’s public inquiry into the meaning of YU’s institutional mission problematizes the very brief explanation the mission offers of the term Torah Umadda. As excerpted in the epigraph to this chapter, YU as an institution reflects “the time-honored tradition of Torah Umadda, [providing] the highest quality Jewish and secular education of any Jewish university in the world.” Yet, Shulamit’s multi-vocal panel, composed of religious, administrative, and student voices, reflects that the scope of Torah Umadda extends far beyond the institution’s dual curriculum. In fact, in organizing the event, Shulamit performs her own sort of institutional ethnography, attempting to better understand the implications of the institutional mission where she was receiving an undergraduate education, as if to imply that she was not satisfied with the available information about YU’s institutional mission.

Shulamit’s completely self-sponsored rhetorical activity “mark[s] a space of engagement between students/educators and communities” (Alexander and Jarrett 527). Like the students Alexander and Jarrett interviewed for their article “Rhetorical Education and Student Activism,” Shulamit may be poised towards activism “by virtue of [her] (trans)national experiences and religion” (541). Additionally consistent with Alexander and Jarrett’s claims, Shulamit does not attribute her activism—or what I identify as her rhetorical activity—to classroom instruction in community literacy or traditional rhetoric. As a writing center administrator, I understand Shulamit’s experience as a writing tutor as preparation for, and rehearsal of, her rhetorical
activity. Writing center work, sitting one-to-one with other writers, involves publicly negotiating incomplete or contested messages circulating in the institution.23

Shulamit’s rhetorical activity involving YU’s institutional mission demonstrates that rhetorical education happens in what I call “unscripted” ways; in other words, despite there being no mention of a rhetorical curriculum in the institutional mission or in the first-year writing program, rhetorical education is an effect of other institutional and curricular forces. The writing center is relevant in undergraduate student-tutors’ participation in their institution’s rhetorical education for the various rhetorical experiences the writing center offers tutors. The writing center offers a rare space in this religious affiliated institution that is neither ostensibly secular nor religious, neither wholly curricular nor extracurricular. As Julie Bokser identifies in “Pedagogies of Belonging: Listening to Students and Peers,” tutors “understand the paradoxical ways in which writing and academic literacy more generally are instruments of belonging that can constrain as well as liberate” (43). Through Yeshiva University’s development of rhetorical education specifically, part of undergraduate students’ academic literacy involves understanding and negotiating the role of institutional mission and the intersection of Torah (Bible) and madda (the world) in their daily lives. Therefore, undergraduates who work as tutors in the writing center are uniquely positioned to witness, participate in, and understand the way rhetorical education functions within the institution as a specific result of institutional mission, or Torah Umadda.

In addition to navigating the rhetorical education established by YU’s institutional mission, tutors revise institutional rhetorical education in their performance of alternatives to

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23 Chapter Three reads data from fieldwork in the writing center and tutors’ narratives of their writing center sessions to theorize tutoring sessions as “public” rhetorical activity.
institutionally authorized codes of communication. When I asked Shulamit what Torah Umadda means to her, she said that she believes “Torah Umadda means that every individual has a dual responsibility within the Jewish community.” When I asked Shulamit to clarify this dual responsibility, what began as a definition of Torah Umadda shifted to a presentation of a conflict. She offered a metaphor for a concept of God that she once had, describing God as “a man up in heaven with a scoreboard. For every good deed you get a point, for every bad deed you get a minus. And as much as I have eradicated that from my being, every day that I walk around in pants I’m just like, ‘pssht, [God’s] just a little bit pissed today’” (my emphasis). In answering my question about what Torah Umadda means to her, Shulamit highlights what scholar Tamar Ross corroborates, namely that dress is a common practice defined for observant Jewish Modern Orthodox women, and that there is a “prevailing emphasis in Orthodox circles against women wearing pants” (Ross 260). On the one hand, Shulamit voices how closely her religious views are bound with her identity and her way of seeing herself in the world. On the other hand, Shulamit presents a way in which she deviates from a dominant practice in Orthodox Judaism: wearing pants instead of a skirt. While this practice in Modern Jewish Orthodoxy is drawn from interpretation of sacred texts and rabbinical commentary,24 this dress code is practiced as an extension of religious identity and reaffirmed institutionally in a memo to faculty and students each semester, indicating that “women [students] must wear skirts and sleeves of appropriate length in all campus buildings.” Like the archival institutional documents Jessica Enoch reads in Refiguring Rhetorical Education, the material dissemination of YU’s dress code on its women’s campus is “a disciplinary […] device meant to constantly remind teachers

24 For more on halakhic dress code (or dress code as interpreted via Jewish law), see Tamar Ross’s Expanding the Palace of Torah, p. 35 and endnote no. 20 on pages 260-1.
and students that they must comply” (82) with the institution’s plan, a subtle reminder of how the Torah Umadda mission has practical consequences for institutional stakeholders.

The act of wearing pants is a rhetorical statement for Shulamit that, although not linguistic, is certainly semiotic, communicating her disidentification with institutional rhetorical education. Shulamit’s rhetorical activities that I present here—her institutional event around defining Torah Umadda and her private choice as a Modern Orthodox woman to wear pants instead of skirts—present a complex understanding of audience, an understanding that I argue is connected to Shulamit’s experience as a writing tutor. In composing her performance of these rhetorical activities, Shulamit invested attention in invention; in their article “The Integrating Perspective: An Audience-Response Model for Writing,” Ruth Mitchell and Mary Taylor define invention as “those methods designed to aid in retrieving information, forming concepts, analyzing complex events, and solving certain kinds of problems” (qtd. in Lunsford and Ede 211). In what Shulamit told me about her decisions in composing, both in organizing a public event and in choosing an outfit to wear that deviates from the institution’s dress code, Shulamit reveals how she synthesizes information about the institution with her own personal beliefs in making her decisions. For example, Shulamit tells me that she wanted YU’s religious, administrative, and student leaders to weigh-in on defining Torah Umadda because “it is this incredibly important philosophical notion that theoretically leads the decisions made by the institution, and [not knowing what Torah Umadda means] is like having a company policy without knowing what the policy is.” In this statement, Shulamit harnesses not only her discontent with the lack of clarity around Torah Umadda as a “notion ... that leads the decisions made by the institution,” but the discontent she knows is present among student leaders who
ultimately agreed to participate in this event; Shulamit’s own feelings and knowledge of
students is as formative in her invention of this rhetorical activity.

Shulamit shows a similar thoughtfulness in invention in her decision to wear pants. In
the moment I quoted earlier where Shulamit claims to “have eradicated [a particular concept of
God] from [her] being,” she calls upon a memory of a metaphorical notion—God with a
scoreboard—she had of God judging her decisions, a memory that remains with her at the time
of our interview (to which she wore pants!). Shulamit understands Orthodox interpretation of
Jewish law that discourages women from wearing pants, as well as the cultural expectations of
many her community, none of which she takes lightly as a woman who has devoted a
significant portion her education to learning Bible. She takes all knowledge of her religion, her
community, and even her past self into account in her rhetorical activity of getting dressed to
present herself to her community, her audience, her public. In this way, Shulamit’s rhetorical
activities are what Ede and Lunsford describe about writing: “a means of making meaning for
writer and reader” (213-14). And in Shulamit’s case, Ede and Lunsford’s terms “writer and
reader” could be better identified here as “rhetor and public.”

Shulamit’s rhetorical activity outside of the writing center, which is in conversation with
YU’s rhetorical education, is connected to her work in the writing center. Shulamit uses a
Hebrew word to represent her rhetorical activity in both the writing center and within the
larger institution. Just over an hour into my interview with Shulamit, I asked her if any of what
we had talked about had anything to do with her life as a tutor, and she responded that
working as a tutor, perhaps not surprisingly, informed her as writer and reader, although she
didn’t use the language of “reader” and “writer” to describe the influence tutoring had on her.
Rather, Shulamit used a Hebrew term to elucidate this relationship, saying that, as a writing tutor, she learned to be medachtic: “medachtic means, like, very careful and particular, with the work that my students [in the writing center] wrote, so I would ask them, ‘Why did you choose that word?’ And I would make them give an answer. And it made me feel much more responsible.” Shulamit’s explanation of medachtic, a responsibility towards language and meaning, is parallel to her readerly desire for more explanation around the term Torah Umadda, which inspired her rhetorical activity of organizing panel of speakers to define the term. Like her impetus as a reader of the institution, Shulamit holds the students with whom she works in the writing center to the same standard of care in contemplating their rhetorical choices as she does herself, even in acts as seemingly mundane (but clearly very loaded in this institutional context) as choosing what to wear within her community. Shulamit’s role as a tutor raised her sensibilities—her metacognitive understanding of rhetorical relationships—moving her away from making random rhetorical and semiotic decisions and instead compelling her to actively attend to her and her tutees’ decisions about language usage (and fashion choices).

Shulamit punctuates her investment in the language she uses both in the writing center and in her public life by invoking another Hebrew term, kavanah, to explain how her desire to be medachtic, to have a heightened responsibility to language, has allowed her to refine her idea of kavanah, what Shulamit defined as intentionality. “My relationship with language and my relationship with writing was this idea [...] that comes up a lot in Jewish prayer, of kavanah, which means intentionality. [...] It’s really important to have intentionality when you pray. And people ask, ‘if you’re not gonna have intentionality, why would you pray?’” During my hour-and-forty-five-minute interview with Shulamit, she fluidly used the same Hebrew terms for her
writing center work, rhetorical activity, and religious practices. I see this as an intersection of the rhetorical education offered by YU with the rhetorical act of working one-to-one with another writer. While the Torah Umadda mission subtly disseminates messages and codes of behavior that Shulamit resists, like the dress code, her identity is strongly bound with the YU community, as evidence by her organization of the Torah Umadda panel discussion. She is aware of her need to perform the mission—or make deliberate choices not to—for her YU community, for in her in her words, “everything is about intentionality. And you can’t move, you can’t think, you can’t speak, you can’t do anything without this intense intentionality because people are watching everything that you do.” However, I know from research with other tutors that those who are actively civically engaged credit the writing center for their rhetorical activity. Shulamit called the “writing center process,” working one-to-one with another writer:

    a model for how to relate to anything. It’s a model for forcing someone to, like, put their cards on the table in a certain way, and tell you that there’s something behind their language. And it’s this unwillingness to accept empty language. I think that’s one of the most powerful things that I’ve learned in the writing center because I’ve taken that into Biblical analysis.

While “forcing” someone to “put their cards on the table” is not a typical metaphor of peer tutoring, Shulamit reveals here that she encourages students in the writing center to have the intentionality she so values in her own rhetorical activity, an intentionality nurtured by YU’s mission and rhetorical education.
While Shulamit’s rhetorical activity demonstrates how she positions herself in relation to an institutional audience that values the Torah Umadda mission, another tutor, Edith, frames her definition of Torah Umadda in ways that demonstrate how Edith herself can be considered the ideal institutional audience of the mission statement. I interviewed Edith during her last semester as a student at YU, and her last semester working as a tutor at Stern College for Women. Edith is the daughter of a European-born, Catholic-school-educated Jewish father and a mother who converted to Judaism. While she did not expand on the current occupations of her parents during our interview, she did mention that her mother and father initially met “on Wall Street, at a business dinner or something.” When I asked Edith to define Torah Umadda and how it has affected her life, she created a narrative that demonstrated how, at least by the time she started college, she saw Torah UMadda as having defined her entire life up until her arrival and study at Stern College for Women. She told me that her upbringing had been defined by what “[she] might call Torah UMadda values”:

[Torah UMadda] has been a guiding principle by which I live my life, even before I was aware that Yeshiva University’s motto was Torah Umadda; it’s just how I was raised, in that I was raised in a household that was very open to other cultures, other ideas. My dad was a philosophy major [so] we were always discussing ideas but not necessarily in a Jewish context. It was, “where did you learn that?” Or “why did you say that?” It would turn into a conversation about ideas. [...] My dad and my mom both always related back to Torah. I guess for them also it’s just how they operate.
Edith’s presentation of Torah UMadda, even in its informality or perhaps because of it, offers a sense of what this term might look like in an undergraduate student’s life. Edith uses the word “motto” (after I had used the term “Mission Statement” in my question about Torah UMadda, a phrase distinctly more institutional than “motto”), to describe both the university’s use of Torah UMadda and her own personal definition. For Edith, Torah UMadda is a way of life, a personal motto, one characterized by an openness to cultures and ideas outside the personal sphere of home. In this way, and considering the term’s existence at an institution with a religious-driven mission, Edith seems to be identifying a secular approach to her view of Torah UMadda, yet she also punctuates how, in her personal life, her parents, who are formative in Edith’s definition of Torah UMadda, “related back to Torah.”

Like the student participants in Alexander and Jarrett’s study, tutors’ rhetorical activity is clearly informed by family values in this study, as well. Despite the secular nature of some of the conversations—“discussing ideas but not necessarily in a Jewish context”—that Edith describes, Torah is central to such secularism in that Edith’s mother and father “always related back to Torah.” In building on a text, or values associated with a text, as part of its institutional mission, Yeshiva University’s rhetorical education speaks directly to its students’ personal and religious histories. Yet, Edith’s excerpt also demonstrate that her articulation of Torah Umadda puts Torah into more direct conversation with the secular than the institutional mission actually does.

Edith’s articulation of her relationship to institutional mission and Torah Umadda illuminate how Talmudic rhetoric, an extension of YU’s religious education, builds a kind of
rhetorical education. In her essay “Talmudic Rhetoric: Explorations for Writing, Reading, and Teaching,” Andrea Greenbaum argues “for the exploration of Judaic texts” (152) alongside traditional and recently recovered texts that scholars have brought into the field of Rhetoric. Specifically, Greenbaum reads the Talmud, a “summary or oral [Jewish] law [... and] commentary” (152) on oral law. While Greenbaum does not use the language of rhetorical education in positioning the Talmud alongside classical texts, she cites Thomas Sloane’s *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric* to offer language for the communal engagement for which the Talmud also prepares its readers: “‘The main goal of the Sophists’ education program was to turn man into an effective citizen,’ and likewise, Talmudic rhetoric was concerned with not simply humans’ relationship to God, but with humans’ relationship to others and their responsibility to their community” (qtd. in Greenbaum 163). The following excerpts and analysis of Edith’s talk around her religious and secular education illustrate the degree to which YU’s institutional mission establishes a rhetorical education that offers undergraduate writing tutors ways of reading religious text that transfer into their secular studies.

During our interview, as Edith narratively detailed her relationship with Torah Umadda beyond her family, she identified that for her Torah Umadda was indeed connected to her life within the classroom at YU. Edith characterized her religious learning at YU as a process in which she confronted conflict:
Because you have to sift through, let’s say, Midrash\textsuperscript{25} and Torah and oral law and traditional law and everything I guess, to figure out [if] it’s all true but some of it’s more allegorical and some of it’s more fictitious. I don’t remember who says it but someone says that the whole [...] exodus from Egypt and the splitting of the sea was actually an allegory; it might not have really happened. Whatever. Then do you believe that, what kind of truth is that, what is that trying to convey to you? I don’t think I consciously thought about that growing up. It’s a pretty complex thing to think about.

Edith voices a familiar conflict for a religious person: how to develop faith from scripture that is allegorical or seems unbelievable. While Shulamit’s narrative allows us to understand how an undergraduate tutor conceives of audience, Edith’s narrative demonstrates how the institution constitutes its audience of undergraduate students, for it is Edith’s narrative that gives me a better sense of how Torah Umadda might, as the mission says, “bring wisdom to life.”

Edith’s narrative represents YU’s rhetorical education in rather neutral terms; she does not reflect the same tension with or resistance of Torah Umadda as institutional mission that Shulamit’s narrative does. Edith goes on to identify how religious conflict is addressed in her secular courses:

\footnote{\textsuperscript{25} Edith defined \textit{midrash} as “allegorical stories that comment on scripture.” Tamar Ross calls \textit{midrash} a “method of exegesis,” developed by Talmudic scholars, “focused on close reading of the style, particular vocabulary, and peculiarities of the narrative, and reconciling apparent contradictions and embellishing some of the Bible’s more enigmatic statements” (11).}
But, I guess it’s subconsciously always been there, a search for truth, a search for a greater meaning. What is fact? What is fiction? Is fiction really fake or is it just a different variation of fact. It’s come up in my papers on Edith Wharton, on Little Red Riding Hood, Tim O’Brien, all these things that have nothing to do with religion. [...] My Tim O’Brien paper [has] nothing to do with religion; it has to do with how Tim O’Brien’s fiction reflects the reality of his world. It’s the same theme that I guess I use when I approach Torah.

Edith demonstrates that her experience reading the Talmud, her background in Biblical exegesis, prepared her well to complete her Senior Exit Project, for which she wrote papers on Wharton, O’Brien, and the fairy tale Little Red Riding Hood. Edith’s transfer of her educational experience from the religious to secular also illustrates that YU’s rhetorical education is not simply relegated to its dual curriculum—Judaic courses as one line of inquiry separate from the liberal arts, as suggested by the mission—but rather YU’s rhetorical education can involve an exchange between the religious and secular. Although this exchange between the secular and the religious is implied in the Torah Umadda mission, there is no direct statement in the institutional mission about how YU develops rhetorical education, nor is there an imperative for an intersection between the religious and secular in any part of the curriculum. So while there is no explicit claim to offering a rhetorical education to its undergraduates, rhetorical education occurs almost in spite of itself, unscripted by institutional documents.

Edith’s rhetorical abilities, as shaped by her rhetorical education, are not limited to her ways of reading and writing within the institution, and in fact, Edith extends Talmudic rhetoric
to her ways of making meaning with students in the writing center. One strategy Edith developed as a tutor involved using the language of Biblical exegesis to help students who came to the writing center needing help analyzing secular texts: “P’shat means literal [...] and drosh is interpretive [...] a lot of the times, the students, when they don’t get the difference between evidence and analysis, I will use the p’shat and drosh terms. Some of them get it if they are more familiar with religious terminology. [...] a lot of times that works.” Indeed, Greenbaum, in turning to Kabbalist David Cooper’s text God is a Verb, defines p’shat and drosh in terms strikingly similar to Edith’s. Cooper explains, that when studying the Torah, p’shat “means the simple or literal interpretation” and drosh “is an examination of the text by bringing in additional material” (qtd in Greenbaum 157). While there is slippage between how Edith and Cooper each use the word “interpretation,” they both convey that p’shat involves literally reading a text and drosh involves going beyond the literal meaning. In transferring her rhetorical skills as a reader and writer into working with students in the writing center, Edith demonstrates her savvy as an undergraduate student rhetor. We should also note that, while certainly a product of YU’s rhetorical education and the institution’s commitment to offering a dual religious-liberal arts undergraduate curriculum, these complex rhetorical moves—transferring a religious way of reading and writing—were not directly taught as a part of the curriculum. In other words, Edith rhetorical savvy, beyond learning Biblical exegesis, is completely self-sponsored in in the institution, but influenced by her rhetorical training and experience in the writing center.
Conclusion

Shulamit and Edith offer a range of ways for us to understand how a religious-driven mission manifests materially into students’ reading, writing, and civic engagement, all rhetorical acts that this study will continue to take up in the coming chapters. In her resistance, Shulamit tacitly engages the tenants of Torah Umadda, choosing a secular practice (wearing pants) while still closely identifying with a religious community that does not necessarily appropriate the same practice. In this way, Shulamit revises the rhetorical education—the authorized code of communication and civic engagement—within her institutional community. Her revision of institutionally established rhetorical education serves as an alternative for other undergraduate rhetors in her community.

Unlike the way Shulamit’s engagement with institutional mission involves tension and resistance, Edith reveals the possibility for a complimentary engagement with institutional mission, one in which a student is invoked as audience in a way suggested by that very mission. Edith demonstrates that students’ reading and writing practices originate in unexpected curricular spaces, and in fact are often not born in the English classroom. Without much help from writing center administrators, tutors productively use these practices, gleaned from their experience as religious learners, to support student writing in secular course work.

Understanding writing center tutors in this capacity has implications for writing center administration and liberal arts education. To view tutors as rhetors who participate actively in an institutional mission, to the degree that they also revise that mission for their peers, should move writing center administrators to revise our approaches to tutor training. Understanding how Edith calls upon her religious reading and writing skills makes me wonder about Edith’s
increased potential as an educator and rhetor had I worked to make her more aware of her religious language as a rhetorical practice. While certainly offering tutors the space for divergent thinking, I wonder how the writing center could have more actively supported Shulamit in her civic engagement had I supplied these young educators with texts on rhetorical education in addition to their tutor training manuals. As I further explore in Chapter Four, tutors’ civic engagement extends well beyond institutional walls, affording writing center administrators and tutors ways to make our knowledge about undergraduate students’ rhetorical activity evident. As a writing program administrator, I wish to take up Alexander and Jarrett’s call in the writing center: “Future studies of rhetorical education should encompass the curricular and the cocurricular, the formally sponsored and the self-sponsored, as mutually informing resources if research in rhetoric and writing studies is to contribute vitally to a collective struggle for cultural understanding and peaceful coexistence” (542).
Chapter 3

Writing Center as Public: Tutor-Rhetors Within the Institution

Religious beliefs will determine how a school teaches in a Jewish community.
They cannot be divorced from each other. [...] Pedagogical goals and religious beliefs in a Jewish institution will be hand-in-hand in the mission statement.

-“Tara,” writing center tutor, interviewed May 8, 2013

My data in the current chapter reveals that interactions between tutors and students, among tutors themselves, and between tutors and the larger student body are at the center of institutional mission. Here, I move away from familiar conversations about how writing centers and tutors support student writers to demonstrate that a tutor’s act of working with a student is rhetorical in that it involves the tutor actively constituting a public. The current chapter builds on Chapter Two’s definition of institutional mission as developing rhetorical education by demonstrating that writing center work—namely, a tutor’s one-to-one session with a student writer—directly engages institutional mission. Further, I extend Chapter Two’s consideration of institutional audiences by offering data, in the form of a tutor’s writing for YU’s women’s campus newspaper The Observer, which shows how one tutor engages with a public beyond the writing center. Finally, I argue that an interaction between tutors at a staff meeting is a performance and reinterpretation of institutional rhetorical education. I continue to employ José Esteban Muñoz’s term to show how tutors disidentify with institutional rhetorical education. The data demonstrates that tutors model ways of simultaneously engaging with and
resisting institutional mission through rhetorical activity that is not authorized outside of the writing center.

Data from the writing center reveals how tutors constitute distinct categories of “public.” Specifically, I understand tutoring as a public, rhetorical act, a conceptualization of tutoring that deviates from a particular strand of writing center theory. While the canonical work of Kenneth Bruffee in “Collaborative Learning and the ‘Conversation of Mankind’” and John Trimbur in “Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning” have offered us important ways to define and value collaboration and authority in tutors’ sessions with students, my work identifies how tutors’ work in their one-to-one sessions reveals tutors rhetorical savvy in their understanding of institutionally authorized education and public expectations of that education. My research reveals that tutors possess a sophisticated awareness of institutional publics, and indeed invoke those publics regularly, in their sessions with student-writers, in their interactions with other tutors, and in their writing within the institution. Therefore, this chapter names tutors’ rhetorical activity as engaging publics in three distinct ways: 1) a tutor’s rhetorical activity is “public” in that a tutor’s pedagogy involves participation in a socially situated exchange with a student who visits the center for writing support; 2) tutors engage with broader institutional publics in their rhetorical activity as undergraduate students in the institution, such as in writing for the college’s newspaper, and 3) tutors constitute a “public” when tutors themselves are audience to each other’s rhetorical activity in the writing center, such as in informal discussions, professional development, and rhetorical performances in staff meetings.

My reading of the way tutors constitute institutional publics documents that tutors
“compose a revised rhetorical education” (Enoch 122) through disidentification with YU’s institutional mission. I return to two texts that offer the theoretical underpinnings for these terms: Jessica Enoch’s *Refiguring Rhetorical Education: Women Teaching African American, Native American, and Chicano/a Students, 1865-1911* and José Esteban Muñoz’s *Disindentification: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. In Chapter Four of *Refiguring Rhetorical Education*, Enoch presents the writings of three Mexican teachers—Jovita Idar, Marta Peña, and Leonor Villegas de Magnón—in the Spanish-language paper *La Crónica* that was based in Laredo, Texas, just north of the border between Mexico and the United States. According to Enoch, these women’s writings practiced a dual pedagogy that maintained a commitment to teaching English “of the land that they live in” (121), but also emphasized upholding the Spanish language and Mexican culture. The effect of Idar’s, Peña’s, and Villegas de Magnón’s writings was that they “advanced a rhetorical education that mediated between these two competing worlds [of Spanish and English] and taught readers to negotiate the conflicting definitions of their civic and cultural memberships” (121). There is an evident parallel between the relationship of the teachers in Enoch’s study and the English-and-Spanish language *curriculum* they created for their audience with the dual secular-and-religious curriculum defined in YU’s institutional mission; yet, more poignant is Idar’s, Peña’s, and Villegas de Magnón’s investment in “negotiating conflicting definitions” and what it means to be aware of conflicting discourses in education. By publicly claiming their commitment to maintaining the Spanish language and Mexican culture in their writings in *La Crónica*, Enoch forwards how these women politicized the role of female teachers who “enabled students to communicate and compete with the Anglo community in Texas” (141), while resisting an
Americanizing effort that sought to disconnect students with their Mexican heritage. Like Idar, Peña, and Villegas de Magnón, the women who tutor at YU similarly identify with a dominant educational script; in the case of YU, this institutional script involves identifying with Modern Orthodox religious observance. Further, the women in Enoch’s study, like the women who participated in this research, disidentify with dominant educational discourse to compose a rhetorical education through their rhetorical engagement with the publics they constitute in their roles as tutors.

As is evident in my reading of Enoch alongside rhetorical education at YU, tutors acts of disidentification are central to tutors’ pedagogy and the ways tutors constitute publics, as I present in the next sections of this chapter. I return to Muñoz’s *Disidentifications* to reiterate his claim that that disidentification is a mode of resistance that functions by identifying with aspects of dominant culture “in an effort to dismantle [certain] dominant codes” (26). In the data that follows, I present three socially situated interactions where tutors constitute publics; in each of these rhetorical interactions, tutors disidentify with institutional mission to compose a rhetorical education that offers an alternative performance of the mission for their fellow undergraduates.

**A Tutor’s One-to-One Pedagogy as Public**

Rhetorical education is necessarily defined by how an institution authorizes public communication; therefore, a consideration of the term public is imperative to this dissertation. Publics are often conceived in terms of the degree to which a text, broadly conceived, reaches an audience. Indeed, Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede complicate the multitude of texts, authors,
and audiences in their chapter “‘Among the Audience’: On Audience in an Age of New Literacies.” Yet even as their intent is to consider “new literacies,” speakers, listeners, and media, Lunsford and Ede’s examples draw solely on written texts and specifically on writing classrooms. To demonstrate how the day-to-day work of tutoring involves sophisticated rhetorical activity, I move beyond Lunsford and Ede’s emphasis on a written-product and writing classrooms to include rhetorical processes; specifically, I turn to Brian Grogan’s consideration of publicity in teaching public rhetoric in his article “Expanding the Aims of Public Rhetoric and Writing Pedagogy.” I understand publicity—or “the degree to which a composition is accessible, visible, or audible” (537)—not solely in terms of “published pieces that reach a public audience” (539), but also in terms of Grogan’s concept of publicity that invokes rhetorical processes, “moves made to constitute a public” (539). I apply Grogan’s definition of publicity, which includes rhetorical processes, to signify three different ways that tutors constitute publics: through their work in one-to-one sessions, through their interactions with other tutors, and through their writing within the institution. The tutor narratives here demonstrate how tutor-rhetors “make public and public knowledge” (Grogan 539, my emphasis); not only is a public determined by the act of a final piece of writing reaching an audience—as in an article in a student newspaper—but a public is also made, constituted by the action and process of addressing an audience, such as a tutor working with a student or speaking with other tutors.

I first look at Charlotte’s reflection of her work with a student in the writing center to define how a tutor’s one-to-one work with a student writer in the writing center constitutes a public. Charlotte graduated from YU in May 2013 and began working in the writing center

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26 As in prior chapters, all tutors names are pseudonyms.
during her second year in college. Charlotte was interdisciplinary in her studies at YU, double-majoring in Judaic Studies and Political Science. Describing the institutional mission during our interview, Charlotte called Torah Umadda 27 “something that can’t be reconciled.” She named a kind of Torah Umadda experience that she had in the writing center, one that she said required a “cognitive dissonance between two aspects of self,” specifically between the secular and religious in Modern Orthodoxy. Charlotte’s cognitive dissonance, as will soon become evident, involved her identification with a concept of physical modesty that an art history student associated with Modern Orthodoxy; simultaneously, Charlotte demonstrates disidentification with that same tenant of religious observance in the way she appropriated religious context within her pedagogy.

Charlotte’s following recollection of an interaction she had with an art history student reveals how a tutor’s pedagogy, her ability to facilitate communication in a one-to-one writing center session, creates a kind of public in the process of communication, her rhetorical activity. During my interview with her, Charlotte described a session in the writing center with this student who was struggling with an art history assignment that asked the student to describe a nude statue. The course’s content presented challenges for the student in terms of her religious identity, which is inherently related to the Torah Umadda mission of the institution. Charlotte characterized the discussion with the student as follows:

The session ended up turning into a conversation about how [the student] had asked her rabbi if she was allowed to take the course to begin with. [...] He said,

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27 As my reading of Torah Umadda in chapter two identifies, the literal English translation of Torah Umadda is “Bible and science” or “Bible and the world”; therefore, the implications for this pair of terms can be conceived in familiar terms, religion and the secular world.
‘yes, you should take certain steps to ensure that you’re not overstepping the
bounds of modesty.’ [But the student] was very uncomfortable with the subject
matter and was considering switching into music. I was trying very much to just
convey her options to her.

Charlotte’s representation of this interaction with a student reveals how undergraduate
students at YU are extensions of institutional mission. As an outsider to Judaism, I understand
Charlotte’s description of the student’s conversation with her rabbi and the student’s
consideration of dropping the class as reflecting a problem—or perhaps a space that beckons
additional possibilities—for the student. Charlotte says she was “trying [...] to convey her
options to her,” implying that there were possible ways of being in an art history course that
asks students to describe nude statues which the student had not yet imagined. Charlotte’s
representation of this student reveals how intimately connected students are to the religious
rhetorical education of YU’s institutional mission, Torah Umadda.

As a tutor, Charlotte makes pedagogical choices based on her and the student’s shared
knowledge of Torah Umadda, and based on the information she gains from the student about
the student’s orientation and discomfort in this art history course and the assignment involving
a nude statue. Charlotte reflected that the student “was using really non-specific language. [...] I
pointed out, ‘you’re really not being very specific.’ And she said, ‘Well, I feel that it’s not
tsnias.’” The student cited tsnias, or “sexual modesty,” according to Charlotte, as her reason for
not using language to identify the human body. Again, as an outsider to this discourse
community, I have no referent for understanding the meaning of tsnias or even for
understanding sexual modesty in relationship to this assignment. However, in Charlotte’s
description of the student’s assignment, Charlotte understood that the student’s resistance to
to the assignment as a whole—was an extension
language identifying specific body parts and of the student’s religious identity. This data is representative of Beverly Moss’s findings in
African-American preachers’ sermons that she presents in A Community Text Arises: A Literate
Text and A Literacy Tradition In African-American Churches. Consistent with Moss’s research on
the sermon as a literacy event for a specific discourse community, the tutors in my study
likewise “use shared knowledge to signal ‘in-group’ communication, group memberships,
community, or all of the above” (80). Although Charlotte called the assignment “an innocuous
thing” in our interview, her almost innate understanding of the student’s relationship with
tsniias allowed Charlotte to describe very casually how she offered the student choices for
revision: “Use the word bicep. Use the word chest.” Seemingly mundane, these suggestions for
specific language to describe the form of the statue, a replica of the human body, for an art
history class offered the student possibilities which could help the student see outside of her
institutional rhetorical education. Charlotte’s narrative implies that the student’s access to
language necessary to complete her art history assignment was determined by the institution’s
rhetorical education, the imperative by a representative of Modern Orthodoxy (a rabbi) to
uphold religious conventions of modesty. Because the student did not feel authorized to use
the language that describes the physicality of the human body due to religious principles of
modesty, she did not have language to address the assignment. In offering language as simple
as “chest” and “bicep,” Charlotte is attempting to help the student reconcile her discomfort
with the class with her religious identity, while authorizing the student to communicate in a
way that is unfamiliar to her.
Charlotte uses her shared knowledge to offer an unfamiliar alternative to the student, consistent with preachers’ use of shared knowledge in Moss’s study. Moss writes:

The principal that seems to undergird this reliance on shared knowledge is that ministers use the familiar to reemphasize or reacquaint the congregation with old (or shared) information; that ministers use the familiar to make the congregation look at something familiar in a different light; that ministers use the familiar to introduce the unfamiliar, something new; and that ministers use the familiar to provide avenues for the congregation to enter into the text and become part of the dialogue that constitutes the text. (81)

According to Moss, preachers use shared knowledge to introduce their communities of congregants to unfamiliar concepts, an act that can invite participants into the literacy event, or what I would call the rhetorical activity, of the sermon. While I do not have a transcript of Charlotte’s session with the art history student, Charlotte’s narrative of the session reflects that she too uses her shared knowledge to establish familiarity with the student’s identity as an Orthodox Jew; yet in a rhetorical act that seems almost invisible, Charlotte offers the unfamiliar, language that describes the physicality of the statue in ways that authorize the student to use that same, ostensibly secular, language that the student had not entertained (or felt comfortable) using before her session with Charlotte. I am not suggesting that the student did not know the words chest and bicep but that there is evidence in Charlotte’s transcript to suggest that the student did not feel authorized to use language describing the physicality of the human body at this religious institution. Charlotte’s tutoring authorizes an alternative to institutional rhetorical education for this student.
Charlotte’s session represents her as a tutor who is both rhetorician and rhetorical educator, as she modeled possibilities for a revised rhetorical education. Charlotte offers language that paves a way for the student to negotiate her conflicting feelings about this secular course coming into contact with religious identity, or what the institution authorizes in its articulation of Torah Umadda and its affiliation with Modern Orthodoxy. In her saying of the words that the student could not or was afraid to say, Charlotte authorizes the student to use language that she was not previously using, language that ultimately helped the student move forward in the assignment. Charlotte, as an insider within YU’s Modern Orthodox Community, has the shared (and rhetorical) knowledge to understand and situate her student’s discomfort within a religious framework. Her rhetorical moves, her choices as a tutor to convey options that challenge her student’s conception of religious modesty, perform a pedagogy that Grogan would describe as constitutive of a public:

When publicity is understood as an activity, pedagogy assumes the power to authorize publicness. Understood as an activity, publicity signifies the process by which a rhetor seeks, engages and widens the attention of publics. [...] Thus, this pedagogy teaches that rhetoric is constitutive of publics and emphasizes the processes through which student rhetors might make publics and public knowledge. (539)

Following Grogan’s imperative to understand publicity as rhetorical activity, Charlotte’s expansion of options for her student is an act of creating knowledge together, in Grogan’s terms. To identify peer tutoring in these terms names a tutor’s work with her students as public rhetorical processes. Undergraduates, like Charlotte, who work as tutors in the writing center
are uniquely positioned to witness, participate in, and understand the way rhetorical education functions within the institution as a specific result of institutional mission, or Torah Umadda.

It is tempting (and possible) to read Charlotte’s rhetorical activity with her student though the lenses of canonical writing center theorists, such as Kenneth Bruffee and John Trimbur. Indeed, we could say that Charlotte and her student make knowledge through collaborative practices that apprentice the student into the academy (Bruffee), and that the dissensus between Charlotte’s orientation to the assignment of describing a nude statue and the orientation of her student performs the hierarchical nature of discursive practices present in the academy (Trimbur). Yet what is overlooked in writing center research is how, in the midst of collaborative knowledge-making and negotiation of authority, tutors, together with the students they serve, treat the lived experiences of institutional mission for undergraduate students. This is relevant for us to see undergraduate writing center tutors, and undergraduate students more broadly, as stakeholders in institutional mission. Further, in serving the rhetorical role of audience and writing tutor for students who negotiate mission, tutors become rhetorical educators of the institution. Beyond simply practicing the roles that “constitute fields or disciplines of study” (Bruffee 545), tutors at YU’s women’s campus’ writing center are in the position of negotiating students’ religious identities in terms that the dual religious and secular curriculum simultaneously authorize and undermine. Charlotte’s pedagogy offers a model of rhetorical activity that the student may not find in other institutional spaces, and indeed did not find in consultation with her rabbi, who, according to Charlotte’s narrative simply advised to “take certain steps to make sure that you’re not overstepping the bounds of modesty.”

Charlotte offered her student a real-life, public performance of how to productively place
religious identity into conversation with the demands of a secular liberal arts curriculum. Charlotte’s writing center pedagogy helps the student confront a secular assignment, with which the student counter-identifies, therefore offering the student language that allows her to discuss the nude statue within her own boundaries of modesty.

Charlotte’s narrative reflects how a religiously observant student’s liberal arts course can come uncomfortably into contact with religious curriculum. Charlotte’s session with this art history student serves then to challenge common writing center narratives like Harris’s work Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference. Understandably, writing center scholarship, and indeed training manuals, are often devoted to guiding tutors and writing center administrators in their thinking about how best to support students. However, like Daniel Sanford, in his article “Challenging the Narrative of Tutoring One-to-One,” I encourage those in writing center studies to “to question the centrality of the one-to-one appointment to the narrative that defines our identity and our daily practice” (12). It goes without saying that looking at the one-to-one session is necessary work in the field of writing center studies, but complicating our narratives and expanding our focal points of these sessions, or more specifically how these sessions necessarily support student writers who visit our centers, offers us more productive ways to support the rhetorical growth of our tutors, express and assess our centers’ broad range of work, and engage in a liberal arts curriculum.

As a tutor in a Jewish women’s writing center, Charlotte’s rhetorical activity in her session directly engages YU’s dual religious-liberal arts curriculum in a way that is not authorized in other institutional spaces. This writing center offers a rare intra-curricular space in the institution that is neither ostensibly secular nor religious, neither wholly curricular nor
extracurricular. I return to Julie Bokser’s article “Pedagogies of Belonging: Listening to Students and Peers,” for the way she frames the tutoring session as a contact zone where a tutor might use her dominant institutional role as an experienced writer to facilitate a student’s sense of belonging (45). In offering the student ways to describe a nude statue in the context of a religious curriculum that can feel as if it prohibits such description, Charlotte invited her student into a different public, one that authorizes the audience of the institutional mission, the part of Charlotte’s and her student’s education that urges “certain steps” to avoid being immodest. While the student initially consulted a rabbi, a religious educator, for support in her art history course, Charlotte’s narrative of her session suggests that it was the student’s interaction with a writing center tutor, a rhetorical educator, that offered other ways to imagine bridging the religious and secular curriculum. In other words, Charlotte’s pedagogical choices, her rhetorical activity, created a process that constituted an alternative public with diverse linguistic representations for the student. In offering students different ways to view and navigate moments where the religious and secular, Torah and madda, conflict between curricula, tutors offer their own form of rhetorical education. Charlotte’s comments suggest that tutors’ alternative rhetorical education is more flexible than the education disseminated by the institution. It is tutors’ complex sense of belonging and peeriness, being simultaneously in a rhetorical role analogous to the students they tutor, a role precisely defined by the religious imperatives of Torah Umadda and one that is intended to act as receiver of this mission, while also serving as a kind of rhetorical educational guide, one who has navigated the complexities and possible discomforts of the dominant mission. I suggest that it is the writing center’s in-betweenness, and perhaps more importantly the tutor’s rhetorical inbetweenness, that leads
tutors specifically to vocalize how “Torah” is often at odds with “madda,” the two resisting each other’s aims rather than complimenting them, as institutional mission claims. Tutoring provides a divergent space in which that rhetorical education can be negotiated.

A Tutor’s Rhetorical Reach: Identifying Rhetorical Activity Beyond the Writing Center

Naming Charlotte’s act of constituting a public through her rhetorical work in a writing center session illuminates the relationship between Charlotte’s writing center activity and work outside of the writing center. In particular, Charlotte’s work as a writing center tutor informs how she rhetorically engages with institutional publics. Early in the Spring 2013 semester, Charlotte published an article in the women’s campus’ student newspaper, which she herself reflected in our interview was “about this God-awful book that almost every Modern Orthodox school has the students read.” Charlotte’s article is a familiar form of public engagement: a written attempt to critique and resist dominant social practices. In her article, Charlotte levels a charge against Gila Manolson’s book The Magic Touch, which, as Charlotte writes in her article, served as reading material for the culminating assignment after “several months of the ‘Jewish Women’ class all girls took senior year” at Charlotte’s Modern Orthodox high school. According to Charlotte’s article, Manolson’s book fuels a “topic [of] near-obsession for Modern Orthodox high school students”: shomer negiah, a Hebrew term that signifies the “halakhot of intimate touch,” or Jewish laws that forbid touch between unmarried men and women. Charlotte goes

In order to preserve the anonymity of the participants in my study, I am withholding the title of Charlotte’s article here.

As with my presentation of the word tsnias, my definitions for culturally and linguistically specific terms like shomer negiah derive from my participants’ interviews and any artifacts they provide; in this case, the artifact is Charlotte’s article.
on in her article to criticize how, when reading what she calls a “medieval” book as a high
school senior, she felt objectified by Manolson’s claim that “a women who kissed a man before
she was married was ‘used goods.’” In order for tutors’ socially situated interactions to be
clearly understood, we must look at the wider context of Charlotte’s article that circulated
throughout the institution, both in print and online.

Charlotte’s public for this piece is evident in a way that her writing center public was
not. Writing for her college’s newspaper, Charlotte understands that she is addressing an
audience who has a shared experience with Manolson’s book. Indeed the 40 comments in the
article’s online edition and over 1000 Facebook “Likes” corroborate this assumption about
audience, as commenters (women and men alike) reflected their own experiences reading The
Magic Touch in Modern Orthodox Jewish high schools. While YU is not ostensibly responsible
for curricula in these religious high schools, the common experience of YU’s students having
read the book before arriving to college suggests that YU, at the undergraduate level, is an
extension of Modern Jewish Orthodox high school culture.

The event of Charlotte’s article in print and its online reception illustrates a web of
relationships that constitute a wide institutional public. Beyond engaging YU students, Modern
Orthodox high schools, and YU itself, Charlotte goes on to reference other religious
organizations that she identifies as perpetuating similar agendas that discourage teenagers
from touching the opposite sex, thereby indoctrinating the practice of “being” shomer negiah:

These dramatic scare tactics are, unfortunately, not limited to Manolson’s panic
inducing book. NCSY [National Council of Synagogue Youth], a popular Orthodox
youth organization, features an article on its “sex education” site entitled “Why
Girls Should be Shomer Negiah.” The article argues that “when a man looks for a
wife he prefers a virgin” and that no man will be “serious” about a woman who
“acts loose.” A women’s value as a wife, according to these sources, is directly
correlated to her chastity.

Charlotte’s critique here reveals the multiple identities of her public, as she expands her
critique to address a popular orthodox youth organization. This excerpt from Charlotte’s article
reveals her resistance to the educational discourse that constitutes rhetorical education within
her community, a community that is established and nurtured before, during, and after college.

In publicly indicting Orthodox educational institutions in a YU publication, Charlotte is also using
the space of this similarly Orthodox institution to subvert educational practices that are part of
the fabric of YU’s culturally and religiously specific rhetorical education.30

Similar to how her pedagogy offered choices to her student in the writing center,
Charlotte here offers her wider public audience a model for performing institutional critique:

It is necessary [...] to question the value of halakhic objectives achieved via
arguments that are anti-religious in nature; arguments that dehumanize their
subjects rather than affirming [sic] their dignity as human beings. Eliezer
Berkovits, a noted 20th century Jewish philosopher, claimed that a religious
Jewish sex ethic is one that demands mutual respect and the clear recognition of
the humanity of one’s partner. It should be inconceivable for Orthodox day
schools, youth groups, and yeshivot to promote sources that take an antithetical

30 It is interesting to note how this Jewish Modern Orthodox approach to countering teenage
desire parallels a broader cultural discourse of “abstinence only” in resistance to sex education
for teens.
approach. It’s time for such institutions to reevaluate the sources that they use to teach Orthodox youth about the Jewish approach to sex and relationships.

Charlotte’s affect in this excerpt above is distinctly different than how she represented herself in her writing center session. Here Charlotte is direct in her critique of Modern Orthodoxy and the texts disseminated in Modern Orthodox day schools, and in outlining her personal politics of inclusion for Jews of various levels of observance; yet in describing her session with an art history student in the writing center, Charlotte never indicated during our interview that she directly critiqued the student’s more conservative religious observance or the advice the student received from a rabbi. Charlotte reveals a sophisticated sense of audience-awareness between these two moments, and in particular, how her rhetorical engagement changes when her writing reaches a public beyond the writing center.

In offering her audience of YU student-readers a model for critiquing the institution, Charlotte also explicitly advocates for a more dignified way of valuing members of her community, male and female alike, as she critiques Manolson’s characterizations of both men and women. As opposed to the objectification that Charlotte feels certain texts disseminate within Orthodox institutions, Charlotte’s own text performs that which she suggests: “mutual respect and the clear recognition of the humanity” of the other. Charlotte’s rhetorical sophistication is evident in how she identifies with certain aspects of her audience’s ethos to simultaneously resist or question other aspects of that audience’s ethos. Further, and like her rhetorical engagement in the writing center, she models through her critical resistance an alternative to the dominant practices of rhetorical education and offers discursive possibilities for rhetorical engagement that her public may not have previously imagined.
Together, Charlotte’s rhetorical activities in and around the writing center represent José Esteban Muñoz’s concept of disidentification. Muñoz claims that “Disidentification can be understood as a way of shuffling back and forth between reception and production” (25), indicating the performative nature of constituting an audience for one’s work. Muñoz goes on to explain that disidentification is a mode of resistance that functions “in an effort to dismantle dominant codes” (26). But for Muñoz, and further evidenced in Charlotte’s rhetorical performances, disidentification is not only resistance, in that disidentification is not purely an act of rebellion or insurrection; rather, to disidentify is to engage in “revisionary identification,” where “revisionary is meant to signal different strategies of viewing, reading, and locating ‘self’ within representational systems” (Muñoz 26). Charlotte’s constituting a writing center public in her one-to-one session, along with her work addressing a wider public in her writing for the school newspaper, offer ways of locating herself within Jewish Modern Orthodox discourse that present alternative strategies for performing YU’s rhetorical education.

**Socially Situated Tutors: The Public of Writing Center Staff Meetings**

Building on Charlotte’s disidentification with YU’s rhetorical education, and considering the ways that Charlotte’s rhetorical activity constitutes different institutional publics, I turn to “Tara,” another tutor in the writing center, whose personal choice in religious observance engages her fellow tutors in the writing center in a public transaction of resistance and revision. This section reads interview and fieldwork data with Tara, a tutor who graduated in May 2013 with a major in Jewish Education and minor in English. In the Fall 2011 semester, I observed Tara’s interactions with other undergraduate writing center tutors during a staff meeting, and I
later asked Tara to reflect on my observations during our interview a year and a half later in May 2013. In December 2011, Tara appropriated the space of a writing center staff meeting for public negotiation of Yeshiva University’s institutional mission. I identify how Tara’s discussion of marriage laws in Jewish Modern Orthodoxy and her vocalization of her own religious observance of these laws involve other peer tutors in a third kind of public engagement, one in the writing center but not necessarily involving the one-to-one work that is so common in writing center scholarship. This section offers further evidence to demonstrate that Tara, like Charlotte, presents her public audience alternative models for performing engagement with institutional rhetorical education.

In December 2011, during the moments before one writing center meeting, Tara engaged in a public transaction with her tutor-colleagues that shifted the pedagogical focus of this meeting space typically for tutor education from the one-to-one activity between students and tutors to the rhetorical education of the institution. Tara appropriated a writing center staff meeting to share with the staff her choice as a recently married woman to cover her hair. Covering one’s hair after marriage is a common practice for observant Jewish Orthodox women, and this practice extends from readings of the Torah that signify family law in Orthodox Judaism. Tara, married only the month before this meeting, told her tutor-colleagues “how weird it is” to wear a sheitel, the Yiddish word for wig that some Orthodox Jewish women wear to cover their hair once they are married. The staff at that meeting on that day was composed solely of undergraduate tutors who were interested in following Tara’s lead, taking up her hair covering as a line of conversation before the meeting starts. The undergraduate tutoring staff—who, besides Tara, were all unmarried—excitedly bombarded Tara with
questions about her *sheital*, asking her how it feels on her head and if it generates lots of heat, all the while offering compliments about how great her new hair looked. Tara was smiling and fingerling her long, dark, glistening *sheital*. Tara’s articulation of “how weird it is” to cover her hair acts as an invitation to this group of fifteen undergraduate writing center tutors; Tara engages in a rhetorical act of communal identification on the ground of religious observance, since presumably the exclusively female undergraduate public in this space could potentially confront the decision of wearing a *sheital* if they too choose to observe Jewish Orthodox marriage laws. Accepting Tara’s invitation, one staff member asked about the maintenance of Tara’s wig. Tara replies: “I always have a clean one to wear out. [The wig] gets dirty just like real hair. Not stinky like gym clothes, but dirty, just like any hair. So I have to wash it every few days. I even had to get it cut and styled. This *sheital* thing is serious.” Through Tara’s transaction with her tutor-colleagues, the writing center staff meeting that is typically a space for tutor education around supporting student-writers, shifted its pedagogical focus to implicitly engage religious facets of the *Torah Umadda* mission of YU’s rhetorical education.

Tara’s public transaction with her tutor-colleagues in the writing center—her casual conversation inviting her audience into her life-world where she covers her hair in accordance with her religious observance—involves institutional rhetorical education in that she explicitly takes up practices that are an extension of YU’s religious curriculum. Yet, her performance of actually speaking about this gendered act of religious observance is a form of disidentification that resists rhetorical education and offers rhetorical possibilities for Tara’s tutor-public. This exchange about Tara’s sheitel, the wig she has chosen to externally represent her observance of family law in Orthodox Judaism, is a rhetorical transaction between Tara and her tutor-
colleagues, all of whom are familiar with the religious practice of a married woman covering her hair. In one of my interviews with Tara, a year-and-a-half after this staff meeting, I asked her to recall this public writing center transaction about her sheitel. In that interview Tara connected the discussion about her hair covering to the religious identity of the institution, much Tara’s quotation which serves as the epigraph to this chapter does. She told me that “nobody [in the institution] talked about the culture of marriage in Judaism.” While covering her hair is consistent with the religious mission invoked in YU’s rhetorical education, Tara’s *speaking* about this practice, particularly her description of this observant practice as being “weird” subtly resists the mission to offer an alternative rhetorical possibility.

In our interview, Tara connected her public engagement to the religious curriculum of the institution, which I identify as engagement with YU’s rhetorical education. Consistent with the work of scholars like Andrea Lieber and Tamar Ross whose research identifies the way Orthodox Judaism defines women’s religious practices in terms of the private, rather than public, sphere, Tara revealed how the silence she felt as an observant Modern Orthodox Jew is specific to women. Tara claimed that this private sphere of women’s religious practices is amplified by the silence she perceived around the body of religious laws and practices that she didn’t fully understand prior to becoming engaged to be married. Tara says: “I found out, when I got married, that nobody was talking. Nobody talks here. […] You don’t even learn that much about family law—and there’s a lot of it—before you get engaged. You get engaged, and then you meet with a teacher; one specific woman, for however long it is that you’re engaged.” This piece of data points to the Judaic curriculum that is the cornerstone of YU’s institutional mission. When Tara states that “you don’t even learn that much about family law,” she is
indirectly pointing to the shortcomings that she sees in the Judaic core curriculum required of all students at YU. Part of this Judaic requirement on the women’s campus involves a course in marriage law, a course that, according to Tara, didn’t offer her enough of a satisfying picture of the way marriage laws would affect her life. Tara views this lack of education around marriage laws at her Jewish college as constructing a silence that is isolating; she even talked about feeling “pissed” that no one was talking. So in her transaction with tutor-colleagues, Tara strives to publicly disrupt the silence she perceived around marriage laws within YU’s Modern Orthodox curriculum.

Tara’s performance of disidentification of YU’s rhetorical education in the writing center offers an alternative performance or presentation of the institution’s rhetorical education for her audience of tutor-colleagues. Consistent with Jessica Enoch’s presentation of the teachers in *Refiguring Rhetorical Education*, tutors in our centers perform two complicated tasks at once: they simultaneously perform institutional mission in ways sanctioned by that mission while engaging in “resistant pedagogical practices” (Enoch 169). Enoch offers us useful ways of thinking about how teachers, in this case tutors, “create a rhetorical education that encourages students to interrogate the rules of rhetorical decorum and to consider what it would mean not to follow these rules but to break them” (71). In her presentation of the work of Lydia Marie Child, a white female teacher who was charged with the education of freed slaves, Enoch looks at Child’s *The Freedmen’s Book* (published in 1865), for the way that Child constructs a text which offers “a rhetorical education aimed at change and disruption rather than acceptance and submission” (32). Child’s rhetorical education offered black students alternatives to dominant white educational narratives, “a rhetorical education that invites [...] readers to
create their own arguments as they enter public discussion” (71). Echoing the resistant practices of Lydia Marie Child in Enoch’s study, Tara pushes “the rules of rhetorical decorum” at YU to go public, creating a discussion that she feels her institution denies her.

Tara’s hair covering is both an external marker of religious identity and also a public representation of an element of the institutional mission of the Jewish Orthodox college that Tara attends. Tara connects her work as a peer tutor to her rhetorical activity in the writing center when she says: “When I get to the writing center, everyone finds it hilarious that I’m bitching about the hair. It’s hot. It’s itchy. I have so much hair on me right now. It was so nice to be able to talk about it. [...] It’s an openness.” This openness points to a well-established characterization of writing centers as safe spaces (so common is this description, in fact, that an entire writing center conference was dedicated to questioning that metaphor in 2010). While there is certainly value in the comfort Tara felt sharing her experience covering her hair, it’s worth noting how the familiar conception of writing-center-as-safe-space-between-student-and-tutor is refigured with this data. In the paragraphs the follow, I suggest that Tara would not have felt as open in other institutional spaces to utter her personal feelings about the religiously-sanctioned tradition of covering her hair.

As a final way to punctuate how Tara’s rhetorical activity revises the undergraduate rhetorical education offered by YU, Tara connects her disruption of silence to her work in the writing center to demonstrate how she disidentifies with YU’s institutional mission. When Tara explained the loneliness that she had felt silently dealing with marriage laws, I asked her if her desire to talk about marriage laws was in any way related to her work in the writing center. Here’s Tara’s response:
I think it’s also having the encouragement. A big thing in the writing center is that a lot of times people know exactly what they want to write. They know exactly what they want to say, but they’re not feeling confident enough. It’s a lonely experience. [The writing center offers] companionship and shared experience. It’s having the tutor be like, “Yes! I like that. That’s good. You could do that.” Having peer tutors also […] say, “Yes, I took that class. I remember I did that paper.” [Knowing someone] survived it, it’s pretty nice.

This data recalls many of the rhetorical practices that both Charlotte and Tara present in their narratives. Although Tara voices the loneliness that can accompany writing, she also articulates that working in the writing center complements the way she values “shared experience.” Similar to Charlotte’s method of drawing on what Moss called “shared knowledge,” Tara equates the shared experience of writing center work to her motivation to disrupt the silence around religious practice; these instances of sharing are efforts to create communal knowledge and experience around Tara’s feelings of isolation, both in terms of an observant Jewish woman’s adherence to marriage laws and in terms of an undergraduate student writing in the institution. While Tara reflected feeling that her marriage law course was insufficient in offering a community of practice, her interactions in the writing center about some of the same topics offered her a sense of community and shared knowledge with other women who may have a similar experience some day. This situation, which represents institutional rhetorical education, again frames the writing center as safe-space, but also frames Tara’s pedagogical goals: her work in the writing center, like her engagement with the institutional mission, demonstrates her communal values, her attempt to redefine the experience of college writing for students
who come to the writing center and to redefine for tutors ways of upholding the religious values of the institutional mission. Tara’s identification as a writer and as a married Modern Orthodox Jewish woman rub up against her disidentifying practices as a tutor, her rhetorical acts of moving that which is the private in the sphere’s of writing and religion, and making those feelings and practices public.

Conclusion

I chose an excerpt from Tara’s narrative as the epigraph to frame this chapter that articulates how an institution’s religious identity can dominate rhetorical education: “religious beliefs will determine how a school teaches in a Jewish community. They cannot be divorced from each other [...]. Pedagogical goals and religious beliefs in a Jewish institution will be hand-in-hand in the mission statement.” Although YU is clear in its mission that, as an institution of higher education in America, it is committed to offering undergraduate students a liberal arts curriculum (and as a faculty member at YU, I can attest that indeed the institution is committed to that endeavor), in institutional documents and students’ perception of their education, religious rhetorical education dominates the scene of undergraduate life.

In looking at Charlotte’s and Tara’s rhetorical activity in the writing center together, this chapter characterizes the writing center as a specific institutional location that encourages intra-curricular disidentification, the act of identifying with the communal values of this religious institution to offer ways of disrupting and resisting the dominant practices imbedded in the institutional mission. Undergraduate tutors do not attempt to dismantle institutional rhetorical education, but they do want to redefine it in their own terms. In her chapter
“Retheorizing Writing Center Work to Transform a System of Advantage Based on Race,” Nancy M. Grimm looks at familiar characterizations of writing center work to demonstrate the racial privilege that underlies many of our assumptions about working one-to-one with students. While my work does not explicitly read racial diversity or privilege in the writing center—for my research site exists on a nearly exclusively white campus—complicating characterizations of tutoring or “retheorizing writing center work” at my research site reveals that tutors are rhetoricians who participate in public engagement, perhaps not across racial lines, but certainly across lines of levels of religious observance. Charlotte and Tara both authorize one performance of religious observance while performing alternative forms of engagement: for Charlotte, this occurred through her offering of expanded language to an observant student, and for Tara this involved using language to utter what is normally unspoken about a religious practice.

The data from my fieldwork and interview with Tara further expands on Grimm’s retheorizing of writing centers’ relationships within the institution more broadly to demonstrate that, in addition to identifying the writing center as “public,” my work connects writing centers to rhetorical education. Grimm notes that many of the opportunities for collaboration and community-practice for undergraduate students in the institution are highly orchestrated and inauthentic. Grimm identifies how the writing center, as a space, resituates this reality of undergraduate education: “One place where undergraduates are able to participate in an authentic practice of the community is in a writing center where they contribute to the teaching mission of the institution” (97). Charlotte’s rhetorical engagement with the art history student, her pedagogical process of constituting an audience in a one-to-
one session, shows this contribution to teaching explicitly; but Tara’s rhetorical act with a slightly expanded public, composed exclusively of other undergraduate women tutors, moves beyond any teaching mission of the institution and engages with the wider Torah Umadda mission that undergirds YU’s rhetorical education. In claiming a writing center staff meeting as a public forum, Tara is an undergraduate writing tutor who engages the institutional mission in ways she felt she could not outside of the writing center, particularly in her courses the institution has established for the sole purpose of furthering her religious education. And in her disruption of silence, Tara’s alternative performance for her tutor-colleagues, who may very well be choosing between silence and disruption of silence in their own observance of marriage laws soon, represents a symbolic expression of Torah and Madda in ways that are not authorized in other institutional spaces beyond the writing center.
Chapter Four

Coming Out of the Center: Tutors Disidentifying through Civic Engagement

“Something that I want to keep doing is just pushing for equality in all ways within Orthodoxy, and equality is really antithetical to Orthodoxy.”

--Shulamit, interview on Feb 22, 2013

The data that I offered in Chapter Three of writing center tutors within the center and within the institution foregrounds how tutoring and writing centers connect to civic engagement. The current chapter builds on Chapter Three’s identification of how tutors’ interactions constitute various publics within the writing center and within the institution to define civic engagement as an extension of the public performances that happen in and around the writing center.

The rhetorical relationships I present here involve tutors engaging with Jewish Modern Orthodox audiences outside of the institution. While this turn outside of the writing center and the institution certainly invokes an audience that may overlap in some ways with YU’s institutional one—in that graduates of YU necessarily make up some of the broader Modern Orthodox community in New York City—the audiences that tutors address in the data I present here are neither exclusively nor expressly affiliated with YU. This is significant for the different ways rhetorical practices are indicated by the data that follows. As tutors move their civic engagement outside of the institution, the content and form of their rhetorical practices featured in this chapter are markedly different from those in earlier chapters. These
institutionally-specific and community-specific relationships more generally reflect what James Berlin in \textit{Rhetoric and Reality} calls “the nature and role of the individual” within social structures, and further reflects “the distribution of power in society” (4). In his introduction to \textit{Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures}, Berlin specifically argues for rhetorical education in America based on a broad historicization of rhetorical education in fourth and fifth century Athens: “Citizens needed rhetorical education to prepare for public performance when required to speak for themselves before the law and assembly” (Berlin xii). Considering civic performance in the terms Berlin provides, this chapter considers undergraduate writing center tutors’ performances for 21st century civic audiences; but rather than presenting themselves “before the law and assembly,” this chapter shows tutors successfully performing for their community of peers outside of their educational institution, but still among their religious Jewish Modern Orthodox community.

The data in this chapter provides evidence indicating that tutors strongly identify as Modern Orthodox Jews, yet I feature two examples of tutors’ civic engagement to show how tutors publicly resist YU’s religious rhetorical education in terms of gender and sexual identity. Specifically, this chapter analyzes two tutor-organized civic events: a panel-reading of work written by queer Jewish women and a co-educational prayer group led by women. Both civic events disidentify with YU’s religious identification in ways that I explicate in this chapter. I further argue that writing centers are connected to rhetorical education by showing that tutors’ civic engagement constitutes counterpublics outside of the institution that stand at an ideological distance from institutional publics. This collective data also proves how writing
centers are middles spaces where tutors develop rhetorical skills and gain opportunities for rehearsing their civic performances.

In their introduction to *The Public Work of Rhetoric: Citizen Scholars and Civic Engagement*, John M. Ackerman and David J. Coogan indicate that they are interested in the ways rhetoric helps students “appropriate a place within a contested, discursive framework” (6). Ackerman and Coogan identify the challenges that exist for educators who are charged, or take it upon themselves as rhetoricians, to teach students to appropriate such a contested place, for institutions of higher education themselves uphold a range of socio-cultural divisions and privileges. Yet, it is precisely because the university does not control publics—beyond its own boundaries, at least—that Ackerman and Coogan’s work looks at rhetoric’s role in civic engagement: “Rhetoric may provide the moment, the acuity, and the discursive terrain for translations of discourses criss-crossing the university and public life” (8). My current chapter shows tutors’ rhetorical activity, their “discourses criss-crossing the university and public life,” to exist as public representations of engagement with institutional—social, religious, cultural—discourse and resistance of that very discourse through alternative public performances.

Implicit in Ackerman and Coogan’s and Berlin’s understanding of rhetoric and civic engagement, and relevant to framing tutors’ civic engagement, is the how minority voices make themselves heard in civic arenas, or appropriating “a place within a contested, discursive framework” (Ackerman and Coogan 6). Literacy scholars have worked actively, through ethnographic research and community literacy projects, to define how civic engagement can offer access to minority communities whose needs are otherwise marginalized or unheard. Linda Flower offers a particularly useful definition of civic engagement that suits the data in the
chapter. She calls civic engagement “direct action supporting the public voice of marginalized people and perspectives through collaborative research, community-based courses and projects, media development, and public dialogue” (Flower 137). This chapter features the public work of undergraduate writing center tutors who create their own spaces for public dialogue that is restricted on their college campus. Through civic engagement, tutors use multiple means to publicly enact rhetorics and identities that are marginalized within the institution.

Tutors’ civic engagement represents a disruptive pedagogy that revises institutional rhetorical education. Tutors’ civically engaged pedagogy enacts what composition scholar Paula Mathieu calls “a process that must be forged communally” (20). In her book Tactics of Hope: The Public Turn in English Composition, Mathieu offers examples of civic engagement intended to disrupt dominant practices. Mathieu describes a series of bus tours guided by homeless writers that she organized in partnership with Chicago’s Neighborhood Writing Alliance and the StreetWise Writers Group. Through Mathieu’s careful consideration of labor and her details of the tours, she demonstrates that “the tour attempted to upset conventional expectations about Chicago, bus tours, and homeless people” (45). Like the disruptive (and productive) nature of Mathieu’s bus tours, tutors’ civic engagement that I document here reveals how undergraduate writing center tutors similarly upset conventions of their Modern Orthodox communities. In working with each other and with Orthodox institutions beyond YU, tutors’ civic engagement “engages all stakeholders in a dialogue” (Feldman 23). In Making Writing Matter: Composition in the Engaged University, composition scholar Ann M. Feldman emphasizes the importance of the “engaged university,” one that is embedded in “communities
of practice that exist across departments and across institutional boundaries” (22). While Feldman focuses on institutions that mobilize in civically engaging ways, her definition of engagement represents tutors’ civic activities that resist institutional rhetorical education.

I continue to build on my earlier use of Jose Esteban Muñoz’s term disidentification to show how tutors simultaneously identify as Modern Orthodox Jewish women yet disidentify with certain gender normative performances within Modern Orthodoxy. I argue that tutors’ civic engagement disidentifies with certain tenets of institutional rhetorical education for audiences beyond the institution. In fact, we can conceive of an undergraduate tutor communicating outside of the institution as a disidentifying move in and of itself. This chapter demonstrates how tutors’ civic engagement disidentifies “with dominant ideology, [a disidentification] that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposed it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology” (Muñoz 11).

The data here, presenting fieldwork from a tutor-organized public reading by queer Orthodox women authors and tutor-organized a mixed-sex prayer group, reflect that both events interpellate Jewish Modern Orthodox audiences in terms of religious identification; yet the civic events here also push “against dominant ideology” in the way they transgress conceptions of gender and sexuality in Modern Orthodoxy as well. Through their civic engagement, tutors revise institutional rhetorical education in their resistance of conventions of Modern Orthodox identity.
Civic Engagement, Counterpublics, and Disidentification

Civic engagement involves directly addressing a public for the express purpose of modifying or resisting a particular discourse. This section returns to Shulamit’s narrative to feature an example of her civic engagement: her organization and execution of a panel of women writers reading excerpts of their work on queer identity in Orthodox Judaism. In Spring 2012, during her senior year as an undergraduate at YU, Shulamit’s fellowship at the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA) afforded her the opportunity to organize an event “to promote the message of JOFA” (more on that message in a moment). Shulamit described her role at JOFA during our interview: “Every year [JOFA has] a cohort of fellows on different university campuses across the east coast, and all the fellows are charged with having two events on their campuses per year.” I attended one of the events that Shulamit organized for her JOFA fellowship, a panel she moderated as part of a book tour for the anthology *Keep Your Wives Away from Them: Orthodox Women, Unorthodox Desires*, edited by YU alumna Miriam Kabakov. Shulamit arranged for Kabakov and five other of the book’s contributors to do a reading and discussion that Shulamit introduced and moderated. In what follows, I present how Shulamit’s *Keep Your Wives Away* event itself disidentifies with YU’s rhetorical education, how Shulamit’s narrative about the event reveals that she too disidentifies with YU’s institutional mission and rhetorical education, and that, through civic engagement, Shulamit, a writing center tutor at the time, revises rhetorical education.

The mission of JOFA generally, and specifically JOFA’s Campus Fellowship Program for which Shulamit applied and was selected, simultaneously serves to complement and antagonize the institutional mission of YU and the rhetorical education developed specifically on YU’s
women’s campus. JOFA’s mission statement positions itself as an organization which views change within Orthodox Judaism as urgent and imperative. On their website, JOFA identifies itself as:

[...] the leading organization advancing social change around gender issues in the Orthodox community. JOFA expands the spiritual, ritual, intellectual and political opportunities for women within the framework for halakha (Jewish law), by advocating meaningful participation and equality for women in family life, synagogues, houses of learning and Jewish communal organizations to the full extent possible within halakha. The core JOFA belief is that fulfilling this mission will enrich and uplift the entire Jewish people. (“Mission”)

In its project to advance “social change around gender issues” and advocate “meaningful participation and equality for women,” JOFA is an organization that strongly articulates a commitment to civic engagement. Based on my earlier definition of civic engagement, this urgency around change—around modifying a particular discourse—reflects a resistance to dominant discourse and practices within Judaism. JOFA’s official description of its Campus Fellowship on its website, however, is less specific in terms of effecting change the way the broader mission does: “The JOFA Campus Fellowship gives undergraduate Orthodox women the opportunity to take on a leadership role within the Orthodox community of their campus” (“JOFA Campus”). While the description of the Campus Fellowship goes on to very concretely define how the fellowship supports this investment in leadership—“leadership training, mentoring, stipend, as well as a programming budget”—JOFA does not reiterate its commitment to change in this description. I emphasize this difference between the general
mission and the specific fellowship description not to suggest that JOFA’s fellowship is not committed to advocacy for Orthodox women’s issues in the way the larger mission identifies, but rather to point out how the broad focus on women’s “leadership” is language that resonates on YU’s women’s campus. As a women’s liberal arts college, YU’s Stern College for Women is committed to creating leadership opportunities for women.

Despite this seeming agreement between these two Modern Orthodox Jewish institutions—YU and JOFA—the language of JOFA’s larger mission, is distinctly at odds with an organization like YU that is committed to authorizing public communication to uphold and define gender difference as tutors’ narratives have shown. Considering JOFA’s references to inequalities within the common discourse of Modern Orthodoxy, JOFA is committed to redefining Modern Orthodoxy, to creating spaces for women that have not historically been authorized within the tradition. JOFA then offers a kind of rhetorical education, particularly for the undergraduate women who participate in JOFA’s Campus Fellowship, which serves as an alternative to YU’s rhetorical education. The rhetorical education that JOFA’s mission enacts is an act of disidentification, in that the organization sees itself as part of the Modern Orthodox tradition, while also resisting its gendered discourse. Shulamit’s involvement in JOFA echoes the organization’s disidentification with Modern Orthodoxy in rich and generative ways.

Although Shulamit’s role as a JOFA Campus Fellow stipulated that she hold JOFA events on her home campus, Shulamit made a deliberate rhetorical choice in not doing so. As an undergraduate with a keen understanding of YU’s institutional ethos, Shulamit believed that identifying an event as “queer” to host on YU’s campus would not be approved by institutional
programming. Shulamit spoke to a blogger for the feminist Jewish magazine *Lilith* about the *Keep Your Wives Away From Them* event:

I wanted to sidestep the fallout of a “scandalous” event which would generate conversation about scandal rather than the important issues addressed. There’s no policy banning gay events but there is a board that looks at all the speakers that are brought in and the content of events. For this reason, I surmised that this event would not have been permitted. I would have to package it as something else to fly under the radar—such as “What feminists are writing about Orthodoxy.”

Anticipating YU’s refusal to engage (homo)sexuality as a topic of discussion, Shulamit made a choice to host the event at JOFA’s offices on Manhattan’s west side. Shulamit’s choice reflects her perception that YU would not authorize an event committed to queer Jewish identity. Shulamit did not want to closet this event for the YU community, and by choosing to organize the event at JOFA, she not only made this event accessible and marketable to YU’s community of undergraduate students, but she employed a variety of rhetorical considerations, as well.

Shulamit’s rhetorical savvy comes from her direct experience of how YU’s institutional rhetorical education operates within curricular restraints as well as extra-curricular possibilities. During Shulamit’s first semester at YU, the institution publicly resisted supporting its queer students in response to an event on YU’s men’s campus. In December 2009, students organized a panel on YU’s men’s campus, Yeshiva College, which included four speakers—three graduates and one undergraduate—who identified as gay. The goal of the panel was to begin a

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31 To protect Shulamit’s anonymity, I withhold the full *Lilith* citation here.
conversation about identifying as gay in the Modern Orthodox community and at YU. *Lilith* magazine reported on that event in their feature on Shulamit’s *Keep Your Wives Away* reading, saying that, “some 800 students filled the YU venue to overflowing. Rabbinical faculty protested the event and the great chill set in when at least one wealthy donor threatened to stop donating.”32 Despite the obvious interest among YU’s students, reflected in the sheer numbers in attendance, the institution’s response to the event at YU’s men’s camp reverberated three years later when Shulamit was organizing her JOFA event, inviting queer Jewish women writers to speak about their experiences in and around YU. Shulamit told me, “if I pushed harder, if I worked harder, if I hadn’t been going through a lot, I probably could have made it happen at [YU]. And ... ultimately, I had it at the JOFA offices” (Shulamit’s emphasis). Shulamit expresses tentativeness when she reflects on her choice of the location of her event at JOFA’s offices. She does not directly invoke the institution’s response to the 2009 panel of gay YU students and alumni, but that event is a part of recent institutional history that is particularly relevant to queer life at YU and part of Shulamit’s institutional experience that informs her rhetorical decisions.

Shulamit’s event and her choice of JOFA’s offices as a venue for the event, as opposed to YU, constitute a counterpublic to the institutional publics featured in the last chapter. In “Going Public—in a Disabling Discourse,” Linda Flower indicates that counterpublics “offer

32 Shulamit’s tentativeness here indeed reflects her perception that YU would not have welcomed a panel of Jewish women speaking about queer identity based on the institution’s reaction to the 2009 panel at the men’s campus. Yet it should be noted that students on the men’s campus push-backed against institutional homophobic discourse in their campus newspaper *The Commentator*. In particular, YU student Arel Kirshstein, in his article “A Letter to the Student Body from a Non-Anonymous Homosexual Student,” directly expresses his (many positive) experiences coming-out at YU.
marginalized groups and individuals a rhetorical safe house—a place to try out their voices, to grow, to plan, to recuperate, and to regroup. But in asserting their own vernacular rhetorics, these counterpublics frequently insist on renaming the issues and building embodied arguments through narrative and performance” (146). Indeed, JOFA’s mission, inasmuch as it advocates “meaningful participation and equality for women in family life, synagogues, houses of learning and Jewish communal organizations,” claims almost explicitly that it is a counterpublic to much of Modern Orthodox discourse. Yet more striking here is that Shulamit—an individual undergraduate writing tutor at a small, religious, women’s liberal arts college—not only personally disidentifies with her college’s rhetorical education, but actively creates a counterpublic to achieve Flower’s “rhetorical safe house” for approaching conversations that she perceives have been prohibited on her college’s campus. In this way, Shulamit is “claiming the stigma” (Flower 137) of queer identity at YU, a rhetorical move that is akin to what Flower identifies in the civic engagement of urban high school students coming out as learning disabled. Shulamit’s “claiming the stigma” of queerness in Modern Orthodoxy is an act of disidentification in her ownership of queer sexuality at an institution that seeks to silence public conversations around (homo)sexuality. Shulamit’s choice in the location of the event, far from a scheduling technicality, reflects that she identifies with the heightened discomfort around sexuality at YU. This knowledge and experience leads Shulamit to make a choice that creates an entry into a conversation of queer sexuality in Modern Orthodox Judaism that is accessible to the YU community and offers alternative representations of the discourse around such conversations than those that have happened in YU’s recent past.
Beyond the rhetorical activity of Shulamit’s organization of the *Keep Your Wives Away* event, Shulamit disidentifies personally in the larger activity of the event’s performance. Her civic engagement, while public, serves as rather private “rhetorical safe house” for processing the messages the institution sends in regards to sexuality. In describing her choice of organizing this as her second event to fulfill the responsibilities as a JOFA Campus Fellow, Shulamit told me:

I had been to one of [the *Keep Your Wives Away from Them*] book readings the year before, and I really wanted to, uh ... bring this idea to Stern because both myself and a lot of my friends that I knew were struggling with this idea of sexuality. ... And, uh ... it was obviously very closeted and hush-hush and something that was a very big part of my life. And I ... I really thought it was an important event at Stern.

Shulamit’s narrative data in Chapter Two reflects that, as an undergraduate tutor, she strongly identifies with the mission of YU, even in her resistance of it; similarly, Shulamit also reflects in the earlier chapter that her commitment to Judaism reverberates in her tutoring pedagogy. What strikes me as a researcher when I look at the transcript above is how Shulamit, a participant who spoke fluidly and confidently when discussing her relationship to her faith and the religious institution where she received her undergraduate education, falters here when reflecting on her relationship with her own sexuality within the constellation of the institution. Shulamit’s disidentification is apparent in the long pauses, indicated by the ellipses above, and spaces of hesitation (“uh”), or perhaps moments when her reflections and thoughts were not coming as quickly and seamlessly as other times in our interview, as those I feature in Chapter
Shulamit’s hesitation in her narrative here suggests a few things to me: that she may be looking for categories of identification that Modern Orthodoxy, and YU as the institution authorizing her Modern Orthodox expression at the time of our interview, can accommodate; that she may be representing a particular kind of homophobic discourse circulating at the institution, one that silences talk of non-normative representations of sexuality. And yet, while both of these suggestions may be at play in this data, the data goes on to show that Shulamit strongly identifies with the complexities of lacking a way to name her identity within in her Orthodox Jewish faith. The act of civic engagement around Judaism, religious texts, and sexual identity is a performance of Shulamit’s process of negotiating those prickly, often conflicting categories, in her own life. Shulamit invokes the Torah in her description of the success of the *Keep Your Wives Away* event and how the event connected to her own experience:

I just felt like it was really important to address the question of female sexuality specifically within the Orthodox community because male sexuality is something that’s very clearly prohibited by the Jewish text. There’s a very explicit verse in Leviticus that says man may not lay with another man, [...] whereas for women, there’s actually no mention of female sexuality in the literature until much later. [...] But the thing that I find so interesting [...] is just the idea of women finding themselves in the text [of the Torah and its commentaries], and how women are portrayed, and relating to the portrayal of women in the text, and as a woman how do you deal with learning about that. [...] There’s one specific woman [Elaine Chapnik] who wrote for the anthology, and she talks about how finding
herself in the text was so refreshing, ‘cause it’s like, “oh look, there’s really a place for me in this text, even if it’s subversive, even if I have to reinterpret something. But like, they mentioned me in this text, and even though it’s negatively, like this is such a great feeling to know that I’m somewhere here, and I wasn’t forgotten.”

Shulamit moves away from discussing her own sexuality here to discussing the representations of queer male sexuality in the Torah. Shulamit is interpellated by a discussion of queer male sexuality and aware of the absence of queer female sexuality in the Torah. She is drawn to a particular speaker and writer for *Keep Your Wives Away from Them*, Elaine Chapnik, whose essay in the anthology takes up the absence of queer female sexuality in Jewish texts, while queer male sexuality, according to Shulamit and Chapnik, is expressly forbidden often. Shulamit indicates that finding one’s self in the text—from the specific subject position of a queer women—is a phenomenon she credits to her civic engagement on the topic of women’s queer sexuality in Modern Orthodoxy.

Shulamit’s civic engagement performs the very thing she says excites her about the writers of the anthology *Keep Your Wives Away from Them*. The absence of women’s sexuality from a religious text, the Torah, is filled for Shulamit through a secular text, the anthology. Specifically, Shulamit references Elaine Chapnik, who read an excerpt of her essay “‘Women Known for These Acts’ Through the Rabbinic Lens: A Study of Hilchot Lesbuit,” anthologized in *Keep Your Wives Away from Them* for the JOFA event. Chapnik reads Torah commentaries on


Leviticus\textsuperscript{33} that take up “women known for the acts,” or women known for bodily contact with other women. Yet, Chapnik makes clear that, despite lesbianism being taken up in commentaries, it is invisible in the Torah, in the Bible itself. And while she is aware that this might be comforting to some queer observant Jewish women who wish “to remain under the radar screen of rabbinic oprobium” (81), Chapnik’s reading is committed to unearthing lesbian acts in the Jewish tradition, which she excerpts as “these acts” from a phrase in Torah that refers to women touching each other. One part of Chapnik’s thesis is that “it is far better to be in the text and banned than not to be mentioned at all” (81). In her careful consideration of Jewish texts, Chapnik explores the ambiguity of “these acts,” this mysteriously ill-defined bodily contact between women, and how its attempt at definition stems from heteronormative and patriarchal views of sex and sexuality. In her celebration of the appearance of lesbian sexuality at all in Jewish texts, Chapnik says:

I find some joy in Maimonides’ writings. I love his assumptions that women would naturally be drawn to doing mesolelut [bodily acts] with each other, so much that he had to warn men to guard their wives. [...] How wonderful and moving it is to discover in a medieval, classical Jewish text the existences of lesbian desire in twelfth-century North Africa: the recognition that Jewish women similar to us, the Orthodykes, not only existed in another place and time, many centuries ago, but their presence was actually tolerated—albeit to a very limited extent—by the Jewish community. (92-3)

\textsuperscript{33} The one excerpt here does not do justice to Chapnik’s voluminous knowledge of Torah commentaries, which, evidenced in her full essay, is prolific, ranging from the Talmud to Rashi to Maimonides and others.
Identifying her involvement with the Orthodykes, “a support group in New York for Orthodox lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered women” (78), Chapnik also makes clear the importance, particularly in Judaism, for marking a historical, textual precedent for one’s identity. Chapnik’s text reflects a few things that are mirrored in Shulamit’s civic engagement: Chapnik, like Shulamit, is interested in tracing queer identity within Judaism. One effect of this genealogy extracted from religious texts is that it buttresses Shulamit’s counterpublic. Further, this genealogy provides a sort of cultural validation that authorizes the existence of queer women in Judaism, as Shulamit echoed in her interview with me, “they mentioned me in this text, and even though it’s negatively, like this is such a great feeling to know that I’m somewhere here, and I wasn’t forgotten.” Shulamit’s expression of desire to exist in the text—to be authorized among a community of women who similarly identify—was corroborated during the question-and-answer session after the *Keep Your Wives Away* event. This standing-room only crowd was partly composed of YU women alumni who told their own stories of feeling closeted or marginalized as college students, and voiced their interest and comfort in hearing the reflections of other observant queer Jewish women, some of whom had connections to YU. Shulamit’s re-owning of Jewish texts through the lens of queer identity serves as a revision to the rhetorical education of YU in that her civic engagement outside of the institution authorizes a kind of communication that has been silenced within the institution.

Shulamit’s civic engagement—the organization of the *Keep Your Wives Away* event and its performance both in relation to YU and at arm’s-length from the institution—mirrors some of the rhetorical performances of Shulamit’s life in the writing center. In Chapter Two, we saw Shulamit developing her one-to-one pedagogy through language informed by YU’s rhetorical
education: *medachtic* and *kavanah*. Shulamit defined *medachtic* as having a heightened responsibility to language and *kavanah* as having intentionality. Shulamit cultivates this language, which reflects the intersection of one tutor’s life with YU’s institutional mission, into rhetorical approaches in the writing center and in her civic life. As I highlighted in presenting this data in Chapter Two, Shulamit’s understanding of the terms *medachtic* and *kavanah* undergird her approach to one-to-one tutoring as a model for how to relate to anything. It’s a model for forcing someone to, like, put their cards on the table in a certain way, and tell you that there’s something behind their language. And it’s this unwillingness to accept empty language. I think that’s one of the most powerful things that I’ve learned in the writing center because I’ve taken that into Biblical analysis.

Shulamit transfers this pedagogical practice, one that she also uses in her religious studies, to her life outside of the institution through her civic engagement. Chapnik’s reading of a portion of her essay for the event Shulamit organized is a public space of engagement that offers the possibility for Orthodox Jewish women, like Shulamit, to *find themselves in the text*. Shulamit’s commitment to civic engagement seeks both to identify herself in the text, but also to create a counterpublic, Flower’s rhetorical safe-house, for others in her Modern Orthodox community to hear and join a discussion about women’s sexuality. Shulamit’s desire to find herself in religious texts and to facilitate others’ ways into those texts and conversations resonates with the intentionality and responsibility to language she practices in the writing center. These practices developed for Shulamit as she negotiated, identified, and disidentified with YU’s rhetorical education in the writing center and within the institution. Shulamit’s civic...
engagement performs productive alternatives to institutional rhetorical education and models ways of communicating that are not otherwise happening at the institution.

**Arm-Chair Civic Engagement: Writing Centers (and Living Rooms) as Middle-Space**

This project’s data collectively argues for us to consider writing centers as middle-spaces, or “productive places to question” accepted values, discourses, “commonplaces or ideologies” (Coogan 159). David J. Coogan, in his article “Sophists for Social Change,” develops a definition of middle-spaces based on Susan Jarratt’s *Rereading the Sophists*: “middles spaces were both concrete places and cerebral places where rhetors articulated the ‘codes’ to evaluate conduct, entertain political possibilities, and in other ways arrange their affairs“ (159). My work traces the rhetorical activity of writing center tutors who, indeed, articulate the codes of conduct within their institution of higher education. In Chapter Three, we see Charlotte and Tara using writing center sessions and meetings to “entertain political possibilities” of going public with issues of modesty for Orthodox Jewish women. The current chapter shows civic engagement beyond the institution that is the result of the rhetorical work of the writing center as middle-space; Shulamit’s interview data reflects that she credits the writing center for helping her cultivate the accountability for language and intent that she sees as crucial to her work within the Jewish community. My own interest in this project as a source of research in fact stemmed from the innumerable occasions that I was invited into conversations in the writing center that engaged the codes of YU’s rhetorical education, while simultaneously constituting publics for intervening into and contending with those codes. Borrowing again from Coogan’s notion of middles spaces, I conceive of writing centers as a places where the
meta-rhetorical work of constituting publics happens: “Making a middle space is not generating and then disseminating ideal strategies for rhetorical intervention but generating publics capable of addressing their own social problems” (159). This section further demonstrates that writing center tutors are particularly well prepared to generate such publics, using their own civic engagement to address concerns within their community.

Shulamit and Charlotte moved their civic engagement from the-writing-center-as-middle-space to Shulamit’s living to authorize an alternative to dominant prayer in Modern Orthodoxy. Much of Shulamit and Charlotte’s casual conversations, often banter, in the writing center involved their concerns about equality between men and women in Modern Orthodox religious practices. In a departure from traditional Orthodox prayer groups, which are led by men and involve distinct spaces for men and women to pray separately, Shulamit and Charlotte convened what they called “an egalitarian prayer service” twice during the 2012-2013 academic year. This prayer service was marked by an investment in co-educational prayer, offering a space where men and women would pray together, without separation, and where women could lead the prayer service. To demonstrate how their plans for revising prayer translated outside of the writing center, Shulamit invited me—and more than 200 other people—to this egalitarian prayer service via Facebook. On a Friday evening just before sundown, the prayer service convened in Shulamit’s living room, where a woman began praying aloud, leading the other female and male congregants who quickly joined in. Halfway through the prayer service, Charlotte gave a sermon about her experience learning Jewish religious texts in a co-educational study hall during a program the previous summer. When Charlotte finished,

34 In Chapter Three, I feature Charlotte’s narrative, in which she reflects on working with an art history student in the writing center, and an article she wrote for her campus newspaper.
praying resumed with men and women taking turns leading prayer. After the congregants had welcomed the Sabbath, Shulamit walked to the front of the room, thanked the congregants for their attendance and participation, and offered a brief history of the night’s event. Shulamit noted that she and Charlotte had been taking suggestions (via Facebook again) for naming this egalitarian prayer gathering and announced that they had decided on the name “Voices from on High,” a tribute to both the biblical Jeremiah and to Washington Heights, the upper Manhattan neighborhood that is home to many of the Modern Orthodox Jewish congregants in attendance that night. I celebrate the title Charlotte and Shulamit chose for their prayer group in the title of this dissertation, an homage to the tutors who participated in this research.

Similar to the pedagogical work of extra-curricular literacy practices highlighted in Anne Ruggles Gere’s “Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms: The Extracurriculum of Composition,” there is a revisionary and subversive pedagogy that took place in Shulamit’s living room for the “Voices from on High” prayer service during the 2012-2013 academic year. Shulamit and Charlotte’s self-sustained civic engagement explicitly resisted dominant methods of prayer in Modern Orthodoxy through its equal valuing of women’s and men’s voices and involvement in the service. This pedagogical intervention was evidenced in the data I collected through informal interviews with attendees after the service who were eager to express the significance of this event. One attendee told me that the formation of this prayer group “was revolutionary because it represents a minority view in Modern Orthodoxy.” Specifically, “Voices from on High” subverts traditional Modern Orthodox prayer by creating a space for women to lead prayer and for both women and men to pray together without a physical room divider.
As a way to echo Shulamit’s quotation that serves as a masthead to this chapter, I feature data from Charlotte’s interview here to demonstrate how YU’s rhetorical education—developed through the institutional mission of Torah Umadda that we see Charlotte negotiate in Chapter Three—led to her investment in creating an egalitarian prayer service. In our interview, Charlotte says that “there two different ways to look at Torah Umadda,” two distinct possible ways to define the term.

One is that both Torah religion and general [secular] culture should be important to a human being, to a Jew. But those two, [religion and secular culture], are separate categories. The other is that, as a whole human being, there’s a constant dialogue between the two that you can’t necessarily separate, so that you are doing Torah and doing Judaism in all aspects of your life, whether or not you are in a specifically religious space. [And] the ideas and general [secular] culture are also infusing, are also a part of, your religious life.

In Charlotte’s view, Torah Umadda can be understood in one of two ways: that religion and secular culture are separate-but-equal, two distinct categories of one’s identity with little contact between the two, an understanding that Charlotte later seems to suggest is a bit naïve; alternatively, she defines a second way of understanding Torah Umadda as two categories—religious and secular culture—of a person’s identity that are always-already in contact. I situate Charlotte’s definitions of Torah Umadda here in the context of understanding the writing center as a middle-space alongside her civic engagement with co-developing “Voices from on High.”

Drawing on data I presented in Chapter Three, Charlotte’s tutoring session with an art history student who struggles to navigate the conflict between her religious beliefs and the
demands of a course that requires her to describe nude statues illuminates a similar tension in Charlotte’s definition of Torah Umadda above. Charlotte’s engagement with the art history student functions to constitute a public through an implicit, yet distinct, conflict. The art history student that arrived at Charlotte’s scheduled tutoring hour had a distinctly different relationship with her religious identity than Charlotte does. While I of course cannot speak for the art history student’s own identity, her concerns about modesty—tsnias—were rooted in an institutional place (specifically with her Orthodox rabbi) that contrasted with Charlotte’s representation of how to navigate religious concerns. Where the student was nervous and tentative in speaking about the body for reasons of religious modesty, Charlotte had an easily accessible language for the body to offer the student that she did not couch in religious significance. In offering the student these possibilities, Charlotte performed a revisionary rhetorical education for a public-of-one. I suggest that this tutoring activity where Charlotte translates and negotiates the codes of YU’s institutional mission and rhetorical education for herself and her student mark the writing center as a middle-space, serving as a space to generate a public and to rehearse for Charlotte’s civic engagement outside of the center.

The conflict underlying Charlotte’s and her student’s approaches to the art history assignment are negotiated in the writing-center-as-middle-space and mirrored in the conflict between Charlotte’s definitions of Torah Umadda above. Charlotte describes YU’s understanding of Torah Umadda according to her first description above, the separate-but-equal representation of religion and secular culture, where, in her words, there is an investment in upholding divisions between secular values and religious life, as “there’s a huge discomfort” with the two coming into contact with each other; yet, she describes her
orientation with Torah Umadda according her second representation above, that both religion and secular values are continually in conversation with each other. It is this secular-religious contact, a “synthesis” as she calls is, that informs Charlotte’s interest in forming a prayer group where women can assume leadership roles that are traditionally associated with men in modern Orthodoxy. For example, Charlotte tells me that her “reading of feminist literature” dovetails with her interest “in more egalitarian forms of Judaism, forms of Judaism that give women a greater platform.” Charlotte identifies feminist literature having influenced the way she sees the Modern Orthodox tradition as her definition of Torah Umadda, an awareness and “synthesis” that she places in contrast to how she sees the institution as defining its mission. While the institution’s mission denotes some prescribed ideals, Charlotte and her fellow tutors explore various connotations of the mission that are not officially authorized or uttered by institutional policies.

Charlotte’s understanding of traditional prayer groups in Modern Orthodoxy and her move to create an alternative to that tradition reveals a sophisticated awareness of audience, an awareness that extends from her practice generating publics within the writing center. Traditional prayer in Modern Jewish Orthodoxy is practiced at YU as an extension of the institution’s rhetorical education, as it is steeped in conventional gendered practices that authorize behavioral communication in a specifically gendered way. Charlotte tells me that the way prayer would happen in co-educational spaces at, or affiliated with, YU would involve a mechitza, a room divider intended to separate the men from the women. Charlotte is vocally uncomfortable with this practice saying, “It doesn’t make sense to me to put an artificial barrier [between men and women],” and she voices frustration with having felt like “prayer is a
spectator sport” for women. Organizing Voices from on High, then, takes into account the traditional form of prayer, not to abandon it, but to subvert it enough to be inclusive for all involved. Charlotte’s ability to facilitate sensitive conversations about the body, language, and writing in the academy, particularly when religious values come into conflict with such categories, as a tutor is analogous in certain ways to her civic engagement. Similar to her role as an educator in the writing center, one who offers alternatives to tradition and navigates religious and secular tensions for institutional publics, Charlotte offers a similar model of rhetorical engagement in her community, a model that revises traditional modes of prayer that simultaneously upholds tradition through its resistance.

Conclusion

In the epigraph to this chapter, I quote Shulamit, who offers an impetus for her civic engagement: “Something that I want to keep doing is just pushing for equality in all ways within Orthodoxy, and equality is really antithetical to Orthodoxy.” Together, Shulamit and Charlotte’s civic engagement featured here—the panel-reading by queer Orthodox Jewish women and the egalitarian prayer service—demonstrate Shulamit’s cause and critique. Like JOFA’s mission, which encouraged Shulamit’s civic engagement around women’s queer sexuality, Shulamit and Charlotte reflect their investment in creating spaces for inclusion and egalitarian participation in their Modern Orthodox communities that they felt were not authorized by YU’s institutional mission. Yet their institutional experiences triangulate and complement their civic engagement through their work as writing center tutors. Specifically, Shulamit’s commitment to and rehearsal of the rhetorical roles of writer and reader as a tutor in the writing center inform her
investment in offering other Modern Orthodox Jewish women ways to read themselves in Jewish texts and writer their ways into conversations about sexual identity. Similarly, Charlotte’s writing center pedagogy that performs alternative representations of institutional rhetorical education prepare her for the performance of civic engagement with the same communal effect.

As tutors, Shulamit and Charlotte are teachers within their communities; as students, their institutional lives have been bound in certain ways by the rhetorical education developed by YU. These tutors’ rhetorical acts outside the writing center—indeed, outside of the institution—actively intervene and revise institutionally developed rhetorical education. It is tutors’ intimate understanding of the communal identity of their fellow students, an understanding at least partially gained in the writing center as a neither wholly curricular nor extracurricular space, that allows us to see tutors’ impact on institution mission.
Conclusion

How Did a Curriculum Like You End Up in a Writing Center Like This?

The Multicultural Curriculum of a Jewish Women’s Writing Center

In Chapter One, I highlight Sollod’s critique of the “hollow curriculum” that claims to be multicultural but does not include religion as a category within that curriculum. While my research clearly considers religion as a category of identity and discourse that we must attend to and make space for in writing studies, my work also demonstrates how religion is inextricable from other, equally complex, categories of identity, like gender and sexuality. I also identify how, distinct from public and/or secular institutions of higher education that make specific claims to valuing multiculturalism and diversity (Morphew and Hartley), YU is unique in that its undergraduate mission and curriculum is specifically built to ensure cultural continuity. Do a quick internet experiment by reading the institutional mission statements of the first public institution of higher education that comes to mind, and you will surely find a statement of the institution’s commitment to diversity, inclusion, and multiculturalism. The project of YU, and other institutions that were established in response to exclusion from dominant culture (such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities), is less about diversity, inclusion, and multicultural identities (in fact, in the case of YU, the mission is deliberately not about these key terms), and more about strengthening a very specific communal identity. My research is responding to a question I’ve felt since my early days working in this Jewish women’s writing center: how can I, as writing program administrator, composition teacher, and rhetorician,
learn from and compose a multicultural rhetorical curriculum in a space that seems so purposefully homogenous?

Throughout the process of gathering, coding, and analyzing my data, I began quietly feeling something that, at first, felt a bit naïve and certainly counterintuitive to my life-long-public-school-educated self: that this all-women’s writing center at a small liberal arts college affiliated with Modern Orthodox Judaism was doing the work of multicultural rhetorical education ... almost on its own. My research site performs some of what Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes encourage in their recent CCC article “Flattening Effects: Compositions Multicultural Imperative and the Problem of Narrative Coherence.” Alexander and Rhodes call for those of us in writing studies to:

move beyond, perhaps even leave behind, the multicultural imperative to “include” queerness as another category of “difference” in the composition curriculum (as well as in the profession) and explore instead how queerness in its excessive modes—the ways queerness can exceed normalizing categories of identity, even lesbian and gay identity—poses a unique and significant challenge to literacy (432).

Simply naming a category of difference, like “queerness,” is what Alexander and Rhodes call the “flattening effect” of a multicultural curriculum, one that reduces the “other” into easily identifiable categories. Rather, they encourage “radical alterity,” a move against basic inclusion towards “a need for acknowledging and working through identity categories while also problematizing them, keeping alive a sense of how they lead to elision of important differences” (439). While Alexander and Rhodes acknowledge the near impossibility of this task, their
investment in envisioning a robust curriculum that encourages confronting discomfort through awareness of difference (rather than a happy we-are-the-world sort of inclusion) is reflected in the narratives of the women in this study. Despite YU’s many normative practices—two single-sex campuses separated by miles of Manhattan terrain with discursive practices in place to reinforce that separation of sexes—the women writing center tutors whose voices I try to present here continually work to complicate the categories of identity that YU develops through its rhetorical education enacted by its mission statement. I suggest here that it is perhaps because of the very ways that YU overly identifies its students, the way the institution prescribes specific criteria for students’ identities—some of those categories featured here are (married) woman, sexual desire, religious observance (evident in practices like dress, touch, modesty, and prayer)—that encourage certain students, at the very least writing center tutors, to blur and collapse those categories into alternative ways of being in the world. I certainly am not suggesting that institutions of higher education would benefit from over-prescribing categories of students’ identities; rather, I am claiming that writing centers, more than composition classrooms and other institutional spaces, are better spaces for the work of cultivating a rhetorical education with a robust approach to multiculturalism, perhaps most effectively in a seemingly homogenous, overly-identified institution. My work with undergraduate writing tutors has shown that tutors engage different identities in ways that confront difference with respect for diverse experiences and the desire to include difference in their work in the writing center, institution, and civic engagement.

Writing center scholars are aware of the trappings of the flattened multicultural curriculum. Fifteen years ago, in “Postcolonialism and the Idea of a Writing Center,” Anis
Bawarshi and Stephanie Pelkowski urged us to consider the writing center in terms of Mary Louise Pratt’s *contact zones*, indicating that doing so would help “marginalized students function within academic discourses [and] also make explicit how these discourses rhetorically and socially function” (52-3). In other words, Bawarshi and Pelkowski too resist the inclusive safe-space metaphor to encourage tutor contention with difference, particularly when working with “marginalized students.” In more recent writing center scholarship, Kathryn Valentine and Mónica F. Torres, in their chapter “Diversity as Topography: The Benefits and Challenges of Cross Racial Interaction in the Writing Center,” recommend that writing center administrators train tutors to understand differences between themselves and their students, particularly by “challenging tutors to explore the assumptions they make about the meanings of students’ racial and linguistics backgrounds” (206). These markers—Bawarshi and Pelkowski’s “marginalized students,” and Valentine and Torres’ students’ “racial and linguistic backgrounds”—and the ways these markers signify at YU, lead to the unique rhetorical activity I see the women tutors performing at YU.

My look at rhetorical education and writing center tutors complicates notions of multiculturalism and privilege. As Jewish women, tutors at YU are marginalized, minorities among Christian Americans and *spectators* (to borrow Charlotte’s description of practicing prayer in Modern Orthodoxy) to the activities of men within their religious tradition. Yet, these tutors also occupy the role of privilege, in that all tutors who participated in this study, and indeed all tutors who have worked at the writing center at least since my arrival in 2007, are and have been racially white, and have attended private educational institutions throughout most of their academic lives. All tutors that I interviewed here told me the various way that
both privileged and minority positions have been conditions of their lives in very glaring ways since as long as they could remember. So while multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusion are staples of many American institutions, the implications of how power relations constantly fluctuate within a truly multicultural space are felt and acknowledged very explicitly at YU, an institution that pays no mind to such words.

The tutors who participated in this study reveal what happens when “multiculturalism,” “diversity,” and “inclusion” are not keywords in the mission of an institution or its writing center. Specifically, the women who tutor at YU’s writing center on the Stern College for Women campus understand the ways in which they signify through dress, hair coverings, and books that they read, and these women call each other out on these differences all the time. And while this may be a result of same-sex education or Jewish education (both interesting possibilities for future research), my research shows that tutors’ awareness of their own signification is connected to the ways institutions educate these tutors, and the ways these tutors engage with publics to resist and revise—to disidentify with—this education. Writing center scholar Harry Denny in Facing the Center: Toward an Identity Politics of One-to-One Mentoring attends to the “differential experiences of those who can’t perform normalized or naturalized identities in the public domain of college teaching and learning. [...] All of us signify even before we utter words, not just the folks whose performances are always already read as different” (115). Denny is right to identify here, and throughout his work, the way privilege circulates in “college teaching and learning,” particularly in writing centers, and how difference, once read through its signification, can have silencing effects. Denny’s challenging of the writing-center-as-safe-space metaphor here resonates with my research, but in different ways.
than represented in his text. Indeed, multiculturalism (or inclusion or diversity) can efface “differential experiences of those who can’t perform normalized” identities, a Denny states. But when tutors’ work publicly disidentifies with institutional rhetorical education—be it in tutoring sessions, staff meetings, the school newspaper, or civic engagement beyond the institution—they show us, as administrators, that there is promising work to be done to develop tutors’ awareness of themselves as rhetorical actors in dialogue with the circulating identities of their fellow peers (in this case, undergraduates) but also in dialogue with their institution and communities.

Another way to name the kind of robust curriculum that Alexander and Rhodes, and the other scholars I look at in this chapter, describe aligns with Ackerman and Coogan’s language around civic engagement that I offered in Chapter Four: to help students “appropriate a place within a contested, discursive framework” (6). So what would happen if we trained tutors for civic engagement? If, in addition to fostering an awareness of the distinct identities and experiences of students who use the center, we revise our training curriculum and staff development to mentor tutors (and how lovely if those tutors are undergraduates!) to enter conflicted rhetorical spaces? These rhetorical spaces perhaps involve contact with differences in religious observance, sexual orientation, and identification with institutional mission. My work calls for a revision of writing center curriculum and tutor training to include making tutors aware of their roles as rhetors within the institution and their communities, not only as peers who work with diverse students. Training tutors for civic engagement then, for me, seems to be a task that helps tutors see the very individuals that they are as tutors; tutoring is a kind of civic engagement, a kind of way of triangulating the problems of being students, the demands
of heeding institutional rhetorical education, and the value of interpellating various (and perhaps contested) identities. To help our tutors see themselves as civic rhetors is to maintain a sort of queer futurity, “the rejection of the here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world” (Muñoz, Cruising Utopia 1). My writing center—another world of possibility—is one where undergraduate tutors are imagined as institutional stakeholders, rhetorical educators, and civic actors.
Appendix A

Recruitment Email to Potential Participants

Dear [Potential Participant’s Name],

You are receiving this email because I am inviting you to participate in an ethnographic research study as part of my doctoral dissertation at the CUNY Graduate Center.

I’m using the Beren Writing Center as my research site. As you are a current or past tutor in the Writing Center, I’m hoping to interview you as part of my ethnographic research. My questions will ask you about your understanding of Torah U’Madada in your education at Stern, your work in the Writing Center, and your life beyond Stern. The purpose of this research study is to better understand the role of institutional mission and The Beren Writing Center in tutors’ educational lives. The results of this study may increase awareness of how writing centers function as spaces of rhetorical and literacy education within higher education.

Your participation in this study would be voluntary, and you may decide not to participate without prejudice or penalty.

If you are interested in participating or would like more information about my study or the interview, please contact me at andrearossoefthymiou@gmail.com or 917-699-1910.

Thank you in advance for considering,

Andrea
Framework and Sample Questions for Tutor Interviews

I. Background Information

- Choose a pseudonym.

- If a current tutor: What are you studying? And how did you become interested in working as a writing tutor?

- If graduated: How did you become interested in working as a writing tutor while you were at Stern? And what have you been doing since graduation?

II. Introduction of Dissertation Project

I’m writing a dissertation in the field of rhetoric, which I define broadly as understanding spoken, written, and behavioral communication in a social context; such communication can be between individuals and also between individuals and institutions. I see the Beren Writing Center (BWC) as a site where rhetorical work between tutors and the institution happens. I understand YU’s institutional mission of Torah Umadda as integral to the ways tutors communicate within the writing center and within the institution.

III. Defining Rhetorical Education at SCW: Mission and Definition

- What does the mission Torah Umadda mean to you? How do/did you see this mission working in your education?

- How is/was this mission a part of your writing center experience?
• Where do you see Torah U’Madda informing your life outside of Stern? Where do you see it in your Jewish life? In your non-Jewish life?

IV. Literacy

Part of my understanding of the rhetorical work of tutors in and around the BWC makes me interested in what I’m calling tutors’ religious literacy. In other words, I believe that the language practices of tutors at this particular institution are linked to the mission Torah U'madda, or at the very least to tutors’ religious and communal identity.

• Did any of your writing while at Stern employ religious language? Did your writing ever embody the ideals of Torah U'Madda? If so, would you be interested in sharing a copy of it with me for my project?

• How do/did you use religious language in the BWC?

• How do you use religious language in your life outside of the institution?

V. Civic Engagement

• In your next stages after Stern, how do you see yourself in your public life?
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