

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: EMPLOYMENT WRITING IN GROUP
OUTPLACEMENT TRAINING PROGRAMS

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This dissertation provides an empirical account of rhetorical and writing practices in outplacement, which comprises a collection of for-profit and governmental organizations that offer consulting and counseling services to aid displaced professional workers—who are usually highly experienced in their fields—in finding new employment. Outplacement organizations offer training and support in job application letter, résumé, and networking script writing; capabilities assessment; job-finding strategies; networking and interview preparation; and ongoing opportunities for out-of-work people to provide each other with mutual support. Neither job-placement agencies nor recruiters, outplacement training programs are sites of teaching and learning that prepare experienced professionals to find new employment independently. In outplacement, out-of-work people learn to apply their professional capabilities to the task of finding new employment. Through participant observation in group outplacement training programs, interviews with outplacement practitioners and participants, and analyses of published outplacement training manuals and other

textual artifacts produced by outplacement organizations, I discern three distinct ways in which outplacement consultants, the providers of the service, help outplacement candidates, the service's recipients, to engage in rhetorical and writing-based job-finding practices. First, as they compose in practical job-finding genres by writing résumés, job application letters, and networking scripts, outplacement candidates learn to both identify their professional capabilities and connect them to new workplace opportunities. Second, as they compose in reflective genres, including those of life writing, outplacement candidates learn to negotiate tensions between their personal goals and the contemporary realities of professional employment. Third, as they learn job-search strategies that include tasks such as composing audio-visual job-finding texts and participating in both traditional and distance-mediated, multimodal employment interviews, outplacement candidates become familiar with technological innovations in personnel recruitment and learn how to adapt, throughout their careers, to the continually changing contexts of professional hiring practices. My dissertation makes a unique contribution to rhetoric and writing studies by focusing on the rhetorical and writing work that out-of-work people do at key moments of transition in their professional lives as they move from workforce displacement, through unemployment and outplacement, and toward reemployment.

EMPLOYMENT WRITING IN GROUP OUTPLACEMENT TRAINING
PROGRAMS

by

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Table 1: Outplacement Training Manuals' Curricular "Phase[s]," "Milestone[s]," and Chapters

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

On a humid, already-sweltering June 2014 morning in the US mid-Atlantic region, thirty-two out-of-work professionals and I converged in a seminar-style classroom on the sixth floor of an imposing, ten-story office building. This was the tallest structure in a sprawling, suburban area characterized at that time of year by four contrasting elements: heat-softened, practically-melting asphalt, white concrete and glass that reflected the sun's rays in all directions, and some small trees growing here and there. The area comprised a strip mall situated in a large parking lot filled with cars. It included a coffee shop, fitness center, and grocery store; several smaller restaurants and shops; and a defunct pool hall. Five floors of the building housed classrooms used by five local college, school, and university programs. A regional workforce center was also located onsite. We were there to spend the next two days learning about job-finding and hiring as part of what is called a group outplacement training program. Neither a job-placement center nor a recruiting organization, outplacement is an adult-education program whose participants learn rhetoric and writing techniques to conduct their own job searches. Put simply, outplacement practitioners teach out-of-work professionals how to find new jobs independently.

“Ann” (all names in this study are pseudonyms) who was at the time the assistant director of the state-government outplacement center that orchestrated the training—and who has since become its director—led the program. The center offered two-day sessions like this one semi-monthly, and any displaced professional

worker who lived in the state could attend. Some out-of-work people, Ann informed me, would drive more than one hundred miles to participate. Over the next two days, both Ann and “Ed”—another of the center’s educators and a Certified Professional Résumé Writer—led training sessions about job-finding and hiring. The activities, exercises, and presentations on their agenda included an orientation to contemporary hiring practices; a personal and professional values assessment writing exercise; job application letter and résumé writing strategy sessions; and presentations on interpersonal networking, interview preparation, and salary negotiation techniques—the latter for use when the participants (known at this center as “customers”) became fortunate enough to be chosen as the preferred applicants for new jobs.

This was by no means a typical outplacement training program. In the US, outplacement is usually provided by for-profit corporations that contract with employers who are discharging members of their workforces. Employers pay outplacement providers fees for offering their displaced professional workers outplacement program benefits, which are usually part of severance benefits packages that the departing employees receive. Ann explained the state government-operated outplacement center’s unusual nature to the candidates in our cohort on the first morning of the two-day training program. She told the candidates that this was the only governmental outplacement training program in the US. She asked the candidates in attendance if any of them had received outplacement benefits from a for-profit provider, and, if so, if they knew how much those programs had cost their former employers. A few candidates raised their hands; one said that his outplacement package had cost his employer several thousand dollars.

This was not my first time participating in outplacement, either. After leaving one of my former employers voluntarily, I received six months of outplacement training and support as part of my severance agreement. In that program, I received a printed training manual containing the provider's main curricular texts (including reading material about job-finding, exercises and heuristics, templates, and worksheets); access to online resources; and the opportunity to complete a psychometric career assessment that informed me I was best suited to work in either counseling or education. The provider offered its candidates access to computers and shared office space for job-finding work; appointments for individual discussions with its outplacement consultants; group training in interviewing and job application letter and résumé writing; and opportunities to interact with other candidates who were seeking work—all in its suite on the top floor of a well-appointed, Class A office building. There, the outplacement provider also hosted employer-candidate networking events, seminars and consultations on saving for retirement led by local bankers, and other career- and employment-related sessions.

My conclusion from participating in both for-profit and state government-operated outplacement training programs is that outplacement is not only functionalist job-finding work but also a context in which out-of-work people can reflect on their careers, themselves, and the nature of professional work itself as an amalgam of individual expertise and collaborative effort. Outplacement, I have concluded, is a form of “between-work” (i.e., neither paid employment nor unemployment, but something in between the two) and a kind of “meta-professional work” (i.e., work about professional work: work that engages outplacement candidates in learning—or

relearning—how to participate in professional employment and contemporary workplaces).

On the first morning of the state government-operated outplacement training center's two-day program, Ann made clear to the candidates in our thirty-three-person (including me) cohort that the program was indeed about work—and a specific kind of work, at that. She informed the candidates, “You are now in the marketing business, and you are marketing the toughest product: yourselves.” I have thought extensively about this enthymeme—i.e., an argument with an implicit premise that has been “omitted as understood” (Lanham 65)—since participating in this study's data-collection phases. The argument that candidates are marketers implies that they need to sell themselves to secure new employment, and it is one that recurs throughout my primary and secondary research for this study. “Lesley,” a for-profit outplacement consultant whom I interviewed, said that her candidates participated in job-finding as a “marketing campaign.” “Ethan,” another for-profit consultant, said candidates needed, first, to engage in “consultative sales” by asking employers about their needs, and, second, to compose “value propositions”: arguments explaining how they (i.e., the candidates) were best-suited to fulfill employers' needs while requiring minimal acclimation and training resources to do so.

The idea that outplacement is a kind of professional work—e.g., management, marketing, project management, sales—is prevalent in the two outplacement training manuals that I review throughout this study. Lee Hecht Harrison's *Managing Your Search Project* says outplacement and job-finding are forms of project-management work. It orients candidates to outplacement by observing, “During your career, you

have probably been involved in the management of numerous work-related projects,” and it observes that candidates should think of their job-finding work as a kind of project management (A-5). Right Management’s *Marketing Your Talents* suggests that outplacement is marketing work. It says that “individuals who are most successful in managing career transitions are those who conduct their own job search or ‘market campaign.’ They don’t leave it to other people to make things happen” (1). Both manuals call outplacement “career management” (*Managing* A-3; *Marketing* 1). Because many outplacement candidates are neither marketers nor project managers, however, these terms connote, but do not denote, marketing and project management when outplacement consultants and candidates use them.

These manuals imply that candidates should transfer knowledge of management, marketing, project management, and sales from their professional experiences to their job-finding work in outplacement, but even experienced professional workers may have only layperson knowledge of management, marketing, project management, and sales as specialized professional practices. Furthermore, these terms do not mean the same things in outplacement that they do in professional workplaces. They are examples of what linguistics scholar Christiane Donahue calls *analogies*; as she reports, “the single most agreed-upon tool for developing transfer—reasoning or learning by analogy—is the least-studied or referenced in composition studies” (159).

Donahue contends that rhetoric and composition scholars should use an alternative term—“productivity” (160), perhaps—to denote transfer; she suggests the latter term is unsuited to the task of describing people’s inter-contextual reasoning

(161). She cites education scholars Giyoo Hatano and James G. Greeno (Donahue 160), who argue that the terms “*productivity*” and “*productive thinking*” signify more accurately “the extent to which learning in some activity has effects in subsequent activities of different kinds” (Hatano and Greeno 647). However, Donahue affirms, “Analogy is, for most transfer scholars, at the heart of it all” (159).

To participate in outplacement productively, candidates who are inexperienced in marketing and project management must transfer not expert but rather common sense knowledge of these specializations to their job-finding work in outplacement. This suggests that ostensibly pure knowledge transfer may not be possible. As I show in this study, outplacement consultants tell their candidates that job-finding work is like (i.e., analogous to) management, marketing, project management, and sales. This means that out-of-work professionals with expertise in these areas may be better-suited for outplacement and job-finding work that draws on these analogies than are their colleagues who have layperson knowledge of these practices. Indeed, as for-profit consultant Ethan told me during his interview, salespeople and executives were often his most successful candidates because while salespeople were comfortable with “selling themselves” to find new employment, executives were ambitious and curious and wanted to “try everything” as they sought to land new jobs.

“Marketing” and “project management,” as analogies for outplacement and job-finding work, have two important implications. First, they suggest that outplacement is a corporatist endeavor that is subject to critique by scholars who distrust capitalist enterprise. For example, linguistics, English, and literacy scholars

James Paul Gee, Glynda Hull, and Colin Lankshear cite “growing concern in the new capitalism with *sociotechnical* practices—that is, with the design of technology and social relations within the workplace to facilitate productivity and commitment, sometimes in highly ‘indoctrinating’ ways” (6). Likewise, English scholar Lester Faigley claims, “To be a successful job hunter . . . you must analyze yourself as a ‘product’” (*Fragments* 142). Faigley is critical of the job application letter and résumé genres; he notes how a job-seeker whom he studies, who writes in these genres, “has voluntarily assented to his subjectivity within the dominant ideology and thus has reaffirmed relations of power” (*Fragments* 142). Referencing this passage in Faigley’s work, English scholar Randall Popken observes that Faigley “criticizes the severe limitations that rhetorical properties of the résumé place on résumé writers”—that is, Popken says, “Faigley argues that, in modern job searches, the résumé forces employment candidates to locate themselves entirely . . . [in] the world of the professions” (“Pedagogical” 92).

The second implication of “marketing” and “project management” as outplacement and job-finding analogies is that they suggest professional contexts are distinct from academic, civic, and personal ones. For rhetoric and writing studies scholar-teachers, the question becomes: Is outplacement a contextual area of rhetoric and writing practice that is different from rhetoric and writing as practiced in civic, educational, and personal contexts—or are rhetoric and writing inter-contextual activities and practices that connect outplacement to sites of academic, civic, and professional work? It is with this question that I begin the present study of outplacement.

Defining Outplacement

Outplacement is a set of counseling and consultancy services that aid out-of-work people in job-finding activities oriented to their re-attainment of work that will benefit them in their careers. Recently, a prominent outplacement organization, whose parent company is a human resources (HR) firm, has claimed that its objective is to provide professional workers with access to “meaningful work across a wide range of skills and industries” (*ManpowerGroup*). The firm says “meaningful work” is work that “connects employees to an organization and its success” (*Talk 4*). Outplacement’s main characteristic is its focus on professional work and workplaces: while outplacement practitioners do not secure new employment for the out-of-work people who are their candidates, they model behaviors reflecting effective participation in job-finding work.

Outplacement scholar-practitioners Lawrence M. Brammer and Frank E. Humberger claim that outplacement is “a process of helping terminated employees [to] face the crisis of job loss with renewed self-esteem and to conduct a positive job placement or retraining campaign” (1). Researcher Max Eggert defines outplacement as the “process whereby an individual or individuals compelled to leave their employer are given support and counselling to assist them in achieving the next stage of their career” (3). HR scholars Noeleen Doherty and Shaun Tyson say outplacement is “the term used to denote the services provided, usually by independent consultancies engaged by an employer, to guide departing personnel through the redundancy experience and to offer various forms of practical help and counselling” (17-18).

Communication and adult learning scholars John L. Meyer and Carolyn C. Shadle view outplacement as “a consulting and career counseling process that assists both employers and terminated employees in facing transition—organizational change for employers; a new job, career, or lifestyle for employees” (xi). Psychologist and counselor Alan J. Pickman defines outplacement as “a process of helping employees who have been terminated or whose jobs have been eliminated, to face their job loss with renewed self-confidence, to learn effective job search strategies and techniques, and to conduct a successful job search campaign” (1). In researcher Renae F. Broderick’s definition, outplacement comprises “the processes and practices needed to manage the involuntary movement of employees out of their jobs and the organization” (2). On one hand, these scholars and practitioners show that outplacement is counseling and consultancy that helps out-of-work people contend with job loss and find new employment. On the other hand, they show that outplacement is a systematic process that benefits employers and displaced professional workers.

Practitioners have contrasted outplacement with other employment services, and they have identified experienced professional workers as their primary clientele. Entrepreneur James E. Challenger claims that he invented outplacement. “In the 1960s,” he writes, “I perceived that while there were numerous assistance programs for the disadvantaged who were discharged, nothing was being done for the individual who was not disadvantaged. That person underwent the same emotional trauma and stress as his or her less privileged counterpart upon losing a job and . . . deserved no less in the way of assistance” (1). From its beginnings, Challenger

explains, outplacement emphasized emotional support and practical job-finding training for experienced professionals.

Pickman (*Complete* 4) and business and social science scholar Kelly M. Kilcrease (3) explain that employers can implement outplacement through “internal” and “external” programs. Says Kilcrease, HR executives “may conduct it within the organization, or it can be sourced externally to an outplacement firm” (3). While Challenger started his own outplacement firm, employment director Donald H. Sweet explains that in the early 1970s his firm, which had “recently released nearly 2,000 employees,” developed an internal plan “to assist exempt [i.e., salaried] and nonexempt [i.e., hourly] workers to find another position” (48). He says, “The corporate employment staff concentrated on the exempt white-collar professionals, because this group had been hit the hardest on layoffs throughout the country and faced an extremely soft labor market” (48). Challenger and Sweet contrast outplacement, in its external and internal forms, with employment services oriented to non-professional workforce populations.

In its group-based form, outplacement emphasizes practical consultancy over holistic counseling. Practitioner William Morin, chairman and chief executive officer (CEO) of “Drake Beam Morin [DBM], a national outplacement firm based in New York,” claims that the firm “did its first group outplacement in 1969” (Filipczak 46). This statement has been read as signifying that DBM held the first-ever group outplacement training program: though he does not cite Filipczak’s report, management scholar Gerald Bush says that DBM “did the first group outplacement in 1969” (61). As Filipczak suggests, “Initially, group outplacement was a radically

stripped-down model of the individual version. After all, the whole thing was conceived as an executive perk” (46). Group outplacement emphasizes practical training over emotional support.

In Morin and management scholar Lyle Yorks’s coauthored book about outplacement, the authors blend suggestions that outplacement is consultancy with claims that it is counseling. They define outplacement as “a systematic process by which a terminated person is trained and counseled in the techniques of self-appraisal and securing new employment appropriate to his [sic] needs and talents” (Morin and Yorks 132). Though they suggest a focus on practical job-finding “techniques,” Morin and Yorks—echoing Eggert, Doherty and Tyson, and Pickman—call outplacement “counseling,” implying practitioners’ concern for candidates’ wellbeing. Even so, Morin and Yorks suggest that the services outplacement practitioners can provide candidates are limited.

Outplacement contrasts with job-placement centers and other employment agencies. As Morin and Yorks point out, “Contrary to popular misconception, outplacement counseling does not assume responsibility for placing the terminated person in a new job. Rather, it truly is a counseling service. Its purpose is to provide the person with advice, instruction, and a sounding board that can help him [sic] in organizing and executing the job search” (132-33). Meyer and Shadle echo this point, arguing “the term [outplacement] is for some an unfortunate misnomer with negative connotations of being placed ‘out’ of the job market. For others, it carries misleading expectations—that the service will ‘place’ its candidates in new jobs” (xvii).

Practitioners insist that candidates are responsible for conducting their own job searches.

The definitional tension between outplacement conceived as counseling and outplacement understood as consultancy influences all aspects of its practitioners' and candidates' interactions and work, including, to use rhetoric scholar Kenneth Burke's term, their "*identification*" (20) of themselves against and with each other. For example, Pickman observes that while "outplacement practitioners whose background experience is primarily in large corporations" are "likely to view their role as that of coach, advisor, or business consultant, . . . there is also a large group of practitioners who come to outplacement from a background that includes formal training in counseling" and who therefore identify as counselors (*Complete* 73). Practitioners' identification as counselors or consultants aligns them with social-justice or corporatist outplacement philosophies that shape candidates' perceptions of outplacement.

Outplacement providers' philosophical stances toward counseling and consultancy distinguish their firms' services in the marketplace. Consultant John A. Challenger, CEO of founding provider Challenger, Gray and Christmas, advocates a social justice-oriented approach to outplacement that includes "proactive mental health and counseling support for discharged workers" (J. A. Challenger 86). In contrast, Sanjay Sathe, CEO of outplacement "startup" RiseSmart, advocates a practical philosophy that emphasizes "placing laid-off workers in new jobs quickly" (15, 12). As Sathe puts it, "Most laid-off employees today don't want to be stroked and coddled; they simply want to find a new job as quickly as possible" (12).

Established outplacement providers and startups invoke counseling and consultancy to compete for business.

The distinction between outplacement defined as counseling and as consultancy affects outplacement's connection to other academic, civic, personal, and professional contexts. Conditions of literacy sponsorship determine the extent to which outplacement can be defined as counseling. Practitioners with, to use Pickman's words, "training in counseling" can support candidates in a psychological capacity. Those without such training, such as the consultants whom I interviewed, are equipped to treat outplacement primarily as practical job-finding training. Access to outplacement is inequitable because it corresponds to practitioners' training, candidates' seniority, and sponsoring organizations' generosity. Researchers observe that this may affect outplacement practitioners' ability to aid candidates based on class and gender differences.

For example, outplacement researcher Caryl C. Neinas suggests that while displaced "management personnel often end up in positions far more satisfying than the previous job and sometimes make more money," the "laborer and the non-professional support staff who lose their jobs . . . are often without support systems and have little knowledge of what else they can do or how to find a job" (80). Similarly, counseling scholars Suzanne C. Freeman and Marilyn Haring-Hidore report that while "outplacement has been offered mainly to managerial employees, most of whom are men," hourly employees, "many of whom are women, usually have not received outplacement services" (287). Stratified access to outplacement means that candidates with the most career opportunities and successes stand to derive the

most benefit from the service. Neinas and Freeman and Haring-Hidore show that outplacement access is related to people's class and gender.

The conditions under which outplacement is implemented affect the terminology that is used to describe its constituents. As Pickman says, while outplacement practitioners with training in counseling or psychology often call themselves *counselors*, practitioners with business, management, and HR backgrounds tend to identify as *consultants* (*Complete* 73). In the case of for-profit providers, the employers that are displacing members of their professional workforces pay for the service. Pickman explains that the employer is therefore known as the “sponsoring organization” (*Complete* 14). Employers’ subsidy of outplacement for their displaced workers reveals ambiguity in the entity viewed as benefiting from the service. For example, sponsoring organizations and displaced workers can both be called outplacement *clients*. As Pickman points out, the displaced worker is often called the “client or candidate” (*Complete* 1). However, say Meyer and Shadle, the term “corporate client” may be used to signify the sponsoring organization (xviii). Practitioners at the state government-operated outplacement provider that I researched call the displaced workers whom they help “customers,” a term derived from the federal legislation authorizing US government subsidy of its operations (Kaiser 99).

In this study, I call the organizations offering outplacement either *for-profit* or *state government-operated* providers as appropriate. While I refer collectively to the people who design and implement outplacement training programs as *educators* (sometimes referencing outplacement *curriculum writers* when I do so), I usually call

the people who implement outplacement *consultants* or *practitioners*. I call the employers that contract with for-profit providers *sponsoring organizations*, and I call the out-of-work people who benefit from outplacement *candidates*.

Research Questions

A central research question motivates the present study: In what ways is writing contextual, and in what ways is it inter-contextual? Guiding this study of rhetoric and writing practices in outplacement are four relatively more specific research questions: What purposes does writing serve in outplacement? How do outplacement consultants orient candidates to writing? How do consultants and candidates implement writing in outplacement? What are the implications of outplacement consultants' and candidates' writing? This study contributes to scholarship in rhetoric and writing studies—and outplacement—by answering these questions.

In this study, I contend that writing orients candidates to job-finding work but also reinforces outplacement training programs' roles as “discourse communities” (Bizzell; Beaufort, *Writing*), components of job-finding “activity systems” (Engeström), “communities of practice” (Lave and Wenger; Wenger), and sites of “legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave and Wenger). I show that outplacement consultants orient candidates to writing using “analogies” (Donahue) to professional employment, including marketing and project management predominantly. I suggest that writing in outplacement is both an assigned activity reinforcing expert-novice pedagogical models and an ongoing practice about which candidates have opinions and in which they have a stake. Regarding writing's implications in outplacement, I

explain that writing reflects changing employment philosophies, policies, and practices. I show that candidates need sufficient place, space, and time to understand writing's importance to their lives and careers.

Methodology

This study answers questions about the contextual and inter-contextual nature of writing in outplacement, about how educators orient out-of-work people to writing's purposes in job-finding and engage them in writing in outplacement, and about how these constituents reflect on employment writing's broader role in people's professional careers. To answer these questions, I conducted an Institutional Review Board-approved qualitative study of outplacement that includes primary and secondary empirical research. Since outplacement is mainly a for-profit enterprise in the US, I sought access to the nation's three preeminent outplacement providers to interview their consultants and candidates. Of the three firms that I approached, one granted me access to conduct semi-structured interviews with three of its consultants. The other two firms declined my request, claiming that they sought to protect the privacy of the sponsoring organizations who paid for their services and the displaced workers who were their candidates. The firm that allowed me to interview its consultants did not permit me to interview its candidates for privacy reasons.

After interviewing the three for-profit outplacement consultants, I gained access to the only state government-operated outplacement provider in the US. This provider allowed me to conduct semi-structured interviews with its director and three of its candidates; it also permitted me to participate in its semimonthly, two-day group outplacement training program. To further support my research, I participated

in three consecutive biweekly sessions of the state-government outplacement provider's accountability group, in which candidates met to discuss their ongoing job-finding work. Further supporting this research, I met informally with the public relations director of the preeminent private, for-profit outplacement provider in the US.

Overall, I conducted seven consultant and candidate interviews with outplacement constituents including four consultants and three candidates. I interviewed each consultant and candidate individually. Each interview lasted between one and three hours, thus generating approximately fourteen hours' worth of primary research data. The state-government provider's group outplacement training program took place on two consecutive days, operating from nine o'clock a.m. until four o'clock p.m. each day, for a total working time of fourteen hours. The three accountability group sessions that I attended each took place between one-thirty p.m. and three-thirty p.m., for a total working time of six hours. While the consultants whom I interviewed declined to be audio-recorded, I took written field-notes during all interviews and participant observations for this study; I also audio-recorded field-notes of my own immediately following each encounter. I transcribed all audio field-notes that I composed. Totaling 89,136 words, these transcribed field-notes documented my firsthand recollection of the consultant and candidate interviews as well as numerous anecdotes, conversational interchanges, and learning activities.

I collected extensive employment writing material during my interviews and participant-observation work, including official biographical sketches describing each of the three for-profit outplacement consultants whom I interviewed, résumés from

each of the three candidates whom I interviewed, and handouts and worksheets from the for-profit and state government-operated outplacement providers. During their interviews, the for-profit outplacement consultants whom I interviewed also identified texts that informed their work with their candidates and that they advised candidates to read during their job-finding endeavors. These included popular-press books like Richard H. Beatty's *The Résumé Kit* (1984), William Bridges's *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes* (2004), Marshall A. Brown and Annabelle Reitman's *High-Level Résumés: High-Powered Tactics for High-Earning Professionals* (2005), and Daniel H. Pink's *Free Agent Nation: The Future of Working for Yourself* (2001). One consultant also referenced management scholar Peter Cappelli's *Why Good People Can't Get Jobs: The Skills Gap and What Companies Can Do about It* (2012), in which Cappelli argues that hiring practices, and not applicants' capabilities, limit out-of-work professionals' access to employment. These are examples of the kinds of published texts that circulate in outplacement training programs viewed as job-finding discourse communities.

The most significant printed educational materials that inform this study include the provider-authored and published training manuals used by two preeminent for-profit outplacement firms in their group outplacement training programs. I procured these manuals independently of the above-described research activities. These texts, including Lee Hecht Harrison's *Managing Your Search Project* (2006) and Right Management's *Marketing Your Talents* (2006), are printed and bound training manuals issued to candidates who participate in these providers' respective group outplacement training programs. Such manuals are becoming increasingly rare:

in the past decade, outplacement firms like Lee Hecht Harrison and Right Management have migrated their curricula to online formats, hosting them on password-protected websites available only to consultants and candidates.

Managing Your Search Project and *Marketing Your Talents* are extensive job-finding texts that give candidates roadmaps through their providers' outplacement curricula and that share generic characteristics. Both are deemed proprietary and are not offered for general sale. Both are approximately US letter-sized texts. *Managing Your Search Project* is a set of three softcover workbooks, totaling 342 pages, stored in a glossy turquoise box with a hook-and-loop clasp. The three workbooks that it comprises guide candidates through three curricular "phases" or "stages": "Assess Opportunity," "Implement Search," and "Manage Transition," respectively, which are described throughout the manual using the acronym "AIM." AIM comprises ten curricular "milestones," including: "1. Survey Your Professional Environment"; "2. Determine Your Professional Objective"; "3. Create Your Communications Strategy and Résumé"; "4. Define Your Target Market"; "5. Gather Marketplace Information"; "6. Get Your Message Out"; "7. Talk with Hiring Managers"; "8. Consider Other Methods of Search"; "9. Interview, Cultivate Offers[,] and Negotiate"; and "10. Transition into a New Position" (A-2). (See Table 1.)

Marketing Your Talents is a 211-page, spiral-bound manual with glossy blue and white front and back covers. Divided into nine chapters, it describes a "strategic approach to career management called the Zeroing-In Process (ZIP)" (3). ZIP comprises six curricular "phases," including: "1. Preparation-Understanding Yourself"; "2. Research Your Market"; "3. Focus-In on Specific Jobs"; "4. Interview

and Negotiate to Closing”; an unnumbered step, “Landing” a new job; and “5. Manage Your Career” (11). (See Table 1.) Both manuals, authored by providers that compete directly with each other in the outplacement industry, purport to place candidates on linear paths from workforce displacement, through unemployment and outplacement, and toward reemployment.

A Theoretical Framework for Examining Outplacement

Discourse communities, activity systems, genre systems, communities of practice, legitimate peripheral participation, and analogies can be used to explain aspects of writing work in outplacement. Bizzell says that a “‘discourse community’ is a group of people who share certain language-using practices”; this group is “bound together primarily by its uses of language, although bound perhaps by other ties as well, [e.g.,] geographical, socioeconomic, ethnic, professional” (222). Popken suggests that “a writer’s discourse transition is embedded in the global act of gaining membership in discourse communities—of acquiring community knowledge” (“Genre” 4). Outplacement consultants and candidates form communities by collaborating in focusing on language uses that pertain to job-finding. Beaufort explains how discourse community members interact: she says they share *communicative practices* including *communication channels, goals and values*, and *physical conditions* (*Writing* 57-59). They also apportion *roles and tasks*; contribute different kinds of *input*; and share knowledge of *subject matter, rhetoric, genre* characteristics and *norms*, and *writing processes* (*Writing* 58-59, 64).

In outplacement seen as a discourse community, consultants help candidates identify communication channels for informal networking and formal hiring, as well

as these practices' respective goals and values, including relationship-building and job-finding. Consultants orient candidates to physical conditions (e.g., face-to-face and online interactions) through which job-finding communications take place. Through this process, consultants and candidates share roles and tasks, including apportioning responsibility for job-finding expertise. While consultants claim that they are experts in career-related subject matter, they also affirm candidates' subject-matter expertise in their respective professions, as well as candidates' ability to provide input through collaborations with each other. Consultants share with candidates specialized rhetorical and genre knowledge, suggesting normative writing processes for composing generic job-application materials and explaining those materials' rhetorical importance in job-finding.

Education scholar Yrjö Engeström explains that “activity theory” is “a framework for analyzing and redesigning work” (960). He identifies *instruments*; a *subject*, an *object*, and an *outcome*; as well as *rules*, a *community*, and a *division of labor* as activity systems' key elements (962). He also says that “disturbances” and “contradictions” signify “change potentials” in activity systems (964). Activity theory is useful for understanding outplacement because while it gives terms for outplacement as an activity that supports candidates' job-finding as its main objective, it also reveals other, contradictory objectives in outplacement.

For example, while hiring is a tightly-controlled activity in which hiring specialists choose applicants through résumé reviews and formal interviewing, consultants say that candidates can mitigate rigorous formal hiring rules through persuasive social interaction (e.g., networking) with influential contacts. Further, job-

finding is a contested objective in outplacement. Some candidates see outplacement aiding their transfer into new professional employment; others see it helping them contend with personal and professional dimensions of their transitions from unemployment to reemployment. Some consultants want to transform candidates' thinking so that they see outplacement as a key component of employability.

Like discourse community theory, activity theory offers terminology for showing how outplacement informs consultants' and candidates' writing work. Literacy sponsorship shapes discourse practices in outplacement as an activity system: consultants provide candidates subject-matter expertise pertaining to job-finding. Outplacement's dominant curriculum informs candidates about writing in preeminent job-finding genres, including job application letters, networking scripts, and résumés. However, composing in outplacement's recessive job-finding genres, such as life writing, can help candidates contend with job loss. Furthermore, learning how genres change as new communicative means are developed can help candidates participate effectively in job-finding throughout their careers.

Genre systems theory facilitates, but also limits, analysis of the relationship between outplacement as a discourse community, an activity system, and the genres in which consultants and candidates write. I will explain how after first showing how scholars have connected genre systems theory to activity theory and have distinguished these theories from discourse community theory. As English scholars Anis S. Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff explain, "part of what identifies a genre system . . . as such are the actions that these genres, working in dynamic interaction with each

other, enable individuals to perform over time, within different contexts of activity” (87).

English scholar David R. Russell proposes that activity theory—in combination with genre systems theory and as contrasted with discourse community theory—be used to investigate the “relation between writing in formal schooling and writing in other social practices” (504). While Russell concedes that under discourse community theory “substituting metaphors of conversation and dialog for metaphors of context and its contents . . . expands theories of writing to allow a . . . dynamic and interactive—or ecological—approach” to analyzing “the relation between writing in schooling and society” (506), he argues that discourse community theory has two shortcomings.

First, he contends that discourse community theory “brackets off” non-conversational “actions” and a “host of nonlinguistic tools: buildings, machines,” etc. (506-07). This is an analytical limitation, he says, because “writing is used to organize ongoing actions over much larger reaches of time and space than does face-to-face conversation” (507). Second, he suggests that because discourse community theory focuses ostensibly on “individuals engaged in reciprocal utterances . . . , the dialectical relations between and among collectives are not ordinarily the focus of analysis” (507). Russell says discourse community theory has limited potential for helping people understand writing beyond the classroom because it focuses, first, on conversations rather than on people’s interactions with material objects and, second, on communities (e.g., classrooms) treated discretely rather than as interconnected entities. However, Russell cites neither Bizzell—who argues that academic discourse

comprises work in scholarly communities reaching beyond pedagogical conversations in classrooms—nor Beaufort, who conducts extensive empirical research premised on workplaces as inter-contextual discourse communities.

Russell identifies four areas where activity theory connects with genre systems theory. He says, “First, we must go beyond the conventional notion of genre as a set of formally definable text features that certain texts have in common . . . and consider genre in relation to social action and social motives” (513). He adds, “Second,” based on a social view of genre, “it is possible to see discourse . . . as one kind of tool among many others and to relate genres to other kinds of material actions” (513). His “third step in connecting genre to activity theory . . . is to see that written genres help mediate the actions of individuals with others in collectives (activity systems) to create stabilized-for-now structures of action and identity” (514). Russell’s “fourth step in connecting genre to activity theory is to see how the concept of genre as operationalized social action helps account for change as well as stability” (516).

In the present study, I show how consultants and candidates interact socially to help the candidates write for three main reasons: to connect their professional capabilities to new workplace opportunities, negotiate the dynamic relationship between their personal and professional lives, and participate in changing contexts of job-finding and professional affiliation throughout their careers. I suggest that discourse communities, activity systems, and genre systems are three lenses for understanding employment writing practices in outplacement; job-finding; and participation in personal and professional life. As these lenses help me show,

practitioners propose that outplacement is a community that helps candidates learn how to participate in job-finding activities encompassing personal and professional affiliations. Candidates engage in two kinds of learning. First, they learn how to participate in outplacement as a community. Second, they learn an expert way of seeing job-finding as an ongoing, social activity. This expert view contrasts with the popular, common sense way of seeing job-finding as a formalized, rigorous process in which job applicants are relatively powerless participants.

Genre is a central yet potentially reductive area of attention for outplacement consultants and candidates. These constituents perceive several genres—e.g., job advertisements, job application forms, letters of application, letters of recommendation, networking scripts, reference lists, résumés—as vital components of job-finding activities, even though job-finding and hiring are social practices that transcend these genres. Hiring practices are formalized such that it is difficult to imagine occasions when applicants land jobs without composing and distributing textual artifacts in job-finding genres. Job-finding is often understood as the scripted circulation of people and texts, and common sense and specialized understandings of job-finding support this view.

From a common sense perspective, there are numerous interview-preparation and résumé writing texts available in the popular press. These texts often suggest that people get jobs consistent with the quality of their résumés and formal job-interviewing abilities. In outplacement's specialized discourse communities, educators devote significant curricular resources and pedagogical effort to résumé writing and interviewing instruction. In rhetoric and writing studies, also, activity and

genre theorists' arguments suggest that people get jobs through the routinized composition and distribution of texts in dominant job-finding genres.

For example, Russell points out that an “activity system is any ongoing, object-directed, historically conditioned, dialectically structured, tool-mediated human interaction” (510). An activity theory-based, genre-focused understanding of job-finding and hiring suggests the following five assumptions about these inter-contextual practices: first, people are imagined as participating continually in job-finding and hiring activities—viewed as “typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations” (Miller, “Genre” 159)—in local, regional, national, and international contexts. Second, the object of these job-finding and hiring efforts is people’s employment to perform the work that hiring organizations need to accomplish. Third, because job-finding and hiring are perceived as happening continually, prior instances of these activities suggest possible future ways that they are likely to occur. Fourth, dialectical tension emerges in these activities because while employers want to hire people as inexpensively as possible, applicants—who want to perform work of which they believe they are capable—seek maximum compensation for their efforts. Fifth, communication tools, including written compositions in dominant job-finding genres, are required for job applicants’ and employers’ mutual interactions.

Activity theory and genre systems theory would suggest that the routinized composition and distribution of texts in dominant genres (e.g., the résumé) are activities critical to job-finding and hiring. As English and education scholar Charles Bazerman explains of job-finding texts’ circulation, “job ads are followed by letters of application, which are in turn followed by phone calls setting up interviews, and so

on” (“Systems” 82). Bazerman sees people’s success and failure in job-finding and hiring in terms of genres; he says “to achieve our ends we must successfully hold up our ends of the generic exchanges. . . . If we can’t write the job letter, or fill out the necessary forms, or appear intelligent and cooperative at the interview[,] . . . we get into various kinds of trouble” (“Systems” 82).

Bazerman views applicants’ and hiring specialists’ behaviors in relation to genres of writing; he suggests that these constituents’ relative abilities to “hold up” their “ends” of “generic exchanges” permit hiring to happen. This suggests that deviation from scripted, “generic” interactions may obtain, presumably, in applicants’ failure to land a position. In the present study, I propose that genre work, rather than determining the success or failure of job-finding and hiring, is the minimal work that facilitates applicants’ and hiring specialists’ interactions. Applegarth’s discussion of scripts, in her analysis of vocational guides that recommend “bodily dispositions” for women workers in the interwar era (“Bodily” 126), helps me make this case.

Applegarth observes, “Scripts for professional embodiment . . . work together to naturalize certain behaviors, to legitimate an intense degree of scrutiny, and to recruit,” in her example, “women’s participation in self-scrutiny” (“Bodily” 126-27). Scripts in outplacement and job-finding, which establish protocols for pro forma written and verbal interpersonal interactions, invite networking contacts’ and hiring specialists’ “intense . . . scrutiny” of job applicants, who are in turn expected to deliver scripted statements that tout their credentials—and to engage in “self-scrutiny,” particularly during formal job interviews.

Hiring—to use Miller’s phrase, borrowed by Russell—is a form of complex, often-unpredictable “social action.” Dominant job-finding genres and scripts support, but do not necessarily control, circumstances in which hiring specialists scrutinize applicants and their qualifications. For example, in a scenario that outplacement curriculum writer Orville Pierson discusses, a hiring manager “screens and interviews people” knowing that “she is not serious about these candidates”; she is “doing it because there’s a policy that says she is supposed to,” and she ends up hiring the “known candidate” whom she had planned to hire all along (61).

Referring to the passage of Bazerman’s text that I discuss above, English scholar John B. Killoran calls Bazerman’s formulation “the employment-seeking genre system”; paraphrasing Bazerman, he says, “Job ads lead to application letters and résumés, which in turn lead to phone requests for interviews, and so forth” (428). As Killoran argues, “The résumé’s job-seeking genre system is so familiar that it has become something of an iconic example for scholars seeking to illustrate genre systems”; he suggests “this system is so well established as to be the most familiar among the broad population of those who have written, read, taught, or researched résumés” (430). As I show in the present study, though, job-finding and hiring occur within and because of circumstances that often depart from genre theorists’ views of these activities and practices. For example, as more than a place where candidates learn about job-finding and hiring, outplacement is also a site where consultants and candidates interact to accomplish outplacement as contextual and inter-contextual work: as both a practice unto itself and a component of the protean job-finding and hiring activity system.

Outplacement training programs are discourse communities whose constituents use specialized language unique to outplacement as they learn the specialized language of job-finding and hiring. These programs are also components of job-finding and hiring activity systems understood as milieu of academic, civic, personal, and professional communities and practices. Outplacement shares characteristics with college and university settings where students gain pre-professional experience; job-finding and hiring contexts including job fairs and alumni- and professional-association meetings; for-profit, nonprofit, and governmental job-placement centers; sites of adult education, re-skilling, and retraining; for-profit and nonprofit entities offering professional certifications; and numerous other educational and professional contexts.

Outplacement can also be considered a “*community of practice*”—a term that connotes “participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities” (Lave and Wenger 98). Education and learning research scholars Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger see communities of practice as sites of what they call *legitimate peripheral participation*, “a descriptor of engagement in social practice that entails learning as an integral constituent” (35). As Wenger points out, “the learning that is most personally transformative turns out to be the learning that involves membership in . . . communities of practice” (6).

Viewing outplacement as a community of practice and a site of legitimate peripheral participation helps me to show that while outplacement is a place where candidates learn how to participate in job-finding and hiring activities, it is also a site

where candidates learn about themselves through mutual interaction. As I show in this study, while candidates use outplacement as a springboard to new workplace opportunities, they also use it as an opportunity to interact with others and reflect on potential new directions for their careers. Outplacement is not only an instrumental community where out-of-work people learn only functional job-finding practices. It is also a humanist community where consultants and candidates reflect upon and share stories about aspects of their personal and professional experiences and identities.

Profiles of Outplacement Consultants and Candidates

The seven outplacement constituents whom I interviewed for this study include for-profit consultants “Lesley,” “Cora,” and “Ethan”; state-government training center director “Ann”; and candidates “Mario,” “Lea,” and “Ileana.” The first outplacement practitioner whom I interviewed was for-profit senior consultant Lesley, who identifies herself in her biographical sketch as a “leadership and career coach.” Her professional background is in HR consulting, and she earned a BA in sociology and an MS in HR management. During her April 2014 interview, Lesley took what I considered a market economy-oriented, rationalist view of hiring and employment. Her interview comments suggested that she considered job-finding a competitive endeavor in which employers hire the most appropriate applicants based on their professional qualifications. In this view, Lesley said, candidates’ existing professional capabilities determine the workplace opportunities for which they are most qualified. Candidates seeking career continuity—i.e., continuance in their extant areas of professional expertise—stand the best chance of finding new work. Even so,

Lesley told stories of candidates with whom she had worked who had made significant job and industry changes.

The second practitioner whom I interviewed was senior consultant Cora, who claims in her biographical sketch that she “brings a compassionate/sensitive approach” to outplacement practice. Cora was one of two for-profit outplacement consultants whom I interviewed who had also been a candidate in her firm’s program. With a BA in economics and a professional background in HR and training, Cora resigned from her prior employer, a large bank, after implementing a yearlong worker displacement (i.e., layoff) initiative. During her April 2014 interview, Cora explained that she was responsible for informing “several hundred” employees at her prior firm of their dismissals, knowing that she, too, would lose her job at the layoff action’s conclusion. She received an outplacement package as part of her severance benefits, and she landed her outplacement consultancy job based on her educational and professional qualifications. Cora expressed satisfaction with her work; she felt as an outplacement consultant that she was now “on the right side of” worker displacements because she could help out-of-work people with job-finding.

Ethan, whose title at the time of his May 2014 interview was vice president and senior career management consultant, was the third outplacement practitioner whom I interviewed. He describes himself in his biographical sketch as an “executive with a broad base of business experience in private and public sector operations.” After earning a BS in management, Ethan first attained managerial and directorial positions in information technology (IT) for a large for-profit corporation and later became the marketing director for a nonprofit HR organization. After the nonprofit’s

chief executive combined the group's marketing and sales functions, Ethan lost his job and received an outplacement package as part of his severance agreement.

Based on his educational and professional background, he explained in his interview, he decided to pursue an outplacement consultancy role. He claimed that while the outplacement firm "used to hire PhDs in organizational development," they later began hiring displaced professionals with managerial and executive-level qualifications because candidates could better relate to them. He said that candidates relate to consultants like him either as colleagues or through interactions echoing protégé-mentor and worker-supervisor relationships. Ethan voiced satisfaction with his work, claiming he liked "meeting with people" and helping them to engage in job-finding activities.

The fourth practitioner whom I interviewed was Ann, the state government-operated outplacement training center's director. Holding a BA in sociology and French, as well as an MA in education, and employed at the outplacement center since its inception in the early 1990s, Ann's professional experience included HR management as well as for-profit and governmental career-consultancy expertise. Among the first people qualified to conduct federal job-search and counseling training sessions, she demonstrated extensive knowledge of federal, state, and local governmental employment and job-finding initiatives. During her June 2014 interviews, Ann exhibited enthusiasm for her work aiding displaced professional workers with their employment searches. She invited me to participate in one of the center's semimonthly, two-day outplacement training programs, which she co-led, and she permitted me to interview candidates participating in the center's educational

initiatives. Unlike the for-profit consultants whom I interviewed, who showed caution with respect to offering me access to their curricular activities and materials, as well as to out-of-work people interested in being interviewed, Ann welcomed my participation in the outplacement training center's activities and my interaction with its candidates.

During this study, I interviewed three outplacement candidates: "Mario," "Lea," and "Ileana." I gained access to these candidates through the state government-operated outplacement center's two-day training program. All three candidates and I were in the same training-program cohort; each of us attended the full program on the two consecutive days that it was offered. This was advantageous because, in each candidate's interview, we could discuss specific events and interactions that occurred during the program in which we participated. For example, in terms of the candidates' employment writing during the program, Mario, Lea, and Ileana could describe for me their understanding of the training center's résumé-review process.

Mario, the first candidate whom I interviewed, was most recently a computer systems analyst with fifteen years of experience working with a government contractor onsite at three federal agencies. Mario was a military veteran and former noncommissioned officer who had operated supply and warehouse facilities and set up portable airfields and airfield lighting. He held a secret security clearance and had worked for his most recent employer as a programmer and applications engineer before becoming a systems analyst responsible for writing software documentation. During his August 2014 interview, Mario explained that he became interested in

computer programming after his military service, when he was working as a warranty administrator at a car dealership and had been put in charge of restarting the dealership's temperamental mainframe computer. His educational experience included some community-college coursework and various courses and certifications in programming applications and languages.

Coincident with the burgeoning use of personal computers in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Mario completed and taught programming classes. Despite his acumen, Mario did not hold a college degree and was therefore especially vulnerable to industry changes. He said that he needed to retrain and recertify frequently to sustain his professional capabilities. Without a degree, he was unable to move into a management position and remained an individual contributor at his most recent employer. Out-of-work for more than a year at the time of his interview, Mario sought a position in computer helpdesk support; this was a role for which he was overqualified but one that he considered relatively less demanding than were his previous work responsibilities as a systems analyst.

Lea was the second outplacement candidate whom I interviewed. She said during her August 2014 interview that she began her career developing computer hardware and software for a large IT corporation after earning a BS in chemistry with a minor in mathematics. Her first job involved photolithography, a process whereby computer circuit boards are manufactured. After working for her first employer for sixteen years—beginning as an engineer, advancing to systems engineer and technical team lead positions, and ending as a program manager—Lea worked for a series of smaller firms as a senior program manager, director of program operations, project

manager consultant, and program manager. In these roles, she worked on projects with budgets of between \$10 million and \$150 million and had supervisory responsibility for as many as twenty-five people.

During this period, she earned a Project Management Professional (PMP) certification and received a top secret/sensitive compartmented information (TS/SCI) security clearance. In her interview, Lea mentioned on several occasions that she had an extroverted personality. She said that while this helped her build rapport with networking contacts and hiring specialists in formal job interviews, she sometimes relied on rapport-building at the expense of adequate interview preparation. Out-of-work for approximately six weeks at the time of her interview, Lea sought new work in her existing profession of project management, and she desired employment with a federal contractor.

Ileana, the third outplacement candidate whom I interviewed, had spent most of her career at the time of her August 2014 interview working at a large, nonprofit member organization for seniors. Employed there for more than thirteen years, she served in roles including organizational educational specialist, organizational development consultant, diversity advisor, and leadership and training consultant. Ileana held a BA in history and an MA in HR administration. Identifying herself as an HR professional, she worked for one year as the principal trainer and facilitator at a small consultancy firm where she helped other organizations comply with Affordable Care Act healthcare legislation. She left that position approximately one month before her participation in the state-government outplacement training program.

During her interview, Ileana said that she sought to become a personal coach. Demonstrating her knowledge of HR discourse, Ileana's word choices in her interview reflected those of many outplacement consultants whom I interviewed and observed as they led training sessions. For example, Ileana identified herself as an "individual contributor" to her employers and noted that she had lost her job with the nonprofit organization when her position was "abolished," a Department of Labor term signifying structural unemployment obtaining from an employer's removal of a position (*BLS*). Earning coaching certifications as her finances permitted, Ileana had completed a coach training program and had earned certifications in diversity training, emotional assessment, gerontology, and organizational development. She sought work either with a new employer or as an independent contractor.

Contribution to Scholarship in Rhetoric and Writing Studies

This study contributes to scholarship in rhetoric and writing studies by focusing on the rhetoric and writing work that experienced professionals perform when they face significant changes to their personal and professional lives—including primarily the loss of their jobs. By providing firsthand accounts of out-of-work people's experiences in outplacement, I show how people use rhetoric and writing to connect their professional capabilities to new workplace opportunities, negotiate their lives' personal and professional domains as they contend with unemployment and engage in outplacement work, and participate in career and job-finding contexts that are always altering in response to changes in employment philosophy, policy, and practice—e.g., changes in communications technologies as these appear to reshape expectations for professional interaction.

Rhetoric and writing studies scholar-teachers, including writing program administrators (WPAs), want to prepare their students for lifelong participation in academic, civic, personal, and professional contexts. An open concern, however, is whether these contexts should be treated discretely or as interconnected entities. For example, English and rhetoric scholars including Patricia Bizzell and Cheryl Geisler regard academic discourse and academic literacy as specialized practices in which only some students wish to participate. Bizzell says scholars “are struggling to develop pedagogies that can initiate undergraduates into academic discourse, and graduate students into the disciplinary discourse of our field, without too forcibly imposing upon them academic and disciplinary world views” (223). Geisler suggests “educators can no longer easily assume” that laypeople “ought to be made by the educational system to resemble” expert professionals (209).

In their investigation of the relationship between academic and professional contexts, English and written communication scholars Chris M. Anson and L. Lee Forsberg see these settings as interconnected, but they consider students’ migrations between them as conceptually and experientially difficult. They contend, “While certain surface-level writing skills are ‘portable’ across diverse contexts, such skills are less important to making a successful transition as a writer than [is] coping with the unfamiliar epistemological, social, and organizational characteristics of a new context” (201). Similarly, education, linguistics, English, and literacy scholars including Patrick Dias et al. see academic and workplace contexts as being simply “worlds apart” (3).

In their discussion of curricular designs for writing majors, English scholars Greg A. Giberson and Thomas A. Moriarty regard civic preparation as writing education's ultimate objective. They argue, putatively on behalf of WPAs, "As we make our arguments to colleagues and administrators, potential students, and the public at large" about what writing majors are for, "we need to be careful to not inadvertently diminish the prospects for rhetoric education in the twenty-first century by focusing our undergraduate degree programs exclusively on practical, career-related concerns" (213). In contrast, language, literacy, and culture scholar Anne Beaufort cautions that rhetoric educators should not overlook the rhetorical work people perform in professional contexts. She argues that some rhetoric scholars "lament the loss of a civic emphasis in rhetoric education . . . in a society" that they see as being "largely ruled by oligarchies" and corporatocracies (Epilogue 233).

English scholar Risa Applegarth shows how personal writing, including people's autobiographical accounts of their work, has resonance in professional and vocational contexts. She discusses "*vocational autobiography*: first-person narratives focused on a writer's vocational training, career choices, educational experiences, relationships with mentors and colleagues, and excitement about and commitment to her work" (531). Similarly, English scholar Amy J. Wan encourages other rhetoric and writing studies scholars to consider citizenship as connecting many realms, including those of employability, vocationalism, and the professions. Wan contends that "the transformation of education from liberal to vocational marks a central tension in educational policy today, as policymakers and educators feel unable to reconcile civic and moral goals of liberal education with the goal of employable skills

through vocational education” (43). “Underlying these discussions about citizenship and vocationalism,” she suggests, “are actually questions about the relevancy of education” (44).

Questions of education’s relevance reflect Bizzell’s and Geisler’s concerns about what scholars intend to prepare their students for. As Geisler puts it, “academic expertise is a culture into which all students neither want nor need to enter. For this reason, we need to use the curriculum to find a way to interact with those who are different than us and intend to stay that way” (255). In the present study, I argue that academic, civic, personal, and professional communities are inter-contextual rather than discrete entities. Learning in and about each can help students perform effectively in the others in accordance with their objectives.

Scholar-teachers and WPAs have developed conceptual tools for understanding the relationship between the various contexts in which people write. However, such discussions, and such tools, presuppose that these contexts are different. Scholars Kathleen Blake Yancey, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak, for example, use a pedagogy emphasizing “transfer of writing knowledge and practice” (2) to help students learn how to apply their developing knowledge of writing in contexts beyond academic courses. English scholar Rebecca Nowacek sees transfer as a rhetorical strategy of “seeing” and “selling” (40), involving conscious reflection and persuasion, in which students learn to recognize what they know, apply that knowledge in new contexts, and demonstrate to others their knowledge’s relevance in each context.

Anson and Forsberg, as well as Dias et al. and education and literacy scholars Patrick Dias and Anthony Paré, identify transition as a way of understanding the complex nature of students' migrations from school to work. Dias et al. argue that "learning is a situated and contingent experience, and that school-based simulations of workplace writing fail to prepare students for professional writing because they cannot adequately replicate the local rhetorical complexity of workplace contexts" (201). As Dias and Paré claim, "our research suggests that the transition from academic to professional writing is an inextricable part of a larger, more comprehensive transition, one that involves the student in a process of gradual initiation or enculturation into the workplace community" (3). In their discussion of students' learning about writing, mass communication and rhetoric and professional communication scholars Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle identify threshold concepts of writing studies, and they contend that knowledge of writing is *transformative* (2) because it changes students' understandings of themselves as they learn new ways of writing.

Among many scholar-teachers and WPAs, though, writing is considered a social activity. Faigley suggests that writing should be understood not as the labor of individuals working in isolation but instead as an activity involving people's mutual understandings and negotiated expectations. He says, "Researchers taking a social perspective study how individual acts of communication define, organize, and maintain social groups. They view written texts not as detached objects possessing meaning on their own, but as links in communicative chains, with their meaning emerging from their relationships to previous texts and the present context" (235).

Similarly, communication and rhetoric scholar Carolyn R. Miller argues that genres are “typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations” (“Genre” 159): that written and spoken genres, rather than being static textual categories, are shared ways of shaping writing and speech that people adapt continually, through ongoing socialization, to achieve new rhetorical objectives. Miller argues further that all writing, including functional composition, can therefore be considered “humanistic” (“Humanistic” 610).

Arguments for writing’s social qualities, however, still lead some scholars to suggest that writing differs fundamentally between contexts. English scholar Patrick Moore argues instrumental writing, because it serves functional purposes, should be considered distinct from humanistic writing. He dissuades scholars from ignoring what he claims “is socially useful and humane about the instrumental aims of technical communication” (“Instrumental” 101). Similarly, as Dias et al. and Dias and Paré contend, writing in school and writing in the workplace cannot be reconciled because practices of and purposes for writing differ markedly between these contexts. Seeing schools and workplaces as “worlds apart” (Dias et al. 3) suggests it is important to focus on students’ “transition[s]” between these worlds because, as Dias et al. put it, “what is learned in context *is* the context” (3). This idea suggests that something learned in one context cannot obtain in another.

Scholars’ and WPAs’ views of writing as either context-dependent or inter-contextual matter because the relevance of conceptual tools for understanding and practicing writing—and for educators’ abilities to teach writing—are at issue. On one hand, if there are significant differences between academic, civic, personal, and

professional writing contexts, then tools including transfer and transition, along with understandings of writing as transformative, have purchase in writing pedagogy and practice. On the other hand, if academic, civic, personal, and professional writing share key characteristics, then scholar-teachers' application of transfer, transition, and transformation to writing studies may construct artificial distinctions between writing's contexts and practices. These distinctions could be considered counterproductive if they inhibit students' development as writers. Considering holistic writing ability as either context-dependent or inter-contextual provides for two radically different approaches to writing instruction. In one approach, students would learn to write in academic, civic, personal, and professional contexts viewed as discrete settings. In another, students would learn writing as an inter-contextual skill that connects these settings.

In the present study, I investigate writing practices at sites where academic, civic, personal, and professional purposes for writing converge in the rhetorical context of experienced professional workers' searches for new employment. The following is an empirical account of writing in outplacement training programs, which are sites of adult education in job-finding for out-of-work people. Outplacement shares characteristics of schools and professional workplaces. It also shares qualities of businesses and civic entities because both for-profit and governmental organizations offer outplacement. Access to outplacement is limited among for-profit and civic providers. At for-profit providers, which offer the most extensive training programs, employers subsidize displaced workers' participation in outplacement. Civic providers offer equitable access to outplacement—at least, for

unemployed people as contrasted with employed people, that is—but their curricular resources are limited as contrasted with for-profit providers.

For-profit and civic outplacement providers share conditions of what English scholar Deborah Brandt, in her 2015 monograph, *Literacy in American Lives*, calls “literacy sponsorship” (*Literacy* 18). She says that “sponsors of literacy” are “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (*Literacy* 19). In her 2015 monograph, *The Rise of Writing*, Brandt argues that literacy practices can be understood as “dominant” and “recessive” (*Rise* 2). Her argument helps me show how, in outplacement, literacy practices are treated variously not only as dominant and recessive but also as idealized. In using the latter term, I mean that outplacement educators advocate certain literacy practices even if there are insufficient resources available to teach them extensively. In this study, I suggest that *writing for transfer*, *writing for transition*, and *writing for transformation*, respectively, are outplacement practitioners’ dominant, recessive, and idealized curricular objectives.

While for-profit and civic outplacement providers offer out-of-work people opportunities including training in résumé writing, primary and secondary job-finding research, and interview and salary-negotiation techniques, they also constrain candidates’ access to outplacement by limiting availability for individual consultations and other opportunities. For example, for-profit consultants whom I interviewed for this study explain that their candidates receive access to outplacement corresponding to their levels of professional seniority and their former employers’

generosity in subsidizing outplacement. While senior supervisors and executives may receive “support until landing” (i.e., outplacement benefits until they “land” a new job), junior workers and other “individual contributors” (e.g., non-managerial staff) may receive programs lasting between one and three months. “Nonexempt” (i.e., hourly) workers may receive outplacement “crash courses” lasting one or two days. At the state-government provider, candidates complete a requisite two-day training program that qualifies them for access to onsite networking events, reflective assessment sessions, and accountability-group meetings.

The central argument that I make in this study—that educators must see academic, civic, personal, and professional work as inter-contextual—is an urgent one. Cultural, economic, and social pressures challenge perceptions of educational possibilities in many disciplines and constrain employment opportunities in numerous industries. In a recent issue of the Association of Departments of English’s *ADE Bulletin* focusing on declining undergraduate enrollments in English majors, editor David Laurence observes that “the areas of study students select indeed reflect the ongoing collective cultural conversation about what’s of moment and where good employment opportunities and career prospects lie” (7). Laurence suggests undergraduates may not be choosing to major in English because they do not believe that doing so would lead them to lucrative careers.

In the same issue of the *ADE Bulletin*, English scholar Kent Cartwright asks educators to address questions of “why humans need narrative, how it is structured, and how it changes our minds and beings” (30). In the present study, I suggest that group outplacement training programs are sites of inquiry into how out-of-work

people compose narratives of transfer, transition, and transformation as they navigate from unemployment to reemployment. The stories that people tell themselves and each other as they seek (and accomplish) meaningful work in interconnected academic, civic, personal, and professional contexts should be English studies scholar-teachers' focus in the twenty-first century—an era characterized by radical changes to people's relationships to employment.

In rhetoric and writing studies, journal articles published in and after the era of the Great Recession have focused on the field's role in relation to discussions of education's value in and contribution to students' socioeconomic success. For example, discussing “unpaid student internships,” English scholar Katherine T. Durack suggests that “economic conditions have changed so dramatically over the past decade that we must consider a quite different reality than has applied in past periods of greater economic health if we are to appropriately—and ethically—assess” unpaid student internships’ “place in undergraduate writing programs today” (245).

Also addressing the relationship between education and professional workplaces, writing, rhetoric, and digital studies scholar Michael Pennell “looks[s] beyond the boundaries of school and work to investigate alternate places for the brokering of literacy”; he is concerned with cases where “unemployed, or dislocated, workers find themselves more dependent on local noneducational institutions as ‘sponsors of literacy’” (346). Likewise setting composition studies on a socioeconomic footing, rhetoric, composition, and literacy scholar Chase Bollig states, “The 2008 financial crisis and Great Recession caused a crisis of confidence for Americans, reopening old debates over the value of higher education” (150). He

“propose[s] that compositionists refuse the compartmentalization of cultural, civic, and economic functions of higher education and consider the merits of understanding the subject of composition in terms of the citizen-worker” (151).

Scholars like Bizzell, Geisler, Applegarth, and Wan—along with Durack, Pennell, Bollig, and many others—address the relationship between academic, civic, personal, and professional work. As Wan makes clear, these discussions are often really about education’s role as either a humanist practice on one hand or a vocational project on the other hand (44). She contends, accurately, that this is a false dichotomy. Public arguments for education as a functional, instrumental, and vocational project often obtain as public advocacy for students’ future employability. This suggests, inaccurately, that humanist approaches to education are contraposed to the employability impetus.

As I show in the present study, employability is itself a social construct. Psychology, sociology, and education scholars Thomas Kieselbach and Sabine Mader contend that employability “cannot merely be regarded [as] an individual responsibility. Rather it constitutes a challenge to companies and their concepts of training, as well as to the educational systems” (14). People’s ability to understand job-finding, hiring, and professional work not only as a genre system (in which people receive employment and compensation through the composition and distribution of texts) but also as an ongoing rhetorical practice of identification, persuasion, and socialization contributes much to discussions of employability. Employment is a vocationalist project accomplished through humanist means;

employability is the social manifestation of employment-related matters in academic, civic, personal, and professional contexts.

Scholars in professional writing and technical communication focus extensively on students' career preparation and employability. For example, English scholar Jim Henry investigates his students' workplace writing practices, advocating archaeological and ethnographic approaches to helping students understand themselves, their identities, and their relationships to professional work. He seeks to "turn the lenses of discourse theory to workplace writing, long denied such attention because of its seeming transparency and its 'instrumental' functions" (*Writing* x-xi). Elsewhere, Henry argues that "technical communicators who seek to fit into any organization must develop skills as cultural analysts" ("How" 75). He cites a tradition of "studies of technical communication that have drawn on" empirical research methods and "cultural analysis" ("How" 75).

These studies' authors show how technical communication professionals perform their work. For example, rhetoric and composition scholars Jack Selzer ("Composing") and Dorothy Winsor (*Writing Like; Writing Power*) discuss engineers' writing practices. Edited collections including scholars Lee Odell and Dixie Goswami's *Writing in Nonacademic Settings*, rhetoric scholar Rachel Spilka's *Writing in the Workplace*, Dias et al.'s *Worlds Apart*, and Dias and Paré's *Transitions* discuss writing in numerous workplaces, including architectural, banking, and chemicals organizations. Rhetoric and professional communication scholar Clay Spinuzzi discusses writing practices in transportation agencies (*Tracing*), telecommunications firms (*Network*), and both "nonemployer firms [sic]" and co-

working environments (*All Edge*). My study contributes to discussions like these but takes a different approach: I reveal the rhetoric and writing practices of experienced professionals who are out-of-work and seeking new employment. I show how they learn to use strategies of identification and persuasion to interact with employed professionals and other influential people who may help them land new jobs.

Employability, job-finding, and professional development are among technical communication educators' most pressing concerns. For example, English scholar R. Stanley Dicks argues that technical communicators "need to know how to manage projects using both traditional . . . project management methods and newer, less time-consuming and more user-oriented methods/models such as agile development, iterative design, and extreme programming and documentation" (310). Rhetoric scholar Brad Mehlenbacher argues that "simple skills preparation cannot prepare" technical communicators "for a twenty-first-century workplace made up of wicked problems, accelerated time lines and distributed expertise, and exponential technical and scientific development" (198).

Technical communication and rhetoric scholar Michael J. Albers "examines the technical communication career path and how it may require redefining the junior and senior writer" positions (335). He argues, "By distinguishing clear roles for junior and senior technical communicators, with most of the specialization occurring at the senior level, the profession can both encourage professional development and raise overall professional status within organizations" (335-36). In the present study, I describe situations in which experienced technical communicators, project managers, HR specialists, and others encounter significant challenges to their personal and

professional identities when they lose their jobs, seek to make career changes, and even begin to question their own workplace capabilities.

This study's exigence is rhetoric and writing studies scholar-teachers' concern for people's employability in professional contexts where specialized expertise intersects with career-advancement narratives and workplace experiences that shape professional workers' fortunes in organizations. Employability is an interdisciplinary project. As English and women's studies scholar Laurie Grobman and rhetoric and composition scholar Christian Weisser point out, "jobs can transform over time through promotion, downsizing, and other factors," while workers "can change professions multiple times throughout their careers" (Grobman and Weisser 200).

While professionals often must bring specialized expertise to their work roles, they must also acknowledge that career-focused archetypes privilege professionals' advancement from individual-contributor roles to managerial, supervisory, and executive-level positions. As outplacement training manuals like *Managing Your Search Project* (A-3) and *Marketing Your Talents* (1) assert, the most important projects that professional workers should be managing are their careers.

Advancement in professional employment entails professionals' shifting participation in workplace discourse communities, activity systems, and genre systems, and it requires their emphasis on work responsibilities that will direct their focus away from the areas of professional expertise with which they identify.

English scholar James A. Berlin argues, "We must finally provide a college education that enables workers to be excellent communicators, quick and flexible learners, and cooperative collaborators" (53). I further this claim by suggesting that

rhetoric and writing studies educators must also help their students understand the roles rhetoric and writing, as sites of learning and practice, play in their own efforts to advance their professional careers.

Despite claims that employers have moved to episodic rather than linear career models—with the former being characterized by “digressions, polyphony, and polysemy” (Collin 163)—and to non-hierarchical, non-stratified (i.e., “flat”) organizational structures (Spinuzzi, *All* 25), hiring specialists, supervisory managers, and executives continue to read job applicants’ work histories against traditional narratives of career advancement and performance. Employers reward applicants and professionals who not only have specialized professional expertise, manage projects capably, and work well with others but also demonstrate propensity to advance and perform in their careers through their ability to supervise other people effectively. Career advancement is fundamentally a project of socialization that often occurs at the expense of deepening one’s expertise in one’s area of specialization.

Chapter Overview

My study’s three body chapters explain writing’s purposes in outplacement, as well as consultants’ and candidates’ orientation to and implementation of writing work in outplacement. I organize my body chapters, respectively, around three thematic views of writing in outplacement, which I call “writing for transfer,” “writing for transition,” and “writing for transformation.” Based on my empirical research for this study, I contend that these are the three main rhetorical contexts in relation to which outplacement’s consultants and candidates write. In each body chapter, I use five subthemes—“social participation,” “genre work,” “identity,”

“learning,” and “reflection”—which I derive from Adler-Kassner and Wardle’s threshold concepts of writing studies, to orient readers to the writing work that outplacement’s consultants and candidates perform. My concluding chapter discusses five main implications of outplacement consultants’ and candidates’ writing practices. Each chapter engages this study’s central research question: In what ways is writing in outplacement contextual (i.e., different in discrete contexts) and inter-contextual (i.e., similar across contexts)?

In chapter 2, “Writing for Transfer in Outplacement,” I show how writing in outplacement is both contextual and inter-contextual. Outplacement consultants assert that candidates should pursue career continuity by seeking employment in the same jobs and industries as those in which they were working previously. In this view, effective writing in outplacement requires candidates to connect their professional capabilities to new workplace opportunities. Writing in dominant genres, including job application letters, résumés, and networking scripts, requires candidates to name “transferable skills”: capabilities learned in their prior workplaces that have purchase in new employment contexts.

This rhetorical objective engages distinctions between rhetoric and writing studies scholar-teachers’ understandings of transfer. For example, Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak see transfer as helping people to “develop writing knowledge and practices that they can draw upon, use, and repurpose for new writing tasks in new settings” (2). In outplacement, the career-continuity objective suggests that candidates’ main objective is not learning how to write in new settings but is instead finding new work in settings just like their prior workplaces.

When they name “transferable skills,” outplacement candidates claim parity between their professional capabilities and the work opportunities that they seek. This rhetorical objective reflects Nowacek’s understanding of transfer as a rhetorical strategy. Consultants teach candidates to engage in what Nowacek calls *successful integration*, a technique in which rhetors “consciously see a connection and successfully sell it to their audience” (41). Both Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak’s and Nowacek’s views of transfer are critical to candidates’ job-finding work. On one hand, candidates need practice writing for transfer in the capacity of successful integration. On the other hand, candidates do not simply “transfer” to new jobs. To reach those jobs, they must traverse other contexts, including those of unemployment and job-finding. To transfer to comparable employment, they must—repeating Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak’s words—learn “new writing tasks in new settings”: they must learn how to write in outplacement.

Writing in outplacement also has contextual and inter-contextual valences pertaining to candidates’ personal and professional lives, as I show in chapter 3, “Writing for Transition in Outplacement.” While their main writing work emphasizes composing rhetorical connections between their professional capabilities and potential new workplace opportunities, outplacement candidates also experience radical changes to their identities and subjectivities as they traverse workforce displacement actions—i.e., colloquially, “downsizing,” “firing,” “layoffs,” “termination”—as well as unemployment, outplacement, and job-finding activities. Following Brandt’s argument that sponsors not only afford but also constrain literacy

access, outplacement consultants devote relatively few pedagogical resources to “writing for transition” as contrasted with “writing for transfer.”

Anson and Forsberg, who study professional writing student interns’ entry into the workplace, suggest that these learners experience “three stages of transition” comprising “*expectation*,” “*disorientation*” (including “*frustration* and a sense of failure”), and finally “*transition and resolution*” as they begin professional work (208). Similarly, outplacement practitioners admit that candidates may experience feelings of “anger/hostility,” “denial/bargaining,” and “grief/sadness,” as well as “formal/procedural,” “stoic/quiet,” and even “relieved” responses to job loss at displacement and as they begin outplacement (*Conducting* 4). Even so, relatively few curricular resources are available in outplacement to help candidates contend with their transitions from employment; through unemployment, outplacement, and job-finding; and toward reemployment.

While “writing for transfer” is outplacement’s dominant curricular objective, candidates may also benefit from “writing for transition”—i.e., writing to negotiate the personal and professional domains of their lived experiences as they contend with job loss and job-finding work. Applegarth says, “Autobiographical accounts are solicited within specific social and rhetorical contexts and, within those contexts, make claims that often, or perhaps *always*, extend beyond the personal” (531), while English and women’s studies scholar Trev Lynn Broughton sees résumés as a form of life writing (344).

Ethan, one of the outplacement consultants whom I interviewed for this study, admits that his candidates conflate job application letter and résumé writing with

autobiography when they use epistolary and “promotional” job-finding genres (Kong 202) to tell stories of their life experiences that, in the consultant’s view, do not reflect the informational needs of the hiring specialists who comprise their audiences. English scholar Kenneth Kong observes that the “promotional genre” has come to be regarded as “a colonizer of other genres, which [in turn] have become increasingly promotional” (202). In their desire to tell stories of, as Ethan puts it, “sailing around the world,” his candidates colonize dominant job-finding genres with their personal stories. They engage in inter-contextual writing that, though hiring specialists may see it as detracting from the candidates’ job-finding efforts, may help them therapeutically as they reconcile their personal successes with their experiences as out-of-work professionals.

In chapter four, “Writing for Transformation in Outplacement,” I show that even though candidates write for the specialized, scripted contexts of job-finding, including interactions with “networking” contacts and hiring specialists, those interactions are inter-contextual because they alter over time as changes in communications technology prompt innovation in job-finding conventions. The most important transformation, however, is not one of technological innovation but rather of changes in outplacement candidates’ understanding. Consultants do not wish merely for candidates’ attainment of new professional employment. Instead, they seek what education scholars Jan H. F. Meyer and Ray Land call “a transformation of personal identity, a reconstruction of subjectivity” (7): a reconfiguration of candidates’ understanding of employment philosophies, policies, and practices.

Consultants want candidates to begin thinking as they do: to see employment and job-finding as ongoing forms of professional participation and to understand the inter-contextual relationship between professional capabilities, participation in professional organizations, and workplace opportunities. Employment-related innovations require professionals to update their capabilities continually. Professionals must also interact with each other, consultants say, because hiring and professional work are social activities.

Technological advances in the capacity of innovations in specialized communication practices and tools belie tacit consistency in rhetorical expectations for people's participation in job-finding and professional work. At issue, say rhetoric, technical communication, and English scholars Cheryl E. Ball and Colin Charlton, as well as English scholar Bruce Horner (*Rewriting*), is the idea that multimodality is a harbinger of ostensible innovation in rhetoric and writing pedagogy, philosophy, policy, and practice across academic, civic, personal, and professional contexts. In their brief essay, "All Writing Is Multimodal," Ball and Charlton argue that while "rhetoric and composition studies is often assumed to focus on writing (and sometimes speech) as solely alphanumeric-based communication," the "teaching of writing has almost always included the production of multimodal texts" (42).

Similarly, Horner asserts that "even in its focus on seemingly monomodal forms, composition has always already been 'multimodal'" (*Rewriting* 49). In outplacement, while consultants insist that candidates must become adept at using new communication tools and practices—e.g., video-interviewing technologies—candidates' most significant, transformative understanding is that adroit use of

writing and speech across genres including job application letters, résumés, and networking scripts, and across contexts including informal networking and formal hiring practices, is the real key to their rhetorical success.

In chapter five, this study's conclusion, I identify five areas where matters of concern in outplacement reflect rhetoric and composition educators' views regarding the nature and purpose of writing in contemporary academic contexts—particularly as these are viewed as connecting to professional workplace settings. First, in a section about linear and recursive outplacement curricula, I show that while outplacement training programs guide candidates toward reemployment, they reinforce expectations that candidates will move from “writing” and “research” to “networking” and “interviewing.” Linear outplacement curricula suggest that candidates should move from introspective to extrospective subjectivities and from individualistic to collaborative interpersonal stances. Linear outplacement curricula make it difficult for candidates to understand how writing can be a recursive, reflective tool that can benefit them in their careers.

Second, I address the resources of place, space, and time that outplacement candidates need for composing job-finding texts and participating effectively in job-finding activities. I connect this discussion of resources to debates regarding socio-political pressures for institutions to adopt competency-based education (CBE) models. Outplacement invites candidates to learn so they can perform job-finding and professional work effectively, rather than so that they can demonstrate mastery of outplacement curricula to outplacement practitioners.

Third, I examine more closely the analogies of “marketing” and “project management” shaping consultants’ and candidates’ work in outplacement. I show that these analogies operate according to assumptions regarding outplacement candidates’ professional knowledge of marketing and project management. I suggest that while knowledge transfer from the specialized professional knowledge domains of marketing and project management is difficult if not impossible because many candidates do not have expert knowledge of these domains, configuring outplacement as “marketing” and “project management” orients candidates to outplacement as resembling the professional work that they complete in their careers.

Fourth, I show how outplacement training programs share characteristics of educational and professional workplace settings. I contend that the similarities between academic and professional settings that outplacement reveals invite inquiry into the scripts of transfer, transition, and transformation that guide rhetoric and composition educators’ assumptions about students’ migrations from school to work. I suggest that students may in fact compose narratives of transfer and transition because educators may expect them to implicitly. Refiguring academic and professional settings as inter-contextual entities may invite educators to re-envision the academic and workplace narratives that they expect their students to compose.

Fifth, I address outplacement training programs’ private and public characteristics. I suggest that while for-profit outplacement training programs are entities whose constituents value privacy, inquiry into these organizations’ ostensibly private practices helps rhetoric and writing studies educators better evaluate and understand characteristics of public discourse. Outplacement is not only an example

of a potentially beneficial public pedagogy kept private. Instead, my study's analysis of outplacement invites rhetoric and composition educators to consider how academic, civic, personal, and professional contexts all have both private and public characteristics. The questions thus become how best to share knowledge amongst and between these contexts and how to determine who benefits, and why, when aspects of these contexts are deemed either private or public.

Chapter 2: Writing for Transfer in Outplacement

Introduction

Outplacement educators' dominant curricular objective for out-of-work people is *writing for transfer*. These educators' goal is that candidates connect their professional experiences to the workplace opportunities for which they are most qualified. Transfer is a social and material concern in outplacement. In terms of their concern for the social and material dimensions of transfer, outplacement educators want out-of-work people to find new employment that meets both constituents' criteria for meaningful work. Materially speaking, meaningfulness signifies outplacement candidates' attainment of an income and their access to resources equal to, or even above, their levels prior to unemployment. Outplacement educators want candidates to find sustainable work: full-time, permanent employment rather than contingent, contractual, part-time, or temporary work.

Outplacement educators urge candidates to seek employment in their prior professional areas because, they argue, doing so is the candidates' best chance of finding work for which they are most qualified and securing incomes matching their prior salaries as closely as possible. From a social perspective, outplacement educators suggest that candidates find employment for which they are an appropriate match. Employers are likely to hire candidates who align with their organizations in terms of logos (i.e., professional and technical "competence" as qualification for the position), ethos (i.e., "compatibility" with the organizational culture), and pathos (i.e., "chemistry" or likability from an interpersonal perspective) (*Managing M-14*). The outplacement training manual *Marketing Your Talents* calls these metrics "Can Do,"

“Will Do,” and “Can We Stand You While You Do It?” (16). Outplacement training manuals describe candidates’ and employers’ mutual alignment as *fit*: candidates’ ability and willingness to perform the work combined with their compatibility with the employer’s workforce and organizational culture (*Marketing* 16; *Managing M-* 14). The areas where candidates are most qualified to work, outplacement educators insist, are those where employers and candidates are likely to be satisfied with each other in terms of logos, ethos, and pathos understood collectively as *fit*.

Outplacement educators’ understanding of fit derives from HR practitioners’ idea of “*person-environment fit*” (Ungemah 122). HR consultant and psychologist Joe Ungemah explains that there are “two types of fit: *supplementary* and *complementary*” (123). He contends that while supplementary fit comprises “shared goals, values, norms, personality, or attitudes between an individual and his or her co-workers,” complementary fit obtains “when the needs of either the employee or organization are fulfilled by the other party” (123). From outplacement’s perspective, employers hire candidates who supplement the organization by sharing its “values” and complement the organization by “fulfill[ing]” its “needs.” Employers are also likely to hire candidates whose own “needs” have the highest potential to be “fulfilled” through their work for the organization.

Fit is important in terms of writing for transfer in outplacement. To use Aristotle’s term, it is the “first principle [*archē*]” (Kennedy 69) governing rhetoric and writing in outplacement. Outplacement educators focus candidates’ attention in terms of writing and interpersonal participation around fit. In outplacement, educators teach candidates how to write and speak in ways that convey the rhetorical objective

of obtaining employment for which they are a good fit. In terms of writing, educators teach candidates how to compose texts—primarily in the résumé genre—conveying fit. With respect to speaking, educators teach candidates how to secure and participate in informal conversations—“networking” activities and “informational interviews”—and formal job interviews.

In these informal and formal conversations, outplacement educators insist, candidates’ objective is to learn about their potential future employers’ “values” and “needs” so the candidates can convey two messages: first, the alignment of their own “values” with the organization’s, and, second, that the candidate is qualified to meet the employer’s “needs.” In this chapter, transfer in the form of *connecting capabilities to opportunities* reflects outplacement candidates’ pursuit of fit. The chapter begins with a discussion of *writing for transfer* deriving from three biweekly “accountability group” meetings held by the state government-operated outplacement training center in January and February 2017.

Writing for Transfer: “Accountability Group” Examples

The résumé’s dominance as outplacement’s preeminent written genre was apparent during the state government-operated outplacement training center’s biweekly accountability group meetings. In those meetings, candidates met to discuss their job-finding progress. Many candidates evaluated that progress in relation to their composition of their résumés. During one accountability group meeting, for example, a candidate named Ira—a former entrepreneur who had started, operated, and eventually sold a publishing company and an information technology (IT) firm implementing hardware and software systems—confessed to the group that he did not

know what he wished to do next, other than that he wanted to “manage managers.” As he put it, “I don’t even have a résumé [put] together.” Another candidate, Ash, suggested that Ira do some reflective writing to help him decide on his next career direction. She was specific in her instructions to him for this writing heuristic. Ash told Ira to take a piece of paper, draw out quadrants, write out categories including “accomplishments,” “objectives,” “qualifications,” and so on, and explore career ideas by writing freely and reflectively in each quadrant.

This heuristic was an example of *writing for transfer*: it comprised reflective writing for the purpose of *connecting Ira’s capabilities to his potential career opportunities*. In suggesting this heuristic to Ira, Ash was advising him to set the résumé genre aside and engage in reflective writing to determine what he wanted to do next. Ira did not heed Ash’s advice, however; at the meeting’s conclusion, he announced to the accountability group that his objective for next time was to have worked on his résumé. This example shows the résumé’s dominance as a genre that occupies candidates’ job-finding work and their thinking in outplacement. While it is impossible to write an effective résumé without a specific career goal, many candidates focus on the résumé genre above all others, even if they have not yet determined their professional objectives. Despite Ash’s suggestion that Ira set his preoccupation with the résumé genre aside and engage in reflective writing to help him convert his general goal of “manag[ing] managers” into a specific career objective, Ira could not see the value of Ash’s suggestion and thought of his job-finding work solely in terms of writing in the résumé genre. Candidates may have

difficulty seeing writing's job-finding value beyond their composition and possession of a résumé.

Transfer and Social Participation in Outplacement

Transfer and Career Continuity: Giving Outplacement Coherence

Transfer to a comparable professional position is the controlling idea governing candidates' "social and rhetorical" (Roozen 18) participation in outplacement: career continuity serves the rhetorical function of giving outplacement coherence as an activity. In most cases, outplacement practitioners suggest, meaningful work is the work candidates were doing in their most recent professional positions. Writing as "a social and rhetorical act" (Roozen 18) is meant to anticipate the needs of networking contacts and hiring personnel as the audiences "addressed" and "invoked" (Ede and Lunsford 156, 160) in outplacement. Consultants and candidates interact to help the candidates participate in future socialization activities with these audiences. The outplacement consultants whom I interviewed, including Lesley, Cora, and Ethan at the for-profit outplacement provider, as well as Ann, the state-government provider's director, whom I interviewed and observed in leading a two-day outplacement training program and a series of accountability-group sessions, configured candidates' work around social and rhetorical interactions that anticipated candidates' participation in formal job interviewing. In describing her firm's outplacement training program to me, Lesley explained that candidates participate in a series of fundamental-skills training modules resulting in a completed résumé, a

networking strategy, a job-search strategy, and formal job-interviewing and negotiation skills.

Following outplacement's initial training program, Lesley said, eligible candidates—usually, managers, supervisors, and executives—complete a series of specialized modules on topics including starting a business or consultancy, using online professional networks and other social-media applications as job-search tools, and job-search participation for candidates aged fifty-plus. Cora discussed her firm's use of affinity groups as a tool for engaging candidates in ongoing socialization by profession. She led affinity groups for candidates in the marketing and sales and pharmaceutical industries.

The firm's migration to distance-mediated communications technologies expanded the reach of these groups, which drew candidates from areas throughout the US East Coast. While candidates who participated in these affinity groups met weekly to share job-search strategies and discuss employment-related topics specific to their professions, they were also competitors for available jobs in their fields. At the for-profit and state government-operated outplacement providers, and in the training manuals that I analyze, outplacement programs are characterized by a curricular move away from initial writing work and toward social participation as verbal interpersonal collaboration.

“Why Would You Want to Network with a Bunch of Unemployed People?”

The outplacement candidates whom I observed and interviewed participated in the state-government training program in accordance with the requirements of its dominant curricular focus on transfer. Ann, the center's director, informed the

candidates in attendance that the center's objective was to "reemploy the state's managerial population" of professional workers. Based on this objective, the candidates in the cohort were expected to participate in the program as managerial professionals. When the candidates "networked" with each other, for example, the transfer objective suggested that the normative approach was for the candidates to network as representatives of their professions.

This objective made it difficult for the candidates to learn in the program if they were unclear about their professional objectives. For example, the candidates whom I interviewed, including Mario, Lea, and Ileana, had differing opinions about the extent to which the two-day program engaged the candidates in active learning. For example, Mario and Ileana, who sought to modify their careers' directions, said that they wished the program had engaged them more fully in, as Mario called it, "hands-on" learning. In contrast, Lea, who sought a new job in her established profession, made clear to me that she appreciated the training program very much, especially given its focus on helping candidates write in the résumé genre.

Based on the volume of job-finding information that it provided, the two-day outplacement training program engaged candidates most extensively in passive rather than active learning. Candidates' networking with each other was a nominal objective, though. As Ann asked rhetorically during the program, "Why would you want to network with a bunch of unemployed people?" Her answer to her own question was, "You never know who is in whose network." However, the candidates were expected primarily to participate by listening, taking notes, answering the consultants' questions when called upon, and contributing to the discussion with

stories of their experiences. Mario's, Lea's, and Ileana's different career objectives appear to have influenced their opportunities for professional socialization in the program. Of these three candidates, only Lea, a credentialed Project Management Professional (PMP), sought a new position in her prior line of work. This certainty let her focus on a specific topic in the program: composing her résumé.

Characteristics of "Group Outplacement Services"

Socialization is central to outplacement work and its emphasis on transfer understood as career continuity. Pickman identifies six components of "group outplacement services"—the predominant training format at the for-profit and state-government providers studied here—including: "1. understanding the points of view of others," "2. developing more effective social interaction skills," "3. learning to share concerns and ideas with others who face similar problems," "4. obtaining a range of reactions to problems that are presented," "5. receiving support and encouragement from others," and "6. obtaining useful information" (*Complete* 37-38). As Pickman explains, citing "one of the few empirical studies designed specifically to identify those factors that were perceived as helpful by participants in job search groups," the "helping factors" of group-based outplacement "fell into two major categories," including "those that promoted support and self-esteem and those that facilitated job search tasks" (*Complete* 38).

Despite outplacement groups' focus on socialization, their main goal is candidates' transfer to new jobs aligning with their previous occupations. As outplacement consultant Challenger explains, most candidates who seek new jobs "are tied to their functional expertise" because "there is no way a career changer can

possibly compete for the same or better salary in a new and different function in which he or she has no expertise” (J. E. Challenger 14). Pierson advises candidates, “When people succeed in making large career changes in one big leap, it is often because” the hiring manager “knows them personally or has heard of them from a trusted source” (98). In conditions where candidates are unknown to hiring personnel in the organizations where they are seeking employment, Pierson tells candidates to “please think very carefully before making a move” in the form of a career change (99). While socialization is crucial for candidates’ reemployment, the career continuity objective may make learning and socialization difficult for candidates like Mario and Ileana who are uncertain of their career objectives.

Career Continuity Makes Outplacement Coherent

For outplacement to be coherent as a social and rhetorical activity, its constituents must see the relationship between its components as being relatively stable. Writing for transfer thus emerges as outplacement’s dominant curricular objective. The idea that consultants help candidates with relatively stable professional objectives to get new jobs aligning with their old ones requires these constituents to regard outplacement as an “activity system”—to agree to the following “[r]ules”: candidates are the “[s]ubject[s]” who are the beneficiaries of the service; if candidates are to be successful in landing new jobs as an outcome, then job-search preparation must be the “[o]bject”; and consultants and candidates must work together to compose the résumé as the principal instrument of candidates’ engagement in job-search as a distinct activity related closely to, yet separate from, outplacement (Engeström 960, 962).

Outplacement's "rules" are such that constituents' socialization supports the transfer objective; the community's constituents can direct their work toward the goal of transferring the candidates' professional experiences and qualifications to a comparable employer. The assumption that consultants are job-search experts while candidates are experts in their fields readies these constituents to share outplacement's "division of labour" (Engeström 962). As candidates gain job-search expertise, they begin engaging with consultants as their mentors and each other as professional colleagues. Writing for transfer is the most efficient means of writing for the job market; it is also an essential means of understanding outplacement as a coherent activity.

Résumé Writing Makes Outplacement Recognizable

The career-continuity principle informs candidates' writing in outplacement. Likewise, candidates' writing in outplacement reinforces career continuity as the principal objective that outplacement practitioners have for candidates. The career-continuity principle and the genres in which outplacement candidates write reinforce each other. In outplacement, candidates' placement as an overarching objective entails what education scholar Tara Fenwick calls, in her description of sociomaterial theory, "the constitutive entanglement of the social and material" (16). When outplacement practitioners, including curriculum writers and consultants, have candidates write for transfer, they engage placement as an example of what Fenwick calls "*heterogeneous assemblages*," which are "gatherings of *heterogeneous* natural, technical[,] and cognitive elements" that "act together" to "bring forth what appear be actors, objects[,] and phenomena of everyday life" (16).

Fenwick's conception of sociomaterialism is important because without the transfer objective, outplacement as a "*heterogeneous assemblage*" is incoherent; the career-continuity objective allows outplacement to become a recognizable activity. As English scholar Dylan B. Dryer points out in "Writing is Not Natural," one of his contributions to Adler-Kassner and Wardle's *Naming* volume, "neither writing produced with technologies—all writing, in other words—nor written language itself can be said to be 'natural'" ("Natural" 27, 28). The career-continuity principle permits outplacement, and writing for transfer in outplacement, to "emerge" (Fenwick 16) as coherent activities. From the perspective of sociomaterialism, the placement of candidates entails the interactions of people, the circulation of texts, and the sharing of knowledge; the idea of career continuity makes this possible.

Candidate-Employer Fit: A Social Construction

Transfer in outplacement entails candidates' conceptual and physical movement between contexts including employment, unemployment and outplacement, job-search, and reemployment. Composing and distributing texts in genres such as the résumé support candidates' movements, as hiring personnel collect and assess candidates' résumés as artifacts signifying their professional credentials. Using tools such as Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS), hiring personnel screen résumés as proxies for candidates themselves. Candidates whose credentials have parity with the employer's specifications for the position may be asked to interview for the job, whereupon hiring personnel judge their fit for the job and the employer based on their credentials and interpersonal characteristics. In sociomaterial terms, understanding fit engages constituents in asking questions of "how and why particular

elements become assembled, why some elements become included and others excluded[,] and, most important, how elements change as they come together, as they *intra-act*” (Fenwick 16).

Fit engages what Fenwick calls “the fundamental *uncertainty* of everyday life,” where “novel possibilities and patterns are always *emerging*” (16). Despite its importance, however, the idea that people gain employment through fit—a form of social construction in which people get jobs through a series of emergent, negotiated, and unique interactions between hiring personnel and job applicants—is difficult for outplacement practitioners to communicate to candidates. The result is outplacement consultants’ dominant curricular objective is to teach candidates about the formal hiring process. Writing for knowledge transfer, primarily in the résumé genre, has a prominent role in outplacement work because it makes outplacement coherent as an activity system.

Transfer and Genre Work in Outplacement

Résumés as Lists, Promotional Texts, and Keyword Databases

Candidates’ writing in outplacement supports their transfer to a comparable position. Writing instruction focuses on the “recognizable forms” (Bazerman, “Writing” 35) most likely to help them achieve this objective. Dominant among these forms is the résumé. Already a concise genre whose writers and readers are known for paying close attention to correctness, the résumé’s performative—i.e., “*locutionary*,” “*illocutionary*,” and “*perlocutionary*” (J. L. Austin 109)—value as a keyword database (*Meet*) strengthens this view. Keyword-searchable résumés “reify”

(Wenger 59), i.e., perform with material “force” (J. L. Austin 109), job applicants’ qualifications for ATSs and the hiring personnel who use those tools to screen applicants. As performative texts, résumés’ “phrases or sentences,” in English scholar Andrea A. Lunsford’s words, “constitute an action” (“Performative” 44).

Citing an unpublished dissertation addressing “the historical evolution of the employment résumé,” management and information technology scholars JoAnne Yates and Wanda J. Orlikowski note that “starting in the 1970s[,] the purpose of promoting the candidate’s abilities in order to secure a job interview was added the [résumé’s] existing purpose of factually listing a candidate’s qualifications” (“PowerPoint” 71). At the time of her 2014 interview, for-profit outplacement consultant Cora said the ATS was the most significant change in hiring and recruitment over the past decade. With ATSs, résumés no longer merely promoted candidates’ capabilities: they made candidates visible to hiring personnel who accessed their résumés through database queries.

Because outplacement practitioners teach candidates how to write résumés and other texts that the candidates need to secure new jobs, writing in outplacement shares characteristics of “writing in school” and “writing at work” (Dias et al. 5). Outplacement writing is regarded primarily as composition in the résumé genre, which, in turn, is seen by outplacement’s constituents as a dominant text. This finding echoes Bazerman’s claim that “while writing may require more awareness of genres,” contextual “factors,” such as schooling and professionalization, “limit conscious, reflective examination of genres” (“Writing” 37). Outplacement candidates may

misinterpret outplacement as a didactic course in résumé writing, rather than as an opportunity to reflect on their experiences.

Hiring Specialists: Gatekeepers, Screeners, and Résumé Readers

The outplacement consultants whom I interviewed, including Lesley, Cora, Ethan, and Ann, explained the résumé's importance in outplacement candidates' job-search work. Lesley emphasized the résumé's importance as a screening tool. She advanced an argument about how outplacement consultants taught writing that the other consultants also articulated: because hiring personnel now used ATSs to manage the résumé submissions they received for the open positions they advertised, candidates and other job applicants needed to write their résumés so they reflected precisely the keywords appearing in the job ad. Since hiring personnel searched the résumés they received for keywords pertaining to the job, candidates needed to incorporate those keywords inventively in their résumés.

During the two-day outplacement training program, Ann, the state-government training center's director, mentioned to the candidates in the cohort an infographic entitled *Meet the Robots Reading Your Résumé* addressing this matter. The infographic explains to job applicants, "Résumés should now be optimized to stand out to an ATS, not just to a recruiter or hiring manager" (*Meet*). As the infographic advises candidates, "Use keywords from the job description in your résumé" (*Meet*). This is because "Applicant Tracking Systems analyze keywords, dates, titles, and other critical information in candidates' résumés to evaluate the candidates' depth of experience, including how recent and relevant that experience was" in candidates' work histories (*Meet*).

Effective Résumé Writing as Correctness

Cora and Ann characterized effective writing in outplacement as correctness in formatting, grammar, and word usage; they were also adamant that the candidates themselves were responsible for the content, layout, and correctness of their résumés. A significant portion of the state-government outplacement center's training program was devoted to the topic of correctness in résumé writing, and the candidates in attendance asked lots of questions regarding the correct composition of résumés' surface features, including bullet points and verb tense in their descriptions of their professional accomplishments. Employers' adoption of screening technologies, including primarily the ATS, meant that consultants and candidates needed to ensure their résumés met the standards of two audiences: the ATS and the hiring personnel who evaluated the résumés that cleared the preliminary screening process. To satisfy the ATS, the résumé must be machine-readable and must contain the correct keywords. To satisfy the hiring personnel, it must be error-free, describe accomplishments effectively, and have an effective layout.

Résumé "Review" and Revision

Participants in the state-government outplacement training center's two-day program were expected to bring their current résumés on the training program's first morning. Candidates in the cohort submitted their résumés in an inbox placed on a table at the front of the seminar room. Although many candidates thought the program's consultants would give editorial comments on the versions of the résumés that the candidates submitted initially, the consultants treated these as baseline résumés. They expected the candidates to revise their résumés themselves based on

the program's teachings, then submit their revised résumés for editorial review (Swarts 33-34). This approach helped the consultants compare a given candidate's baseline and revised résumés to determine whether they had engaged in independent revision work. This process accomplished two things: first, it ensured that the candidates wrote and revised their own résumés; second, it reduced the consultants' workload because it required the candidates to make substantial revisions before they could receive editorial feedback.

The process is an example of what communication and rhetoric scholar Jason Swarts calls "[a]rtifact-oriented reviews," which are "used to clarify content and verify the accuracy of the information in a text. . . . In this case, review treats a text as an artifact, which reveals both the text's and the writer's 'fit' in an organization" (33-34). In the outplacement training program, the résumé is one of the most important "parts of an existing cognitive architecture that mediates the work practices that occur throughout the organization" (Swarts 33). Candidates know they are learning effectively in the training program when the consultants "verify the accuracy" and appropriateness of their résumés.

Of the three candidates whom I interviewed, including Mario, Lea, and Ileana, only Lea demonstrated an understanding of the state-government outplacement training center's résumé-review process. Neither Mario nor Ileana could recall receiving their résumés back with the consultants' editorial comments. Regardless of the candidates' professional objectives, this approach made candidates' knowledge transfer evident to the consultants *prima facie*: candidates who listened to the

consultants' teachings would compose and submit revised résumés in accordance with the established review process.

Candidates' Résumé Revisions Demonstrate Knowledge Transfer

Transfer and its absence were apparent in the candidates' revisions. Among all candidates, those who pursued career continuity rather than career change were in the strongest position to benefit from this process because their résumés conveyed a coherent set of professional experiences to begin with. Candidates with clear understandings of the relationship between their experiences and objectives were already in the most advantageous positions to respond to the consultants' editorial suggestions. Because the training program separated candidates' résumé writing and revision from their learning *about* résumés—with the latter topic being the program's focus—candidates who were already clear about their professional goals were in the most favorable positions to learn from the consultants.

Outplacement practitioners' focus on the résumé as the dominant job-search genre orients and limits candidates' attention to writing. The résumé “mediates” (Swarts 33) candidates' work in outplacement—but only when candidates believe that they need a résumé to get a job. Separating résumé review from résumé writing disconnects candidates' understanding of the stories of their lives from their work in composing their résumés. The distinction between writing and other forms of communication is evident in outplacement consultants' descriptions of genres and their purposes in outplacement as a “discourse community” (Bizzell 222).

For example, as Challenger puts it, “The foremost written item is, of course, the résumé” (J. E. Challenger 132). He explains, “The job seeker's modes of

communication within the marketplace are the written category, including the résumé and whatever letters, if any, may be sent to prospective employers during the job-search campaign,” and “the verbal category, including employer contact work and conducting job interviews” (132). Challenger separates writing from speech, rather than connecting them.

A Candidate’s “Core Message”

In contrast, Pierson suggests that a “good résumé effectively advocates” candidates for the positions they seek and “puts the most emphasis on the experience, skills, knowledge, and abilities most relevant to that group of jobs” (142). Pierson advises candidates to compose a “Core Message”: a two-minute statement that “consists of your most relevant experience, skills, education, training, and credentials” that “may also appear in briefer[,] written form as a six-line ‘background summary’ at the top of your résumé” (142). The core message is significant because it is a key component of, but also transcends, the résumé genre. While the résumé, the core message, and other job-search artifacts together form outplacement’s “genre system” (Bawarshi and Reiff 96), their mutual interaction as a system may not be clear to outplacement candidates.

Curriculum writers such as Pierson and training manuals including *Marketing Your Talents* and *Managing Your Search Project* direct candidates to write and speak about their credentials, but the résumé is the dominant written artifact that these practitioners and resources instruct candidates to compose. While outplacement constituents understand the résumé to be a coherent written genre, consultants ask candidates to write about their accomplishments in other genres about whose

characteristics both constituents are less aware. Broughton identifies “CVs” as a “bureaucratic” form of “life writing,” and she cites “the complex and contradictory ways in which lives and contexts . . . may constitute each other” through life writing forms that “problematize distinctions” between different “genres” of life writing and show how “lives and contexts . . . constitute each other” and “disrupt facile understandings of the relation between public and private” (344). Outplacement’s constituents may have a clearer picture of writing’s role in their work if they understand the résumé as a form of life writing that connects with other forms and modes of autobiographical storytelling.

“Reification”: Résumés as Material Objects

The importance of résumé writing persists in outplacement, even though consultants such as Ethan insist that candidates do not need a résumé to get a new job. Although consultants maintain that candidates are most successful in their job searches when they are “known candidate[s]” (Pierson 61) for a position, the résumé remains essential as a recognizable form of writing. The résumé’s form shapes consultants’ and candidates’ writing work in outplacement. Through a dominant curriculum “reifying” (Wenger 60) the résumé as an essential job-search text, outplacement programs reinforce the idea that candidates get new jobs by circulating résumés, even though outplacement practitioners teach otherwise.

Candidates transfer their existing knowledge and beliefs about résumé writing to their work in outplacement; they view résumé writing as the locus of their outplacement work. Ann, the state-government outplacement center’s director, noted that one of her prior candidates had questioned the training program’s importance. As

the candidate had put it, “I don’t know why I’m here; my résumé is, like, ninety-five percent perfect.” Ann said that the percentage figure the candidate used to describe his résumé’s quality decreased as he learned more about résumé writing in the program. Consultants help candidates adapt their understandings of how to write their résumés in accordance with new expectations for how hiring personnel use the résumé genre, and they regard assisting candidates with revising their texts in this form as one of their most important objectives.

The Résumé’s Ultimate Objective

This attention to the résumé reinforces the idea that the résumé’s ultimate objective is to qualify candidates by conveying the correct meaning to the right audiences. Given the limited time for writing in outplacement programs, résumé writing takes the recognizable form of a curricular objective because the résumé is viewed as an essential recognizable form for candidates, ATSs, and hiring personnel, even though consultants like Ethan insist that by using interpersonal interactions effectively, candidates do not need a résumé to get a job.

In outplacement, consultants and candidates treat the résumé as a dominant text. Consultants emphasize the importance of composing in the résumé genre, and candidates regard composing and revising their résumés as the most important aspects of their work in outplacement. These parties recognize that the résumé is essential for participation in the formal, traditional conception of hiring, which the curriculum writers of Right Management’s *Marketing Your Talents* manual call the “reactive job market,” which “includes all positions that a company or organization has taken some active measure to publicize—such as through an ad, an employment agency[,] or a

search firm” (110). In this traditional sense of job-finding, applicants circulate their résumés as widely as possible in response to job advertisements that they determine are relevant to their professional credentials, and they wait for responses from hiring personnel. Candidates are “on the job market” reactively because their résumés—proxies for themselves—await evaluation by the hiring personnel to whom they are sent.

Outplacement practitioners discourage this job-finding approach because applicants who are already familiar to hiring personnel are advantaged over candidates in the “applicant pool” when the decision to extend formal interview offers is made (Pierson 62). Even so, outplacement constituents including consultants and candidates emphasize the importance of writing, revising, and distributing résumés above other job-finding genres and activities. These constituents’ treatment of the résumé genre resonates with Wenger’s conception of “*reification*,” a term that is “used to convey the idea that what is turned into a concrete, material object is not properly a concrete, material object” (58).

Consultants and candidates tend to treat the résumé as an object that candidates must possess and distribute to get new jobs. Scrutinizing the objectification of the résumé reveals that the perceived importance of this genre in traditional (i.e., “reactive”) job searches has a profound effect on the ways writing is taught and learned in outplacement. The idea that the résumé “reifies” the candidate’s experience suggests why résumés need to be “correct” in common sense understanding: résumés must reify the facts of the candidates’ work histories through

their surface features of formatting, grammar, and layout. Employers' increasing use of ATSs strengthens this understanding.

Transfer and Identity in Outplacement

Analogies of Marketing and Sales

Outplacement consultants' and candidates' "identities and ideologies" (Scott 48) reinforce the idea that candidates' best chance of attaining meaningful work is pursuing transfer to a comparable position. Consultants adopt the role of experts who support this goal; candidates perform their work in outplacement as members of their professions. This approach contributes to outplacement's coherence. Outplacement practitioners use analogies like marketing, sales, and project management to describe job-search work; these analogies inflect consultants' and candidates' views of writing, echoing rhetoric and composition scholar Tony Scott's claim that when "we are immersed in discourses through reading and dialogue with others, we begin to name and understand *through* those discourses, internalizing the ideologies they carry" (49).

With its emphasis on knowledge transfer, outplacement puts its candidates in charge of their own job-finding writing and their own job searches. The outplacement consultants whom I interviewed, including Lesley, Cora, and Ethan at the for-profit outplacement provider and Ann, the state-government outplacement training center's director, invoked the analogies of marketing and sales to characterize out-of-work people's responsibilities in outplacement as professional work. For example, Lesley described candidates' job-search work as a "marketing campaign." She made clear

that candidates' job was selling themselves to prospective employers. In her discussion of writing and identity, literacy scholar Roz Ivanič distinguishes between the question of “what the writer is *doing*” and “what s/he is *being*” (94). In outplacement work, candidates are tasked with “*being*” job-finding professionals who must carry out their writing work accordingly.

The “analogy” (Donahue 159) of marketing and sales supported the consultants' claim that candidates' best option was pursuing new work in their existing occupations. Considered from the perspective of marketplace competition, candidates are advantaged when they can demonstrate to potential employers that their workplace experiences match their professional objectives. Ethan referenced two concepts from marketing and sales—*consultative sales* and the *value proposition*—to describe the arguments that candidates need to make to convince prospective employers of their viability for available positions. Through a “consultative sales” strategy—i.e., one which, in the discourse community of business management, “focuses on clearly defining a customer's needs and objectives . . . and ensures that a customer agrees that these needs should be addressed” (Dissel, Probert, and Tockenbürger 1947)—candidates should identify employers' needs and then explain how they will meet the employer's stated needs.

“Consultative Sales” and “Value Propositions”

Through writing and speech, consultants suggest, candidates should compose “value propositions”: concise statements explaining how the candidate will resolve the employer's problems. Also deriving from the discourse community of business management, the term “value proposition” signifies rhetorical formulations that, if

communicated effectively, “force companies to rigorously focus on what their offerings are really worth to their customers” (Anderson, Narus, and van Rossum 92). In composing their value propositions, candidates “focus on what their offerings are really worth” to the organizations with which they seek employment.

Outplacement candidates can best accomplish this persuasive strategy in formal job interviews when their professional experiences match the employer’s needs. The analogies of marketing and sales are meant to convince the candidates to work proactively and strategically in persuading prospective employers of their viability as qualified job applicants rather than believing their goal is merely to react to employers’ judgment of their capabilities during job interviews. As Ann explained to the cohort of candidates in attendance at the state-government outplacement center’s two-day training program, “You are all in the marketing business, and you are marketing the toughest product: yourselves.” Marketing and sales analogies orient candidates to outplacement work and their job-search responsibilities.

Candidates’ Tasks: “Seeing” and “Selling”

The outplacement candidates whom I interviewed, including Mario, Lea, and Ileana, recognized that they needed to “sell themselves” to land new positions. Mario, who had experienced a varied career including military service, fresh produce sales, warranty administration at a car dealership, and, most recently, work as a systems analyst for a federal contractor, mentioned the sales acumen that he demonstrated on-base during his military career and in working for his brother’s produce business. Using Nowacek’s terminology, these were examples of “frustrated integration” (40):

Mario recognized the importance of selling his abilities, quite literally, but he had difficulty doing so in the rigorous discourse of hiring and recruitment.

In Nowacek's words, Mario had "consciously made a connection" between his experience and his responsibilities but had "fail[ed] to sell"—i.e., market—that experience to his audience. Mario's continual need to update his professional qualifications to keep pace with rapid technological changes in his field was another source of frustration for him. Although he had taken some college courses, he was without an earned degree. This made him unqualified for a management position, and he was required to trade on his programming skills, which remained "transferable" only insofar as he understood the software development frameworks that his employers valued. For Mario, "successful integration" (Nowacek 40) into a new position meant continual retraining.

In terms of her transfer to new positions in the organization where she had worked for most of her career at the time of her August 2014 interview, Lea recognized that her success in pursuing career advancement in the organization required her to "see" and "sell" (Nowacek 35) opportunities to move—both departmentally and geographically. She moved from engineering to marketing and sales, relocating to the US West Coast in the process, promising that she would remain with the firm and return to the East Coast and her prior supervisor's team at a later point. Her advancement reflected a *quid pro quo*: it was the product of her interpersonal success in negotiating with members of her employer's management team. Ileana, who sought to build her coaching credentials, saw her participation in

outplacement as an opportunity to learn job-search skills of her own while observing the consultants' coaching interactions with the candidates.

Job-Finding: A "Market Campaign"

Donahue argues that knowledge transfer takes place through "reasoning or learning by analogy" (159). Analogies are central to outplacement candidates' transfer of their existing knowledge of professional behavior and conduct to their work in outplacement. Training manuals like *Managing Your Search Project* and *Marketing Your Talents* link outplacement analogically to project management and marketing. The *Managing Your Search Project* manual compares outplacement work to candidates' involvement "in the management of numerous work-related projects," and it suggests that "effective project management involves definable phases, delineated steps[,] and identifiable milestones. Managing a project as important as your job search needs to be structured in the same manner" (A-5). The *Marketing Your Talents* manual states that successful candidates "are those who conduct their own job search or 'market campaign.' They don't leave it to other people to make things happen" (1). These manuals tell candidates to regard themselves as professionals assigned to accomplish outplacement work, which itself is understood as professional tasks including project management and marketing.

Meyer and Shadle identify three key identities which outplacement practitioners adopt that support candidates' corporatist approaches to their job searches: first, some practitioners "assume the role of consultants, advising corporate management about downsizing and rightsizing and dealing with corporate change"; second, some practitioners "play the role of the counselor, providing support services

for outplaced persons who need emotional support as well as career counseling”; third, some practitioners “see themselves as marketing managers, supervising a campaign to market . . . [to prospective employers] the outplaced individuals whom they advise and counsel” (115). Outplacement personnel in the present study either discussed or played all three roles, but they cast candidates predominantly as marketing professionals and PMPs responsible for their own job-search work. This finding echoes Donahue’s contention that analogical reasoning is “the single most important and agreed-upon tool for developing transfer” (159).

Selling Oneself: A Key “Threshold Concept”

Outplacement’s constituents work toward the dominant goal of candidates’ placement in new paid professional employment. From these constituents’ perspectives, candidates’ placement entails sales: executives and salespeople must sell outplacement provider firms’ services to sponsoring organizations. Consultants must sell candidates on outplacement programs’ curricular objectives. Candidates are viewed as needing to sell themselves to prospective employers. The corporatist terminology of outplacement, which includes concepts such as marketing and sales, project management, consultative sales, and the value proposition, are signifiers of “threshold concepts” (Meyer and Land 12; Adler-Kassner and Wardle 2) in outplacement that orient outplacement’s constituents to the “identities and ideologies” (Scott 48) that form its central practices.

Through writing and speech that enacts outplacement’s educational practices—the latter of which are codified in training manuals like *Marketing Your Talents* and *Managing Your Search Project*—corporatist discourse orients

constituents to outplacement work and reifies its dominant objective of candidates' transfer to new opportunities through career continuity. Hiring personnel expect candidates to sell themselves; in consequence, selling oneself becomes a key threshold concept in outplacement. This corporatist orientation favors the candidates who understand it: outplacement consultant Ethan said that those candidates who are salespeople and executives are most comfortable with the idea of selling themselves to get a new job and with being willing to "try everything" to achieve this objective. Of the three outplacement candidates whom I interviewed, Lea—who was qualified as a PMP and who sought new work in that role—appeared to understand her responsibilities as an outplacement candidate the most clearly.

The corporatist discourse that outplacement providers use to orient candidates to outplacement work constrains candidates' conceptions of their identities and their options for the next phases of their careers. The analogies of marketing, sales, and project management that outplacement practitioners use to make outplacement coherent as corporatist work prompt candidates to approach outplacement from the perspective of their prior professional roles. Furthermore, the rhetorical formulations of "consultative sales" (Dissel, Probert, and Tockenbürger 1947) and the "value proposition" (Anderson, Narus, and van Rossum 92) compel candidates to connect their past professional experiences to the professional opportunities to which they will best transfer. To compose effective value propositions and engage effectively in consultative sales, candidates must invoke their prior professional roles. Viewed conversely, candidates may find outplacement's rhetorical work difficult if they wish to change careers.

Career Change: A Destabilizing Influence

In most cases, outplacement candidates seek new work in their prior positions. However, some candidates seek career changes, while others pursue alternatives to traditional careers, including retirement or forms of work other than full-time, salaried employment, such as consultancy or entrepreneurship. For most outplacement candidates most of the time, reemployment in an equivalent position is the dominant objective. However, outplacement normalizes this objective for all candidates through its use of corporatist discourse.

Drawing from Engeström's terminology, career continuity comprises the "deeply communal motive" that "is embedded in the object of" outplacement as "the activity" (964). Outplacement reflects Engeström's idea that activity systems' "communal[ity]" (964) is a complex social achievement: candidates align with outplacement as a "work project" (Pierson 15) in accordance with their individual professional objectives. Engeström anticipates this possibility when he argues that activity systems possess internal "contradictions": he writes that "while the object and motive" of an activity "give actions coherence and continuity, by virtue of being internally contradictory, they also keep the activity system in constant instability" (964).

Engeström's notion of contradictions explains how some candidates' desire to change careers has a potentially destabilizing influence on outplacement's dominant objective of career continuity. The corporatist "identities and ideologies" of outplacement work counteract the destabilizing influence of the career-change objective. However, candidates' emergent potential as writers is tied to their embrace

of career continuity: there is no practical purpose for writing reflectively to explore one's career options in outplacement if the service is viewed primarily as an activity system that works to stabilize candidates' existing professional identities.

Transfer and Learning in Outplacement

Candidates Learn about Their "Values and Interests"

Outplacement's teachings are configured around the pursuit of meaningful work in the form of candidates' transfer to a comparable professional role.

Consultants' teaching is motivated by the idea that candidates have "more to learn" (Rose 59) about job-search work and job opportunities. The career-continuity objective directs candidates toward learning but limits their primary learning to the matters of acquiring new job-search skills and pursuing new jobs in their prior professions. Candidates learn about themselves through outplacement's assessment practices, which are meant to improve their writing and interactions with key job-search constituents; this idea resonates with English, composition, and rhetoric scholar Peggy O'Neill's claim that "assessment is . . . a critical component of writing and learning to write" ("Assessment" 67), but it suggests that effective "consequential validity" (Yancey 170; cf. O'Neill, "Threshold" 161) must be learner-focused. In writing studies scholar Yancey's words, "'consequential' validity . . . refers to the power of an assessment to help the person tested learn; the principle here is that an assessment is valid to the degree it helps a student learn" (170). In outplacement, candidates learn by assessing themselves and their professional opportunities.

The consultants whom I interviewed and observed cast themselves as job-search experts and assigned candidates the role of learners. Even though the consultants told the candidates to pursue work opportunities in the same jobs and industries as before, they also prompted the candidates to complete formal and informal assessment heuristics to learn about themselves. Lesley said that her firm contracted with a psychometric assessment provider to offer career assessment tools to its candidates; she said that completing these instruments gave the candidates information about their “values and interests.” Ethan said these assessments helped candidates explore their aptitudes and needs, as well as the experiences and responsibilities that “motivate” and “demotivate” them. As he put it, completing psychometric assessments helps the candidates understand the ways in which they are aligned with “the organization and the boss.”

On the first day of training at the state-government outplacement center, Ann engaged the candidates in two successive activities in which they assessed their values and their prospective employers’ values. The first heuristic, a “Priority Grid” exercise, helped the candidates in the cohort to identify the values that they desired most in their next jobs. First, Ann asked the candidates to voice their chosen values to the group; as they did so, she wrote them down on a pad of paper mounted on an easel at the front of the seminar room, where all candidates could see it. For the exercise’s second part, the candidates selected the values from the easel that they most desired, as well as any others they could think of, and listed their top-ten values in any order on the “Priority Grid” worksheet. The worksheet asked the candidates to

rank each of their ten values against the other nine individually, thereby producing a list of prioritized values.

Ann encouraged the candidates to “blue-sky it”: to identify their idealized values during the exercise’s group component. The candidates responded enthusiastically, and Ann had soon filled the easel with values including “challenge,” “cooperative,” “creativity,” “diverse,” “flexibility,” “growth,” “independence,” “limited supervision,” “respect,” “resources,” “routine,” “stability,” “time and space,” “total involvement,” and “work-life balance.” Although the exercise was meant to get the candidates thinking and writing about their work in a potentially empowering way by helping them to formulate talking points for their résumés’ summary statements and for use during interviews, the values that the candidates selected were altogether different from the values that Ann showed the candidates next.

Candidates Learn about Employers’ Values

After the candidates completed the “Priority Grid” exercise, Ann showed them a presentation slide containing data excerpted from the National Association of Colleges and Employers’ *Job Outlook 2014* survey (Job 32). That survey’s ten preeminent values—ranked in descending order of importance to the employers surveyed—included *teamwork; decision-making and problem-solving; work planning, organization, and prioritization; verbal communication; information-processing; quantitative analysis; job-related technical knowledge; computer proficiency; written report creation and editing; and sales acumen and influential ability* (Job 32). To prepare themselves for new positions, candidates needed to link the values they associated with their work, which they determined by completing the

priority-grid exercise, with the characteristics employers desired most, such as those listed in the *Job Outlook 2014* survey. However, there was insufficient time for the group to investigate connections between the candidates' and employers' respective value sets, and indeed that goal was unstated in the program.

Outplacement candidates complete formal or informal assessment heuristics whether they pursue new work in their prior occupations or seek career changes. The assessments that candidates complete help them learn about themselves and orient them toward learning from contacts made during their job searches. As Meyer and Shadle explain, implementing a values assessment “is where outplacement counselors begin when assisting a terminated employee making a job or career change”; they also say such assessment is “a particularly relevant endeavor when one is making a job or career change in midlife” (86). However, Meyer and Shadle also claim that assessment is valuable for candidates who are pursuing career continuity because it helps them learn about strengths that distinguish them from other applicants: “For those who will remain in the same field, assessing their preferences can also be helpful as they examine particularly the unique preferences they bring to the job as compared to the common interests of others in the field” (87).

Employers and Job Applicants “Interview Each Other”

Pierson also connects assessment with candidates' learning about themselves. Addressing candidates who have “a lot of questions about what kind of work you want to look for,” he recommends “reading a book or two on career development and making career choices. This kind of book may include written exercises designed to help you clarify your interests, skills, values, personality assets, and how these relate

to career choice” (115). Pierson also suggests that there “are numerous career-related psychological instruments, inventories, and informal questionnaires” these candidates can complete to gain “useful suggestions” about how to proceed in their job searches (115). He connects this approach to “talking with people who actually do the kind of work you are considering,” which he calls an “invaluable” technique, especially “for recent graduates considering what kind of career to pursue” (115).

Calling this technique “information interviewing” (115), Pierson dissuades highly-experienced candidates from cultivating an extensively learner-centric job-search ethos, however. He argues that some practitioners “confuse networking with a technique called ‘information interviewing,’ which is appropriate only for people just starting their careers or working on major career change” (176). Pierson says requesting information about an industry, employer, or position could be viewed by hiring personnel as signaling the candidate’s inexperience. The problem with Pierson’s argument is that if hiring entails negotiating fit between organization and applicant, then learning is a vital part of these constituencies’ mutual interactions. As Ann, the state-government outplacement training center’s director, explained to the candidates in the cohort during the two-day outplacement training program, employers and job applicants must “interview each other.”

Employer-Candidate Compatibility

One of outplacement candidates’ primary roles is learner. Using English scholar Shirley Rose’s phraseology, consultants insist that candidates always have “more to learn” (59). The preliminary assessments that many candidates are assigned to complete at the beginning of their outplacement programs reinforce the idea that

candidates are expected to perform as learners. Learning and development scholar Wendy Patton claims that established career theory pertaining to the topic of values assessment makes three contentions: first, “that interests grow out of values, and that individuals seek out work environments which are compatible with their attitudes and values and allow them to use their skills and abilities”; second, “individuals strive for congruence, or correspondence, between occupational characteristics and their own needs and values”; and, third, “individuals aim to satisfy their values in making career decisions” (76).

Outplacement educators’ use of assessment as a reflective tool for candidates contradicts the career-continuity objective. If career continuity is candidates’ best option for getting a new job, then why should candidates spend time completing reflective assessments? A possible answer is that these heuristics prime candidates to learn from their consultants—and from each other—in their training programs, and to transfer their roles as learners to their job-search work. Examining values assessment in the contexts of knowledge transfer and career continuity, it seems that in using assessment as a reflective tool, outplacement practitioners want candidates to learn enough about themselves to understand their values’ potential connection to the most practical job opportunities that they are likely discover through their job-search work. For candidates, learning about themselves is meant to help them function effectively in the context of career continuity rather than focusing extensively on potential career changes.

Inquiry into Employers' Practices and Cultures

Through encounters with networking and informational interviewing contacts in informal interactions and participation in formal job interviews, consultants insist that candidates adopt an active-learner role: consultants say candidates should inquire about potential employers' specific practices and organizational cultures. Candidates should use "consultative sales" (Dissel, Probert, and Tockenbürger 1947) techniques and "value propositions" (Anderson, Narus, and van Rossum 92) to uncover employers' specific problems and make persuasive cases for themselves as qualified applicants who can solve those problems. Reflective activities help candidates learn about themselves and transfer this lesson to contexts in which it is important to learn about other professionals and the organizations for which they work. Having learned about themselves and written scripts and texts that codify their learning into concise messages, candidates are ready to make their identities known to formal and informal job-search contacts and, in turn, to begin learning about professional opportunities that may lead to their reemployment.

For some candidates, learning about themselves in outplacement may prompt them to consider making a career change, and outplacement practitioners acknowledge that they must account for this possibility. Practitioners, including curriculum writers and consultants, leave open the possibility of candidates' pursuit of career change while at the same time suggesting that candidates pursue career continuity as though the latter decision were the candidate's idea. Practitioners accomplish this objective by engaging candidates in reflective heuristics including writing activities oriented toward candidates' self-assessment.

“Strengths”: Combining “Abilities” and “Areas of Interest”

For example, in Right Management’s *Marketing Your Talents* manual, candidates begin with a series of exercises entitled “Understanding Your Strengths” (19). The training manual’s writers regard strengths as “abilities that match your areas of interest,” with ability denoting “something you do well” and interest signifying “something that intrigues or motivates you positively” (20). While the manual includes a heuristic for identifying candidates’ strengths in abstraction (20), it next prompts candidates to write about their personal and professional accomplishments, using corporatist language in its suggestions for word choices and phrases—e.g., “Innovate, invent, change, develop, devise, break with convention”; “Listen actively, understand the message others are delivering”; “Write clearly, concisely[,] and effectively[;] use the written word to get results”; “Speak clearly, concisely[,] and effectively[;] use the spoken word to get results”; “Persuade, convince, influence, overcome opposition, sell”; “Work well with a team, be a team player when necessary” (38).

By the time candidates begin work on the training manual’s second heuristic, entitled “Defining Your Objectives” (45), they are working exclusively in a corporatist framework. The manual directs candidates toward corporatist thinking by suggesting that objectives emerge at the intersection of candidates’ “interests,” “abilities,” and “opportunities” (45), and it orients candidates toward devising their career directions and objectives in the context of a “specific area of interest,” “specific job,” and “specific industry” (46). The *Marketing Your Talents* manual

orients candidates to the career-continuity objective through a series of decreasingly personal and increasingly professional writing heuristics.

In contrast, Lee Hecht Harrison's *Managing Your Search Project* manual engages candidates directly in work toward two milestones: "Survey Your Professional Environment," in which candidates "are able to summarize the current state of your profession and industry, including the key trends shaping the future, and how these trends will directly affect your career goals" (A-29) and "Determine Your Professional Objective," in which candidates "can state your professional objective in a phrase or a sentence so that the kind of work you are seeking is clearly understood by people inside and outside of your profession" (A-41). By encouraging candidates to learn about themselves and their work opportunities and by suggesting that, ultimately, candidates' best option is pursuing career continuity, outplacement engages candidates in learning and directs them toward what is perhaps the most likely objective they will achieve as outplacement candidates: "landing" a new job in their prior occupational areas.

Transfer and Reflection in Outplacement

Emphasizing Relationship-Building over Writing

The relationship between "cognition" (Dryer, "Cognitive" 71) and "metacognition" (Tinberg, "Metacognition" 76) has a contested position in outplacement. While outplacement educators use assessments and other reflective tools to direct candidates' attention toward their professional experiences and job-search objectives, writing in outplacement may be viewed as "instrumental" (Johnson

76; Moore, “Myths” 210) rather than as “humanistic” (Miller, “Humanistic” 610). In rhetoric, composition, and technical communication scholar Robert R. Johnson’s words, to transcend the writer’s role as a “mere scribe,” outplacement candidates must perceive that they are “intimately connected with” both networking and hiring contacts and “the actual users of technology,” including, for example, the HR personnel who use ATSs to make job-applicant screening decisions (76). As technical communication scholar Carolyn Rude observes, “Moore . . . makes a case for the humanity and ethics of unambiguous, instrumental discourse” (167).

While job candidates’ writing must be “unambiguous” for ATSs to validate it, outplacement educators advise out-of-work people to take a “humanistic” approach to job-finding by building relationships with employers and hiring managers so they are less dependent on ATSs and other gatekeeping tools for access to jobs. Writing helps candidates land new jobs in the occupations for which they are most qualified; these are usually jobs in which the candidates have a record of professional experience. However, by emphasizing relationship-building over writing, outplacement practitioners imply that candidates’ writing in résumés and other job-search genres is preliminary to the “real work” of job-search.

“Communication Is Key”

Outplacement educators say that job-finding involves identifying and communicating with the potentially influential networking and interviewing contacts whom Pierson calls “Decision Makers” (19): professionals who are already employed in the organizations and industries where candidates seek work. As Pierson explains, decision-makers “are the most important audience you need to reach. They are the

people who could be your next boss. They are the people you need to convince” (19).

The problem is, by positioning writing as an “instrumental” rather than a “humanistic” means of engaging candidates in the work of “cognition” and “metacognition,” outplacement may not help candidates learn enough about themselves to interact effectively with these decision-makers. Outplacement suggests to candidates that the résumé is a fragmentary genre. A consequence for candidates is that job-finding can be a fragmentary activity.

The for-profit and governmental outplacement consultants whom I interviewed, including Lesley, Cora, Ethan, and Ann, ascribed writing an unclear place in outplacement. While Lesley was adamant that “communication is key” to candidates’ job-search work, the relationship between writing and other forms of communication may remain unclear to candidates, who may regard their writing work as complete when they can compose a résumé that represents their credentials and objectives. Lesley suggested candidates’ writing abilities were evidence of their professional capabilities overall. She said that candidates who could compose effective job-search texts stood a good chance of finding new jobs quickly, efficiently, and effectively. Résumé writing ability has limited use in job-applicant screening, though. In their roles as writing advisors, consultants aid candidates in writing the texts they need. Hiring personnel, however, cannot judge who wrote a given job applicant’s résumé, and the credentials it documents must stand alone as evidence of the applicant’s capabilities.

Writing Is “The First Part of It”

For their parts, Cora and Ethan addressed the relative importance of candidates’ writing in their searches for new jobs. Cora said that candidates who could arrange for their résumés to be hand-carried to hiring personnel stood the best chance of getting hired if their credentials were relevant. Ethan claimed that résumés are not essential for candidates’ acquisition of a job at all. Ann, who felt writing was important as “the first part of” candidates’ job searches, also told the candidates in attendance during the two-day outplacement training program that they alone were the best-suited people for composing their résumés—regardless of their writing abilities—because they knew their professional experiences best. Her argument suggests that résumé authorship is a “cognitive” and “metacognitive” activity: by reflecting on their experiences as they write their résumés, outplacement candidates are preparing to engage in later reflective work during their interviews with hiring “Decision Makers” (Pierson 19).

For the outplacement candidates whom I interviewed, including Mario, Lea, and Ileana, composing a coherent résumé involved specialized writing ability—familiarity with the résumé genre and training in how to write a résumé for contemporary audiences—and candidates’ possession of coherent professional workplace experiences. The principles of career continuity and career growth suggest that résumés’ audiences, especially hiring personnel, seek to read narratives documenting—in the words of career studies scholar Audrey Collin in her discussion of “Career as Rhetoric”—candidates’ individual “agency, continuity, and potential for development” (172) during their careers. A recognizable career path for professional

workers is from positions of individual contribution to managerial roles that include supervisory experience.

Chronological Résumés and Career-Development Narratives

As management scholars Todd J. Maurer and Manuel London put it, “Organizations must have employees who are willing to take a successful leadership journey, from individual contributor into and through the leadership ranks” (3). Further advancement includes movement into executive-level positions involving leadership of the organization. Despite candidates’ individual career objectives, hiring personnel read résumés from the perspective of this archetypal career-development narrative, as their preference for the “chronological” résumé format—which documents a “career history show[ing] growth and development” (*Managing* A-98)—suggests. In many cases, the most qualified candidates are those whose experiences transfer to new employment contexts and who show significant potential as organizations’ future leaders.

Of the three candidates whom I interviewed, Mario and Ileana demonstrated professional experience as individual contributors, while Lea’s résumé indicated her movement from individual-contributor work as an engineer to roles where she served as a project manager and a supervisor of between ten and twenty-five employees. All three candidates included evidence of having been mentors on their résumés; however, none expressed information about their mentoring experiences in their résumés’ summary statements. While Lea’s résumé included a concise summary statement, it did not reflect a clear synopsis of her role as being one of either a project-oriented manager or a supervisory manager, which are two different

understandings of management. While Lea and Ileana included narrative summaries and bullet-point lists of skill keywords on their résumés, Mario's summary was a laundry list of keywords and phrases pertaining to his workplace duties. In terms of knowledge transfer, all three candidates would have benefited from reflecting on their career experiences from the perspective of the archetypal career-growth narrative and written their résumés accordingly.

Even if they have command over coherent career narratives, the résumé genre fragments candidates' professional experiences. In consequence, candidates may lack a comprehensive "Core Message" (Pierson 139). As Pierson explains, the core message is the candidate's "overall plan for what you will say about yourself in your [job] search and how you'll say it. It needs to be honest, carefully planned, and completely positive. It should focus on the needs of Decision Makers in the kind of organizations you've targeted—and on what you have to offer them, covering all of your important selling points" (139-40).

"Technical Skills," "Transferable Skills," and "Windowpane" Language

Although the résumé is among the most obvious job-finding genres in which outplacement candidates write, candidates' completion of formal and informal reflective assessments is also a crucial writing heuristic—one that may help them to avoid becoming "entrenched" (Anson, "Habituated" 77) in the cognitive, experiential, and rhetorical dimensions of their prior work roles. Assessment, reflection, and knowledge transfer are interrelated in outplacement. Pickman identifies "two major goals in assessment": the "first is to gain as complete a picture as possible" of the candidate, so candidates "can understand as much about themselves as possible" and

thereby “articulate those skills that they use in carrying out their work-related responsibilities” (*Complete* 20). In performing this work, candidates accomplish the “second major goal of assessment,” which is “to promote enhanced self-esteem in” the candidate (*Complete* 20).

Echoing Meyer and Shadle’s idea that assessment helps candidates distinguish themselves from their job-search competitors (87), outplacement consultant Daniel White discusses the relationship between candidates’ “technical skills,” which he describes as “situationally specific” to their professions, and their “transferable skills,” which he says “can be applied in a number of different situations” (66-67). White says labor-market competitiveness indicates the importance of transferable skills: “Technical professionals need to find ways to differentiate themselves from their competitors. It is transferable skills that describe the real differences among professionals” (67). White describes “communication and marketing skills” as being essential in competitive labor markets (69-70).

Although White regards “communication and marketing” as “transferable skills,” Miller calls this perspective “the ‘windowpane theory of language’: the notion that language provides a view out onto the real world, a view which may be clear or obfuscated” (“Humanistic” 611-12). Because communication and marketing appear to offer views of the “real world” that emphasize interpersonal interaction, White considers them “transferable” rather than “technical skills.” However, communication and marketing are “situationally specific” and are therefore “technical skills.” The “project management” and “marketing” work of outplacement is different from the work of project management and marketing professionals. Outplacement has adopted

project management and marketing discourse as “analogies” (Donahue 159) that connote candidates’ job-finding work; in doing so, it has made that discourse “situationally specific” to outplacement. Project management and marketing discourse as used in outplacement should not be dismissed as corporatist jargon; rather, it should be considered contextual job-finding discourse that performs rhetorical functions unique to outplacement.

In outplacement, teaching for transfer is deeply contextual and relies extensively on curricular assumptions that, while facilitating teaching and learning, may not reflect candidates’ learning goals and needs as outplacement’s main beneficiaries. Outplacement practitioners, including curriculum writers and consultants, teach for transfer: they want candidates to land lucrative new jobs, and they want them to do so as quickly and efficiently as possible. Transfer in outplacement invokes parity between candidates’ credentials, objectives, and opportunities, even if candidates see their careers and identities in ways that are less cohesive and more fragmented.

The Most Practical Career Choice

The writing that candidates do in outplacement emerges in and through recognizable forms, primarily the résumé, that are most favorable to narratives of parity. Practitioners teach candidates to be reflective: candidates reflect on their experiences and objectives using assessment heuristics, and they learn to inquire about the nuances of positions and employers. Candidates reflect on themselves and their opportunities in outplacement, but they also learn to assume that a new job in their existing profession and industry is their most practical career choice. In learning

how to transfer their specialized professional knowledge to new domains, and even in learning how to use writing as a tool for accomplishing this objective, candidates do not necessarily learn how to use writing itself as a means of reflecting on the interrelationships between their experiences, objectives, and opportunities. As a site of “literacy sponsorship” (Brandt, *Literacy* 18), outplacement’s resources of space and time are too limited, and its curricular objective of career continuity is too pressing, to allow for candidates’ expansive engagement in metacognitive practices. Outplacement’s focused curricular goal is purchased at the cost of candidates’ opportunities to explore extensively themselves and their personal and professional choices.

Transfer is a key area of focus for compositionists, an area of research and teaching that emphasizes students’ abilities to compose in the discourse communities of the field itself and in other academic and professional discourse communities. Writing studies practitioners teach writing not for its own sake but rather as a means of preparing students to write in contexts beyond the field itself. With its focus on career continuity, outplacement engages with knowledge transfer as its dominant goal and makes clear that compositionists and outplacement practitioners have a common objective: preparing the learners with whom they interact to repurpose writing knowledge for use in new contexts.

Transfer and Outplacement’s Relevance beyond Itself

Both sets of educators are concerned so deeply with transfer because they are invested in their learners’ writing performance in contexts that they see as being beyond their immediate control. Resonating with Lave and Wenger’s idea of

“legitimate peripheral participation,” a “descriptor of engagement in social practice that entails learning as an integral constituent” (Lave and Wenger 35), outplacement is connected to, yet distinct from, the professional discourse communities where candidates seek to “land” new jobs. The key to understanding the significance of learning in outplacement is comprehending its connection to, rather than its dissociation from, learning to get a job and “learning as an integral constituent” of effective, successful professional work.

In their study of transfer’s relationship to composition in college, rhetoric and composition scholars Kathleen Blake Yancey, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak ask “how we can support students’ transfer of knowledge and practice in writing; that is, how we can help students develop writing knowledge and practices that they can draw on, use, and repurpose for new writing tasks in new settings” (2). In her study of transfer, Nowacek links this topic to concerns in higher education over the purpose and effectiveness of writing studies courses. Arguing that “faith in the transfer of writing-related knowledge has been challenged by questions about the viability of first-year composition curricula,” Nowacek “focuses on how (and why and when) students connect learning from one domain with learning in another domain and how teachers can facilitate such connections” (2, 3). Nowacek addresses the question of writing studies courses’ and programs’ relevance beyond themselves as discourse communities that prepare students for work in other contexts. Outplacement derives its relevance from its effectiveness in preparing candidates for participation in job searches. This participation involves candidates’ circulation of texts such as the

résumé and their use of writing to prepare for interpersonal job-finding activities that they may, paradoxically, perceive as being dissociated from writing.

Conclusion

Transfer—*connecting capabilities to opportunities*—is outplacement’s dominant curricular objective. The idea of career continuity makes consultants’ and candidates’ *social participation* in outplacement coherent; career continuity suggests that candidates, as representatives of their professions, should seek new employment in their extant areas of professional expertise. *Genre work* in writing’s dominant “recognizable forms,” including primarily the résumé, supports the career-continuity objective; candidates write primarily to compose job application letters and résumés as contrasted with writing to explore potential new career directions. Transfer reinforces consultants’ *identities* as job-finding experts and candidates’ identities as learners of fundamental job-finding information.

Candidates have *more to learn*, however. Their learning extends beyond outplacement to networking and informational interviewing interactions where they must balance learning about employers’ local contexts with the cultivation of their ethos as experienced professionals who would be capable employees if hired. There are limited opportunities for *reflection* in the dominant context of transfer. While outplacement candidates use assessment tools and reflective writing heuristics to determine their work- and workplace-related values, the results of these assessments compete with the narrative of career continuity, which—outplacement curriculum writers, educators, and practitioners argue—presents candidates with their best chances of gaining new employment.

Chapter 3: Writing for Transition in Outplacement

Introduction

Outplacement educators' recessive curricular objective for candidates is *writing for transition*. While these educators understand the importance of candidates' negotiation of the relationship between the various domains of their lived experience—including, e.g., the personal and the professional—such negotiations are often relegated to outplacement's peripheries. For example, outplacement educators limit curricular resources of place, space, and time so that candidates' generic and reflective writing occurs outside the classroom and beyond the outplacement training program's operational hours. Outplacement educators may expect candidates to write and revise their dominant generic texts—usually job application letters and résumés—outside class time. Similarly, they suggest that candidates engage independently in reflective writing such as journaling, list-making, and other uses of writing for reflection and decision-making regarding their job searches.

In terms of the interpersonal interactions taking place between outplacement educators and candidates—or amongst the candidates as one another's peers—candidates' contention with transition in the form of *negotiating experiential domains* becomes a peripheral, private act. For example, candidates may discuss matters of transition informally with each other before, during, and after their participation in outplacement training programs. Similarly, outplacement educators may insist that candidates make appointments to meet with them in their private offices to discuss their personal difficulties in dealing with matters including their displacement from paid employment; their experiences of unemployment; trouble they may be

experiencing in their searches for work; or other affective, cognitive, or experiential concerns.

Transition has recessive status as a rhetorical component of outplacement. Because it is a peripheral, private, and usually unofficial dimension of outplacement educators' and candidates' interactions, candidates often attempt to manage their transition experiences through speech rather than via writing. For example, candidates may share laments with each other about their difficulties in being out-of-work, or they may confide in outplacement educators privately to discuss their difficulties. In outplacement, genres such as the lament and the confessional—the latter as a private confiding—are often associated with unofficial, private, or otherwise recessive forms of speech, rather than with official, public, and dominant forms of writing.

This is so because these generic forms portend to turn outplacement constituents' focus away from the dominant, rational curricular project of transfer. As English scholar Linda M. Austin observes of the lament genre, "Lamentation veers away from the cognitive and the pictorial toward sound" (279). Similarly, as rhetoric scholar Erik Doxtader points out regarding the confessional genre, "confession appears to turn the self around and against itself" (274). Without official places in outplacement curricula, candidates' laments are voiced, "spontaneous and involuntary" (L. M. Austin 285) disruptions of the official curriculum or components of "spontaneous" break-time conversations. Similarly, outplacement educators make places, spaces, and times available, outside the domain of outplacement's official curriculum, for private meetings as confessionals.

Outplacement candidates' lamentations and their confessions that they are having difficulty negotiating the experiential domains of personal and professional life—including the domains of displacement from work, unemployment and outplacement, searches for new employment, and other concerns—challenge the narrative that the candidates themselves are responsible for finding new jobs. However, these often-spoken generic forms reflect out-of-work people's efforts in attempting to solve the problem of their unemployment. As Austin points out of the lament, "even the temporary aphasia characteristic of verbal reactions to sublime experiences is a sign of recovery" (L. M. Austin 304). By lamenting of and confessing their employment-related difficulties, out-of-work people are attempting to resolve the problem of being out-of-work. The chapter begins with a discussion of *writing for transition* deriving from three biweekly "accountability group" meetings held by the state government-operated outplacement training center in January and February 2017.

Writing for Transition: "Accountability Group" Examples

The state government-operated outplacement training center's biweekly accountability group meetings were sites of *writing for transition* in which candidates needed to *negotiate the experiential domains of activity systems* (Engeström) and *communities of practice* (Lave and Wenger; Wenger). Candidates in attendance at two of the three accountability group meetings were given a 5.5-inch by 8.5-inch piece of colored cardstock—a genre called a "script"—on which they were asked to write four things: first, their "productive" job-finding activities over the past two weeks; second and third, respectively, their "successes" and "challenges" during that

period; and, fourth, the job-finding “activities” to which they were willing to make a “commitment” over the next two weeks. Initial writing in this reflective genre was intended to elicit examples of candidates’ specific job-finding “activities.”

However, some candidates treated the script-writing exercise as a bureaucratic task rather than a reflective heuristic; they asked whether the consultants would “collect” their scripts. These candidates imagined that they were writing their scripts for data-collection purposes rather than to “script” productively their participation in the accountability group session and the job-finding activities to which they would be “accountable” over the next fortnight. For some candidates, writing in the script genre was anxiety-inducing; one candidate observed that “writing it down” (i.e., composing a specific job-finding objective) was “scary” because the act of writing “makes it real” for her (i.e., makes her feel accountable for the task about which she has been writing). Indeed, instilling an affective, ethical, and rational sense of accountability in the candidates was the script heuristic’s main purpose.

For the accountability group meetings to be effective, candidates had to police each other’s script-writing and verbal participation in the accountability group. Candidates affirmed for each other the exercise’s reflective rather than bureaucratic purpose, and they needed to keep each other’s “accountability” discussions on track. The “script” genre asked candidates to write about specific job-finding activities to which they would hold themselves accountable. The problem for some candidates was that these activities conflicted with the objective of participating genially in the accountability group itself as a community of practice. To participate, some candidates spoke in generalities about their job-finding responsibilities.

For example, while some candidates held each other accountable for accomplishing specific objectives—e.g., completing a professional certification or connecting with a potential networking contact—others reinforced their colleagues’ speaking in generalities about their accountability goals. For some candidates, the abstract goal of “writing [one’s] résumé” slipped from week to week; others voiced general “commitments” including “staying positive” and “trying to keep swinging.” Candidates intended to use such clichés productively to affirm their wellbeing and build rapport with the accountability group’s other members, but these were not specific job-finding activities to which they could be held “accountable.” For out-of-work people, participating genially in the accountability group as a community of practice could conflict with the objective of identifying and committing to specific job-finding tasks.

Transition and Social Participation in Outplacement

Outplacement’s Public, Private, and Pedagogical Writing Practices

Candidates’ experiences of being out-of-work involve changes to their personal and professional lives, but in terms of its official discourse practices, “social and rhetorical” (Roozen 18) participation in outplacement focuses on unemployment’s professional dimension. Balancing candidates’ personal and professional transitions is a challenge that comprehensive/humanistic (J. A. Challenger) and functional/instrumental (Sathe) outplacement providers handle differently. These providers offer their services by trading on different understandings of meaningful work. Outplacement practitioners say candidates should write to

contend with their transitions through unemployment, recommending reflective writing heuristics such as journaling and writing lists of pros and cons; they also assign workbook-based writing, such as the assignments and heuristics found in Lee Hecht Harrison's *Managing Your Search Project (Managing)* and Right Management's *Marketing Your Talents (Marketing)*, but consultants and candidates may not regard this work as writing per se.

This view of writing echoes English scholar Heidi Estrem's view that "formal," "informal," and "sometimes ephemeral" writings such as "journals" are "generative and central to meaning making even though we often don't identify" this "rich range of everyday and workplace-based genres" as writing per se ("Writing" 19-20). Consultants at the for-profit outplacement provider, including Lesley, Cora, Ethan, and Ann—the latter of whom was the state government-operated outplacement training center's director—suggested that candidates' difficulties in coping with the loss of their jobs and the stresses of unemployment were largely private matters rather than outplacement's focal points. Reinforcing the idea that job loss is an experience to which candidates have emotional reactions, Lesley explained that she meets with candidates in private to discuss their concerns. In her words, "there's a reason why" she keeps a box of Kleenex facial tissue on her desk: because, she intimates, candidates come into her office upset and crying about having lost their jobs.

Career-Continuity Advice and "the Right Side of" the Employment Picture

As a former HR manager, Cora told the story of her own career change to become an outplacement consultant. At her previous employer, a large bank, she had been responsible for displacing "several hundred" employees during a mass layoff,

knowing that she, too, would ultimately lose her job. Considering her career change from an affective perspective, she felt that she was now, in her words, “on the right side of” the employment picture because, as an outplacement consultant, she could help out-of-work people find new jobs, rather than being responsible for large-scale workforce displacements. Ethan, a former marketing and sales executive, also described his career as an outplacement consultant in affective terms: he claimed that he liked “meeting with people” and helping them find new jobs.

Through accounts such as these, transition emerged as an often-verbalized, rarely-written, recessive counternarrative to the dominant curricular focus on transfer. Outplacement consultants like Cora and Ethan had engaged in career changes to become involved in outplacement professionally; at the same time, Lesley, Cora, and Ethan all reinforced, through their philosophies and work practices, the idea that candidates are best served through career continuity: getting on with the business of finding new jobs in their current professions as quickly as possible. While they regarded candidates’ experiences of transition as private matters for resolution through consultations in their offices, the practitioners whom I interviewed derived satisfaction from having found new careers as outplacement consultants.

The candidates regarded their participation in outplacement as rational work rather than an opportunity to consider the affective dimensions of their experiences of job loss. The candidates in the two-day outplacement training program exhibited none of the emotional responses to job loss the for-profit outplacement consultants suggested were grounds for limiting my research access to their firm’s candidates. Discussing this matter with me during her interview, Ann, the state-government

provider's director, made clear that neither she nor the other consultants on staff at the outplacement training center were qualified to support candidates as counselors. Instead, in appropriate cases, they referred candidates to trained counselors. While Ann said that she would meet individually with candidates to discuss their concerns, she requested that they write her an email beforehand so she could understand the nature of their inquiry in advance of the meeting. Among the thirty-three candidates who attended the two-day program, I witnessed no crying, emotional outbursts, or tirades.

Group Outplacement: "Therapeutic," but Not "Therapy"

For the three candidates whom I interviewed—Mario, Lea, and Ileana—the decision to pursue career continuity or career change had no observable effect on their affective states. Instead, all three candidates told stories of transitional moments in their careers that they regarded as being personally and professionally difficult, but these stories could not be reduced to instances in which candidates who were pursuing new jobs in the same occupations as before had fewer affective difficulties. Mario, who had been out-of-work for one year at the time of his interview, expressed frustration at feeling unqualified for a new position in his prior occupation. Lea described an internal job change and coast-to-coast relocation as an especially difficult point in her career. Ileana discussed the mistrust that she held for large organizations like her prior employer, and she claimed that she sought work with a smaller firm for her next position.

The writing work that candidates do in outplacement can support their successful transitions through unemployment. Pickman discusses benefits to

candidates' wellbeing that derive from their participation in outplacement. He describes outplacement as "a process of helping employees who have been terminated or whose jobs have been eliminated to face their job loss with renewed self-confidence, to learn effective job-search strategies and techniques[,] and to conduct a successful job search campaign" (*Complete* 67). He contends that "the relation between outplacement and psychotherapy is a delicate one," and he argues that outplacement practitioners should "be mindful that although outplacement is not therapy, it can be highly therapeutic to individuals experiencing [job loss as] one of life's major stressors" (*Complete* 70). Writing, even when it is oriented to candidates' job-finding work, is a vital component of outplacement's therapeutic dimension. Furthermore, candidates' social participation in outplacement is a counterpoint to their potentially destabilizing experiences of transition from employment, through unemployment, and toward reemployment.

Negotiating Relationships between Job-Finding's Genres

While job loss and unemployment may be isolating experiences, outplacement practitioners engage candidates in writing activities that are intended to prepare them to participate effectively in the interpersonal aspects of their job searches. To aid candidates in their socialization responsibilities, Lee Hecht Harrison's training manual, *Managing Your Search Project*, assigns its candidates to write the following texts: a "professional objective" giving a "statement of what kind of work you want do"; a "positioning statement" describing "your professional identity, key competencies[,] and unique strengths (differentiating you from other candidates in the same profession)"; "[a]ccomplishment stories (highlighting your skills)"; and an

“[e]xit statement and responses (preferably proactive) to predictable [job-search and interview] questions” (A-86).

Right Management’s *Marketing Your Talents* manual assigns its candidates to write a “Career Objective” (49), a “Reason for Leaving Statement” (5), a “30-Second Commercial” (51), and a list of accomplishments; it defines *accomplishment* as “an activity which gives you pleasure, fulfillment[,] and a feeling of success” (21). Each assignment emphasizes candidates’ uniqueness; these heuristics suggest that candidates’ attainment of meaningful work will depend on their writing of an individualized job-search narrative that accounts for their singular career trajectories and the expertise they have gained. These artifacts—the “professional objective,” “positioning statement,” “accomplishment stories,” “exit statement,” and “interview responses”—together form a “genre system” (Bawarshi and Reiff 96) through which candidates tell their individual narratives of transition. None of these official job-search genres permits candidates to tell their career stories in their entirety; rather, social participation in outplacement requires candidates to negotiate the relationship between these genres. As they seek new jobs, candidates must tell their stories in fragmented ways to meet their audiences’ information needs.

“Perceived Privacy” in Group Outplacement Training Programs

Outplacement consultants’ and candidates’ interactions entail their negotiation of the relationship between transfer and transition. While they understand transfer as a rationalist activity—people get new jobs because their experiences and objectives align with available job opportunities—candidates’ transition experiences are often seen in affective terms in outplacement. Consultants Lesley and Cora said that

candidates' transition experiences are grounds for outplacement providers' emphasis on privacy. Lesley characterized candidates as being emotionally vulnerable from their experiences in being out-of-work. Outplacement's limited time and space resources give little opportunity for constituents' engagement in socialization that addresses the candidates' affective experiences of transition. Instead, socialization is configured around candidates' rationalist career-continuity work: transfer to comparable employment.

During outplacement's group-based work, practitioners wish to avoid direct engagement with candidates' affective experiences of their transitions through unemployment. Practitioners accomplish this by offering a corporatist counterpoint to many candidates' experiences of uncertainty during their periods of unemployment. For example, calling outplacement "project management" work (*Managing A-5*) or a "market[ing] campaign" (*Marketing 1*) encourages such corporatist thinking. Despite practitioners' interest in avoiding such public engagement with job loss's affective concerns, Ethan said that he could recall few instances where candidates' affective responses to job loss inhibited their productive engagement in outplacement. In his experience, candidates had transcended their negative affective responses to job loss in one or two weeks.

Nonetheless, for-profit outplacement providers' executives and consultants invoked candidates' emotional vulnerability as grounds for limiting my research access to their training programs. In contrast, Ann, the director of the state government-run outplacement training center, did not regard such "perceived privacy" concerns as a reason to limit my ability to interview and interact with

outplacement candidates in the program. For-profit outplacement practitioners invoked transition in the form of candidates' affective difficulty in adjusting from employment to unemployment as they worked to afford and constrain my access to outplacement candidates—and as they controlled the candidates' social participation in outplacement.

Sponsoring Organizations' Ethos of Social Responsibility

Outplacement candidates' transitions involve their navigation of the emergent relationship between their experiences of being out-of-work, their job-finding preparation, and the social motivations for sponsoring organizations' subsidy of outplacement. Outplacement scholars maintain that sponsoring organizations pay for their discharged workers' participation in outplacement to emphasize their ethos of social responsibility (Alewell and Hauff 469). Employers' sponsorship of outplacement serves the employers' ends by reinforcing their positive reputations as corporate citizens. Summarizing this view, economics and social science scholars Dorothea Alewell and Sven Hauff suggest that “outplacement is basically interpreted as an instrument protecting the image and the reputation of downsizing employers”—i.e., sponsoring organizations (469). Sociologists Michael V. Miller and Cherylon Robinson, whom Alewell and Hauff cite, argue that employers use outplacement as a “cooling-out device” (Miller and Robinson 62; Alewell and Hauff 469). From this perspective, “outplacement aims at reducing or avoiding negative reactions of terminated employees, avoiding lawsuits[,] and minimizing redundancy payments” to displaced workers (Alewell and Hauff 469).

Employers sponsor displaced workers' participation in outplacement to direct their attention away from pursuing litigation against their former employers and toward job-search learning and practices. Scholars including Miller and Robinson use employers' social-responsibility motivation and outplacement's reorientation of candidates' focus toward job-search work as grounds for disputing outplacement programs' value to the candidates whom they serve. However, this view of outplacement delegitimizes outplacement educators' claim of providing a productive service for candidates. Furthermore, Alewell and Hauff argue that sponsoring organizations' motivations for subsidizing—and providers' motivations for offering—outplacement cannot be separated from their utility as services for candidates. As Alewell and Hauff put it, “it is difficult to separate ‘purely social’ from ‘purely economic’ motives” for providing outplacement training to candidates (470). Candidates must navigate the complex matter of sponsoring organizations' and providers' motivations for offering outplacement as they determine whether their own participation in outplacement is worth their time and effort.

Candidates Write in the Context of Sponsoring Organizations' Motivations

The complex relationship between these three principal sets of constituents—i.e., the sponsoring organizations that pay for outplacement, the practitioners who develop and offer outplacement services, and the candidates who benefit from social participation in outplacement—affects outplacement candidates' experiences of writing. In their discussion of “situated learning,” for example, workplace writing scholars Dias et al. and Freedman and Christine Adam contend that “learning and knowing are context-specific, learning is accomplished through processes of

coparticipation, and cognition is socially shared” (Dias et al. 185; Freedman and Adam 32). While outplacement is a site of learning for candidates, learning emerges in the context of sponsoring organizations’ motivations for subsidizing—and providers’ motivations for offering—outplacement training to candidates. Outplacement’s functioning as a site of “literacy sponsorship” (Brandt, *Literacy* 18) affects candidates’ social participation in outplacement, and, in turn, the perspectives they adopt when they write their ways into and through outplacement. Candidates’ decisions to see outplacement as comprehensive or as functional depends on their individual experiences of transition from employment, through unemployment, and toward their job searches and reemployment.

A significant learning task is for learners to understand the relationship between the lessons they are being asked to learn and the contexts in which their learning takes place. In terms of outplacement candidates’ transitions from social participation in their prior workplaces to social participation in outplacement and their job searches, consultants dissuade candidates from becoming preoccupied with the matter of transition itself. For example, Pierson dissuades candidates from applying their potential views of unemployment as a “life crisis” to their job-search work because, in doing so, candidates “treat their [job] search as part of the crisis rather than as a work project” (15). Outplacement practitioners place job-search responsibility on candidates. Viewing outplacement as marketing and project management—i.e., as a “work project” (Pierson 15)—encourages candidates to get down to the business of job-finding and avoid preoccupation with the conditions of

literacy sponsorship under which employers subsidize, and outplacement providers offer, outplacement's services.

Transition and Genre Work in Outplacement

Writing about Being Out-of-Work: An Ethical Matter

Candidates' social participation in outplacement takes "recognizable forms" (Bazerman, "Writing" 35) that are primarily verbal, not written. While candidates lament unemployment's difficulties, these laments are themselves meaningful work. They are productive forms of problem-solving: candidates participate in outplacement and share stories of their experiences to, as Alewell and Hauff put it, "cope with the conflict associated with the redundancy and regulate emotions accompanying the layoff" (468)—i.e., contend with their transitions from paid employment, through unemployment and outplacement, and towards new professional work. Outplacement candidates' engagement in writing and speech as they transition through unemployment and their job searches has profound implications for their wellbeing.

Lunsford suggests that "shifting and expanding understandings of audience and of the ways writers interact with, address, invoke, become, and create audiences raise new and important questions about the ethics of various communicative acts" ("Addresses" 21). In outplacement, the extent to which practitioners encourage and support candidates' writing about their experiences of being out-of-work is an ethical matter. Outplacement candidates' oral expression of their laments suggests their desire to resolve those concerns. In outplacement programs with relatively few place,

space, and time resources, candidates' opportunity to write about their concerns regarding their transitions is limited.

"No Whining" about Job Loss: Classroom and Hallway Conversations

In focusing their teaching efforts on the dominant job-search genre of the résumé, outplacement directs candidates' contentions with their difficulties of being out-of-work to its periphery. When the state-government outplacement training center's director, Ann, informed the candidates there would be "no whining" about job loss, she made clear that the candidates' discussions regarding the non-professional aspects of their transitions through unemployment and toward reemployment were not germane to their work in the program. For the candidates whom I observed during the two-day training program, many of the stories they told each other emerged in and through the peripheral, recessive form of the lament.

The outplacement training center's "no whining" policy had a material effect: it relegated candidates' laments to the program's physical and temporal peripheries. In the hallway and the classroom during break times, candidates told each other stories of the difficulties they were encountering. On one occasion, candidates who had congregated in the hallway during a session break lamented employers' continued outsourcing of professional jobs other nations, their difficulty in paying out-of-pocket for healthcare and health insurance for themselves and their families, and the cultures of "rampant age discrimination" that they perceived employers to be harboring. With respect to outsourcing, one candidate noted ironically that his former work colleagues in India—to whom his previous employer had outsourced portions of

its work—were themselves complaining that their work was, in turn, being outsourced to countries including China and Malaysia.

On another occasion, candidates who had remained in the classroom during a lunch break noted in careful, measured tones that, in their searches for new jobs, “the salaries just aren’t there any more” and “it’s frustrating.” One candidate explained to another that she no longer wanted to work in an office, because such environments made her “nervous and edgy.” Laments also surfaced occasionally during the training program itself. For example, a middle-aged candidate who appeared preoccupied with being out-of-work referenced several times his status as an out-of-work person. On one occasion, he noted dejectedly that he had “had a job until three months ago”; in another instance, he complained that he would be “competing with twenty-year-olds for jobs.” Without a genre in which they could write about laments such as these, candidates voiced them.

Candidates’ Unique Stories of Their Job Loss Experiences

Each of the three candidates whom I interviewed told a unique story of his or her job loss experience. Mario, a military veteran who had found his way into the burgeoning computer programming industry in the 1980s, completing and teaching various computer programming courses, had prepared himself for work as a programmer, engineer, and systems analyst. He worked in the latter capacity writing software applications documentation for two federal contractors at which he was employed at various points from the late 1990s until he lost his most recent position approximately one year before his August 2014 interview. Mario claimed that he had lost his job because his most recent employer had given him an ultimatum: learn the

programming language of the new software development framework the employer had licensed or lose his job. By that point in his career, Mario claimed that he had retooled himself, in his words, “four or five different times” by learning new programming languages and gaining new certifications. Doing so again, he said, would only qualify him for work as an entry-level programmer on his employer’s new system. Mario was unwilling to learn the new application, so he lost his job.

Lea, a program and project manager with supervisory experience; a Project Management Professional (PMP) certification; and experience working at small, medium, and large manufacturing and consulting organizations, was displaced from her most recent employer approximately six weeks before her August 2014 interview. Although she did not discuss the reason for her displacement, its timing aligned with a reduction in the US government’s federal spending on defense contracting and other initiatives. Ileana, who had worked for approximately fifteen years for a large nonprofit member organization for seniors, was displaced in 2013 when, as she put it, her position was “abolished”—a Department of Labor term signifying structural unemployment due to the removal of a position (*BLS Information*). Ileana had worked for a small consulting firm between 2013 and mid-2014; in that role, she had used her HR experience to help organizations comply with Affordable Care Act (ACA) legislation. Lea sought a new PMP position, and Ileana desired to become a certified coach.

Expressive Writing about Job Loss

Key questions in outplacement address the extent to which its interpersonal components and writing activities help its candidates contend with their transitions

through unemployment. Candidates deal with their job loss experiences through the recognizable spoken form of the lament and their composition of texts in familiar job-search genres, including résumés; elevator pitches; and professional objective, reason-for-leaving, and accomplishment statements. Is writing more important than speech in candidates' contentions with transition? For their contentions with job loss and unemployment to be effective, must candidates' writings focus on these topics?

In a quantitative research study in which outplacement practitioners assigned candidates expressive writing tasks, researchers Stefanie Spera, Eric D. Buhrfeind, and James W. Pennebaker found that candidates "who wrote about the trauma of losing their jobs were significantly more likely to find reemployment in the months following the study than [were] control subjects," even though the candidates "in the experimental condition did not receive more phone calls, make more contacts, or send out more letters than [did the] controls" (730). The authors suggest, "Writing about the thoughts and feelings surrounding job loss may enable terminated employees to work through the[ir] negative feelings and to assimilate and attain closure on the loss, thus achieving a new perspective" (731). The authors' study suggests that candidates like Mario, Lea, and Ileana might find new jobs more quickly if they first write about the difficulty of being out-of-work.

Psychology and management scholars Barlow Soper and C. W. Von Bergen also discuss outplacement practitioners' use of expressive writing to help candidates contend with the loss of their jobs. They argue that "written expression may fill an important need of providing a practical, concrete, and specific mechanism of emotional expression in circumstances where such expression can be difficult" (151).

They suggest “a prototypical expressive writing methodology” in which candidates “would be asked write for 15 to 20 minutes once or twice a week, ideally for a minimum of 3 or 4 weeks”; they suggest that candidates “would be best served if asked to write about their most intense thoughts and feelings related to the[ir] current unemployment experience” (157). These studies support the idea that expressive writing helps candidates resolve for themselves the matter of their job loss and the circumstances of their unemployment and prepare for their participation in job-search work.

“I Didn’t Want to Have to Write Papers”: Writing, Ambiguity, and Resistance

Despite the potential utility of Soper and Von Bergen’s suggestion, the conditions of “literacy sponsorship” (Brandt, *Literacy* 18) constrain the resources of place, space, and time that are available to candidates in outplacement. For example, in the state-government outplacement center’s two-day training program, consultants encouraged the candidates in the cohort to write biographical statements during the evening between the program’s first and second days. While during her interview Lea admitted to giving the assignment a “halfhearted” attempt, she also claimed of the task that she “took it seriously.” She said that she sat on her back patio “with a glass of wine” on the program’s interim evening and attempted to write her biographical statement. Although she began writing, she said she “kept scratching out” wording she did not like. As she admitted wryly during her interview, “This is why I became a chemistry major: I didn’t want to have to write papers.” The two-day outplacement training program’s limited resources of place, space, and time did not permit sufficient time during the program, the consultants claimed, to engage the candidates

in structured writing activities in genres like the biographical statement. Candidates needed to write in this genre in the program's periphery and on their own time.

In his profile of outplacement consultant James E. Challenger, business writer Michael Barrier describes for-profit outplacement provider Challenger, Gray and Christmas's engagement of its candidates in writing for transition. Barrier explains, "As the outplacement process begins, with a meeting between a client [i.e., a candidate] and a member of [James A.] Challenger's staff, the client is asked to write about [his or her] work history and attitudes toward life" (Barrier 56). James A. Challenger reports that his firm's "average client writes somewhere between 100 and 500 pages, at the inception of our program" (qtd. in Barrier 56). This is a "writing task," says Challenger, that informs the firm's practitioners about the candidate and directs the candidate's focus away from the circumstances of his or her termination (Barrier 56).

Challenger suggests in this profile piece that the writing he assigns candidates to complete "reinforces [their] self-worth"; he maintains he "read[s] everything [candidates write] himself" because the firm's training program is unstructured and costly due to the levels of customization and individualized attention involved (Barrier 56). Contrasting his firm's specialized approach with outplacement providers that help sponsoring organizations implement large-scale workforce displacements, Challenger observes, "When you're letting 3,000 people go, you can't afford us" (qtd. in Barrier 56). Writing for transition in outplacement requires providers' allocation of resources including place, space, time, and expense. In training programs of limited

duration, though, providers claim that there are insufficient resources to engage candidates in extensive writing activities beyond the résumé genre.

Candidates' Professional Seniority and Sponsoring Organizations' Generosity

Scrutinizing outplacement from the perspective of transition reveals inequities that affect candidates' experiences of outplacement. Lesley and Cora informed me that, at for-profit outplacement providers, candidates receive outplacement benefits in accordance with their professional seniority and the generosity of their previous employers. Candidates with higher professional ranks (e.g., managers, supervisors, and executives) have greater access to outplacement consultants and are more likely to experience outplacement as a customized training program oriented to their needs. This socioeconomic reality also affects candidates' experiences of writing. The forms of writing that consultants teach in outplacement are most recognizable as components of candidates' job searches. Structured reflective writing, which takes a form whose relevance is unclear to candidates' job searches, is a luxury that is often reserved for managerial-, supervisory-, and executive-level candidates.

Outplacement: "Crash Courses" and "Support until Landing"

At the state-government outplacement training center, candidates' engagement with their laments in written form could help them address their transitional concerns. Rather than detracting from the curriculum, the laments that I heard in the program's peripheries—in its hallways and during its break times—were productive. Candidates discussed difficult topics of transition: outsourcing, the expenses of healthcare and health insurance, perceived age discrimination, inadequate compensation for the

professional work that they performed, and their compatibility with employers' organizational cultures, their work colleagues, and their workplaces' physical environments. While airing such grievances alone may help candidates cope with their transitions, careful scaffolding of opportunities to write and speak about these matters could be even more helpful.

Outplacement engages candidates in writing that focuses on their transitions to the extent that this objective aligns with the provider's philosophy and is supported by the terms of the provider's financial arrangement with the sponsoring organization. This arrangement determines the candidates' levels of access to practitioners' resources of expertise, place, space, and time. Sponsoring organizations pay for outplacement in accordance with their levels of generosity and the candidate's professional seniority. For example, Lesley explained that executive-level candidates may receive "support until landing": access to outplacement consultants and curricula until they "land" new jobs.

Executives' perpetual access to outplacement practitioners and resources until they find reemployment contrasts with the one- or two-day "crash course" outplacement training programs that Cora claims many nonexempt (i.e., hourly) outplacement candidates receive. Managerial candidates, individual-contributor candidates, and nonexempt candidates may receive outplacement training program benefits lasting months, weeks, or days, respectively. "[L]iteracy sponsorship" (Brandt, *Literacy* 18) as a philosophy and a "sociomaterial assemblage" (Fenwick 84) affects the extent to which outplacement practitioners can support candidates' writing for transition—i.e., writing to contend with being out-of-work, progressing through

outplacement curricula, arranging their relationships with their new employers after accepting a job offer, participating in their professions during their careers, and contemplating occupational (i.e., job and industry) changes.

Transition and Identity in Outplacement

Candidates' Identities and Transition's Multiple, Contradictory Meanings

Both being out-of-work and participating in outplacement require candidates to perform in a context of new “identities and ideologies” (Scott 48). As they pursue meaningful work, out-of-work people transition between the identities and ideologies of experienced professional, out-of-work person, outplacement candidate, job applicant, and “landed” candidate. Candidates must adjust rapidly as they transition between the disparate and often-conflicting requirements of these identities.

Outplacement's multiple and sometimes-conflicting purposes make it difficult for its constituents to understand writing's role in its communities; this reflects writing scholar Kevin Roozen's view that the “extent to which we align ourselves with a particular community, for example, can be gauged by the extent to which we are able and willing to use” its “language, make its rhetorical moves, act with its privileged texts, and participate in its writing processes and practices” (51).

The consultants whom I interviewed, including Lesley, Cora, Ethan, and Ann, used the term “transition” in multiple, sometimes-contradictory ways to signify the instability of outplacement candidates' identities. For example, Lesley described her employer, a for-profit outplacement provider, as offering “career transition services.” She said that it was important for candidates who were “in transition” to develop the

ability to tell prospective employers coherent stories about their workplace experiences and professional objectives, and she observed the “higher the salary, the longer the transition” period was for outplacement candidates. Cora maintained that the term transition signified a candidate’s desire to pursue a career change. Ethan was adamant that outplacement was “not an industry of transition,” even though, as he put it, the term “describes what candidates are going through.” During the two-day outplacement training program at the state-government outplacement center, the word “transition” was used prominently on only one occasion: to describe the experiences of out-of-work people who sought to make career changes.

Outplacement as “Transition Management”

In these instances, the term transition signified out-of-work people’s experiences of being unemployed and being outplacement candidates and prospective job applicants. This meaning of the term transition aligned with Lesley’s description of outplacement as a service that helps its candidates to manage their transitions to new employment. Meyer and Shadle use the term similarly when they call outplacement “career transition management” (217). However, Cora and Ethan emphasized the term’s use as a signifier of some candidates’ desire to change careers. From this perspective, Ethan objected to the use of the term to describe his employer’s services: the firm was not in the business of helping candidates to change careers en masse; transition understood as career change—which is also the way in which the term was used at the state-government outplacement training center—was the exception, not the rule, in most outplacement candidates’ experiences. The term denotes transitions through unemployment and outplacement and into new

employment. It also signifies some candidates' attempts to pursue career changes. The term's various meanings each interpellate outplacement's constituents differently.

Short- and Long-Term Unemployment

The experiences of the outplacement candidates whom I interviewed, including Mario, Lea, and Ileana, complicated the idea that outplacement gives candidates a linear path through unemployment and toward reemployment. Mario, for example, was a member of the US population of long-term unemployed persons—i.e., “people who have been looking for work for 27 weeks or longer” (Kosanovich and Sherman 2). Out-of-work for fifteen months at the time of his August 2014 interview—more than double the twenty-seven-week timeframe classifying him as being long-term unemployed—Mario participated in the state-government outplacement training center's program as part of a repertoire of responses to unemployment that also included his interactions with recruiters and his participation in job fairs.

In contrast to Mario's experience, Lea, who had only been out-of-work for approximately six weeks, had already learned about the state-government outplacement training center, registered for and participated in its two-day training program and two of its supplemental activities—including a psychometric assessment and an online professional-networking seminar—and completed one formal job interview, which she had landed on her sister's recommendation. Ileana participated in the state-government program as a supplement to the six months of outplacement

training she had received from the member organization for seniors where she had worked for more than fifteen years.

Candidates' Differing Expectations for Outplacement Work

As members of long-and short-term unemployed populations—and as professionals with different qualifications, experiences, and objectives—Mario, Lea, and Ileana had different expectations for their work in outplacement. For example, Mario saw outplacement as a component of his ongoing transition through unemployment and toward a position that, he hoped, was “not minimum-wage.” Lea saw outplacement as a means of updating her résumé, accessing online professional networks, learning about herself through psychometric assessments, and remaining engaged with other professionals through interpersonal interactions as a participant in the outplacement training center’s ongoing activities for its candidates.

As she put it, “I’m not going to hide in my house.” Lea refused to avoid socializing with others during her unemployment, and she said that the idea of admitting to herself and others that she was out-of-work was one of the most important lessons the program’s consultants had taught her. Ileana saw the requisite two-day training program as a means of pursuing supplemental initiatives that would benefit her as an outplacement candidate and an aspiring personal coach. She was as much concerned with observing how the consultants and other candidates performed their work in the program as she was with the outplacement training program’s subject matter and her own unemployment.

Heading “to the Coffee Shop”

A key dimension of transition with which outplacement candidates must contend is that of the changing relationship between their personal and professional identities. For candidates, job loss means a loss of income and potential instabilities in candidates’ personal and professional lives. Among the outplacement consultants whom I interviewed, such instabilities were grounds for their organizations’ attention to matters of candidates’ privacy. For example, Lesley, a for-profit consultant whom I interviewed, claimed that some candidates with whom she worked chose not to inform their families they had lost their jobs. Instead, these candidates got up each day, put their work clothes on, and, as she put it, headed surreptitiously “to the coffee shop” instead of to their former places of employment. This was the main reason, she said, why I could not interview the for-profit firm’s candidates or participate in its training program: the outplacement firm would not divulge its candidates’ identities partly because some candidates had not even informed their own families of their job loss.

Outplacement training manuals, including Right Management’s *Marketing Your Talents* and Lee Hecht Harrison’s *Managing Your Search Project*, address these matters early in their curricula. For example, *Marketing Your Talents* explains, “Families face many anxieties and concerns in daily life, but the added burden of a job search can be difficult to handle” (8). The manual gives candidates “Family,” “Couple,” “Children,” “Money,” and “Time” tips for dealing with these concerns (8-10). However, its advice is an overview rather than a comprehensive strategy. The manual gives limited advice to candidates for managing the demands placed on their

personal lives during their periods of being out-of-work. While *Managing Your Search Project* explains that “involuntary termination, unemployment[,] and the [job] search itself nearly always create barriers to [job-finding] productivity” (A-6), the manual does not advise candidates extensively about how to solve this problem.

Being Out-of-Work; Being an Outplacement Candidate

Management scholars Doherty and Tyson discuss the complex relationship between outplacement candidates’ personal and professional identities that emerges during their unemployment. Doherty and Tyson observe that employed professionals “often try to protect their non-work lives from the impositions of work-related pressures by drawing boundaries between home and work” (86). “However,” they report, “in the event of redundancy[,] not only is the professional identity threatened but the personal identity also comes under scrutiny” (86). The authors argue that being out-of-work “poses a threat to both the structure and base of personal relationships and family life. Therefore, redundancy becomes not only a major transition for the individual but it also forces the partner and the family to become part of that transition” (86-87). Outplacement providers rely in part on their curricula to help candidates address these concerns by engaging in outplacement as professional work. However, as Lesley’s comments about candidates who avoid telling their families that they have lost their jobs show, some candidates may experience profound difficulty with admitting to themselves and others that being out-of-work and being an outplacement candidate are parts of their identities, however temporary or transitional those identities may be.

Consumerism and Claims That Outplacement Is “Useless”

Candidates’ potential to function effectively in outplacement depends on the extent to which they identify with outplacement as an educational program. During the state-government outplacement training center’s two-day program, a candidate named Jan described the program to me as being “useless” because neither it nor its consultants could or would give him a new job. For this candidate, who sought new work in his existing profession of electrical engineering, his beliefs about what outplacement should give him, which contradicted the program’s express purpose, kept him from identifying with the program, its constituents, and its objectives. In terms of his identity and its connection his ideology, this candidate believed it was the job of the consultants at the state-government outplacement training center to find him a new position.

Jan could not understand that the center’s objective was to encourage him to regard job-search work as his responsibility and his main professional task in unemployment. The center’s practitioners sought to have the candidates extend their identities as professionals to their searches for new work as a means of coping with the transitional difficulties that they encountered and as a strategy for participating effectively in the rhetorical interactions through which jobs are created and people are hired. Jan’s belief that the outplacement program in which he participated was not useful suggests his subscription to a consumerist rather than a corporatist—i.e., a “project management” (*Managing* A-5)- or “market[ing]” (*Marketing* 1)-oriented—ideological view of outplacement and its role in candidates’ job-search work.

Achieving a Sense of Place in Outplacement

Such beliefs may also extend to candidates' writing. For example, Ann, the state-government outplacement training center's director, advised the candidates in the cohort to avoid résumé writing services because, she said, the candidates know themselves and their professional experiences best. She gave the example of a candidate who paid a résumé writer several hundred dollars for an insubstantial résumé. Candidates who adopt a consumerist identity may have significant difficulties participating in outplacement. Their difficulties in achieving a sense of place in those programs may extend to both their job searches and their abilities to land new employment. Candidates' success entails their transitions into outplacement and, ultimately, into new jobs. The trouble that some candidates encounter in accomplishing these transitions illuminates the distinctions between outplacement recipients' identities as out-of-work people, as outplacement candidates, as job applicants, and as "landed" candidates.

Transition: Some Candidates' De Facto Objective

Transition is a significant keyword and concept in outplacement, as it denotes what Engeström calls "disturbances": "deviations from standard scripts" that "typically indicate developmentally significant systemic contradictions and change potentials within the activity" (964). In outplacement, consultants invoke the term *transition* to signify candidates' difficulties in their identities as out-of-work people and outplacement candidates. Consultants are concerned with candidates' transitional difficulties that may include, for example, prolonged anger or grief over job loss or "entrench[ment]" (Anson, "Habituated" 77) in outplacement's curricular phases or

milestones. Although career continuity is outplacement practitioners' dominant curricular objective, the experience of transition itself may become candidates' de facto objective in outplacement: candidates' preoccupation with unemployment's attendant difficulties may challenge career continuity and reemployment as outplacement's dominant objectives.

As outplacement consultant Challenger explains, "The wary or frightened job seeker can avoid the market or approach it in a half-hearted, defeatist fashion" (J. E. Challenger 51). As a counterpoint to this perspective, Challenger assigns the candidates who participate in his firm's training program to write "a detailed work history highlighting . . . [their] specific accomplishments, in order to be able to successfully relate [their] talents to an available position and obtain an interview"; lists of "personal resources—skills, abilities, talents[,] and personal characteristics which are the tools that the person, as a seller in the job market, offers to a prospective employer"; and a delineation of "personal achievements, apart from employment, that provided" the candidate with "satisfaction or a feeling of accomplishment" and that, in turn, may contribute to the candidate's ethos of confidence (J. E. Challenger 146). Candidates may configure their social participation in outplacement around their identities as out-of-work people; this configuration of identity contrasts with the objectives of outplacement practitioners, who train candidates to view their job searches as their main professional responsibility in unemployment.

Marketplace Differentiation: Providers' Comprehensive and Functional Philosophies

Different outplacement providers attend to the concern for candidates' preoccupation with their transitions through unemployment to different extents. For example, some providers advocate "proactive mental health and counseling support for discharged workers, plus tailored coaching in job finding skills" (J. A. Challenger 86), while others contend, "Most laid-off employees today don't want to be stroked and coddled; they simply want to find a new job as quickly as possible" (Sathe 12). These contrasting observations suggest that outplacement providers differentiate themselves in the marketplace through their organizational philosophies regarding candidates' experiences of transition. While John A. Challenger's firm takes a comprehensive, humanistic approach to outplacement, Sathe's firm values a functional, instrumental philosophy.

Outplacement consultants John A. Challenger's and Sathe's comments imply that there is a continuum of outplacement services, with comprehensive programs at one end and functional programs at the other end. Outplacement providers that emphasize a comprehensive, humanistic philosophy may attempt to engage candidates' identities holistically—i.e., as professionals and out-of-work people who experience rational and affective responses to job loss. In contrast, outplacement providers that emphasize a functional, instrumental philosophy may treat job-search work primarily as a rational project—i.e., as a problem to be solved so the candidate (as a long-term member of a stable, well-defined profession) can return to paid employment as quickly and efficiently as possible. These philosophies influence in different ways outplacement candidates' identities as job-seekers and writers.

Transition and Learning in Outplacement

Candidates Negotiate Identities as Experts and Learners

For outplacement candidates, the key reason for outplacement providers' existence is the providers' assumption that candidates have "more to learn" (Rose 59) about how to "land" new jobs. However, this practical learning objective may contrast with some candidates' goal of reflecting on their professional identities, even as their job loss experiences threaten those identities. As a site of adult learning, outplacement's rational and affective dimensions are viewed as discrete experiential domains that are "dominant" and "recessive" (Brandt, *Rise* 2), respectively. For example, outplacement scholars like Alewell and Hauff list outplacement's rational and affective learning objectives sequentially.

The first objective, "training for writing applications and self-presentation in recruiting processes for redundant employees," is different from the second objective: candidates' participation in "psychological counseling to cope with the conflict associated with the redundancy and regulate emotions accompanying the layoff" (Alewell and Hauff 468). Whether candidates pursue career continuity or career change, they may experience job loss and unemployment in rational and affective ways. As a transitional identity, the outplacement-candidate role encompasses the rational and affective dimensions of unemployment, but negotiating the relationship between these dominant and recessive experiential domains is largely the candidate's responsibility.

Outplacement's learning objectives for candidates may place them in contradictory ideological positions. For example, for-profit consultant Lesley noted

during her interview that once the candidates with whom she worked had completed the fundamental-skills components of their training programs, she expected them to participate in two to three informational interviews per week. During those interviews, the candidates needed to negotiate simultaneously the identities of experts and learners. They needed to inform their audiences of their credentials and objectives while also requesting information about their networking contacts' industries and employers. While positioning themselves as information-seekers, they also had to make clear that they possessed significant expertise in their fields. While informational interviewing was a learning activity, candidates needed to approach it as experienced, highly-qualified representatives of their professions. This meant that the candidates needed to transcend any anxieties and uncertainties as out-of-work people quickly so they could begin their job searches from the definitive perspective of distinct industries and professions.

Epistolary Writing and Candidates' Stories of "Sailing around the World"

The candidates' contradictory ideological positions often emerged at the intersection of their responsibilities in terms of interpersonal interaction and writing. For example, the outplacement consultants whom I interviewed explained that candidates needed to express definitive accounts of their professional identities and objectives in their writing. For-profit consultant Ethan, for instance, explained that to land informational interview opportunities, candidates needed to compose executive-style letters for the audiences with whom they sought meetings. In these letters, candidates needed to state their purposes for writing, explain their credentials, and describe their professional objectives in clear, concise, engaging ways. Ethan said that

candidates' epistolary writings frequently required substantial revision. He considered himself an editor: the drafts of candidates' job application letters that he read often contained, in his words, "fluffy" material that did not reflect the level of concision he insisted the letters' audiences demanded.

Ethan described the candidates with whom he worked as "proud" of their personal and professional accomplishments, but he saw his job as helping the candidates rein in their personal stories in their epistolary writing for their job searches. Ethan said candidates' letters often included stories of, as he put it, "sailing around the world"—i.e., stories of noteworthy personal accomplishments. Rather than composing these achievement narratives, Ethan remarked, candidates should write to connect, compellingly and concisely, their professional objectives to their target industries' and organizations' needs. Ethan's view indicates that candidates exhibit a desire to write about aspects of their lived experiences considered irrelevant and superfluous to dominant job-search genres' textual requirements. Writing is a tool for helping outplacement's main beneficiaries accomplish their transitions from out-of-work people to outplacement candidates; job applicants; and, ultimately, "landed" candidates. However, candidates' writing efforts cut across genres in ways that may complicate their abilities to write purposeful texts. For instance, candidates' desire to write autobiographically conflicted with the demands of their résumé writing and epistolary responsibilities.

Candidates Need "Enough Time to Write It All Down"

A related problem is that candidates may be experiencing uncertainty about their occupational objectives. Such uncertainty affects their participation in

outplacement, informational interviewing, and other job-search activities. For example, the outplacement candidates whom I interviewed, including Mario, Lea, and Ileana, appeared to benefit from the learning opportunities that the two-day outplacement training program presented them in accordance with the divergent learning objectives that they voiced to me during their interviews. Mario, a former systems analyst who felt he was unable to keep pace with the technological changes that reshaped his work responsibilities continually, sought to make—in the for-profit outplacement consultants’ discourse—a “career transition”: he wished to work in computer helpdesk support. This was not an idealized desire for career change on his part, however. Rather, this potential change to another position in his industry was one that he perceived as being a transition to a role that was less professionally competitive and less intellectually demanding.

Based on his comment that he sought a job that was “not minimum-wage,” Mario conveyed a sense of desperation in having been out-of-work for more than one year. His view of the outplacement training program matched his feeling of being overwhelmed: he claimed the program provided a lot of information and, for him, there was “not enough time write it all down.” In contrast, Lea, a project manager who sought another position in project management, felt she learned a lot from the outplacement training program and that the consultants’ coverage of the material was “not a firehose.” By this, she meant that the consultants did not give a deluge of job-search information. Ileana, a trained HR specialist with substantial professional experience in designing educational modules for adult learners, felt the consultants could have included more printed or online learning materials to allow more time for

the candidates to interact with each other and practice the writing and interpersonal skills and techniques covered in the program. In her desire to transition into a personal-coaching role, Ileana sought to practice what she had been learning in outplacement.

Listening and Life Writing

In terms of their participation in the two-day outplacement training program as learners, while Lea could listen selectively for the information she sought, Mario and Ileana needed to listen widely for material that could help them. Furthermore, based on their divergent professional objectives, these three candidates exhibited substantially different levels of preparation for participation in job-search work. Mario appeared unable to settle definitively on his pursuit of work in computer helpdesk support. In contrast, Lea appeared confident in her decision pursue new work as a PMP. Ileana recognized that she needed further credentials to pursue work as a personal coach.

In outplacement, transition does not signify only a vulnerable affective state and a period of uncertainty regarding one's professional future. Instead, transition also signifies outplacement candidates' potential to learn and grow through their experiences of being out-of-work and participating in outplacement. During her interview, for-profit outplacement consultant Lesley directed me to the writing of popular-press consultant and lecturer William Bridges, whose discussion of transitions in people's lives was one of the books that she kept on the shelf in her office and recommended to candidates with whom she worked. Bridges regards transitions as comprising "an ending" (132), a "neutral zone"—i.e., "a time when an

inner reorientation and realignment are occurring”—(154), and a “new beginning” that “may take the form of either of an inner idea or an external opportunity” whose “hallmark” is “the ‘resonance’ it sets up in us” (160).

Bridges’s theory establishes for his audience the idea that transitional periods, including being out-of-work, are opportunities for learning, reflection, and reflective writing. As he advises people in transition, “*Take this pause in the action of your life to write an autobiography*” (145). Although Bridges makes this recommendation to his audience, he does not give his readers practical advice regarding how and why it would be beneficial for them to begin writing in this genre. This suggests there is a significant opportunity for outplacement practitioners and compositionists to engage outplacement candidates and rhetoric and composition students in life-writing work so that both populations may reflect on and learn from their experiences of personal and professional transition.

Learning and Problem-Solving

Bridges’s teachings echo the findings of behavior and health science scholars Anders Hallqvist and Lars-Christer Hydén (“Learning”). In their qualitative study of outplacement candidates’ experiences of and reactions to job loss, Hallqvist and Hydén “suggest that the process of occupational transition, as experienced by white-collar workers participating in outplacement services, leads through several events with adherent choices. The choices people make and the lines of action they follow in the process of problem solving promote learning of different kinds” (“Learning” 332). The authors advance the idea that transition entails outplacement candidates’

navigation of a series of “‘choice junctures’ characterized by certain challenges, opportunities, and outcomes” (“Learning” 334).

Hallqvist and Hydén distinguish between candidates who endeavor to “embrace change” in response to job loss and candidates who seek “to re-establish what they had lost by securing a new job in the same profession or position” (“Learning” 335). The authors focus “not primarily on people’s emotional response” to job loss but “rather on their engagement in terms of action orientation” (“Learning” 335). They conclude that out-of-work “people’s sense of agency emerges in and through a process of problem solving and learning” (“Learning” 341). Although they approach the topic of transition from different perspectives, Bridges and Hallqvist and Hydén (“Learning”) view transitions not solely as periods when people experience negative affective responses to the uncertainty of being out-of-work. Instead, they suggest that people’s experiences of transition are ones of learning and problem-solving.

Outplacement candidates’ experiences of transition reflect the rational and affective dimensions of entry into new discourse communities. There are significant similarities between candidates’ transitions between employment, unemployment and outplacement, job-search, and reemployment and other constituents’ transitions between various discourse communities. For example, the transitions of advanced college students from university environments to workplace internships—about which writing studies scholars Anson and Forsberg write—bear a striking resemblance to out-of-work people’s initial experiences as outplacement candidates. Anson and Forsberg identify “three stages of transition through which the[ir study’s]

interns passed as they moved from academic to nonacademic writing”; these stages included “*Expectation*,” “*Disorientation*,” and “*Transition and Resolution*” (208).

Transition as Contention

Anson and Forsberg observe that, for their student interns, a combination of rational and affective elements characterized each of these three transitional stages. For example, in the expectation stage, the authors contend, “the writer builds a vision, that is, a social construct, of him- or herself working and writing in a new professional setting. Often, the picture is *idealized*, particularly if the student has been a reasonably successful writer in college” (208). While the student interns idealized their expectations regarding their new, workplace responsibilities, they “bec[ame] disoriented” and experienced “*frustration* and a sense of failure” when they realized that the reality of their lived experiences in their internships did not match the idealized views of the workplace experiences they had imagined initially (208). Finally, on “establish[ing] a role and form[ing] new knowledge . . . [and] new self-concepts” as they gained familiarity with their new workplaces, Anson and Forsberg claim, the student interns attained a “*resolution* of [the] previous frustration” that they had experienced during their internships (208).

Anson and Forsberg’s findings reflect Bridges’s conceptions of people’s lived experiences of transition. Like Bridges’s theory, in which people’s experiences of transitions in their lives begin—counterintuitively—with an ending, followed by a neutral zone of uncertainty, and concluding with a new beginning, Anson and Forsberg’s students needed to contend with their “new beginnings” (Bridges 160) as professional-writing interns and with the fact that their academic experiences and

responsibilities were ending. As Anson and Forsberg put it, “Much of the disorientation expressed by the interns soon after they began writing on the job . . . originated not only from the disappointment of generally held expectations, but from the collision of what they saw in their new reality and what they had learned from previous experience in other discourse settings” (211).

Bridges’s theory and Anson and Forsberg’s findings suggest that novices—entrants into a new “discourse community” (Bizzell 222)—must anticipate what the new community will be like and prepare for it to be substantially different from the prior discourse communities in which they have gained experience. Approaching entry into new discourse communities is not solely a rational project wherein people merely transfer abstract, de-socialized lessons that they have already learned to the new environments in which they find themselves. Instead, people must prepare for altogether new sociomaterial experiences that will challenge them affectively and rationally.

Affect and Worker Displacement

Out-of-work people’s job loss experiences require their entry into new discourse communities. Furthermore, outplacement practitioners have thought extensively about the affective dimension of highly-qualified professionals’ job loss experiences and the difficulties that they encounter as they become outplacement candidates—and, later, job applicants and, ultimately, “landed” candidates. For example, for-profit outplacement provider Lee Hecht Harrison’s *Conducting a Notification Meeting* handbook for managerial supervisors who are tasked with performing the “notification meeting” (i.e., the worker-displacement action) identifies

a range of potential “behavioral reactions” (i.e., affective responses) that professional workers are likely to experience and perform when they learn they will be displaced from their jobs. These responses include “anger/hostility,” “denial/bargaining,” and “grief/sadness” (*Conducting* 4). The manual also suggests that some candidates’ responses will be “formal/procedural,” while others will accept their notices with “stoic/quiet” reactions, and still others may even be “relieved” to hear the news of their displacement from their jobs (4). These “behavioral reactions” echo Hallqvist and Hydén’s finding that outplacement candidates experience displacement from work differently—e.g., as an “*opportunity*,” a “*release*,” or an “*offense*” (“Learning” 335)—depending on their personal and professional circumstances.

These responses suggest that displaced workers’ entry into outplacement as a transitional phase of their careers is an affective and a rational experience. While Anson and Forsberg conclude in their study, “Further research must begin to bridge the gap between academic and nonacademic writing by taking a more developmental perspective toward the factors that contribute to learning to write in professional settings” (288), my study of outplacement supports and advances another research direction: learning how out-of-work people—who may or may not identify as writers, professional or otherwise—may use writing to contend with their affective and rational experiences of transition in their personal and professional lives.

Transition and Reflection in Outplacement

Candidates Pursue Professional Stability or Career Change

“Cognition” (Dryer, “Cognitive” 73) and “metacognition” (Tinberg, “Metacognition” 75) are contested practices in outplacement. On one hand, candidates must learn new things to contend with their transitions and participate effectively in their job searches. On the other hand, candidates’ pursuit of meaningful work may require them to change their personal and professional lives significantly. For candidates, outplacement as an activity system becomes a site of “disturbance” (Engeström 964): transfer and transition compete as outplacement’s objectives depending on candidates’ pursuit of either professional stability or career change.

Outplacement candidates benefit from writing whether their writing work focuses on their transitions through unemployment and job-finding or whether it comprises writing in familiar job-search genres. Considering outplacement candidates’ writing work in relation to their transitions echoes compositionists’ finding that, as Dryer explains, “there is now substantial evidence that composing practices measurably influence other mental processes (recall, goal setting, attention span, knowledge acquisition, processing time, etc.) as well as psychosocial and even *physiological* phenomena (stress and anxiety levels, recovery from trauma, . . . etc.)” (“Cognitive” 73). Candidates can benefit cognitively and metacognitively from writing, but expense, place, space, and time resource constraints can limit therapeutic writing opportunities in outplacement.

Although the outplacement consultants whom I interviewed, including Lesley, Cora, Ethan, and Ann, acknowledged candidates’ social and material difficulties in

contending with their transitions through the identities of employed professional, discharged worker, outplacement candidate, job applicant, and landed candidate, they also expected candidates to set their difficulties aside and compose the texts that they needed in their job searches. By encouraging candidates to proceed with the business of job-search writing, the consultants were also encouraging the candidates to transcend the difficulties of being out-of-work. From this perspective, by writing texts such as résumés and scripts such as reason-for-leaving statements and elevator pitches, the candidates were also using writing to secure their own wellbeing.

Writing's Cognitive Complexity

Even though mindfulness in the form of “cognition” and “metacognition” is an important component of writers’ composing processes, close attention to the contexts in which one writes and to every potential implication of the words that one composes may inhibit writers’ abilities. Cora addressed this point directly: she claimed that new outplacement candidates may withdraw from outplacement based on the extensive writing responsibilities the consultants impose on them. Also discussing the matter of writing’s cognitive complexity, Ethan described candidates’ résumé writing processes as the most important and most difficult aspects of his firm’s outplacement training program. He assigned candidates to write extensively about their professional accomplishments. He said his candidates wrote five to eight essays about their work in their careers and revised them to produce concise accomplishment statements for inclusion on their résumés and for use as verbal scripts during formal job interviews.

“It’s Work”: Candidates Write for Invention in the Essay Genre

Ethan characterized this as a daunting task for candidates that, in his words, “takes several hours” complete. Although he maintained that many candidates do not like the task because “it’s work,” the potential result for candidates is metacognitive command over narratives in which they can describe their workplace experiences—narratives that transcend generic forms of writing and speech. The problem, however, is that Ethan’s writing heuristic serves the purpose of helping candidates compose primarily in dominant job-search genres, especially the résumé. Candidates revise their essays to produce concise, compelling accomplishment statements for their résumés. However, if they focus too closely on writing for the résumé genre, they may eliminate or ignore aspects of their written narratives that reflect conceptual connections between various incidents in their personal and professional experiences.

Potentially lost in candidates’ reflective writing for the résumé genre is their ability to use the essay genre to both explore their experiences of transition and cope with job loss. As Hallqvist and Hydén suggest, transition is a “problem solving and learning activity” (“Learning” 341). Candidates who write metacognitively may develop an improved sense of the relationship between their identities and ideologies. In terms of problem-solving, candidates may think of new professional objectives when they reflect, through writing, on their experiences of transition.

Candidates’ Storytelling and Writing in the Résumé Genre

My interviews with the three outplacement candidates—Mario, Lea, and Ileana— provided rich evidence of their ongoing transitions between their professional and personal lived experiences. However, these candidates’ composition

in the résumé genre did not let them tell their careers' stories fully. Focusing on their résumés alone would mean the loss of their detailed, nuanced verbal summations and reflective analyses of their professional careers. In these candidates' careers, professional development—which, for these candidates, was lost, ironically, in the résumé subcategory bearing this name—reflected interpersonal work beyond the labor that they performed on behalf of a given employer.

For example, Mario discussed during his interview his interest and experiences in teaching computer programming to adult learners. Mario built his computer-programming career not through his performance of this work in isolation for a given employer but rather through the programming courses that he taught and completed at various points in his professional life. However, the reciprocity between teaching and learning that he characterized in his interview as being life- and career-shaping did not read clearly in his résumé. While Mario included a section entitled “Training” on his résumé, it comprised a list of training courses that he had completed; this list did not reflect the reciprocal relationship between teaching and learning in computer programming that had characterized his professional-development work during his career.

Ileana discussed during her interview and listed on her résumé her involvement in a mentorship program for women and girls of color, but her focus on writing in this genre limited her ability to link her personal work as a facilitator of that program, in which college-age women mentored school-age girls, to her professional work as an HR consultant, with the latter comprising work in which she coordinated her employer's training and mentorship program initiatives. Mentorship

involvement was an important part of Ileana's personal and professional life, but, on her résumé, she fractured mentorship into discrete personal and professional experiential categories. Ileana's writing in the résumé genre failed to communicate what mentorship meant to her personally and professionally.

On her résumé, Lea summarized her participation in a training program in which she had gained her PMP certification as the protégé of one of her PMP-certified work colleagues and had, in turn, mentored two other colleagues in gaining their PMP certifications. Lea described this mentorship work during her interview, explaining it was an important aspect of her career. On her résumé, though, her description of this mentorship work supplemented her primary workplace responsibilities. Mario, Lea, and Ileana would have benefited from writing about their transitions between their working, professional, and volunteerism-oriented experiences, whose subtleties were not reflected in their résumés and whose nuances could also become lost in the rigid, scripted, verbal performances required of them in formal job interviews.

"Employability": A Social Construction

Outplacement candidates may be encouraged to write texts in job-search genres such as the résumé for their own wellbeing and to gain improved command over their personal and professional narratives. From the perspective of their cognitive and metacognitive engagement with their transitions from employment, through unemployment and outplacement, and toward reemployment, comprehensive outplacement takes a counseling-style approach to interactions with candidates. This approach may be preferable to programs that solely help candidates with the practical

aspects of “landing” new jobs. However, helping candidates through their transition experiences is expensive and resource-intensive. Engaging candidates in job-search writing, research, and interpersonal activity may support candidates’ successes in their transitions. Building on this idea, some outplacement scholars suggest that the experiences of out-of-work people, including outplacement candidates, must be viewed in the larger context of “employability” (Kieselbach and Mader 14; Kieselbach et al. 24) as a sociomaterial phenomenon.

For example, psychology of work scholars Kieselbach and Mader admit that outplacement candidates’ experiences of transition must be resolved “meaningfully for the individual,” a process entailing the development of “coping strategies” that help them contend with their circumstances of being out-of-work (14). However, Kieselbach and Mader also suggest that candidates’ transitions “cannot merely be regarded an individual issue”; they reference “employability,” which comprises employees’, employers’, and industries’ mutual “[a]daptation to the continuously changing labour market” (14). In their expanded study of occupational transitions, Kieselbach et al. regard employability as a central component of “transition counselling”; they argue,

Given the increased instability of labour markets in general and an associated increase in transitions in individual occupational biographies . . . counselling and training during job loss is but the least requirement. Employability has to be continuously assured and maintained—through comprehensive educational programmes that formulate a challenge to all the actors involved. Employability cannot

solely be regarded an individual characteristic and an individual task.

(24)

Kieselbach et al.'s view of employability challenges the idea that transition is an individual experience and suggests instead that it is one for which there must be an ongoing, comprehensive social response involving academic, civic, and professional constituencies.

Reflection: A Counterproductive Objective?

From the perspective of transition, the central question is what the role of reflection should be for candidates in their outplacement work. Education scholar Fenwick argues that social and material realities are interconnected, inextricable “*heterogeneous assemblages*” (16). This idea echoes Bazerman and English scholar Howard Tinberg’s view that people engage in writing through “embodied cognition”: while “[w]riting is a full act of the mind,” they say, embodied cognition “draws in addition upon the physical and affective aspects of the composing process” (Bazerman and Tinberg 74-75). For candidates experiencing radical changes to the sociomaterial conditions under which they perform professional work, reflecting extensively on the circumstances of their transitions from employment, through unemployment and outplacement, and toward reemployment may seem like a counterproductive objective. If outplacement is considered functional and instrumental (Sathe), then engaging in writing about transition can seem like a superfluous indulgence. However, advocates of comprehensive, humanistic, “proactive” outplacement philosophies (Barrier 56; J. A. Challenger 86) see *writing*

for transition (e.g., therapeutic writing) as essential for candidates' career advancement, job-finding progress, and wellbeing.

Composing Opportunities for Reflective Learning

Examining transition as *negotiating experiential domains* suggests that candidates are advantaged when they pay “*reflective (mindful, self-aware, thoughtful)*” (Downs and Robertson 114) attention to their writing work in outplacement. Candidates should not treat outplacement purely functionally or instrumentally as a résumé writing service; they should write humanistically, reflectively, and therapeutically to both contend with their unemployment experiences and develop new professional objectives. By placing candidates in charge of their own job-search work, consultants also make them responsible for their own transitions. In turn, focusing on how outplacement's constituents treat the topic of transition reveals that outplacement operates in a realm between “close supervision” and “autonomous practice,” complicating the idea that “students move from close supervision to autonomous practice as they make the transition from school to work” (Dias et al. 202). School and work cannot be “worlds apart” (Dias et al. 3) if outplacement, which is neither school nor work, shares characteristics of both. Learning in outplacement reflects consultants' and candidates' abilities to construct and negotiate meaning through their engagement in partially supervised and partially autonomous practices. Outplacement's limited resources of expertise, space, and time mean that there are limited opportunities for consultants to give candidates closely-supervised opportunities for reflective learning. Candidates must find these for themselves.

Candidates' Transition Experiences: Assets, Not Liabilities

Transition as an area of focus in writing studies addresses differences between the contexts in which people learn about and practice writing. Writing studies practitioners who focus on matters of transition attend to what Dias et al. describe as “various contexts and conditions that support processes of situated learning” (188). Outplacement helps candidates with their transitions, but transition is a recessive component of outplacement curricula. Consultants recommend that candidates write to compose job-finding artifacts and adapt to new contexts, but composing in dominant job-finding genres takes precedence.

Dias et al. are concerned with transition because their focus is preparing college and university students for professional work. They argue that “learning is a situated and contingent experience, and that school-based simulations of workplace writing fail to prepare students for professional writing because they cannot adequately replicate the local rhetorical complexity of workplace contexts” (201). Although they believe that school-based preparation for professional writing is “essential,” Dias et al. contend that this “introduction must be followed by more extensive and integrated workplace experiences, such as work-study programs, internships, on-the-job training, and other forms of transition between school and work” (201).

While Dias et al. are concerned about the meaningfulness of novice professional writers' early workplace experiences, they also use the term transition to signify ways in which learning and practice in school and work are different. For students and out-of-work people, the term *transition* denotes *negotiating experiential*

domains. Writing studies scholars and outplacement educators help learners enter new workplace environments. As Dias et al. observe, “In order to begin feeling like a member of the community,” students as novice workers “must quickly gain a picture of the entire collective endeavor and their own place in it” (213). Outplacement consultants suggest the same is true of out-of-work people who seek new jobs.

Candidates transition through profound shifts in their identities as they contend with being unemployed, learn how to participate in the discourse communities of outplacement, and learn how to adapt to new workplace contexts when they land new jobs. The critical lesson for outplacement’s constituents is that candidates’ transition experiences are not liabilities but rather assets that, once reflected on, can help them understand themselves and compose new trajectories for their personal and professional lives.

Conclusion

Transition—*negotiating experiential domains*—is outplacement’s recessive curricular objective. As outplacement candidates seek new employment through the job-finding activities that outplacement educators and practitioners recommend, they also engage in recessive forms of *social participation* that emphasize verbal communication. For example, candidates may discuss their job loss difficulties with either outplacement consultants or their fellow candidates. Their conversations with the consultants, which often take place privately in the consultants’ offices, comprise *genre work* resembling the “recognizable form” of the confessional: they engage topics deemed not germane to outplacement’s dominant curricular work. The candidates’ conversations with their fellow candidates, which usually take place on

the peripheries of outplacement curricula—e.g., during break times—may take the form of laments.

Despite their recessive status, these confessions and laments are productive activities in which candidates engage as they seek, indirectly or directly, to transcend their *identities* as out-of-work people. While outplacement candidates have *more to learn* about job-finding activities, they also require further learning to determine which potential new directions their job searches should take. Negotiating the experiential domains of job loss, unemployment, and outplacement may signal possible changes of career direction that prompt candidates to diverge significantly from the career-continuity objective. Although outplacement consultants encourage candidates to compose written texts in which they engage in *reflection* to generate data for use in their oral and written job-finding texts, such reflective writing may point candidates in new career directions.

Chapter 4: Writing for Transformation in Outplacement

Introduction

Outplacement educators' idealized curricular objective for candidates is *writing for transformation*. Most outplacement candidates are experienced professional workers, and they have often been employed for many years, either by the same employer or in a succession of organizations. However, during the time that they were engaging in professional work, candidates were likely paying little attention to changes in either job-search tools and practices or employers' hiring and recruitment philosophies outplacement educators point out. One of outplacement educators' main pedagogical goals is training candidates to understand the contemporary methods that hiring and recruitment personnel use to identify and select job applicants and the contemporary philosophies that inform employers' hiring decisions.

Outplacement educators also try to make clear that people who are out-of-work at one point in their careers may become unemployed again or may decide to seek new work at later points in their working lives. Outplacement educators' idealized objective is helping out-of-work people realize that understanding how hiring and recruitment happen should not be simply a lesson learned once and forgotten as soon as a new employment offer is made but is, rather, a philosophy that is vital for candidates throughout their careers. This learning objective is idealized because outplacement's resources are devoted primarily to the "dominant" (Brandt, *Rise 2*) curricular objective of transfer. In contrast, the idealized curricular objective

of transformation—which involves helping out-of-work people learn how to participate in changeable contexts of hiring, recruitment, and professionalization—commands scant attention in terms of outplacement’s curricular resources of place, space, and time.

The idealized view of outplacement as a site of transformative learning to which outplacement educators reach signifies a stretch beyond extant theories of knowledge transfer. This idealized view of learning echoes the perspective of education scholar King Beach, who implores his readers “to move beyond the transfer metaphor in understanding how we experience continuity and transformation in becoming someone or something new” (102). Beach contends that “learners and social organizations exist in a recursive and mutually constitutive relation to one another across time” (111), and he is concerned with understanding how forms of transformation “occur within the boundaries of a social activity that is itself changing” (117).

In terms of candidates’ participation in outplacement, consultants want them to understand outplacement not merely as a site of remediation—i.e., as a one-time training program in job-finding skills—but rather as an example of adult education in what Beach calls “generalization”: “the continuity and transformation of knowledge, skill, and identity across various forms of social organization” (112). Beach dismisses the “transfer metaphor” because he claims that it decouples learning from the contexts in which people acquire and demonstrate knowledge. Conversely, he sees knowledge and the contexts in which learning take place as reinforcing each other.

Beach's view of transformation aligns with Meyer and Land's belief that learning is "[t]*ransformative*," "[p]robably *irreversible*" and "[i]*ntegrative*" because "it exposes the previously hidden interrelatedness of" various entities and phenomena (7). Outplacement educators want out-of-work people to transcend unemployment, but they also want them to participate in their professions regardless of their employment statuses. Outplacement acquires a civic dimension when it decouples professionalism from paid employment: when it helps candidates to gain transformative, integrative understandings of learning.

Transformation, viewed by outplacement educators, reflects the idea of *participating in changeable contexts*. Outplacement educators want out-of-work people to retrain and re-skill to be competitive for new workplace opportunities—and to recognize retraining, re-skilling, and civic participation as vital components of their careers. Furthermore, outplacement educators want professional workers to see writing as a tool that is helpful for them in managing their ongoing transformations: professionals must write for transformation by composing both to participate in their professions and to reflect on their always-emerging professional knowledge. The chapter begins with a discussion of *writing for transition* deriving from three biweekly "accountability group" meetings held by the state government-operated outplacement training center in January and February 2017.

Writing for Transformation: "Accountability Group" Examples

Candidates who participated in the state government-operated outplacement training center's biweekly accountability group meetings engaged in *writing for transformation*. As they composed the "scripts" orienting them to their participation

in the accountability group meetings—which asked them to report on their prior job-seeking successes and challenges as well as their future job-finding objectives—candidates recognized that job-finding involved *participating in changeable contexts*. For example, many candidates realized that they had to gain new professional certifications, retrain, or re-skill to find new jobs. For instance, an aerospace engineer mentioned that she needed training to learn the “agile” approach to project management so that she could perform compressed, biweekly software-development process iterations effectively.

Ash, a former public-school teacher who was pursuing a new career in HR, sought state-government approval to take a subsidized training and certification course on a specialized topic outside her county of residence because it was not offered in her locality. While the outplacement training center’s consultants affirmed that Ash’s enrollment in a course outside her locality was possible because an equivalent course was not offered in her county, Ash told them that she had encountered difficulty in gaining approval from the locality in question.

Some candidates who were contractual or freelance professional writers and technical communicators sought positions offering full-time, permanent employment in those fields. Of these candidates, several mentioned that they needed to gain competency in new programming languages and with new technical applications to stay competitive in their professions. One candidate noted that without such proficiency she found she was always “ninety-nine-percent qualified” for employers’ advertised positions.

Sometimes, candidates' philosophies regarding their careers affected their ability to participate their professional contexts as extensively as they desired. For example, Inger, a candidate who held Juris Doctor and PhD degrees, told the other candidates in attendance during an accountability group meeting that she operated an individualized training program for job-seekers aged fifty-plus. Inger revealed that she had extensive community and governmental connections in her locality and a burgeoning reputation as a trainer for job-seeking seniors. For example, she noted that she had been contacted recently by someone whom she "didn't know from Adam" who had requested her job-finding training expertise.

Although Inger listed among her "accountability" goals that she sought to expand her training program's reach by moving it outside her home, increasing its enrollment capacity beyond the level of six participants, and initiating a Spanish-language version of the program, she was unwilling to convert her initiative into a nonprofit organization and solicit charitable donations that could help her expand her training operation because, as she put it, she viewed nonprofits as "begging" entities. Candidates needed to transform themselves continually to keep pace with the effects that continual professional and technological changes were having on their careers. Though many candidates realized that they needed to retrain, re-skill, and gain new certifications, Inger's experience suggests that transformation also entails candidates' sustaining of a dynamic relationship between their employment philosophies and their professional capabilities because such sustainment can help them remain open to new professional opportunities. Candidates may need to adapt their employment philosophies if they wish to transform their careers.

Transformation and Social Participation in Outplacement

Suitability for Work: Some Outplacement Candidates Become Consultants

Rather than reflecting a specific curricular approach, outplacement's "social and rhetorical" conditions (Roozen 18) are "emergent and entangled" (Fenwick 5). As education scholar Fenwick explains, emergence is "the understanding that in (complex adaptive) systems, phenomena, events, environment[,] and actors are mutually dependent, mutually constitutive, and actually emerge together in dynamic structures" (52). For outplacement's constituents, this means—with respect to the idealized curricular objective of transformation—that consultants and candidates do not work solely within the limits of a linear outplacement curriculum but rather transform outplacement itself to suit their distinct curricular and career objectives.

The outplacement consultants whom I interviewed made this finding clear: two of the four consultants whom I interviewed had been displaced from their prior professional positions and, while unemployed, had worked to transform themselves from outplacement candidates into outplacement consultants. Although the consultants at the for-profit provider—including Lesley, Cora, and Ethan—dissuaded their own candidates from attempting career changes, two of the three consultants had done so themselves. Cora and Ethan explained during their interviews that, after they had completed their outplacement training programs, they took full-time consultancy positions with the same outplacement provider with which they had been candidates.

Cora's and Ethan's transformations from candidates into consultants resulted in part from their outplacement provider's transformation of its expected professional qualifications for its consultants as expert practitioners. Ethan acknowledged this

point; he said that the for-profit provider where he and Cora had worked at the time of their interviews in April and May 2014 used to hire consultants holding PhDs in organizational development. More recently, though, it had begun hiring former managers and executives—especially ones who had lost their jobs, because they could better relate to candidates’ experiences of unemployment.

The result was a “mutually constitutive” (Beach 111; Feldman and Orlikowski 1241; Fenwick 52) transformation of outplacement: while outplacement providers’ executives changed their expectations regarding the qualifications of the professionals whom they sought to hire as consultants, Cora and Ethan as outplacement candidates identified and pursued work in outplacement consultancy as a professional objective that suited them. They transformed their own outplacement participation from job-finding to entry into what was for them a new stage in their professional careers.

Following Social Conventions of Professional Work in Outplacement

Cora and Ethan said that their experiences in their prior industries—HR and marketing and sales, respectively—affected ideologically their interactions with the outplacement candidates with whom they worked. Candidates who interacted with them followed the social conventions of professional work; for example, because Cora and Ethan had held managerial, supervisory, and executive positions, candidates treated these consultants variously as work colleagues, peers, mentors, and supervisors. Because they were not, to reiterate Ethan’s phrasing, “PhDs in organizational development,” but were, instead, former outplacement candidates who had secured positions as outplacement consultants, Cora and Ethan could trade on their prior career experiences as examples of “layperson knowledge” (Geisler 72) that

contrasted with the “arcane knowledge” (Geisler 53) of hiring and recruitment that “PhDs in organizational development” might possess. Cora and Ethan could help candidates from their positions as outplacement experts with “arcane knowledge” of outplacement and job-finding that “goes beyond everyday understanding” (Geisler 53). They could also use their “layperson knowledge” as former outplacement candidates to help their candidates as fellow out-of-work people. The candidates whom they helped likely regarded Cora and Ethan as experts who, paradoxically, were just like them.

As Cora and Ethan learned how to play the social roles of outplacement consultant and outplacement candidate, their career experiences became implicit, ideological tools that enabled them to relate to their candidates differently depending on whether the candidates sought, for example, expertise, mentorship, or leadership. Cora and Ethan could transform into colleagues, mentors, or supervisors depending on their perception of candidates’ needs. Furthermore, Cora’s and Ethan’s hybrid roles as candidate-consultants contrasted strikingly with their advocacy for the dominant curricular objective of career-continuity in outplacement. Even though they advised candidates to pursue work in jobs and industries comparable to their prior positions, Cora and Ethan had transformed themselves into outplacement consultants, electing thereby not to follow the career-continuity recommendation that they made to their own candidates.

Candidates’ Reconfiguration: A Dynamic, Ongoing Activity

Candidates participated in outplacement to support their own objectives, not just to become passive recipients of consultants’ pedagogical goals. For the

candidates whom I interviewed, including Mario, Lea, and Ileana, transformation was an ongoing, dynamic activity in which all three candidates engaged differently. For Mario, transformation unfolded daily and weekly as he reconfigured himself and his writing continually in response to the range of social interactions that recruiters and other hiring personnel levied upon him. As he and I worked to schedule his interview, for example, Mario noted that any telephone calls from recruiters that he might receive could require him reschedule his interview. His last-minute plan—which he did not end up carrying out—to participate in a job fair with a neighbor from his community also affected his existing job-search plans during the week of his interview.

As a long-term unemployed candidate, Mario made clear that he sought a new job that aligned closely, but not exactly, with his prior occupation as a systems analyst. He indicated interest in finding work in computer helpdesk support. For Mario, transformation signified his continual adjustment to the employers and employment opportunities that he encountered during his participation in job fairs and other professional interactions. Mario's experience suggests a downside to the idea of transformation: in their desires for work, candidates' adaptations to divergent employers' needs can dilute the "Core Message[s]" (Pierson 139) that they have worked so hard to compose.

Extroversion, Improvisation, and Rehearsal in Formal Job Interviews

Lea said that she needed further preparation for the job interviews that she was successful in arranging. Although she described herself as being extroverted, she claimed that she stumbled during her most recent job interview in answering a

question involving classified aspects of her work. Lea held a Top Secret/Sensitive Compartmented Information (TS/SCI) security clearance, but she found that holding this credential complicated her ability to participate effectively in the social dimension of formal job interviewing, whose conventions required job applicants' openness in answering interviewers' questions. Describing herself as an extrovert, Lea said that she relied on her ability to interact spontaneously with her interviewers, improvising her answers to their questions rather than planning for interview questions by writing down and rehearsing her answers before an interview. Rather than writing and rehearsal, she relied on her "extroverted" interpersonal acumen and her verbal command of her career narrative in formal job interviews.

As Lea put it, she could explain to an interviewer precisely how she had solved a problem in her work because "I [am the one who] solved the problem." Lea recognized, however, that this strategy had gotten her into trouble in her most recent formal job interview. Without first writing about and reflecting on her answers to questions pertaining to her top-secret work, she was unable to tell her most recent interviewer, in Pierson's words, "accomplishment stories"—i.e., "the everyday stories of how you've done particular parts of your job well, or solved problems that came up, or how you went the extra mile on something"—(141) that explained the aspects of her classified work that she could discuss. For Lea, transformation entailed her recognition of how important it was to increase her own reflectiveness on her professional experiences in preparation for her job interviews and, conversely, to reduce her reliance on "extroversion" through her tendency to participate in interviews engagingly but with minimal preparation.

Outplacement as Professional Work

In Ileana's case, transformation was a steady, ongoing project. She sought to add coaching qualifications to her professional credentials. Ileana had identified two prominent coaching organizations and pursued training and certification with them as her financial circumstances permitted. She recognized that her transformation required new forms of professional training. By pursuing certifications with these coaching organizations—and by demonstrating that she understood and sought to join the professional-development discourse communities of the coaching field—Ileana sought to qualify as a coach. Ileana's was not merely a dream of career change; rather, she supported her career-change objective by seeking the appropriate credentials for professional work in the coaching industry.

Outplacement as "Career Management"

Outplacement is an emergent site of social participation that supports, but only to an extent, some candidates' idealized objectives of transformation. Outplacement practitioners seek to transform outplacement's focus from supporting displaced professional workers to providing "career management" services for all professionals. Pickman discusses the suggestion that outplacement can be a provider of "career management" services (*Special xi*) that transform candidates into careerism experts. As Pickman—and Meyer and Shadle—point out, a professional organization for outplacement consultants, the International Association of Outplacement Professionals, changed its name in 1994 to become the International Association of Career Management Professionals (Pickman, *Special xi*; Meyer and Shadle xix). Pickman explains this name change as follows:

outplacement professionals have come to recognize that their skills and expertise are of value not only to those corporate employees whose jobs have already been eliminated, but [also] to those individuals who remain within their organizations. Such individuals, the “survivors[,]” as they have come to be known, also need assistance to manage their careers more effectively. (*Special xi*)

Pickman addresses outplacement providers’ objective of transforming outplacement’s services into “career management” (*Special xi*) initiatives to accommodate professional constituencies beyond the population of outplacement candidates.

Outplacement as an Essential Component of Human Resources Practice

Like Pickman and Meyer and Shadle, Doherty suggests that outplacement has a place in the transformative contexts of professional employment. Doherty argues that outplacement has been transformed from an ad hoc program to an essential component of HR practice. As she writes, “Although the initial use of outplacement appeared to be somewhat reactive in nature, the heightened credibility and proliferation in its use as a tool in the change management process raised it to strategic status” (348). Doherty argues for outplacement’s continued presence in HR practitioners’ toolkits because worker displacement has become standard practice among employers (348); this, in turn, has forced displaced workers to contend with unemployment, job-finding, and the need to make transformative changes to their careers.

Doherty describes the complex social relationship between employers, displaced workers, and retained workers: “Managing the potential tensions at the

interface between the organisation and its employees is an unceasing challenge, owing to the extensive nature of redundancy but increasingly because of the continually changing nature of the employment relationship[,] which is affected by, among many other factors, the use of redundancy tactics” (349). Doherty claims in this context of continual change, “the HR function is always in transition as it has to address fundamental people dilemmas for which there are no resolutions” (350). Doherty characterizes outplacement as “normative good practice” (350), a consistent response to employment as a complex, emergent social achievement involving the strategic retention of some workers and the dismissal of others.

Continual Changes to Hiring and Recruitment as Justification for Outplacement

Echoing Doherty’s argument, outplacement providers invoke continual change to hiring and recruitment practices as justification for the services that they offer to candidates. As Ann, the state government outplacement training center’s director, put it during her interview, “There’s no roadmap in this world of work.” With sufficient resources of expertise, place, space, and time, outplacement programs help candidates understand how changes in hiring and professional work force changes in professionals’ social participation in these rhetorical contexts.

Outplacement candidates’ challenge is understanding the relationship between outplacement practitioners’ teachings and their own “career management” objectives. Without this understanding, candidates’ participation in outplacement may reinforce what human development, psychology, education, and women’s studies scholars Mary Field Belenky et al. call “separate knowing” (103). From the perspective of separate knowing, outplacement becomes a course that posits “the way They [i.e.,

outplacement consultants] want you to think” and that directs candidates “to learn how to do it [i.e., to learn how to think in that way]” (Belenky et al. 103). The term “separate knowing” signifies each candidate’s struggle—perceived as individual, separate, and unique—through unemployment and toward reemployment. Belenky et al. contrast this view of learning with “*constructed knowledge*” (134). Among the women whom Belenky et al. interviewed for their study, constructed knowledge “began as an effort to reclaim the self by attempting to *integrate* knowledge that they felt intuitively was personally important with knowledge they had learned from others” (134). A transformative view of outplacement requires candidates to learn its fundamental teachings and, in collaboration with the consultants and each other, to “Design [sic]” (Cope and Kalantzis 20) anew the relationship between collaborative learning and their individual objectives in outplacement.

Transformation and Genre Work in Outplacement

Candidates’ Ideal Job-Finding Expertise: Telling Inter-Contextual Stories

Candidates begin thinking like experts when they understand that job-search writing takes the “recognizable forms” (Bazerman, “Writing” 35) of the résumé and other, less-familiar forms of writing. When candidates view writing as an artifact—and an “*activity*” and “a subject of study” (Wardle and Adler-Kassner 15)—they are better able to use writing as a tool for improving their intra- and interpersonal acumen. Gaining this transformative perspective of writing helps them to consider what kinds of work will be the most meaningful to them. Such understanding may help candidates transform into people who can relate stories of their workplace

experiences, qualifications, and objectives in writing and speech across genres and contexts.

This transformative ability reinforces Ball and Charlton's idea that rather than being "a single mode of communication," writing is "multimodal" and "performative": an "activity that takes place within any number of genres . . . and disciplines" (43). Considering the threshold concept that writing is multimodal in relation to the topic of transformation in outplacement shows why compositional forms made widely available to the public—for example, personal computer and webcam technologies that employers and job applicants use for "video interviewing" (Toldi 20)—become essential components of job-search practice. Changing composition and communication technologies transform hiring and recruitment practices. In turn, job-search competition favors applicants who are the most adept at using compositional technologies that make easier the jobs of hiring and recruitment personnel.

Candidates Assess Their Own Multimodal Interview Performances

Among the consultants whom I interviewed at the for-profit outplacement provider, Lesley and Cora explained that the new communications technologies their employer had incorporated into its training program, including a multimedia mock-interviewing tool, were also being adopted by some employers for screening their job applicants. During her interview, Cora demonstrated the multimedia mock-interviewing tool to me in her firm's office suite. At a computer workstation set up for candidates' use, she modeled the use of this technology, which was programmed to ask candidates randomized interview questions and to record their responses in

audiovisual files—after providing them with a three-second pause to prepare to deliver their answers. The application recorded the candidate’s answer in an audiovisual file; then, on completion of the mock interview, the tool emailed the file to an outplacement consultant for evaluation.

When I asked her to describe how she assessed candidates’ multimodal compositions, Cora replied that she asks the candidates to judge the quality of their own answers. This reflective assessment activity requires candidates both to produce multimodal compositions and to perform their own evaluations of their persuasive delivery, including their word choices, elocution, and nonverbal interpersonal acumen. Cora’s understanding of assessment as candidates’ responsibility invites a transformative view of what writing studies scholar Yancey, in her discussion of assessment in writing studies, calls “consequential validity”—a term that, in Yancey’s view, “refers to the power of an assessment to help the person tested learn” (170; cf. O’Neill, “Threshold” 161). Outplacement consultants help candidates transform themselves into “reflective practitioner[s]” (Schön 295) by demanding candidates’ investment in their own composition and assessment practices.

Outplacement practitioners’ role in assisting outplacement candidates with multimodal interviewing practices such as the one that Cora demonstrated is vital. For example, HR practitioner Nicole L. Toldi, who reviews the use of “video interviewing” technologies, reports that video interviewing may be used in “live” (i.e., synchronous) and “nonlive” (i.e., “asynchronous”) contexts (20). She contrasts video interviewing with “videoconferencing,” and she suggests that the former uses

“webcams and personal computers instead of expensive videoconferencing equipment” (20).

Toldi addresses what, from the perspective of writing studies, could be construed as the video interviewing genre’s relatively asocial qualities as contrasted with the two-way, synchronous communication practices of the formal job interview genre. As Toldi explains, “A nonlive interview is basically a recording of a candidate answering interview questions. The candidate is only able to give information due to the asynchronous nature of a nonlive video interview”; he or she is “unable ask the interviewer questions” or “receive other information from the employer. The interview is recorded at one point in time and is reviewed by the interviewer(s) at another point in time. Nonlive video interviewing is typically used as an initial assessment in the . . . [hiring] process” (20).

Job Applicants’ Multimodal Compositions as Hiring Specialists’ Screening Tools

Toldi’s description suggests that asynchronous video interviewing is effective as a form of applicant screening. She addresses two of job applicants’ main rhetorical objectives for their interactions with employers. First, she reports that “applicants want the interviewer to learn more about them than what is stated in their résumés” (24); second, she suggests that applicants “also [want to] ask the employer questions in order to find out whether the organization will be a good fit for them” (24). While asynchronous video interviewing allows job applicants to accomplish the first objective, it does not permit them to achieve the second objective. Job applicants can ask questions, however, if they are granted an audience with hiring personnel in the form of a formal job interview.

Despite the constraints of employers' use of asynchronous video interviewing as an applicant screening tool, Toldi finds in her study of this technology that applicants for jobs advertised by employers who utilized video interviewing technology "were not restricted in their ability to communicate their interest in the job and the organization; their knowledge, skills, and abilities; and any other additional information they wanted communicate the interviewer"; she indicates that many of the applicants whom she studied "favored video interviewing" (24). Toldi addresses the importance of teaching job applicants how to use video interviewing technology; as she argues, "Applicants need to fully understand not only how video interviewing works from a technical perspective, but also how it fits into the selection process" (25).

In their discussion of the "video résumé as a screening tool," marketing scholars Katie J. Kemp et al. address this matter. They cite "the emerging trend of" candidates' composition of "video résumés in the job application process" (84-85). They suggest, "A brief introductory video résumé can and should be seen as a natural complement to portfolio materials and [be] used in conjunction with a traditional paper résumé" (86). While, in Kemp et al.'s view, video résumés give job applicants who compose them "a competitive edge" (85), such multimodal compositions are likely to become central elements of job applicants' promotional activities and hiring specialists' gatekeeping efforts.

Based on her study of job applicants' reactions to their use of video-interviewing technologies, Toldi concludes that "when candidates feel a [hiring and recruitment] process is procedurally fair and . . . gives them the ability to

communicate information, they will favor its use” (26). Audiovisual interviewing applications are burgeoning as mock-interviewing technologies in outplacement and formal job-interviewing technologies in hiring and recruitment. This finding shows how outplacement curriculum writers and practitioners must transform outplacement curricula continually to reflect changing hiring and recruitment philosophies, practices, and tools.

Multimodal Participation in Outplacement through Distance-Learning Technologies

While outplacement consultant Cora demonstrated her employer’s multimodal interview technology, she also explained that outplacement providers are expanding their use of videoconferencing and video interviewing tools to reach outplacement candidates more flexibly in environments beyond the outplacement provider’s physical office location. Outplacement consultants teach candidates how to use these multimodal-composition technologies to achieve their own persuasive ends. Since asynchronous video interviewing may not give candidates assessments of their video interview performances, candidates’ ability to complete their own assessments becomes especially important. Such reflective assessment practices possess “consequential validity” (Yancey 170; O’Neill, “Threshold” 161) because they help candidates learn how to evaluate, and improve on, their multimodal performances through video interviewing and other multimodal composition technologies that employers use in their hiring and recruitment activities.

Cohesion, Fracture, and Fragmentation of Candidates' Experiential Narratives

Rigorous constraints on outplacement candidates' writing in the résumé genre meant that their stories of their ongoing career transformations had tenuous value for their job-search work. For example, during the state-government outplacement training center's two-day program, Ed, a consultant who was a Certified Professional Résumé Writer, informed the candidates in the cohort that they should include only their most recent ten to fifteen years of professional experience on their résumés. However, Ed also discussed notable exceptions to this rule. For instance, he explained that one of his former candidates had been a Rhodes scholarship finalist, while another had played on another country's Olympic soccer team. Ed told the candidates that, in such cases, they should include this noteworthy information on their résumés. Despite hearing this advice, however, the candidates in the cohort remained uncertain about the criteria for determining the noteworthiness of their own career experiences. For example, one candidate told the group that he had been a police officer until 1995 and was unsure whether he should include that credential on his résumé, because it fell outside the ten- to fifteen-year date range for the résumé.

Although Ed told this candidate to list his experience as a former police officer on his résumé, the interchange between Ed and this candidate shows that hiring and recruitment processes, which focus on relatively narrow chronological segments of candidates' professional experiences, fragment candidates' career narratives and make candidates unsure of their own career stories' cohesive value. This was especially troublesome for experienced candidates whose careers spanned thirty years or more.

This finding shows that the résumé genre favors candidates with consistent, relevant experience across the most recent ten to fifteen years of their careers. However, many experienced candidates' career narratives spanned considerably longer time periods. Because the outplacement training program focused on candidates' résumé writing at the expense of their reflective writing in other genres—for example, those of life writing—the program was itself complicit in fracturing candidates' career narratives. It was difficult for the candidates to use their résumés to explain to outplacement consultants how they had gained experience, grown, and developed—transformed—during their careers. These limitations of the résumé genre likely extended to candidates' interactions with hiring personnel in formal job interviews.

Candidates Learn by Telling Their Stories

Transformation in outplacement suggests that candidates can both learn from the stories they tell and use those stories to teach others about themselves. Behavior and health science scholars Hallqvist and Hydén address the importance of “narration as a practice through which people negotiate meanings and make claims about their life history” (“Work” 1). Referencing “stories about work transitions told by people who have been made redundant and are participating in outplacement services,” the authors discuss “biographical learning by using and developing a narrative approach that specifically focuses on the role of self-reflexive narration”; they argue that “biography could . . . be seen as the outcome of the learning process when the focus is on new knowledge that is produced,” and they view the purpose of “biographical

learning” as “reclaiming and reconsidering the past to cope with the challenges of the present” (“Work” 2).

Hallqvist and Hydén “use the notion of evaluation present in narrative theory . . . to examine evaluative moments in people’s biographical accounts, in order to further explore and understand the learning potential in biographical storytelling” (“Work” 3). In its idealized form, outplacement engages candidates in resolving the problem of their unemployment by reflecting on their career narratives and finding new opportunities to perform meaningful work.

Through interviews with outplacement candidates, Hallqvist and Hydén distinguished between candidates who had learned from the stories they told and candidates who had not (“Work” 14). They found that while two candidates “continually reflected on themselves in relation to the event of their job loss,” for a third candidate, “any reevaluation of what happened is not an option for her[;] rather[,] she considers the evaluation made as continuously valid. Thus, she does not seem to learn very much from her storytelling. The learning potential in [the two other candidates’] rhetorical strategies seems to be greater” (“Work” 14). The authors conclude,

The variation in evaluative strategies we have highlighted suggest that there are different kinds of reflexive efforts, which, in turn, are related to different modes of biographical learning. This variation is not only found between individuals but also ‘within’ individuals[;] that is, one individual may use a variety of strategies. . . . Thus, it should not be considered a competence that people either do or do not possess,

residing within an individual; rather[,] it is related to situations: time, space, audience, and the position in the overall narrative. (“Work” 15)

Hallqvist and Hydén’s findings (“Work”) suggest that the challenge for outplacement practitioners is to help candidates learn from their own stories. This is a genre-related concern because, from the perspective of outplacement’s idealized curricular objective of transformation, there would be sufficient resources of expertise, place, space, and time available in outplacement for consultants to help candidates compose in “recognizable forms” (Bazerman, “Writing” 35) beyond the dominant genre of the résumé.

The Résumé’s Relative Importance

Outplacement candidates face one writing challenge above all others in terms of their genre work as they search for new jobs: the fallacy of gauging writing’s importance in terms solely of dominant job-search genres. For example, candidates must transcend the idea that their job-search writing work begins and ends with their composition of their résumés. While the increasing prevalence of Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) makes it appear that the résumé is an essential element of candidates’ applications for new positions, this is true only when candidates participate in what outplacement practitioners call “reactive” job-search work.

As for-profit outplacement consultant Ethan explained during his interview, candidates “do not need a résumé to get a job.” In saying this, he meant that, for candidates who engage in what outplacement practitioners call “proactive” job-search work, the résumé is relatively incidental to their abilities to interact with networking and informational interviewing contacts in informal job-search contexts and with

hiring personnel in formal job-interview settings. The résumé's relative, not absolute, importance in outplacement candidates' proactive job-search work should not suggest that writing itself is unimportant. Candidates who rely on improvisation—i.e., on unrehearsed, unscripted interactions with their job-search audiences—may find themselves unprepared for informal and formal interpersonal interactions, including networking and job interviewing.

Writing in Outplacement: The Résumé or “Nothing at All”?

Dominant job-search genres occupy hegemonic positions in the activity systems of outplacement and hiring and recruitment. As writing and rhetoric scholar Collin Brooke and professional writing scholar Jeffrey T. Grabill caution, “while writing technologies participate in the production of new and changing rhetorical contexts[,] . . . it has become difficult to separate the scene of writing from the tools we use to produce it” (33). Genre work in outplacement echoes English scholar David Fleming's assertion that because rhetoric has been understood as “a transdisciplinary hermeneutic method whose object of analysis, persuasion, was located everywhere and in everything[,] . . . rhetorical knowledge often has been taken to be either everything imaginable or nothing at all” (“Becoming” 93-94). The same claim can be made of outplacement consultants' and candidates' genre work: writing work in outplacement is the production of dominant job-search texts like the résumé or “nothing at all.”

In the latter instance, writing becomes something with which outplacement constituents may feel that they need not be concerned from the perspective of candidates' job-search work. Rather than engaging in writing as “an *activity*” and “a

subject of study” (Wardle and Adler-Kassner 15)—a phrase suggesting, counterintuitively, that writing transcends the genres in and through which it emerges—outplacement consultants and candidates collaborate to write a résumé, write for ATSs, write epistolary correspondence such as job application letters, and so forth. This idea echoes writing scholar Roozen’s description of the common sense view of writing work as artifact-oriented. As Roozen puts it, “We say, ‘I am writing an email’ or ‘I am writing a note,’ suggesting that we are composing alone and with complete autonomy, when in fact, writing can never be anything but a social and rhetorical act, connecting us to other people across time and space in an attempt to respond adequately to the needs of an audience” (18).

The central problem in terms of writing work in outplacement, then, is to help candidates understand the paradoxical lesson that while writing emerges in and through genres, writing remains essential, “social[ly] and rhetorical[ly]” speaking, even as candidates work to develop written and spoken narratives that appear to cut across genres or transcend them altogether. By thinking of writing as “an activity and a subject of study,” rather than as certain “recognizable forms” or artifacts of writing that may seem more or less important than others, outplacement’s constituents may be better-prepared to engage in writing as it is understood in Adler-Kassner and Wardle’s “transformative” (2) sense.

Transformation and Identity in Outplacement

From Outplacement Candidate to Job Applicant to “Landed” Candidate

Outplacement candidates are transformed when they regard themselves as performing multiple professional “identities” in numerous professional “ideologies” (Scott 48). As experts in their fields, they are also members of professional organizations and communities whose participants have diverse allegiances to other areas of expertise and “communities of practice” (Wenger 6). Meaningful work is the product of professionals’ collaborative performances of their identities in these ideological communities. Candidates’ transformations entail their transformed understanding of outplacement itself: writing in outplacement helps candidates focus on their own identities as professionals, confirming English scholar Estrem’s observations that it is “through writing that disciplines . . . are both enacted and encountered by writers—first as students, and then as professionals throughout their careers” and that “writing is not merely a matter of recording one’s research or thoughts, but is in fact a process linked to the development of new, professional identities” (“Disciplinary” 56). For the consultants whom I interviewed, including Lesley, Cora, Ethan, and Ann, transformation from the outplacement-candidate and job-applicant identities to the “landed” candidate identity reflected candidates’ success in landing comparable positions or their accomplishment of significant occupational changes, including altering the jobs—and, possibly, the industries—in which they worked.

She “Completely Remade” Her Experience and Her Career

Lesley gave the example of two candidates who made significant career changes. The first used letter-writing land a new job in a position equivalent to her previous one but in a new industry. Lesley described writing ability as contributing to this candidate’s success. She described the candidate’s writing ability as exceptional, claiming that only “one in five-hundred” candidates possessed her level of writing acumen. Through the job application letters that the candidate composed, she gained an audience with “several CEOs,” which led to her success in being hired. This example demonstrates the importance of writing ability beyond the résumé for candidates’ attainment of access to managerial-and executive-level personnel who can make hiring decisions. Writing was central to this candidate’s “landing” of a new professional position.

The second example that Lesley gave was of a candidate who had lost her job as an aerospace engineer. During that candidate’s participation in outplacement, she had expressed her dissatisfaction with her work in the aerospace engineering profession and had said that she wished to change careers to become a nurse. Lesley said that the candidate returned to school, earned a nursing degree, and gained a nursing job. Lesley explained that the candidate “completely remade” her experience and her career by pursuing the credentials necessary to work in an altogether new job and industry.

Both candidates accomplished what Lesley considered significant career changes. The first candidate gained reemployment partly through her exceptional epistolary ability. The second accomplished a radical career transformation by

earning professional credentials in a fundamentally different field from that of her prior occupation. Examples like these show that candidates must transform themselves whether they pursue career continuity or career change. Consultants encourage all candidates to use epistolary writing to secure interpersonal interactions with networking and hiring contacts, and they advise all candidates to keep their professional credentials up-to-date. Even to remain qualified as professionals in their existing fields, consultants suggest, candidates must retrain and re-skill continually. In for-profit outplacement consultant Cora's words, candidates should always "network and nurture" their careers by working continually to renew their professional identities. This perspective suggests that outplacement practitioners' teachings are important regardless of candidates' employment statuses or their choices for their careers' future directions.

They "Lost Their Jobs"? Outplacement Candidates Who Resigned

Engaging with the topic of identity and ideology in relation to candidates' transformative work in outplacement complicates a key assumption on which outplacement is based. This is the assumption that candidates participate in outplacement because they were dismissed from their previous employers involuntarily. Having participated in outplacement training as part of a voluntary separation package from my employer, I asked for-profit consultant Lesley during her interview whether other candidates may have left their employers voluntarily. Her response was that the candidates with whom she worked had "lost their jobs" (i.e., had been displaced involuntarily) and were participating in outplacement for that reason alone. During the two-day outplacement program at the state government-

operated training center, however, two male candidates explained that they were participating in the program after resigning from their positions as teachers. The younger of the two had resigned after seven years in a local city school district, while the older candidate, who had worked in a local county school system, had left after twenty-two years of service.

Career Change: Civic Service as “Grounds for Sainthood”

These candidates told their stories during a segment of the training program that was oriented to the topic of participation in formal job interviews. The candidates were concerned because they did not know how to tell the stories of their resignations to hiring personnel while also conveying a positive ethos during their interviews. The state-government outplacement center’s director, Ann, advised the candidates to tell their stories factually, explain they had devoted themselves to teaching for many years and had sought to make career changes after performing this work. She also told the two candidates to be silent once they had told their stories, which would encourage their interviewers implicitly to fill in the silence with either a new thought or another direction for the interview.

The other candidates in the cohort voiced admiration of and sympathy for both candidates for having worked as teachers. Ann, too, opined that working as a teacher for multiple years was “grounds for sainthood.” This interaction is important as far as transformation is concerned because it suggests that participation in certain forms of employment, such as public-school teaching—which Ann as the director and the other candidates regarded as both a profession and a civic service—authorized people in those professions to pursue alternative careers. Candidates’ express desire for

transformation through alternative employment after a period of loyal service to an employer was a potentially powerful argument for career change that they could make in their job-finding work.

Hiring as Humanistic: “People Hire People”

For outplacement candidates, making career changes requires a change of identity. Although interpersonal fit is essential for the attainment of a new job—as Pierson puts it, “people hire people” (196)—hiring and professional work are not equivocal realms in which professionals are free to inhabit any identity they choose. Employment scholar Marilyn Clarke, for example, discusses the “boundaryless career”—which she contends is popular in career management discourse—in relation to candidates’ outplacement experiences (35). As she argues, “The expectation of a linear, hierarchical career enacted in a single organisation has been replaced by the expectation of multiple careers enacted across a range of organisations and industry sectors” (34-35). Clarke contends, “The boundaryless career is based on two underlying assumptions, first that individuals should take . . . a more proactive and flexible approach to careers, and second, [that] movement between jobs and organisations is not only desirable but also possible” (35-36).

Loyalty to “Career or Profession” Rather than to Employers

The boundaryless career entails a reconfiguration of professional workers’ identities as they distinguish their individual career development from employers’ demands of their workforces. In Clarke’s words, “boundaryless careers incorporate flexibility, loyalty to the individual’s career or profession rather than to the

organisation[,] and involve both lateral and vertical progression” (37). Through empirical research conducted with “a group of mid-level to senior managers in career transition following redundancy” who participated in outplacement (39), Clarke determines that conceptions of the boundaryless career do not align with candidates’ experiences. For the candidates whom she interviews,

any perception of being in control of a psychologically boundaryless career was now being challenged by the reality of job loss. That is, even with seemingly marketable skills and experience[,] they were finding physical boundarylessness, or movement across organisation, industry[,] and professional boundaries, was more difficult to achieve than they had anticipated. (56)

Clarke finds that the candidates’ “career transitions were also hampered by a range of invisible barriers associated with individual characteristics, such as career history, age, skills, experience, qualifications, and networks” (56). Clarke concludes that “barriers to career transition are faced by those in low level jobs or with poor skills, qualifications[,] and experience[,] and by those with seemingly highly sought after and highly transferable skills” (60).

I echo Clarke’s finding that the “boundaryless” career idea, while compelling, does not reflect outplacement candidates’ lived experiences. Candidates such as the former public-school teachers who desired to career changes but who expressed uncertainty regarding the appropriate rhetorical strategy to invoke to accomplish career changes reinforced outplacement consultants’ claim that candidates’ best opportunities for finding new work would emerge in the professional realm of their

existing occupations. Outplacement candidates could change career directions by articulating connections between their career experiences, employers' needs, the job specifications of available positions, and—in the case of the two former teachers—by invoking their prior teaching roles as hybrid civic-professional identities from which they had earned the opportunity to depart.

“Landed” Candidates Explore Their New Employers’ Cultural Norms

Despite the limitations of the “boundaryless career” that Clarke notes, outplacement consultants expect that candidates will change through their outplacement work. As the Right Management training manual, *Marketing Your Talents* points out, practitioners “view career transition, learning, and growth as the norm” (3). The Lee Hecht Harrison training manual, *Managing Your Search Project*, informs candidates, “In addition to the information and techniques you will learn to make this transition, you will learn career management skills you can use throughout your career” (A-3). Candidates are expected to see outplacement as an educational tool that orients them to the persuasive conditions under which they need to interact with others through writing and speech as they work to secure new employment.

Outplacement consultants help candidates to see how hiring and recruitment happen, and outplacement shows candidates that hiring and recruitment are complementary and contiguous with professional participation in paid work. This means that although consultants may advocate candidates' pursuit of career continuity, outplacement's teachings are relevant not only to candidates who seek career continuity, but also to those who seek career change. From this perspective, outplacement is valuable training for all professionals.

Managing Your Search Project discusses the relationship between candidates' job searches and their success in "landing" new jobs. The manual gives landed candidates recommendations for "assimilat[ing] into the[ir] new organization[s]" (M-62). The manual informs candidates who have been hired successfully, "You probably gained an impression of the [employer's organizational] culture during your [job-finding] research and interview activities. Now is the time to refine what you know" (M-62). The manual suggests that candidates who are new hires should observe the employer's "organizational culture" and look for behaviors that are "not usually written down anywhere" (M-62). Candidates must "identify the cultural norms and styles of the organization, your manager, peers[,] and direct reports. This is a critical step in understanding the similarities and avoiding potential mismatches between your style and the company's culture" (M-62). The skills that outplacement practitioners teach are meant to apply to candidates in all professions, and they are meant to help the candidates perform effectively as outplacement candidates, job applicants, and "landed" candidates.

Outplacement's Role in the Employment Activity System

The idea that transformation in outplacement involves consultants' training of candidates to think as they do invokes the importance of inclusive consideration of how outplacement practitioners—including curriculum writers, executives, consultants, and other constituents—contemplate outplacement's role in the larger activity system of hiring and recruitment and the still-larger milieu of professionalism and compensation for employment understood in the context of one's career. The transformative view of outplacement suggests that its constituents are changed

through their interactions with each other. Philosophically and sociomaterially speaking, this means that outplacement reaches productively into numerous academic, civic, personal, and professional contexts.

Outplacement as an Ongoing Collaboration

Such a view challenges and expands conceptions of outplacement as an activity system. Engeström argues, “The identification of contradictions in an activity system helps practitioners and administrators to focus their efforts on the root causes of problems” (966). In other words, scrutinizing competing objectives in an activity system can help its constituents learn how to resolve its contradictions. Engeström identifies “co-configuration,” “knotworking,” and “temporary groups” as “emerging new types of work organization” that respond to changing means of interaction for accomplishing objectives (972, 973). Outplacement has organizational characteristics that correspond to these entities.

For example, “co-configuration” is relevant to outplacement because it situates “product[s],” “service[s],” organizations, and “customer[s]” within larger communities that are oriented toward supply and demand while emphasizing “mutual learning from interactions between the parties involved” (973). Outplacement shares characteristics of “temporary groups” (“one-time formations created for the purpose of completing a task with a clear deadline”) and “knotworking” interactions: “collaborative performance[s] between otherwise loosely connected actors and activity systems” that are “formed, dissolved, and re-formed as the object is co-configured time and again, typically with no clear deadline or fixed end point” (972, 973). While constituents interact in outplacement to help candidates gain

reemployment, outplacement is also an ongoing collaboration: candidates participate to support their own objectives, and practitioners transform outplacement continually to reflect changing conditions of employment, hiring, and recruitment.

Transformation drives changes in outplacement curricula and outplacement constituents' lives.

Transformation and Learning in Outplacement

Candidates' Main Job-Finding Task: "Informational Interviewing"

Outplacement consultants realize that candidates have "more to learn" about writing in the "activity system" (Engeström 964) of job-search work. For consultants and candidates in outplacement, a transformative understanding of writing involves the knowledge that writing as "an *activity*" and "a subject of study" (Wardle and Adler-Kassner 15) involves and transcends matters of the genres in and through which writing emerges. For example, during her interview, outplacement consultant Lesley discussed the relationship between two writing genres: the résumé and the networking brief.

To be sure, outplacement practitioners tell candidates that job-search work involves answering published job advertisements and waiting to be called in for formal job interviews. More importantly, though, they tell candidates to interact proactively with potentially influential job-search contacts outside the formal job-interview context. Lesley described this work as "informational interviewing": she expected her candidates to meet with contacts informally to explain their credentials and request information about the contact's experience in the industries and organizations where

the candidate was interested in finding employment. The candidate's objective was to gain information rather than to request a job.

The "Networking Brief": An "Anti-Résumé"

Lesley's discussion of the informational interviewing activity is important for candidates' writing work in outplacement. This is because the résumé—the dominant written job-search genre—is unsuited to the "typified rhetorical actions" that signify the "recurrent situations" (Miller, "Genre" 159) of candidates' informational interviewing interactions. Lesley told her candidates to participate in two to three informational interviews per week during their job searches. She explained that she and the firm's other outplacement consultants recognized the résumé's unsuitability for the informational interview context. The outplacement practitioners at her employer therefore assigned candidates to write what she called a "networking brief," which she also described as an "anti-résumé." Lesley showed me examples of two outplacement candidates' drafts of their networking briefs.

Although it contained similar information to the résumé and accomplished a similar rhetorical objective—i.e., connecting candidates' professional qualifications and objectives to opportunities that they sought in professional industries and organizations—the networking brief's genre conventions departed from the résumé's. For example, in terms of visual design, unlike artifacts in the résumé genre, the two candidates' networking briefs were composed in a two- to three-column, landscape layout, rather than in the résumé's typical single-column, portrait orientation. Because the example networking briefs that Lesley showed me did not need revision for reading by ATs, since the candidates would not be submitting them in response to

job postings, these texts could have high “multimodal” (Ball and Charlton 43) production qualities, including integrated images, graphics, and text.

Each of the example networking briefs included a small profile photo of the candidate in its top left-hand corner. While one of the main concerns regarding the inclusion of a profile photo in a résumé is that hiring personnel may judge applicants based on their physical appearances, the networking brief’s purpose was for candidates to circulate them during interpersonal interactions outside résumé-screening and formal job-interviewing contexts. Reflecting the idea in genre studies of “‘not’ talk” (Reiff and Bawarshi 325)—referred to also as “not talk” (Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 14)—Lesley characterized the networking brief in terms of what it was not: she described it as an “extended business card” and not a résumé. As Reiff and Bawarshi suggest, “‘not’ talk” is an example of people referring to “written work (and writing process) by explaining what genres it is not” (325).

The networking brief was a textual artifact that contained essential information about the candidate that the candidate could circulate among informational interviewing contacts without, as Lesley put it, “pushing résumés”—i.e., without circulating résumés as examples of a writing genre signifying job-finding as its main rhetorical purpose. The networking brief genre transcends the job-search objective and emphasizes connection and “networking” interactions with informational interviewing contacts. It reorients the object of candidates’ and networking contacts’ rhetorical interactions. If both parties understand that interpersonal connection and mutual learning—not the candidate’s request for employment—is the interaction’s object, then both constituents can interact

successfully. If employment is the object, however, then both constituents may see the interaction as a failure if the networking contact is unable to make an employment offer. The networking brief genre removes employment offers as signifiers of success or failure because, in circulating networking briefs, candidates are engaging in “networking” interactions, not requests for employment.

Job-Finding: “Nothing but Rejection,” Followed by “Acceptance”

For outplacement candidates, success in the form of new professional employment is an atypical, monumental event. This is because outplacement is, practically by definition, professional training for out-of-work professionals. A significant component of learning involves candidates’ transformation of their understanding of failure. In this sense, outplacement’s teachings coincide with Brooke and English and comparative literature scholar Allison Carr’s views that “failure is an opportunity for growth” and that “the capacity for failure (and success) is one of the most valuable abilities a writer can possess” (Brooke and Carr 63). Outplacement’s strength lies in its consultants’ ability to teach candidates this lesson. The primary learning opportunity for practitioners responsible for implementing outplacement pedagogy is to better integrate writing as “an *activity*” and “a subject of study” (Wardle and Adler-Kassner 15) into outplacement—for all candidates, regardless of their professional seniority or the generosity of their sponsoring organizations—as a means of transforming failure into success as they work to secure new professional opportunities.

The idea that outplacement is a practice that is oriented around candidates’ failure is counterintuitive. It is a “bottleneck” to learning (Pace and Middendorf 3)

and a “threshold concept” (Meyer and Land 3; Adler-Kassner and Wardle 2) that, once understood by candidates, can help them embrace their job-search work as a learning activity. Failure is significant in outplacement’s professional discourse. For example, as Pierson explains, “Everyone knows that job search involves rejection. Not just once or twice, but again and again. . . . In fact, the entire search is nothing but rejection” (38). Pierson advises candidates to reframe their thinking about job searches around the idea of failure. As he suggests, “Your job in job search is go out every day and get rejected. Once you get enough rejections out of the way, you will find that one really good acceptance. Then the search is over” (39). Candidates could view job-search interactions as failures if they do not lead a new position. By arguing that candidates’ future success in finding new work obtains from their prior failures, Pierson is encouraging candidates to subvert that reasoning.

Group Outplacement Candidates’ Individual Learning Needs

The outplacement candidates whom I interviewed exhibited difficulty with their participation in the state-government outplacement center’s two-day training program in accordance with their individual learning objectives for their work in the program. These objectives correlated with their divergent goals for securing new positions in the professional workplace. The problem was, in addressing the collective needs of all thirty-three candidates in the cohort, the two-day training program was unable to help candidates with their individual learning needs.

Candidates’ participation in outplacement on their own terms meant that their individual experiences in the program varied dramatically. Although Mario, Lea, and Ileana, the candidates whom I interviewed, suggested that they benefited from their

participation in the program, there were several ways in which the program could not meet their specialized learning requirements. For example, although Mario was a long-term unemployed candidate and Lea and Ileana were short-term unemployed candidates, the training program did not account for these candidates' divergent learning needs based on the durations of their unemployment.

Trying to "Get the Sense Out of" Job-Finding Work

Candidates' perceptions of their professional identities and job-finding purposes also affected their learning in the program. While Lea stated a relatively clear career objective, Mario and Ileana were equivocal regarding their goals for securing new professional employment. By assuming that Mario's, Lea's, and Ileana's career objectives and identities were equal and stable, the consultants who led the program were unable to assist these candidates with their individual learning needs. In terms of his experience in the program, Mario felt, in his words, that he "couldn't get the sense out of it"—i.e., he couldn't relate the consultants' teaching of a consistent job-search approach to his own experience of upheaval in attempting to answer the array of potential employment opportunities that both the recruiters with whom he interacted and his own job-fair participation presented him. Neither did the program address Mario's frustration, which he explained to me during his interview, that he needed adapt his résumé to meet each employer's unique specifications for every new position for which he applied.

For Lea, the principal lesson was that while she felt her résumé documented her work experience effectively, she believed that her participation in formal job interviewing involved "conversation[s]" for which she thought she needed further

preparation. Missing for Lea was the idea that writing was more than her possession of a résumé as a singular, correct artifact that, given its performative value in formal, reactive job-search work, was the literal key to attaining new employment. Lea could have benefitted from expanding her view of writing to include composition as a means of preparing for the formal job interview as a “conversation[al]” genre.

During her interview, Ileana evaluated the outplacement program’s effectiveness relative to its value in providing the candidates with writing-related resources, including template interview follow-up letters. In one instance, she recalled that Ed—one of the outplacement consultants who led the program’s résumé writing and epistolary-correspondence components—had mentioned to the candidates that he had a template thank-you letter in his files. Ileana found using templates very helpful for her as a writer. She wrote to Ed and requested a copy of his template letter, which he provided, but she noted in her interview that this template letter should have been made available to all candidates in the cohort without their having to ask for it. In its two-day format, the program was unable to give Mario, Lea, and Ileana a transformative understanding of writing’s holistic role in their job-search work.

The “Biographical Sketch”

These candidates would have benefitted from the opportunity to write a résumé and a networking brief akin to the one that for-profit outplacement consultant Lesley described during her interview. A similar genre, the “biographical sketch,” is discussed in Right Management’s outplacement training manual, *Marketing Your Talents* (95). The manual explains, “Although it differs in format from a résumé, the

biographical sketch serves the same purpose. It is a one-page description of who you are and what you have to offer a potential employer” (95).

As I explain above regarding Lesley’s synopsis of the networking brief, however, the biographical sketch serves a different purpose from the résumé: it is not part of the rigid activity system of hiring and formal job interviewing of which the résumé is an integral component. The manual explains further, “A biographical sketch is especially useful if you have a long or varied work history. It allows you to summarize a great deal of information in very little space, and to weave a story thread through apparently very different positions or fields of interest” (95). As the manual summarizes, the biographical sketch “has one critical advantage” over the résumé: “since it is not bound by formal rules, it is not subject to [the] criticism often heaped on résumés” (95). Outplacement candidates who write in the networking brief or biographical sketch genres have significant flexibility with respect to their composition of their career narratives.

Job-Finding Genres’ “Formal Rules”

Although the *Marketing Your Talents* manual suggests that the biographical sketch is not governed by “formal rules” (95) that define its generic conventions, the manual includes two example biographical sketches that make identical persuasive moves. The manual’s example biographical sketches are text-based, single-column, single-spaced, single-page documents comprising five and six paragraphs. These samples are written in the third person. Their first paragraphs introduce the candidate by name and professional title or profession and describe his or her most significant professional accomplishment. Their second paragraphs describe the candidate’s work

history for his or her most recent employer; they emphasize career development in terms of advancement and promotion while also describing the organization's characteristics—e.g., the size of its operations (*Marketing* 96-97).

The example biographical sketches' third paragraphs describe in further detail the candidates' most significant accomplishments for their organizations (96-97). Their fourth paragraphs summarize the candidates' other accomplishments for their employer (96-97). The first sample biographical sketch's fifth paragraph discusses the candidate's work experience at his prior employers, and his sketch's sixth paragraph discusses his transferable skills—e.g., “management skills” and “organizational abilities” (96). The second biographical sketch's fifth paragraph describes the candidate's accomplishments for her prior employer.

Reviewing these example biographical sketches gives an understanding of how candidates with different professional experiences can compose biographical sketches that follow almost identical generic formulae. From the perspective of education scholars Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis's understanding of “Multiliteracies” (5), these candidates were able, first, to learn the rhetorical conventions of the genre as an example of “Available Designs” (20); second, to “Design” (20) their own artifacts in this genre; and, third, to have their own biographical sketches become examples of “the Redesigned” (23): variations of the genre, in turn, become “Available Designs” to which other candidates may refer as they compose their own biographical sketches. As candidates compose in the biographical sketch genre, they develop coherent understandings of their career trajectories; this enables them to

explain their careers to networking contacts and hiring personnel in informal and formal job-search contexts.

Transformation and Reflection in Outplacement

Outplacement as a Rational, Professional Project

A transformed understanding of outplacement emerges at the intersection of its dominant, recessive, and idealized curricular objectives. Outplacement coheres as an activity system around the dominant idea of transfer in which, for most outplacement candidates most of the time, it is preferable to transfer to a new job in the same occupation (i.e., position and industry) as that in which the candidate was working before. Knowledge transfer is outplacement constituents' dominant curricular objective because it is a cohesive, understandable one. Since career continuity is many candidates' goal beyond their experiences of outplacement and unemployment, this goal allows outplacement consultants and candidates to treat outplacement as a rational, professional project: candidates approach their job-search work as though it were the kind of work they would perform for compensation in their careers.

Outplacement training manuals like Right Management's *Marketing Your Talents* and Lee Hecht Harrison's *Managing Your Search Project* contribute to outplacement's comprehensibility as a professional project. In their personal and professional lives, many candidates, regardless of their workplace qualifications, possess lay understandings of marketing and project management. Outplacement

curriculum writers invoke this understanding by using project management and marketing as “analogies” (Donahue 159) for outplacement work.

Career Change and Professional Requalification

The career-continuity and knowledge-transfer objectives’ curricular dominance in outplacement makes the transition objective recessive. The term *transition* has two primary connotations in outplacement discourse. On one hand, it signifies the potential difficulties that many outplacement candidates experience as they contend with challenges to their lived experiences that emerge through displacement from their professional positions, being out-of-work, becoming outplacement candidates, beginning their job searches as job applicants, and seeking to become “landed” candidates who gain new jobs successfully.

On the other hand, the term *transition* signifies some candidates’ desire to treat their unemployment experiences as opportunities to change careers: to pursue work in new occupations. While outplacement consultants neither can nor do seek to control candidates’ career choices, they nonetheless, in many cases, advise candidates to avoid career change because this choice entails new challenges: candidates who seek job and industry changes must requalify for work in the professional capacities in which they seek to build new careers. This decision has consequences for candidates who must gain new educational and training credentials, as well as new workplace experiences, for hiring personnel to regard them as viable job applicants in their desired careers.

Candidates: Enduring Unemployment or Learning in Outplacement?

Transfer and transition are not the only two views of outplacement, however. Although many candidates consider it productive to see outplacement as supporting the dominant curriculum of knowledge transfer, it is potentially damaging to regard outplacement as looking askance at its candidates' experiences of transition. While outplacement practitioners use candidates' difficulties in contending with job loss as arguments for keeping outplacement's pedagogical methods and its recipients' identities secret, this view signals that job loss is a negative experience for candidates.

Candidates' unemployment is primarily unpleasant, the dominant view of outplacement suggests. Unemployment should be endured and relegated to the status of a distant memory as soon as the candidate who experiences it "lands" new, meaningful work. While this view may support the objective of making outplacement as efficient and effective as possible from the perspective of candidates' placement into new professional work, it ignores the idea that candidates may learn much during their experiences of unemployment and outplacement.

Understanding Careers in Outplacement to Shape Them in Employment

Nominally, outplacement practitioners may have begun migrating away from an oppositional view of their practice—one that embraces transfer at the expense of transition—in favor of one that reaches toward a transformative understanding of people's careers. Their promotion of their industry as advancing "project management" (*Managing* A-5), "career management" (*Marketing* 1; Pickman, *Special* xi; cf. Meyer and Shadle xix) and, indeed, "career enhancement" (*Marketing* 1) as job-finding frameworks suggests the potential for mobilizing outplacement

curricula as transformative bodies of knowledge that are beneficial for out-of-work people (e.g., outplacement candidates) and all professionals who want to sustain and advance in their careers. In practice, however, outplacement continues to be an industry in which sponsoring organizations subsidize for-profit outplacement providers' pedagogies, which in turn intend to transform displaced workers into outplacement candidates and, ultimately, "landed" candidates.

The academic and professional discourse communities of business, career, and HR management have contributed—both to outplacement and to other employment-related initiatives—extensive and nuanced analyses of the term *career* that address its numerous attendant meanings. This matters because outplacement candidates and students need to understand the nuances of the term "career" if they are to shape their own careers effectively. The first of two such analytical trends is the separation of the term "career" from the closely-related idea of work for compensation (Höpfl and Atkinson 136).

As organizational psychology and organization studies scholars Heather Höpfl and Pat Hornby Atkinson observe, while "the rewards a company or occupation can offer serve as compensation," a "career" can also be "viewed as a projection of life into the future"; in the latter capacity, a career "appears to give meaning to experience and a sense of order, continuity, and purpose" (136). In the distinction between "compensation" and "meaning," people's careers emerge in and through their personal and professional lived experiences. Meaningful work becomes distinct from the occupations, employers, industries, and sociomaterial contexts in which one performs professional work for pay.

The second trend is toward the idea that a career is a “narrative” (Collin 171). Outplacement candidates, as storytellers and writers, configure the events of their personal and professional lives in ways that are designed to persuade their audiences—primarily, formal and informal job-search contacts—that they are qualified for new work opportunities. Outplacement’s re-figuration as career management requires that candidates become rhetoricians who can describe their lived experiences in strategic ways that resonate persuasively with audiences (i.e., hiring personnel) who can help them to attain new, relatively stable conditions of employment. As career studies scholar Collin warns, however, “The emerging [employment] context may not be able to sustain the kinds of continuing and coherent [career] identities that had been generated in the more stable conditions of the past” (171). Therefore, through their discourses of “project management” (*Managing A-5*) and “market[ing]” (*Marketing 1*), outplacement intends to make candidates responsible for composing their own career narratives.

An idealized view of outplacement as “career management” emerges only at outplacement’s periphery. It is therefore possible to regard outplacement’s transformation into “career management” as unattainable. Because displaced workers (i.e., newly out-of-work people as well as members of the long-term unemployed population), outplacement candidates, and other job applicants are the primary beneficiaries of outplacement practitioners’ services, it is viable to argue that outplacement will never be a comprehensive “career management” program whose teachings, in egalitarian fashion, are meant for all workers regardless of their employment statuses.

Is Outplacement “Career Management”?

The principle of “literacy sponsorship” (Brandt, *Literacy* 18) suggests that outplacement exists because labor-market “imperfection[s]” (Bitzer 6; Boudreaux and Palagashvili 11) produce a sociomaterial need: sponsoring organizations subsidize outplacement because they seek both the advancement of an ethos of professional goodwill and “the avoidance of negative publicity” (Alewell and Hauff 467) in their markets and industries. Offering outplacement to already-employed professionals is counterintuitive in such a circumstance: there is perhaps little to no market for the sale of career-management expertise to already-employed professionals; hence, outplacement cannot be construed as “career management,” despite the aspirations of some of the profession’s leading practitioners.

The transformative idea that outplacement is a form of career management occupies a legitimate, if idealized, place in outplacement. During the state government-operated outplacement center’s two-day training program, for example, Ed—the consultant who led the program’s résumé- and letter-writing instructional components—told the candidates what contemporary hiring and recruitment personnel meant by “long-term” professional employment. At the time of my June 2014 observation of this training session, Ed informed the outplacement candidates in the cohort that, for professional workers, one to two years in a given position and three to five years with a given employer was considered long-term employment.

Outplacement’s Long-Term Value for Candidates

Ed encouraged the candidates to think of these figures relative to the duration of their own working lives. He suggested that the candidates estimate the number of

years they planned to continue working before retirement. He then advised them to divide this number first by the time-in-position (i.e., one to two years) figure and second by the time-with-employer (i.e., three to five years) figure. The quotients for each of these equations, he said, comprised the number of positions in, and employers for which, the candidates could expect to work for the balance of their careers.

Ed's point was that the candidates should think of their experiences of displacement from employment, the resulting discontinuity in their working lives, and their work in the outplacement training program not as one-time experiences but rather as recurring aspects of their careers. Ed characterized job loss and job-search as elements of the candidates' careers that they should anticipate and be prepared for. He was arguing for the long-term value of the outplacement training program's teachings.

Outplacement as Rhetorical Education

Distinguishing between outplacement as job-search work and outplacement as an ongoing, reflective, transformative practice through which candidates use writing and speech to negotiate changes in their employment statuses, occupations, professions, and industries requires its constituents' understanding of the difference between "cognition" (Dryer, "Cognitive" 71) and "metacognition" (Tinberg "Metacognition" 75). In terms of outplacement constituents' work, the distinction between cognition and metacognition requires an understanding of the idea that outplacement is not one-time, remedial job-search training but is, rather, a form of rhetorical education through which people learn and enact professional participation in career development.

Outplacement constituents' challenge is to understand writing's importance to their metacognitive work: while outplacement consultants share writing instructors' objective of, in writing studies scholar Tinberg's words, having "students produce effective writing," consultants must also help candidates as writers to "demonstrate consciousness of process that will enable them to reproduce success" ("Metacognition" 75). The problem is, although outplacement practitioners want outplacement to operate as a site of career-management work that engages candidates in the metacognitive practices necessary for them to comprehend the long-term value of outplacement's teachings, the conditions of literacy sponsorship under which for-profit and state government-operated outplacement programs are implemented limit that possibility.

Candidates "Attend Sessions in Their Pajamas" and Go "Out Knocking on Doors"

During her interview, for-profit outplacement consultant Cora explained that her employer had adopted a distance learning-based curricular platform in 2010. While candidates had the option of participating in their training programs in person, the distance-learning platform meant that they could participate from their homes, and, as she put it, "attend sessions in their pajamas." This view of outplacement work contrasted with for-profit consultant Lesley's perspective; Lesley was adamant that candidates should be "out knocking on doors" as opposed to being in an office—much less staying at home "in their pajamas."

During his interview, for-profit outplacement consultant Ethan suggested that there was a financial motivation for his employer's migration to a distance learning-based curriculum. He pointed out that "belt-tightening" and "nickel-and-diming" on

the part of sponsoring organizations had led to his employer's curtailment of its in-office services and its embrace of distance-learning technologies. Moreover, Ethan claimed that while his firm's average outplacement package duration was four to six months when he first began working as an outplacement consultant in 2000, it was one three months at the time of his May 2014 interview—and, as he put it, “closer to one month than three.” Based on Ethan's claim that most candidates came to terms with their job loss in one to two weeks, their outplacement programs were almost complete by the time they came to terms with their new identities as out-of-work people and outplacement candidates.

Outplacement Training Program Consolidation

Ann explained that the state-government outplacement training center's program had been consolidated from three days to two at the height of the Great Recession. She explained gasoline prices were then so high that the center's directors did not want out-of-work candidates to have to drive long distances—often from remote parts of the state—to participate in three days of outplacement training. The program's consolidation into a two-day format, however, gave less time for candidates to engage in writing during the official curriculum, and even less time still for them to think beyond applying its consultants' fundamental teachings to their immediate job-search responsibilities. The conditions of literacy sponsorship that have afforded for-profit and state government-operated outplacement providers' existence have limited outplacement's potential to become a site of holistic “career management” training for candidates.

Someone Who Will Listen: Candidates' Reflections Defy Generic Classification

In the context of outplacement's sociomaterial constraints, the fact that the candidates whom I interviewed desired to reflect on their careers by telling me their stories is this study's most striking finding. Most of the candidates in the state government-operated training center's cohort chose not to participate in semi-structured interviews with me as an outplacement researcher. In contrast, the three candidates whom I did interview—Mario, Lea, and Ileana—responded to the interview opportunity with enthusiasm. For example, in his correspondence with me by email and telephone as we worked to schedule his interview, Mario conveyed a sense of urgency that we meet. Throughout her interview, Lea mentioned her extroverted personality on several occasions. Interaction with me was part of her ongoing interpersonal work as she sought new employment. When I asked Ileana why she had volunteered to meet with me for an interview, she replied, "I have a passion of helping others," and she added, with a smile, that doing so also helped her in the process. All three candidates sought to support my research project and tell their stories.

For Mario, Lea, and Ileana, transformation through ongoing changes to their personal and professional lives was reflected in the rich and nuanced stories that they told me during their interviews. Many of the stories these candidates told defied generic classification and had perhaps-limited value in the rigid rhetorical conditions of formal job interviewing. Nonetheless, these narratives established rapport between us as interviewer and interviewee. During their work in outplacement as a rational and affective project, these candidates were anxious in medias res for someone—

including a researcher of rhetoric and writing practices in outplacement—to listen to their stories of transfer, transition, and transformation.

Mario explained that he had once been fired after he was linked to three work colleagues who had conspired to leave their employer and start their own business—even though Mario claimed that he had wanted no part in their plan. Lea told how, having relocated the West Coast and with no family around to support her, she had negotiated paid time off when doctors had discovered that her young son had a heart condition that required surgery. Ileana noted, after losing her brother and sister-in-law in an airplane accident, she had, with her mother's help, raised their two young daughters as her own children. These candidates' experiences were shaped by circumstances that do not fit into the dominant career-continuity narrative of professional knowledge transfer or the recessive narrative of transition as one of uncertainty and disaffection stemming from job loss. Engaging candidates in writing about such experiences may have had, due to these narratives' reflective dimensions, unclear but potentially valuable roles in outplacement training.

Candidates' Employment Narratives and Outplacement's Value

Outplacement candidates' success in their training programs, job searches, and careers is a product of their sociomaterial circumstances, the stories that they tell themselves and others, and the ways in which they act based on their circumstances and narratives. Candidates' success in outplacement involves landing a new job and transforming outplacement's teachings into tools for success in their lives and careers. The principal tool for success is for candidates to gain command over the narratives that help them and their audiences to comprehend their lives. This is how writing, and

all other media in and through which stories are told, become vital tools for outplacement candidates.

Sociologist Douglas Ezzy, who studies the relationship between unemployment and narrative, argues that the “sense of self-continuity in identity is a product of narratives of self-consistency through life’s changes” (31). Hallqvist and Hydén claim that Ezzy “finds two main ways of narrating” people’s experiences “of job loss and work transitions” (Hallqvist and Hydén, “Work” 3). Ezzy contends that out-of-work people compose narratives of “*divestment*” (Ezzy 34) and “integration” (Ezzy 34; cf. Nowacek 2, 33) that characterize their movements from one social status to another—e.g., from employment into unemployment. Ezzy suggests, “*Integrative passages* usually entail a transitional period followed by integration into a clearly delineated new status entered through a ceremonially specified process”—e.g., getting hired (34). Conversely, “*divestment passages* emphasise separation from a status and often contain extended transitional phases of uncertain duration” (34).

Arguing that narrative “is central how people understand their life-history” (37), Ezzy suggests that the type of dismissal from employment that outplacement candidates experience

can add to, or moderate, the trauma of job loss. Very short notice, inappropriate timing, and the humiliating events associated with losing a job can all create anger and distress as a consequence of a violently disturbed life plan. On the other hand, a long notice period, counselling, monetary retrenchment packages, and outplacement services that help the person begin to find work, can all moderate the

impact of job loss allowing the person to renegotiate their life plan.
(77).

In keeping with outplacement's teachings of rapport-building, interpersonal interaction, and the establishment of mutual fit between the candidate and his or her audience, telling their stories was a vital component of Mario's, Lea's, and Ileana's participation in outplacement. Engaging out-of-work people in emergent, semi-structured opportunities to write and speak about their ongoing personal and professional transformations may be at least as valuable as their completion of a structured outplacement curriculum.

Conclusion

Transformation—*participating in changeable contexts*—is outplacement's idealized curricular objective. As candidates move past their initial outplacement training and toward *social participation* in networking and interviewing interactions, outplacement educators encourage them to think like job-finding experts: to recognize that job-finding itself is a social activity rather than one in which candidates should merely compose and distribute résumés in response to advertised positions and then wait for responses from employers. Outplacement's constituents should not consider writing to be merely an initial component of job-finding work that candidates should transcend as they seek interactions with networking and interviewing contacts. Instead, job-finding expertise reflects the idea that *genre work*—composing in the dominant genre of the résumé and other “recognizable forms” (Bazerman, “Writing” 35), such as those of life writing—should be one of candidates' preeminent, ongoing career-related activities.

Out-of-work people's *identities* change as they participate in outplacement: although they retain their identities as experienced professionals in their areas of work, they must also contend with new identities, such as displaced worker, unemployed person, outplacement candidate, job applicant, and, ideally, future "landed" candidate. As outplacement curricula and educators suggest, however, candidates should also learn to think like job-finding experts. The latter change of identity requires candidates to recognize that they will always have *more to learn* during their careers, as lifelong learning and the pursuit of opportunities for professional participation, recertification, retraining, and re-skilling are essential components of twenty-first century employment. As candidates engage in *reflection* on their prior career experiences in unemployment, outplacement educators recommend that they reflect on their relationships to work as their employment contexts transform continually through technological innovations; new employment philosophies, policies, and practices; and other sociomaterial phenomena. Such transformations, outplacement educators suggest, are inevitable dimensions of people's career development.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Introduction

Outplacement training programs are sites of transfer, transition, and transformation. Candidates learn how to transfer their knowledge, and themselves, to new professional opportunities. They learn that their migrations from employment, through unemployment and outplacement, and toward reemployment prompt them to consider not only their professional capabilities but also their personal and professional relationships to their work. Outplacement training programs prompt candidates to negotiate the complementary and competing aspects of their lives within and beyond the workplace. Candidates also learn that whether they are employed at a given point, the contexts in which they perform their work alter as employment-related philosophies, policies, and practices change. No professional worker can continue in his or her profession without learning innovative ways of performing work and new ways of participating in interpersonal contexts. Outplacement educators and training programs aim to model ways of participating in professional discourse that can help candidates function effectively throughout their careers.

While outplacement intends to help candidates with challenges of transfer, transition, and transformation, however, it also presents other areas of potential difficulty with which candidates must contend. For example, while outplacement training programs' linear curricula put candidates on paths from unemployment toward reemployment, these curricular trajectories carry assumptions about when and where candidates should engage in introspection, writing, research, and interpersonal

socialization including networking and interviewing. While candidates may see their work as proceeding linearly through outplacement curricula, their learning in outplacement may take place through recursive means that could complicate their ideas of what progress toward new employment looks like. Additionally, while working through outplacement curricula as quickly as possible may seem effective and efficient, candidates need place, space, and time to reflect on their professional objectives, even if they believe that they are clear about their job-finding goals.

Furthermore, the analogies that orient candidates to their work in outplacement, including marketing and project management, may make outplacement feel like professional work, which candidates as displaced professionals may find comforting in their experiences as out-of-work people. However, navigating these analogies requires candidates to not only understand fundamental aspects of marketing and project management but also apply that understanding to job-finding as work that is both similar to and different from specialized marketing and project management work. Moreover, even though these analogies suggest that outplacement is like professional work, outplacement is also like educational work in many respects. Candidates should embrace outplacement not only as a bridge to new employment but also as a learning opportunity that can help them to understand more clearly what to do next in their careers.

Finally, outplacement training programs engage candidates in both private and public work. While candidates usually negotiate the relationship between their personal and professional lives largely in private—for example, through individual consultations with outplacement consultants and through mutual, constructive

laments with their fellow candidates—outplacement consultants also ask them to do work that is strikingly public: engage in networking and other forms of interpersonal interaction, often with others whom they do not know. Outplacement invites candidates to consider the aspects of their lives and careers that they feel are private and those they are willing to address and analyze in public. In this concluding chapter, I address the topics of linear and recursive outplacement curricula; resources of place, space, and time for learning in outplacement; the analogies that shape outplacement pedagogies; the relationship between outplacement, education, and the professions; and the public and private consequences of studying and participating in outplacement. I engage these topics from the perspective of this study’s focus on rhetoric and writing practices in group outplacement training programs.

Linear and Recursive Curricula

Outplacement training programs are organized into linear curricula, which suggests that candidates who follow them move “from” workforce displacement, “through” unemployment and outplacement, and “toward” new professional positions. This narrative of linear progress from unemployment to reemployment contraposes research to networking, writing to speaking, and introspection to extrospection. In my primary and secondary research for this study, I observed linear conceptions of progress shape consultants’ and candidates’ perceptions of writing’s value as both a form of participation in outplacement and an aspect of job-finding work. As Ann, the state government-operated outplacement training center’s director said, writing is “the first part of it”—i.e., the first part of candidates’ job-finding processes.

As shown in Table 1, Lee Hecht Harrison's "AIM" curriculum in *Managing Your Search Project* and Right Management's "ZIP" curriculum in *Marketing Your Talents* assign résumé writing, research, and networking numerical positions in these providers' respective outplacement training programs. For example, in *Managing Your Search Project*, "Create Your Communications Strategy and Résumé" is the third milestone of the curriculum's initial "AIM" phase, "Assess Opportunity." Likewise, in *Marketing Your Talents*, "Developing Your Résumé" is the fourth chapter of the curriculum's initial "Zeroing-In Process" phase, "Preparation-Understanding Yourself." This suggests that writing is initial, preparatory work in outplacement.

Similarly, In the Lee Hecht Harrison curriculum, research is evident most clearly in the fifth AIM milestone, "Gather Marketplace Information," while in the Right Management curriculum, research comprises the second ZIP phase, "Research Your Market." Finally, in these curricula, interpersonal interactions comprise networking and interviewing. This is evident in the sixth, seventh, and ninth AIM milestones: "Get Your Message Out"; "Talk with Hiring Managers"; and "Interview, Cultivate Offers[,] and Negotiate," respectively. It is also evident in the sixth, seventh, and eighth chapters of the ZIP curriculum: "The Power of Networking," "Interview and Negotiate to Closing," and "Negotiating the Offer," respectively.

Outplacement training programs not only assign numerical sequences to job-finding's reading, writing, and speaking activities but also ascribe value to these literacy practices through curricular narratives. This is evident particularly in Lee Hecht Harrison's *Managing Your Search Project* curriculum, which includes ten

“Search Tale[s]”: one for each milestone. These are anecdotes—composed by the provider’s curriculum writers and each describing a candidate’s experience in the program—that offer contextual illustration of the lesson being taught in each milestone. Three of these search tales ascribe the Lee Hecht Harrison curriculum writers’ pedagogical values to three example candidates’ job-finding strategies and tactics. These search tales apportion value to research, writing, and interpersonal communication that is intended to influence the program’s candidates’ perceptions of these practices.

I am concerned with three of *Managing Your Search Project*’s search tales here: “The Consummate Researcher” (I-19), “A Legend in His Own Time” (I-105), and “When Silence Is *Not* Golden” (M-67). In “Consummate,” a candidate named “Bharat”—a medical doctor who was “[b]orn in India”—is described as “a quiet, reflective person with few professional contacts and virtually no network.” As the tale’s nominal “consummate researcher,” Bharat’s job-finding strategy was one that the curriculum writers called “marketplace research.” The tale reports that through “[s]avvy” Internet research, “Bharat located a relatively obscure professional organization comprised of medical doctors in large companies and sent letters to the members.” Says the tale, Bharat’s ostensibly secondary “research” activities led him to attend several medical conferences and ultimately to his new “position as medical director” for a Chicago-based employer.

In “Legend,” a candidate named “Joe” exclaims to his outplacement consultant, “I want to find a job in six weeks so I don’t exhaust my severance pay”! The consultant replies, “I’d suggest you put most of your energy into making

connections and talking with people. Build up as large a networking list as you can and go after them.” Dutifully, Joe arrived at the outplacement provider’s “office every day dressed in business attire (in case he needed to go out and talk to someone that day) and worked the phones constantly.” As the tale reports, “By the end of his second week” in his outplacement program, “he’d had five conversations with hiring managers,” and, “At week six, his severance package still largely intact, Joe started his new job.”

In *Managing Your Search Project*, the curriculum’s numbered milestones and sequential phases prompt outplacement candidates to read the “Consummate” and “Legend” search tales against the curricular sequence’s dominant narrative: “writing” precedes “research,” while “networking” supersedes both practices. Even though Bharat attends medical conferences in his search for new employment, *Managing Your Search Project* deems his work “research”; in contrast, the manual calls Joe’s interpersonal activities “networking.” The search tales show these candidates pursuing putatively divergent job-finding strategies: Bharat and Joe both landed jobs even though they engaged in “writing,” “research,” and “networking” to different extents. The main point, however, is that through these tales, *Managing Your Search Project* affirms that writing, research, and networking are contextual, discrete, sequential activities rather than co-emergent, interconnected, inter-contextual practices. Joe’s landing a new job through the dominant job-finding practice of “networking” is deemed noteworthy primarily because it takes only six weeks. Bharat’s landing a new job is deemed exceptional because he accomplishes it ostensibly through the non-dominant practices of “writing” and “research.”

Linear outplacement curricula assign their candidates evolving identities: through AIM and ZIP, candidates are assigned to move from writing and research to networking and interviewing. As they do so, outplacement curricula suggest, candidates are prescribed to move from individualist to collaborative job-finding agendas and from introspective to extrospective interpersonal characteristics. *Managing Your Search Project* clarifies these assignments and prescriptions in its “Silence” search tale. In this tale, outplacement candidate “Cheryl,” who is described as having risen through her most recent employer’s ranks, has “attributed her success to just doing her job, working hard and staying clear of what she considered internal politics.”

However, six months after a relocation in which she was assigned to a new supervisor, the tale says, Cheryl loses her job. When her outplacement consultant asks, “What do you think happened, Cheryl? What kind of feedback were you getting from your boss?” Cheryl replies, “Well, none really, I just did my job. I assumed that since no one said anything, I must be doing OK.” Her consultant responds, “You assumed that silence meant autonomy. . . . It doesn’t always work that way. You need to ask for regular feedback.” For Cheryl, the tale claims, “this is a lesson learned the hard way. I guess my nature is to be sort of a Lone Ranger, keep my nose to the grindstone and people will just know that I’m doing a good job. You can be sure I won’t ever let this happen again!” In this tale, Cheryl loses her job through the “silence” of her individualist work ethic and, in consequence, learns of extrospection’s importance to her professional success.

Scholars Dias et al. describe a similar circumstance involving a student intern, “Julie,” who, they claim, “viewed each [work] task as though it was set in a university context” (197). Dias et al. report that Julie

consistently insisted on “getting on with her work,” rather than availing herself of the learning opportunity offered her every day by the supervisor who invited her to take a short walk with him and another intern. Every day she refused the opportunity for shared reflection on and learning about what had been happening in the complex political and social rhetorical context of their workplace. (197)

The *Managing Your Search Project* manual and Dias et al.’s account invite a reading of the “Cheryl” and “Julie” narratives through scholars Belenky et al.’s observation that “*silence*” is “the absence of voice” (24). In their respective workplace contexts, while Cheryl and Julie are characterized as believing that they were performing their work dutifully, their silence appears to signify and reinforce their isolation from not only their supervisors but also their work colleagues and workplaces.

As Belenky et al. explain, the women whom they interview “do not envision authorities communicating their thoughts through words imbued with shared meanings. In their experience[,] authorities seldom tell you what they want you to do; they apparently expect you to know in advance” (28). In these narratives, Cheryl and Julie are depicted as equating their silence with their autonomy. Julie is shown as viewing her supervisor’s “walks” as “new assignments” to which she refused to acquiesce: ““I didn’t know I was expected to go to that meeting,’ she said

resentfully,” as Dias et al. report; “‘Was I *supposed* to come?’ she asked under her breath in annoyance” (197). In outplacement and professional work, the “Silence” search tale suggests, workers are meant to assert their individuality through ongoing social interactions rather than through their silence.

Linear outplacement curricula shape candidates’ trajectories from writing and research to networking and interviewing, and from personal introspection and silence to interpersonal extrospection, collaboration, and socialization. Writing therefore occupies an ambiguous, potentially confusing role for outplacement educators and out-of-work people. This is because outplacement curricula suggest that candidates write as introverts and network as extroverts, while introversion and extroversion are themselves valued differentially in the inter-contextual ideologies of job-finding and professional participation in work.

Collin contends that “the twentieth-century rhetoric of career . . . restored” amongst professional workers “lost wholeness and authenticity, and constructed a sense of agency, continuity, and potential for development”; however, she argues the following of conceptions of careers in the twenty-first century: “What is perhaps discernible now is a new rhetoric of the individual, seen in the now generally accepted view in organisations that individuals have to be responsible for their own development to ensure employability” (174). This perspective differs from writing scholar Lee-Ann M. Kastman Breuch’s view that, under post-process theory, educators should “move away from a transmission model of education and toward a transformative model that includes active participation from both teachers and students as collaborators” (124).

While Collin describes an individualistic approach to career development, Breuch suggests that collaboration is the key to post-process pedagogy. Though Collin acknowledges the fracture of, to use Lyotard's phrase, the "grand narrative" (Lyotard xxiii) of individuals' linear progress through their careers, Collin asserts "that individuals have to be responsible for their own [career] development" (174). This argument echoes outplacement educators' assertion to their candidates that "the responsibility for your learning and growth rests with you" (*Marketing* 1).

Collin departs from Breuch because Collin regards responsibility as an individual construct rather than a collaborative, interpersonal, and social achievement. As adult education in rhetoric and writing, outplacement, with its philosophy of individual candidate responsibility, echoes, in performance scholar Jon McKenzie's words, performance management's "attempts to displace the rational control of workers by empowering them to improve efficiency using their own intuition, creativity, and diversity" (McKenzie 63). While outplacement demands individual responsibility to compensate for the loss of "twentieth-century . . . continuity" of people's career development (Collin 174), post-process scholarship in rhetoric and composition claims "collaborative negotiation" (Heard 299) as its idealized pedagogical model.

Scholars including Dias et al. regard the ethos of individual responsibility as grounds for their claim that "school and work are worlds apart" (3). In their thinking, students learn in academic contexts, and they perform—"or else," as McKenzie puts it wryly (7)—in "real-world [professional] settings" (Dias et al. 30). The implication of the "worlds apart" argument (Dias et al. 3) is that once students become

professional workers, they must perform effectively in their jobs “or else” they may “be fired, redeployed, [or] institutionally marginalized” (McKenzie 7). Dias et al.’s view accounts, however, for neither the individual importance, among educators and students, of performance and assessment in academic contexts nor the importance for employers and employees of collaboration and “lifelong learning” (Adler-Kassner 439; Gee, Hull, and Lankshear 22) in professional workplace settings. Academic contexts and workplace settings demand of their constituents ethics of individual responsibility and collaborative engagement. While schools emphasize collaboration in contrast to the idea that academic assessment interpellates students as individuals, workplaces emphasize individuality in contrast to the idea that professionals accomplish work collaboratively. Linear progress requires outplacement candidates and students to negotiate the relationship between individualism and collaboration.

Academic contexts and workplace settings reflect ethics of linear progress. For example, whereas the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*’s exigence is matriculating college students’ “success in college and beyond” (*Framework 2*), the *WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition*’s focus is “students[’] move[ments] beyond first-year composition” (*WPA*). Similarly, Grobman and Weisser see “an undergraduate writing major grounded in rhetoric” as “an effective path to gainful and meaningful employment and success beyond undergraduate coursework” (200-01). Just as rhetoric and writing curricula work because they evoke imagined contexts of students’ academic, civic, personal, and professional performances “beyond” their immediate pedagogical settings, so too do

outplacement curricula work because they imply that outplacement gives a path “from” workforce displacement “to” reemployment.

In their journal article, “Genres of Organizational Communication,” management and information technology scholars Yates and Orlikowski argue that sociologist Anthony Giddens’s “[s]tructururation theory involves the production, reproduction, and transformation of social institutions, which are enacted through individuals’ use of social rules. These rules shape the action taken by individuals in organizations; at the same time, by regularly drawing on the rules, individuals reaffirm or modify the social institutions in an ongoing, recursive interaction” (“Genres” 299-300). This view of organizational participation echoes the “post[-]process” (Breuch; Heard) model in rhetoric and composition of “collaborative negotiation” (Heard 299), and it also suggests the mechanism by which “confronting and revising” (Horner, *Terms* 72) discourse communities (Bizzell 222) and organizational cultures is possible.

This “recursive” model of “*structuration*” (Yates and Orlikowski, “Genres” 299, 300) makes sense in the context of “Performance Management”-oriented organizations (McKenzie 63) that value individual responsibility when it supports organizational objectives. However, out-of-work people encounter difficulty with recursivity and structuration when they regard their main objective as developmental, linear progress into new employment for their own benefit. While outplacement practitioners teach candidates to consider themselves responsible for their job searches as individuals and to see themselves as progressing linearly “from”

unemployment “to” reemployment, outplacement also shows candidates that job-finding is a social project in which job applicants and employers are invested.

Outplacement educators suggest that effective writing is, in state-government outplacement training center director Ann’s words, “the first part of” candidates’ progress toward reemployment, but they also view writing as a “recursive” activity in which candidates revise résumés and other texts based on “research” (*Managing* I-19; *Marketing* 99) and “networking” (*Managing* I-34; *Marketing* 121). Outplacement’s ethos of individualist responsibility complicates candidates’ lesson that outplacement and job-finding are collaborative, social activities. The same may be true for college students: conceptions of writing pedagogy as “post[-]process” and writing courses as “complex,” “*emergen[t]*” “ecologies” (Reiff et al. 3-5) contrast with students’ perceptions of their linear, developmental progress as individuals “through” college and “from” college and university settings “to” employment, workforces, and workplaces. Compositionists can help their students understand that their writing, and their participation in job-finding and professional work, have linear and recursive characteristics.

Resources of Place, Space, and Time

Out-of-work people require resources of place, space, and time to understand outplacement’s preliminary teachings; negotiate the personal and professional dimensions of their experiences; and generalize outplacement’s fundamental principles to other dimensions of their lives across their careers. The implication for compositionists is that students have greater opportunities to learn when they have more learning resources available. The implication for employment writing is that

learners need place, space, and time to understand the balance between “traditional expert-novice” (Geisler 241) and social—i.e., “collaborative” (Heard 299)—pedagogies. Empirical analysis of outplacement engages debates regarding “accountab[ility]” (O’Neill et al. 275; Adler-Kassner and Harrington 81) in education; traditional education versus “competency-based education (CBE)” (Adler-Kassner 438); and learning “outcomes” (Harrington et al. xv) and “programmatic outcomes” (Rankins-Robertson 59) versus “threshold concepts” (Adler-Kassner and Wardle 2; Meyer and Land 10) as pedagogical approaches. As a site of adult education in rhetoric and writing, outplacement shows that extensive opportunities for learning about and reflection on rhetoric and writing contribute to out-of-work people’s success as capably analytical, civically-engaged professionals.

Rhetoric scholar Fleming argues for rhetoric education as “a multi-year, integrated process of character formation,” and he suggests that, in its idealized form, “rhetorical education is a lengthy affair, literally coextensive with a person’s life” (“Rhetoric” 172, 178). Fleming suggests that “the goal of rhetorical training is neither a material product, nor a body of knowledge, nor technical proficiency in achieving pre-determined ends; it is rather to become a certain kind of person” (“Rhetoric” 179). English scholars including O’Neill et al. have criticized Fleming’s argument on three main grounds: first, they “were unable pin down exactly what Fleming means by” the “ideal” of “produc[ing] ‘a certain kind of person,’ a person whose character will, presumably, benefit society”; second, in their view, Fleming “refus[es] to connect the ‘study of speaking and writing well’ to careers and jobs”; and, third, Fleming “grounds his theoretical discussion of the benefits of a rhetoric major

exclusively in the Western tradition” (O’Neill et al. 274). O’Neill et al. claim that compositionists “need to prove that students who graduate with a major in rhetoric are employable” (O’Neill et al. 274), and they suggest that Fleming’s argument for rhetorical training neither gives such proof nor “address[es] us—or most others teaching at public universities whose mission is to serve students from all walks of life and who are accountable to the public” (O’Neill et al. 275).

Fleming’s argument (“Rhetoric”), and O’Neill et al.’s critique thereof, are productive because these scholars engage in discussion regarding the place, space, time, and other pedagogical resources that students need in order to learn and the relationship between pedagogy, its benefits for learners, and educators’ concern for the public good. Regardless of the content of a given program in rhetoric as a “course of study,” Fleming argues that learning is a “lengthy” process (“Rhetoric” 169, 178). Fleming’s and O’Neill et al.’s debate underscores the tension between pedagogy, its relevance in contexts “beyond” itself (*Framework 2*; WPA; Grobman and Weisser 201), and questions of who is “accountable” for teaching and learning (O’Neill et al. 275; Adler-Kassner and Harrington 81). Fleming’s (“Rhetoric”) and O’Neill et al.’s discussion raises issues relevant to outplacement for two reasons. First, in outplacement as a site of adult education in rhetoric and writing, more access to pedagogical resources of space, place, and time is better than less. Second, while consultants are “accountable” to candidates, candidates are primarily “accountable” to themselves.

In their discussion of “accountability” in rhetoric and composition education, Adler-Kassner and English scholar Susanmarie Harrington claim that administrators’,

policymakers', employers', and other constituents' use of the term "impl[ies] that something that should be happening in postsecondary classrooms isn't, and that accountability can help 'us' gather information to target the problem(s) and create solution(s) to remedy the situation" (Adler-Kassner and Harrington 73-74). This view of accountability contrasts with Dias et al.'s understanding of professionals' accountability in workplaces. Dias et al. report that hospital "workers and managers" whom they observed "used the term 'accountability'" to speak of "complex and sometimes competing motives" to "make the department, its individual members, and its genres more 'accountable' to their own and others' motives" (124-25). Adler-Kassner and Harrington argue, "Many current policy documents imply (or state) that educators should be accountable to employers, since employers will ensure the economic futures of the students populating our classrooms," but they critique the "notion that the purpose of education is to prepare twenty-first-century workers" (85).

Counter to Adler-Kassner and Harrington's claim, though, outplacement suggests that employers *will not* "ensure the economic futures of students." As economist and attorney Charles J. Muhl asserts in his discussion of at-will employment, barring exceptional circumstances, "The employment-at-will doctrine avows that, when an employee does not have a written employment contract and the term of employment is of indefinite duration, the employer can terminate the employee for good cause, bad cause, or no cause at all" (3). That is why the ethos of individual responsibility is central to outplacement practice. Professionals' individual responsibility to their employers under the conditions of at-will employment should

be a central focus for students as they compose generative theories of their relationships to work.

Adler-Kassner and Harrington “suggest that ‘accountability’ is not an appropriate term for . . . discussions about teaching and learning, and they “sketch the outlines of an alternative frame that has ‘responsibility’ at its core” (74). They argue, “When teachers ask, ‘to whom are we responsible? For what? Whose voices need to be heard? And how do we act on our understandings of these responsibilities?’ we engage responsibility to make our work in the classroom visible while simultaneously talking with others about that work” (90). Adler-Kassner and Harrington argue, further, for an “embrace . . . [of] the responsibility to talk with and listen to the values and ideas of multiple audiences—others in our program, and university; community members; potential employers—and try to understand their potential multiple and overlapping values and ideals” (90). Adler-Kassner and Harrington vie for a social conception of responsibility that engages educators, “community members,” and “potential employers” in civic discussion of their expectations for students’ learning.

Debate over students’ learning entails discussion of the places and spaces in, and the times during which, learning happens. In her discussion of the “Common Core State Standards (CCSS)” initiative (437) and “competency-based education (CBE)” (438), Adler-Kassner argues that proponents of these projects challenge “the notion that education is intended to do anything *but* prepare students for college and career readiness” (437). Adler-Kassner contends that the CCSS initiative’s adherents support “dissolving ideas about writing as a discipline and distilling writing a function in the service of college and career readiness” (442). She also suggests,

The fundamental premise underscoring CBE is that education should be assessed differently. Currently, it's the measure of hours as embodied in the Carnegie Unit. . . . Instead, CBE advocates argue, achievement . . . should be indicated by masteries of the competencies established for that particular site. In this framework, it doesn't matter how long it takes students achieve the competency. (445)

Adler-Kassner argues the CCSS and CBE initiatives render rhetoric and writing as functional practices that serve employers' needs and as a body of "competencies" for which students should be able to earn college credit by demonstrating sufficient understanding of—to echo Fleming's use of the term—rhetoric and writing as "bod[ies] of knowledge" ("Rhetoric" 179).

Out-of-work people need place, space, and time resources to move from regarding outplacement as a "body of knowledge" to comprehending outplacement as a "course of study" in rhetoric and writing that engages various "post[-]process" (Breuch 119; Heard 283) rhetorical contexts of interpersonal interaction—including, for example, "networking," "interviewing," and "at-will employment." As in outplacement, employment writing is not merely people's composition of résumés in anticipation of job-finding interactions but is, rather, an ongoing assemblage of interpersonal and metacognitive activities, practices, and texts that construct and support professional workers' participation in the lived experiences that comprise their careers.

Learning and Analogy

Outplacement educators deliver outplacement pedagogies using analogies that orient out-of-work people to outplacement's learning processes and outcomes in ways that "make sense," as it were, in the contexts of professional and technical discourse that govern participation in "at-will employment" (Muhl 3) across employing organizations. The implication for compositionists is that professional discourse should be analyzed as generative discourse that serves rhetorical purposes. The implication for employment writing is that professional discourse is best understood as a rhetorical practice from a vantage point that is situated outside that discourse. Just as candidates are well-positioned to study the discourse practices of hiring and recruitment in outplacement, students are well-positioned to study professional discourse practices from their places in higher education. Understanding how educators use analogies to accomplish pedagogical objectives in discourse communities that invoke other discourse communities helps learners.

Critiques of "fast capitalism" (Gee, Hull, and Lankshear 24; Cope and Kalantzis 11; Lu, "An Essay" 19) and "post[-]Fordis[m]" (Berlin 45; Cope and Kalantzis 11, 127; Henry, *Writing* 76; McKenzie 182) in rhetoric and composition are productive if they invite students to think about how corporatist analogies and other rhetorical constructions affect them. Learning to critique fast capitalist and post-Fordist analogies like "project management" and "marketing" as they are used in contexts like outplacement can help students to understand how such analogies perform rhetorical work that affects their academic, civic, personal, and professional lives.

In her discussion of knowledge transfer, Donahue observes, “What is perhaps most interesting of all is the fact that the single most important and agreed-upon tool for developing transfer—reasoning or learning by analogy—is the least-studied or referenced in composition studies. Analogy is, for most transfer scholars, at the heart of it all” (159). Analogy determines the nature of candidates’ work in outplacement. However, candidates’ abilities to comprehend the analogies that practitioners use to orient candidates to outplacement work requires an understanding of how knowledge transfer itself works. This conclusion supports Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak’s finding that “it was the language of the TFT [i.e., ‘Teaching for Transfer’] course that provided students with the passport to writing across multiple sites” (61). The question remains, however, whether negotiating analogies is the most effective or efficient way for people to learn how to accomplish work—including that of job-finding.

The two training manuals that I discuss, including Lee Hecht Harrison’s *Managing Your Search Project* and Right Management’s *Marketing Your Talents*, use “project management” and “marketing” as analogies that are meant to orient out-of-work people to job-finding work. Since many out-of-work professionals are neither project managers nor marketers, they must rely on “layperson” (Geisler xiii) understandings of these terms to use these analogies effectively in their job-finding work. Out-of-work professionals who have experience in project management and marketing may have better chances of applying the analogies of project management and marketing to their job searches because they are arguably better able to transfer

their professional knowledge of project management and marketing to their identities as outplacement candidates, job seekers, and job applicants.

The significance of the project management and marketing analogies that are used in outplacement is that candidates must understand these analogies to accomplish the job-finding work that the *Managing Your Search Project* and *Marketing Your Talents* manuals ask them to perform. These manuals do not ask the candidates to perform project management or marketing work per se. Instead, “project management” and “marketing,” in the capacity of analogies, are cognitive bridges—“passports” (Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 61)—from most candidates’ “layperson” (Geisler xiii) understandings of these concepts to “project management” and “marketing” work as these manuals define it in the outplacement context.

Outplacement training manuals like Lee Hecht Harrison’s *Managing Your Search Project* and Right Management’s *Marketing Your Talents* use analogies including “project management” and “marketing” as cognitive frameworks that orient out-of-work people to their job-finding responsibilities. However, “project management” and “marketing” mean different things in outplacement than they do in these professional areas. As outplacement firms compete for access to sponsoring organizations’ displaced worker populations, Lee Hecht Harrison and Right Management use the “project management” and “marketing” frameworks to describe job-finding work. For example, *Marketing Your Talents* invokes the project-management analogy when it explains to out-of-work people, “to manage a career successfully[,] you must be able to transfer your skills, proactively pursue your next career opportunity, and push to stay on the leading edge of your profession. You can

no longer depend solely on your employers keep you state-of-the art; the responsibility for your learning and growth rests with you” (1).

Another management analogy, that of *career management*, guides out-of-work people’s work in the *Marketing Your Talents* program; as the manual explains, “The Right Management process will show you how to become your own career manager” (1). Similarly, *Managing Your Search Project* invokes a “project management” analogy that describes out-of-work people’s job-finding responsibilities. As the manual explains, “You know . . . that effective project management involves definable phases, delineated steps[,] and identifiable milestones. Managing a project as important as your job search needs to be structured in the same manner” (A-5). In these cases, career management and project management are analogies; they are not areas where outplacement candidates as learners must have professional expertise.

Managing Your Search Project and *Marketing Your Talents* also use marketing analogies that direct out-of-work people to job-finding tasks. For example, *Managing Your Search Project* explains,

One way to understand the value of defining a target market is to look at your [job-]search project as if it were a sales and marketing endeavor. If you were planning to introduce a new product, you would first need to identify the group of customers who would most likely need and purchase your product. . . . The same is true in job-search[—] . . . your target market is defined by four factors: industry or type of

organization, size, location[,] and the culture of the organization. (A-142)

Here, the manual constructs for outplacement candidates a layperson understanding of both what marketing is and the kinds of work that marketers perform.

The *Managing Your Search Project* manual advises out-of-work people to develop a “personal marketing plan” consisting of a “[p]rofessional objective”; a “[p]ositioning statement with competency list”; research on a “[t]arget market” of industries and organizational types, as well as their “[g]eographic location[s]”; and a rolling “[t]arget list” of potential employers (A-148). Likewise, in *Marketing Your Talents*, the program’s “Research Your Market Phase” (see table 1) positions out-of-work people as market researchers. In the manual, “Market Research” entails “gather[ing] all the relevant information on the [employment] options (or industry sectors) you have researched,” “establish[ing] relationships with one or more key people in each of those sectors,” and summarizing, in writing, the results of that primary and secondary research (99). In these cases, “marketing” (*Managing* A-148) and “Market Research” (*Marketing* 99) signify practices that are unique to outplacement and are different from the practices that marketing professionals perform in their work.

Analogies of “project management” and “marketing” shape the writing work that the *Managing Your Search Project* and *Marketing Your Talents* manuals ask their respective sets of candidates to perform. In *Marketing Your Talents*, out-of-work people’s marketing work involves composing in genres that engage with ideas of transfer, transition, and transformation. To perform that work, candidates compose in

genres beyond the résumé. For example, in terms of writing for transfer understood as *connecting capabilities to opportunities*, the manual prompts outplacement candidates to compose “Needs/Contribution Statements” in which they “list all of the needs and issues . . . within a given industry segment” and “summarize the specific experiences and skills that qualify . . . [them] to address that need or issue” (137). In their needs/contribution lists, candidates juxtapose their own qualifying “experiences and skills” (i.e., *capabilities*) with industries’ and employers’ needs (i.e., *opportunities*).

Regarding writing for transition understood as *negotiating experiential domains* and writing for transformation understood as *participating in changeable contexts*, the *Marketing Your Talents* manual asks candidates to compose in another genre, the “Market Research Summary” (107). In this genre, candidates develop a qualitative inventory of “positive” and “negative factors” (106) that characterize a given “industry,” “sector,” or “company” (106). The manual asks candidates, “What factors have you identified as ‘positives’ . . . —i.e., work environments, growth trends, jobs that sound exciting to you[?]” (106). The manual also asks candidates, “What factors represent ‘negatives’ . . . —i.e., consolidation of the industry, obsolescence of the products or technologies, regulatory threats or geographical concentration in places you’d rather not be[?]” (106).

The manual prompts candidates who compose in the “Market Research Summary” genre to evaluate what they surmise, based on their primary and secondary qualitative research, to be things they may like and dislike about working in a certain industry or for a given employer. Candidates’ “positives” and “negatives” are meant to be grounded in affect and rationality: candidates may wish to pursue work in a

certain industry or with a given employer because it “sound[s] exciting,” or they may dismiss such opportunities because of unfavorable industry trends or undesirable geographic locations. The manual “addresse[s]” and “invoke[s]” (Ede and Lunsford 156, 160) out-of-work people as active, feeling, and thinking agents who can negotiate both *experiential domains* and *changeable contexts* as they seek meaningful, new work opportunities.

The above discussion suggests that to transfer knowledge successfully using analogies, learners (in this case, outplacement candidates) must understand the sense in which a given knowledge resource (e.g., an outplacement training manual) is using an analogy—e.g., in an “expert” or a “layperson” (Geisler xiii) capacity; the sense in which the knowledge resource delineates the “arcane” (Geisler 53)—i.e., specialized—work that it expects the learner to perform; and the terms by which the learner is expected to make the cognitive “leap”—or, in other words, acquire the cognitive “passport” (Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 61)—that will take them from the analogy to the realm of the arcane, specialized work in question. The variables are: what the learner knows about the analogical knowledge domain, the knowledge resource’s assumptions about the learner’s analogical knowledge, and the translation that the learner can make between his or her extant experiential knowledge of the analogical domain and the knowledge resource’s delineation of the “arcane” work that it expects the learner to perform. Analogies may not be “generalizable” (Donahue 154) if they signify different work in different cognitive domains.

For educational practitioners and curriculum designers, the two problems are, first, to help learners understand if and how knowledge transfer works and, second, to

evaluate the pedagogical costs and benefits of using analogies as learning aids. Outplacement's "project management" and "marketing" analogies show that people have unequal access to analogies as conceptual frameworks. Outplacement candidates have unequal understandings of what "project management" and "marketing" signify. Furthermore, these concepts have limited purchase in helping candidates to perform rhetoric and writing work in outplacement. The question of equitable access to "ways of knowing" (Belenky et al.; Carter) becomes salient in knowledge-transfer discussions. As Donahue is careful to ask, "For how much longer will *transfer* remain the term of reference?" and, "At what point might the term [transfer] no longer service the discussion adequately?" (161).

Education and Professionalism

Outplacement shares characteristics of educational and professional workplace settings. From this perspective, outplacement reflects the idea that experienced professionals—whether they are out-of-work or not—should pursue educational objectives continually to sustain their professional capabilities. While outplacement pedagogies emphasize out-of-work people's learning of preliminary concepts that delineate contemporary job-finding practices, processes, and tools, they also demand out-of-work people's collaborative, professional participation in outplacement. Outplacement models the kinds of participatory activities in which people should engage during their professional employment. The implication for compositionists is that educational and workplace contexts should be read as interdisciplinary rather than divergent entities. The implication for employment

writing is that such writing is situated amongst and between academic, civic, personal, and professional workplace contexts.

Views of school and work as “worlds apart” in studies of workplace writing (Dias et al. 3), as well as views of writing courses, curricula, minors, programs, and majors as preparation for contexts “beyond” themselves (*Framework 2*; WPA; Grobman and Weisser 201) contribute to “transfer,” “transition,” and “transformation” narratives’ attainment of intellectual capital in rhetoric and composition; in turn, such narratives reinforce artificial differences between academic and professional communities. My study of outplacement suggests to compositionists and students that joining professional communities should not entail leaving one’s academic communities behind. Instead, students should use employment writing strategies to consider how they will negotiate—continually during their careers—the relationship between their academic and professional lives.

Compositionists have benefited from the commonplace that professional workplaces possess authenticities that educational settings cannot claim. The truism that workplaces are authentic implies that educational settings lack authenticity; this belief invites students to compose narratives of—to borrow Lu’s phrase, “conflict and struggle” (“Conflict” 32)—whereby they “document” (Anson and Forsberg 204) their movements from the (inauthentic) academy to the (authentic) professions. For example, in their *Written Communication* article, “Moving Beyond the Academic Community,” Anson and Forsberg employ the testimony of “college seniors . . . who were conducting professional internships” to “examine the transitions that writers make when they move from an academic to a nonacademic setting and begin writing

in a new and unfamiliar professional culture” (204, 201). Anson and Forsberg “document . . . a cycle of expectation, struggle, and accommodation typical of” their student “interns as they began writing in new professional settings” (201-02).

Outplacement suggests that compositionists and students should view with caution the idea that education and professionalism are different, discrete entities. Although Anson and Forsberg “identified from our data three stages of transition through which the interns passed as they moved from academic to nonacademic writing”—including “*Expectation*,” “*Disorientation*,” and “*Transition and Resolution*”—(208), the idea that there are affective, ethical, and rational distinctions between “academic” and “nonacademic writing” and between “academic” and “professional” or “nonacademic setting[s]” may predispose Anson and Forsberg’s students to composing testimony of their transitions between these realms in the capacity of differences, rather than similarities, between school and work. Students may be “document[ing]” their transitions “from” the academy “to” the professions as narratives of “conflict and struggle” because they believe that courses, curricula, and educators are asking them to.

In his monograph, *Writing Workplace Cultures* (2000), English scholar Henry performs similar rhetorical work to that of Anson and Forsberg. Gathering empirical data for his book, Henry draws on written narrative accounts of the workplace experiences of his students, whom he identifies as “practicing professional writers (and aspiring writers) [who] composed workplace ethnographies of writing” in which “they produced analyses of discursive processes and products in workplace cultures” (*Writing* xi). Henry recounts in his book’s introduction that he “struggled to develop

adequate representations of what” his students “had done” in writing their “workplace ethnographies” (*Writing* xi). As he reports, “My solution has been to conceptualize this book as an archaeology, in which researchers’ findings and researchers’ self-representations figure as so many shards to be scrutinized by readers according to their own theoretical frames and local contexts” (*Writing* xii).

Researching outplacement, I perform similar “archaeological work” (Henry, *Writing* 9): I report on outplacement consultants’ and candidates’ experiences, but I do so using an ethnographic methodology that emphasizes the relative importance of transfer, transition, and transformation as outplacement’s dominant, recessive, and idealized curricular objectives. Furthermore, I discuss transfer, transition, and transformation in the framework of Adler-Kassner and Wardle’s “threshold concepts of writing studies” (3). While my empirical research pointed to this methodological framework’s importance, my “archaeological” recovery of ethnographic data regarding outplacement emerges in and through discourse that is germane to compositionists’ work. My study pertains to both my readers’ needs as compositionists and my own employment writing objectives in rhetoric and composition; it is not, and cannot be, purely objective work.

The same is true for Henry and his readers: his students’ testimony of their academic and professional experiences reflects his premise that academic and workplace cultures are different from each other. Henry desires to “study the specific ways in which the structures and practices of our academic institutions shape writing subjects’ relationships with other subjects, and how these relationships compare with those of the workplace. In what ways are writing subjects shaped as functionaries,

and in what ways as collaborators or apprentices?” (*Writing* 17). Henry lays claim to his students’ testimony’s relative authenticity. The audiences that he “addresse[s]” and “invoke[s]” (Ede and Lunsford 156, 160)—including “professional writers (or aspiring writers), workplace managers, writing teachers, curriculum designers, professional writing scholars, and compositionists” (11)—are meant to “scrutiniz[e]” (*Writing* xii) his students’ testimony in accordance with their “own theoretical frames and local contexts” (*Writing* xii) Henry’s “archeological” analogy suggests that his project is to recover testimony of his students’ participation in “workplace cultures” on behalf of the academy, and the implication is that academic and professional cultures are, to employ Dias et al.’s phrase, “worlds apart” (3).

In their contribution to Dias and Paré’s edited collection *Transitions* (2000), workplace writing scholars Freedman and Adam also use an archaeology metaphor to signify their attempt to uncover evidence of distinctions between the academy and the professions. Freedman and Adam recommend, for instance, that the “first step” in understanding the relationship between educational and professional workplace environments “must be a sensitive anthropological analysis—perhaps even archaeological excavation—of each learning site” (58). Using the metaphor of “contaminat[ion]” (Freedman and Adam 57; Dias et al. 200), Freedman and Adam suggest that while, in colleges and universities, the “requirement to grade and evaluate contaminates the relationship between students and instructors . . . [s]chools do offer the opportunity for an exclusive focus on learning and the learner, uncontaminated by concerns for results or material outcomes” that characterize participation in professional workplaces (Freedman and Adam 57). Here, the

metaphor of contamination suggests that the academy and the professions are “worlds apart” (Dias et al. 3) and that people’s cross-cultural interaction across the two “settings” is undesirable for reasons of “contaminat[ion]”: mutual interactions between the academy and the professions may pollute these settings’ “ecologies” (Reiff et al. 5).

Many compositionists’ main concern is to ascertain the student-as-subject’s relative place in the “mutually constitutive” (Beach 111; Feldman and Orlikowski 1241; Fenwick 52) “sociomaterial assemblages” (Fenwick 84) of education and professionalism. The idea is that educational and professional settings are different yet interconnected. This concern drives three beliefs: first, that students can “transfer” writing-related knowledge amongst and between academic and workplace contexts (Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak; Nowacek); second, that students “transition” from the academy to the professions (Anson and Forsberg; Dias et al.; Dias and Paré) and can give written testimony thereof; and, third, that learning “threshold concepts of writing studies” (Adler-Kassner and Wardle 3) is a “[t]ransformative” (Meyer and Land 7; cf. Adler-Kassner and Wardle 2) experience for students.

While Faigley laments that a job applicant—whose application letter Faigley analyzes—“effaces himself” in his epistolary writing (*Fragments* 142), Faigley also says that “written texts” are not “detached objects” but rather “links in communicative chains” (“Nonacademic” 235). While this applicant “effaces himself” in his job-finding writing, he may be working to build rapport with hiring specialists and professional colleagues through speech or via writing in genres other than the job application letter and résumé. Like Faigley, Henry sees concern for social justice in

the pronouns that workplace writers use to signify their subjectivities in their texts.

Henry argues:

When conceptualized as a site at which social forces struggle to enter discourse, the ‘I’ of the professional writer stands as a key point in intervening in cultural reproduction. The erasure of the ‘I’ through current-traditional composition epistemology has been roundly seconded by workplace discursive practices, judging by the reports of researchers [i.e., Henry’s students] in this book, rendering this site [i.e., ‘the ‘I’ of the professional writer] somewhat inaccessible.

(*Writing* 165)

Faigley and Henry both fear that workplace writers’ identities and subjectivities will become lost to “the new capitalism” (Gee 54). However, as I have attempted to show in the present study, outplacement candidates’ identities and subjectivities emerge in ways other than via job-finding writing in dominant genres like the résumé. They emerge, for example, through fit and employability in the capacity of interpersonal constructions involving job applicants, hiring specialists, workplace colleagues, and other constituents.

As Gee argues, “In the emerging world of the new capitalism, security, which people once sought in fixed identities, static localities, and permanent jobs, resides not in one’s ‘employment’ but in one’s ‘employability’” (61). He explains further, “What the new capitalism requires is that people see and define themselves as a flexibly rearrangeable portfolio of . . . skills, experiences, and achievements” (61). Outplacement shows that people must draw on education and professionalism, and on

each other, to remain employable. Outplacement is by no means a panacea that will resolve capitalism's depersonalization of workers and workplace practices. I have shown, though, that outplacement is connected to other contexts—i.e., academic, civic, personal, and professional ones—in which people interact in mutual support as they work to improve societal conditions for themselves and others.

On contrasting different “[k]inds of ‘I’s’” (i.e., uses of the first person singular pronoun) that appear in the discourse artifacts of relatively economically advantaged and relatively economically disadvantaged children, Gee argues, in his contribution to Cope and Kalantzis’s edited collection *Multiliteracies*, that “through the mediation of families, communities, and schools[,] two broad types of people are emerging for our new world. One type is ‘fit’ for the new capitalism; the other type is not” (54). Gee contends that “‘fit’ for the new capitalism” comprises sociocultural readiness that correlates with socioeconomic status (62), a finding akin to Bourdieu’s conception of *cultural competence*, “which is acquired in relation to a particular field functioning both as a source of inculcation and as a market, [and which] remains defined by its conditions of acquisition” (Bourdieu 65). Gee illuminates the palpable tension in the academy that emerges between the goal of preparing students for professional work and the possibility of losing them to corporatist machinations.

For example, while Henry critiques “current-traditional composition epistemology” and “workplace discursive practices” for their effacement of the first person singular pronoun—and, thereby, “the ‘I’ of the professional writer” (*Writing* 165)—Gee, in turn, critiques Lave and Wenger’s conception of “communities of practice” (Gee 50; Lave and Wenger 30; Wenger 6) for being a theory in which, says

Gee, “the romantic nostalgia associated with ‘community’ is recruited, while the primacy of sociotechnical engineering is masked” (50). As Gee contends, “Communities of practice, I would argue, are the crucial node at which business, schools, and society are aligning and merging in the new capitalism” (50). It is therefore unsurprising that Adler-Kassner calls Lave and Wenger’s “communities of practice” idea an example of a pedagogical “approach . . . that demonstrate[s] how a remodeled balance between liberal learning, professional training, and disciplinary identity can help students become career ready” (449).

For Adler-Kassner, the “communities of practice” model is an “analogical” (Donahue 147) construct, a “passport” (Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 61) between the realm of compositionists and the territory that is inhabited by proponents of CCSS and CBE, who, Adler-Kassner claims, wish, for imperatives of revenue and profit, to reduce rhetoric and writing to functional, competency-based bodies of knowledge. While Adler-Kassner does not desire the functionalization of rhetoric and writing education for corporatist purposes, she echoes CCSS and CBE proponents’ sentiment—which O’Neill et al. share (274)—that rhetoric and writing students should be “career ready” (Adler-Kassner 449). From my perspective in studying outplacement and advocating for compositionists’ embrace of employment writing as a rhetorical tool for orienting students to writing and its relationship to their careers, “career read[iness]” involves helping students to develop generative theories of their relationships to work—theories in which they place themselves and their interactions with others front-and-center and in which they negotiate continually the relationship between education and professionalism.

Publicity and Privacy

Outplacement is an industrial and a civic project. Although most US outplacement providers are for-profit enterprises, outplacement is also a civic initiative in some localities. This suggests that outplacement can be read industrially and civically, regardless of whether a given outplacement organization under study is deemed “public” or “private.” The implication for compositionists is that identifying, accessing, and analyzing private communities is necessary to understand public ones. The implication for employment writing is that such writing has private and public characteristics and is generative of private reflection and public attention. Debates in rhetoric and composition over whether writing programs should be understood as “civic” (Giberson and Moriarty, “Civic” 204) or “professional” (McCartan and Sadler 98; Grobman and Weisser 190), “general-specific” or “liberal-technical” (Campbell and Jacobs 280; cf. Livesey and Watts 85; McCartan and Sadler 98; Rude 165) may be most helpful when they aid compositionists in designing them. As the following discussion of publicity and privacy suggests, writing programs may be the most effective when they prompt students to address the meaning of and relationship between terms including *publicity* and *privacy*, *civic* and *professional*, *general* and *specific*, and *liberal* and *technical* as they pertain to education and professionalism in rhetoric and writing.

In his call for program proposals for the 2013 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in Las Vegas, NV—themed “The Public Work of Composition”—English scholar Tinberg notes, “Public funding for higher education continues to decline and in its place private organizations—including for-

profits—rush to fill the void (Tinberg, *Call*). Tinberg asks compositionists, “In what sense is writing public work?” and, “As [US] states continue to cut funding for colleges and universities and as private entities come forward to initiate educational reform, how might composition step up in defense of public funding for higher education?” (*Call*). The conference theme and Tinberg’s questions underscore a dialectical tension between publicity and privacy in the field that reflects many compositionists’ advocacy for “social justice” (*Call*) and, in some cases, their concomitant distrust of entities that are designated as “for-profit” or “private.” The reason for such distrust is that some compositionists equate privacy with an ethos of individualistic accountability, competitiveness, and responsibility, rather than with collaborative interactions that are mutually beneficial for individuals and communities whose members may have unequal educational access.

Adler-Kassner puts some educators’ advocacy for social justice and distrust of corporatist privacy into historical context in her discussion of general education’s history at US colleges and universities. She says that “three models for general education” have emerged since the arrival of “general education as it was conceived of during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries” that have attempted “to encompass intellectual development (liberal learning); ‘curricular unity’ via specialized, discipline-based inquiry (disciplinarity); and training for participation in the broader culture (professional training)” (438). The first model, in Adler-Kassner’s view, “attempt[ed] to achieve this equilibrium” by emphasizing “the ability to identify critical social issues and develop methodologies that could be applied to address those issues” (438). The second model “sought to balance the tension

between liberal learning, professional training, and disciplinarity” by placing “emphasis . . . on lifelong learning (liberal learning) with an eye toward educated reflective practice” (439).

Adler-Kassner says that the “third model of general education attempting to balance tensions between liberal learning, professional training, and disciplinarity” placed an “emphasis on the role of general education in cultivating the citizenry” that “shifted from a sense of collective action . . . [to] individual effort”—i.e., “to be[ing] an *individually responsible* participant in the culture” (439). In her discussion of the CCSS and CBE initiatives, Adler-Kassner asserts that “the college- and career-readiness framework” these initiatives’ adherents invoke “taps into a . . . tension . . . between education as a public good and education as a private good” (441). She claims that these initiatives “collapse distinctions between liberal learning and professional training” and thereupon “position professional training as a public good, privileging the development of [students as] individually competitive economic actors” (441-42). In Adler-Kassner’s view, CCSS, CBE, and similar initiatives downplay education’s role in developing citizens with public orientations and emphasize education’s production of citizens whose goals are privacy and competitive, individualized performance.

As Adler-Kassner and English scholar Anson—the latter in “Climate Change,” his “Chair’s Address” at the 2013 CCCC in Las Vegas (Anson, “2013”)—argue, for-profit education adherents’ eliding of “college readiness,” “career readiness,” “professional training,” the “private good,” and the “public good” (Adler-Kassner 441, 443) coincides with their desire to reject seat-time (i.e., ‘the Carnegie

Unit') as "the official means by which educational achievement is indicated" (Adler-Kassner 445). As Anson argues, while "the Carnegie Unit eventually became the gold standard for certifying student progress toward a degree[,] . . . the Department of Education, accrediting agencies, the Lumina Foundation, and others are trying to figure out how to regulate institutions that want to move toward competency-based education," an initiative that allows students to "fulfill . . . [certain] education requirements" via testing and, thereby, "jump . . . more quickly into the workforce" ("2013" 332). Adler-Kassner and Anson are concerned that CBE emphasizes demonstrated competency at the expense of reflective inquiry. The heart of their concern is that, under CBE, undergraduate education, including in rhetoric and composition, could become vocationalist in terms of its style of curricular implementation.

Outplacement gives out-of-work people rhetoric and writing training that reaches toward the idealized objective of "career management," which prompts candidates to "transfer your skills, proactively pursue your next career opportunity, and push to stay on the leading edge of your profession" (*Marketing* 1). Perhaps outplacement's most striking characteristic is the valuable, comprehensive view of "career management" that its for-profit providers advocate, which is, paradoxically, one that they take special care to make and keep private. Even though for-profit outplacement providers such as Lee Hecht Harrison and Right Management offer similar curricula and are organizational exemplars of a "public good" (Adler-Kassner 438) in their capacities as educational initiatives that support effective professional

“reflective practice” (Adler-Kassner 439), these firms regard their curricula as proprietary and their constituents’ lived experiences as confidential.

Focusing on the work of private organizations (e.g., for-profit outplacement firms) will help compositionists to better understand the nature of composition as public work. Invoking an argument made by philosophy scholar Nancy Fraser, writing and rhetoric scholar Steve Parks claims that “the struggle to alter conceptions of ‘the public’ are contingent on formerly private behaviors being transformed into public concerns” (Parks 15). Fraser suggests that there are gradations rather than binary distinctions between publicity and privacy. For example, she argues that while the “rhetoric of domestic privacy seeks to exclude some issues and interests from public debate by personalizing and/or familiarizing them,” the “rhetoric of economic privacy, in contrast, seeks to exclude some issues and interests from public debate by economizing them; the issues in question here are cast as impersonal market imperatives or as ‘private’ ownership prerogatives or as technical problems for managers and planners, all in contradistinction to public, political matters” (73).

Whereas the state government-operated outplacement training center where I performed empirical research for this study made outplacement a “public, political matter” by intervening in the job-finding work of experienced professionals who were state residents, the for-profit outplacement provider whose consultants I interviewed invoked the “rhetoric of domestic privacy” to argue that their business had interests in maintaining its own and its candidates’ “economic privacy.” Because some of the for-profit provider’s candidates sought to retain their “domestic privacy,” for reasons including the fact that some of them had not told their family members that they had

lost their jobs, the for-profit outplacement provider sought “economic privacy” to ensure its candidates’ confidence in the services that it offered. The outcome for the for-profit provider’s consultants and candidates was that unemployment became a “technical problem” (rather than a public problem) that they needed outplacement’s privatized places, spaces, and time to solve.

There is common ground between compositionists’ interest in contrasting their work with CCSS, CBE, and other corporatist interests (Adler-Kassner; Anson, “2013”) and for-profit outplacement providers’ invocation of the “rhetoric[s]” of “domestic privacy” and “economic privacy” (Fraser 73) as grounds for keeping their proprietary outplacement curricula confidential. Neither constituency desires the “commodification” (Horner, *Terms* 27) and “reification” (Wenger 58) of their curriculum or pedagogical approaches. Adler-Kassner resists CCSS and CBE based on her argument that these initiatives elide a historical “tension” between conceptions of general education as a “public good” and general education as a “private good” by “position[ing] professional training as a public good, [and, thereby,] privileging the development of [students as] individually competitive economic actors” (441-42). However, Adler-Kassner’s resistance to CCSS and CBE is also grounded in her concern that these initiatives will reduce rhetoric and writing education to “instrumental” (Moore, “Myths” 211; Rude 167) work that serves “college and career readiness” objectives at the expense of giving students access to “liberal education” (437). Outplacement providers do not wish to see their curricula “commodified” or “reified,” either. For profit and state-governmental providers do not want other constituencies to annex their curricula for their own purposes.

Fraser addresses the dynamic relationship between “publicity” and “privacy”; as she explains, “there are no naturally given, a priori boundaries here” (71). Adler-Kassner’s and Anson’s (“2013”) critiques of CBE can be read, for example, as attempts to privatize liberal rhetoric and writing education against CBE proponents’ identification of “professional training as a public good” (Adler-Kassner 441). Adler-Kassner’s argument reflects the idea that liberal rhetoric and writing education takes place in a private realm that is distinct from the realm of marketplace competition that the CCSS and CBE initiatives appear to serve.

Writing and rhetoric scholar Beaufort historicizes the agonistic relationship between civic and corporatist entities in rhetoric and composition education. She claims that “rhetoricians traditionally have focused on communications whose goals are ethical and civic and have not considered interpersonal or commercially oriented communications scholarly interests” (233). Although the subject of Adler-Kassner’s discussion is pedagogy as contrasted with “scholarly” research, Beaufort’s claim reinforces the idea of rhetoricians’ and compositionists’ historical distrust of corporatocracies (Beaufort 233) and other private initiatives. As Brandt makes clear via her discussion of “literacy sponsorship” (*Literacy* 18), however, it would be a mistake to consider rhetoric and writing education as taking place in a private, a-socioeconomic realm.

Fraser contests the idea of a binary relationship between public and private realms. In doing so, she writes that “the problem of democracy becomes the problem of how to insulate political processes from what are considered to be non-political or pre-political processes, those characteristic, for example, of the economy, the family,

and informal everyday life” (65). For Fraser, reinforcing the distinction between public and private entails asking “how to strengthen the barriers separating political institutions that are supposed to instantiate relations of equality from economic, cultural, and socio-sexual institutions that are premised on systematic relations of inequality” (65). Publicity and privacy are social constructions that afford and constrain people’s access to literacy and understanding.

Lee Hecht Harrison, Right Management, and other for-profit outplacement providers compete to sell sponsoring organizations their services. Although their curricula are substantially similar, these firms are interested in retaining control of their curricula for reasons that echo compositionists’ desires to shield rhetoric and writing education from the interests of the CCSS’s and CBE’s respective sets of proponents. For-profit outplacement firms give outplacement training to candidates in accordance with their seniority and their sponsoring organizations’ generosity. Candidates who participate in for-profit outplacement programs therefore receive unequal access to for-profit outplacement providers, consultants, resources, and services. In contrast, state-resident attendees of the state government-operated outplacement training center’s programs receive equal access to the center’s services based on their state residency and statuses as out-of-work people. This does not mean, however, that the state government-operated outplacement training center’s candidates benefit from the training program in equal ways.

The outplacement candidates whom I interviewed had dramatically different career and professional development experiences before, during, and after their participation in outplacement. Some experiences afforded them career advancement

and others constrained their career development. These experiences reflected their participation in inherently inequitable public and private academic, civic, personal, and professional environments. Their challenge was to navigate—individually, collectively, and with the help of community, educational, familial, for-profit, governmental, professional, private, and public constituents—the inequities that they faced. The outplacement consultants and candidates with whom I interacted engaged in this work as extensively as their circumstances permitted.

Conclusion

Outplacement, as adult education in rhetoric and writing for out-of-work people, has dominant, recessive, and idealized curricular dimensions: *transfer* (connecting capabilities to opportunities), *transition* (negotiating experiential domains), and *transformation* (participating in changeable contexts). I have used five threshold concepts of writing studies—*social participation*, *genre work*, *identity*, *learning*, and *reflection*—to explain how these curricular dimensions gain their dominant, recessive, and idealized characteristics. Outplacement offers curricular activities, objectives, practices, and theories that would be beneficial for out-of-work people and experienced, novice, and pre-professionals—including college and university students in professional writing, technical communication, rhetoric and composition, and other areas.

Outplacement suggests that there are ways of predicting potential challenges that people will encounter in their professional careers. Focusing on outplacement and unemployment aids people in understanding employment. Studying employment philosophy, policy, and practice from a rhetoric and writing perspective can help

students to anticipate their careers' trajectories, know what to do when their career plans change, and understand how their relationships to work will change as philosophies and practices of employment evolve. This does not mean that all students must become economists, HR professionals, or outplacement consultants; rather, it means that compositionists' and their students' knowledge resources expand when they consider employment philosophies, policies, and practices as realms that are worthy of critical rhetorical evaluation.

This does not mean, either, that understanding employment rhetorically reduces rhetoric and composition to an instrumental, vocational project. Outplacement is a rhetoric- and writing-based adult-education initiative that helps out-of-work people to write résumés, research job opportunities, perform effectively in job interviews, and understand their always-emerging rhetorical relationship to their work. Résumé writing, job-finding, and interviewing are valuable, but outplacement also helps out-of-work people to understand professional employment's rhetorical contexts. Helping out-of-work people to develop employment-related rhetorical acumen is an idealized pedagogical objective in outplacement, however.

Despite its strengths, outplacement's four principal limitations, in my view, are: first, candidates' attainment of reemployment, rather than of comprehensive, employment-related rhetorical thinking, is outplacement's dominant objective; second, out-of-work people receive unequal access to outplacement; third, policies of confidentiality and privatization rather than openness and transparency govern many outplacement providers' operations; and, fourth, analogies like project management and marketing, while giving out-of-work people rhetorical frameworks for seeking

reemployment, narrow those constituents' thinking to the idea that job-finding is a corporatist practice.

These limitations are opportunities for compositionists who wish to take an employment writing approach to their pedagogies. The first opportunity is to reorient outplacement as an “activity system” (Engeström 1994) around the objective of employment rather than that of reemployment. While outplacement practitioners help candidates to gain reemployment, compositionists can help students to gain employment. In terms of employment writing, the latter objective involves engaging students in developing generative theories of their relationships to work. The three objectives of transfer (i.e., connecting capabilities to opportunities), transition (i.e., negotiating experiential domains), and transformation (i.e., participating in changeable contexts) are ways of orienting students to employment writing work.

Second, employment writing should be an essential teaching and learning objective in all college and university settings in which students have access to rhetoric and composition education—including two- and four-year institutions, as well as institutions that may adopt CBE models. While this strategy does not resolve the problem of providing all people with equitable access to higher education, it does refigure employment-related learning as a college and university project. Rather than being viewed solely as a job-finding activity that out-of-work people perform in outplacement, employment writing becomes in higher education a civic, liberal, and pre-professional initiative.

Third, refiguring outplacement as employment writing makes outplacement “public work” (Tinberg, *Call*) in rhetoric and composition and higher education. With

this re-figuration, higher-education administrators and other constituencies (e.g., employers) may be willing to direct additional or supplemental funding to writing programs to support employment-focused pedagogical initiatives. As Adler-Kassner warns, however, entities that adopt, establish, fund, or support academic programs may attempt to influence their pedagogical implementation. While institutions and employers may be willing to invest in programs that advance students' employment-related rhetoric and writing capabilities, resource support for employment writing initiatives may entail the cost of shared "accountab[ility]" (O'Neill et al. 275; Adler-Kassner and Harrington 81) for, and mutual influence upon, curriculum design and implementation.

Fourth, compositionists can help students to develop employment writing acumen that will benefit them in corporatist contexts. Employment writing can be an essential component of students' navigation of employment-related experiences, philosophies, policies, and practices throughout their careers. In its idealized form, outplacement involves writing in dominant genres including the job application letter and résumé as well as idealized genres including those of life writing. Students should be taught comprehensive, holistic, humanistic employment writing practices before—and as—they become experienced professional workers.

Preparing students both to seek and perform professional work and to understand how their jobs will change as their careers unfold requires compositionists to help them learn how to theorize their relationships to their work. Outplacement points to employment writing as a productive locus of rhetorical inquiry and writing practice for students who need a comprehensive strategy for connecting rhetoric and

writing work to their professional objectives. Writing for transfer, transition, and transformation is that strategy.

Table 1

Outplacement Training Manuals' Curricular "Phase[s]," "Milestone[s]," and Chapters

Lee Hecht Harrison, <i>Managing Your Search Project</i> (A-2)		Right Management, <i>Marketing Your Talents</i> (iii-v)	
"AIM" ¹ "Phase"	"Milestone"	"ZIP" ² "Phase"	Chapter
"Assess Opportunity"	"1. Survey Your Professional Environment" "2. Determine Your Professional Objective" "3. Create Your Communications Strategy and Résumé" "4. Define Your Target Market"	"1. Preparation-Understanding Yourself"	"1. Introduction" "2. Understanding Your Strengths" "3. Defining Your Objectives" "4. Developing Your Résumé"
"Implement Search"	"5. Gather Marketplace Information" "6 Get Your Message Out" "7. Talk with Hiring Managers" "8. Consider Other Methods of Search"	"2. Research Your Market" "3. Focus-In on Specific Jobs"	"5. Research Your Market Phase" "6. The Power of Networking"
"Manage Transition"	"9. Interview, Cultivate Offers[,] and Negotiate" "10. Transition into a New Position"	"4. Interview and Negotiate to Closing"	"7. Interview and Negotiate to Closing" "8. Negotiating the Offer"
		"Landing"	--
		"5. Manage Your Career"	--
		--	"9. Organizing Your Job Search"

Source: *Managing Your Search Project*. Lee Hecht Harrison, 2006; *Marketing Your Talents*. Right Management, 2006.

¹ "AIM": "Assess Opportunity," "Implement Search," "Manage Transition" (*Managing* A-2).

² "ZIP": "Zeroing-In Process" (*Marketing* 11).

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