Nicholas Curl

Professor Perry

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The Importance of Credibility and Identity

In “Pay attention to the man behind the curtain: The importance of identity in academic writing,” Bronwyn T. Williams writes to academic writing instructors so that they understand that credibility and identity is key for writing an academic piece. In order to achieve this aim, he uses two moves: revealing his identity and quotes from experts.

Williams reveals his identity in various ways with the purpose of establishing credibility and experience regarding the subject for his audience. He reveals his identity by telling his audience about his personal experience reading academic writing. This is shown when he sets up his main argument for the paper. “I heard again all the arguments about how objective, rationalistic, academic literacy leaves no room for issues of identity” (710). Williams gives his readers this bit of insight to help setup his main purpose regarding identity. In doing so, he reveals a part of his identity, which allows his audience to relate to subject, in turn relating to Williams. Additionally, his identity is revealed by moving from common sense to his claim, changing how his audience views him and his credibility. Williams uses this method when he is talking about the presumed identity of an author. “When we pick up a piece of academic writing, without explicit descriptions about the identity of the author, we often move to our cultural default setting of whom we assume the author to be. In the West, there is a cultural image of the scientist as a white man in a labcoat (or in the humanities, as a white man in a tweed jacket)” (712). Williams disrupts the readers view of himself regarding his identity. This allows him to change the mindset of his readers of what is the actual identity of the author. His audience view that Williams’s credibility is greater, since he throws his identity into question. With both of these ways of revealing his identity, Williams establishes his authority about the subject matter.

Williams uses quotes and paraphrases with the purpose of establishing his credibility and purpose. He uses a variety of sources to help support his claims, especially when using quotes from experts. When talking about readers presuming the identity of an author, Williams paraphrases an argument made by Spack. “But we make assumptions about the identity of the author that rest on dominant culture ideas and images, which for scientists and scholars are white, male, and professional class” (712). Here he paraphrases this quote to allow him to further his argument. With this he allowed the reader to understand that he has credibility and is able to find evidence to support his claims. He also commentates on pieces of academic writing from other people. He shows this when referencing Watson’s book *The Double Helix*. “What is compelling in *The Double Helix* is the combination of Watson’s distinctive personality with a breathtaking passion for his work” (712-713). Here he furthers his claim by describing briefly what the book is about, but then ties it in with his claim. With using external sources, Williams was able to show the readers his credibility with his claims.

After reading this essay, I agreed with Williams regarding every piece of writing has an identity. Back in high school, I had to write a research paper regarding a topic of my choosing. When I was grabbing sources, so that I can understand the subject and be able to reference them, I was taught that even though there was not apparent bias in a non-fiction book, there was one since information can be omitted. This is the same with identity, even if the author did not intend to have one, it is still present. My feelings after reading this essay have not changed, but my previous knowledge is confirmed.