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A Qualitative Study of Graduate and Professional Studies Students' Writing Identities: The Role of Writing Centers in Constructing Identities

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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

STUDENTS' WRITING IDENTITIES:

THE ROLE OF WRITING CENTERS IN CONSTRUCTING IDENTITIES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania
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Title: A Qualitative Study of Graduate and Professional Studies Students' Writing
         Identities: The Role of Writing Centers in Constructing Identities

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Forming a new identity as a writer in a higher education context is often a difficult process and one that can be particularly difficult for returning students who have been away from school for many years or even decades. This qualitative case study of the perceptions of five Graduate and Professional Studies students examines the ways that adult, nontraditional students face the task of becoming writers and forming a writing identity in a small private liberal arts university context.

This study focused on the experiences of five adult, nontraditional learners as they worked with writing center tutors. Before they started their tutoring sessions, each participant completed a short literacy narrative. When they had completed their tutoring sessions, they each took part in a final interview. The documents and transcripts that were generated in this study indicated the study participants had overwhelmingly positive feelings about their work with their tutors, and most were actively involved in the tutoring process; however, they did not articulate any progress in forming a writing identity for themselves as academic writers.

This study identified six characteristics common to the five participants: adult, nontraditional students are interested in identifying their own problems; adult, nontraditional students exhibit a lack of self-confidence; adult, nontraditional students talk through their problems with a tutor; adult, nontraditional students seek affirmation

from their tutors; adult nontraditional students demonstrate a need to explain their choices; and adult, nontraditional students evaluate their tutoring sessions. Furthermore, the findings of this study indicate that further research is necessary to understand identity formation as it relates to adult, nontraditional learners in colleges and universities as they work with writing center tutors. This research has demonstrated a need for writing center and composition researchers to study in more depth the relationship between adult, nontraditional learners, writing centers, and identity formation.

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My fiancé, Wayne Maples, has also been a source of strength and support for me. He has taken every step of this journey with me, even when he was in Tennessee, and I was in Pennsylvania. Without his understanding and patient listening as I worked on the dissertation, I would have had a much different and less fulfilling experience. I could not ask for a better man to accompany me throughout this process.

and the bad days. Cindy has unfailingly brought me back to reality and given me the encouragement I needed to finish this dissertation.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Overview of the Study

Beginning any new endeavor requires a person to move out of his or her "comfort zone" and learn to become a participant in a new environment, including entering an institution of higher education. Traditional freshmen and students returning to school after a number of years away face the same challenge: to become members of a new community of learners who already seem to "know the rules." However, when they join this new community, returning students bring a different set of challenges and misconceptions to their experience than do traditional students.

Beginning a new endeavor also requires that students form new identities to fit the new roles that they have taken on when they entered a college or university. They must learn to navigate the unfamiliar waters of higher education because all students bring with them apprehensions about how to go about "being a college student."

Faced with new sets of standards, new expectations from professors and fellow students, and the need to form new identities, many students seek help in becoming successful. One place where students find help is the campus writing center. Writing centers, then, are faced with the prospect of helping a wide range of student demographics, needs, and expectations.

In other words, when students transition from high school to college or university, they also begin to play the roles and construct the identities that they perceive to be expected of them in the new role of "college student." In fact, Bartholomae (1985) wrote, "Every time a student sits down to write for us, he has to invent the university for

the occasion" (p. 134). Put another way, students must create a new identity for themselves as soon as they begin writing in an academic setting—"to invent the university for the occasion." Forming a new identity in a new context, particularly in relation to the perceived roles that a student must construct upon entering the world of higher education, can be a difficult journey for any student.

While this is true of all students entering a higher education setting, I believe that understanding the ways that adult nontraditional students perceive, or possibly misperceive, their new role as writers is vital in the 21st century because of the influx of nontraditional students, both graduate and undergraduate, into colleges and universities. These students often use writing centers to help them gain a sense of confidence in their writing. Therefore, the intersection of nontraditional students' growing understanding of who they are as writers and their work with writing centers is an important avenue of investigation.

Using Roz Ivanič's 1998 study of the writing and identity of nontraditional students, I will use as a critical framework the principles she outlined in *Writing and Identity: The Discoursal Construction of Identity in Academic Writing*. Ivanič identified three possible selves "[w]hen people talk about identity in relation to writing" (p. 23): the autobiographical self, the discoursal self, and the self as author. Because this dissertation centers on the way that nontraditional students view themselves and their identities in light of each of these selves, questions about students' writing identities arising from each of these selves inform this study: What do I already know about myself as a writer (autobiographical self)? What do I want others to think of who I am when they read my writing (discoursal self)? Who am I as an author (self as author)?

Ivanič (1998) pointed out that researchers use different words to refer to identity depending on their focus and their discipline. In her study, she defined identity as a "general purpose word" that refers to "people's sense of who they are" (p. 10). Another aspect of identity that Ivanič (1998) referred to is the idea of multiple identities, pointing out that identity is used in the plural as well as singular. People do, of course, have more than one identity; writing student is only one of many both academic and nonacademic identities that any student constructs. Therefore, Ivanič used the word "identity" in both the singular and plural. She also used the word "self" as a synonym for identity. Therefore, in this research I also used the terms synonymously.

Brooke (1991) has written that identity is "a term which denotes what is most central or important about the self" (p. 12). In his study of the ways that students come to understand their discoursal identity in a writing workshop situation, he merged the idea of identity with negotiation to understand students' "attempts to mitigate the clash between opposing forces, to compromise between conflicting camps, to satisfy groups with different demands" (p. 12).

These two definitions of identity formed the foundation of my own use of the word. Like Ivanič, I used the term in both singular and plural senses, and, like Brooke, I was interested in the personal struggles of students learning to become writers in an entirely new and mostly unfamiliar place. For many adult students, adding a new identity as a writer to their other already-established identities can be a challenge, and the journey can be bumpy and difficult; therefore, many of them seek help in constructing their academic identities in various places, including the writing center.

While discourse and identity have long been a focus of research (Brooke, 1991; Cherry, 1988; Cohen, 2011; Ivanič, 1998; Michaud, 2013; Ritchie, 1989; White, 2011), there is less research concerning the relationship between students' development as writers and the work they do with writing center tutors. Tutor identity has also been addressed in writing center scholarship (Finstrom & Lenoir, 2012; Mohrbacher, 2013; Stonerock, & Zimmerman, 2012). While tutor identity is certainly important in any endeavor that seeks to understand how tutors and tutees work together to help students develop their skills as writers and scholars, few studies focus on the role that writing centers and writing center tutors play in adult, nontraditional learners' growing understanding of who they are as students, as writers, and as scholars.

In addition, prior learning in high school plays a role in many students' attitudes toward writing and their role as writers. This prior learning is a significant component of Ivanič's autobiographical self. In other words, this learning is the past that makes up who they were as writers in middle and high school, but as Bronwyn Williams (2006) has pointed out, "Many students are taught that using the five-paragraph essay form with any semblance of identity removed is the core of academic writing and will allow them to march triumphantly through the writing assignments of one class after another" (p. 711). Indeed, students have been well trained in middle and high school to write these kinds of essays. However, in such a rigid format, what are students to do with their own individual identities? If, as Williams asserted, "identity is always present in writing" and it is "present in the best academic and scholarly writing as a positive force" (p. 712), students' writing should also be an indicator of their identity. However, in higher education, students must move beyond the autobiographical self to create the discoursal self. A good

question here, then, in light of their previous experiences with rigid writing expectations, is, "Who will help them to develop their own identity as writers?"

Even more than for traditional students, nontraditional learners' problems with entrenched thinking about what is and what is not "school writing" are exacerbated by the time that has elapsed between when they graduated from high school and the time they entered the higher education community as college or university students. Added to prior learning about writing is the problem of their having forgotten—or their perception of having forgotten—much of what they learned in high school. For many of these students, then, finding their own voice—their own identity as writers—was either not part of their original learning experience in writing the required five-paragraph essays, or it has been forgotten altogether. With continually growing numbers of nontraditional students entering colleges and universities, these students present a challenge for those looking for ways to make their transition from the rigid, identity-barren prose typical of high school writing to becoming writers with unique voices.

Since the 1980s, colleges and universities have seen increasing numbers of adult, nontraditional learners enrolling in their programs. Researchers in andragogy, the study of adult learners such as nontraditional learners, define these learners as students who are not full time students, who have been out of school for a period of time, who have full-time jobs and other, often many other, responsibilities, and who are over the ages of 18 to 23 or 24 (National Center for Educational Studies, 2016).

As a result of the influx of adult, nontraditional students, Malcolm Knowles (1988) pioneered the study of the characteristics and needs of adult students in an effort to effectively reach and teach these students. As a result of his observations of adult

students, Knowles developed a list of six principles that could be used by educators to help those who work with adult students gain a clearer understanding of their adult, nontraditional learners. In *The Adult Learner: The Definitive Classic in Adult Education and Human Resource Development,* Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2005) listed these principles as "(1) the learner's need to know, (2) self-concept of the learner, (3) prior experience of the learner, (4) readiness to learn, (5) orientation to learning, and (6) motivation to learn" (p. 3). Of particular interest to me in this study are the self-concept of the learner, the prior experience of the learner, and the motivation of the adult student to learn. As Bizzaro and Werner (1987) have noted, "[M]any theorists note the existence of a reciprocal relationship between students' self-concept and their academic achievement" (p. 458). This reciprocal relationship is a key element in how successful learners are as they seek to become the writer that they know their professors expect.

Selfe (1995) also addressed the issue of the growing numbers of adult, nontraditional students in "Surfing the Tsunami: Electronic Environments in the Writing Center," when he noted that beginning in the early 1990s the population of colleges and universities began changing; more students attended part-time, more women were going to college, and "[o]lder students . . . [made up] an increasingly larger percentage of the student population" (p. 316). Because of the growing number of nontraditional students, most of whom are adult learners enrolling in colleges for the first time, faculty who teach core classes and writing-intensive classes, particularly composition classes, and writing center directors and tutors face a new challenge. For nontraditional students, who tend to be more proactive in their education and seek out places to receive help with their writing and studies, (Knowles, 1988) writing centers offer a space to work with tutors frequently

and early in the writing process and provide a safe place to become academic writers (Fishbain, Knowles, Johansen, & Houston, 2005).

Ivanič (1998), whose research grew out of her own work with nontraditional students as a literacy tutor, discussed the difficulties of working with the increasing number of students who had left school before they had even achieved basic literacy skills. As a result of her observations of the work that needed to be done to help these students to obtain the literacy skills necessary to succeed in higher education, she "suggest[d] that mature students engaged in academic assignments provide a prime example" of what Candlin called "crucial moments in discourse" (p. 5). Ivanič believes that studies of nontraditional students provide valuable insight into the importance of learning more about their experiences in becoming writers at the college level: "I am particularly focusing on the way in which writing academic assignments causes people to 'change their speech', to take on particular identities, and how they feel about it" (p. 7). For Ivanič, nontraditional students provided the best source of identifying how they felt about learning the new language of academic writing and analyzing how this knowledge affects the way that educators and tutors work with nontraditional students.

Writing Identity

As soon as we begin writing in school, we are actively forming an idea of who we are; quite often, we are doing so in writing. We are, in essence, creating a writing identity for ourselves. We are beginning to form a discoursal self, leading to an understanding of who we are as writers, Ivanič's "self as writer." Susan Kanter (2006), in her dissertation *Embodying Research: A Study Of Student Engagement In Research Writing*, addressed the ways that students learn to write research papers by using models and the influence of

their teachers to create their own identities as writers. She has suggested that "[w]hen students develop identities as readers and writers, they join the club" (p. 64). The club she speaks of is, of course, academic discourse, and it is one that students must learn to navigate at several points in their education. In a paper presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Anne Aronson (1992) categorized nontraditional learners into two broad types: those who are never able to reconcile their membership in multiple communities, and thus their multiple identities, and those who welcome the challenges of their various identities. She wrote of the challenges faced by all students, but particularly nontraditional learners: "The most important of these conflicts [between multiple identities] is the conflict between identities that allows one to join the club, and identities that exclude one from the club" (p. 3). Traditional college students must learn to juggle their multiple identities while learning to write on the college level, and they must also learn the particular discourse of their disciplines; the same is true for nontraditional students. The difference is that there has been a gap, some longer than others, between the adult learners' high school years and their college years. Entry into the club of "academic writer" is, therefore, one more challenge nontraditional students, who are already strongly invested in their education, must face, but they are often less confident of just what it takes to become a member of the club. In addition, when many of these students enter a college or university, they have not yet thought about or begun to create their discoursal selves or come to view themselves as authors at all.

Kathryn Valentine (2008), too, has noted that college students bring with them a host of "memberships of communities of practice" (p. 66), which has the effect of

complicating their efforts to learn to be a member of the new academic community they have entered and which, for many, is significantly removed from the other communities to which they belong. This experience is even more complicated for adult learners who bring with them differing sets of responsibilities and experiences than those of their younger, traditional counterparts. These experiences can also be disconcerting and often even disruptive. For example, in *The Everyday Writing Center*, Geller, Eodice, Condon, Carroll, and Boquet (2007), writing about what they call "trickster moments" (p. 19) in communities of practice, argued that the "disruptions of . . . everyday" (p. 19) concerns and activities can raise questions about identity. Geller et al. (2007) explain that:

> [T]rickster moments may be funny or shocking. But as with any rupture of the assumed, they may also shove us headlong into learning anew what it means to work responsibly . . . in the context of the writing center. (p. 16)

The entry of a new kind of learner—adult, nontraditional students—into a new community of practice such as a writing center certainly does present both the center and the students with a trickster moment, one in which both parties must "learn anew" how to work responsibly in a joint venture: to help the learner become a member of the community of writers in an academic setting. However, not all events that might be considered "disruptions" in a community of practice, such as a writing center, are negative events; they can also cause both tutors and tutees to reexamine themselves in the context of the writing center tutorial and in the context of themselves as members of an academic writing situation. As nontraditional students struggle in their new "disrupting" community of practice and they work with writing center tutors, they are also learning to become academic writers who are a part of the community.

Adult, nontraditional learners, who are sometimes in traditional programs but are often in graduate and/or professional studies programs, now make up a significant percentage of students on college and university campuses (Pelletier, 2010; "Changing Demographics," 2008). In fact, Pelletier (2010) stated that "[d]ata reported by the consulting firm Stamats suggests that as few as 16 percent of college students today fit the so-called traditional mold: 18- to 22-years-old, financially dependent on parents, in college full time, living on Campus" (p. 2). Therefore, this study is necessary to determine whether adult, nontraditional students' use of writing centers has an impact on their growing awareness of their writing identities. A cursory search of writing center publications, such as the *Writing Center Journal* and the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, illustrates that issues of adult learners' use of writing centers to construct their new identities as writers has not yet received much space in the literature, and I have not found a great deal of research on the role of writing center tutors in helping these returning students establish their identities as academic writers when the they write papers for their various classes. While some researchers such as Ivanič (1998), Michaud (2013), and Geller (2007) have moved the discussion of identity forward, more work is necessary to fill the gap to include nontraditional students and writing centers.

Some writing centers, though, have already begun taking steps to fill the gap. For example, an article from Pomona College's writing center webpage titled "Encouraging a Writer Identity" explores the issue of why some students identify themselves as writers and others do not. Although the article does not strictly focus on nontraditional students, it does reinforce the idea that, while writing centers cannot function in the same way as a teacher in a classroom, tutors' excitement about their own writing can be a positive

influence on both students' writing and their growing sense of their own identities as writers. Nontraditional and traditional students alike need this kind of excitement about writing to give them the momentum they need to create their own voices as academic writers. As a matter of fact, Geller et al. (2007) pointed out that we have "failed to account for the operations of power, of identity, of meaning-making in our [writing] centers" (p. 14). That failure to account for the issues of identity should be examined more in-depth in the literature of writing centers.

Sokol (2009), who examines Erikson's theories of identity development and reviews the literature about identity formation over the course of life, agrees with Kroger and Waterman in their studies on identity development. For example, Kroger (2007) has stated that "[i]t is not uncommon for individuals to reevaluate, refine, and readjust vocational and social roles during adulthood" (as cited in Sokol, 2009, p. 144). He also agreed with Waterman in his assertion that "[c]hanges in life circumstances can also cause a reexamination of identity issues . . . [and that] midlife career changes, geographic relocations, resuming one's education, divorce, remarriage, death of loved ones, and adoption are all viable possibilities for middle adulthood" (as cited in Sokol, 2009, p. 144). In addition, he noted that "[r]esearch has indicated that in transitioning from young to middle adulthood [ages 25—39], both men and women frequently change their values, goals, what they find important in life, and what they are generally striving toward" (p. 144). During these times of transition, nontraditional students will encounter new experiences and new expectations during their college years that they may not be ready to face alone, particularly those experiences and expectations that come with writing assignments in their classes.

Furthermore, nontraditional students also bring with them different sets of identity issues than traditional students. While traditional students are simply continuing their journey with little more than a summer break, nontraditional students will necessarily have to become readjusted to life as a student, possibly spending more time determining who they are as students and new scholars than traditional students. Because they have not had the same seamless move from the literacy practices of high school to the more demanding literacy practices of higher education, they may, as Ivanič (1998) has stated in her study of the writing identities of adult, nontraditional students, find "academic life in general, and its literacy demands in particular, alienating" (p. 5). She proposed that these adult learners and their writing present a rich source of information concerning the way that students negotiate the writing that is expected in college-level classes and the way that they develop an awareness of who they are as writers. In her study, Ivanič has concluded that many researchers of writing and its processes have focused on "the context, the reader, the task, goals and purposes, and processes, but researchers other than [Roger] Cherry have neglected the writer" (p. 329). Indeed, in her study, she has taken up Cherry's (1988) call for more study of "the issue of self-representation" (p. 328) in students' writing and has put it into the context of nontraditional students.

Michael J. Michaud's (2013) case study of one adult student's negotiation of his discoursal identity using Ivanič's framework illustrates how this student's writing occurs at the intersection of his professional and academic writing. Building on and extending Ivanič's work in identity formation of adult students, his study focused on the impact of professional writing on a nontraditional student's identity formation in an academic situation. Michaud ultimately concluded that the implications of his study reach further

than simply the ways that nontraditional, adult students construct their identities as writers in the academic arena; he stated that all students, regardless of their age or experience, must encounter this same journey to creating their identities as writers. In this dissertation, I have looked for ways to extend both Ivanič's and Michaud's work by exploring why and how adult learners use writing centers and tutors in their journey to become more effective academic writers.

In this study, I aimed to determine how nontraditional students work with writing center tutors and whether their work with tutors helps them as they are creating their own identities as writers. As part of this study, participants composed their writing narratives about their past writing experiences to submit to me before they began working with a tutor. Then, they worked with tutors in three separate sessions and reflected on their work with their writing center tutors in a final interview with me. I then examined the data to see if they were writing and thinking in a way that would engage all of their possible selves, autobiographical, discoursal, and self as writer. As they wrote their narratives, they needed to consider the ways that they approached writing in the past. This activity would, I believed, help them to think about their past attitudes toward writing. Then, as they worked with writing center tutors, they were be exposed to the new language of academic writing and to form an idea of their discoursal selves, the selves they present to their readers. Finally, when they reflected in their final interviews on their past writing experiences and their tutoring sessions, they could begin to move into their newly created identities as writers, and authors, in an academic environment. This more focused study of the writing center's impact on the construction of nontraditional learners' identities could lead to a better understanding of how the work they do with writing center tutors

helps this population of students to construct new identities for themselves in an academic environment.

Writing Centers in the Gap

In 1995, Muriel Harris wrote about the reasons that students need to spend time with writing tutors; the fact that students need to spend time with writing tutors holds true for all students, nontraditional as well as traditional. And, while it is true that Harris meant all students, it is now time to spend more research hours on the different ways that adult learners use the writing center. While some researchers have written of the relationship of writing centers and adult, nontraditional students (Aronson, 1992; Gardner, Lyman, & McLean, 2002; van Rensburg, 2006), there is still much to be studied regarding students who return to school several years after graduation. Research should be conducted that explores the ways that these students use writing centers and their relationships with their tutors to come to understand who they are as writers and how to use their newly identified writing personas in their academic writing assignments.

In this study, the gap that I seek to draw attention to is nontraditional students' work with writing center tutors and how this work can help students in their quest to create their own identities as writers. Ultimately, this study could lead me to a better understanding of the ways that adult, nontraditional students negotiate their growing understanding of who they are as writers by revealing the ways that their sessions with writing center tutors have contributed to their new roles as writers who are more confident in their identities as learners in an academic environment. By asking them to talk about and reflect on their experiences before and after writing center tutorials, I hoped to come to a clearer understanding of the kinds of academic writing that student

writers and writing center tutors focus on that leads the students to a more defined sense of who they are and who they want to be as writers in their new roles in an academic environment.

Purpose Statement: The Relationship of Nontraditional Learners and Tutors

This research seeks to explore the effect that writing center tutoring has on nontraditional students' growing sense of their discoursal identity. In this study, I examined the attitudes that students had about themselves as writers and as students at two different points in time: before their work with a writing center tutor and after their work with the tutor. In the course of this study and in the dissertation, the relationship between nontraditional students' growing senses of their own discoursal identity and their work with writing center tutors was examined and clarified. This dissertation asserts that there is a relationship between writing center tutors and adult, nontraditional tutees in their journey to become more confident members of their discourse communities.

Problem Statement: How do Nontraditional Students use Writing Center Tutoring to Help Them Identify Their Discoursal Identity?

Nontraditional learners who use the services of writing centers have presented a challenge for writing teachers and writing centers alike. Academic writing in particular gives nontraditional learners a difficult time. The issue this dissertation examined is the attitudes of these learners about the way that writing center tutors help them to identify their discoursal selves using the lens of identity theory and writing center pedagogy. In addition, this dissertation presents a clearer understanding of the perceptions nontraditional students had about their experience in the writing center as they related to constructing their writing identities.

Discourse

There is no real consensus on the meaning of *discourse* at present; however, I have used it, as Ivanič did in her study, in a "relatively narrow definition . . . as involving verbal language" (p. 18). She used discourse in the domain of Gee's "Discourse with a big 'D' . . . [as] ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions and clothes" (Gee, 1990, p. 42). This meaning most clearly mirrors my own as it relates to this dissertation and its participants. Because I believe that writing involves social practice as much as it does process, I focused this study on Gee's "big 'D'" in order to examine the ways that adult students come to define themselves in their present college context.

Discoursal Identity

In this dissertation, the term "discoursal identity" further defines and refines the meaning of discourse by focusing on the ideas of identity and identity formation in the writing of students, in this case adult, nontraditional students. I have combined Ivanič's (1998) and Gee's(1990) definitions of discourse and my own use of the term identity, based on the studies by Ivanič (1998), Brooke (1991), Michaud (2013), and Valentine (2008). For each of these researchers, identity indicates the ways that adult students define themselves in all areas of their lives; it is an intensely personal self-identification. They are also interested in the ways that these identities inform the students' growing sense of who they are as writers in their new and often difficult environment. Because the purpose of this dissertation has been to study the ways that adult, nontraditional students experience their work with writing center tutors to construct their own writing

identities, I wanted to better understand how they developed a new identity as a writer, if they did so, and the ways that they used the help of writing center tutors in their journey to form new identities.

Part of the problem that student writers, both traditional and nontraditional, face is that they have not yet come to an understanding of who they are as students, who they are as writers, and who they are as scholars in their fields. Both Ivanič and Michaud conducted significant studies detailing the experiences that older students had as they wrote for their college-level classes. Ivanič (1998) studied eight adult students as they reflected on their writing "during their second or third years at university, documenting the discoursal choices they made, the origins of these choices, and the dilemmas they faced as they wrote these essays" (p. 109). Her observation of their struggles formed the foundation for this dissertation in that it described the kinds of experiences these students have had and how they worked to address their challenges in becoming a writer in a new context. Michaud's (2013) study followed the similar struggles of "one adult student negotiating the transition between professional and academic communities and identities" (p. 31). In this case, the student had already developed a significant professional identity but was in transition to an administrative role that involved teaching. Michaud studied his journey to develop an identity as an academic writer that he could incorporate into his professional identity and new responsibilities. In addition, Thomas Newkirk (1997), in *The Performance of Self in Student Writing*, has also explored the strategies of student writers as they attempt to produce the kind of writing expected of them in a college classroom. His analysis of student writing as they "perform self" in their writing has shown the disconnect between what writing teachers consider mature writing and the

ways that students choose to form their own writing identities, regardless of how those in

academia believe they should perform. In this book, Newkirk examined several student

essays in light of what writing teachers traditionally have expected from student writing.

In his study, he showed that student writing that might have been considered below

average in many composition classes was instead rich in the students' created selves, a

performance of self that he refers to in the title of the book. In addition to these studies,

Valentine's (2008) research has also demonstrated that students' "narratives might

contribute to changed understandings of the different ways students define themselves

and negotiate their identities within our institutions" (p. 69). It is at this point, that I

believe that adult students take an important step in creating new identities by consulting

with writing center tutors in an effort to improve their writing but which, this study has

aimed to show, also helps them to gain the confidence to develop their own voice, their

own identity, as they compose papers for their classes.

Nontraditional Students

As with most terms that must be defined in a quickly changing environment, such

as higher education, definitions of groups tend to be more abstract than reality. Groups

are always limited by circumstances, and one definition does not fit for all populations.

This is particularly true in my study. In 2016, the definitions of traditional and

nontraditional students are in a constant state of flux, changing from one year to the next

in many cases. Therefore, I have chosen an already established definition for my

population of nontraditional students for clarity. For the purpose of this dissertation, I

have used the definition of nontraditional students given by the National Center for

Education Statistics:

[N]ontraditional students [meet] one of seven characteristics: delayed

enrollment into postsecondary education; attends college part-time; works full

time; is financially independent for financial aid purposes; has dependents other

than a spouse; is a single parent; or does not have a high school diploma. (as

cited in Pelletier, 2010, p. 2)

These seven characteristics that define nontraditional students set them apart from their

traditional counterparts in several significant ways. First, these students are more likely to

have more roles to juggle than traditional students and, therefore, less time, and the time

between finishing high school or receiving a GED is longer. Therefore, their struggles,

though no more difficult than a traditional student's, put them in the position of learning

again how to define themselves as students and writers. This study, then, will focus on

the work that these adult, nontraditional learners do in identity creation as writers.

In his groundbreaking work on andragogy, the methods educators use to teach

adult students, Knowles (1988) has also identified certain characteristics commonly

found in adult, nontraditional students in general. According to Knowles (1998), these

learners tend to have more of a "perspective of immediacy of application toward their

learning" (p. 53). Therefore, while they may be learning to be students again after being

absent from the classroom for a certain amount of time, they are likely to want to do the

work of defining an identity for themselves as writers early in their programs of study.

Traditional Students

I have defined traditional students in this study using the standard definition: they

are students who enter a college or university for full-time study immediately upon

graduation from high school and are typically 18 to 23 years old. Because of the close

proximity to their high school learning experiences, traditional students' struggles to define themselves as college students differ significantly from those of their adult, nontraditional counterparts. Their roles and lack of as many time constraints as well as their ability to be on campus during daytime hours set many of them apart from nontraditional students.

Writing Centers and Writing Center Tutors

Writing Centers and writing center tutors have had a presence on most campuses for decades. However, while they have similar missions, they differ in many other ways. For example, some writing centers are on campuses that only have a traditional student population, while others work with graduate students as well. At King University, my study site, tutors work with clients at all levels: clients in traditional undergraduate programs, traditional graduate programs, and graduate and professional studies programs. Many are traditional students; however, most are adult, nontraditional learners. Most of the tutors at King are undergraduates, but there are also faculty and staff with master's degrees who work as tutors.

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Research Questions

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This study was guided by one main research question and two ancillary questions. These questions are:

- Main Research Question: How do adult learners in post-secondary contexts experience academic writing as they work with writing center tutors?
- Ancillary Question 1: How do these tutoring experiences help them construct their identities as academic writers?

- Ancillary Question 2: What tutorial approaches do these learners identify as being influential in constructing their writing identities?

Research Approach

This qualitative study was a single case study, one which sought to "capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday or commonplace situation" (Yin, 2009, p. 48) of nontraditional students' experiences in one writing center, using an inductive emergent design to better understand the perceptions of nontraditional learners' experiences in the writing center as they construct or refine their writing identities. An inductive emergent design is based on emergent themes, which are "a basic building block of inductive approaches to qualitative social science research and are derived from the lifeworlds of research participants through the process of coding" (Williams, 2008, p. 248). This design allowed me to identify themes or characteristics by "engaging with the data through interactive reading" (p. 248). As I read and interact with the data I had gathered, I was able to identify and recognize the common themes found in the data I was observing. The study used a social constructionist platform that was informed by certain elements of critical theory in that my study explored current identity theory as it relates to student writing and the way that student writers ultimately become producers of their own discoursal identities. In addition, the dissertation examined the relationship between established attitudes found in classrooms in colleges and universities across the county about student writing and the ways that students confront these attitudes in their quest to form their own identities as students and writers.

During the study, participants first wrote a literacy narrative and submitted that to me. As soon as they submitted their literacy narratives, they began attending tutoring

sessions; each participant attended at least three sessions as part of the study. After they completed their tutoring sessions, the participants met with me for a final interview. The literacy narratives, tutoring sessions, and final interviews helped me to document the participants' initial perceptions of themselves as writers before they began their sessions with the tutors and their perceptions of themselves as writing after they completed their tutoring sessions. I analyzed the collected artifacts (literacy narratives, tutoring transcripts, and final interview transcripts) in an effort to identify participants' attitudes about what they learned about themselves as writers before and after having worked with a tutor and whether they had begun to construct a writing identity for themselves. I focused on the participants' thinking about the role that they perceived their tutors played in assisting them in constructing a writing identity. The aim of this dissertation was to determine if students who work with writing center tutors came to create a writing identity for themselves or if there was no perceptible change in the way they felt about themselves as writers. In addition, I would like to call attention to the important work that writing centers and tutors are already doing to help students to come to see themselves as writers. Creating a new identity of any kind, but particularly creating a writing identity in a new setting, is hard work; therefore, I would also like to help the students who come to King's writing center to create writing identities for themselves that will carry them through their education and into their professions.

A Look Ahead

In Chapter Two of this dissertation, I focus on the research in three distinct areas: identity theory, andragogy, and writing center pedagogy. I argue that the way that adult, nontraditional students construct new identities as academic writers requires more

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attention and research than it has received in the past decades and that helping these students in their quest to construct new identities as academic writers is an important focus of research. While a great deal of research has focused on a writer's process and a writer's reader/audience, very little has been done on the importance of students coming to understand who they are as writers in conjunction with writing centers.

Furthermore, I argue that this focus on helping students to come to a better understanding of who they are as writers is particularly important for adult, nontraditional students. These students have typically been away from academic writing for five years or more years and have already developed several identities and bring with them a different set of expectations, skills, and life experiences, which, I assert, makes them a rich population of study. By understanding the way that my participants used the writing centers to help themselves to construct writing identities, I hope to be able to better educate tutors on the best ways to interact with adult, nontraditional learners, which will, in turn, offer them a better experience as they work toward their writing goals.

Last, I tie these two areas of investigation together by exploring the ways that writing center pedagogy can be used and refined to offer not just adult students, but all students, a venue to discover their own identities as writers. I call for a new paradigm in writing center theory and practice by focusing on the little-researched areas of andragogy and identity as they relate to the relationship between nontraditional students and writing center tutors. Far from being less important than a student's process or audience identification, students' own concept of themselves as writers and members of a discourse community should be an area of significant research in both composition

studies and writing center pedagogy. The more comfortable learners are with who they

are as writers, the better the outcome for professors, writing centers, and students.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In "Listening to Students: New Insights on Their College-Writing Expectations,"

Collier (2014) wrote of the results of the NCTE's first Listening Tour in 2013. The

Listening Tour was, according to the College Composition and Communication (CCCC)

website, an attempt "to build a portrait of the experiences and expectations of incoming

college composition students." The CCCC website encouraged writing professors on

college campuses to have discussions with incoming students in their classes or in more

informal discussions on campus "about what it means to be college- and career-ready."

Participating professors were encouraged to submit the results of their discussions to the

CCCC by answering survey questions and/or submitting video or audio tapes to the

organization. While the students who were surveyed are not identified as either

traditional or nontraditional, it can be assumed that at least part of the sample was

comprised of nontraditional students whose presence on campuses in both traditional and

professional programs has increased over the past several decades and that nontraditional

students hold many of the same ideas about higher education that their younger cohorts

do. Some interesting findings from the Listening Tour are valid considerations in my

research. First, Collier noted that, while most students believe they write more than

previous generations, they do not believe that it counts as "real" writing, which they

define as "being what they do for school" (p. 10). They have not left their ideas of what

constitutes school writing, mostly grammar and mechanics grading only, behind just yet.

In other words, they have not yet begun to develop a sense of themselves as writers, and

as Weinerth (1979) has pointed out, "without the clear sense of self . . . no creation, no growth, no learning, no discovery, or self-discovery can take place" (p. 530).

Second, students have effectively compartmentalized their writing selves into "the writing I do at school" and "the writing I do elsewhere." This compartmentalization of writing clearly demonstrates their attitudes about the work of writing. Collier (2014) has written, "Too often, students see themselves as 'writing in silos,' so what they do outside school is not what they do inside school" (p. 11). In addition, Amicucci's (2013) dissertation, *A Descriptive Study of First-Year College Students' Non-Academic Digital Literacy Practices with Implications for College Writing Education,* further developed the idea of students compartmentalizing writing; she found her participants "had opinions on whether new forms of language such as netspeak abbreviations and acronyms should become part of their academic writing. The majority opinion was that such forms of language should not be a part of formal writing" (p. 161). Therefore, not only do students have definite ideas about what does and does not constitute "real" writing, but they also compartmentalize their writing and silo it—and themselves—in a protected and solitary place, a place in which they are alone in their work of becoming writers.

More telling, however, is that students see themselves as adrift in a world of writing assignments that they must complete alone and with little or no help. Collier (2014) points out this fear articulated by new college students:

Students believe, too, that once in college, they will be left without support when it comes to writing, so not only will they be facing a supercharged version of the performance-based writing they experienced in high school, but it will be without

a net. [The CCCC Listening Tour survey] found that students expect to be on their own tackling research papers and other writing tasks. (p. 11)

This fear is just as valid for students returning after a long absence from the classroom as it is for traditional students and maybe even more so. Neither group is likely to be completely aware of two important facts: first, that composition teachers in college "[provide] ample support for students" (Collier, 2014, p. 11), and second, that writing centers are available with tutors and other services that can help these students to overcome their fears and anxieties. For nontraditional students, their fears about returning to school and becoming writers at the college/university level are multiplied by their other responsibilities and identities as full-time employees, parents, caregivers to elderly parents, and more.

In this chapter, I show how the findings identified in the Listening Tour relate to students' identity formation. These findings concerning students' attitudes about "real" writing and their tendency to compartmentalize and silo themselves demonstrate the need for them to move out of their silos to the social context of higher education and inform my research and the following chapter. First, I look to the literature to find other views of student authorship. Beginning with Williams's (2006) and Collier's (2014) call for a move beyond the five-paragraph essay through Hyland's (2002) ideas about writing being an "act of identity" (p. 1092) and Vygotsky's and Bahktin's theories on the interactive nature of writing, I suggest a way to think about where students have been as writers and why they need to move forward. Next, using Knowles's theories of andragogy and Pelletier's study of the challenges that already-compartmentalized adult students face as they enter higher education, I examine the reasons that students tend to

compartmentalize themselves. Both Ivanič and Park, using Ivanič's theory of the autobiographical self, illustrate the way that nontraditional students compartmentalize their lives and writing. Last, I consider one way that nontraditional students can move out of their compartmentalized silos and become members of the higher education community by using the services offered by writing centers.

Identity theory gives us a lens through which to examine the identities we all construct for ourselves, including the way that both individuals and academic support services such as writing and learning centers decide who they are and what roles they should play in their current environment. Stets and Burke (2000) have written of identity theory and the way that we create identities for ourselves:

> [T]he self is reflexive in that it can take itself as an object and can categorize, classify, or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications. . . . Through the process of self-categorization or identification, an identity is formed. (p. 224)

Identifying who they are as individuals and to what groups they belong is an important process for students as they go about the business of becoming academic writers in a higher education environment. Students entering this new community also have to determine both where they fall in the established structure and where they want to be. The first step, as Stets and Burke (2000) posit, is for individuals in social groups to determine how they are similar to others in a particular social group (self-categorization) and how they are different from those who are not a part of the social group they wish to identify with (social comparison).

When students enter a new social group, such as a college or university, they must begin to categorize themselves in ways that work in the particular social group in which they want membership. According to Stets and Burke (2000), members in a group identify and agree on the way that they belong in the group. Each group has a certain set of rules and expectations, and members of the group must meet these rules and expectations in order to maintain membership. Nontraditional students have been removed from membership in an educational context for a certain period of time, so they no longer have active membership in any academic group; they have become members of other social groups and have been fulfilling the expectations and responsibilities of those groups. When they enter a college or university, they must begin to negotiate new identities and enter new social groups. This entry leads both traditional and nontraditional entering students to learning how to become part of their new social group and to begin to form their new identity. When these students are ready to become a part of a new group, they must first become adept at "[being] at one with a certain group, being like others in the group, and seeing things from the group's perspective" (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 226).

According to Ivanič (1998), students entering higher education, particularly adult students, often experience an identity crisis. In *Writing and Identity: The Discoursal Construction of Identity in Academic Writing,* she noted that adult students are in a position in which they must learn to be part of a new discourse community, one which is either much different from any they have been a part of to this point or one that is completely new to them and possibly places them well outside of their comfort zones. While Ivanič's study delved into these students' experiences and attitudes about this new identity they must create, she did not focus on the role that writing center tutors can play

in helping adult students to discover their writing identities. Much of her work with adult students, however, should inform the work of writing center directors as they train tutors and adjust their methods to serve the needs of this growing population of students. Ivanič's study gives writing center directors a lens through which to view the attitudes and needs of nontraditional students. Her analysis of the words of her participants can help writing center directors and tutors to have a fuller understanding of the concerns and experiences of these students so that they can work more effectively with nontraditional tutees and address their unique concerns.

Robert E. Brooke (1991), on the other hand, has focused his work in *Writing and Sense of Self: Identity Negotiation in Writing Workshops* on how the roles that students and teachers assume in a classroom writing workshop affect writers' identities. Brooke, an early researcher in student-writer identity, states that one "theory of identity negotiation suggests that individuals come to experience themselves as one sort of person rather than another largely through involvement in the social situations which surround them" (p. 15). Brooke believed that student writers in search of an identity in a social context must do this work through interaction with peers and teachers or writing centers, which is a paramount process in their growing sense of self. In addition, he asserted that we are not always cognizant of the ways that our thinking and responses to others are dependent on the people we come into contact with in social situations. Although Brooke was writing in terms of a classroom environment, his view of the classroom was quite similar to Lave and Wenger's (1998) community of practice in that this environment helps students define themselves as writers and is as valid for writing centers directors as it is for composition teachers. While Brooke's study is an early example of using identity

theory to analyze student writing, his observations have been validated though studies

such as Ivanič's, particularly his ideas about the importance of social interaction for

students forming their writing identities. However, Ivanič and others have further

complicated his initial theories by applying them to ESL learners and nontraditional

students and showing that identity formation is a multilayered process in which a variety

of life experiences and situations make each student's journey unique.

In "Inventing the University Student," Kurt Spellmeyer (1996) wrote of the

opportunities of 21st century writers to choose from a larger and more diverse set of

possible identities in both society at large and in an academic setting. He pointed out that

"the movement from the home to the school and to the world of work almost always

involves an untiring labor of ascetic self-suppression and refashioning" (p. 41). He went

on to write that students need to master "literate practices" because they are "essential to

the normalization of identity" in their news lives as college students (p. 41). Indeed,

literacy is the key to students' creation of an academic writing identity because it affords

them the language and the knowledge to become who they need to be in an academic

situation.

Likewise, Lee Ann Carroll (2002) wrote in her study of the way that college

students develop their writing identity that it is necessary to take into account the

relationship between students and their environments. As part of her longitudinal study of

the writing practices of college students, she examined "the frequently painful process

that students undergo as they attempt to meet the varying literacy expectations of

different professors" (p. xv). However, she pointed out the lack of research in

composition studies about how students learn to overcome their difficulties with learning

to write in a new environment. She cited Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, and Rosen's study of the writing practices of secondary school students as a worthwhile study of the ways that students become writers. This study was published in 1975, but even in the early years of the 21st century, few studies have focused on this important aspect of students' experience in becoming a writer, and even this study does not address the strategies used by college students. The studies that Carroll cited (Chiseri-Strater, 1991; Miller, 1990; Walvoord & McCarthy, 1990) informed her research on the ways that students learn to navigate the new processes required in higher education. However, while Carroll was mostly concerned with composition classes, these same observations are surely true of the writing center research community as well because writing centers are working toward the same goal as composition teachers: to help students become academic writers.

Christie, Tett, Cree, Hounsell, and McCune (2007) focused on the element of identity in their essay "A Real Rollercoaster of Confidence and Emotions: Learning to be a University Student." They have posited that learning is "not just the acquisition of memories, habits, and skills, but the formation of an identity" (p. 6). They have said that the "culture shock" of entering a new and unfamiliar territory leads to significant stressors, particularly those that involve students coming to understand who they are and what they should do as college students. Indeed, the purpose of their study is to bring attention to the "links between emotional labour and changing identities which has received some attention in studies of the pathways which non-traditional students take to university" (p. 8). They found that the anxiety that students feel is even more serious when students have little background or recent experience in higher education to help

them navigate the new environment. Part of that anxiety felt by adult, nontraditional learners may very well be the fact that the main way that learners are able to grow and change is by beginning to focus more on the self, on their self-identity (Lerner, 1989). Change can be frightening and unnerving, and nontraditional students are in an environment they have not been a part of for at least half a decade and usually much more.

Lest we consider identity construction to be a completely positive experience without any pitfalls, John Ramage (2006) writes:

Our constructed identity, meanwhile, is as much a negative capacity as it is a positive one . . . We construct ourselves based on available models and within the limits of that which we've been given that each of us has the capacity to reject some models and accept others and to modify what we've been given. (p. 42, 43)

Identity construction is hard work, and it may take a great deal of self-evaluation and moving from past experiences to new and present ones. Ivanič (1998) illustrated the difficulties that returning students can have in overcoming entrenched ideas of identity by recounting the story of Rachel, one of Ivanič's participants in her study of mature students entering higher education after having been out of school for several years. Rachel was entering a field that she was at odds with, and she chose only to gain acceptance into a program just to become a student in higher education.

Ivanič (1998) wrote:

Rachel had a love-hate relationship with the academic community. She identified fully with the values and beliefs of a particular small group of radical feminists she had encountered through Women's Studies courses, but she had mixed

feelings about other groups, departments, or disciplines. She wanted to be

accepted by them, but only on her own terms . . . . and [she] felt extremely

ambiguous about her identity as an apprentice social worker. (p. 156)

Her past experience and her present attitudes made her identity construction as a college

student complex, and she struggled to form her new identity. Rachel is certainly not alone

in her struggle, though. All students, including adult, nontraditional learners, must do the

hard work of discovering a new self as a writer in higher education.

Students Becoming "Real" Writers

Students as Authors

As demonstrated in the Listening Tour results, an important question in studying a

student's process of forming a writing identity concerns the way that students think of

themselves. Do they consider themselves writers, authors? Or do they think of

themselves simply as students who must write essays and papers? Pittam, Elander,

Lusher, Fox, and Payne (2009) found that a small percentage of the students they talked

with in a focus group for their study on students' views on authorial identity had even

considered the possibility that they were authors. In fact, while 19 students were in the

focus group, only two indicated that they had thought about what it means to be an author

and considered themselves to be authors. Interestingly, both of these students had done

writing of some kind outside of a school setting. One student who did not think of herself

as an author said that "[i]t seems a bit grand to describe yourself as an author" (p. 156).

Thinking of oneself as an author is a part of creating a new identity as a college

student/writer, but if this study is any indication, most students have not yet made it over

that hurdle. Because of the time they have spent outside any kind of academic setting, this hurdle can be a particularly difficult one for adult, nontraditional students to clear.

Part of the reason that students have trouble thinking of themselves as authors, as "real" writers, may be the way that they have been taught to write essays from the time they were in high school. Bronwyn Williams (2006) has noted that students have been taught that the best way to succeed as a writer, in a composition class anyway, is to write a perfectly structured five-paragraph essay with all trace of themselves erased from their writing. This thinking permeates their ideas of how to succeed in any writing in any educational context. Therefore, if students are to effectively construct a writing identity for themselves, they will need to think beyond the traditional ways of writing they have been taught. In addition, Collier (2014) has pointed out that many students entering college have rather narrow and uninformed views of what "real" writing is. They think only of the five-paragraph essay as real writing and discount any other writing that they do outside of school as less worthy to be considered school writing. This is illustrated in Amicucci's (2013) study in which her participants considered the writing they did for school to be much different from the writing they did on social media by stating that they found it inappropriate to write for school in the same way that they wrote on Facebook. As Collier (2014) noted, these students are performing as many legitimate literacy acts outside of school as they are in school, including writing blogs that often involve more sophisticated thought processes about politics, social issues, and other significant topics. With this attitude toward the writing they do outside of class, it is no wonder that their essays lack the passion of their other writing.

In "Modeling a Writer's Identity: Reading and Imitation in the Writing Classroom," Brooke (1988) connected imitation in writing for classroom situations with identity and identity formation. In his essay, Brooke used a specific definition of identity, one that works in his context of imitation and writing: "[I]dentity is the sense of self attributed to you by yourself and other participants in your social situation . . . This mutual recognition of self by self and others becomes one's identity" (p. 24). He saw a sense of self as inextricably tied to the way we behave and act in social situations with social groups.

In their efforts to help students see themselves as writers, as authors in their own right, composition teachers offer students themselves and the writers in texts they read as role models for them to use to imitate as they become part of the writing community. Because, as Brooke has written, "[p]eople often learn to be certain sorts of people by imitating those they admire" (p. 24), in a teaching and learning situation, the students are given the opportunity to take on the role of "writer" or "author" through imitation. However, not all students have an interest in imitating or becoming like teachers or professional writers and resist this attempt on the part of their teachers to help them find their way to being authors. Therefore, Brooke pointed out, it is important to remember that identities must be negotiated in these learning situations; teachers must understand that just because they model a behavior that does not mean that students will imitate it.

In his study of students in one classroom who were actively attempting to imitate a particular author, Brooke found that the students, even the "A" students, had difficulty thinking of themselves as authors like the one they were imitating. One student who rejected the idea that her writing in the course was related to her identity at all just saw

the class as typical school work, nothing more. But students who either completely or partially accepted the class as a way to relate their own writing to that of the author they read still did not see a connection to themselves as authors. In fact, none of the students was able to see the exercise as anything but a school assignment. For the most part, they were unable to see themselves as an author with any connection at all to the writer they read and imitated.

Academic Writing and Identity

Hyland (2002) opened his essay "Authority and Invisibility: Authorial Identity in Academic Writing" by noting that one of the most important activities that new students undertake is to "construct a credible representation of themselves and their work" (p. 1091) in their new environment. Part of this process is to create the identity that they believe is necessary to succeed in college. In part, Hyland has written, they create identities by observing how their peers form their own sense of self as academic writers. All writers struggle at some point to establish who they are in new situations, and it is no different when a student enters higher education and must learn to write in the academic arena, one with which they usually have little experience. Hyland has called writing in an academic environment "an act of identity . . . [which] carries a representation of the writer" (p. 1092). All students, traditional and nontraditional, face the challenge of becoming an academic writer because they must begin to enter their new discourse community by constructing a new identity. Like Brooke (1991), then, Hyland considered identity construction as a necessary part of a student's success in a college or university setting.

Similarly, both Vygotsky and Bakhtin saw language as inherently interactive and dialogic. Bakhtin (1981) explained the complex interplay of words with other words in a given environment as "living utterances" (p. 276), which themselves come into contact with other living utterances. Joy Ritchie (1989) has explained Bakhtin's view of language as one in which language is always changing and "reflect[ing] the evolving identity of individuals and communities" (p. 154). Individuals do have an impact on language, she has written, but it is complex and difficult work sometimes. It does not happen alone; Bakhtin wrote that it is a "dialogized process" (p. 277), one in which dialogue is an important process in developing language and identity, and, thus, shows the influence of individuals and communities on language. Ritchie has pointed out out that it is difficult for students to construct their own identities and voices; in fact, she uses the word "struggle" to describe this literacy act. Vygotsky (1962), too, posited that the complex work of writers is both being affected by and having an effect on language and identity construction simultaneously. Bakhtin and Vygotsky also agree that the process of creating an identity is one of negotiation that affects both the individual and the community.

Moira Maguire (2013) stated that students who are more involved in writing using a more academic tone are also more likely to have constructed a stronger sense of themselves as writers. Noting that students who have stronger writing identities have some characteristics in common, she cited *The Harvard Study of Undergraduate Writing*:

The findings indicate that those students who improve the most in their writing are those who (i) see themselves as novice writers initially and are open to new

ideas, new ways of doing things and to feedback, and (ii) develop an

understanding of the wider purpose of academic writing. (p. 1113)

In this research I was looking for the ways that nontraditional students, who generally

view themselves as novices, work with writing center tutors to guide them as they

"develop an understanding" of who they are as academic writers.

The Tendency to Compartmentalize Writing

Adult Students and Identity

The study of adult learning, andragogy, pioneered by Malcolm Knowles, informs

this study in significant ways. Because adults do learn differently and, for the most part,

for different reasons, understanding the ways that they learn helps us to understand that

they will probably go about constructing a new identity for themselves in different ways

than traditional students. One of the most important characteristics of adult learners is

their relationship to learning. Knowles (1988) posited that children learn using a sort of

stock-pile practice. They know they will need to use what they learned in one grade to

move from that level to the next and from one educational level to the next. They store

the information they think they will need for future use. Adults, on the other hand, have

already moved through and probably skipped at least one of these stages of learning

development. They tend to have more of a "perspective of immediacy of application

toward their learning" (Knowles, 1988, p. 53). That is, adult learners tend to want to put

what they have learned in the classroom into immediate practice, particularly in their

professional lives. Knowles called these two processes "a *subject-centered* frame of mind

. . . [and] a *problem-centered* or *performance-centered* frame of mind" (p. 53). Adults

have a problem-centered approach because their reasons for being in school are quite

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different from those of children, teenagers, and young adults. For adults, education is a way to understand and tackle the issues that they face in life and in their jobs. This motivation can give them a different perspective on learning and a markedly different approach to their own education.

Therefore, adult students bring with them to their college experience more life experience and possibly better-defined personal and professional identities, or at least a more clearly defined one. While it might seem that adult students' more significant life experience would cause them to feel more confident, in fact, the changes that they are facing often work to negate the confidence that their life experiences would seem to provide. Crossan, Field, Gallacher, and Merrill (2003) found that the new identity that adult learners are presented with becomes a hurdle for them because "[t]he individual's subjective experience, the meaning they attribute to it their new experiences, and their sense of becoming a certain person . . . may involve changes in a person's identity and perception of themselves" (p. 56). Hyland (2002) agreed in a way, noting that non-native speakers face a greater challenge than native speakers because of added cultural differences. I submit that, in a similar way, adult students entering the classroom after even just a few years away from high school must also feel the added challenge of a different kind of culture.

Maguire (2013) has written of the difficulties that nontraditional students face in academics in general but noted that they have more "adaptive strategies to study" (p. 1114) than their traditional counterparts. An example of the way that traditional students sometimes lack even the knowledge of a need to change is found in Ritchie's (1989) conversations with students in a writing class in which she was an observer/participant.

The student, whom she calls "Becky," was a traditional student who had yet to form any concept of herself as a writer. She held to strict ideas of what academic writing is and is not and what she could or should do or not do. Ritchie noted that "she seemed to have nothing to say . . . [because] she had never invested her 'self'" (p. 160). Maguire believed that nontraditional students, unlike traditional students such as Becky, have found ways to address these preconceived ideas or at least that they are more likely to try. Clearly, both traditional and nontraditional students have challenges to face; however, adult, nontraditional students are usually less bound by the traditional practices that they had learned in high school.

Stephen Pelletier (2010) has written of the wide variety of adult, nontraditional students, who can be any age from around 25 to 75 or older; who may work full time and have children or work part time; who may have no children; or who may have more demanding jobs or less demanding ones. They may even be in the military. Many of these students are only able to be on campus during evening hours, so they are less likely to use the services available to them, including traditional face-to-face writing centers. Most importantly, though, Pelletier pointed out that nontraditional students do not view their situation the same way as traditional students. They expect different things from the classroom and from their experiences with college or university services. For example, Susan Aldridge, president of the University of Maryland University College, stated that "adult students learn differently . . . They don't just memorize. They have a context within which they take information [they learn] and apply it" (as cited in Pelletier, 2010, p. 5). Aldridge also noted that not only do adult, nontraditional students "prefer evening and weekend classes . . . [they also] prefer hybrid classes that combine face-to-face and

online learning" (as cited in Pelletier, 2010, p. 5). In other words, they form their identity as college students differently.

Fishbain (1989) also discovered that the returning students in the writing center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison had much different concerns than their traditional students, including time limitations and anxiety about their new environment. Adult, nontraditional students, Fishbain (1989) and Pelletier (2010) have noted, are less tied to the campus and desire more flexible schedules and services. Their identities will, therefore, be formed differently, which may make it more difficult for them to create an effective learning and writing identity. These expectations and desires also mean that writing center directors and tutors must find new ways to meet these challenges and help nontraditional students to become confident members of their new social group and to form clear identities as members of an academic community.

The multiple identities of adult students also make constructing writing identities difficult for them. They know instinctively that the discourse at this level is different, of a higher status. They may even understand that there are different levels of discourse. For example, Ivanič (1998), discussing the multiple identities of adult students, stated that "[m]ature students are not altogether committed to a single path of acquiring these 'appropriate' discourses. Most of them, while partly desiring these statusful discourses and believing in their power are also resistant to them" (53). Ivanič's participant, Rachel, also illustrates this recognition of the new discourses they must learn but that, like Rachel who was hesitant to fully embrace her academic identity as a social worker, they sometimes do not want to follow the path that has been laid out for them.

Christie, Tett, Cree, Hounsell, and McCune (2007) conducted a study based on scholarship that demonstrates that identity formation has become a key element in understanding the way that students learn in a higher education setting. Nontraditional learners in particular must "adapt to changed ways of learning in order to get the greatest benefit" (p. 4). They have suggested that students "undo" already established learning practices in order to be successful in a college or university program. While this need to "undo" may be true of all students, Christie et al. wrote that it is "clear that learning is a profoundly reflexive and emotional construct" (p. 5), and nontraditional students, who have many other barriers to negotiate, will have this added stressor to their new learning situation.

Discussing the emotional experience of the transition to a college or university setting, Christie et al. (2007) have written of the research that shows "the transformative power of learning in adult education" (p. 5), but they also posited that there is a distinct lack of investigation into the emotional aspect of learning. They pointed out that this emotional aspect of learning is particularly relevant to the study of adult students' experiences in transitioning from a non-academic experience to a higher education setting in which they are not yet comfortable with the role that they will play as college students. Their emotional state is an important element in the way that they learn. As Christie et al. (2007) have written, there is "an emotional impulse to learning . . . [that] is especially pertinent to non-traditional students, many of whom are returning to education later in life and grappling with new or unfamiliar learning environments" (p. 5).

Using Ivanič's theory of the autobiographical self, Gloria Park (2013) described her own journey to understand herself as an academic writer as a springboard to study the

ways that L2 students construct their own identities as writers in the new environment of higher education. She found that, even though her native language and culture is Korean, she was already a member of the higher education community but coming to understand her own identity was "an intense encounter . . . [and a] struggle" (p. 337) as she worked to write about "the experiences of diaspora" (p. 337) as a graduate student. Nontraditional students, either native or non-native speakers, whose struggles are a different kind, can also benefit from looking to their past in a similar way that Park did to understand who they already are before they attempt to identify and become who they want to be as academic writers. Just as Park found "constructing her autobiographical self [to be] an empowering experience" (p. 337), the same can be true of any student entering a new "culture" (i.e., higher education).

Ivanič (1998) recounted in her conversation with a nontraditional student that the self-concept of this student, Rachel, was already formed at the time of their interview, indeed long before the interview. Ivanič noted that Rachel "saw the experience of being a mature woman student as very different from being a regular undergraduate" (p. 127). She considered herself much more focused on completing assignments, that these activities consumed most of her discretionary time because she had to "[catch] up on twelve years of [her] life" (p. 127). In other words, Rachel believed that she had not learned well enough how to be a student, and certainly not a student writer, before she entered higher education. She felt that she needed to catch up with other students who already knew who they were in a higher education setting because of their more recent experience in high school, or at least whom she believed had a clear picture of their school and writing identities. Rachel took part only in particular women's social groups

and saw them as "part of 'the survival tactic of creating an environment in which you

gain support'" (p. 127). She clearly knew that she needed the support of the existing

members of her community in order to learn how to become a member of the group to

which she wanted to belong. Seeing herself as different from traditional undergraduates

and understanding her identity as an older student, Rachel found a way to make sure that

she had a support group to help her in a quest to change, refine, or recreate her new

identity. Indeed, for most regular undergraduates, who are entering higher education

with their peers, these identity-forming activities may not be as necessary as they are for

nontraditional students because of the proximity of their high school experiences.

Similarly, Valentine (2008) has written of what she calls a "transitional doormat"

(p. 75), which is simply the fact that some people seem to have had the way into college

paved for them. They were prepared to go to college by their families, their schools, and

other groups to which they belonged. Although in this study she is referring to the

experiences of "students outside the white, middle class" (p. 75), in this part of her essay

in which she describes the experience of Jermaine, an African-American student

struggling gaining a sense of belonging at his college, the same concepts can easily be

applied to nontraditional students. Here the issue of habitus becomes clear. According to

Compton-Lilly (2014), who studied young writers over the course of 10 years, "People

construct habitus across the life span in relation to the contexts they occupy and the

relationships they form . . . , [Bourdieu's] 'structuring structure' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 167)

that contributes to the construction of both limits and possibilities" (p. 374). In other

words, we become the representation of all that we've experienced over our lifetimes,

and this includes ideas we've formed as a result of the past and the actions that result

from those ideas. Rachel in Ivanič's study, who is another example of the influence of habitus in people's lives, also had no transitional doormat. She worked for over a decade to be able to enter higher education. Therefore, we can easily view the transitional doormat through the lens of class or age or time of entry into higher education. For example, I wonder how many nontraditional students, such as Rachel, are nontraditional simply because they had no transitional doormat through which to enter. Other adult, nontraditional students may not have been encouraged to go to college because, in their families or in their communities, higher education was not valued. Maybe the reason they waited to go to college or university is that, either by choice or circumstances, no one had encouraged them or paved the way for them. Valentine's transitional doormat, then, is a perfect illustration of the situation in which many adult students find themselves because many of them had no value placed on education or they felt unable to meet the challenges of college directly after they graduated from high school.

Students Moving out of Their Silos

Writing Centers and Identity

Writing centers can play a significant role in the way that students view themselves and their writing. Indeed, they can be described using Etienne Wenger's (1998) ideas about communities of practice. Geller, Eodice, Condon, Carroll, and Boquet (2007) in *The Everyday Writing Center*, agreed when they referred to writing centers as communities of practice where students can come to learn to be more effective writers. Wenger's four premises of learning and "the nature of knowledge, knowing, and knowers" (p. 4) start with the idea that as humans we are "social beings." As social beings, we are drawn to social groups, and, as Wenger points out, these groups are vital

elements in learning. In particular, Wenger is interested in the "process of being active participants in the *practices* of social communities and constructing *identities* in relation to these communities" (p. 4). For nontraditional students, who are not often on campus, a writing center, then, can provide just such a place for them to learn as part of a group and, as a result, construct identities in keeping with the new community they have entered. As a matter of fact, Wenger theorized that "learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities" (p. 5). For adult, nontraditional students, the guidance and support of writing centers in their learning is a vital element in their becoming a valued member of their own community of practice as writers.

Because writing centers are by their nature communities of practice, and while they exist to help students to become better writers, nontraditional students must learn to negotiate this community in addition to the others they encounter. As Christie, Tett, Cree, Hounsell, and McCune (2007) have pointed out, learning does not always take place on the individual level; it also occurs at a larger community level. When students learn in a community, such as a writing center, they are offered support and "an environment that encourages an active learner approach" (p.4). Writing centers offer the kind of learner-centered environment that all learners, and adult, nontraditional ones in particular, can become a part of and grow in, if not flourish in, as writers. Learning, Christie et al. (2007) pointed out, is not achieved alone but that students are "co-producers of meaning" (p. 7), which is a key function of writing centers. As Muriel Harris (1995) wrote, "Writing Centers do not and should not repeat the classroom experience" (p. 27). Instead, she has noted that they give students another important

aspect of learning to be a writer: interaction with tutors who, through collaboration, help learners to gain the learning experiences they need to succeed in academic writing.

The website for Pomona College's writing center has a page dedicated to instructing its tutors on ways that they can help their tutees to develop their own writing identity, thus promoting a community of practice. This document explains to tutors that the best way that they can help students visiting the writing center to think of themselves as writers is to be more excited about writing and to exhibit that excitement during the tutoring session. They believe that "the Writing Center can play wingman and attempt to bolster interest [in writing] by providing encouragement" to students as they work to improve their writing and to view writing as more than just a requirement to be completed. Pomona College's dedication to showing its tutors how to help students find satisfaction in their own writing demonstrates one way that writing center tutors can help students to create a writing identity.

In 1989, in the early years of the explosion of nontraditional students on campuses, the staff at the University of Wisconsin-Madison identified problems, such as limited time, life changes, anxiety about competing with younger students, and feeling out of touch with being a student, that nontraditional students expressed that were different from the ones that traditional students typically have. Janet Fishbain (1989) explained the series of workshops their writing center developed to help nontraditional students to both express and overcome their fears concerning being college students and the writing they would be required to do during their years in higher education. Nontraditional students had voiced concerns that their time constraints were such that they were not able to take advantage of all of the services available to them through the

university, including the writing center. These efforts to help students to leave their silos of solitary writing struggles and to work with writing center tutors demonstrates how long writing centers have placed themselves in a position of helping students who cannot easily use their services, are unable to be on campus in the day or the evening, or who prefer not to use online services. As a result, writing centers and their tutors are well placed to help nontraditional students become the writers they want and need to be.

Putting It All Together

Writing center professionals would do well to consider Knowles's (1988) conditions of learning as they go about the business of helping all students, but nontraditional learners in particular, to gain the confidence they need to construct their new writing identities. Of foremost importance to those who work with adult, nontraditional students, is, as Knowles (1988) has stated, we need to be aware of the conditions under which learning works best for these students: "The learning environment is characterized by physical comfort, mutual trust and respect, helpfulness, freedom of expression, and acceptance of differences" (p. 57). Writing centers, more than classrooms, can offer an environment in which nontraditional students can improve their writing skills in a safe environment with tutors who are willing to work alongside the learners as they work. Writing center tutors offer them aid in writing and the ability to express themselves freely and without fear of lowered grades. Because these conditions can be met in writing centers, they are the best place that nontraditional students can go as they do the work of creating their own academic and writing identity.

In light of the large number of students still entering colleges and universities and their need to create new identities, the research in this dissertation can add to the growing

body of literature on adult students and their writing identities. More research is still necessary to determine how nontraditional students use their experiences with writing center tutors to construct new identities, how the way they define themselves changes as a result, and what techniques they identify as most influential in their work to become writers in higher education and in their disciplines. This dissertation will move toward understanding the needs of these students and how writing centers can play a central role in their journey toward defining who they are as writers.

Summary and Look Ahead

In this chapter, I have presented research on the situation that adult, nontraditional students find themselves in. Like their traditional counterparts, these students, as Williams (2006) pointed out, have been taught only the five-paragraph essay and many have been away from academic writing so long that they either never learned this method or they have forgotten it. Hyland and Brooke have complicated this situation by pointing out the need for these students to construct new identities for themselves in order to be successful in higher education. Researchers such as Crossan, Field, Gallacher, and Merrill as well as Maguire have noted the relative difficulty that adult students have because their lives are already more compartmentalized into separate silos than those of most traditional students. Knowles's early work in outlining nontraditional learners' character traits informs this study in important ways. His theories of andragogy can give me a sharper lens through which to view these students and their particular needs as a result of their time away from school, during which they have filled roles as professionals and members of communities outside higher education. His theories can also illustrate how these experiences cause returning students to compartmentalize themselves even

more than they already do. Finally, Chapter Two offered the services provided by writing centers as a solution that adult students have already begun to use and as a place that offers a community of practice where nontraditional students can work with tutors to become members of a new community of writers.

Early in this chapter, I mentioned Weinerth's (1979) statement that "without a clear sense of self . . . no self-discovery can take place" (p. 530). This, to me, is why studying the identity formation of students and how they come to have a clear sense of themselves as writers is an important way to help students, in the case of this study the way to help adult, nontraditional students, to become confident writers in their classes and in their professions. In Chapter Three, I outline my research method, a single case study methodology, in which I hoped to discover the ways that the participants in my study worked with tutors to find that clear sense of themselves as writers, as authors. The artifacts that I collected were be a literacy narrative written by each participant that detailed his or her early writing experiences and attitudes, taped and transcribed tutoring sessions with a writing center tutor, and final interviews with me on the experience of working with a tutor on a specific writing project. The research was guided by the following questions: How do adult learners in post-secondary contexts experience academic writing as they work with writing center tutors? How do these tutoring experiences help them construct their identities as academic writers? What tutorial approaches do these learners identify as being influential in constructing their writing identities? In analyzing the data collected from these artifacts, I hoped to come to a clearer understanding of how writing centers and writing center tutors can offer the

necessary services to help adult, nontraditional students construct identities for

themselves as writers in the academic community.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this dissertation is to determine the ways that five nontraditional students in the Graduate and Professional Studies program at King University[1] began to develop a sense of themselves as writers in an academic environment through their work with King writing center tutors. This study was designed as a single case study, one which seeks to "capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday or commonplace situation" (Yin, 2009, p. 48) of nontraditional students' experiences in one writing center using purposive sampling to collect narratives and audio recordings as supporting data. Epistemologically, this is an explanatory case study, which looks to "explain the presumed causal links in real-life interventions" (Yin, 2003, p. 19) because it seeks to establish a causal link between the work that nontraditional students do with writing center tutors and the nontraditional students' changing perceptions of themselves as academic writers.

This chapter explains the process that I followed to gather and analyze data using a case study methodology. First, I provide a brief overview of this study. Following this overview, I describe the research site and the participants of the study and the activities that they undertook in this study. Then, I explain my data collection method. Last, I summarize the chapter and provide a look ahead at the next chapter.

This research was guided by one main research question and two ancillary research questions:

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[1] As part of the IRB process at King University, I received permission from King University, the site of my study and my place of employment, to use its name in my dissertation instead of an alias.

- Main Research Question: How do adult learners in post-secondary contexts experience academic writing as they work with writing center tutors?

- Ancillary Question 1: How do these tutoring experiences help them construct their identities as academic writers?

- Ancillary Question 2: What tutorial approaches do these learners identify as being influential in constructing their writing identities?

Overview of the Study

This study uses purposive sampling based on the selection of five adult, nontraditional learners who fit the criteria listed below. Eligible study participants were identified using data on writing center use among students who had been to the writing center during the previous semester. Then these students were contacted and invited to become participants in the study. These students composed a "literacy narrative" before their tutoring sessions and gave it to me to use as background for this study. The participants then worked with a writing center tutor on an assignment of their choice three or more times during the period of this study, and finally, they took part in a concluding interview with me. The final interview for each participant was conducted after they received grades and feedback on their written assignment from their professors, and participants reflected on their experiences in the writing center as they related to any improvement they perceived in their growth as academic writers. All data from this study are kept in a locked file cabinet in my office at King University.

The dissertation presents the findings gleaned from the narratives of these adult, nontraditional students concerning their attitudes toward their tutoring sessions, specifically in relation to their writing identities before and after three recorded tutoring

sessions. I focused on analyzing the participants' thinking about the role they perceived that their tutors played in helping them to construct a writing identity in the academic atmosphere of King University. Because writing is such an integral part of the college experience, students must learn to become members of their communities, and this dissertation sought to determine if students who work with writing center tutors perceive a difference in their experiences as writers and if they feel more confident in their new academic roles than they did before they worked with a writing center tutor.

Overview of the Site and the Participants

Description of the Site

King University. My study site for this dissertation was King University, a small liberal arts college in east Tennessee. Over the past five to ten years, King University has experienced unprecedented growth and an influx of adult, nontraditional students as a result of the addition of a Graduate and Professional Studies (GPS) program in 1998. In addition, more GPS programs will be implemented at King between 2016 and 2020, which will likely result in increased growth in the nontraditional student population. I received Institutional Review Board approval from both King University and Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The letters of approval are appended to this dissertation (see Appendices F and G).

King University offers programs in one college and five schools: The College of Arts and Sciences, The School of Communication, Information, and Design, The School of Behavioral and Health Sciences, The School of Business, The School of Education, and The School of Nursing. The University offers programs that lead to the following degrees: the Associate of Arts, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Business Administration,

Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Science in Nursing, Master of Business Administration, Master of Education, Master of Science in Nursing, and Doctor of Nursing Practice degrees. In addition to the main campus, King has instructional sites at 12 other locations in the region. There are 22 programs of study for students to major or minor in. This study was conducted on King's main campus in Bristol, Tennessee, and on the Knoxville, Tennessee, satellite campus.

King University Writing Center. The writing center at King is located in the Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) housed in a former classroom building on King's main campus that is now home to faculty offices, staff offices, student media offices, and the ACE. The ACE is composed of the writing center, the speaking center, and the math center and is the central information center for all departmental tutoring on campus. In addition, the director of the ACE serves as the campus liaison for Upswing[2], a national 24/7 online tutoring service. The ACE is centrally located on the main part of the campus and is readily available to students at its physical location, and the writing center and speaking centers are also available online. Adult students are encouraged by GPS faculty and in pre-semester workshops to use the services of the ACE.

Description of the Participants

Participants. The participants in this study were nontraditional, adult students with access to the ACE on the main campus or the Knoxville campus. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the national enrollment of nontraditional students (students 25 and older) in colleges and universities increased by more than 41% between 2001 and 2011. This percentage includes both first-time college or university

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[2] Only King University tutors took part in this study. Upswing tutors did not participate.

students and those returning for a master's or doctoral degree. At the state level, however, these numbers may be higher or lower than the national average. In Tennessee, the site of my study, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission has reported:

> In 2009, public and private higher education institutions in the state enrolled just six percent of adults who had a high school diploma but no college degree, compared to ten percent nationally. The gap in the adult participation rate in Tennessee and the U.S. differs by institutional sector and is widest at public four-year institutions. (p. 7)

However, returning students at King University make up over 67% of the student body, roughly 1,950 out of 2,897 students enrolled in 22 programs of study and attending 13 different locations in Tennessee and Virginia. This higher rate of nontraditional students enrolled at my study site can be accounted for in the Tennessee Commission's statement that "private institutions have consistently enrolled increasing numbers of adult students over the last decade and a half. From 1997 to 2009, adult enrollment increased by 286 percent at private institutions" (p. 7). This percentage is an accurate picture of the increase in the number of nontraditional students enrolled at the site of this study.

The participants in this study consisted of the students who most frequently visit the King writing center: adult, nontraditional learners who fit at least one of the criteria set forth by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) for a nontraditional student (Pelletier, 2010, p. 2). Approximately one half of the students who come to the writing center are adult, nontraditional students who meet the NCES criteria. The numbers are slightly different for the Online Writing Lab (OWL), where approximately 75% of the clients are adult, nontraditional students in professional undergraduate and

graduate programs such as the AA, BBA, MBA, M.ED, MSN, and the DNP

(www.king.edu). Most of the nontraditional students at King are returning to the

academic environment after several years; few of them have moved directly from high

school to a bachelor's degree program or from a bachelor's degree program into a

master's degree program, although this number is increasing. Most of these students are

over the age of 30. The GPS program houses both undergraduate professional degrees

and graduate degrees, and the study includes students in both programs.

     The participants were chosen based on the following criteria:

1. Adult, nontraditional students in classes that require writing
   assignments

2. Adult, nontraditional students with access to the main campus or the
   Knoxville campus

3. Adult, nontraditional students who have visited the writing center or
   used the OWL at least once during the present academic year or the
   previous one

4. Adult students who have worked with a tutor in at least one previous
   face-to-face visit to the writing center

The students in this study indicated that they were struggling with their writing for one or

more classes and were looking for a way to both improve their writing and to feel more

confident as they continued to write. Many GPS students have a strong work ethic and

bring papers to the writing center that exhibit a certain amount of maturity and skill that

traditional undergraduates often do not have, but at the same time, these students are

often the least confident about their writing abilities. Because of their lack of confidence

and their desire to become successful student writers, they provide a good population for this study. Their strong work ethic and desire to improve are characteristics that will lead to personal observations about the success or failure of their work with their tutors.

I chose participants for this research by visiting GPS classes to ask students to volunteer to be part of the study. I described the study to the potential participants in detail and gave them a chance to ask questions. When students volunteered, they completed a short questionnaire about their previous experience in the writing center, and, if they met the criteria listed above, they were asked to take part in the study. Participants were then given an informed consent form that also explained the study and their role in it. After participants signed the informed consent form, they began working with tutors in the writing center on either the main campus or at the Knoxville site. Participants were able to leave the study at any time by simply informing me of their intent; however, no participants left the study.

Writing center tutors. The tutors who worked with the participants in this study consisted of both traditional undergraduates between the ages of 18 and 22 and master's prepared tutors employed by the writing center. These tutors had been trained to work with adult, nontraditional students as part of their ongoing tutor training. The tutors were hired by the writing center director based on personal experience or a letter of recommendation from another faculty member.

Tutors are not required to take a writing center course before being hired; however, both mandatory and optional training sources provide them with necessary instruction in working with tutees. Before tutors began work, they completed tutor training and attended mandatory sessions available each semester and were encouraged to

attend other training sessions as they were offered. Prior to the study, tutors took part in a tutorial about working with adult, nontraditional students as part of regular yearly training for all tutors; therefore, all King University writing tutors were able to work with the study participants.

Before the study began, the writing center director gave the tutors the opportunity to volunteer to work with the participants in this study. When tutors volunteered to take part in the study, they were given an informed consent form explaining the study and their role in it. Tutors could opt out of the study at that time or at any time during the study by requesting to leave the study. Tutors could send their request to the writing center director; however, no tutors left the study.

As the director of the Academic Center for Excellence, I knew the tutors but was not their direct supervisor. My role in the ACE does not include hiring or direct supervision of tutors. I work with the math, speaking and writing center directors to guide them in tutor training. I also schedule activities, maintain the ACE website, and advertise our services. During the course of this study, I did not work with the writing center director to train their tutors on their role in the study.

Data Collection

Literacy Narratives

Literacy narratives (often referred to as literacy autobiographies) are one way to link students' past experiences with their present and possibly future experiences. Linda Steinman (2007) has defined a literacy autobiography "as a reflective, first-person account of one's development as a writing being" (p. 563) that serves to "honour the [writer's] prior knowledge so important in pedagogy" (p. 565). The reflexive activity of

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looking to the past in order to understand the present and the future were key areas of inquiry in this study.

Additionally, in "Linking Narrative and Identity Construction: Using Autobiography in Accounting Research," Kathryn Haynes (2006) wrote of using autobiographies as a "valuable means of understanding and interpreting the identities of individuals within accounting, and the social and professional context in which they are formed" (p. 404). While Haynes's study involved those in the accounting profession, the same principles are true of understanding the journey of students, traditional and nontraditional, as they discover their identities as writers in an academic context. As learners look back on their experiences as writers, they become more aware of how they came to be where they are in the present. The literacy narrative, then, is an important step in determining whether work with a writing center tutor is a benefit to students as they write more or as they become more confident academic and/or professional writers.

In this study, each participant was asked to complete an IRB-approved informed consent form prior to joining the study (see Appendices F and G). I asked each participant to compose a literacy narrative that focused on their experiences as writers. The literacy narratives consisted of participants' descriptions of the kinds of writing they have done in school or at home and their attitudes toward it. I gave them a list of possible ideas and questions that they could incorporate into their narratives (See Appendix A), but I did not require any particular ones to be answered or addressed. All participants were also free to add any pertinent experiences not specifically required by the prompt if they believed that the experience was necessary to present a complete picture of their writing histories.

The participants' literacy narratives were submitted to me via email, and I assigned each participant a pseudonym. All identifying information was removed from the narratives, and I kept the master list and key in a separate file cabinet in my office. The participants will remain anonymous, and the informed consent forms will remain in a separate file from the rest of the data.

Recorded Tutoring Sessions

Participants were asked to work with a writing center tutor on three separate occasions during the period of the study in order to give me the data I needed for each participant. Participants could use any assignment they were currently working on, and sessions were to be 30 minutes to one hour each. All sessions were to be conducted face-to-face rather than online. Participants were not required to use the same tutor for all three sessions. Each of these sessions was audio recorded by the tutor and was immediately submitted to me for transcription. The transcripts were coded using Ruben and Ruben's (2005) questions to identify concepts for coding (see Appendix H) and analyzed for comparative data.

In cases in which the transcripts contained identifying information about either the participant or the writing center tutor, this information was blackened or replaced with pseudonyms; records for each session contain only the participant's pseudonym in addition to the date, time, and duration of the session. As with the literacy narratives, both the participants and the tutors have remained anonymous.

Final Interviews

Following the three work sessions with writing center tutors, all participants took part in an individual interview with me in which they considered what they wrote in their

literacy narratives and their experiences during their writing center sessions. During the interviews after they attended three tutoring sessions, each participant was asked to reflect on his or her experience with the tutor. I then analyzed the data I had collected from the literacy narratives, the tutoring sessions, and the final interviews to determine whether the tutoring sessions were influential in helping the participants better understand who they were as writers.

I advised the participants of their privacy and that no tutor would read their comments. In addition, I provided the participants with a list of questions that would help them to consider how their sense of who they are as writers had been affected by their interactions with their tutor, even if they still did not fully see themselves as writers in the social context of their classes. Those questions included the following:

1. What did the tutor do to help you to understand what it means to be an academic writer?

2. Do you believe that your work with this tutor helped you to understand what you need to do to improve your academic writing skills?

   2a. What suggestions and advice did your tutor give you that helped you the most?

3. Do you believe that your experience working with a writing center tutor has been beneficial to you as you are learning how to become an academic writer?

   3a. In what ways did the tutor help you to become a better academic writer?

4. Do you perceive that you have become a better writer as a result of your tutoring sessions?

   4a. In what ways do you believe that you have become a better writer?

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5. What changes have you made in your writing process, in the steps that you take as you write essays, as a result of working with a tutor?

6. What part of your tutoring session was the most influential in helping you to understand how to become an academic writer?

As with the literacy narratives and audio recorded sessions, both participants and tutors remained anonymous. The transcripts of the final interviews do not contain any identifying information about either the participants or the writing center tutors they worked with during the study. I protected the anonymity of the participants during transcription by assigning each participant a pseudonym; only the participants' pseudonyms are used in the transcripts. All data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my office for a period of three years.

Data Analysis

Data from Literacy Narratives

After participants submitted their literacy narratives, I followed the methods of analyzing literacy narratives discussed by Pavlenka (2007). Although Pavlenka's work is with non-native speakers (NNS), much of the methodology she outlines is useful for this study as well. In "Autobiographic Narratives as Data in Applied Linguistics," for example, Pavlenko presented three reasons that narratives such as the ones my participants wrote can yield useful data. Most significantly for this project, the first two reasons apply to the research questions I have chosen for this study.

First, as Pavlenka (2007) pointed out, autobiographies offer a way for the researcher to observe "people's private worlds" (p. 164) in ways that other data analysis methods might not provide. The literacy narratives that I collected were important

sources of insight into the participants' perceptions of themselves as writers because I had a more personal view of how they felt about writing before they began their tutoring sessions. These perceptions were compared with both their tutoring sessions and their final interviews to identify the paths the students took in perceiving a change in their attitudes about who they were as writers. Next, according to Pavlenko (2007), autobiographies "highlight new connections between various learning processes and phenomena" and, therefore, promote "future research" (p. 165). The fact that the literacy narratives helped me to see the connections between the participants' former attitudes toward writing and the changes that they perceived in their writing following writing center tutorials was the most significant reason to use literacy narratives as data in my project. Therefore, using literacy narratives is a good way to identify and compare students' perceptions about their experiences.

In addition, Rubin and Rubin (2005) have suggested that answering specific questions helps to define the concepts to be coded. Therefore, I read each of the literacy narratives multiple times, taking specific notes and looking for repeated themes in the narratives by defining repeated words and phrases and then coding them. Using Rubin and Rubin's questions[3] (see Appendix H) to guide my thinking, I identified the major concepts for coding based on the following questions:

- "What am I going to call it (label it)"? (p. 216)

- "How am I going to define it"? (p. 216)

- "How am I going to recognize it in the interviews"? (p. 217)

- "What do I want to exclude"? (p. 217)

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[3] These questions are adapted from Boyatzis, R. E. 1998. *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- "What is an example"? (p. 217)

As I observed the data through multiple readings, I used the carefully defined and coded concepts that I identified in the narratives as significant to analyze similarities, differences, and themes in each participant's work toward becoming a stronger academic writer.

Data from Recorded Tutoring Sessions

Another form of data that I analyzed were audio-recorded tutoring sessions. While these recorded sessions were not in interview format, I nevertheless applied Rubin and Rubin's (2005) suggestions to the information that presented itself in these sessions. I transcribed and coded the sessions using the same concepts that I identified in the literacy narratives, Rubin and Rubin's questions as noted above, as I compared the two kinds of recorded data.

Data from Final Interviews

Following the participants' recorded tutoring sessions, all participants were asked to attend a final interview with me concerning their work with the tutor. This interview allowed me to ask a series of questions designed to address their perceptions about their writing identity and to ask an open-ended question that allowed them to fully reflect on their experiences and their perception of change, growth, and/or confidence as a result of their tutoring sessions.

Decisions on Coding

Process

After all literacy narratives, tutoring sessions, and final interviews were completed, I transcribed the tutoring sessions and final interviews. I then began an initial

reading and analysis of all three data sources, looking for common themes in the narratives, conversations, and interviews of the participants and marking all possible categories that repeated in the documents. At first I noted many common characteristics and determined that they fell into three broad categories: higher order concerns (HOCs), lower order concerns (LOCs), and conversational interactions between tutors and participants in their tutoring sessions, which I ultimately call characteristics.

During the conversational interactions between tutors and participants, participants were actively involved in the processes of revising their work to make it more acceptable in an academic atmosphere. For example, all participants in this study tended to talk through problems in order to write a better sentence or to phrase an idea more clearly, and all participants exhibited signs of self-confidence or lack of it. In addition, all of the participants felt that they needed to explain some aspect of their writing.

I approached the data using grounded theory and with no preconceived ideas of what I would find; instead, I allowed the concepts that I coded and studied in more detail to flow naturally from the data. As Glaser and Strauss (2012) have written, "[g]enerating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research" (p. 6). Therefore, I waited until I had compiled and transcribed all data before analyzing it.

After multiple readings of the transcripts and my notes, I analyzed the transcripts of the participants' work with their tutors. Letting the transcripts and notes guide my analysis, I chose six categories as significant areas of inquiry into their identity

formation: (a) identifying their own problems, (b) exhibiting self-confidence or lack of self-confidence, (c) talking through to a solution, (d) seeing affirmation, (e) demonstrating a need to explain, and (f) evaluating their perceived success in the session. As I read and analyzed the transcripts, I identified each category by highlighting the interaction and making notes in the margin identifying the kind of interaction that took place between the tutor and the participant. After I compiled this data, I also performed a search in Microsoft Word for key words that the participants used most frequently in their interactions with the tutors and included any new instances in the data for each characteristic. I had also coded the literacy narratives and final interviews of the participants so that I could more easily trace their initial perceptions of themselves as academic writers through the tutoring sessions and finally to their perceptions in the final interviews.

To illustrate my process, I am including two examples of coded transcripts below:

Example 1:

David: I'm trying to get across the idea that craft is not something else from an outside force. [Writing] is not something I feel compelled to do…[explains reasons]

Tutor: You're saying it's not a craft for you, right? So you're saying you're not intrinsically motivated to do that.

David: Right, and then the transition [to the next idea] is the question: "What could intrinsically motivate me to write something that would not be graded." [talks through to a solution]

Tutor: Good!

David: And in the following paragraph I'm trying to get at [explains ideas] the idea that being funny, looking for jokes, is something that I do eventually and that's a motivation for me, so, if I were to write something, it would have to be funny—that's the intrinsic motivation I already have. And those are the ideas that I'm trying to convey, but I'm not doing that well. [identifying a problem]. [Entire passage = talking through to a solution]

Tutor: You're not sure if it's coming across well?

David: It's sloppy for sure. [lack of self-confidence] [identifying his own problem]

This excerpt illustrates both David's interaction with the tutor and the way that I coded those interactions. I used the following color coding system: red font for talking through, blue font for identifying his own problems, purple font for self-esteem issues, blue highlighting for times he mentioned his ideas, and yellow highlighting for his discussion of transitions.

Example 2:

Sandy: Okay. Do I write these two . . . I mean . . . Do I label them Part One and Part Two [questions the tutor to make sure she understands; self-confidence) or is that up to the instructor?

Tutor: Yes, you may want to ask her about headings, just to make sure.

Sandy: Assessment? Reaction? I think that's what she said to call it…

Tutor: Okay, we're ready to move on to a few grammar things.

Sandy: Comma splices… [identifies her own grammar problem]

Tutor: Right, so we've got some comma splices.

Sandy: Just so you know, I bought his [the author of the book for her book review] book on commas . . . because I know they are my largest issue. [identifies her own problem]

Tutor: Good! Now let's look at about what's going on here. What do you need there?

Sandy: That should be a <mark style="background-color:#00FF00">comma</mark> because I used the word "and." [talks through to a solution]

Tutor: Okay. What is "and" doing here"

Sandy Is it a <mark style="background-color:#00FF00">conjunction</mark>? [self-confidence?]

This excerpt illustrates the interaction between Sandy and her tutor during their first session together. As with all transcripts, the color coding system remained the same: red font for talking through, blue font for identifying his own problems, purple font for self-esteem issues, green highlighting for grammar issues not related to transitions, and pink/purple highlighting for discussion of the assignment directions.

After reading and analyzing the documents several more times to find common themes, I applied Rubin and Rubin's questions on how to define the recurrent themes that I had identified. After reading, coding, and applying these questions to the data, I determined that the most significant characteristics were (a) identifying their own problems, (b) exhibiting self-confidence or lack of self-confidence, (c) talking through to a solution, (d) seeing affirmation, (e) demonstrating a need to explain, and (f) evaluating their perceived success in the session. Rubin and Rubin's questions allowed me to solidify my decision on the best characteristics to focus on as I analyzed the data more thoroughly. While none of these characteristics directly relates to identity, they do indicate the work done by writers that would help them move toward a better understanding of themselves as writers. For example, identifying one's own problems can be difficult, but learning to identify them, in this case while talking with a tutor, is a step toward learners understanding themselves, how they express themselves, and their

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weaknesses as writers. When these learners exhibited a need to explain what they did and why, they were in essence explaining these choices to both their tutors and themselves. Talking through these choices and the talking through they did during the sessions could work together to give them more solid ground as they formed new identities. Seeking affirmation and exhibiting either self-confidence or a lack of self-confidence function in much the same way. While these learners were forming new identities for themselves, they were also works in progress; they seemed to instinctively know that they still needed guidance and were not hesitant about looking for it. Identity formation does not happen quickly, and the characteristics that these participants exhibited were possible signs that they had begun to create new identities.

Identifying the concepts. This was the most difficult of the questions to answer, yet it was also the most important. Using a grounded theory approach, I let the data flow naturally from the coded documents without focusing on any specific literature to inform the coding process. As Rubin and Rubin (2006) have pointed out, "Through what is termed open coding, that is, coding as you go along, grounded theorists have worked out a systematic approach that often results in fresh and rich results" (p. 222). By reading, re-reading, and making copious in-text and marginal notes, I found the data I was analyzing to be both interesting and rich.

Because the HOCs and LOCs labels are already established and understood by those in composition and writing disciplines, I did not need to determine what to call these elements of the data, though I did code the different kinds of HOCs and LOCs issues covered in the documents I analyzed. However, the other characteristics that I observed proved more difficult to define and label. After considering calling these

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observations "interactions," "behaviors," and "conversational interactions," I finally determined that the best label for what I was seeing was "conversational interactions" because these characteristics were not focused so much on the writing, grammar, mechanics, or formatting of the papers brought to the tutoring sessions or on particular behaviors of the participants in the sessions but rather on the kinds of interactions that became a natural, almost organic, part of the conversations between tutors and participants. As a result, I found that these conversational interactions brought a richness to the tutorial session data as they related to the way that the participants seemed to be working with the tutors to come to a better understanding of themselves as writers that was not as evident or as rich in the HOCs and LOCs discussions.

After I determined that the best label for this part of the data would be conversational interactions, I then needed to determine what to name each of the six characteristics that I had identified in the coding and analysis of the documents. The six categories that I chose to focus on were (a) identifying their own problems, (b) exhibiting self-confidence or lack of self-confidence, (c) talking through to a solution, (d) seeking affirmation, (e) demonstrating a need to explain, and (f) evaluating their perceived success in the session.

Defining the concepts. For the purposes of this dissertation, "Conversational Interactions" will mean those elements of the conversations between participants and tutors that involve more in-depth communication and a more conversational style than when they discussed the HOCs and LOCs issues. These kinds of interactions in tutoring sessions led to more collaborative conversations than those of a more instructional nature (such as how to organize an essay, how to avoid comma splices, or how to correctly

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format a paper using either MLA or APA). As I coded, I noted that even when tutors and students interacted in this more personal way, their dialogue was not directly related to identity creation issues but rather on having someone to guide them as they improved their writing. Ultimately, the data from the tutoring sessions do not show much evidence of the participants working consciously to form their own writing identities even with the help of a tutor. I believe that part of the deficiency in the data relates more directly to the final interview than the tutoring sessions. While I asked questions that I thought would elicit more evidence of their work on identity formation, and I asked direct follow-up questions related to identity, the participants' answers did not indicate any significant progress in that area.

I have defined "identifying their own problems" as instances in the course of a session in which the participant identified or pointed out a problem with the essay without prompting from the tutor or as a result of an earlier similar error. These interactions grew naturally out of the conversations and prompted further discussion on that particular issue in the students' writing.

Another characteristic that I found was that all of the participants made comments that either showed their growing self-confidence or their lack of self-confidence. Often, the participants would question their understanding of the assignment or comment on their own weaknesses. These kinds of statements were more common than the ones that showed an established or growing confidence level. Interestingly, the data show that even though the participants were able to both identify their own errors without prompting and to talk through their writing errors to reach a solution, their self-confidence levels remained largely unchanged throughout the three tutoring sessions.

A third characteristic, "talking through to a solution," yielded some interesting data. I considered participants as talking through to a solution when they verbally revised sentences or suggested a change as they considered a problem pointed out by the tutor. Two of the participants in particular were quite involved in working with the tutor to address a sentence structure issue or to find a better way to organize a paragraph, but all five participants talked through their problems to a certain extent.

The category "seeking affirmation" required the most analysis to define. Because it is similar in ways to both self-confidence issues and talking through to a solution, I had to decide on as concrete a definition as I could in order to differentiate it from the other categories. As a result, I determined that participants were seeking affirmation when they directly asked the tutor whether a point they had made was clear or what they did "made sense." In addition, because there was some overlap in this category and with others, I considered some comments to have multiple characteristics. As I coded the transcripts, then, I sometimes labeled a statement or excerpt with two or more characteristics. For example, the comment "Does that make sense" might be both an issue of low self-confidence and also a way to seek affirmation. I used the context of the part of the conversation in which this comment occurred to determine whether it was a self-confidence issue or an attempt to seek affirmation. In some cases, the statements were longer and more complex and therefore fit both categories.

The characteristic I labeled "demonstrates a need to explain" was much easier to define, and I found more instances of these kinds of comments than any of the others. In this case, participants' comments to tutors were less about the subject of the current tutoring session and more about why participants chose a particular way to express an

idea or to format a paper; therefore, they were easier to identify in a conversation. Many of the comments served to help tutors understand more about the decisions participants made in writing and organizing their paper, but others were meant to help tutors understand the more technical aspects of the topics of some essays. These kinds of comments were most frequent in the essays written by students in more technical fields such as information technology and nursing.

The final characteristic that I defined was "evaluating their perceived success" in the tutoring sessions. Most of these statements involved participants expressing confidence that the papers they were working on would be better and that they thought that future papers would benefit from the session as well. These statements were all located at the end of the sessions, but not all sessions ended with comments about how they perceived the tutoring. The sessions that did not end with a self-evaluation usually ended with word of thanks and a promise to bring the essay back for further review after they had revised it.

Recognizing the concepts. By immersing myself in the data and documents after I had compiled all of the data and through repeated reading and jotting notes in the margins of the documents, I looked for recurring words and phrases. Because a grounded theory approach requires the researcher to let the data guide the concepts to be coded, I looked for patterns among the conversation of the five participants and their tutors. As I began to see patterns emerge, I marked the repeated phrases with a label and a color code. From the repeated readings, I identified key words that were used in each of the categories I was considering. Using Microsoft Word's search function, I searched for

several key words in each of the categories to determine whether I had found all instances of the characteristic.

The use of question marks also helped me to recognize a characteristic. For example, a comment ending in a question mark helped me to narrow down the category to either expressing lack of self-confidence or seeking affirmation. After consulting the context of the question, I was able to determine the characteristic that it best fit.

Determining the exclusions. Because tutoring sessions often involve peripheral issues such as making plans for a future meeting or discussing campus or personal issues, I decided to exclude any part of the sessions that was not primarily focused on helping the participants form a writing identity. In addition, the participants and tutors who knew each other injected humor into the conversation, but those parts of the sessions were not directly related to the essay under discussion, so I decided to exclude those comments. I also decided to exclude any specific HOCs and LOCs issues as a focus in my data analysis, although in some cases, these issues were a significant part of the data that I did analyze.

Illustrating the concepts. Each of the six characteristics I decided to focus on are examples of my term "conversational interactions." The following list provides a few examples for each of the six categories:

- Identifying their own problems: "I am having problems with organization." "I just realized I made a spelling mistake here." "That sentence does not make sense."

- Exhibiting self-confidence or lack of self-confidence: "It's sloppy writing for sure!" "How would I do that?" "Does that make sense to you?"

- Talking through to a solution: instances of revising sentences aloud and fine-tuning phrases such as "I could just take 'you' out and rewrite the sentence" and "I could change these two sentences, or I could put a comma and conjunction there."

- Seeking affirmation: "Can you tell that I made some improvements and changes?" "Can I say something like 'As mentioned in the introduction'?" "Would you say it this way instead?"

- Demonstrating a need to explain: "The reason I wanted to incorporate this idea is that…" "I added a paragraph and changed the order of the paragraphs because…" "When I wrote the paper, I knew that these words were too close to each other."

- Evaluating their perceived success in the session: "I think I've got it!" "I can use this [information] for the paper I have to write in my next class." "This is very helpful. I think I'll be a better writer because of this experience."

While several of these categories have some overlap, each separate category touches on a specific element of the interaction. For example, in some cases, exhibiting a lack of self-confidence can also be considered seeking affirmation or needing to explain a particular part of a sentence or paragraph. In some of these cases, I coded a comment as both exhibiting a lack of self-confidence and seeking affirmation. In other cases, I chose one or the other category because of the comment's context. For example, if a student asked "Does that make sense?" it could be coded as either an issue of self-confidence or seeking affirmation. In one participant's tutoring session, the participant was explaining

a concept in her paper that the tutor was not familiar with, and the question "Does this make sense?" indicated that the participant was confident about her knowledge of the topic and wanted to make sure that the tutor understood. However, in another instance, the participant offered a suggestion to the tutor on how to rephrase a sentence, and the question indicated that she wanted to make sure that her revision "made sense" to the tutor. In the first case, the phrase was coded as "self-confidence," while in the second case, the phrase was coded as "seeking affirmation" because the participant wanted to make sure that her revision was correct.

On the other hand, a comment could be coded as both an issue of self-confidence (in this case a lack of self-confidence), and a need to explain. In one tutorial, for example, the participant wanted to know whether she was correct, but she also believed that she needed to explain why she had written a passage in a certain way. Other examples of a kind of cross-pollination of categories occur throughout the documents, and I either used the context to determine the best category in which to place the comment, or I coded the comment as both categories. Because of these kinds of interpretation issues, I made sure to read all of the documents many times and added coding when necessary.

Significance of the Study

When I designed this study, I believed it could present evidence that might either reinforce or change current practice. One possible outcome I predicted was that I might come to understand and raise awareness of the ways that nontraditional students, such as those in the GPS program at King University, construct and/or refine their writing identities. I believed this study would help me to determine whether and how adult students come to construct new identities as writers at King University, and, if applicable,

the effect their writing center sessions had on the work they did in building or clarifying these identities.

I also aimed to effect some kind of change in the role that King's writing center tutors play in the formation or refinement of King's adult, nontraditional students' writing identities. If, as theorists and scholars as varied as Ivanič (1998), Hyland (2002), Elbow (1981), Shor (1980), and Foster (2006) believe, writers' identities are important to the growth and development of students as writers, I wanted to explore the ways that King's writing center and tutors can advance this cause and to determine whether the writing center should be more proactive in training tutors to work with students, particularly adult, nontraditional learners, to help construct or refine their writing identities.

Ethical Considerations

The three main areas of ethical considerations in this dissertation concerned my status as director of the ACE is it relates to supervising writing center tutors; my role as a member of the faculty at King University who occasionally teaches students in GPS programs; and the anonymity of the participants of this study. Although I am the director of the ACE at King, I teach classes that many GPS students take, and I am the direct supervisor of the writing center director, I am not the supervisor of any of the tutors involved in this study. Therefore, I took steps to insure that no tutor felt obligated to take part in the study by having the writing center director maintain all contact with the tutors. Tutors could freely accept or decline the invitation to serve as a tutor in this study with no possible repercussions because I did not know who had declined to participate in the

study. In addition, neither the participants chosen for this study nor the tutors took a class that I was teaching, so there were no teacher-student conflicts of interest in this study.

A second possible area of concern is about the lack of generalizability of most case studies. Because the study for this dissertation examined five adult, nontraditional students at one university, it is not generalizable in the traditional sense of sample-to-population. It does, however, serve to provide insight into the perceptions of one population of students at one school as they created academic writing identities for themselves. In this way, it meets the criteria for generalizability accepted by most qualitative researchers because it provides readers with sufficient detail to decide whether and how best to relate the findings to their own specific contexts. Therefore, this study is likely to be useful to other small, private liberal arts universities and colleges.

I believe that writing center pedagogy could grow from this study that could benefit other small-to-medium sized colleges and universities such as King. Because at the time of this writing there is little mention of identity and adult, nontraditional writers in the writing center literature, the results of this study could open a new avenue of exploration. For this dissertation, the key considerations are to understand and explain how students at one university use the writing center to create a writing identity and what tutoring strategies they perceive to work best in their efforts to become better writers.

Summary and Look Ahead

In this chapter, I outlined my research plan and methods. The study used a case study method in which I asked participants to write literacy narratives that focused on their experiences as writers. Next, I asked each participant to attend at least three sessions with a tutor to work on writing assignments for their classes. The requirement

for participants to attend three sessions allowed me to have a fuller data set from which to analyze the way that the participants and tutors worked together to help the participants begin to construct their own identities as writers. Finally, I asked the participants to reflect on what they wrote in their literacy narratives and what they experienced in their sessions with tutors in a final interview with me. This final data allowed me to identify connections between participants' prior writing experience and their sessions with the tutors.

In Chapter Four, I report the results of my analysis of the participants' literacy narratives, the transcribed tutoring sessions, and the transcribed final interviews. I also analyze the participants' literacy narratives, their tutoring sessions, and their final interviews in order to answer my research questions and come to a better understanding of how their autobiographical selves inform their search for their discoursal selves as they discover their own voices as authors.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS: PERCEPTIONS OF FIVE GPS STUDENTS

In this chapter, I present the perceptions held by Graduate and Professional Studies (GPS) students (David, Penny, Jessica, Sandy, and Jill) about their identities as writers before and after working with a writing center tutor, focusing on what they learned about themselves as writers in a university setting. First, I summarize their perceptions of themselves as writers as stated in their literacy narrative. Next, I report the data from their taped tutorials, followed by their responses in their final interview with me. This information was collected from their written literacy narratives, their taped and transcribed tutoring sessions, and transcriptions of their interviews with me following their last tutoring session.

This chapter is divided into three main sections: identifying participants' initial perceptions of themselves as writers, becoming academic writers, and analyzing participants' final perceptions. For each of the five participants in the study, I present an overview of significant writing and conversation, focusing on Rubin and Rubin's (1998) questions that define the concepts to be coded. These questions include:

- "What am I going to call it (label it)"? (p. 216)

- "How am I going to define it"? (p. 216)

- "How am I going to recognize it in the interviews"? (p. 217)

- "What do I want to exclude"? (p. 217)

- "What is an example?" (p. 217)

In addition, I use my research questions as guide to code and interpret the data from the literacy narratives, transcribed interviews, and final interviews. My research questions are:

- Main Research Question: How do adult learners in post-secondary contexts experience academic writing as they work with writing center tutors?

- Ancillary Question 1: How do these tutoring experiences help them construct their identities as academic writers?

- Ancillary Question 2: What tutorial approaches do these learners identify as being influential in constructing their writing identities?

Because the purpose of this dissertation is to study the ways that adult, nontraditional students experience their work with writing center tutors as they construct their own writing identities, I examine the interactions in the tutoring sessions of five participants to discover how they experienced the session, how they defined themselves as a result of the sessions, and the approaches they identified as being the most influential in helping them come to understand who they were as writers.

Participants' Initial Perceptions of Themselves as Writers

All participants in my study were King University students and were considered adult, nontraditional students. They were enrolled in the university's Graduate and Professional Studies program in four areas of study: Master's in Education in English, Master of Business Administration, Bachelor of Science in Nursing, and Bachelor of Information Technology. Each participant expressed unease about writing, some more than others, and did not feel as confident in their writing skills as they would have liked. Before beginning their tutoring sessions, each participant wrote a literacy narrative that

was open-ended but guided by questions, in that they could write about other writing experiences as well as those in the list of suggested questions to answer. These literacy narratives served as background for me as I listened to, transcribed, and coded their tutoring sessions.

David: "Feelings of Inferiority"

David, a 27-year-old graduate of King University with an easygoing personality, had majored in English as an undergraduate. A former basketball player, he had a quiet demeanor and a deprecating and dry sense of humor throughout his tutoring sessions and his interview. David had a knack for making his sessions simultaneously serious and enjoyable.

David addressed his feelings of inferiority in the opening paragraph of his literacy narrative:

> I am embarrassed by the lack of writing I contribute to the world. I find it easy to consume the writing of others but difficult to give anything back. My relationship with writing is nearly completely one-sided. Although, looking back on my earliest memories of reading and writing I remember how I became stressed at the thought of having to read, but I enjoyed writing whatever it was that I put on paper with pencil . . . . I don't remember what it was that I wrote, but I have a vivid memory of becoming frustrated with reading and preferring writing.

As he recalled this change in his preferences, David was unsure of exactly when this change occurred or what caused it, but he wanted to overcome his feelings of inferiority as a writer.

Later in his narrative, he directly addressed these feelings, in particular the way he feels when he is completing assigned writing: "When writing for an assignment most of my stress or distaste for writing comes from procrastination or feelings of inferiority." He ended his narrative in an introspective mood:

> In conclusion, I feel like I am writing for the switch of motivation to be flipped in my head. I have thoughts that could possibly survive the transfer from mind to page, but I don't have the motivation to do the writing. I respect those who write because it is not always a pleasant experience.

Although David, an English major, would seem to be an unlikely candidate to harbor these fears and feelings of inferiority, they are very real problems for him as a writer.

At the time of this study he was pursuing an MEd in English at the time of the study and took part in the study during Fall 2015 and Spring 2016. Although, he had graduated with a degree in English several years before the study but focused more on literature than on writing in his major courses. After three years of work in a nonacademic area of a small college, David decided to enter King's MEd program in order to be certified to teach at the high school level. In his literacy narrative, he spoke of his feelings of inadequacy as a writer. In his words, he said he "finds it easy to consume the writing of others but difficult to give anything back." He even said he was "embarrassed" by his lack of writing and by his writing skills in general.

David did not recall his parents or brothers writing for pleasure at all. He did note, though, that his mother read to him as a child. Interestingly, David said that he has a vivid childhood memory of a moment when he became "frustrated with reading and preferred

writing." Later in life, in high school and college, he began to enjoy reading more and did not like to write.

David was home-schooled until he reached high school, and, although he was a good student, he had trouble with writing for English classes. In one place in his narrative, he recounted a time when he had one paper that would serve as a grade for two classes: a history class and an English class. To his dismay, and to illustrate what he described as his "dread and self-loathing" when he had to complete a writing assignment, the same paper was given a 98 in the history class and a 52 in the English class. Although he admitted that he did not follow MLA formatting, he still believed the "large discrepancy is funny."

During his senior year as an undergraduate English major, he said he "had an epiphany" that he could tell stories. But, for the most part, his fears have held him back from writing anything that has not been assigned. First, he believed that his "voice would add nothing of value to the 'Conversation,'" as he put it. He also stated that he did not have "enough patience to put words on a page and revisit them." He summed up these feelings by saying that he felt "like he [was] waiting for the switch of motivation to be flipped in [his] head." He believed that his lack of motivation was what held him back from writing the stories he knew he could tell.

David has tried in the past to keep journals but "quickly [found] that [his] thoughts have little value to maintain the process for more than a few days." In addition, he noted that he did not do much writing in social media either and that there was no one in his "immediate social sphere" who encouraged him to write on social media or elsewhere.

David was introspective in his literacy narrative about what he believed are reasons he does not write. In addition to lacking motivation, he also stated that most of his stress comes from "procrastination and feelings of inferiority." Interestingly, he considered himself "more of an observer than an actor" in the sense of the act of writing. Another problem he pointed out in his narrative was that he does "not take the time to plan out my writing."

Interestingly, he did believe that he could become a more confident writer if he had someone like an "exercise buddy" to hold him accountable. He said that he would like to try writing with someone else, someone who could "brainstorm with [him] and hold [him] accountable for getting words on the page." For David, motivation and accountability were important to his becoming more comfortable about writing for school or otherwise.

Penny: "I Didn't Like Writing at All"

Penny was a nontraditional, adult student in her second semester of an undergraduate degree in Information Technology at King. She brought to her sessions and interview several years of professional experience in her field and was patient in explaining new concepts to her tutor. Her defining feature over the course of this study was perseverance, and she worked diligently to use her tutor's suggestions as she revised her work multiple times.

She begins her literacy narrative, in this way:

All through high school I dreaded my English class as I knew I would have to write a term paper. I didn't like writing at all. I knew I was bad at it. I had thoughts in my head but had an extremely difficult time getting what I wanted

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on paper. This was partly because I hated writing and partly because I have

ADHD and it was hard comprehend things for me.

Penny went on to write that she "never really understood what was needed in [term

papers] and could find no help in writing them." She did, however, end with a positive

attitude about writing: "Over the years I have learned to hate writing a little less" and that

she now has a "journal where [she] writes letters to her daughter" about her early years.

Penny said that she has had a few positive experiences in college and that she does like to

use the writing center for help with papers.

Penny took part in this study during Fall 2015 and Spring 2016. After working a

variety of jobs in which she was able to put her computer skills to use, Penny decided to

attend King to earn her degree. In addition to attending school, she also wrote a blog

about knitting, though she felt that her writing is not what it should be. A stay-at-home

mother and full-time student, Penny devoted a good deal of time to school work but still

lacked confidence in writing.

In her literacy narrative, Penny remembered that growing up she saw no focus on

writing in her family: "I never had the opportunity to watch others in my family write

anything." She did remember seeing her father doing school work to gain his certification

as an EMT when she was young. Her mother was mainly "into accounting stuff," though

she did have memories of her mother trying to help her write papers and organize her

thoughts. Her primary interest was always in computers because she was "shown more

about computers than writing."

Penny reports that her main memory of writing in school occurred in sixth grade

when she was "required to keep a journal and turn it in every week with at least three

one-paragraph entries." But this is an exception to her writing experiences throughout her high school years. She said that she always "dreaded [her] English class as [she] knew [she] would have to write a term paper." Her reasons for dreading these writing assignments indicated just how difficult writing was for her. Among these reasons for her dread were found in comments such as:

- "I didn't like writing at all."

- "I knew I was bad at it."

- "I had thoughts in my head but had an extremely difficult time getting what I wanted on paper."

- "I never really understood what was needed in a term paper."

- Besides her mother's help with organizing her thoughts, she "could find no help in writing [papers]."

She summed up these thoughts by saying that she "hated" writing, and she believed this was because she has ADHD.

Journaling was the only writing that she still did voluntarily and, though she did journal periodically, she said that she did not journal regularly. She was most proud of the fact that she journaled letters to her daughter before she was born and even afterward. Mostly she reported journaling about the events of her day and what she was thinking at a particular time. Penny stated that journaling was the only time she was "ok with writing because nobody had to see my writing and judge how good it was." Even so, she has kept all her journals.

While Penny's experiences with writing have been stressful for her, she did say that she had her first positive experience in writing, other than the journaling she did in

sixth grade, when she took a professional writing class at King. She said that she was encouraged in class to get help from the writing center on each of the written assignments for the class. Taking up the teacher's challenge to go to the writing center, Penny found the help she needed. She said the help she received "from the writing lab was so amazing."

Jessica: "More than Just a Research Paper"

Jessica, a 23-year-old graduate of King with a degree in Technical and Professional Communication, was the youngest of the participants and the one who had been out of school for the shortest amount of time. She was a quiet participant who had expressed the most confidence in her ability to write for an academic audience. She is a natural listener, who preferred to listen and learn rather than to talk.

Despite some early positive writing experiences, Jessica wrote in her literacy narrative that she doesn't :

> think it was until [she] reached [her] college years that [she] really appreciated writing. Prior to this time [she] associated writing mainly with research papers. [She didn't] believe it was until [she] took [her] business communication class [her] freshman year that [she] realized there is more to writing than just a research paper.

She pointed out one experience as her favorite class and best writing assignment in college. For this assignment, she was "challenged . . . to dig deep and write about something that I wanted to write about. . . . [and it] helped [her] to express [herself]." She believed this experience was so memorable because she was not often allowed to write about what interested her the most.

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She ended her narrative by stating. "Overall, my feelings have changed about writing and I have grown to appreciate the beauty in expressing yourself with written communication." She credited one of her teachers and her internship supervisor for helping her to see that writing is not just about research papers.

As a new MBA student at King, she stated that she had been "writing for as long as [she] can remember." One of her favorite early memories of writing was when she was in fourth grade, and her class's local 4H officer challenged the students to "pick a topic, write a speech, and present it the following week." The students could choose any topic that interested them, and she had just gotten a border collie puppy at Christmas. She was excited at the prospect of researching and learning everything she could about her new puppy, write about it, and tell everyone in the class. She said that she spent the entire week writing her speech and presentation.

However, this positive experience did not prompt her to enjoy writing for school. Jessica said that she never really appreciated writing until she entered college. Before that she only thought of writing in terms of research papers. She did write in a journal as a child, but each time she would get started, her journaling efforts only lasted a few weeks before she found "it was no longer appealing" to her. This cycle has been repeated numerous times over her life. At present, she did not "feel as if expressive writing is something that . . . [she has] time for" because of her other responsibilities for both her classes and her job.

As far as negative experiences in writing, Jessica stated that her worst experiences were always those in which she had to write a research paper "about a topic [she] was not enthused about" because she found it difficult to stay motivated throughout the writing of

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the papers. She found it particularly difficult to write a paper in which she could not include her own ideas and opinions.

Jessica's most positive writing experience was in one of her undergraduate classes in which she was encouraged to freewrite and to write about topics that interested her. Jessica said, "It is not often that a teacher says, 'Write about what you are passionate about,'" but in this class, she felt empowered to write about anything that interested her or that she found important. In addition to this positive experience, Jessica said that she had a writing mentor, her internship supervisor. While she says that she had "many conversations with teachers, peers, and advisors," she believes that her internship supervisor had helped her the most in becoming a better writer.

Jessica said that her feelings about writing have changed over time; she had come to see writing as more complex than she had thought it was. Her experiences in the past had not made her feel confident about writing, nor did they lead her to want to write anything other than school assignments and research papers. Her experience in college has led her to a new appreciation: "I have grown to appreciate the beauty in expressing yourself with written communication."

Sandy: "A Bad Taste for Writing"

Sandy, a woman in her late 40s, had strong opinions about her writing weaknesses, though she was less confident of her strengths. A recently widowed mother of two children, she was interested in finding a new purpose in life, and she wanted to improve her writing skills to help her reach her goal: to teach high school English.

In her literacy narrative, Sandy related a memory of an elementary school teacher who accused her of plagiarizing when she knew that she had not. That experience, she

wrote, "left a bad taste for writing. I do not remember having to write again until my final years in undergraduate school." She went on to recount that her bachelor's degree was from an online college, and she did not believe that she learned much about writing during that time. She does, however, find that she is beginning to find value in writing:

> The more I write, the more I find writing I enjoy writing. I hope teachers spend more quality time helping students to learn to write. I find writing a great way to express emotions and tell a story. The more I learn about writing, the more I understand when reading.

Her experiences in graduate school and with her professors, Sandy said, have helped her to overcome her early disillusionment with writing.

Sandy was in a different position than the other participants in this study. She had already earned two degrees and was working on her third degree: a second Master's degree in English education. Her work history was also more varied than most of the other participants. She did, however, have similar feelings about her past writing experiences.

Sandy started her literacy narrative by saying, "I cannot remember ever liking to write anything." She said she never kept a diary or a journal of any kind, but she now wished that she had. However, her memories of writing were mostly negative or neutral. She believed that part of her lack of interest in writing can be attributed at least in part to her educational experiences. She simply did not remember teachers who "inspired [her] to write," and she wished that more teachers had encouraged her to write.

Her first real memory of writing was in fifth grade. One writing assignment in particular was a positive experience for her. Her teacher had assigned the class to write a

story about name brands, and she remembers being happy because she earned a good grade on the assignment. The teacher had liked her story so much that she asked Sandy to continue the story because it was so interesting. However, while she did finish the story, she doesn't consider that part of the story to be as good or as interesting. She thought that she used up all her passion for the story in the first part and just did not have as much interest in telling the rest of the story.

Sandy's next clear memory of writing was a negative experience. She explained that she had a teacher who did not like her because the poetry she wrote about in a paper was about Rock music, The Rolling Stones, and the teacher said she was "worshipping the devil." After receiving an F on the rough draft of that paper because the teacher accused her of plagiarism, she and her father worked to prove that the paper was not plagiarized. Sandy said that she did cite sources, though she felt sure that her citation method was not correct. She said "[t]hat experience left a bad taste for writing."

Her experience as an undergraduate was also not a good one. She attended an online university, which required a good deal of writing both in assignments and class interaction. The writing lab at the school was automated, and she only received "very basic grammar" suggestions. She did, however, learn to use APA formatting and was confident in her abilities to format a paper.

When she decided to get an MBA, she received "very good grades on every paper [she] wrote." Sandy believed that part of this was because was able to correctly format the papers in APA. However, when she decided to pursue a second Master's degree, an MEd, she had to take many undergraduate English classes to make up for credits she lacked and had to learn to use MLA correctly. While she had little trouble learning the

new formatting style, she had to write more. One negative experience was when a professor told her that she wrote like Hemingway. Sandy thought this was a compliment, but she found out that, in this case, it was not, at least for this teacher.

Over the last two years in graduate school, Sandy said that she had "learned a lot about writing . . . but am in no way considered a good writer." She did end her narrative on a more hopeful note, stating that "The more I write, the more I find I enjoy writing . . . and the more I learn about writing, the more I understand when I read." Finally, she expressed her wish that teachers would "spend more quality time helping students learn to write."

Jill: "I Need a 'Real Person'"

Jill, a 35-year-old graduate student working toward a master's degree in nursing, took online and face-to-face classes at King's Knoxville campus. Of all the participants, Jill had the strongest personality and opinions about her own writing. She was far more likely to challenge her tutor with her own views of the writing problems that the tutor pointed out to her.

In her literacy narrative, Jill chose to "focus on the joys and challenges of writing." She wrote of the journals she kept in high school, but she was most proud of one accomplishment in writing:

> My most crowning writing achievement was that I amazingly documented every single day of my son's first year of life on a bigger calendar: ate carrots, pooped the penny, and threw up on my favorite green blouse. I stopped on his first birthday, waited three years, and did the very same thing for my daughter.

This accomplishment in addition to a similar writing experience in high school when she kept a gratitude journal gave her a positive outlook on what writing can do.

Despite these positive experiences, she also wrote about her challenges. She said that she missed a class that focused only on writing and that she now faces a "teach yourself, learn as you go process." She also wrote that she found "[t]he formality of a proper research paper is tedious."

Jill said that she "remember[ed] little of what [she] wrote in school" but that she did journal on "teeny tiny calendars" when she was in high school, and she considered this her fondest memory of writing. She started this practice as a gratitude calendar when one of the Sisters at her Catholic school suggested—"OK assigned" as she puts it—this practice. Jill still has all of her journals. Jill remembered that her father and uncle wrote. Her father has been "writing his life story for years," and her uncle has also written and published his memoirs.

As far as writing for school, Jill said she did not remember writing much for her undergraduate classes—just taking tests—"mostly multiple choice and route [sic] memorization." She has always found the "formality of a proper research paper . . . tedious." She said that she would rather learn facts and information about her major field than to spend "hours on the perfect, hammered out paper."

Jill's most positive writing experience occurred in Fall of 2015 when a friend who also attended King introduced her to the assistant director of the Academic Center for Excellence at King's Knoxville campus and who is also the writing center director there. She had worked with the director there on many essays and considered the director her "new best friend." Whereas before she started going the writing center, Jill had found

writing a tedious chore, she soon found that her attitude had changed completely. Jill wrote that things "seem completely different when a real [person] shows . . . you your issues on your own paper." She considered this a much better experience than sending papers to King's Online Writing Lab (OWL) or using King's 24-hour tutoring service, Upswing, and having papers returned with comments typed on the paper. She much preferred working with "a real person" when she had an essay to write and revise.

Becoming Academic Writers: The Tutoring Sessions

The tutoring sessions provided me with a rich source of data concerning the ways that the participants went about working through their writing fears and difficulties with tutors in King's Writing Center. The characteristics that I observed while analyzing the documents and transcripts provided me with a way to think about how these adult, nontraditional students perceived themselves as writers and what they believed helped as they improved their writing.

Going into the study, I initially thought that the participants would be concerned mostly about their grammar and mechanics issues than other concerns, and while they did spend a portion of most tutoring sessions on these Lower Order Concerns (LOCs), more time was spent on Higher Order Concerns (HOCs). However, even more time was spent in developing a rapport with the tutors and in coming to understand why they made the mistakes that they made. As I analyzed the data, I found that the best indicators of how the students perceived the help they received and their progress as academic writers were the six characteristics outlined above. For the most part, the participants were active in the sessions, with only one participant who was much less vocal and active in working through the essays with a tutor.

Table 1 shows the relationship among the six characteristics, HOCs issues, and LOCs issues as noted in each tutoring session. The numbers are total comments for each characteristic.

Table 1

Overall Participant Characteristic Distribution by Session

Characteristic	First Session	Second Session	Third Session	Total
Higher Order Concerns	85	51	76	211
Lower Order Concerns	29	59	12	100
Identifying Their Own Problems	31	15	11	57
Exhibiting Self-Confidence or Lack of Self-Confidence	16	28	20	64
Talking through to a Solution	39	24	43	106
Seeking Affirmation	0	8	10	18
Demonstrating a Need to Explain	16	29	39	84
Evaluating Their Perceived Success in the Session	2	4	5	11

This table shows that participants worked on HOCs and LOCs 311 different times and that participants displayed the six characteristics in 340 different interactions. Because many of the characteristics of the general interactions between participants and tutors in these sessions also included HOCs and LOCs issues, it is clear that participants were active in their desire to become better writers in King's academic atmosphere. One interesting observation is that there is no clear, consistent progression of change in the characteristics, HOCs, or LOCs issues identified in this study. Only the characteristic "identifying own problems" showed a steady decrease in instances of discussions, while both "seeking affirmation" and "evaluating their perceived success in the succession" showed a steady, though small, increase over the course of the sessions.

When the data are broken down by individual participant, it becomes even more interesting. Table 2 shows the number of times each of the characteristics was exhibited or that the participant and the tutor discussed HOCs and LOCs issues.

Table 2

Overall Characteristic Distribution by Participant

Characteristic	David	Penny	Jessica	Sandy	Jill
Higher Order Concerns	40	48	20	51	53
Lower Order Concerns	10	14	8	31	37
Identifying Their Own Problems	14	14	0	20	9
Exhibiting Self-Confidence or Lack of Self-Confidence	7	8	4	22	23
Talking through to a Solution	12	18	8	29	39
Seeking Affirmation	2	1	0	1	14
Demonstrating a Need to Explain	12	18	1	18	35
Evaluating Their Perceived Success in the Session	3	1	0	3	4

The data that stands out the most in this distribution table indicate that participants overwhelmingly wanted to talk about the choices they made in their writing; the characteristics with the most comments are in the categories of "talking through to a solution" and "demonstrating a need to explain." Only Sandy spent a great deal of time in seeking affirmation or in evaluating her success in the session. These data suggest that these participants were looking for a chance to talk about their work and not just accept what the tutor was telling them. In other words, they were interested in taking part in the process directly through dialogue and, for the most part, doing so actively. Participants often said they were writing down a suggestion or asked the tutors to repeat what they

had said to make sure they had written the information down correctly; even Jessica, the quietest of the five, wrote down suggestions to use when she revised her essay.

Identifying Their Own Problems

Over the course of three tutoring sessions, all but one participant began to identify the problems with their writing before the tutor addressed it. Jessica, the only participant who did not exhibit this characteristic, was also the quietest of the participants in general and spoke only in brief sentences to the tutor. While she did interject words such as "right" and "I see" to indicate understanding, she never looked for problems on her own but waited for the tutor to take the lead. The other four participants readily played an active role in looking for and identifying errors in their writing. Sandy, in particular, was critical of her own writing and commented openly on her weaknesses. The following table illustrates the number of times each participant exhibited this characteristic.

Table 3

Distribution by Characteristic #1

Characteristic	David			Penny			Jessica			Sandy			Jill		
	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3
Identifying Their Own Problems	11	2	1	8	6	0	0	0	0	11	2	7	1	5	3

Of the four remaining participants, David, Penny, and Sandy identified fewer problems with each session; only Jill's self-identification of problems fluctuated. However, Jill's total number of comments about her own problems was much smaller than those of David, Penny, and Sandy, who commented 14 or more times.

David identified weaknesses in his writing 14 times over the course of the three sessions. He commented much more in Session 1 (11 times) as opposed to his two

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comments in Session 2 and his one comment in Session 3. In Session 1, his comments were more general and tended to focus on his weaknesses as a writer rather than specific writing issues that he encountered. He only commented once on lower order concerns, a misspelling, in his first session with the tutor. The other comments consisted of statements such as "I have trouble expressing my thoughts in a fluid manner" or "I struggle to get ideas on paper." His concerns, then, were not so much about the mechanics of writing as they were about his desire to write a solid paper that was creative and interesting to the reader. He was not at all confident that his writing "flows" or that he was expressing his ideas in great enough depth. In Session 2, David only made two comments on his own difficulties, with one being another general comment about his writing process and the other that he realized that he had not cited a source. Then, in Session 3, David stated that he realized that his was trying to convey an idea but was not successful, so he was still focusing more on himself as a writer than on the words and sentences on the page. A careful analysis of David's comments on his own errors shows that David clearly wanted to be a successful writer, both academically and professionally, but he was still working through what he perceived to be his weaknesses as a writer.

Like David, Penny commented on her writing weaknesses 14 times over the course of the three sessions. Unlike David, however, she noted problems with her writing itself more often. In Session 1, she commented eight times on such issues as organization, transitions, sentence structure, and phrasing. At one point, Penny suggested that her organization was "just a little scatterbrained" and that she had problems in general with organization and transitions. Later in the same session, she tried out a new way to phrase a sentence but realized that the new phrasing "sounds worse than before." Several times

in this session, she suggested different wording but finally concluded that she still didn't like the new wording. In Session 2, Penny identified six problems with her writing, but in this session her comments were equally focused on the writing issues in the paper itself as well as on herself as a writer. For example, in this session, Penny admitted that she had "problems when revising and organizing and forgets to incorporate changes" and that she had trouble proofreading. However, she also pointed out comma errors and long, wordy sentences. By Session 3, Penny identified no errors on her paper and, in fact, stated that she was happy with the final draft of her paper. Penny's concerns about her writing changed over the course of her work with the tutor in that she was mostly concerned with the lower order concerns in her first session, but by the second session she had begun to identify what she needed to do to improve as writer rather than on the writing itself. After she began to make these kinds of changes in her thought process, Penny began to feel more confident in her writing and in herself as a writer.

In Session 1, Sandy identified 11 problems with her writing. Like Penny, she focused solely on problems in the paper itself rather than on herself as a writer. Sandy was most interested during the first session in making sure that her sentences were well structured and correct. Other issues she identified were paragraphing problems and formatting mistakes; however, these are the only two issues she mentioned besides sentence structure errors. She often commented on a sentence she had written that "doesn't make sense anyway." She was also quick to point out comma errors, particularly comma splices. Unlike either David or Penny, though, she also made a suggestion on how she might correct the problem. Interestingly in Session 2, Sandy only identified two of her own errors, which may be that, as she noted at the beginning of her session, she

had worked to eliminate those problems that were identified in the first session. One error

was a basic formatting error, and the other was a topic sentence. In this session, Sandy

also explained how the topic sentence problem occurred: she was making corrections, but

because she "added this [phrase] to [the paragraph], it makes it not a topic sentence."

Interestingly, in Session 3, Sandy identified seven problems, all but one of which was a

sentence structure or grammar issue. The other comment involved a question about a

citation. The increase in self-identifying errors is possibly because she made a significant

number of changes to the second draft of the paper, which may have led to other errors

she did not catch in her revision. In all three sessions, Sandy was comfortable with

herself as a writer and with the tutor's help. She understood what she needed to do to

become a better writer in an academic setting, but she also recognized that she needed to

look more closely at her writing during revision.

Of the four participants who identified their own problems in the essays, Jill

pointed out the fewest errors. Session 1 for Jill was mostly a preliminary meeting with the

tutor to help her get started with a paper. The two mostly discussed Jill's previous

writing[4] and the paper she was currently writing to bring to her next tutoring session. This

session was mostly brainstorming. Jill did note that she wanted to work on the

readability of her paper, making sure that each paragraph did the work that it was

supposed to do. In Session 2, Jill identified mostly problems with formatting and only

one punctuation issue. Throughout her three sessions, Jill was detail-oriented regarding

APA formatting and wanted to make sure that she had caught all formatting issues. In

fact, Jill and the tutor discussed formatting 30 different times in this tutorial alone. She

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[4] Jill and the tutor had already worked together on other papers before the study.

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also noted that many of her problems were the result of what she considered her poor proofreading skills. Jill also tended to mention a problem and then note that she had not had an issue with it earlier. In Session 3, Jill only commented on her own problems three times. During this session, Jill was most likely to suggest a solution to a problem but then determine that the solution would not work. She knew there was a problem with a sentence or a formatting element, and she was active in looking for a solution, even when the solution was not the best way to solve the problem. For example, Jill realized that she had an organization issue and asked the tutor, "Can I say 'as mentioned in my introduction'"? She followed this question up quickly with "No…" when she realized that her solution was not the best way to work through her challenge in organizing the paper. Throughout Jill's three sessions, she demonstrated that she wanted to write in a way that would be acceptable to her professor—and the tutor—and she was willing to work diligently to do so.

Exhibiting Self-Confidence or Lack of Self-Confidence

Because this characteristic included both self-confidence and lack of self-confidence, the tutoring sessions reveal some of the most interesting data. First, most of the data suggests that these participants lacked self-confidence to some extent. In fact, the only participant who expressed any positive self-confidence more than once was Jill; all of the other participants except David expressed only lack of self-confidence. However, only three comments out of Jill's total of 23 indicated any positive self-confidence, and only one of David's seven expressed positive self-confidence. The two participants who had been out of school the longest exhibited the most instances of problems with lack of self-confidence. In fact, the two participants who had been out of school the longest,

Sandy and Jill, exhibited this characteristic more than twice as often as David, Penny, and

Jessica, who had been out of school for fewer years. The data clearly show that self-

confidence was a factor for all five participants. Table 4 below shows the wide variety of

data for this characteristic.

Table 4

Distribution by Characteristic #2

Characteristic	David			Penny			Jessica			Sandy			Jill		
	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3
Exhibiting Self-Confidence or Lack of Self-Confidence	2	2	3	5	3	0	2	2	0	4	10	8	3	11	9

David's main difficulty in all three sessions was that he was not sure that he was

getting his point across clearly. He sometimes described his writing as "sloppy" or

"awful." For example, in Session 3, he said that he changed one paragraph "significantly

because I was trying to get across an idea, and I don't think I did very well." Later in the

session, he suggested that this attempt was "sloppy." David viewed his paper with a

critical eye in each session; in fact, he and Sandy both identified 11 problems with their

writing, which means that they were both willing to do the work of finding and

evaluating their mistakes. However, while Sandy expressed less self-confidence, David

only exhibited this characteristic a total of seven times as compared to Sandy, who

exhibited a lack of self-confidence 22 times. Interestingly, both of these participants were

returning to college for a Master's Degree in Education with an emphasis in English, so

their expectations are likely different from those of the other participants.

Neither Penny nor Jessica make many comments indicating their confidence

level. Penny, with eight total comments, and Jessica, with four, were more vocal about

their writing weaknesses in Sessions 1 and 2, but neither expressed concern in the third session. By the end of their tutoring sessions, Penny and Jessica seemed more confident about their work on the paper they were writing and exhibited no concerns about submitting their papers. Jessica, who exhibited this characteristic fewer times than the other participants, was also the quietest. However, when she did exhibit a lack of self-confidence, it was usually asking the tutor what the best way to revise a sentence or paragraph would be or to express uncertainty about a change she had suggested.

Jill exhibited the most self-confidence of the three; however, the number of comments involving strong self-confidence were outweighed by the 20 comments she made that indicated that either she was uncertain about an issue or that her confidence was misplaced. For example, at one point she was sure that she had addressed a required element of the paper, but when she and the tutor went back to check it she had not. While she was more likely to comment on her "careless mistakes" and "bad proofreading" skills, she was also more likely to say "I'm getting there" or to note how much better the second draft of her paper was than the first draft.

Talking Through to a Solution

The characteristics that elicited the most conversation in the tutoring sessions was "talking through to a solution." The closest characteristic in number of comments is "demonstrating a need to explain," which is closely related to this characteristic. In some cases, there is overlap between the two categories. Again, Sandy and Jill exhibited this characteristic much more than the other three participants. Only Jessica did not talk through to a solution in a session, and Jill exhibited the characteristic 29 times in one session alone, her third, which is twice as many times as the next nearest, Sandy, with 14

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instances of talking through to a solution in her first session. Table 5 illustrates the wide variety of instances for this characteristic.

Table 5

Distribution by Characteristic #3

Characteristic	David			Penny			Jessica			Sandy			Jill		
	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3
Talking through to a Solution	6	2	4	12	4	2	5	3	0	14	7	8	2	8	29

In Session 1, David either revised sentences aloud or suggested improvements six times. David is the only participant who used humor during his tutorials, and his comments when talking through to a solution demonstrate this well. In his first tutoring session, he suggested a revision to a sentence that he was not happy with and then commented that his "relationship [with writing] is complicated." He also mentioned a couple of times that he would like to be able to write jokes or comedy. By the end of Session 1, he became more serious and noted that he appreciated the tutor's honesty in helping him improve the paper. David was quieter in Session 2, only offering two suggestions to improve a passage he had revised. In both cases, he ultimately decided to delete the phrase that had troubled him as a result of the tutor's help in analyzing the passages to determine the best way to rectify the problem. By his last session, David had made significant changes, and he spoke about those changes in detail with the tutor. As he and the tutor looked over the revised essay, he found four more places that needed work. In all four cases, the problem was with clarity, so he worked to find a better and clearer way to word a phrase or a sentence. David and the tutor had developed a strong rapport, and, as he had more sessions with the tutor, he became more open and at ease.

Penny's comments in all three of her sessions focused on general writing strategies to make her writing clearer and easier to read. Beginning is Session 1, in which she talked through 12 problems in her draft, with most of them concerning organization, an area of difficulty for Penny that she had identified herself, and sentence structure issues. She often asked the tutor's advice as she was working through a particularly difficult organizational challenge or to find a better way to phrase a sentence. For example, near the end of her first session, Penny noted that she would "need a smoother transition here" and then suggested a way to improve and clarify the sentence. By her second and third sessions, instances of Penny talking through to a solution had dropped significantly to four times in Session 2 and two in Session 3. In these sessions, she tended to work on either more word and sentence-level issues or on formatting. For example, as an information technology major, her papers tended to be more technical, but her audience for both the tutoring sessions and the professor were writing teachers and not in a technical field, so Penny looked for ways to make her information clearer for a non-technical reader. In one case, she determined that assuming the audience knew what she meant by "code-like" might not be a correct assumption, so she decided to use "DOS terminology" as a result of talking about the problem with her tutor.

Jessica, who spoke the least during her tutoring sessions, commented more than usual when she was talking through her writing issues than she did for any other reason. Like Penny, Jessica was more likely to talk through issues of organization or sentence structure. Interestingly, she was also more likely to ask for the advice of the tutor after she had talked through a problem and suggested a different sentence structure or organizational strategy. For example, in Session 1, Jessica was looking for a way to

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organize her paper so that it had "better flow," and, after she made a suggestion, she asked the tutor for her input. In Session 2, she also used the tutor's reaction to gauge the effectiveness of the way that she wanted to revise a particular paragraph in the paper. By the third session, Jessica did not feel that she needed to talk through any issues. It is hard to determine the impact that tutoring had on Jessica by the comments she made while talking through her errors because she talked very little throughout the sessions; however, her final interview did show that she gained a great deal of insight into ways to improve her writing.

Alternatively, Sandy spent a good deal of time in her tutoring sessions talking through her problem areas with the tutor. In Session 1, she commented 14 times with most of these comments concerning sentence level revisions, more a fine-tuning of the sentence than anything else. Her other comments involved organization, development, and adding detail. One way that she differs from the other participants is that she was quite concerned with grammar and mechanics issues. Many of the sentences she talked through had grammar issues, and she wanted to make sure that she could revise them correctly. Sandy and her tutor spent the most time talking through her comma issues, and she also noted that she had problems with verb tenses. In Session 2, however, she was more concerned about higher order concerns such as organization and adequately expanding on her points. For example, as she talked with the tutor, she realized that she needed to move a paragraph to another place in the paper because "the second part is more about my opinion, and the first part isn't." Being able to talk this organization issue through with the tutor helped her to not only recognize a problem but how to correct it as well. Sandy continued to talk through her problems and fine-tuning them in Session 3.

Similarly, in this session, she was more concerned about organization and transition issues just as she was in Session 2. However, her comments were more talking through what the problems were and considering ways to address them than simply trying out different phrasing or organizing strategies. For instance, in this session, she searched for a transition she could use, noting that she "could almost put 'therefore' before 'teaching,' which would then bring those two [ideas] together." In another instance, she had an extended conversation with the tutor about why her writing was better when she paid attention to the transitions between paragraphs and sentences. With a total of 29 instances of talking through her problems to a solution, Sandy interacted with her tutor more than any other participant besides Jill, and she also had fewer instances of comments indicating a low confidence level as she moved from one session to the next.

Jill talked through her problems more than any of the other participants in this study, and she spent a great deal of time trying to understand what she did wrong, demonstrating her strong desire to submit the best paper she could. In Session 1, Jill worked mostly on organization and formatting than on sentence structure, grammar, or other general writing issues. In Session 2, though, she was more interested in sentence level issues than she was in Session 1; however, she still focused on addressing the formatting problems she needed to work through. In fact, she was more likely to explain why she made a particular choice than to try to talk through her issues with the tutor. Most of her "talking through" interactions involved Jill trying to correct formatting issues such as using italics for journal titles or lowercase letters in article titles. In Session 3, Jill talked through writing issues 29 times, significantly more than any other participant, but this time she focused equally on formatting and sentence structure. She was more likely

to read through her own sentences and then try out different phrasing or completely

revising sentences than she was in previous sessions. At the end of this session, she also

expressed more confidence in the quality of her work than she did in any of the other

sessions.

Seeking Affirmation

The data for this characteristic is interesting in that all but one participant sought

affirmation in at least one session. In fact, one participant did so 14 times as opposed to

three other participants who only looked for affirmation once or twice. The difficulty in

both coding and interpreting this data lies in the nature of the way the different

participants sought positive input from their tutors. Three of the five participants used

mostly indirect methods to gain affirmation from the tutor. Other participants, however,

sought affirmation by asking the tutor direct questions about their papers that could lead

to a positive statement. Only one participant, Jill, asked the tutor direct questions about

the quality of her suggestions and revisions. In addition, only one participant, Jessica, did

not seek affirmation either directly or indirectly. Table 6 illustrates that most of the

participants in this study did not seek affirmation often; in fact, only one participant

looked for affirmation more than once or twice.

Table 6

Distribution by Characteristic #4

Characteristic	David			Penny			Jessica			Sandy			Jill		
	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3
Seeking Affirmation	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	5	9

David is a good example of the way that some participants sought affirmation

indirectly. In Session 1, he never directly asked or indicated that he wanted the tutor to

agree with him or indicate the quality of his suggestion or revision. For example, David's good humor and self-deprecating manner and conversational style with his tutor could be interpreted as a way to lead the tutor to make affirming statements, such as "that's not bad," "Yes, that's one way you could go," and "That's a great transition." In Session 2, however, David began by asking the tutor to "start with the good and end with the bad," indicating that he desired positive feedback from his tutor.   And at the end of the session, he jokingly asked the tutor if the essay could be published. While this question was clearly a joke, it also indicates that David would like to hear an affirming statement at the end of a long work session.

Penny and Sandy exhibited this characteristic fewer times than David or Jill with only one instance each in the three sessions. While they were both proactive in most ways, they did not directly seek affirmation. At the end of Session 1, Penny was interested in whether the tutor could "tell that I made improvements and changes," and she asked this as a direct question to the tutor. Similarly, Sandy sought affirmation directly only one time. In this case, however, she was not asking the tutor to affirm her in what she had done in revising the paper; instead, she asked the tutor to agree that the problem she identified in her paper was indeed a problem, in this case a poorly worded sentence.

Of all the participants, Jill most actively looked to her tutor for affirmation, with 14 different questions about issues such as formatting, development, and organization. Most of these instances are direct questions, such as "Should I use bold for this heading?" or "I am just not good at proofreading. Do you know what I mean?" A consistent theme throughout Jill's tutoring sessions is that she wanted to make sure that her tutor

understood that she was not a careless and sloppy student but that she was not good catching her own mistakes. She was also quite focused on making sure that the APA formatting was correct and asked the tutor numerous questions about it, including several in which she suggested what she should do and asked the tutor directly to affirm her suggestions. Interestingly, as will be noted below, Jill also demonstrated the most desire to explain what she had done in a particular passage and why.

As with many of the other characteristics, seeking affirmation is not a clear cut distinction from other characteristics, particularly exhibiting a lack of self-confidence or demonstrating a need to explain what the participant had done in a particular place in the paper. The defining element of this characteristic became the use of direct questions or comments that required the tutor to reply in a way that would affirm the participant in his or her decisions.

Demonstrating a Need to Explain

The participants in this study showed a strong need to explain why they wrote something in the way they did or why they made a particular choice. Again, Jessica was the only participant who did not feel that she needed to explain her choices as much as the other participants did, with only one comment in which she explained a choice she had made, and Jill was the most likely to do so, with 35 instances of exhibiting this characteristic. The other three participants, David, Penny, and Sandy, all explained their choices in the same range of comments. Table 7 shows the distribution of the comments indicating that each participant felt that he or she needed to explain a choice made in the paper.

Table 7

Distribution of Characteristic #5

Characteristic	David			Penny			Jessica			Sandy			Jill		
	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3
Demonstrating a Need to Explain	5	3	4	6	7	5	1	0	0	3	5	10	1	14	20

David exhibited this characteristic evenly across all three sessions, mostly focusing on explaining his thinking at certain points in his essay. In most cases, his explanations concerned bigger picture issues such as idea development and why he came to a particular conclusion. In Session 1, he offered more explanation for lower order concerns such as why he used a footnote and why he believed one of his sentences did not work. He also commented on what he considered to be an unsuccessful use of humor in his essay. His concerns in Session 2 became more focused on higher order concerns such as why he included a particular passage in the place that he did. By Session 3, David was fully concerned with explaining why he wanted to make a particular point or what sentences and paragraphs indicated the main ideas that he wanted to develop. In these sections, David gradually moved from less important concerns of formatting and grammar in Session 1 to more important issues of what he was saying and how he was saying it in Session 3.

Penny, unlike David, believed that she needed to make sure that the tutor understood the unfamiliar language and technical words of her major, information technology. In Session 1, Penny explained the technical language of her paper four times out of her six interactions. While Penny lacked confidence in her writing skills, she demonstrated that she was confident enough in her knowledge to explain these details to

the tutor. Even though she was not confident about her writing skills, she did make it clear to the tutor that she knew her subject. In Session 2, however, Penny focused more on grammar and spelling issues and how she performed the research for the paper. At one point, she explained why one of the sources was older than the others and why it was an acceptable source. In Session 3, Penny explained how she decided to organize new information she added to the paper and how she addressed a paragraphing problem. As she did in Session 1, Penny also explained more about the technical aspects of her discipline. Throughout her three sessions, Penny explained equal amounts about why she made certain decisions or wrote a sentence a certain way or cited a particular passage and about the technical language of her major.

Jessica, on the other hand, only explained what she had done one time, and that was in Session 1. Early in the session, Jessica explained that she had already taken care of one of the tutor's concerns about organizing the paper. Because of Jessica's quiet and receptive personality, she did not feel that she needed to explain her choices to the tutor. Instead, throughout the sessions, Jessica listened carefully to the tutor, indicated agreement or understanding and talked through ways she could improve her paper, but she did not offer other explanation. One reason for her quietness and careful listening may be that she expressed the most confidence about her writing in her literacy narrative than any of the other four participants, and she felt confident enough in her work as a writer not to feel that she had to explain how and why she wrote her essays.

Sandy, like David and Penny, demonstrated a moderate amount of need to explain her choices. Interestingly, Sandy's need to explain what she had done grew over the course of the three sessions. In Session 1, she explained choices three times, she

explained them five times in Session 2, and she explained them 10 times in Session 3. Her comments in the first session were mostly about general decisions she had made, such as why she chose the book she did for the critique and how it was structured. Her comments in this session did not concern her own writing so much as they did in explaining her choice of book to critique. This focus on explaining her book choice may be that the draft that she brought to the first session was a very rough draft, and she was still working through organizing her thoughts. She focused more on her paper after she had done significant revisions for Session 2. In this session, Sandy explained why she made points in the way that she did or why there was a formatting error. In one place, she explained that she thought she had adequately explained a point, but, after reading this draft again, she realized that she had not. In Session 3, she focused more on telling the tutor about the sentence level issues she had worked on and what she did to connect one idea to the next more clearly. Sandy's sessions demonstrate that she was looking at her drafts with a more critical eye the more that she worked with the tutor. By the end of her third tutoring session, Sandy was focusing more on describing what she did to fine-tune the rough spots in her paper than to explain why she made an initial choice. Interestingly, the last session, in which she explained more, is the only one in which she sought affirmation from the tutor.

Again, Jill exhibited the most instances of needing to explain her choices, with 35 comments over the course of three tutoring sessions. Like Sandy, her explanations tended to increase from one tutoring session to the next, culminating in 20 comments in the final tutoring session of the study. In Session 1, Jill only offered one explanation to the tutor, and that comment was about the fact that she had not written much since she completed

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her Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree several years earlier. In Session 2, like Penny, she felt that she needed to explain the more technical aspects of her field to the tutor, who was not a nursing major. In this session, she often explained that she knew the rules of formatting and citing sources, but she had just missed those when she proofread. She also explained that some of her errors were because she was not good at proofreading and that she had trouble with copying and pasting, which often led to new problems that she sometimes overlooked. Jill occasionally commented on grammar problems that she knew were problem areas for her. Early in Session 2, for example, she stated, "I'm working on the active/passive thing." She often pointed out when she double checked something that she had written or that she checked her APA book to make sure she had cited her sources correctly. However, in Session 3, Jill felt that she needed to explain a point or a choice 20 times, twice as often as Sandy did and many times more than David, Penny, and Jessica. In this session, she focused clearly on the writing choices that she made most often, but she also explained to the tutor the content of the article she was critiquing. In this session, Jill was upset over the grade she received on the original draft of the paper and wanted to make sure that she revised it correctly. A significant portion of this tutoring session required that she and her tutor compare the grading rubric with Jill's finished product; therefore, many of the comments involved Jill trying to explain why she made a choice, such as leaving out a required section on the rubric, and the tutor explaining what she needed to do to correct that issue. By the end of the session, Jill understood what she needed to do but also needed to explain her side of the issue. Interspersed regularly throughout this part of the conversation, Jill talked through how to rectify the problems and asked questions when she did not quite understand what she needed to do or why.

Though this part of the session was somewhat tense, Jill and the tutor had a rich and meaningful dialogue about using a rubric to write the kind of paper the professor expected and how to go about addressing issues that were not as clear as others. Overall, Jill's sessions with her tutor were lively and focused.

Evaluating Their Perceived Success in the Sessions

A particularly critical aspect of this research is to discover the perceptions of the participants regarding their tutoring experience; therefore, the data on this characteristic is important in establishing their perceived success in the tutoring sessions. While there is not as much hard data for this characteristic, it is important to note that these comments tended to be a summary of the how successful that the participants believed they were in their work for each session. Table 8 shows the distribution of comments on the way that each participant felt about the success of their sessions.

Table 8

Distribution of Characteristic #6

Characteristic	David			Penny			Jessica			Sandy			Jill		
	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3
Evaluating Their Perceived Success in the Session	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	3	0	2	2

Again, Jessica did not specifically make a judgment about how successful she thought she was in each session. While she did not express any perceptions about how successful she thought her sessions were to her tutor, she was enthusiastic when she related her experience to me in our final interview. So, even though she did not express her perceptions directly to the tutor, she did do so when I spoke with her.

David, on the other hand, consistently expressed his feelings about the sessions with his tutor. He ended each of his sessions with statements such as "I appreciate your honesty on my paper," "Everything deserves to be reread," and "This session was very helpful." In all three cases, David was summing up his experience as useful. His statement at the end of Session 2 about everything deserving to be reread is a concept that he had said he had trouble with during a conversation in Session 1 about writing and revising drafts. David stated that he did not usually feel motivated to write or revise, saying, "To be honest, I don't even know if [connecting his ideas by writing about past experiences] would motivate me." David seems to have overcome his reluctance to revise his papers and to use resources such as the writing center for help in improving his writing.

In contrast, Penny only made a statement about how successful she viewed her tutoring sessions at the end of her last session. At the end of Penny's first two sessions, she left with a positive attitude and mentioned the next session, but she did not make any direct statements about how she perceived the session. At the end of Session 3, Penny told the tutor, "I have a paper due in my next class, and I will use what I have learned to write it." This statement, though not so much a direct statement of the success of the session, indirectly indicates that she found the sessions valuable enough to apply what she learned to the papers she would be writing in her other classes. Like Jessica, Penny was more enthusiastic about how helpful she thought the sessions were when I spoke with her in the final interview.

Like David, Sandy ended each session with a comment about how she perceived the work that she had done with the tutor. In Session 1, she stated that she thought they

had covered everything they needed to and said, "I think we're good!" In Session 2, she indicated that she felt the session was successful, that she looked forward to the next session, and that she felt that she had what she needed to make revisions. In her final session, Sandy stated that she felt confident and that the session was good. While Sandy's comments on the success of her sessions were low key, they were also not prompted by the tutor and seemed to express her honest thoughts about what they had accomplished.

Jill was the most expressive in her evaluations of the sessions. Though she did not comment on the success of the first session, she did comment enthusiastically in Sessions 2 and 3. For example, at the end of Session 2, she told the tutor that "I am making better grades than some of the people in my class, and I think that might just be because I come [to the writing center]." Similarly, near the end of Session 3 she said that she believed her work was much better written than it was before. She ended the session by saying, "Lesson learned!"

Table 9 illustrates the distribution of characteristics for all participants throughout all three sessions. It clearly shows that some participants were more open to discussion than others, and the number of comments by each participant is comparable from session to session and characteristic to characteristic.

Table 9

Distribution of all Characteristics by Participant and Session

Characteristic	David			Penny			Jessica			Sandy			Jill		
	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3
Identifying Their Own Problems	11	2	1	8	6	0	0	0	0	11	2	7	1	5	3
Exhibiting Self-Confidence or Lack of Self-Confidence	2	2	3	5	3	0	2	2	0	4	10	8	3	11	9
Talking Through to a Solution	6	2	4	12	4	2	5	3	0	14	7	8	2	8	29
Seeking Affirmation	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	5	9
Demonstrating a Need to Explain	5	3	4	6	7	5	1	0	0	3	5	10	1	14	20
Evaluating Their Perceived Success in the Session	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	3	0	2	2

For example, it is easy to see that Jessica spoke the least, with only 28 interactions in these areas, and that Jill spoke the most during their sessions, with 124 interactions. Sandy interacted nearly as much as Jill, with 93 interactions, but her conversations with her tutor were more evenly distributed through the sessions and characteristics than Jill's were. David and Penny interacted nearly the same number of times, with Penny having slightly more interactions than David.

Participants' Final Perceptions

All of the participants reported having a positive experience working with a tutor over the course of three sessions. The final interview questions are listed below.

1. What did the tutor do to help you to understand what it means to be an academic writer?

2. Do you believe that your work with this tutor helped you to understand what you need to do to improve your academic writing skills?

    2a. What suggestions and advice did your tutor give you that helped you the most?

3. Do you believe that your experience working with a writing center tutor has been beneficial to you as you are learning how to become an academic writer?

    3a. In what ways did the tutor help you to become a better academic writer?

4. Do you perceive that you have become a better writer as a result of your tutoring sessions?

    4a. In what ways do you believe that you have become a better writer?

5. What changes have you made in your writing process, in the steps that you take as you write essays, as a result of working with a tutor?

6. What part of your tutoring session was the most influential in helping you to understand how to become an academic writer?

I also gave each participant a chance to tell me anything he or she would like to add that I had not asked about in the questions listed above. The participants all reported positive experiences in their tutoring sessions and noted that they enjoyed working with the tutor they had been paired with. Some of the participants spoke more and offered more details, while others were not as likely to give details without prompting. Interestingly, Jill, who spoke more during her tutoring sessions, spoke the least in the final interview, and Jessica, who spoke the least in the tutoring sessions, spoke much more in the final interview and was extremely positive and grateful for her experience.

In answering the question "What did the tutor do to help you to understand what it means to be an academic writer?" most of the participants gave similar answers. David, Penny, Jessica, and Sandy all spoke of how their tutors had helped them to understand the value of writing a clear, well-organized essay in an academic setting. While Penny focused her work with her tutor on organizing her paper better, David, Jessica, and Sandy found that their writing was much easier to read after their tutors helped them with transitions. David also commented that he realized after the tutoring sessions that writing multiple drafts was more important than he had thought it was in his undergraduate writing. Jessica noted that her tutor helped her to understand that she does not have to always use "strict chronological order because sometimes other ways to organize papers work better." Jill, on the other hand, did not mention any particular writing issue, but she did say that the tutor helped her to understand the importance of using strong references. Sandy found that the examples that her tutor used to illustrate problem areas and how to address them were most valuable to her in becoming a better academic writer. Seeing the examples offered by her tutor gave her a better idea of what "academic writing looked like."

When I asked them the question, "Do you believe that your work with this tutor helped you to understand what you need to do to improve your academic writing skills?" all five participants answered the question emphatically that their experiences were "definitely beneficial." They all noted that they now feel more confident in what a well-structured sentence, paragraph, and essay should look like. Penny stated that she would "be using the writing center again for sure." Learning to organize an essay and to "make it flow" was a significant result that each participant touched on. Jessica, for example,

said, "I now have a better idea of how to organize my papers and use transitions to make my paper flow." Sandy and Jill both noted that they now realize how important it is to write sentences that the reader can easily understand. Sandy took her comments about making her sentences easier to understand further when she mentioned that they would also be more interesting to the reader. Jill said that she now has a "clearer understanding of writing and formatting" academic papers.

The follow-up to this question provided more detail from the participants. In this question, I asked them "What suggestions and advice did your tutor give you that helped you the most?" David's response was the most complete and detailed. In his answer, he listed several suggestions that his tutor gave him that he believed would make him a better writer and that he was interested in writing again, particularly writing as part of a team. David's list included writing issues such as using transitions, spending more time organizing his writing, and writing stronger sentences. However, he mentioned several times that the best advice his tutor gave him was spending time in drafting and revising. Penny most appreciated her tutor's advice to make sure that her main point was clear. While Penny said that she was not good at this, she said she felt better equipped to work on this area of weakness as a result of working with her tutor. Both Jessica and Sandy mentioned that they believed the best advice they got was using transitions to make the paper flow better.

All five answered the question "Do you believe that your experience working with a writing center tutor has been beneficial to you as you are learning how to become an academic writer?" positively. Jessica, in particular, notes that her work with a tutor had helped her to understand more clearly how to write in a more academic way. In one

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of her sessions, Jessica mentioned that she was unaware that some of the words she was using were what she called "country girl language." Following her three sessions with the tutor, she now believed that she knew how to avoid informal language. Penny, too, stated that she found writing in an academic atmosphere more comfortable after the tutoring sessions because she could more easily recognize her tendency to use words and phrases that are not really appropriate when she is writing an essay for a class. In answer to this question, Sandy found the tutor's work was valuable in that "I learned how to write more fluently . . . . I am now more aware of how sentences relate to other sentences."

After I asked the participants "In what ways did the tutor help you to become a better academic writer?" David and Penny believed that their tutors helped them to become better writers by teaching them the importance of writing multiple drafts and focusing on revision. Jill, on the other hand, focused on what the tutor actually did during the session to help her to become a better writer: "She showed me directly, with pen and paper in hand, exactly what needed work [in my paper]." For Jessica and Sandy, learning to write stronger sentences with a more academic tone would be most helpful to them as they wrote more in the academic setting.

When they considered the questions "Do you perceive that you have become a better writer as a result of your tutoring sessions? In what ways do you believe that you have become a better writer?" all participants perceived that they had become better writers as a result of their tutoring sessions. David was the most introspective in the group, noting that he "tended to use too much humor in my first draft, but [he] was able to see a better kind of humor when [he] wrote [his] second draft." He said that he was also striving to use drafting and revision more now; according to David, "I have found

value in giving myself time between drafts because it gives me an opportunity to see the paper anew." Jessica, like David, stated that she believed she would be a better writer because her tutor helped her understand how important it is to proofread her writing more than one time: "Going over the steps in the writing process . . . helped me to learn to be more mindful of how I can change a rough draft into an A paper." Penny, too, felt confident that she would be able to write a better paper "even before [she takes] it to the writing center" as a result of her tutoring sessions. Sandy's response was based more on the skills she had learned in constructing sentences and avoiding comma errors as important to helping her to become a better writer. She said, "I am definitely more aware of how sentences should flow, so, yes, I believe that I am now becoming a better writer." Similarly, Jill said that she believed that she is becoming a better writer because she felt more fully prepared to take part in researching and writing in her field after working with her tutor.

When considering the question "What changes have you made in your writing process, in the steps that you take as you write essays, as a result of working with a tutor?" most of the participants mentioned that they take more time in writing a paper than they did before and that the tutoring sessions helped them to realize how important it is to use a process while writing. Penny said that she was already brainstorming more in preparation to write a paper, and Jessica, who had never considered proofreading her work more than one time, reported that for her next paper, she had proofread three times before submitting the paper and that she believed that "taking the time to proofread everything I write will stick with me as I continue my education." Sandy said that "the

changes I have made already are to make my writing more enjoyable for the reader." She also stated that she had begun paying more attention to the structure of her essays.

The question "What part of your tutoring session was the most influential in helping you to understand how to become an academic writer?" prompted the greatest variety of responses than the other questions. Jill, for example, said that she thought that sitting side-by-side with a tutor gave her better insight into her writing, while Sandy was focused more on the reader, stating that "the tutor was able to make me think about my writing through the eyes of the reader." Jessica, like Sandy, realized just how important it was to make the topic she was writing about, whether she found it interesting or not, more interesting for her reader and "how the flow and structure of an essay can catch or lose the reader's attention." David believed that the most influential part of his tutoring sessions was watching his tutor discuss his paper with him in a way that was both honest and positive at the same time. He said that he can now hear his tutor's voice in his head as he works on papers for his classes.

Summary and Look Ahead

The literacy narratives, tutoring sessions, and final interviews all indicate that these adult, nontraditional students all had somewhat negative experiences with writing when they were younger; some even said that they dreaded or even hated writing. Some wrote in journals off and on as they were growing up, but only two had practiced journaling as adults, and those were journals in which they were recording their children's early years. Only one participant said that she had come to appreciate writing as a result of her sessions. The tutoring sessions showed four of the participants to be quite active in the process of revising and improving their papers, while one participant

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was not as active but maintained a positive and accepting attitude throughout her sessions. By the end of their sessions all of the participants stated that the experience was beneficial to them and gave examples of what they had learned about writing in an academic setting.

In Chapter Five, I discuss the participants' experiences in more detail and discuss how they relate to the research questions for this study. While the results of the data I collected show that these adult, nontraditional students had beneficial and positive experiences in their tutoring sessions, I look more closely at the conversations and literacy narratives to determine whether and how the students had come to identify themselves as academic writers.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIVE STUDENTS AND THEIR JOURNEYS TOWARD ACADEMIC

WRITING IDENTITIES

When I began this study, I was not sure where my journey or the journeys of the participants would lead. I knew that I wanted to understand the ways that adult, nontraditional learners navigated the sometimes murky waters of academia to become academic writers with clearly-defined identities. I had taught many classes in King's Graduate and Professional Studies Program and had worked with learners who were returning to school after several or even many years. Their struggles involved more than just getting to know new students, new professors, and new classes. Many of these students could not remember the last time they had written anything, even when they were in high school or when they attended a community college. They knew who they were on personal and professional levels, but they found it difficult to know who they were as students and members of new academic and professional discourse communities.

The challenges that I heard about most were the difficulties these learners faced when they were writing papers for their classes. Their confidence levels were low; they knew what they wanted to say, they told me, but they weren't sure how to write it down in a paper. They became discouraged when they received low grades on an essay, especially one that was riddled with what was to them nearly incomprehensible terms: thesis statement, informal tone, development, plagiarism, and more. They knew what most of the words themselves meant, but they had a hard time processing what they meant in the context of writing papers and wondered how they would ever be able to write a paper that met all of these standards.

In the last chapter, I began to make sense of what the participants in my study wrote in their literacy narratives and what they said in their conversations with their tutors and in their final interviews with me by looking closely at the data that I had gathered and by reading and rereading it many times over. In this chapter, I discuss the results of my data analysis and offer conclusions and implications based on this analysis.

Discussion

Relationship between the Data and the Research Questions

For this study, I was interested in understanding how adult, nontraditional students experienced their work with writing center tutors as they learned to become writers in a college or university setting, how they defined themselves after taking part in three tutoring sessions, and the tutoring approaches that best helped them define themselves as academic writers. To guide my research, I focused on one main research question and two related ancillary questions:

- Main Research Question: How do adult learners in post-secondary contexts experience academic writing as they work with writing center tutors?

- Ancillary Question 1: How do these tutoring experiences help them construct their identities as academic writers?

- Ancillary Question 2: What tutorial approaches do these learners identify as being influential in constructing their writing identities?

To answer these questions, I decided to have my participants write a literacy narrative before they began their three tutoring sessions. Then the participants worked with a tutor in at least three sessions. Each of their three sessions was taped, and I transcribed them

for coding. Following the taped tutoring sessions, I interviewed each of the participants about their experience.

Main research question. *How do adult learners in post-secondary contexts experience academic writing as they work with writing center tutors?* As I read and analyzed the data that I had collected, I soon discovered that the data I had collected presented a complex set of answers. Each of the participants in the study exhibited similar characteristics, and their experiences seemed to be similar as well—on the surface. Looking more carefully at the data, I found a wide discrepancy in the ways that the participants reacted in and to the tutoring sessions. One participant (Jessica) was passive in her interactions with the tutor, allowing the tutor to guide her in the process. Three of the participants (David, Penny, and Sandy) were more active in their tutoring sessions; however, they still clearly experienced the tutorial from nearly a teacher-student position. They, too, relied on their tutors to guide the process, but they were also much more likely to engage in dialogue with their tutors, identifying problems or talking through them to a possible solution than Jessica. The final participant (Jill) approached her tutoring sessions by actively participating in shaping the conversation, sometimes even guiding the tutor rather than passively waiting for the tutor to identify areas of discussion. While her tutor suggested areas to discuss, Jill also tended to move the conversation in the direction that she wanted it to go. In the section below in which I discuss the characteristics exhibited by the participants, I will discuss in depth the interactions of the participants with their tutors.

Ancillary research question 1. *How do these tutoring experiences help them construct their identities as academic writers?* The literacy narratives and the final

interviews with each participant were the documents that helped me to gain insight as I sought an answer to this ancillary question. Three participants (David, Penny, Sandy) indicated in their literacy narratives that they either had negative experiences with writing in the past or that they were not really interested in writing. These negative experiences had left them with self-confidence issues about writing that were clearly evident in their tutoring sessions. These three participants did not like writing when they were younger and were not eager to write in their classes at King. The other two participants (Jessica and Jill) had had fewer negative experiences and even reported enjoying some kinds of writing they had done in the past. For example, Jessica wrote about the speech she wrote for 4H about her new puppy, expressing her excitement about writing on a topic she was interested in and enjoyed. Jill, too, had the positive experience of keeping a gratitude journal in high school and later keeping a journal for each of her children's first year of life. While none of the participants directly defined themselves as writers, the common theme for most of them was that they were reluctant writers in school. Even for the two participants who had positive experiences, neither took the step of describing herself as a writer. In fact, all but Jessica expressed doubt about their abilities to write in a college or university setting.

After their tutoring sessions, all five participants were enthusiastic about their experiences, and they all expressed confidence in themselves as writers because of the work they had done with their tutors. All participants believed that they were better equipped to meet the expectations of their professors as they continued to write papers for their classes. However, expressing confidence in newly developed skills is not the same as defining oneself. As I talked with all of the participants following their tutoring

sessions, I was disappointed that none of the participants mentioned that they had come to see themselves as writers, academic or otherwise. Clearly they had come to understand that they were now better prepared writers, but they were not yet ready to define themselves as academic writers in their conversations with me. This does not mean, however, that they did not gain a better idea of who they are as writers. Their hard work in the tutoring sessions and their positive comments in the final interviews indicate that they came to believe that they were better equipped to continue the journey that they began in this study. However, they did not directly indicate that they thought of themselves as writers. I believe that part of the reason that they did not take the step of identifying themselves as academic writers is that I did not focus on this concept in their final interviews as much as I should have.

Ancillary research question 2. *What tutorial approaches do these learners identify as being influential in constructing their writing identities?* Based on the participants' tutoring sessions and the final interviews, I discovered several approaches that the tutors used that resonated with these participants. For David, accountability was a key element in his experience. He mentioned several times that he was always reluctant to write multiple drafts but, after working with his tutor, he understood how important that was. Jessica, like David, said that she had not considered doing multiple drafts before her work with her tutor and that she had already begun to proofread and revise her papers more than one time as a result of her tutoring sessions. The tutor's advice to use the steps in the writing process, brainstorming in particular, helped Penny as well. She found that working with the tutor on more than one draft and that thinking through what she wanted to say before she began writing were going to be beneficial steps for her to take as she

wrote future papers. Sandy and Jill found the most effective part of their tutoring sessions was having "another set of eyes" look over what they had done, and, at the same time, they found value in the tutor helping them to think about their writing "through the eyes of the reader."

The Literacy Narratives: Early Negative Experiences

All five of the participants in this study had negative writing experiences to varying extents, ranging from feeling uneasy to "hating to write." Most of the experiences stemmed from elementary school or high school experiences. Their attitudes toward writing ranged from self-confidence issues (David) to disliking to write (Penny) and coming to understand that writing is more than just writing research papers (Jessica) to "having a bad taste for writing" (Sandy) and needing someone to work with one-on-one (Jill). These early experiences had clearly colored the way the participants viewed writing and also the way they viewed themselves as not being "good" writers.

This identity that they had created of themselves as "bad" writers also colored their interactions with their tutors in the sessions. For example, when one of the participants was explaining a choice or talking through to a solution, he or she often relied heavily on the tutor or either accept or reject the explanation or suggestion. Many of these interactions included hints of uptalk when participants made statements that sounded as if they were questions instead of statements. A good example of this kind of interaction occurred during Sandy's statement to her tutor that she would "expand on that [idea]." Although the sentence itself was a direct statement, her voice indicated that it was really a question.

Working with a Tutor and Reflecting on the Sessions

After the participants completed three sessions with their tutors, I asked each to reflect on the experience in a final interview during which I posed questions designed to help them describe their experience (see Appendix B). I also gave them the opportunity to tell me any other thoughts that they had on their experience. All participants believed their sessions to be beneficial and that they had been able to move past earlier negative experiences, at least in these tutoring sessions, to work directly with their tutors, and to be more comfortable as they wrote future drafts of their papers. This overwhelmingly positive response may indicate that the participants were not yet confident enough to point out deficiencies in their tutors' methods and suggestions, or they may indicate that the participants were saying what they thought I wanted to hear, a not uncommon reaction among students on King's campus. Though on occasion participants might have felt overwhelmed or frustrated, they worked through the problems in their writing by collaborating with a tutor to guide them, to act as a mentor, and to celebrate with participants when they succeeded in correcting a deficit in their writing. Analyzing the participants' tutorials in light of their original feelings and experiences and their reflections on what they had achieved in those sessions has helped me to clarify my own thoughts on the ways that adult, nontraditional students work with writing center tutors to solve their writing problems and to begin creating their own identities as writers. In the following sections, I outline the participants' general interactions with their tutors and their perceptions of the work they did in the sessions, focusing on what the literature says about these interactions.

Adult, nontraditional students are interested in identifying their own problems. The data from this study show that, in general, returning students want to take an active role in learning to write acceptable papers. As Knowles (1998) noted in his study of adult learning, adult learners are more motivated and tend to want more immediate progress than traditional learners. The participants in this study demonstrated their motivation to learn by becoming active partners with their tutors in the tutoring sessions. They were not content to wait for the tutor to point out their errors; they wanted to point them out as soon as they discovered them. Because of their more active role in identifying the problems they saw in their writing before the tutor did, they were not always passive participants but active and ready to work to improve their writing.

In her study of authorial identity, Maguire (2013) noted that the more mature students in the program she studied "face particular challenges in HE [higher education] and evidence suggests they are likely to have more adaptive approaches to study" (p. 1114). Indeed, the participants in this study showed that they were willing to approach their tutoring sessions in ways that they were comfortable with; identifying their own errors was a strategy they were comfortable with as they learned to become academic writers. In fact, only one participant in this study did not identify problems in the essays she brought to the writing center, and she was the least active of all five participants. The other four participants were quite active in finding their own ways to improve their own writing.

For example, in his final reflection, David commented on how his tutoring sessions gave him an opportunity to look critically at his own work; he said he had become more prepared to revise future papers because he "[understood] that [he needed]

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to be more focused in [his] writing . . . [and that] drafting will give [him] the opportunity to fix the problems that we identified." Even though David was one of the most active participants in identifying his own errors, he stated that he was still "looking for more chances to improve." This statement is in line with the results of studies by Maguire (2013) and Ivanič (1998). Ivanič has stated that "mature students feel that the onus is on them to change in order to identify themselves with the institutions" (p.8) they have entered. Having found value in his tutoring sessions, David fundamentally understood that it was his responsibility to improve his writing. The onus, in Ivanič's words, is on him, and he became confident that he knew what to do as he continued to revise his papers and to look for issues that needed more work.

Penny, who was also active in finding problems in her writing without prompting from her tutor, felt that the work she did with her tutor would help her to continue to identify problems as she wrote more papers for her classes. She noted that in the past, "I just wrote out the paper and fixed it, but for me, it will help to brainstorm [more]." This knowledge of what she needed to do to achieve her goal is called self-efficacy, which Maguire (2013) defined as "an individual's belief in his or her capabilities" (p. 1112). While she was already active in identifying her writing weaknesses, by the end of her tutoring sessions, she had started to develop self-efficacy as evidenced by her belief that she would be able to continue to refine her writing strategies, brainstorming in particular, even more as she wrote papers for other classes.

Jessica was the only participant who did not identify any problems herself. As the quietest of the participants during tutoring sessions, Jessica was more likely to express agreement with what the tutor pointed out than to look for errors on her own. Her

tendency to avoid identifying problems in her writing might be because Jessica was more confident in her writing skills than the other four participants going into her tutoring sessions and because she was the participant who had been out of her undergraduate program the shortest time. For example, at the end of her final interview, she said:

> I didn't use the writing center much before. I thought being a communication minor was enough. It wasn't. I only went to the writing center when I was required to for a class, so I never when on my own. I would have become a better writer if I had.

Jessica's comments demonstrate that she already had some self-confidence and had built an identity of being a "good writer" before she took part in the study. While Jessica never used the word "identity" in her sessions or interviews, she clearly illustrated that she thought of herself as a good writer as we talked in her final interview. Jessica stated that she was surprised to see some of the errors that she made because she "always thought [she] was good at [writing]" but that she came to understand the importance of using feedback and the writing process to become a better writer in her discipline. For example, she appeared to have retained a portion of her self-efficacy during the short time between her undergraduate and graduate programs. For Jessica, then, this was her first use of the writing center for which she was not required to go but chose to.

Jessica's experience in the writing center exemplifies the notion presented by Crossan et al. (2003) that sometimes adult, nontraditional students' identities led to "changes in [their] identity and perception of themselves" (p. 56). Jessica did come to realize that she had to modify her perception of both herself as a writer. In fact, though she never mentioned identity in her interview, she said that she was already learning to

look for her own weaknesses and to revise and proofread more than one time, an indication that she was already modifying her identity as a Master's level writer. While her identity as a "good writer" changed somewhat, she believed her experience was a positive one.

Sandy, the most likely to identify problems in her essay, also accepted suggestions that her tutor gave her and put them into practice immediately. Sandy indicated in Session 2, for example, that she had continued looking for the weaknesses identified in the first session as she revised her essay. In her final reflection, Sandy noted that, because her tutor gave her examples of correctly constructed and connected sentences, she now understood "how a well-written sentence should flow." Sandy illustrates the experience of Rachel, a participant in Ivanič's (1998) study who came to understand the importance of using the experience of someone else in the community in which she wanted to belong to help her as she created her own identity as a writer. Sandy's appreciation of her tutor's use of examples (in other words, to use her own experience as a member of the academic community) was evident in her final interview. Near the end of the interview, she stated that her tutor helped her to "think about [her] writing through the eyes of the reader," indicating that she found value in the process of identifying her own errors and revising them with the help of her tutor.

Jill, on the other hand, did not point out her own errors as often as David, Penny, or Sandy. She was more likely to want to work actively on avoiding the problems pointed out by her tutor and to explain why she made certain choices. This tendency to want to work immediately on problems pointed out to her rather than on finding them herself is a good illustration of what Christie et al. (2007) mean when they say that adult learners

must "adapt to changed ways of learning in order to get the greatest benefit" (p. 4). Jill did not seem to want to take chances but instead wanted to continue with the learning practice she was already familiar with: correcting problems that a teacher—or tutor— pointed out to her. However, although she was less likely to use this strategy and was more passive in this instance, she, like Sandy, stated in her final interview that she appreciated being able to work closely with her tutor to improve her writing. Jill's and Sandy's comments may, however, be an indication that they were being polite to their tutors by not mentioning any perceived lack of progress in their writing.

Adult, nontraditional students exhibit a lack of self-confidence. Fishbain (1989) writes that "[w]ithout exception, adults [returning to school] express lack of self-confidence in their writing ability" (p. 2) when they enrolled in writing courses at her university. While this article was written near the beginning of the influx of adult, nontraditional students into colleges and universities, her statement about the anxiety felt by adult, nontraditional learners is still an issue today; in fact, all of the participants in my study exhibited this characteristic, though one participant made comments that showed that she did, on occasion, feel confident about the work that she had done. Comments ranged from expressing how poorly they wrote to their lack of skill in proofreading their own work. Many times participants would question the tutor to make sure that one of their suggestions "made sense."

Fishbain's (1989) statement that writing anxiety occurs without exception may be overstating the case, but the participants in this study certainly show that her observation is true for most adult, nontraditional students in my setting. The fact that all participants

in this study demonstrated this characteristic is significant in that tutors must be able to help their tutees to develop more confidence as they are working to improve their writing.

David, who made several comments about the poor quality of some of his sentences and his organizational choices, found his tutor's encouragement to write more drafts and her eagerness to read as many drafts as he brought to her a positive aspect to his tutoring sessions, David is an example of Ivanič's (1998) statement about the writers, all of whom were adult, nontraditional students, that she worked with in her study. She writes, "One thing that characterizes most of the writers I worked with was a sense of *inferiority*, a lack of confidence in themselves" (p. 88). However, after his tutoring sessions were complete and he had seen the improvements he made between the first and second drafts of his essay, David indicated that he felt more confident in his writing. He stated that his "second draft was better, more organized, and clearer" and that he saw a "big difference between the first and second drafts." David initially lacked much confidence in his ability to write at the level he needed to, but with his tutor's help, he felt that he had made significant progress in that area.

In her tutoring sessions, Penny was always quick to ask her tutor's advice on a possible revision for a sentence or a choice about a paragraph. While she exhibited strong self-confidence in her knowledge of the content of her paper, she was less confident about her ability to express her knowledge in writing. Penny's confidence in the workplace knowledge upon which she based her essay mirrors in many ways Michaud's (2013) participant, Tony. Tony was an adult, nontraditional student whom Michaud describes as constructing his identity as a writer based on his workplace persona, a place of confidence for him. Penny, too, found self-confidence in her other identity, one that

she had cultivated in the workforce. Unlike Tony, however, she was less confident in her writing and much more willing to work to become a better academic writer and to produce writing that would fit those expectations. By the time of her final interview, she indicated that she felt more confident in her writing, saying that she knew that even her first drafts would be better than they had in the past. She said she also intended to use the writing center more than she had in the past because she knew that she still had problems that she needed to work on.

Jessica, like Penny, requested advice from her tutor only two times, but her self-confidence issue was not that she wasn't sure that she had made a change as she needed to; instead, she was more likely to ask her tutor directly for suggestions. Although this questioning could indicate a lack of self-confidence, it may actually demonstrate that Jessica was looking for a way to compare her thoughts with the tutor's suggestions before making a decision on how to proceed. Overall, with only four instances of exhibiting self-confidence issues as compared to Sandy's 22 instances and Jill's 23, Jessica seemed more confident than the other participants. She was much less likely to try out a new sentence or to suggest a change in organization than the other participants.

However, unlike the confidence that she expressed in her literacy narrative, Jessica seemed to rely more on the tutor for help revising sentences and paragraphs. As Harris (1995) has pointed out, writing center tutors greet their clients in a friendly and helpful manner, which might lead to learners placing some level of confidence in their tutors as a kind of authority, someone who can help them address the problems. It may be the case that Jessica found in her tutor this kind of helpful presence, and she was willing to trust her tutor's ideas more than her own. This positive aspect of writing center

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tutoring may have led to Jessica becoming more passive and accepting of what the tutor said. However, although she was less likely to want to collaborate with her tutor while they were working together, she was enthusiastic about the new skills she had learned and regretted not having used the writing center services much before the study. In her final interview, Jessica spoke of problems she had never thought about before, such as not spending enough time proofreading her work before submitting it. Based on her comments in the interview, Jessica seemed to have gained even greater confidence in her writing abilities.

Sandy and Jill both exhibited a lack of self-confidence much more often in their tutoring sessions than the other three participants. Sandy, with 22 instances, and Jill, with 23 instances, were both worried primarily about "getting it right." In her tutoring sessions, Sandy tended to be less sure of her writing than Jill, often making a statement and asking the tutor's opinion about what she had suggested. Jill, on the other hand, had no trouble making suggestions, but she was more likely to blame an error on her poor proofreading skills or on not understanding exactly what she should do. For example, Jill told her tutor that she did not know how to cite a source because her professor did not give her enough information about a source. She was also more likely than the other participants to point out that she was right about a choice she made or that she was making progress.

Jill's self-confidence issues seem to stem from what Christie et al. (2007) say about learning in a new environment: "[S]ignificant learning is what changes our ability to engage in practice and to understand why we do it" (p. 6). Jill did not just want to "get it right"; she also wanted to understand and to be understood, and her self-confidence

issues seemed to be a result of this desire. Sandy, however, did not indicate confidence in her original draft or in the revisions. Even after revising her paper a second time, she was still not sure whether she had corrected all of the problems. At one point in Session 3, Sandy said, "I checked for comma splices, but that doesn't mean I caught them all." Even Jessica, who directly expressed the most confidence in her writing abilities, still told the tutor that she wasn't sure that she had addressed all the issues she needed to before she submitted the paper.

However, Sandy and Jill expressed how much more confident they felt after working with their tutors. Both Sandy and Jill had learned that their work with their tutors "empowers individuals to take advantage of the learning opportunities open to them" (Christie et al., 2007, p. 7). Sandy, for example, stated that she was "definitely more aware of how sentences should flow, so yes, I believe I am a better writer." She also noted that she was much more "confident in comma use" than she was before working with her tutor. Jill said that she is "absolutely . . . a better writer." None of the participants said that they would not benefit from more writing center sessions; they believed that they had improved and were more confident writers.

Adult, nontraditional students talk through their problems with a tutor. Of all the characteristics identified in this study, the participants talked through their problems to a solution more often than they did anything else. In the 15 total sessions analyzed for this study, participants talked through to a solution 106 times, compared to the 57 times they identified their own problems or the 84 times they demonstrated a need to explain their writing choices. They talked through their problems much more than they

sought affirmation, with only 18 instances, or evaluated the success of the session, with only 11 instances.

Because writing centers are collaborative in nature (Geller et al., 2007; Harris, 1995; Mohrbacher, 2013), they are a place where learners have a chance to leave their silos, where they are compartmentalized (Collier, 2014) to the supportive atmosphere of a writing center (Christie et al., 2007). This atmosphere lends itself to the free flow of communication that can take place between tutors and learners. This characteristic, then, is a positive indication, along with the participants' willingness and ability to identify their own problems, that they were willing to be proactive in improving their papers. They exhibited a significant desire to work with their tutors rather than to passively wait for the tutor to correct an error or point out a better way to express their meaning, to construct a sentence, or to organize their papers.

David, who reported that he felt uncomfortable in his first session because he and his tutor had been colleagues in the past, nevertheless overcame his feelings of discomfort and was able in all three sessions to revise sentences aloud and to say why he believed a particular error was a problem. David was quieter in his second session, but he continued to make suggestions on improving sentences. David stands in contrast to Bea, a participant in Gardner, Lyman, and McLean's (2002) study who wanted her tutor to be a "Mr. Fix-It" (p. 10). Instead, in his final interview, David said that he appreciated the way that his tutor asked him to reword sentences and how she prompted him to think about his paper in ways he had not considered when he started writing. Instead of expecting his tutor to do all the work, he wanted to be a part of the work as well, and talking through his weaknesses gave him the chance to be a part of the process.

Penny and Jessica, too, spent time in their sessions suggesting revisions and trying new ways to organize their papers. They were both interested in working through their issues with the tutor's input. Their responses indicate that they wanted to be a "co-producer of meaning" Christie et al., 2007, p. 7). In her final interview, Jessica said that she found her tutor's willingness to help her work through the writing process to be important because she had become more aware of how the process helped her to improve her writing. Penny reported that, because she was able to have a conversation with her tutor, she had come to a better understanding of just how important it is to make sure you look at your paper "through the eyes of the reader."

Sandy and Jill spent the most time in their tutoring sessions talking through their problems to solve their writing problems. In Session 1, Sandy made 14 suggestions on ways to improve sentence structure problems or issues involving organization, while Jill was most active in her last session, with 29 instances of suggesting improvements in sentence structure and clarity. She also talked through her problems with citing sources, an issue she was worried about throughout all of her sessions. In their final interviews, both Sandy and Jill expressed how much they liked being able to work side-by-side with a tutor, which Harris (1995) has said is an important aspect of becoming a writer when she stresses the value of collaboration between the tutor and the tutee. Because they felt that getting someone else's opinion was important in improving their writing, they most appreciated the immediate feedback they received from their tutors. All five participants experienced what it means to become co-producers of meaning; they believed that was important to them in becoming academic writers.

Adult, nontraditional students seek affirmation from their tutors. In

conjunction with their lack of self-confidence, all but one of the participants in this study

also looked for reassurance from their tutors that they were doing what they needed to do.

By seeking affirmation from the tutor, they were recognizing that they had worked hard

to write and improve their writing but that they were not yet confident enough to submit

their papers. They wanted to make sure that what they had done was acceptable, and

while they exhibited a certain amount of confidence when they identified problems and

talked through to a solution, they were also cautious. Christie et al. (2007) call the

journey toward becoming an academic writer a "rollercoaster," and the participants in

this study illustrate that well. In the sections on talking through to a solution, I have noted

that they had begun to show that they were interested in learning to do the work of

revision by collaborating with their tutors, which takes a certain amount of self-

confidence. However, they also illustrated the low point of their rollercoaster ride when

they expressed doubts about what they had done. Seeking affirmation is another of the

low points on their rollercoaster ride of competing emotions and confidence. Therefore,

given the negative experiences in their elementary and high school writing experiences,

they were not quite ready to accept that they had done what they needed to do to make a

good grade or to submit an acceptable assignment to their teachers.

Jill in particular needed reassurance from her tutor that she was improving the

writing and formatting of her papers so that she would get the grade that she wanted.

Ivanič (1998) has written that a "writer's life-history . . . may not have engendered in the

writer enough of a sense of self-worth to write with authority" (p. 26). Jill's past

experiences in writing may not have provided her with enough confidence in her self-

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worth as a writer to trust her own instincts. Interestingly, she directly sought affirmation more in each successive session. In Session 1, she was working on developing an essay but had not done any serious composing at that time, so she did not seek out reassurances from her tutor. However, in Sessions 2 and 3, she questioned the tutor a total of 14 times about whether she had correctly formatted a citation, explained a point clearly, or developed a paragraph enough. When considered together with Jill's need to explain what she had done, these questions paint a picture of a student who wanted to improve, who wanted to do the best that she can, and who needed reassurance from her tutor as she worked toward her goal. In other words, the fact that she continued to exhibit this characteristic points to her ongoing need to work with her tutor to improve her own feelings of self-worth as a writer.

Three of the other participants, David, Penny, and Sandy, sought affirmation once or twice in their sessions, but Jessica did not directly seek affirmation from her tutor at all. Based on Jessica's literacy narrative, it is clear that she had developed more of a sense of self-worth as a writer than the other participants. As Ivanič (1998) has posited, "The self as author is likely to be to a considerable extent a product of a writer's autobiographical self" (p. 26). The confidence Jessica exhibited in herself as a writer in her literacy narrative may have led her to feel that she did not need to seek affirmation. As she stated in her final narrative, she did not think she needed help from the writing center as an undergraduate because she was a communication minor. In contrast, Penny was the only participant who asked the tutor directly if she could tell that she "had made improvements and changes" in her essay. On the other hand, David and Sandy were more likely to seek affirmation indirectly. For example, David wanted the tutor to give

him positive feedback first, which is a way of saying that he would like to hear good news about his writing. Sandy, too, was more indirect in seeking reassurance that the changes she had made were good ones. While she did ask the tutor a question, it was not straightforward. In Session 2, for instance, Sandy phrased her suggestion as a question to get further feedback from her tutor.

In their final interviews, the participants agreed that their tutors' feedback helped them to understand what they needed to work on most and how to improve those areas. David stated that "having honest feedback, constructive feedback, was beneficial. My third draft was much better as writing in general but also as a piece of academic writing." He went on to say that he "can't even imagine how [working with a tutor] would not be beneficial because everyone has one or more areas that need improvement." Penny, too, spoke of the importance of her experience with her tutor and said that she would be using the writing center more frequently as a result of the good conversation with and feedback from her tutor. Jessica, Sandy, and Jill were also enthusiastic about their experiences. Sandy noted that she found her interactions with her tutor to be beneficial because of the examples the tutor used when she was having a difficult time with a concept. Her ability to have a conversation and ask questions made a difference for Sandy. Likewise, Jill said several times that being able to sit side-by-side with her tutor and get immediate feedback from the tutor was beneficial to her.

Adult, nontraditional students demonstrate a need to explain their choices.
Another characteristic that these participants exhibited was that they needed to explain why they made the choices that they did. They wanted the tutor to know that they had thought about a particular word, phrase, or sentence or that they made conscious

decisions when they arranged their paper in a certain way. This characteristic, too, has strong ties to self-confidence, only in this case they felt that, if they could explain their thinking to their tutors, they would be able to convince them that their choices made sense. With 84 instances of explaining their thought processes and choices, participants exhibited this characteristic more than any of the other characteristics except for talking through to a solution. The experiences of these participants prove Harris's (1995) point about the value of collaborative work between tutors and tutees.

Of the five participants in this study, Jessica felt that she needed to explain only one of her decisions to her tutor, while Jill, with 35 total instances of explaining her choices to her tutor, exhibited this characteristic the most. David, with 12 instances of explaining his choices, and Penny and Sandy, who felt they needed to explain what they had done 18 times each, fell almost directly between Jessica's and Jill's instances of explanation. At least four of the participants had clearly formed a collaborative bond with their tutors, enough so that they felt comfortable with what they had written and wanted their tutors to understand why the made certain choices. Geller, et al. (2007) wrote of the community that writing centers offer learners, and the collaborative work of tutors and learners are key elements of this community of writers. For the participants in this study, the sense of community forged between the participants and their tutors gave them a place to explain their thinking without fear of ridicule or judgment.

In their final interviews, none of the participants mentioned why they felt they needed to explain either their writing choices or the content to their tutors. David, who had been uncomfortable in his first session because he knew his tutor before he took part in the study, mentioned that he felt comfortable with her because she "did not seem

judgmental at all," which may explain why he felt comfortable explaining his writing choices to her. Jessica, who said she was "shocked" at some of the errors she had made, was glad that she could talk through the issues with the tutor so that she could better understand what she had done wrong and how she could address the errors. In her final interview, Sandy said that she was grateful for her tutor listening to her concerns so that she would know how to correct the problems that they had identified. Their self-assessments fall in line with Thonus's (2002) study in which she studied ways to assess the perceived success of tutoring sessions. She found that:

> Successful tutor behaviors most often cited by both tutors and tutees were (a) helping with the definition and the construction of a thesis statement . . . ; (b) clarifying and expanding essay content around it . . . ; (c) emphasizing student ownership of the paper . . . ; and (d) encouraging further contact between the tutee and the course instructor. (p. 125)

All of these characteristics, which Thonus's tutors and participants agreed on, were exhibited by the tutors in this study. In addition, getting to know their tutors over multiple sessions may be another factor in helping these participants to be comfortable enough to not just listen to their tutors point out errors for them but to explain their choices with no fear of judgment or rejection.

Adult, nontraditional students evaluate their tutoring sessions. Thonus (2002) has asserted that it is important to have writing center clients evaluate the success of their tutoring session. In my study, all of the participants voluntarily assessed the success of one or more of their sessions and reaffirmed that assessment in their final interviews. In fact, all but one of the participants stated directly to the tutor during tutoring sessions that

they believed that their tutoring session had been successful. Most of the participants acknowledged that their tutoring sessions would help them not only to make the papers they had worked on in these sessions better but also the papers they would write in the future. Jill was especially enthusiastic about the help that she had received, though David and Sandy consistently expressed how valuable the help was by stating their opinions about their progress at the end of each session.

The comments that the participants made in their sessions were all positive. Only Jessica did not offer an evaluation to the tutor about how successful she perceived the session to be. Each of the other four participants told their tutors that they thought the session went well and that they felt good about the work that they had completed. David and Jill, in particular told the tutor that they were confident that their writing had improved. Jill left Session 2 saying that "using the writing center has made a difference" for her. David felt confident enough to tell the tutor after their final session that he believed he would be a better writer as a result of the work he had done with her in the writing center. In fact, in their final interviews, all five participants were enthusiastic about how much they had learned about writing and about their own individual problems as writers. Penny said that "this has been one of the best writing experiences I've had," and Jessica stated that everything that she had learned in her sessions would help her in all of her subsequent academic and professional writing. While they all acknowledged that they still have work to do, all of the participants in this study believed that their work with a tutor made a difference in their writing.

Although these participants' comments are uniformly positive about their experiences, it is important to keep in mind that these learners may not have been

equipped to use a more critical eye as they evaluated their sessions. Another consideration is that the participants may have liked their tutors on a personal level and did not want to be judgmental about their experience. Because King's campus is relatively small, the students often feel a kinship with each other that might not exist on a larger campus. As I read through the transcripts, I saw some areas of improvement in the tutors' work that the participants may not have been aware of as needing work. For example, in some cases the tutors tended to talk too much in a tutorial, especially when one of the participants was quieter than usual. Also, on many occasions the tutors didn't wait long enough for participants to think through a question and answer it. Often a tutor would answer a question for a participant after only a few seconds.

Ultimately, while no participant made a direct statement about his or her identity as a writer, they all did mention that they were more comfortable writing future papers for their classes. Questions such as "What did the tutor do to help you to understand what it means to be an academic writer?" and "What part of your tutoring sessions was the most influential in helping you to understand how to become an academic writer?" were designed to help the participants think through their experiences to realize that they were writing for a different purpose than they had before and that they needed to learn to write in a different way—to form a new identity as a writer in a new context. However, even with follow-up questions in which I asked specifically about who they thought they were as writers, they still did not use the word identity in their answers. However, the characteristics that they exhibited did indicate that they were coming to know themselves better as writers. They could recognize their own problems and talk through those problems to a solution. While they did exhibit a lack of self-confidence and often sought

reassurance from their tutors that they were correct in their thinking, they were also willing to explain the choices they made. Interestingly, while no participant articulated that he or she had come to identify himself or herself as an academic writer, they all exhibited both enthusiasm and a sense of confidence that they were better writers as a result of their experience and more prepared to do the writing that would be required of them in their future classes and as professionals.

Implications for King University

The implications of this research as they relate to King's writing center or, by extension, for writing centers at other small, private liberal arts colleges and universities, are clear. Because over two-thirds of King's population are classified, using the currently accepted definition, as nontraditional students, King is in a period of transition. All areas of student service at the University have been affected, and the directors of the writing, speaking, and math centers in the Academic Center for Excellence have already begun to make the changes necessary to address the needs of the significant increase in the number of adult, nontraditional students who visit the physical Center or use the Online Writing Lab. However, more work is necessary to ensure that we are offering the kinds of help that these students need.

First, in the Academic Center for Excellence and in the writing center we need to consider the particular concerns of adult, nontraditional learners, which can lead us to offer the services that work best for them. Second, we should consider preparing our tutors to work with the specific characteristics exhibited by the participants in this study. As this study has revealed, the adult, nontraditional students who use King's writing centers are more likely to be interested in higher order concerns than is characteristic of

many of King's undergraduate writing center clients, who are interested in lower order concerns as much as and sometimes more than in higher order concerns. Therefore, at King, or in any similarly sized liberal arts college or university, we must find ways to educate our tutors on the characteristics, needs, and expectations exhibited by these participants. In 2016, adult, nontraditional learners outnumber traditional learners at King University, and since most of King's tutors are traditional undergraduate students, we need to be sure that all of our tutors understand the characteristics of these learners and are prepared to work with them in a way that will benefit them the most. In this study, the participants all worked with master's level tutors, so we will need to make sure that the knowledge gained in this study is relayed to undergraduate tutors as well.

There are also implications for the tutors who work with these learners. The participants in this study demonstrated that they wanted to work collaboratively with their tutors but that they also needed a certain amount of assurance that they were doing what they needed to do to succeed as a writer at King. If undergraduate tutors, for example, are only used to tutoring undergraduate learners, they may not be fully prepared for the expectations of the adult, nontraditional learners who come to the writing center seeking help with a writing assignment. While the writing center director at King has an obligation to fully prepare tutors to do their work, each individual writing center tutor should reflect on his or her own strategies for working with nontraditional students and identify those that work best with these students. By reflecting on the tutoring sessions with adult, nontraditional students and considering different strategies than they may be accustomed to using when they interact with undergraduate learners, tutors can identify

the successful tutoring techniques they have used with nontraditional students to improve their own tutoring skills.

Next, there are implications for King University itself. King's steadily growing enrollment in its Graduate and Professional Studies programs means that more adult, nontraditional students will be using the writing center every semester. In addition, in 2016, King added a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program to the School of Nursing, and these students, along with those in the already-existing master's programs, which indicates that there will be an immediate need to have some tutors with Master's degrees available to tutor students in these more advanced programs. While King does use an off-site tutoring service, Upswing, another answer may be offering King faculty a course reduction for working in the writing center for a semester or to hire part time tutors with master's degrees in the disciplines, such as nursing and business, that need tutors who are more experienced in writing for their disciplines.

Future Research

When I first began to analyze the data, I was disappointed that it did not really point to a particular defining moment in which the participants came to understand who they were as writers in a university setting. What I found, instead, was that over the course of the study they had begun a journey to discover their identities, but that journey cannot be finished in a few weeks or in three tutoring sessions. The data indicate that, while they have indeed begun their journeys to create a writing identity and define themselves as writers, not just as "bad" writers, they will continue on that journey throughout their academic and professional lives. A longitudinal study that follows adult,

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nontraditional students throughout their studies and as they transition to their careers is one way to study identity formation these students.

At the time of this writing, there are no studies exploring the identity development of adult, nontraditional learners in the writing center literature. More studies, however, are available in the literature about the ways that student writers create writing and academic identities for themselves. Ivanič's groundbreaking research into the identity of mature learners in Great Britain was published in 1998, but few have followed her lead in the way that Michaud (2013) and Park (2013) have. To date, little research on the impact that writing centers can have on this aspect of learners' identities has been conducted. The identity construction of learners becoming writers is a rich area of inquiry, and I believe one that needs to be part of the larger conversation taking place in both writing centers and composition studies.

Another informative study would involve research into tutors' perspectives of working with adult, nontraditional learners. I did not interview the tutors in this study because I was focused on the perceptions of the participants, but I believe that a study that analyzes the perceptions of the tutors would be a good source of knowledge in the writing center community. Importantly, these insights from tutors could lead to better ways to help learners as they work to create writing identities for themselves with the help of writing center tutors.

A third avenue of research that this study opens up would involve the impact of the increased number of adult, nontraditional learners' using writing centers at small to medium colleges and universities. Because writing centers in smaller colleges and universities have constraints that those in larger universities do not have, the impact of a

growing population is greater for them. Most small to medium size colleges and universities do not have access to graduate students to work as writing center tutors, nor do most of them have enough funds to hire part-time Master's level tutors to supplement the undergraduate tutors who work in their writing centers. Because of these constraints, it should be a prime concern of these colleges and universities to find ways to provide better prepared tutors to work with their adult, nontraditional learners. However, Gladstein and Regaignon (2012) point out that small liberal arts colleges, which are "bound in the fabric of their institutions" (p. 159), provide a place for students to receive help in writing because these schools have a "strong commitment to students as intellectuals, apprentice scholars, and future leaders" (p. 158). For King University and many other small liberal arts colleges, the writing center has become a significant place in which to ameliorate the challenges that most of these institutions are faced with and to address the needs of their nontraditional students.

Conclusions

This qualitative case study examined the ways that adult, nontraditional students used the guidance and help they receive from writing center tutors to help them to create identities for themselves as writers in the academic community. Based on Ivanič's (1998) study of mature students' identity formation, this study suggested that there may be a link between adult, nontraditional learners' experiences in the writing center and their process as they created a writing identity for themselves in an academic setting. There is little direct literature on identity formation of adult, nontraditional students in writing center literature; however, the literature of composition theory and writing center pedagogy influenced my choices in this study. While the data in this study do not provide a

definitive answer to the research questions, the characteristics identified in the participants' tutoring sessions illustrate that adult, nontraditional students do believe that their work with writing center tutors gives them the tools and experience necessary to meet the challenges they face as they become academic writers. Writing center administrators in small colleges and universities should be ready to make adjustments to their tutor education programs to address the needs of all of the learners who seek help there.

One of the most significant findings of the study for me was my personal and evolving understanding of the role that age plays in classifying students as nontraditional based solely on their age and how using a student's age to determine if a student is considered nontraditional is problematic. Jessica, for example, technically fulfills the definition for an adult, nontraditional student because she had already graduated from college. However, because she had graduated relatively recently, her approach to her tutoring sessions was closer to the ways that traditional students work with tutors. On the other hand, Penny fit both the age criteria and the number of years removed from her last year of school. Although she was in the Graduate and Professional Studies program, she was receiving a bachelor's degree after having been out of school for nearly two decades. Her reactions and responses were more like a traditional undergraduate even than Jessica's were, although both fell within the parameters of the definition of nontraditional students. David, Sandy, and Jill, whose ages range from mid-twenties to late forties, all responded similarly and unlike Jessica's and Penny's more traditional approach to working with a tutor. As a result, I believe that a student's age is not necessarily an adequate determiner of a student's experience in higher education.

Chapter Five of this study has presented the characteristics exhibited by adult, nontraditional students in writing center tutoring sessions: (a) Adult, nontraditional students exhibit a lack of self-confidence, (b) Adult, nontraditional students exhibit a lack of self-confidence, (c) Adult, nontraditional students talk through their problems with a tutor, (d) Adult, nontraditional students seek affirmation from their tutors, (e) Adult, nontraditional students demonstrate a need to explain their choices, and (f) Adult, nontraditional students evaluate their tutoring sessions. These characteristics will inform further studies as researchers begin to explore the ways that adult, nontraditional students work with writing center tutors to form their identities as academic writers. The implications and recommendations of this study can help writing center administrators to work with this growing population of learners with a clearer view of the learners' needs, expectations, and goals in becoming a member of the academic writing community.

A Final Reflection

This study of the perceptions of adult, nontraditional students' identity creation as they worked with writing center tutors began with my curiosity about "writerly identity" and how the writing center might help these students create their own. During my years as director of King University's writing center, I often wished that I could find a way to help all of the students who came to the center to become more confident and sure of themselves as writers, but I soon became increasingly concerned about the problems that the adult, nontraditional students brought with them to their tutoring appointments. When I first became the writing center director in 2004, King's student population was almost exclusively traditional students. In the 12 years since that time, the make-up of the student population has changed considerably; King now has more adult,

nontraditional students than traditional students. Consequently, writing center tutors now work with more adult, nontraditional learners than traditional ones.

With only five participants, this study is not generalizable outside of the writing center at King University or other similar institutions, and it would benefit from further and more far-reaching research. Much still remains to be researched and studied concerning the creation of a student's writing identity, but I now feel better equipped to understand, in a measure, their concerns and the ways that they have learned to deal with those concerns. I can now understand better why they are so unsure of themselves and what they need from their tutors. It is my hope that, in my work as director of the Academic Center for Excellence at King University, I can help the directors of all of our centers, writing, speaking, and math, to help their tutors in the work that they do with all of the learners who come to our space, whether they are traditional or nontraditional students. I think that I find Sandy's closing words in her final interview the most encouraging as I continue to help students create their own writing identity: "The more I learn about writing, the more I enjoy writing." This statement encourages me to take the steps I need to take so that I can help adult, nontraditional students at King University as they create their own writing identities.

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    CA: Sage.

Appendix A

Directions for Literacy Narrative

Leonard Hall, Room 110   P: (724) 357-2261
421 North Walk   F: (724) 357-2265
Indiana, PA 15705-1015

Writing Prompt for Literacy Narrative:

A literacy narrative is basically the story of the role literacy has played in your life. In the case of this literacy narrative, you will focus on your experiences as a writer in school settings: elementary school, middle and high school, and college. In other words, explore the kinds of writing you have done in school and your attitude about writing.

You may use the following questions as a guide to write your narrative; however, you are not required to answer all, or even any, of these questions. They are simply provided to guide you in writing your narrative.   Feel free to add any pertinent experiences not specifically mentioned in this prompt if you believe that the experience is necessary to present a complete picture of your writing history.

Questions to consider as you write your literacy narrative:

1. What is your earliest memory of writing in school?
2. Did you enjoy writing?
3. Did you write in other situations (in a diary or journal, stories, cartoons, etc.)?
4. What are some positive experiences you had as a writer in school?
5. What are some negative experiences you had as a writer in school?
6. Did you have any role models for your writing?
7. Do you remember any conversations you had with adults (family, friends, teachers) about writing?
8. Have your feelings about writing changed over the years?
9. Were you able to observe other people in your family writing?

The suggested length of your narrative is between 750 to 1000 words (approximately three to five pages, double spaced). However, you may write more or less if you choose to do so.

When you complete your literacy narrative, you may submit it in either electronic or hard copy form:

> (1) Electronic: submit your literacy narrative to the Google Drive document that is set up for this purpose using your pseudonym
> **or**
> (2) Hard copy: submit it to the Writing Center Director who will give it to me.

Appendix B

Final Interview Questions

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Leonard Hall, Room 110
421 North Walk
Indiana, PA 15705-1015

P: (724) 357-2261
F: (724) 357-2265

Questions for Final Interview (after tutoring is complete)

1. What did the tutor do to help you to understand what it means to be an academic writer?

2. Do you believe that your work with the tutor helped you to understand what you need to do to improve your academic writing skills?

   2.a. What suggestions and advice did your tutor give you that helped you the most?

3. Do you believe that your experience working with a writing center tutor has been beneficial to you as you are learning how to become an academic writer?

   3a. In what ways did the tutor help you to become a better academic writer?

4. Do you perceive that you have become a better writer as a result of your tutoring sessions?

   4a. In what ways do you believe that you have become a better writer?

5. What changes have you made in your writing process, in the steps that you take as you write essays, as a result of working with a tutor?

6. What part of your tutoring session was the most influential in helping you to understand how to become an academic writer?

Appendix C

Invitation to Participate in the Study

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Leonard Hall, Room 110
421 North Walk
Indiana, PA 15705-1015

P: (724) 357-2261
F: (724) 357-2265

Recruitment Letter
Participation in a Research Project
A Quantitative Study of Graduate and Professional Studies Students' Writing Identities:
The Role of Writing Centers in Constructing Identities
Indiana University of Pennsylvania/King University

I am Kim Holloway, a Ph.D candidate at Indiana University of Pennsylvania and associate professor of Technical and Professional Communication and director of the Academic Center for Excellence at King University. I am conducting a study entitled "A Quantitative Study of Graduate and Professional Studies Students' Writing Identities: The Role of Writing Centers in Constructing Identities" for my dissertation prepared for Indiana University of Pennsylvania's Composition and TESOL program.

The purpose of this research is to come to a better understanding of the role that writing centers and writing center tutors play in helping nontraditional students to define who they are as writers. Higher education is a new environment for students, and it can sometimes be difficult to construct an identity as an academic writer. The main question this research seeks to answer is: How do adult, nontraditional learners use their experiences working with tutors in a writing center context to construct their identities as academic writers?

You, as a King University Graduate and Professional Studies student, are invited to participate in the study by returning a signed copy of this consent. As part of the study, you will write a short autobiography, called a literacy narrative, of your past writing experiences, work with a tutor three times this semester, and talk with me briefly

after you complete your tutoring sessions about your experience in the writing center, which will end your participation in the study. Your participation in this project is voluntary.

There are no known serious risks as a result of your participation in this study. You will not be asked to disclose any sensitive information, and for the autobiography you are free to write only of experiences that you choose. For the reflection, you will not be required to answer questions that you do not wish to. During tutoring sessions, you will not be required to disclose any information to the tutor that you do not wish to.

As a participant, you will be completing the following activities: writing a literacy narrative (1 to 2 hours), taking part in three tutoring sessions (approximately 1 hour for each session for a total of approximately 3 hours), and participating in a final interview with me (approximately 30 minutes).

The main benefit to you in joining this study is that you will receive three tutoring sessions on a writing assignment for one of your classes during the Fall Semester 2015, which could possibly result in a higher grade than you might otherwise have earned (though this is not guaranteed) or in a more advanced understanding of writing, the writing process, or grammar and mechanics.

You may also benefit from the self-examination necessary to complete the autobiography and reflection. You may gain a new understanding of your strengths and weaknesses as a writer.

Your responses and tutoring sessions are strictly confidential. When the data are presented in the dissertation and the oral defense of the dissertation, you will not be linked to the data by your name, title, or any other identifying item.

If you would be willing to help with this study, please return the completed and signed consent form to your instructor. You will receive further directions at that time.

If you have any questions, now or later, you may contact me (Kim Holloway) at vqxp@iup.edu or 423.652.6326.

If you have questions for Dr. Ben Rafoth, the project director, regarding the approval of this study you may contact him at brafoth@iup.edu or 724.357.3029.

If you have any questions regarding the approval of this study, you may contact Vanessa Fitsanakis, Chair of the IRB Committee at King University at 423.652.6322 or

vafitsan@king.edu.

Thank you for considering this invitation to take part in this research.

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE INDIANA UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (PHONE 724.357.7730).

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form for Participants

Leonard Hall, Room 110
421 North Walk
Indiana, PA 15705-1015

P: (724) 357-2261
F: (724) 357-2265

Participation in a Research Project

Indiana University of Pennsylvania and King University

If you are willing to participate in this study by writing a short literacy narrative, completing three tutoring sessions, and taking part in a final Interview, please sign the statement below and return it to me. Take an extra unsigned copy with you for your records. If you choose not to participate, please return this document and the information sheet to me.

Project Director:

 Dr. Ben Rafoth

 Dept. of English, Composition and TESOL

 Indiana University of Pennsylvania

 Indiana, PA 15705

 Email: brafoth@iup.edu

 Phone: 724.357.3029

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE INDIANA UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (PHONE 724.357.7730).

This project has also been approved by the King University Institutional Review Board for Protection of Human Subjects.

I have read and understand the information on the attached information sheet, and I consent to be a participant in this study. I understand that my participation is completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any time by contacting me at vqxp@iup.edu or by calling me at 423.652.6326. I understand that if I elect to withdraw from the study, all of my data will be destroyed. I understand that withdrawing from the study will in no way affect my relationship with me, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, or King University. I have received an unsigned copy of the Informed Consent Form and the informational document to keep in my possession.

NAME (Please print)

_____

Signature

_____

Date _____

Phone number or email where you can be reached

_____

Best days and times you can be contacted

_____

Appendix E

Informed Consent Form for Tutors

Leonard Hall, Room 110
421 North Walk
Indiana, PA 15705-1015

P: (724) 357-2261
F: (724) 357-2265

Participation in a Research Project

Indiana University of Pennsylvania and King University

If you are willing to participate in this study by working with participants in three tutoring sessions and having your tutoring sessions with study participants taped and transcribed, please sign the statement below and return it to me. Take an extra unsigned copy with you for your records. If you choose not to participate, please return this document me.

Project Director:

> **Dr. Ben Rafoth**
> **Dept. of English, Composition and TESOL**
> **Indiana University of Pennsylvania**
> **Indiana, PA 15705**
> **Email: brafoth@iup.edu**
> **Phone: 724.357.3029**

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE INDIANA UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (PHONE 724.357.7730).

This project has also been approved by the King University Institutional Review Board for Protection of Human Subjects.

I have read and understand the information about this research project, and I consent to tutoring study participants and being audiotaped as part of this study. I understand that my participation is completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any time by contacting me at vqxp@iup.edu or by calling me at 423.652.6326. I

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understand that if I elect to withdraw from the study, all of my data will be destroyed. I understand that withdrawing from the study will in no way affect my relationship with me, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, or King University. I have received an unsigned copy of the Informed Consent Form and the informational document to keep in my possession.

NAME (Please print) _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix F

IRB Approval Letter from Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
www.iup.edu

Institutional Review Board for the
Protection of Human Subjects
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Stright Hall, Room 113
210 South Tenth Street
Indiana, Pennsylvania 15705-1048

P 724-357-7730
F 724-357-2715
irb-research@iup.edu
www.iup.edu/irb

December 11, 2015

Kimberley M. Holloway
243 Orchard Street
Gray, TN 37615

Dear Ms. Holloway:

Your proposed research project, "A Qualitative Study of Graduate and
Professional Studies Students' Writing Identities: The Role of Writing Centers in
Constructing Identity," (Log No. 15-255) has been reviewed by the IRB and is
approved. In accordance with 45CFR46.101 and IUP Policy, your project is
exempt from continuing review. This approval does not supersede or obviate
compliance with any other University requirements, including, but not limited to,
enrollment, degree completion deadlines, topic approval, and conduct of
university-affiliated activities.

You should read all of this letter, as it contains important information about
conducting your study.

Now that your project has been approved by the IRB, there are elements of the
Federal Regulations to which you must attend. IUP adheres to these regulations
strictly:

1. You must conduct your study exactly as it was approved by the IRB.

2. Any additions or changes in procedures must be approved by the IRB
   before they are implemented.

3. You must notify the IRB promptly of any events that affect the safety or
   well-being of subjects.

4. You must notify the IRB promptly of any modifications of your study or
   other responses that are necessitated by any events reported in items 2 or
   3.

The IRB may review or audit your project at random *or* for cause. In accordance
with IUP Policy and Federal Regulation (45CFR46.113), the Board may suspend
or terminate your project if your project has not been conducted as approved or if
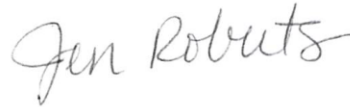other difficulties are detected

Although your human subjects review process is complete, the School of
Graduate Studies and Research requires submission and approval of a Research
Topic Approval Form (RTAF) before you can begin your research. If you have not
yet submitted your RTAF, the form can be found at
http://www.iup.edu/page.aspx?id=91683 .

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While not under the purview of the IRB, researchers are responsible for adhering to US copyright law when using existing scales, survey items, or other works in the conduct of research. Information regarding copyright law and compliance at IUP, including links to sample permission request letters, can be found at http://www.iup.edu/page.aspx?id=165526.

I wish you success as you pursue this important endeavor.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Roberts, Ph.D.
Chairperson, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Professor of Criminology

JLR:jeb

Cc: Dr. Ben Rafoth, Dissertation Advisor
       Dr. Sharon Deckert, Graduate Coordinator
       Ms. Brenda Boal, Secretary

IRB Approval Letter from King University

Memorandum

To: Kim Holloway

From: Vanessa A Fitsanakis, PhD
Chair of the Human Subject Research Review Committee

Date: 10/2/2015

Re: HSRR Approval

Dear Kim:

Thank you for your recent submission to the Human Subject Research Review Committee. I am pleased to inform you that the committee is satisfied with your proposal, and you are approved to begin your research as of 2 October 2015. If you have any additional questions, please don't hesitate to contact me further.

Sincerely,

Vanessa A Fitsanakis, PhD

APPROVED

Appendix H

Ruben and Ruben's Questions for Coding[5]

- "What am I going to call it (label it)"? (p. 216)

- "How am I going to define it"? (p. 216)

- "How am I going to recognize it in the interviews"? (p. 217)

- "What do I want to exclude"? (p. 217)

- "What is an example"? (p. 217)

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[5] These questions are adapted from Boyatzis, R.E. 1998. *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.