

NEGOTIATING AUTHORITY: PERCEPTIONS OF AGE

IN THE WRITING CENTER

THESIS

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by

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated first to the non-traditional seminary students at the Moravian College and Theological Seminary, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, who, upon arrival in Texas, told me, “Like hell you’ll come home. You’re here, you’re going to finish out this program.” Without them, I would not have made it this far in the first place.

This thesis is dedicated to Brendan J. Wright, for his constant support and encouraging love throughout my most difficult moments of writing, revising, and thinking. His encouragement helped keep my research alive and vivid for me.

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## CHAPTER 1

### THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING AGE-BASED ASSUMPTIONS IN WRITING CENTERS

#### **Introduction**

From 2003-2006, I worked as a writing center tutor at a small, private, liberal arts college: Moravian College and Theological Seminary. I was what many might call the "traditional" college student. I was 19-22 while I worked at the writing center, a middle-class Caucasian woman, and a practicing Roman Catholic. On my campus, I was more than just a "traditional student"; I was a clear member of the majority. The ratio of men to women on campus was 1:3 at that time, three-quarters of the school was Caucasian, and over half of the student-population identified as Roman Catholic regardless of the fact that the school was founded by a non-Catholic Christian sect.

During my three years working as a tutor at the Moravian College and Theological Seminary Writing Center, other tutors and I faced our biggest challenges while tutoring Moravian Seminary students—graduate students at the seminary who were studying to become affiliated with the Moravian Church (a Christian sect that broke away from the Roman Catholic Church centuries before Martin Luther nailed his theses to the door). These students were typically years older than tutors. As younger tutors, we often felt these older student-writers did not value what we had to say about writing and we

frequently had informal discussions about which seminary students didn't seem to want to take any advice. Our conversations sounded something like this:

“Joe came in again today. I don't know why he keeps coming to the writing center. Whenever I start to bring up questions about structure, citations, or even his thesis statement, he always tells me his professor doesn't care. If his professor doesn't care, and he doesn't want to talk about it, I don't know what to do with him!”

“I know how you feel. When Anna comes in, she always tells me the professor doesn't care about things like structure or whether or not she explains why she's using particular passages from her sources. I don't know if that's true or not, though. I mean, what does the professor want them to get out of this writing if there's no real form or need to explain yourself?”

We knew the seminary students were writing for a purpose, but somehow we could not understand what that purpose was. All we kept hearing was what the purpose was *not*, placing an added strain on our work as undergraduate peer tutors. This seeming lack of purpose, or lack of communication in regards to purpose, wasn't the only problem tutors faced, though.

The age difference sometimes caused tutorial sessions to go “off track” and made tutors *feel* like younger, less worthwhile students and people. Tutors might be in a lively discussion about the thesis—the purpose of the piece—when suddenly they found themselves defending their extracurricular activities or the fact that they personally did not believe in God the same way the writer believed in God. Sometimes, we tutors excused the behavior: “They're seminary students. Proselytizing is what they do, what they're learning to do.” This fact seemed especially true, on occasion, because the

Moravian Church—the church they were training to become a part of—is well known for its global missionary initiatives. However, at other times, tutors felt that such "lectures" were a direct result of their being younger than the writers. A writer might say, "Well you're young yet, so you don't know about so-and-so," or something in that vein, making the tutor feel inadequate because of age. Upon receiving comments like this from the student-writers I worked with, I often felt degraded. My identities as a practicing Roman Catholic, as a gendered female, or my so-called expertise as a writing tutor were tossed aside with little regard as to my knowledge, emotions, and personal interactions.

At other times, conflict occurred not because of age, but because of culture. Because Moravians emphasize missionary work in foreign countries, and because the Moravian Theological Seminary is the only Moravian seminary in the Western hemisphere, at least 10% of seminary students are from countries other than the U.S.<sup>1</sup> Seminary students who spoke English as their second—or even third—language also proved problematic for tutors. We did not enjoy working with them because they came to the writing center primarily to work on grammar. Grammar was not "what we did" in the Moravian Writing Center. We focused on global issues and felt that even English Language Learners and seminary students needed to work on global issues in their texts more so than other things, such as grammar constructions; there were tutors in other departments whose purview it was to give grammar assistance.

Clearly, we had run head-long into several instances of Mary Louise Pratt's contact zones, or "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery,

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<sup>1</sup> According to <http://www.moravianseminary.edu/general/studentbody2.htm> on March 29, 2008.

or their aftermaths as they are lived on in many parts of the world today” (582). In our case, the contact zone seemed characterized primarily by age-related conflicts. In fact, while there were many conflicts between writing center tutors and seminary students at Moravian College, tutors often lumped them all under the heading of “age conflict.” Being younger, inexperienced, traditional college students from middle- to upper-class backgrounds, we felt all of the conflicts resulted from age differences. Clearly, not all of these conflicts were related to age, but neither I nor my fellow students understood that there were more contact zones interacting than what was on the surface.

Regardless of the fact that age was not always at the root of the conflicts, my interest in age-related contact zones stems from these experiences and my limited understanding of them. When I began graduate studies, I began to think about age and the kind of research I might do to illuminate the role age plays in writing center interactions. In particular, I wanted to know what kinds of perceptions, biases, and assumptions tutors held about students of “non-traditional” college age, students age 23 and older.

The Texas State University Writing Center is an ideal site for studying tutors’ perceptions of non-traditional students because non-traditional students—which I narrow for the purposes of this study to only those students who are 23 or more years old—constitute 42.14% of the overall student population at Texas State (<http://www.ir.txstate.edu/Facts/xfacts.html>).<sup>2</sup> Because 183 non-traditional students visited the writing center between January 13, 2008 and March 19, 2008 out of a total of

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<sup>2</sup> Texas State defines non-traditional students as students who meet one, some, or all of the following criteria: “first time/returning student, currently/formerly married, parent or guardian, lives off campus or commutes, full time job, disabled, military veteran, age 23+ years old, age 17 years and younger, post graduate, any life experience that separates you from a traditional student” (<http://www.studentorgs.txstate.edu/ntso/>).

500 students—that’s 36.6% of students seen in half of one spring semester—the writing center is a space that both lends itself to and might benefit from this research.

Not only is the writing center an apt space for this type of research because of the amount of non-traditional students who use it; the writing center is also an excellent site for this research because the center is a place of learning for a wide variety of students. An understanding of students’ backgrounds and how tutors perceive of students allows tutors to better help the writers they work with—tutors can tailor their work with students to the students’ needs. According to Beverly J. Moss and Keith Walters, understanding students’ backgrounds is crucial to teaching them. In “Rethinking Diversity: Axes of Difference in the Writing Classroom,” an articulate detailing of how different types of students learn in composition classrooms, Moss and Walters claim they “know of no research concerning the ways in which the presence of [different types of students] might affect the writing classroom,” but they “know from personal experience that these students have different kinds of goals and different strategies for reaching them than their younger classmates” (451). They argue American institutions of higher education have begun to confront a major demographic shift in the populations they serve, the ultimate result of which is that no single ethnic group will constitute the majority of Americans: instead, the majority will soon be composed of various groups of ethnic minorities that have traditionally been underrepresented in these same institutions. (438)

While Moss and Walters focus primarily on race as a particularly important “axis of difference,” their argument might as easily apply to age. My own research indicates that the lack of research on adult learners in composition studies is mirrored by the lack of

research on age and adult learners in the writing center even though there has been much research on adult-learners in the academy (Moss and Walters, Soles, Spellman, Jacobs and Stoner-Eby, Thomas).

Research tells us non-traditional students have special learning circumstances and needs. Sometimes they need more hands-on interaction and lessons or more flexible learning times. They need to bring diverse personal lives into conversation with the academy, sometimes by bringing children with them to campus or negotiating employment with schooling, etc. These learning circumstances need to be taken into account when non-traditional students seek on-campus resources. These needs especially must be considered within the context of the writing center, where non-traditional students may work with traditional-age tutors, students between the ages of 17 and 22 (Bruffee, Trimbur, Pratt, Geller et al.), or with tutors who are the same age as they are or older (especially at Texas State's Writing Center where 9 out of 24 tutors are non-traditional students). This research, coupled with my own experiences with non-traditional student-writers, reinforces the need to broaden our conversations about contact zones in the writing center, tutor talk, and working with students from diverse backgrounds with unique learning needs.

### **Situating the Research Project**

This project builds on several conversations central to composition and writing center studies: theories of collaboration, in particular the notion of "peerness"; studies of actual tutor-student interaction; research on adult learners; and the one study conducted thus far in writing center studies that examines tutors' perceptions of the students they work with.

*Theories about Collaboration and the Idea of "Peerness"*

Theories of collaboration are central to writing center studies. Kenneth Bruffee offers what might be considered one of the first and most important articulations of this idea. In "Peer Tutoring and the 'Conversation of Mankind,'" Bruffee argues that although collaboration sometimes appears to be a hit-or-miss teaching and learning technique, it is still a useful pedagogical tool with a rich underpinning of history, theory, and practice. To build his argument, Bruffee presents collaboration as an extension of the 'Conversation of Mankind'—the conversation that allows people to socially construct knowledge through language and discussion—and leads students to become better writers through their collaborative activities. Bruffee claims "peer tutoring is important because it provides the kind of social context in which normal discourse occurs: a community of knowledgeable peers" (212).

Bruffee goes on to show that peer tutoring is beneficial—not debilitating for students. He explains that peer tutoring is not a case of "the blind leading the blind," but rather that peers who are *not* acclimated to academic discourse are better able to "[work] together—pooling their resources—[in an effort] to master [the discourse] if their conversation is structured indirectly by the task or problem that a member of that community (the teacher) provides" (212). Peerness between student-tutor and student-writer stems from their lack of understanding and their need for acclimation.

What Bruffee fails to recognize, however, is that student-status in itself may not be enough to establish "peerness" between two individuals. Bruffee fails to consider that the student-writers' identities as students may not be the most salient identity of the student. Instead, whether or not we consider another a "peer" has as much to do with

race, culture, etc as it does with more common-place demographics like age. Because student-status is Bruffee's main argument for peerness, the discussion of how similar tutors and student-writers are must contain a discussion of the relevancy of age in establishing peerness. How tutors perceive of and respond to student-writers' ages helps them to become or not become peers with student-writers. As Bruffee describes it, per tutoring is thus problematic not only because teachers may distrust their students to tutor each other effectively, but also because the term "peer tutor" itself implies an inherent contradiction in terms of who has expertise and who does not.

John Trimbur, in "Peer Tutoring: A Contradiction in Terms?" begins to challenge Bruffee's simplistic notion of "peer," arguing that if a student is a tutor, that student has more expertise than the student-writer. Thus, tutors and student-writers are not peers because the tutor has power in terms of writing expertise that the student-writer does not have. While Trimbur complicates the idea of peers as students with equal status, he does not go far enough. Trimbur does not move the discussion of peerness beyond academic peerness, as my study begins to. Trimbur does not acknowledge that academic ability or status is only one of many factors, which can include those related to personal identity—race, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, etc.—as well as those related to academic identity—level and type of program as well as discipline.

North's landmark "The Idea of a Writing Center," places a discussion of peerness in the writing center as well, although he ultimately fails, as do Trimbur and Bruffee, in understanding the complexity of the issue of peerness inherent in writing center conferences. North's argument reads as wishful thinking, as he explains, a peer tutor as a person "who will really listen, who knows how to listen, and knows how to talk about

writing too” (71). Although North demonstrates tutors’ desires to be students helping other students, he, too, fails to see how age may either isolate or encourage students to utilize the writing center as a learning resource. North has the opportunity to envision all of the ways writing centers can serve various students’ needs when he claims the writing center “defines its province [...] in terms of the writers it serves” (69). Although this first essay limits the idea of “writers”—readers are left to assume writers are traditional students with traditional students’ needs, wants, and intentions—North successfully brings the idea of collaboration and collaborative writing/engagement into writing center discussions.

North redeems himself somewhat in “Revisiting ‘The Idea of a Writing Center’” by refuting passages from his original text—such as his statements about tutors being willing collaborators, ready to listen and assist. He shows tutors as students, too, with their own stressors: “Okay, so maybe you [the tutor] were tired or busy or habitually a little abrupt [...] and your greeting was something like ‘What is it?!’” (83). Although North begins to unravel the utopian tendencies of his first essay, and although he begins to see tutors for the complete individuals they are, he continues to ignore age in the conversation. He does not consider that age might have something to do with the student-writer’s writing or purposes in visiting the writing center, nor does he consider how tutors’ actions are shaped by their perceptions of student-writers’ ages. His failure to consider tutors’ perceptions of student-writers multiple identities reflects the failures of Bruffee and Trimbur to go beyond the idea of academic peer to the idea of personal peer.

In this study, I seek to close the gap left in research on collaboration and what it means to be peers by authors such as Trimbur, Bruffee, and North. I aim to extend the

discussion and retheorize notions of “peerness” by examining tutors’ perceptions of age. By examining tutors’ perceptions of age, I focus attention on a contact zone that has been paid little heed in the area of composition and writing center studies.

Current theories of collaboration point out the problems with these early theoretical models, in particular their limited and at times utopian vision of “peerness.” In fact, many consider Mary Louise Pratt’s “contact zones” a more appropriate metaphor for the work that takes place in writing centers. According to Pratt, contact zones are “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other,” especially where power struggles between the two groups are evident or historical (582). Pratt has in mind obvious forms of culture-clashes—the British colonization of South Africa, America’s struggle to overcome racism, and the wage gap between American women and men—but more subtle contact zones that affect society are equally consequential; these subtle conflicts of power are often played out intensely in the societal microcosm of the university and the writing center. The metaphor of contact zones helps us to see the ways in which early ideas about peerness are limited.

What is perhaps most interesting about Pratt’s discussion of contact zones is that she places them “in contrast with the ideas of community that underlie much of the thinking about language, communication, and culture that gets done in the academy” (586). When teachers aim to bring students together in a community of learning, they often silence some students’ voices; therefore, Pratt’s concept of the contact zone contrasts with the need for a civil conversation because it highlights the idea that through conflict our students learn—not through homogeneity. Thus, the contact zone represents the split in the utopian academic community scholars like North, Bruffe, and Trimbur

envisioned early on. Pratt shows learning does not occur in a vacuum or a perfect community because, underneath the glassy surface of utopia, power relations ripple against each other, creating contact zones.

In the next section, I review research on tutor-student interaction, research that helps articulate what contact zones look like in the writing center.

### *Research on Tutor-Student Interaction*

Current conversations in writing center studies remind researchers that studies of “tutor talk” are essential to moving the field forward. North says in “The Idea of a Writing Center,” in the writing center, “talk is everything. [...] If the writing center is ever to prove its worth in other than quantitative terms—numbers of students seen, for example, or hours of tutorials provided—it will have to do so by describing this [tutor] talk: what characterizes it, what effects it has, how it can be enhanced” (76).

Numerous articles and books look in-depth at the kind of tutor talk North advocates studying, that is, how and why tutors interact with their clients (Trimbur, Bruffee, North, Nelson, Geller, DiPardo, Grimm). These pieces go farther, however, than merely articulating that contact zones affect students; rather, they articulate how writing center tutorials can be shaped by conflicts arising from contact zones between tutors and students. Because contact zones shape tutor-student interactions, they have a substantial effect on how tutors and students are able to connect as peers.

When contact zones arise in tutorial sessions, they affect the session itself. Contact zones lead tutors to respond and interact with student-writers in different ways, depending on what type of contact zone is being enacted. Tutors need to understand how contact zones affect their tutoring because their tutoring needs to be tailored to individual

students in order to help those students. When tutors work with non-traditional students, as Mary Wilson Nelson points out in *At the Point of Need: Teaching Basic and ESL Writers*, tutors must be aware of student-writers' circumstances in order to work effectively with those writers. Non-traditional students need to be exposed to different pedagogical techniques because of their unique circumstances. I argue non-traditional student-writers in the writing center need to be seen—and, in fact, are seen—as unique.

Nelson argues students should learn techniques, tools, and skills when they are most needed—not at teachers' convenience in the semester's schedule. The student groups Nelson studies are basic and ESL writers, but her insight may apply to adult-learners as well. Because ESL and basic writers have different writing histories than other student-writers, they need particular assistance in mastering the discourse community of the university. Nelson argues that when writing centers fail to acknowledge ESL as a contact zone, they may do these ESL students a disservice by neglecting to see how their past and current situations impact their abilities to write to an academic audience. The same can be said of age.

Building on the idea that writing centers should serve students with varying purposes and needs, Muriel Harris argues writing centers are perfect sites for studying contact zones. In "Talking in the Middle: Why Writers Need Writing Tutors," Harris says, "Since tutors live in [contact zones] somewhere between teachers and students, tutorial talk may be a particularly fruitful area in which to research what those nodes and zones [that Pratt defines] are" (37). Not only are tutors caught in contact zones within themselves as they struggle to negotiate the tightrope between peer-tutor, student, and teacher, but they are also privy to the contact zones (including age-related contact zones)

that occur in writing centers—the contact zones that contrast the perfect community of the writing center North so wistfully articulates.

Anne DiPardo draws on Harris' argument as a foundation for "Whispers of Coming and Going: Lessons from Fannie" DiPardo's case study explores the writing center as contact zone by looking closely at interaction between Morgan, a peer tutor, and Fannie, a student-writer who grew up on a Native American Reservation. Morgan and Fannie's tutor-student relationship is fraught with tension. Their lack of peerness arises from several contact zones: their different backgrounds and cultures, their different understandings of what essays should *do*, and their different understandings of what should occur in a tutorial. These contact zones prohibit Morgan and Fannie from engaging in a meaningful relationship of peerness: they allow the contact zones to separate them from each other rather than trying to engage in the contact zone, learning from it to engage in a more promising tutorial.

DiPardo argues that that background and environment have much to do with how student-writers write and how they interact with writing center tutors. DiPardo says, "Morgan needed to grasp that [Fannie] felt both this commitment [to] *and* this ambivalence [to her writing]; but as was so often the case, Fannie's meager hints went unheeded" (emphasis in original 358). Here, DiPardo demonstrates the conflict that arises in these students' conferences because Morgan and Fannie are approaching conferences from strikingly different perspectives, perspectives which affect them in ways neither are fully aware of. The fact that the two women come from very different backgrounds that affect what how they engage in conferencing is similar to how age might affect writing center conferences. Both tutor and student-writer may be unaware of the assumptions or

biases—arising from either the tutor’s or student’s age—they bring to writing center conferences. Though DiPardo does not discuss this, the age-related contact zone is the obvious next step in understanding authority dynamics in conferencing situations

Like DiPardo, Laurel Johnson Black discusses how contact zones often prohibit peerness in conferencing situations, but Black also shows how to use the disscensus produced by contact zones in order to engage in a successful conference. In *Between Talk and Teaching*, Black dedicates two chapters to “Gender and Conferencing” and “Cross-Cultural Conferencing.” In both chapters, Black demonstrates how an awareness of gender and culture in one-on-one conferences can make the person in the teaching role more aware of the student-writer’s needs. Although Black brings the discussion of contact zones in writing centers to the forefront of the conversation, she, like DiPardo, does not question the role of age in conferences.

In *The Everyday Writing Center: A Community of Practice* by Anne Ellen Geller, Michele Eodice, Frankie Condon, Meg Carroll, and Elizabeth H. Boquet build on Black’s discussion of the effects contact zones can have on peerness in the conferences. They examine the contact zones that arise in writing centers and the historical moments that make those contact zones visible. They attempt to identify Trickster moments in writing centers—those moments that are “[personified by] chaos, the disorderly order inherent in all systems [... and] may also shove us headlong into learning anew what it means to work responsibly and in more principled ways in the context of the writing center” (16). Trickster moments embody contact zones; Trickster moments are the moments when conflicts arise and create the opportunity for growth. While Geller et al. see contact zones arising frequently within the confines of the writing center, the contact zones they focus

on are contact zones already being discussed in current writing center conversations—contact zones that arise from race, for example.

Carol Severino offers perhaps the most expansive discussion of contact zones in “Rhetorically Analyzing Collaborations.” She identifies, for example, race, class, academic experience, life experience, and age, among others. Carol Severino uses a case-study approach to investigate what types of authority negotiations occur in various types of collaboration and how degrees of peerness effect collaboration. Severino attempts to “inductively identify key features of situational and interpersonal dynamics that affects the nature of collaboration” (54). She studies two tutorial sessions. In each session, the student-writer is “Joe, an older African American freshman who has served in the army” while the tutors differ: “Henry, is a high school teacher pursuing his masters in English,” while Eddy “is a freshman with less experience as a writer and a teacher/tutor than Henry” (55). Severino demonstrates how the different experiences of these two tutors affect their tutorial-relationships with the student-writer by rhetorically analyzing observations of the two tutorial sessions. This type of work is important to the research I begin and not only because Severino focuses on contact zones or because she mentions the age-related contact-zone. While the purview of my study does not afford me time to observe any actual writing center tutorials, this is the next step in researching the age-related contact zone. In order to fully understand if age is an important factor affecting the tutorial, actions and interactions between variously-aged student-writers and tutors would have to be observed and carefully critiqued. My study is limited to helping tutors begin to see their possible biases about age and to suggest what these perceptions mean for future writing center work.

Contact zones are important to moving writing center studies forward and pushing them to become advocacy sites for students and sites of student activism by embracing student identities. *Good Intentions: Writing Center Work for Postmodern Times* by Nancy Maloney Grimm appeals to the need to examine contact zones and students' multiple identities in detail in order to move writing centers in such a student-centered direction. Grimm discusses the ways postmodern theory can aid writing centers in becoming centers where institutional change begins and occurs. The premise of the book is that postmodern theory can transform practice in writing centers, and Grimm says much about hidden biases and unfair power dichotomies that emerge in writing center interactions. She claims writing center tutors can help students explore contact zones and the power struggles inherent in them. She says tutors can “[work] with students to acknowledge what matters to the culture of power, to locate these matters in cultural preferences, and to investigate and play with possibilities of redesigning the gates. We can put to the test the mechanisms by which some of us are kept outside and imagine alternatives” (115). Age-related contact zones might be included in future studies aligning themselves with Grimm’s suggestion because age often correlates with different types of power.

Research on actual tutor-student interaction is important; yet it is also vital to understand what might motivate or contribute to particular kinds of interaction. This is where my study comes in. Tutors' perceptions are important to the construction of tutor talk and are as important to study as tutor-student interaction, if not more so, because they are the foundation for tutor talk. I argue that contact zones become apparent when the sub- or unconscious becomes conscious, when tutors and student-writers experience

conflict in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. Studying perceptions that influence tutor talk reveals contact zones more quickly than waiting for contact zones to surface throughout the course of a semester, for example. “Tutor talk” as North describes it allows tutors and scholars to become aware of more subtle contact zones that often are not identified, at first, *as* contact zones.

#### *Research on Adult-Learners*

Research on adult learners provides another potentially important piece of my research puzzle, helping us to understand where age-related contact zones occur. Adult-learners and non-traditional age students are acknowledged as participants in the writing center in ways they have never been before. For example, in “Against Wisdom: The Social Politics of Anger and Aging,” Kathleen Woodward discusses the particular problems the elderly face in American society. Her ideas of the struggle the elderly go through to gain respect might illuminate the perceived demand for respect that at least one tutor in my study identifies. In other words, older students may seek to gain respect by demanding it; or it could be that tutors perceive that these non-traditional students are *demanding* respect simply because they expect that behavior. In order to determine if this contact zone is substantial enough to affect power dynamics, Woodward’s study can be used as a starting point for understanding how adults—and adult-learners—are treated in American universities.

By ignoring the role age plays in shaping students’ identities, writing centers run the risk of alienating, silencing, and ultimately injuring non-traditional students. Jerry Jacobs, Scott Stoner-Eby, and Natasha Spellman discuss the enrollment and retention rates of adult-learners in current American higher education. In their respective articles,

“Adult Enrollment and Educational Attainment,” and “Enrollment and Retention Barriers Adult Students Encounter,” they discuss adult-learners’ struggles to enroll in and graduate from programs in higher education. They show there is a “growing size and changing composition of the population of returning students” among students in general and adult-learners in particular, who now have different reasons for returning to school (Thomas 92). Thomas shows that the rate of adult-learner enrollment and retention is ever increasing across the United States, and he argues that universities are beginning to change as well, catering more to the needs of this new group of learners (4). These three arguments particularly demonstrate how crucial it is to take adult-learners into consideration when understanding how authority dynamics in writing centers work. By ignoring age as a possible area of conflict, prejudice, or bias, writing center researchers and staff neglect to help a particular group of student-writers who need writing centers as much as any other student group.

Age affects writing center conferences because non-traditional students and adult-learners are invested in their educations in ways other students are not; non-traditional student-writers are motivated writers willing and ready to learn. In “Differences in Meaning in Life in Students: The Effect of Non-traditional Status and Region of Country” by John F. Geiger, Lawrence Weinstein, and Christopher S. Jones, adult-learners are taken into consideration in terms of what they want to learn. Geiger, Weinstein, and Jones suggest that adult-learners have a greater sense of purpose in life and that this motivates them to take different courses and to enroll in different classes (569-70). From their research, writing center researchers might theorize ways tutors may help adult-learners or ways adult-learners might benefit from writing center conferences

in ways other student groups may not. If students' ages affect their purposes in life, which in turn affects their motivation in university coursework, then it is pertinent to examine how this plays out in writing center conferences and conversations. The contact zone must be examined because it may be vitally important to how students learn and how tutors work with students.

As mentioned earlier, different students learn in different ways, and students' different learning techniques need to be considered in the context of the writing center tutorials. In "Accommodating Student Learning Styles," Derek Soles argues for the importance of acknowledging and drawing on the different ways that students learn in various classroom settings. Although Soles does not specifically address any learning habits adult-learners might possess, he describes a variety of learning styles, from bodily-kinesthetic to visual learners (27-30). His article suggests that though adult-learners working in writing center conferences are not often seen as especially *different* students, they may have diverse learning needs as do *all* students. While some writing center tutors may not be aware of what techniques they use for individual student-writers, they are surely aware that they *do use* a spectrum of tutoring techniques—from using handouts to drawing pictures to modeling verbal sentence structures. In terms of tutors' assumptions of student-writers, it will be interesting to determine if tutors' perceptions of student-writers' ages affect the types of skills and techniques tutors draw on when engaged in writing center conferences.

#### *Research on Tutors' Perceptions*

Previous research on tutors' perceptions is relevant to my own study and to enhancing an understanding of interaction in the writing center. Despite the potential

significance of this kind of research, I have found only one study that even hints at tutors' perceptions as an important element in understanding writing center interaction.

“Sex in the Center: Gender Difference in Tutorial Interactions,” by Ben Rafoth, Bill Macauley, Kristin Stoltenberg, Steve Housenick, Jerome Brown, and Beth Baran details a case study of the sex/gender-related contact zone in the writing center. This piece is important to my research because it, too, attempts to tease out perceptions that lead to actions and tutor-talk in regards to gendered differences between tutors and student-writers. The authors ask questions that revolve around tutors' outward demonstrations of their beliefs. For example, some of the questions guiding their research are: “Does the gender of the participants influence the amount of talking, or who does the talking? Does it affect whether or how the tutor gives advice?” (2).

These questions point out the importance of first identifying tutors' perceptions and beliefs of how gender affects their work and then comparing those assumptions with actual observations. Rafoth et al. survey tutors and also ask tutors to perform spur-of-the-moment skits portraying typical male/female behavior in a tutorial session. These skits were taped and later used as reference material for discussions with participating tutors as well as participants at an East Central Writing Center Association Conference.

Ultimately, Rafoth et al. find that while most tutors claimed to believe gender affects the tutorial session, during their review of the skits, they denied that gender had any effect on what happened in the skits. They noted instead “that both participants were responsible for a tutoring session and that the tutor, in particular, can at any point try to change the direction of a session that is not going well” (4). The results of this case study show a clear denial of gender's affect on tutorials as tutors note that the success of the

tutorial is not related to gender-relations; rather, it has very little to do with gender relationships and more to do with tutor's seemingly-neutral authority. This case study shows the importance of studying the perceptions behind tutor talk. It shows that tutors may perceive (or not perceive) factors affecting writing center tutorials, but they may ultimately act or refuse to act on or talk about these factors, viewing them as less or more important, respectively.

### **Reararticulating the Upcoming Research**

Throughout this relatively small cluster of composition and writing center research on contact zones, it is evident that not all contact zones have been sufficiently examined. Areas where power conflicts occur on a daily basis, such as the power struggle produced by contesting ages, are often overlooked because they do not appear as important as other contact zones, such as those created when Caucasian tutors work with Hispanic students. However, as the number of non-traditional students grows in American universities, writing centers must acknowledge this new group of students as a distinct group, and centers must be prepared to engage the contacts zone that will inevitably arise. Though they may be Caucasian, Hispanic, Black, male, female, bisexual, straight, Republican, or Democrat, they are set apart by their age. They might often face challenges other students do not face because of their status or position in life. Some of the challenges they face go unheeded because tutors often overlook age-related differences as insignificant. However, age-related differences are significant to student-writers, and tutors may often have unconscious biases towards non-traditional students affecting writing center conferences.

My data suggest that writing center tutors perceive of age as a factor that does affect the outcome of writing center tutorial sessions. They perceive of age-related contact zones as contributing to and detracting from tutors' abilities to engage in peerness with non-traditional student writers.

## CHAPTER II

### METHODOLOGY OF A MIXED METHODS WRITING CENTER CASE STUDY

#### Research Questions

In this chapter, I discuss the research questions guiding my study as well as the research methods these questions lend themselves to. Because research trends in composition and writing center studies are moving increasingly away from the quantitative to the qualitative—reflective of the shift from a positivist to a postmodern epistemology—I underscore the importance of drawing on both quantitative and qualitative methods to compose a mixed methods research agenda for this study. In doing so, I advocate Cindy Johaneck's perspective that there is a “false distinction among competing epistemologies,” and that the best research we might do combines these methods (1). We must, as Johaneck argues, embrace the freedom necessary to conduct the research our discipline so greatly needs” (7).

Beginning this research project with an understanding of Johaneck's perspective has made me more aware of the research I do. Like so many compositionists, I too harbor feelings of fear and dislike towards particular types of research—part of this stems from my desire to engage in feminist forms of research, some from the ways I position myself within the field of composition and my desire to fit in to that field. However, drawing on Johaneck and others (MacNealy, Kirsch, Ritchie, Creswell), I am able to understand the appeal of using a mixed methods approach. I began to think about research not just in

terms of story-telling or in terms of numbers, but in terms of how the two might work together to present a sharper image of the object being studied—a clearer image of the writing center, of tutors' biases, and ultimately, of tutor talk.

In this study, I analyze tutor talk about student-writers in an attempt to isolate possible age-related contact zones in writing center tutorials. Specifically, I seek to better understand tutors' perceptions of non-traditional student-writers and how those perceptions may influence writing center tutorials. I ask the overarching question—Is the age-related contact zone a significant influence in writing center tutorials?—as well as several related questions:

- What assumptions about non-traditional students (age 23 and older) do tutors bring into the writing center?
- In what ways, if any, do tutors find themselves—and the students they work with—articulating their age and/or status during the session?
- How do tutors perceive their age as affecting control of the session?
- Do tutors perceive student-writers' ages as affecting control of the session?
- How do tutors' life experiences play into the tutorial in terms of how they perceive their authority, power, and knowledge working in the session?
- What implications do any findings have for tutor training?

I ask these questions not just to identify other tutors' assumptions and biases about age, but to identify my own. Because this research project stems out of my own personal experiences as a traditional, majority tutor working with non-traditional, often minority student-writers, I aim to get to the bottom of my own perceptions. Throughout

the course of this study, the above questions helped me formulate how I once felt about tutoring non-traditional students as well as how I now feel about tutoring them, and what those differences mean for me personally.

### **Beginning the Research**

In chapter one, I situated myself within the context of my study. I examined the fact that I was once an undergraduate peer tutor in a writing center at a small, liberal arts college. During my three years tutoring at Moravian College, I grew from a 19-year-old girl into a 22-year-old woman, but I was never old enough to be considered a "non-traditional" student. This information may not be crucial to how my audience understands my interpretations, but it is crucial to my interpretation of the data I collected and present in the following chapter. As Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater shows in "Turning In upon Ourselves: Positionality, Subjectivity, and Reflexivity in Case Study and Ethnographic Research," for qualitative researchers "writing about how we are positioned is part of the data" (116).

Chiseri-Strater goes on to explain that "[t]he concept of positionality includes the ethnographer's [or qualitative researcher's] given attributes such as race, nationality, and gender which are fixed or culturally ascribed" (116). I offer my own fixed and culturally ascribed characteristics as a means to show where I stand in terms of perceptions, attitudes, and attributes in relation to the writing center tutors I study. My own perceptions, observations, and recollections will surface periodically throughout my discussion of my findings, as I consider it ultimately important to include my own thoughts as a part of the research I do. After all, my research questions do not just guide my study; they guide my internal struggle to make sense of my own tutoring experiences

and my interpretations of the data I collected for this study. Finally, Chiseri-Strater claims, “Positionality is also shaped by subjective-contextual factors such as a personal life history and experiences” (116). The personal experiences I offer at the beginning of Chapter 1 help to position me as a researcher within the context of my study. Not only do I offer my positionality to give readers and myself a better understanding of my preconceptions towards the study and any possible findings, but I offer my positionality as a means to remain ethical and honest while embarking on the study and recording my findings. By disclosing personal information about my relationship to the study, I am offering a way of “coming clean” to my audience and also my research participants. I am tied to this study not simply because I have engaged in the research but because I was once a member of the larger writing center community and have a desire to understand writing centers and tutors on a different level as a direct result of my belonging to that particular community.

Like Chiseri-Strater, Gesa E. Kirsch and Joyce S. Ritchie argue for a positioning of self within research in “Beyond the Personal: Theorizing a Politics of Location in Composition Research.” Kirsch and Ritchie discuss the growing trend to place “emphasis on the personal, on validating experience as a source of knowledge” (140). More importantly, though, Kirsch and Ritchie suggest

In addition to acknowledging our multiple positions, a politics of location must engage us in a rigorous ongoing exploration of *how* we do our research. What assumptions underlie our approaches to research and methodologies? And a politics of location must challenge our conception of *who* we are in our work. 142

They attempt to understand of the ways in which the self is inscribed in research. Because I feel personal experience is a valid form of data, I have included it in my research—even centered my research on it. However, as Kirsch and Ritchie point out, by doing so, I run the risk of essentialism. My experience is not objective truth—not that there is such thing as objective truth—so I use data from my surveys and my follow-up interviews to speak with and to my experiences, broadening my knowledge and complicating my experiences for a richer understanding of the contact zone I explore. Additionally, adding my own experiences into the research takes away from my own power over the participants whose words I appropriate (148). By voicing my experiences—positive and negative—I make myself more vulnerable; I am able to hear a more honest discussion between my experiences and those of the tutors I work with even as I attempt to demonstrate my peeriness with the tutors I surveyed and interviewed.

### **Rationalizing Mixed Methods Research**

To answer my research questions, I chose both survey and interview methods. The survey gave me a starting point to look for some of the answers to my question. For example, by asking tutors to rate their experiences with student-writers by using a Likert Scale—a scale that asks participants to rank their answers according to a range of “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” and several judgements in between—I began to see answers to questions about tutors’ initial reactions to working with non-traditional students develop. The survey thus acts as a starting point. The questions on the survey required tutors to respond in *general* terms about their attitudes and biases in relation to non-traditional student-writers. By leaving space for more commentary—at the survey-

participant's discretion—I saw rich descriptions of these general feelings and began to see how to ask tutors questions with more depth in the follow-up interviews.

The follow-up interviews more thoroughly answered my research questions. While writing each individual interview questionnaire, I kept both tutors' initial, often-vague responses as well as my own research questions and personal assumptions about the age-related contact zone juxtaposed in my mind. This allowed me to ask questions that tutors were both willing and, at times, uncomfortable to answer. I was able to ask questions that allowed tutors to express their opinions while still shedding light on the information I wanted to know more about. By using the survey as a starting place, I was able to gain a more thorough understanding of what types of assumptions tutors held about age in the writing center.

According to John W. Creswell, the design I use is a “[*m*]ixed methods design [which includes] procedures for collecting, analyzing and linking both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or in a multiphase series of studies [emphasis in original]” (53). This study is not yet a multiphase series of studies, but in its present form, I draw on both quantitative and qualitative data to answer my research questions and draw the conclusion that age does matter in writing center tutorial sessions. Creswell and Clark describe mixed methods as having as its central premise the idea that “the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone” (5). In other words, Creswell, like Johaneck, and Lauer and Asher in our own field, sees that a combination of different types of methodology produces a more complete set of data to answer a variety of research questions.

## Using a Mixed Methods Design

### *Designing an Appropriate Survey*

I wanted to collect rich descriptions of tutors' attitudes and potential biases about age. Thus, I have grounded this description in an intensive interview process, arising from the original surveys tutors responded to. Sequencing the study in this way—from quantitative to qualitative—allowed me, in Mary Sue McNealy's words, to assess "how likely it is that the degree of relationship is pure chance" (41). In order to begin to address some of my research questions and identify what tutors' perceptions of writers' ages might be, I drew on quantitative methods to create a survey (Appendix A).

This survey allowed me to identify basic trends in perceptions. I distributed the survey to current and recent writing center tutors—a total of 30 potential survey-takers—in order to gain insight into how staff members think about their clients' ages. I chose to distribute the survey to writing center tutors at Texas State because they were "[appropriate] to the variables under scrutiny and [because of] their availability" for further research—follow-up interviews and member-checking (84).

The survey is an anonymous survey, but asks willing participants to give their names and email addresses if they were interested in sitting for follow-up interviews with me. In this way, I was able to collect data from participants who were only willing to sit for 10-15 minutes to fill out a survey as well as gather a potential pool of interviewees. The survey questions reveal demographics of tutors, give tutors a chance to articulate what they perceive to be important characteristics of student-writers that impact tutorial sessions, as well as offer tutors a chance to comment on and respond to each question.

I drew heavily on *The Research Methods Knowledge Base*—a hypertextual textbook that introduces undergraduate and graduate students to social research methods—to make choices about which types of questions I would use in my survey (Trochim). The survey is broken into a variety of questions: statistic/demographic, ordinal (questions that ask participants to rank objects, etc), Lickert response scale, and open-ended. The first section of the survey asks participants to answer demographic and statistical questions in order to gain a sense of who tutors are and what types of writers they work with on a daily basis. These demographic questions “assess the personal characteristics of individuals in [my] sample” and are vital to grounding my study within the context of the Texas State Writing Center as a specific community composed of a particular group of students (Creswell 362). I use one ordinal question to determine how age fits into tutors’ conceptions of what types of characteristics affect tutorials. This question gives tutors a chance to demonstrate that they may or may not find age important to tutorials, and with that in mind, they answer questions pertinent to age-related contact zones. The majority of the survey is comprised of Lickert response scale questions and open-ended questions. The Lickert response scale only has four (4) options: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. By only offering four choices, I force tutors to make a decision about the statements presented. However, I also give room for tutor comments, so they can explain why they may have picked one answer more readily than another, or why they had trouble choosing one. The last portion of the survey is open-ended questions in a “finish this sentence” set-up. Part of the question is written for tutors, forcing them to focus on issues of age that the study is interested in

This affords tutors the opportunity to discuss age in ways they feel comfortable—from direct, blunt answers to short, descriptive stories.

The Lickert response scale questions allowed me to gain preliminary statistical data. From these questions, I was able to get a sense of tutors' perceptions and then determine what I did and did not understand in their responses. In this way, not only did I gain statistical data, but I also began to see more questions arising. The open-ended, finish-the-sentence response questions allowed me to see even more questions. I heard tutors saying things, but did not fully understand their points of view. In order to understand the statistical data I received, I had to interview some survey participants. I used the comments from the Lickert response scale and the answers to the open-ended questions to guide my interview questionnaire.

### *Designing the Interview*

After distributing, collecting, and coding my surveys, I wrote interview questionnaires—one for each follow-up interview—to guide me in asking potential interviewees for elaborations on the knowledge I gained from reviewing the surveys. Each interview questionnaire was specific to the interviewee. These questionnaires were designed in conjunction with participants' survey responses in mind; the interviews built on the comments participants wrote on their surveys, which allowed participants to explain their ideas and perceptions more fully while allowing me the opportunity to grapple with the meaning and thought processes behind tutors' written comments. I used these interviews to try to better discern survey participants' thoughts on the matter of the age-related contact zone. According to James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, interviews are “social encounters [that lead] us rather quickly to the possibility that the

interview is not merely a neutral conduit or source of distortion but rather the productive site of reportable knowledge itself” (3).

Because interviews have become a way to understand a person’s thoughts and experiences as well as a means to engage in the creation of knowledge with another person, interviewing is especially suitable for my study, which seeks to determine tutors’ perceptions and attitudes. Throughout the interview process, tutors were able to reflect more deeply on their initial responses to the survey questions, and we sometimes created knowledge about tutors’ perceptions together—coming to conclusions together about why a particular tutor thought or commented the way she did.

In order to effectively construct knowledge with tutors about how they see age affecting writing center tutorials, I had to design questionnaires that brought knowledge of personal perception to the forefront of the conversation. My interview questionnaires (Appendices C, D, E, and F) are a qualitative research method. They draw on interviewees’ experiences in order to better understand the numerical data and preliminary trends presented in the survey results while exploring tutors’ personal perceptions of how student-writers’ ages affect tutorial sessions. Throughout the interview process, I had to keep in mind the fact that I could “not expect answers on one occasion to replicate those on another because they emerge from different circumstances of production” (Holstein and Gubrium 9). I realized each interview offered a different construction of knowledge because the participants in the interviews were different—I remained a constant, but my interviewees changed, and therefore the knowledge we made together changed. I also could not predetermine that each interview would give me the

same data, as interviews are highly personal and situated in the experiences of one particular individual's life.

Before I began interviewing participants, I created a Consent Form (Appendix B). This form presented interviewees with pertinent information about the study, including the reasons for the study, my contact information, potential risks and benefits of participation, an anonymity clause explaining participants' rights to remain anonymous, and the statement that participants are under no obligation to continue participating—if they choose to revoke their participation at any time, they will not suffer prejudice or bias from Texas State.

I interviewed four participants. Before choosing these participants, I first grouped the surveys into categories based on language used in the open-ended response section. After grouping all surveys into one of two umbrella categories—the importance of age in tutorial dynamics and tutors' enjoyment in working with non-traditional students—I read through the survey responses to see which ones particularly interested me in terms of language used. From each of these two categories, I chose one survey from a traditional student-tutor and one from a non-traditional student-tutor. The four participants I asked for follow-up interviews had either particularly interesting responses on their surveys, or their survey responses were representative of several other participants' survey responses. Therefore, their answers were somewhat summative of survey responses in general. In addition, the ages of the interviewees also give me a more balanced, less-biased perspective from traditional and non-traditional tutors.

After developing the consent form, I designed the interview questionnaire. Like the survey, the interview questionnaire also begins with demographic data in order to

establish and situate interviewees' presence and experiences in the writing center. Although I do ask for demographic and identifying data, all interviewees do have the option to remain anonymous. After situating tutors within the writing center, the questions begin to ask more about their specific experiences. Because the purpose of the interview is to build on the data presented in the surveys, I ask participants to reiterate some of the responses they gave in the survey, this time with the opportunity to truly describe what lead them to give certain answers and not others. Irving Seidman shows the importance of asking participants to reiterate concrete details of their lives and experiences to ground their responses to questions that ask about assumptions, perceptions, and attitudes (88). In order to determine tutors' assumptions, perceptions, and attitudes, I paid careful attention to first collecting data about participants' demographics and relationship to the community being studied.

Additionally, Seidman claims, "As soon as interviewers ask if people remember something, impediments to memory spring up" (88). Therefore, instead of constructing questions that ask participants specifically to remember something, I phrase questions around the idea of telling stories. This method allows interviewees a chance to proffer a variety of responses that are not restricted by trying to remember all of the particular details. The questions are truly open-ended and focused on experience, allowing participants an opportunity to give lengthy responses that don't simply hypothesize about an answer but give evidence to an answer—drawing perhaps on personal experiences and telling stories pertinent to the questions asked.

*Transcribing and Coding the Interviews*

I taped each interview because I needed to be able to hear participants' stories again and again to search out themes and truths in their words. Seidman states that his preferred method of "[working] most [reliably] with the words of participants, the researcher has to transform those spoken words into a written text to study" (114). Therefore, after completing interviews, I transcribed the recordings (Appendices D, E, F, G). My transcriptions are not linguistic transcriptions. They do not represent participants' dialectic differences or diction. Mostly, the interviews are transcribed for content, with other verbal cues (such as laughter, pauses, and sighing) represented on paper in order to give a fuller understanding and depiction of participants' words and meanings.

I decided to transcribe for content instead of linguistic content because I am not interested, at least at this stage, in tutors' linguistic practices. Because my goal is to understand tutors' perceptions of age and how those perceptions shape tutorials, as long as the voices are recorded in ways that reflect their meaning adequately, I am satisfied. Because tutors' own word choices, diction, dialects, etc. have no bearing on their perceptions of others, I decided not to transcribe with these variables in mind. Therefore, the transcriptions may have erased some of participants' vocal personalities (perhaps where I substitute Standard American English for a slang word unfamiliar to members of a broad audience), but the transcriptions remain true to participants' meanings. With this in mind, I did pay careful attention to punctuation, as Seidman advises, because punctuation reflects the interviewee's thoughts—punctuation demonstrates meanings that may not come across only in an interviewee's voice (116). Though I have not been exceptionally careful with recording interviewee's vocal idiosyncrasies, I have been

careful to transcribe punctuation in a way that reflects the meaning I hear in participants' voices.

I also decided to transcribe each interview in its entirety. Seidman claims transcribing only "sections that seem important [...] imposes the researcher's frame of reference on the interview data one step too early in the winnowing process" (15). I believe that Seidman is correct. If I had only transcribed a few sections from each interview, I may have missed important insights that influenced the way I interpreted the data collected. Therefore, although transcribing all four complete interviews was a tedious task, it helped me become more familiar with my data and helped me come to conclusions I may otherwise not have reached.

After transcribing the interviews, I read and reread the transcriptions. In order to understand what participants are saying, it is important to give their words time to sink in. Therefore, by carefully rereading interviews, I was able to come to understand tutors' meanings in ways I would not have (or would not have remembered understanding them) if I had only listened to the responses once. Often, rereading the transcriptions coincided with listening to the tapes (although quite a lot of this was also done throughout the transcription process). I took notes on the transcriptions the way any scholar would take notes on a particularly interesting piece of theory, or the way an avid reader might take notes on *Hamlet* or *As I Lay Dying*. I looked for emerging themes not only from question to question in one tutor's interview, but from interview to interview, as well. By identifying themes in this way, I was able to compare what interviewees said with what was represented in the survey. The end result is the argument I present here: that tutors perceive of student-writers' age in ways that might influence the writing center session,

including who has authority, the types of situations tutors perceive of as most likely to occur, and the degree of peerness tutors and student-writers have.

### **Member-Checking: The Final Stage of a Mixed Methods Approach**

The most important aspect of the quantitative descriptive research design, as I have already articulated, is the fact that using qualitative and quantitative methods, researchers can fill in the gaps and use certain forms of research to compliment others. By using a quantitative descriptive design, “one data collection form supplies strengths to offset the weaknesses of the other form” (Creswell 514). The process of determining whether or not data from one source or research method correlates with data from other sources and methods is the process of triangulation. To Lauer and Asher, triangulation is simply a “combining of multiple sources of data” (42). However, a deeper understanding shows triangulation to be a “multiplicity of observations” based on “a conception of knowledge as a social construction, a collaborative search, interpretation, and reinterpretation of complex acts in context” (40). Triangulation, then, is a means of discovering whether or not a researcher’s interpretation is valid in terms of how she constructs the knowledge she gains from her various sources.

By drawing on various methods, I was able to triangulate my data and find meaning from different sources that complimented, enhanced, and emphasized what the other sources of information demonstrated. I triangulated my data by comparing the surveys and interviews, and I also drew on member-checking or member validation. According to Thomas R. Lindlof and Bryan C. Taylor, “*Member validation* [...] means taking findings back to the field and determining whether the participants recognize them to be true or accurate” (emphasis in original 242). The use of member validation stems

from the idea that members of the group or community being studied are “highly knowledgeable about their social worlds” (242). While I did show my interpretation of the data collected to study-participants to check for validity, I also did not rely on them completely to change the conclusions I ultimately came to. Member-checking allowed me to reinterpret and understand my data, but the final conclusions drawn are mine.

## CHAPTER III

### NUMBERS AND VOICES: WHAT TUTORS SAY ABOUT AGE-RELATED CONTACTS ZONES IN THE WRITING CENTER TUTORIAL SESSION

In the previous chapters, I articulated my interest in this study—beginning with my perhaps short-sighted interpretations of the age-related contact zone as an inexperienced traditional-age undergraduate writing center tutor. Then, I discussed the need to study the age-related contact zone within the confines of the writing center. That this particular contact zone has rarely been studied is a disservice to our writing centers, which serve increasing numbers of non-traditional students. I described the different theories in composition and writing center studies related to collaboration, peeriness, tutor-student interaction, and adult learners before discussing one particular case study emphasizing tutors' perceptions in order to set the stage for the case study that is the focus of this project—the subject of this chapter.

My case study has led me to the conclusion that the age-related contact zone in the writing center is worthy of being studied further, and in this chapter, I offer an interrogation and interpretation of my findings from surveys and follow-up interviews that led me to this conclusion. I draw from the rich details included in these surveys as well as from survey- and interview-participants' comments, stories, and voices to argue tutors' perceptions of student-writers' ages sometimes inhibit or enable tutors' abilities to

engage in peerness with writers. By looking first at the survey results, I will explore initial data that later interview data confirms or denies and come to the conclusion that a student-writer's age matters, potentially in relation to the tutor's age. Age is a fluid dynamic of authority in tutors' understanding of writing center sessions. Tutors believe their ages and the ages of student-writers can sometimes lead to opposition, but tutors are more uncomfortable with the power dynamics this entails than they perceive student-writers to be. Additionally, some traditional-age tutors see a more striking contrast with non-traditional-age writers, while non-traditional-age tutors see less opposition and contrast in their work with non-traditional-age writers. Because tutors perceive non-traditional students' ages as affecting tutorials, age affects tutors abilities to engage with non-traditional writers as peers.

### **Playing the Numbers Game**

#### *Basic Findings—The Numbers Run-Down from Survey Results*

Roughly 73% (8 of 11) survey-participants are non-traditional student-tutors while only 27% (3 tutors) are traditional student-tutors. The tutors who participated in the survey have worked, on average, four semesters at the writing center. 64% (7) survey-participants are female, while 37% (4) are male. The ratio of male to female participants reflects the demographics of the writing center, where the ratio is sixteen female to six males (8:3). Therefore, I do not believe gender necessarily has an effect on the results of these findings—though they may. However, I feel it is more important to note that the gender differences reflect the demographics of the Texas State Writing Center.

The most interesting data gathered from the surveys relates to tutors' preliminary responses about the significance of age in the writing center tutorial: not many tutors ranked age as the *most* important factor affecting tutorials, but the majority of tutors marked it as the second most important factor, showing that age is significant in the writing center. A few tutors feel age is not a significant factor in a successful tutorial; as one survey participant commented, "I'm not sure their age is a factor. [...] Honestly, I'm concerned with the students [sic] attitude." However, 55% of tutors claim age is the second most important factor in working with student-writers in successful writing center tutorials. These numbers show that tutors do consider age to have a significant impact on tutorials.

Because an important factor of this study is determining tutors' perceptions about writers' ages, the fact that 91% of survey respondents claim they enjoy working with non-traditional student-writers is significant. In the following sections, I will draw from interviews with writing center tutors to illustrate why this is the case. Only one tutor commented on the survey that he does not enjoy working with non-traditional student writers. This tutor was not interviewed, nor did he offer additional commentary as to why he does not enjoy working with non-traditional student-writers.

Tutors' opinions about how easy or difficult it is to work with non-traditional writers are varied. The majority of tutors think non-traditional student writers are not any easier or any more difficult to work with than traditional student-writers except in extreme cases. For example, 18% of tutors say non-traditional writers are more difficult while 27% say they are easier to work with. However, 82% of tutors say it is definitely *not* more difficult to work with non-traditional writers, and 73% say non-traditional

writers are definitely *not* easier to work with than traditional students. This data puts the numbers at about equal, with only 9% more tutors claiming non-traditional student-writers are easier to work with.

*What Do the Numbers Mean?*

The numbers discussed in the previous section imply that while tutors may not see age as the *most* important factor in the dynamics of a writing center tutorial session, tutors do highlight ideas about how a student-writer's age—in relation to their own—changes the dynamics of the tutorial. While the previous section gives the impression that age is important to students' writerly identities and tutors' tutorly identities, tutors' responses to the open-ended questions included in the survey provide more details about why age is important. In this section, I will draw on tutors' survey comments to demonstrate a preliminary understanding of why age is a factor in the success of a tutorial.

I found that tutors' language about non-traditional student-writers can be categorized into two over-arching ideas: age is an important factor in working with student-writers and tutors generally enjoy working with non-traditional student writers. That tutors language falls into these two categories implies that tutors perceive tutoring as an open-ended dialogue that helps them engage fellow students and fellow writers in a unique type of peerness. While all of the tutors speak of non-traditional students in terms of collaborating in successful tutorials, and the majority of tutors speak with positive language about non-traditional students, tutors saw non-traditional student-writers sometimes taking complete control of the session.

A majority of tutors—73% or 8 tutors—see age as an important factor that affects the dynamics of a writing center tutorial. Tutors typically discussed the effect age has on writing center sessions as stemming from the way age effects a student-writer's actions, voice, and texts. Their language suggests that non-traditional student-writers make efforts to enhance tutorials because these writers are more motivated and interested in their education than other writers might be. Non-traditional student-writers sometimes positively influence a tutorial session, and because age is perceived as the reason behind a non-traditional student-writer's motivation, age can substantially affect the session.

Tutors' language indicating age is important to tutorial dynamics suggests that age is important because it changes student-writers' perceptions of the work they do in the center and in the academy. Some tutors' responses convey this attitude: Mark says, for example, "most non-traditional writers are more motivated than younger writers." Elizabeth observes that "They often desire achievements in writing beyond the classroom," and Urania notes that "They appreciate tutoring sessions." These comments suggest that tutors perceive non-traditional student-writers as having a different respect for earning an education than do traditional writers. Non-traditional students' perceived respect for education influences the paths a tutor will take to guide the tutorial.

Regardless of whether or not the non-traditional student *is* motivated and engaged, the tutor comes into the session predisposed to perceive the student as being motivated, which changes the dynamics of the session. These tutors suggest what much research shows: according to Geiger, Weinstein, and Jones, non-traditional students are more motivated to succeed in higher education because of their intense, often personal desire to earn a degree and thus a better lifestyle or career (569-70).

Other tutors' details add to the discussion of how non-traditional student-writers take tutorials into their own hands, thus showing that the age of a non-traditional student affects how she will act and react in learning environments. One tutor, Stephanie, says, "Often [non-traditional students] have a deeper understanding of the topics they are assigned to write. The responses are generally more insightful," while another tutor, Jared, claims a non-traditional student "brings more to the table by way of life experience and willingness to cooperate in the tutorial process." These comments demonstrate tutors' perceptions of non-traditional students' willingness to take an active role in the tutorial. Rather than only receiving help on one paper during one writing center session, non-traditional student-writers seek out the writing center as a means to grow as writers in a broad, continuous sense. Therefore, age is an important factor in writing center dynamics because tutors perceive non-traditional students often as more motivated than traditional students.

My ideas of the importance of age in regards to writing and tutoring have shifted and changed over the course of six years. When I first began tutoring, I felt age was possibly the most important factor affecting tutorials I engaged in at the center. I saw my work with non-traditional student-writers negatively—I felt I couldn't work well with them, and my inability to work with them and their inabilities to work with me affected the success of our tutorials, and because these attitudes and perceived inabilities influenced my conferences, I saw them as being of vital importance. Now, I see non-traditional student writers in terms of the unique perspectives they bring to their collegiate work. Their motivation is inspiring, and I see this motivation and willingness to learn as another way students' ages affect the writing center session.

One reason tutors see age as important to the tutorial and enjoy working with non-traditional students is that tutors sometimes perceive non-traditional student-writers as particularly motivated writers as I have discussed. Like me, these tutors see student-motivation, stemming from a student's age, as importantly affecting the path the session will take. One non-traditional tutor, Marc, says, "I had to re-learn skills the others [traditional students] took for granted. I had to earn my education." Another tutor, Ryane, discusses student-motivation by saying, "[Non-traditional students] are more concerned with learning things they can use for all writing, want to improve writing not just make an A." These tutors discuss the ideas that non-traditional student-writers see themselves in a spectrum of education; they are not tied down by their majors. Tutor observations that non-traditional student are interested in learning new ideas and ways of doing and seeing things; these new ideas and activities have to be applicable to many areas of their lives and the various activities they engage in, not simply the bare minimum of coursework necessary to have a degree bestowed on them.

Earl Thomas' research in "The Adult Learner: Here to Stay," corroborates with tutors' perceptions of non-traditional students. His discussion of why adult learners have high retention rates—along with similar evidence from Jacobs, Stoner-Eby, and Spellman—indicates that non-traditional students are more interested and more active in their learning, pursuing education in energized ways. Non-traditional students—and the tutors they work with—truly recognize that education must be earned. These perceptions of non-traditional student-writers voice tutors' understanding of why and how age is an important factor that does affect tutorials.

Additionally, tutors perceive non-traditional writers as willing to take possession over the tutorial session and defend their writerly identities even when they appear insecure about their choices as writers. Of these writers, Ryane says, “They sometimes argue with my suggestions, ” while an anonymous tutors claims, “the client will be argumentative. Argument stems from the question of authority; I appear younger, and older clients are used to seniority over people my age. They don’t want to respect me as having authority in the subject matter.” Another tutor, Jared, suggests, “At times they can be more insecure, especially if they are quite a bit older, and have a tendency to be more defensive and sensitive to criticism.” Although these observations have negative connotations, they imply that age affects writers’ desires to resist—to maintain their own voices. Their resistance alters the course of the tutorial.

Although tutors sometimes perceive non-traditional students as overly aggressive in their resistant, tutor also perceive writers’ security in their writing abilities as stemming from age—tutors perceive them as either too secure or much too insecure in regards to their own writing. As an undergraduate tutor, I found both of these extremes to be the case. I was frustrated by my more extreme perceptions of those seminary students whom I avoided working with at all costs. At the time, I saw myself sharply contrasted with non-traditional students and could not help but think they were defensive against the pseudo-expertise I had that they did not. On the other end of the spectrum, I was highly frustrated by any student who consistently deferred to my suggestions without engaging in the tutorial or questioning what I said about the writing process. My approach to these comments has been colored by these experiences, but it is almost comforting to acknowledge that other tutors feel this way also, and that the age-related contact zone is

not simply a contact zone at the Moravian College Writing Center. As at Moravian, Texas State tutors also feel age affects the session in numerous ways.

Related to tutors' perceptions of age's impact on tutorial dynamics is tutors' perceptions about enjoying tutorial session with non-traditional students. As an undergraduate tutor, writing center conferences—as we called them—were successful for me if the student-writer left the center with some concrete work to do, had a solid idea of what that work was, and had played an active role in coming to conclusions about the work that still needed doing. Because I enjoyed working in tutorials that met the above criteria, a successful tutorial could easily be called a tutorial that I enjoyed. Successful sessions made me feel good, satisfied. Sometimes, writers may have only been deferring to me; sometimes they may have tricked me, as Robert Connors' male student does in “Teaching and Learning as a Man” (137-138). Regardless of whether they were actively involved or I simply perceived them as involved, a successful conference with a student-writer made me feel as though we had accomplished something together.

Tutors whose surveys indicate that they enjoy tutorial sessions with non-traditional student-writers often use language that focuses attention onto tutors and not onto students. For example, one tutor, Ashly, uses language indicating she enjoys working with non-traditional student-writers because they teach her something: “I like to learn from them. Especially if they are returning to school after a career, they are more passionate, and they have knowledge I don't yet about the real world.” She emphasizes how working with non-traditional student-writers helps her learn and grow. For another tutor, Dayna, being taught and teaching is also critical to the enjoyment and satisfaction she gains from the writing center session. She says, “It can be more difficult to teach

[non-traditional student-writers] because they are sometimes more set in their ways,” but at the same time, she appreciates working with them because “they usually teach me something, too.” Dayna emphasizes an enjoyable learning experience between two peers. A third, anonymous tutor claims non-traditional student-writers often do not respect his authority in the tutorial session, making it more difficult for him to be satisfied by the tutorial overall. Because he feels disrespected, he cannot enjoy the session.

Because tutors are in the business of teaching, it is almost natural that they would find enjoyment in working with students they can both teach and learn things from. A positive relationship with a student-writer—a degree of peerness with another writer—contributes to a sense of pleasure when the session is completed. There has been some modicum of successful, engaged learning. The language tutors use to discuss the positive emotions they feel at the end of satisfying and successful tutorials demonstrates how important it is for tutors to be satisfied with their work in order to do a good job of it. In my discussion of interviews, I explore how this category demonstrates that age is a factor in the dynamics of a tutorial session but also that a tutor’s age in relation to a writer’s age influences the dynamics of a session and creates a sense of peerness, contributing to a positive experience in the center.

In the next section, I further explore tutors’ perceptions of non-traditional student-writers as alternately inhibiting or enabling a sense of peerness in addition to how tutors perceive themselves as working towards peerness. I flesh out the importance age has on tutorial sessions and also the ways it can be enjoyable—and not enjoyable—to work with non-traditional student-writers by drawing on four follow-up interviews with writing center staff. I chose to interview these four women in particular due to their abilities to

both summarize and expand my understanding of the overarching categories I discerned in the surveys. By mixing their voices with results from the surveys as well as my own voice and memories, I will argue that age affects tutors' and writers' abilities to engage in a meaningful form of peerness that brings tutors and writers together to craft more effective rhetorical texts. I argue that age—especially the relationship between tutors' and writers' ages—matters in writing center tutorial sessions and that traditional student-tutors see more conflict with non-traditional student-writers than do non-traditional student-tutors, who find more common ground with non-traditional student-writers.

### **The Participants**

In the next section, I draw on follow-up interviews with four participants: Ashly, Ryane, Keri, and Dayna. In this section, I offer short profiles of each participant to ground readers in the following discussion of the data gathered throughout the interview process.

#### *Ashly*

Ashly is a 22-year-old female. She does not think demographic factors affect the tutorials she engages in. Instead, Ashly says the most important factor is “whether or not [students have] been forced to come [to the writing center] or whether or not they think their time here is going to be valuable,” and that she feels “a little like [those things aren't] really related to the other factors that [I] asked about [on the survey].” Ashly's responses indicate her struggles attaining peerness with non-traditional writers. While she denies that age is a significant factor, she is careful to discuss tutorials in which she felt inhibited because of the difference between her age and that of the student-writer she was working with. Unlike other tutors, Ashly resists the implication that she may perceive

non-traditional student-writers different than she perceives traditional student-writers. Ashly is more alert to helping student-writers—she is more alert to working to attain peerness rather than investigating what might limit her ability to do so. Ashly resists the fact that age—or any other demographic factor—might affect the tutorial session more than the student's engagement.

*Ryane*

Ryane is a 23-year-old tutor. She finds herself being considered a non-traditional student by the university, although she does not necessarily consider herself a non-traditional student. Ryane is quick to discuss the differences between traditional and non-traditional students. Her comments indicate her ability to achieve peerness with non-traditional students has been inhibited by several unsuccessful tutorials that color her perceptions about most non-traditional students.

Ryane articulates that idea that tutoring an older student is a role reversal—and as a role reversal, there is no room for the consideration of peerness. Ryane says,

I didn't want things to be uncomfortable, you know, on my end or on their end [when I work with non-traditional students]. [...] I felt that it would probably be more on their end because they're coming in, you know, people my parents' age, and having some twenty-something tell them, you know, how to work on their paper. You know, and it's just...it's a backwards role for both parties

Ryane's comments suggest that, contrary to what she actually says, she may be the more uncomfortable participant in the tutorial. She is the one who definitely feels the role reversal—not having interviewed any non-traditional student-writers.

*Keri*

Keri is a 35-year-old non-traditional tutor. She finds herself engaging with non-traditional students more readily than with other students. Keri was originally very uncomfortable with the premise of my surveys and follow-up interviews. She says, “It just made me so uncomfortable thinking about differences. And I actually talked to other tutors and said, ‘Is this real? Are there really differences?’ And they gave me some of their examples. I went back and really thought about it, and I thought, there are some differences.” Over the course of the survey and our interview together, Keri came to see that there are both differences and similarities between non-traditional and traditional student-writers. For Keri, there is a sense of real peerness with non-traditional student-writers that other tutors do not seem to share. Keri feels she can easily achieve a degree of peerness with non-traditional student because she projects her experiences onto them.

*Dayna*

Dayna is a 27-year-old tutor who, at the start of the surveys, did not think age necessarily affects writing center tutorials substantially. When I asked why she ranked age as the second most important factor in determining success of tutorials, she responded,

It’s kind of a process of elimination. Sex/gender, really doesn’t matter. Religions? I hardly ever find out what religion a person is when they come in, unless they have some kind of obvious markings—like they have a veil or something on. Sexual orientation—something I usually don’t know. So it really came down to race and age, so those are really the only two things that affect me.

However, throughout the follow-up interviews, Dayna discusses the ways age *does* affect tutorials. She says she is “definitely intimidated by” non-traditional student writers and that “I’m just a tiny bit more wary, just a little bit more wary than if it were just a regular student.” Dayna’s anxiety about working with non-traditional students is evidence that peerness is hard to come by in some situations: peerness relies on many factors, and age can affect the amount of peerness that can be achieved by two people working together in the context of the writing center.

The following sections detail tutors’ perceptions and how these perceptions affect peerness. Most interestingly, all the tutors I interviewed expressed, in different ways, the conflicts noted above. All four tutors found themselves inhibited in achieving peerness as well as enabled to become peers with non-traditional students. Their experiences show a diverse range of peerness coinciding with the diverse non-traditional writers they work with. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that all four tutors struggled to achieve peerness in many instances, and in others, they were able to attain it.

### **Bridging the Gap Between Numbers and Words**

While the surveys I used offer me a good start in beginning to understand the perceptions tutors have about non-traditional student-writers, they are insufficient. I learned from my surveys that tutors do think age is important to tutorial sessions, but more importantly, tutors told me they listed age as important because they felt that they did not have a choice—the set-up of the survey asked for a ranking of which identity traits affect tutorial sessions, and tutors like Dayna felt the only possible answer was race/ethnicity and age. The data I gained from the surveys led me to see that age is an important factor in writing center work and that tutors are inclined to enjoy working with

non-traditional students. This information, however, does not effectually tell me much. I still had numerous questions after reviewing the surveys, and the survey results made me question the authenticity of tutors' responses. If tutors took the survey feeling they had to focus on age because that's what the survey was ultimately looking for, they may not think age actually impacts writing center sessions—but they had to write about it anyway. One tutor, Ashly, suggested on her survey that students' actions are more important than any other factor, but she was the only tutor to specifically register this comment on the survey.

I originally read the fact that age was ranked as second in importance by so many tutors as a refusal to concede that there is anything more important than writerly attitude that shapes the tutorial session, followed by their hesitant acceptance that personal identity might also shape what occurs in a tutorial. Six years ago, I also thought writership and writing processes were all there was to a student-writer's identity within the confines of the tutorial. However, as I began to take women's studies courses and read through *The Writing Center Journal* and *The Writing Lab Newsletter*, I began to see the student-writers I worked with differently, and I began to notice how my identity shaped the way I tutored and affected my tutorials. Some of the tutors I worked with throughout this project also experienced a type of enlightenment as they moved through the survey and interview process. One non-traditional tutor, Keri, claims the survey "brought me along, and then actually just talking now, I've discovered even more about it, just talking about it out loud." She almost did not take the survey, did not think there was any merit to the idea that age could play a role in tutorials, but then, after talking with other tutors and thinking more carefully about the questions, she began to see her

age as well as her clients' ages as affecting tutorials. Keri's experience mimics my own experience with expanding notions of writerly identity to include broader notions of identity overall. Some of the other tutors may have had similar experiences while filling out the surveys that led them to respond differently towards the beginning of the survey than they did towards the end of the survey or the end of the interviewing process. The journey to a new understanding of perceptions of non-traditional student-writers based on their ages demonstrates a key strength to using interviews—people develop over time, and moving from surveys to interviews allowed my research to grow and develop with my participants as they kept the project in their minds and continued to wrestle with their thoughts on the topic.

The follow-up interviews served other purposes, too. They allowed me to ask questions of tutors to find out if they truly do feel age has an effect on writing center work. The interviews give me the opportunity to discover how tutors feel beyond what the questions on my survey asked, they allowed tutors to give more complete answers and to speak to their responses on the surveys, and the interviews also give me an opportunity to pursue what tutors did not talk about at all on the surveys. Therefore, the interviews are vital data for my study. They fill in the gaps left behind by survey results and allow me to flesh out a more complete understanding of tutors' perceptions of non-traditional student-writers.

Most importantly, these interviews allow me to explore in-depth the idea of what it means to be a peer tutor when tutors and student-writers are different ages. The idea of peerness is central to my study, but it was not a theme in my surveys. Instead, the surveys merely set a foundation for the study. They gave me details I needed to get started, but

the interviews allowed me to see my own fascination with peerness as I compiled and coded my data. Throughout the process of collecting and synthesizing data from the surveys and the interviews, I was able to more fully develop my own ideas of peerness and the perceptions tutors have about how age impacts it.

### **Playing the Descriptive Game**

#### *Finding Peerness in the Writing Center*

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the idea of peerness is problematic for many compositionists. While Bruffee shows how important peer work can be to crafting successful texts, he also explains how some so-called peers have different experiences that give them an advantage over another peer (212). Trimbur argues that there is always a strain on peerness—especially in writing centers where one peer arguably has more experience than the other, complicating the idea of peerness (289). Both Bruffee and Trimbur speak to the idea that the idea of “peerness” itself, once defined only in terms of status as a student, is actually more complicated, although they do little to go beyond the idea that peerness is not constrained by the types of knowledge each peer possesses.

My study suggests there are multiple characteristics of “peerness”—that when students meet together to discuss writing, they do so with multiple rather than a singular “student” identity. Specifically, when compositionists think of peerness, they often do not think of the various demographics and situations that affect students’ abilities to engage effectively in peerness. They do not take into account the various factors that inhibit or enable students to come together and work effectively with one another for a common purpose. I argue that engaging in peerness refers to a tutor’s ability to work with a

student-writer to create a meaningful tutorial session that addresses the student-writer's multiple needs and identities.

The following sections explore this idea of peerness in the writing center. Often, tutors may think of student-writers as *their* students—they even become “ideal” or “not-so-ideal” students in tutors' minds. What I present is a variation of the ideal/not-so-ideal student: tutors see student-writers as ideal or not-so-ideal based on their abilities to work with student-writers. The perceptions tutors have of non-traditional student-writers changes the way they work with these students. More “ideal” student-writers are easier to engage with as peers. Therefore, tutors in this study see age as either inhibiting or enabling meaningful work in the writing center—that is, they begin to see age as a factor that either inhibits or enables peerness to develop in the confines of the writing center.

My follow-up interviews with writing center tutors Ashly, Ryane, Keri, and Dayna, imply that categories—age as inhibiting peerness and age as enabling peerness—to be applicable, though a bit more murky and complex than I first assumed. Importantly, tutors voice both their appreciation of and anxiety towards working with non-traditional student-writers—their appreciation of achieving peerness and their anxiety towards not achieving peerness. What is most interesting, although perhaps not surprising, is that tutors see their multitude of interactions with non-traditional students from their own age-related standpoints. Interpreting tutors' voices, I find it is imperative to study further the effects of the age-related contact zone in writing centers because tutors perceive of non-traditional students as positively and negatively affecting peerness in the writing center. Tutors also experience a denial of difference or an anxiety of difference when working

with non-traditional students. All of these factors demonstrate that age affects the writing center tutorial while complicating the idea of “peerness.”

*Age as Inhibiting Peerness*

“Maybe non-traditional students are less wary of just telling me exactly what they think,” says Dayna. According to Ryane, “They are the ones that if anyone’s going to argue with me about something, or I guess disagree with something that I say, it’s usually them.” Keri says, “I think you develop habits when you’re older. By the time that you get into your 30s and 40s, you develop habits.” Each of these three quotations suggests a particular perception about non-traditional students. Dayna perceives that non-traditional students can be blunt and almost demanding of respect and equality. Ryane echos the age-related seniority Dayna feels by describing non-traditional students’ questioning as a symptom of an “I-am-older-so-I-know-better attitude.” Keri also discusses this perception by suggesting non-traditional students can be more set in their ways, more resistant to tutors’ advice or suggestions.

Age-related respect plays an important role for some tutors working with non-traditional writers, as Dayna suggests above. Because non-traditional students have different and more diverse life experiences than most tutors, she feels they should be given more respect. She says, “Older students I am definitely intimidated by—intimidated because they are older than me, because our society teaches that you should respect your elders, that you should listen to them. [...] I also have more respect for them coming back to school. That’s tough. And so I am more hesitant to give them comments on their papers.”

Dayna references the societal pressure to respect elders—a pressure which may or may not be generational. Regardless, this pressure is very real and demonstrates an inherent authority issue in classrooms as well as writing center tutorials. In fact, Dayna and Ryane both say non-traditional students who are older than tutors need to be respected. Kathleen Woodward addresses dynamics between young people and older people in “Against Wisdom: The Social Politics of Anger and Aging.” Woodward’s claim that older people feel they deserve respect—especially because they often feel silenced by a perceived disrespect by the younger people they interact with—speaks to tutors’ perceived pressures to be respectful (193). Non-traditional students may be acting against the social silencing of the elderly Woodward suggests. Non-traditional students, as well as the tutors they work with, may often feel that respect in a tutorial session means being correct or being spoken to in a certain manner. Issues of respect with non-traditional students are complicated for Dayna. At 27, she is a non-traditional student who feels uncomfortable working with non-traditional student-writers because she is inhibited by an awareness of respecting elders—she is not able to converse with non-traditional students writer-to-writer; she gets trapped in a younger-older dynamic.

Susan Wolff Murphy also speaks to Dayna’s complicated perspective of politeness and respect. Murphy makes the case that saving face and showing respect are key towards crafting a sense of peerness within the tutorial. Her ideas of politeness inform my interpretation of Dayna’s experiences. Because Dayna feels social pressure to show deference to older students, her awareness that she must be polite within tutorials with non-traditional students seems to inhibit any engagement resembling peerness between Dayna and non-traditional students-writers.

While her acts of respect are moral choices, she also finds that they inhibit her abilities to work in meaningful ways with student-writers. Not only is Dayna unable to connect with these students as peers because of societal norms, but she cannot offer them the types of advice she feels will be most fruitful for their growth as learners and writers because of her understandings of how to be polite and respectful. Because Dayna feels she must be respectful and show respect, she is less likely to give what she considers helpful, critical advice to student-writers. For instance, while she says she expects non-traditional students to have better writing abilities because of their age, she is hesitant to give them suggestions when they do need help because she fears she might offend them; As Dayna says of one tutorial, “I think that I probably didn’t criticize her paper as much as it needed to be criticized because I didn’t want to—I didn’t want her to feel bad about her writing. [...] With her, I think I approached things in a more non-direct way, like, ‘Oh, this sounds a little bit funny to me here. You know, but it’s probably just me.’” Dayna’s decision to concede what she believes for fear of hurting the student’s feelings ultimately gives student-writers less to work with, and she says it leaves her unsatisfied about the tutorial session as well. Her politeness, borne of her perception that non-traditional students deserve respect, prevents her from creating a sense of peerness with non-traditional students.

Like Dayna, I too felt the need to show respect when tutoring. The ways in which I showed respect—dancing around large issues with students’ writing, not giving the best constructive criticism I could, etc—inhibited my abilities to offer genuine suggestions to non-traditional writers from the Moravian Theological Seminary. Additionally, I often felt a negative pressure of respect for elders most strongly when these particular non-

traditional student-writers began to discuss theology with me. I felt unsure of how to steer the tutorial session back to their writing and away from their proselytizing. I felt pressured to listen to their ideas and allowed my interests in improving their writing to take a backseat to what they clearly thought was more important—my religious affiliations and my understanding of God.

Dayna's ideas about showing respect are complicated by another perception she has about nontraditional student writers: that they are more likely to resist her suggestions. She tells one story about a student-writer who solicited her advice, but ended up telling her, "I'm just going to do what the teacher does." Dayna also says, "maybe non-traditional students are less wary of telling me exactly what they think [of my suggestions] because I am younger. They feel more confident, maybe; they feel that they can tell me, you know, more honestly what's on their mind." Dayna especially feels in circumstances such as the one she refers to above that peerness is not an option. She is younger, non-traditional students are older, and there is an age-dichotomy that cannot be bridged for peerness.

Ryane expresses this perspective as well, claiming that nontraditional writers are less willing to take her advice, are more resistant to her suggestions. Ryane does not feel comfortable engaging non-traditional student-writers in certain ways, which makes the tutorial session less enjoyable and less comfortable. In discussing a recent tutorial with a non-traditional male, Ryane says, "there was some miscommunication in there somewhere, and I'm not sure what his deal was, but by the end of the session, I felt like he just kind of came in there to—I guess have a confrontation." She says, "He pretty much just disagreed with me. 'Oh, I don't think that's it.' And I'm like, 'Ok. Well, you

know, you know your professor and your classes better than I do, so if that's how you feel, well, then that's fine.' I don't know if it's because I'm younger and they're testing my qualifications."

Ryane found that older men were often more likely to criticize her suggestions or openly tell her they would not be taking her advice. Ryane and I are both unsure of whether this is a result of an age-related or gender-related contact zone. It may be a complication of the two—an older male student working with a younger female tutor is a situation ripe for exploring authority dynamics—but regardless, Ryane clearly is grappling with the tensions of a respect-age dynamic that she perceives as allowing some non-traditional student-writers to feel they have more expertise in writing than Ryane, a young-looking female tutor who has only been tutoring for two semesters. Ryane's example represents one instance where peerness is unattainable because of resistance and frustration from both tutor and student.

Additionally, peerness can be inhibited not just by student-writers' resistance to tutors' suggestions. A diverse array of life experiences can also inhibit the ways in which tutors might become peers with writers. Ryane believes the issue of life experience goes beyond merely a non-traditional student being older than a tutor but is also the result of a lack of understanding writing expectations in the university. She says,

It's just understood that once you get into a university setting, it's just understood that your writing has to take a totally different format and tone and things like that, and it's not something that people are familiar with or even aware of. It's like an unspoken rule or something. So I think, too, that it has a lot to do with it, and to have a younger person say, you know, 'You're doing it wrong, your tone's

not right,' or 'You have to have a different diction—use different vocabulary,' you know, it's almost like telling them their paper's not good enough or it's not right, or they're not smart enough, or it doesn't sound like they're smart enough. [...] there's a certain way to do that when you're in an academic setting, that's hard to explain to anybody, and I think hard to explain especially to somebody who's been out of school for 10 or 20 years.

Ryane is articulating the idea that tutoring academic writing is hard in general, but the difficulty of tutoring is especially compounded by the fact that non-traditional students have different life experiences than traditional students. Ryane believes that non-traditional student-writers understand even less than most traditional students that writing style and expectations change when entering a university-setting. She assumes, though, that because of non-traditional students' life experiences, they are more prone to be offended when younger tutors explain these standards to them. She worries about making non-traditional students feel stupid compared to traditional students and traditional student-tutors. Respectfulness and constructive criticism clash headlong in Ryane's explanation of why she often feels the life experiences non-traditional student-writers have led them to become more resistant than other student-writers. Ryane's perceptions of student writers inhibit her ability to engage in peerness with them.

Because Ryane sees some non-traditional student-writers as resistant learners, she is likely to be predisposed to think all non-traditional student-writers are resistant to her attempts to create a sense of peerness between them. In fact, Ryane has a difficult time meeting with them in some area of common ground. Because common ground with resistant non-traditional writers frustrates Ryane, she is unable to work as colleagues with

these writers, and therefore she is unable to help them truly craft the paper they are capable of writing. Ryane's inability to engage in peerness with certain non-traditional students holds her back from engaging with meaningful work with them.

The types of resistance I've discussed above shed light on why it might be difficult if not impossible for tutors and non-traditional students to achieve peerness, but resistance can go further than simply disagreeing with a tutor's suggestions. Two of the four tutors I interviewed discuss non-traditional students as being set in their ways as though this were an extremely negative state of existence—one which does not lend itself to any kind of activity that might resemble the achievement of consensus that peerness is often described as. When I asked Dayna to explain why she thought non-traditional students might be resistant to her suggestions, she told me, "Maybe they're—and this might just be a stereotype—maybe they're a little more set in their ways? Like, 'This is the way I've been writing for all of this time, and I don't really want to change it. I feel happy with my level of writing,' and I wonder if that's part of it."

Dayna casts non-traditional students in a much more negative light than Keri does, who, as I will discuss later, perceives non-traditional students to be highly-motivated student-writers ready to meet with tutors as peers in the writing center. Because they have differing ideas of why non-traditional students are "set in their ways," they perceive a difference in their personal abilities to create degree of peerness with non-traditional students. When a writer is "set in her ways" because of outside pressures—job, boss, or social environment as Keri points out—the so-called stubbornness is less offensive than when tutors perceive a stubbornness about writing as originating within the student-writer herself, as Dayna does.

Ryane does not talk to the idea that non-traditional students are set in their ways, but what she does imply leads me to believe that she, too, perceives resistance as at least the partial product of life and work experience. She says,

I think maybe [non-traditional students] come in with a paper, and, because they are older and have more experience in the world, so to speak, that they come in, and they think that whatever they have is pretty much good to go. Or that you know, that they're right. [...] I guess maybe it could be insulting to a certain extent that a younger person is like, like you know, 'Maybe you should do this, or maybe you should do that, or that's not quite right.'

Ryane sees that sometimes non-traditional students are set in the belief that their writing is more or less "correct" or the best it can be because they know they are older than Ryane. She perceives of these students as resisting peerhood with her because they are fixated on the idea that she is changing their papers. Ryane perceives non-traditional student-writers to be resistant to taking advice from a younger mouth and brain—which keeps her from engaging as a peer with non-traditional students.

Her perspective, like Dayna's, is a negative perspective. Non-traditional student-writers are resistant to changing their ways or to seeing a new way of writing; they are reluctant to veer from the writing paths and patterns they are familiar with. Keri, on the other hand, sees that these writers are resistant to change because they have been socially conditioned to resist the change. Their previous lives have reinforced bad patterns and habits that the students themselves are wary of breaking from due to an anxiety of repercussions.

Ryane and Ashly both indicate that it is difficult for them to engage in peerness with non-traditional students, Dayna sees peerness being sacrificed through a type of disappointment. She sees non-traditional students as perhaps originally more motivated at the start of their writing center tutorials than non-traditional students, but she also sees less follow through. She recounts one experience with a student who “ended up adding like one sentence. Not much more than what was there [originally].” Though Dayna thought this might show evidence of a passive type of resistance towards tutors, she ultimately concedes that “maybe that’s the way that all students are, and I just see it more with non-traditional students.” Dayna also admits that her negative experiences with several non-traditional student-writers color the way she perceives experiences with all non-traditional student-writers. Therefore, for Dayna at least, non-traditional students are viewed as less receptive to improvement than traditional students. These perceptions of non-traditional student-writers are generalizations, and because they are generalizations, I gain an insight from them as to how tutors generalize about non-traditional students in ways that the university does not. I gain an understanding of how difficult it is to engage in peerness with both traditional and non-traditional students because of these generalizations.

Dayna also expects non-traditional student-writers who are older than she is to be able to communicate better than she does—and better than traditional student-writers do. The university does not take academic abilities into consideration when classifying students as traditional or non-traditional, but tutors such as Dayna and Ryane expect them to be better writers than they are because of their ages. Dayna says, “I guess I just expect older students because of their life experience to be better communicators and better

writers. I don't know why." She also says, "I almost feel like they should have it [communication/writing skills], and when they don't, I'm surprised. You know what I mean? Like, sometimes, I expect their writing to be quite a bit better than it is." Later in the interview, Dayna states she perceives her expectations to be unfair and that she should not compare the abilities of others to her own abilities because she has different experiences than they do. Still, Dayna's initial perception of how she responds to non-traditional students is one of disbelief—she is incredulous that their writing is not better than it is. She projects the idea of writing getting better with age—not necessarily with practice—onto non-traditional student-writers. Dayna's expectations, and her projections of those expectations onto many non-traditional students, further breaks down her ability to meet non-traditional students as peers. She sees a conflict in the types of work she feels non-traditional students are capable of and the types of work she sees them doing. She experiences a type of frustration from these observations that leaves her almost unwilling to work to become peers with non-traditional students, so high is her level of anxiety when working with these writers.

Finally, Dayna pinpoints what it means to be a peer or work to become a peer in terms of getting around age by expressing confusion over what it means to be classified as a non-traditional student. Ashly articulates a similar idea in her responses. Both tutors think of non-traditional student-writers as writers who are significantly, visually older than they are. Dayna says she has difficulties working with student-writers who are mostly much older than she is: "like my parents [age], [...] Probably about twenty years older. Maybe even ten years older, though." Ashly has a similar idea of who the non-traditional student is: "What I see as the non-traditional student is somebody that is

significantly older than me. So, I'm thinking, fifteen, twenty years older than me. And I'm 21, so that's what jumps me into that closer to 40 range. I think the other thing is that I'm looking for someone who's more like my mom." Therefore, Ashly and Dayna may have some denial about the difference between non-traditional and traditional students because of their perceptions of what it means to be a non-traditional student at Texas State. This complicates the notion of peerness. Both of these tutors are inhibited in creating peerness with student-writers when they perceive of those writers as being *significantly* older than they themselves are, suggesting that the amount of years between tutor and student is often a factor in complicating peerness. The more years between a tutor and a writer, the more difficult it is to find common ground.

Tutors perceive a disconnect between their lives and the lives of the non-traditional students they work with. Initially, tutors may not have perceived age as a potentially inhibiting, problematic, complex factor in their tutorial sessions when they first began to tutor. However, as tutors work with more and more non-traditional students, they begin to perceive of non-traditional student writers in a certain way—they perceive non-traditional students as different than themselves, which further inhibits the creation of peerness. As Ryane aptly points out while describing one of her first tutorial sessions with a non-traditional student-writer:

Well, I think too, that was one of my first, I think, non-traditional students I had tutored, which—I don't want to say that it was awkward for me? But I guess it wasn't something that I had expected to encounter. Like, I mean—I thought, you know, I'm tutoring at a college—university, you know? I'm tutoring people that are like me. Well—not the case.

Ryane's insight describes my own miniature epiphany when I first tutored a non-traditional student-writer: amazement, near-shock, deer-in-the-headlights, delayed reaction to the newness of the situation. Both Ryane and I were confronted with an initial perception of lack of peerness, which we then had to actively work against in order to achieve any degree of peerness. Ashly seems to have had a very different reaction than either Ryane or I had. Ashly took tutoring situations with non-traditional students in stride as just another type of student to work with on writing, another tutorial to engage in—no differences. Somehow, I just cannot bring myself to believe her. Her denial of the ways age affects peerness seems similar to a white male tutor's denial that race and ethnicity affect his ability to engage in peerness with a black male writer.

*Age as Enabling Peerness*

Although much of what the tutors I interviewed had to say demonstrated obstacles that impede the acquisition of peerness between tutors and non-traditional students, some of what they discussed leads me to see that non-traditional student-writers are often likely to inspire and help enable peerness to actively shape the tutorial session. More specifically, the diverse array of life experiences non-traditional students have does not always lead to negative situations in the writing center; tutors' perceptions of a lack of peerness does not necessarily prevent peerness from forming. Ashly, a traditional student-tutor, and Keri, a non-traditional student-tutor, both found tutorials with non-traditional students more fulfilling for themselves as well as the writers they worked with because of writers' life experiences. I often find enjoyment in working with non-traditional student writers now because I feel they do have more to offer in terms of life experience; they have an age-related wisdom that, while not necessarily improving their

writing, allows non-traditional students to see the world from an often more critical perspective. Ashly and Keri found non-traditional students' perspectives to be enlightening, producing higher quality tutorial sessions for these two particular tutors. Because Keri and Ashly appear more willing to initially perceive non-traditional student-writers *as* peers, these two tutors are more likely to actually engage these student-writers as peers in successful tutorials.

Ashly finds that “non-traditional students who come to the writing center are more motivated because they are deciding to come back to school. They’re seeking a change in their life, and then, in addition to that, they’re seeking [...] help. They recognize that they need help, and they’re looking for it.” Ashly sees non-traditional students’ life experiences as empowering. She sees their experiences in light of their assumed desire to start a new life, to learn from and move beyond previous life experiences. She also says that non-traditional students are “ready to listen to what you have to offer to them,” although she also recognizes that non-traditional students “might have a knowledge base that I might not have.” Her recognition “makes them more comfortable because I’m not assuming that, because I’m making us equal.” Here, Ashly’s insight into working with non-traditional students is complex. Ashly perceives that while non-traditional students do look for respect from younger tutors because of their more varied life experiences, they are also ready to seek advice. They have moved beyond their past experiences and are focusing more on their futures. Ashly finds these students to be more motivated to actively shape their futures as well as to seek help to shape their futures. The fact that she can relate to these students in terms of willingness to learn, excitement for schooling, and a motivated drive for a different life or future afford Ashly

some common ground with non-traditional students. They have common goals, and these common goals can be more important to creating peeriness than a difference in age can be to impeding peeriness.

At 35 years of age, Keri also sees non-traditional students as more motivated than traditional students and she also sees their motivational drive as enabling a degree of peeriness. She says she sees a certain excitement about non-traditional students that traditional students often lack. Keri admits she sees this excitement more in non-traditional students because she is able to relate to it:

I feel like there's a willingness and maybe more of an excitement to—just to be here in the first place. [...] That this is a privilege to be here, and I think I just sense that from them. I think I'm excited for them, too, in a way, you know, that we share something as a non-traditional student. That I sort of share that with them, and I understand how difficult it can be in particular the challenges for the non-traditional student.

Keri's willingness to relate to her fellow non-traditional students within the tutorial potentially frees her from age-related authority issues. Keri is free to interact with both traditional and non-traditional students that younger or younger-appearing tutors may not. In other words, the authority issue of life experience is not an issue for Keri. She is able to engage in peer tutoring because she sees tutoring as akin to teaching, in some ways, and she is to find common ground with them through her own diverse array of experiences, which leads her to teach and tutor non-traditional student-writers as a respecting peer. She says, "I found for myself, it was a little humbling to come back because, first of all, I think there's just this feeling that you know more than—you think

you know more than you know, but then at the same times, you will get told things in class that in the real world, it doesn't necessarily work that way."

As these comments suggest, Keri's life experiences allow her to relate more directly to non-traditional students. After at one point being a traditional student and being miserable, she left college and took up various careers. She gave up those careers to come back to school. Keri claims to draw on her own experiences to relate to the non-traditional students she tutors to create quality tutorials that both tutor and student can appreciate without much clash of age-related authority. To these students, Keri is a true peer—she has had experiences similar to the experiences they may have had, and she connects with non-traditional students on this level. Keri is able to engage more fully in peerness than another tutor at the writing center might because she feels the peerness more actively than another tutor might. The idea of peerness here is crucial to Keri's ability to interact, communicate, and work effectively with non-traditional students in the writing center.

Keri's situation is unique among the tutors I interviewed. While my personal feelings that it can often be difficult to tutor students older than I am—that it is often difficult to truly become peers with non-traditional students—are reflected by Dayna and Ryane's experiences, Keri is much harder for me to relate to and understand. I have not had the same experiences she has had: I began college at age 18, and I have gone straight through from undergraduate to graduate work. I have never had a career other than student, and my experiences of work (my work in writing centers and my work teaching composition, for example) do not often resonate with non-traditional student-writers. Therefore, Keri's responses forced me to question my own perceptions of peerness.

What I realize is that my perceptions of non-traditional students *has* been shaped by my experiences. I tend to be wary of them perhaps because I do not feel as though I have experiences I can share with them. I am younger than they are and am in a completely different position in terms of life experiences. It is hard for me to relate to these students, but I realize, too, that it is important to find some way to approach them as peers to help them grow as writers.

One of my more interesting findings is that tutors' perception that nontraditional students are set in their ways may actually contribute to, rather than inhibit, peerness. Tutors imagine non-traditional students are set in their ways—they are not open to someone else's writing expertise—and are thus more difficult to communicate with; it is more difficult for tutors to engage non-traditional student-writers as peers because tutors perceive writers' static perceptions of writing as inhibiting meaningful engagement. As noted earlier, Keri says,

I think you develop habits when you're older. By the time that you get into your 30s and 40s, you develop habits, and—you know, I actually got paid to do editing and copy editing work without a degree, and came back to college, and found out that I was short on grammar and punctuation [laughs] even though I had been paid to do it. So, sometimes, you get rewarded for not necessarily doing the right thing in the real world, so that ends up supporting misinformed or bad knowledge, or, you know, confusing knowledge. And I think that gets reinforced more by the time a person's older.

When tutors speak about non-traditional students being set in their ways, they view nontraditional students' prior knowledge as negative, a hindrance. This is a tactic I have

used in the past to remove the blame of guiding a tutorial unsuccessfully from my own shoulders, and it is a tactic I see other tutors using. However, Keri's comments show that patterns non-traditional student-writers fall into are not necessarily indicators of stubbornness or an unwillingness to learn, change, or grow as writers and students, but often. Instead, they may be indicators of patterns that are comfortable and familiar, patterns that when changed may trigger other life changes. However, these are life patterns for her, patterns she was raised with—the former to keep her house clean, the latter to avoid the stress of working-class financial difficulties. For example, my mother is set in her ways—that's why she always washes the dishes right after dinner or why she piles the bills on the kitchen table instead of filing them right away. Through Keri's insight, it becomes clear that non-traditional students' are not necessarily set in their ways because they feel they are the correct way to do engage in an activity, although tutors may perceive the situation in this way. Rather, these students have been shaped into these mannerisms—they have been molded by society, environment, and environmental habits, like Keri's copyediting habits, and to claim that they're just naturally stubborn or cantankerous—as Dayna and Ryane sometimes allude to—is a perceptions that inhibits tutors from engaging non-traditional students as peers. Keri's comments articulate how understanding non-traditional students' life experiences and the origins of their so-called stubbornness can actually *enable* peerness to thrive rather than inhibiting the creation of peerness.

Unlike the other tutors interviewed, Ashly does not see non-traditional student-writers as resistant to change, and because she does not see them as such, she is more likely to engage in peerness with them. She stereotypically sees these students as open to

change and educational growth. Ashly says, “I perceive [non-traditional students] as being down to business, and they want—they came in here for a reason. They don’t want to mess around, but—and they’re more open to the situation mentally. They’re more open to asking for help.” Ashly, then, does not see a negative resistance to non-traditional students changing their writing patterns. Instead, she sees them as willing and open to change; she sees them as actively seeking change. Ashly, therefore, sees age as enabling peerness, in some regards, although, as previously discussed, she is also inhibited from achieving peerness because of age on different occasions.

According to some tutors, non-traditional students are hyperaware of their abilities to learn, which is also a factor that can positively influence the acquiescence of peerness. Keri says they have a reaction to their own learning that is a type of “ah-ha! Kind of eureka kind of thing,” an excitement about learning that most traditional students do not seem to have. Keri admits that this type of learning may happen with traditional students, also, but she is more likely to see it as a reaction from non-traditional student-writers. Keri also claims she thinks non-traditional students are more likely to be “there because they want to be,” not because, like many English 1310 or 1320 students, they are at the writing center because they are required to be. Ashly also comments on non-traditional students’ hyperawareness of learning. She says “older students are more about getting things taken care of,” and she recounts one experience with a non-traditional student writer who “does things traditional students wouldn’t do. She reads the book, she takes her own notes, she brings them in and adds to them based on this professor’s lectures while he chastises other students for not writing and just staring at him.” In this account, Ashly sets up the non-traditional student in different terms than the university

would. This non-traditional student is a different type of student not because of life experiences but because of her desire to do well in school. Ashly voices the opinion that non-traditional students are better students—they take a more active role in their own learning than traditional students would. This is common ground that many tutors draw on to enable them to build the rapport of peerness with non-traditional students.

Ryane voices this idea when she discusses her first session with a non-traditional student-writer. Ryane says,

I remember calling my mom after I tutored that woman and saying, you know, I can't believe this! Somebody that's probably your age or a little bit younger, you know, and I'm teaching her small things! [...] I was shocked, too, because I'm like, how can you be that age and not know those things? And I mean, that too was a big eye-opener, because not everybody knows everything that I know, and there's—I'm sure—plenty of people that know things that I don't, but in that setting, I know more than the people coming in—or I can assume that, for the most part.

Ryane's tells us how younger tutors might react to non-traditional student-writers. Because of age difference, traditional student-tutors expect non-traditional students to know things they themselves do not know, or at least to know the same things they know. They expect to be at least on the same writing level as the non-traditional students they tutor. Tutors like Ryane and Dayna are shocked when non-traditional students do not have knowledge bases compatible with their own. Yet they also recognize, almost simultaneously, that the nontraditional student writer does come to the session with knowledge that the tutor doesn't possess. Ryane, for example, experiences a type of joy

with this particular non-traditional student when she realizes that she has something to offer the nontraditional student and that the nontraditional student inevitably has something to offer her. Ryane experiences, in other words, the joy of learning and sharing. While Ryane and the student-writer are not peers in terms of expertise, they are peers in terms of how and why they come together. They find common ground in their learning, and both leave the tutorial satisfied and happy, peerness having been achieved

Finally, tutors see non-traditional student-writers as more grateful than traditional student-writers, which makes tutors more inclined to *want* to be peers with non-traditional students. In articulating the story above, Ryane describes the woman she tutored: “I just think she was really appreciative.” Dayna echoes this sentiment in a story of her own about a non-traditional, ESL PhD student she worked with in a different writing center. Dayna says, “he was so grateful, that he gave me a really nice mechanical pencil from Korea. [...] That is something about non-traditional students, they’re often—I was just thinking about Janna because I felt so good about that first appointment. She was so grateful at the end for my help.” Dayna clearly sees non-traditional students as more responsive to help and more grateful for help than traditional students. She adds that she feels non-traditional students are more willing to show their gratitude to those who help them because “they’ve just lived longer, maybe they’re less self-centered. [...] They’re still happy [you helped them], and so they are more likely to say thank you.” Additionally, Keri also says she feels from non-traditional students that “there’s a little bit more of a sense of gratitude. That this is a privilege to be here” at the writing center and in the university.

Overall, tutors tended to see non-traditional students as more thankful for the help they receive at writing centers, even when the student-writers themselves seem resistant toward advice and suggestions from the tutors they worked with. Because non-traditional students appear more grateful, tutors can be more willing to work with them, more willing to become peers and share ideas they may not share with a student they may perceive as less interested in and less grateful for the help provided.

### **Piecing all of the Information Together**

In the next chapter, I will articulate how my preliminary findings may influence writing center practice and training in the future. I demonstrate the need for further research in the area of age-related tutor-student interaction and the idea of what it means to be a peer, but more importantly, I discuss how further studies can help bridge the gap between age-separated tutors and students. Additionally, I discuss the need to enhance tutor training based on the implications of my study in terms of diversity and technique training, but also in terms of awareness training and composition theory training.

## CHAPTER IV

### MOVING BEYOND THE DATA

#### **Fleshing Out the Field**

In this study, I argue that despite tutors' beliefs to the contrary, they do perceive non-traditional students in particular ways—ways that, as tutors describe it, might enable and inhibit their ability to work with nontraditional writers as "peers." Tutors perceive of non-traditional students differently than they perceive of traditional students, and the different dynamics they perceive in tutorial sessions affects their abilities to see and work with non-traditional students as peers in the writing center.

My study is one case study on one writing center in one university in the US. Yet I want to argue that while it isn't generalizable to other writing centers, this research study does suggest attitudes that would likely be found in other writing centers. As Dayna says, "It's funny to see, you know, from one writing center to another, you know, we have the same issues, the same problems come up. It's the same pretty much atmosphere." Like Dayna, I, too, have seen similarities between different writing centers. I see similarities between Texas State's Writing Center and the Western Michigan Writing Center (which I wrote a short profile on for a writing center administration course). I see similarities between Western Michigan's center and Moravian's and between Moravian's and Texas State's respective centers. As Dayna notes, the same issues come up in a variety of writing centers—often regardless of their different

contextual situations and locales. While one case study of a particular center is certainly not generalizable to the larger writing center community, it allows other writing centers to be more critical of this issue.

I want to turn now to a discussion of this study's implications—implications for research on peeriness, student-tutor interactions, and the affect of age in the writing center as well as implications for tutor training in the center.

*The Need for Further Research on Age-Related Contact Zones*

My research points out that tutors may at first be resistant to the idea that age affects tutorials at all, but the current field of composition and writing center studies, as I articulate earlier, understands writing center work to be an extension of composition work—both of which have strong ties to the idea that postmodern identities shape writerly identities. Therefore, it stands to reason that even as tutors sometimes deny the effect gender or race may have on a tutorial session—as Rafoth et al. articulate—the effect is still there. If tutors do not necessarily “see” writers' age, then they think age does not affect tutorials. However, postmodern composition studies details the ways both evident and hidden identities affect writing and writerly identity. The fact that tutors do not see age does not mean tutor-student age dynamics do not affect the course of the tutorial session. Because all pieces of writers' identities affect their writing and their interactions with other writers (or tutors), and especially because tutors are more likely to initially deny writers' ages are a factor in tutorial sessions, age-related contact zones in writing centers need to be given more attention than they have previously been given. That is, they need to be studied.

The question then becomes, what exactly needs to be studied? My research points out four areas affecting authority negotiations in tutorials: stereotypes tutors have of non-traditional students, how tutors define non-traditional students, how tutors deny age in the writing center, and finally, how tutors relate to non-traditional tutors in terms of peerness. I argue tutors perceive a difficulty in attaining peerness with non-traditional students. Achieving peerness in order to guide a successful tutorial can be inhibited or enabled by a student's age in relation to a tutor's age. Because tutors' perceive a student's relative age as affecting a tutorial, tutors' actions based on their perceptions must be explored in greater detail.

If writing center staff had an ample amount of time and resources, they could focus their research on looking more in depth at these themes through both interview and observation. The confines of this case study could be extended. Researchers might ask more specifically, "What are the various ways tutors deny age-related authority-issues in tutorials?" They might ask tutors how they portray or deny they own ages. These two issues may be at the heart of the matter. In the same way, composition studies has had to move beyond being "color-blind" (Villanueva) in order to explore the ways in which race impacts writerly identity, we must also move beyond being "age blind." Compositionists in the classroom and the writing center had to identify race as a genuine factor that affects how students write and how they interact with other students. As writing center studies has embraced the idea of postmodern identities and the idea that the political is personal, writing centers need to begin to examine all aspects of tutors and students' identities and how those identities interact and affect tutorial sessions, not simply students' writing.

These important questions—“How do tutors and students deny age?” “How do they portray age?” “How do they read and interact with age?”—will guide future researchers to a better understanding of how the age-related contact zone is played out in tutorial sessions. In order to answer these questions more fully than I have done in this particular study, more qualitative data will need to be collected. To answer these questions, researchers will have to immerse themselves in the writing center. They will have to draw not only on surveys and interviews as I did, but they will also have to use these methods with more frequency while incorporating other methods of data-gathering.

They will have to write more in terms of surveys—not just more questions, but more surveys for tutors to take. Tutors might be asked to take a variety of surveys in one study. Students may also be asked to respond to surveys, thus allowing researchers to see both sides of the age-related contact zone, not simply a one-sided view of what tutors say about non-traditional student. Additionally, there need to be many more interviews than the number I was able to complete during the course of my study.

Seidman suggests a three-interview series approach to interviewing that would be beneficial to a lengthier case study (16-17). Several interviews over the course of the study would allow interviewers to see how participants' ideas changed over time and would also allow interviewers to come back and clarify statements and ideas raised in earlier interviews. Interviews also need to involve a larger variety of writing center participants: tutors, student-writers, staff, directors, assistants, etc. should all be a part of the study.

Finally, researchers must utilize observations. They need to observe the age-related contact zone in the writing center. They might observe a variety of tutor-student

interactions in the writing center. They can focus traditional tutors working with non-traditional student-writers, the reverse, or even interactions between tutors and students of the same age-related classification (non-traditional students and tutors working together or traditional students and tutors working together). Researchers might observe and record observations by hand, or they might also be video or tape record sessions to record and build the data pool for future research and writing center archive projects

By structuring research around over-arching questions that attempt to tease out and explain the age-related contact zone in the writing center, researchers will come to see age as an important part of writerly identities. Age-blindness, like color-blindness, keeps tutors and students from fully understanding, articulating, and drawing from their personal identities.

### **Affects of Seeing the Age-Related Contact Zone in Writing Centers**

Because I see from my preliminary findings in this case study that age is a viable dynamic to study in the writing center, I am also concerned about how tutors are trained to work with non-traditional students. To date, the issue of age has been almost wholly ignored. *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring*, for example, includes chapters devoted to working with a diversity of students—including students of different races, genders, ESL students, and students that might be resistant in varying ways—but it contains nothing about nontraditional students and the dynamics set in motion by age. *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* draws on composition and writing center theory to give tutors a theoretical base on how to tutor student-writers based on a solid foundation of what it means to have postmodern identities in the writing center, yet it too fails to include any discussion about age. My point is that while popular

tutor training manuals such as these offer tutors valuable insight into working with a diverse array of students, they ignore issues of race.

If the readings used in tutor training do not address age as a true possibility affecting writing center sessions, then how can we expect tutors to understand, at times interrogate, at times draw upon, their own perceptions about age? In order to remedy the situation, not only does more research need to be done, more theory and more pedagogical implications have to be written, but also writing center staff must be educated that age-related contact zones do arise in the writing center. Incorporating theoretical readings about various contact zones and adult-learners into tutor training courses will begin to acclimate tutors to the idea that different types of students learn and write in different ways. By educating writing center staff that age plays a role in tutor-student interactions is a vital first step to helping tutors negotiate authority with this particular group of students. Tutor training programs must demonstrate to tutors that age is a part of writers' identities and therefore a part of their writerly identities. Tutors must understand that they react differently to students of varying ages. By using theory about contact zones and adult-learners in tutor training programs, tutors begin to see students' multiple identities. Additionally, role-playing different types of student-writers will help tutors place themselves in student-writers' positions. They will learn to think about what it means to have a particular identity, which is useful for tutors working with a variety of student-writers. The key is to help tutors understand that students have multiple identities. These multiple identities affect students' writing in different ways, and by asking tutors to write on or role-play different possibilities of identities, tutors begin to learn that tutorial sessions can be tailored to the particular needs of the students tutors work with.

Tutors must also understand that their perceptions of and reactions to students of varying ages might be used for good or ill in the writing center session. Just as training programs often push tutors to see differences in students and to learn to understand how their perceptions of those differences may affect the way they interact with student-writers, training programs must force tutors to see age as a potential difference. Training programs must help tutors analyze their own perceptions of what age means in the writing center as I have attempted to push Texas State Writing Center tutors to be critical of how they perceive of non-traditional student-writers and the assumptions they might have about these students. They might create skits that identified hypothetical non-traditional student-writers, or they might ask tutors to read theory about adult-learners and ask tutors to relate this theory to their own work in the center. During training, tutors might meet with non-traditional student organization to discuss their needs and concerns, engaging in a dialogue about what it means to work in the center with each other

### **Conclusion**

All of us who work in writing centers—from directors to tutors--should be taught to see age as a difference, to respect that difference, and be critical of their own assumptions and perceptions of that difference when they come into contact with it in the confines of the writing center tutorial. Because current conversations in writing center studies revolve around tutor talk and tutor-student interactions, we need to continue to be critical of the idea of peerness and carefully examine contact zones that illuminate our ideas of what it means to be a peer, how peerness can be attained, and even whether or not peerness is desirable

## APPENDIX A

### VOLUNTARY SURVEY—PERCEPTIONS OF WRITING CENTER TUTORS'

**PLEASE Return to Courtney's Survey Box in the Writing Center Lobby no later than 12pm (noon) on Thursday, February 7, 2008.  
This survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.**

I want to sincerely thank you for your time and participation in this survey. My name is Courtney Werner, and I am interested in studying "tutor talk." More specifically, I am interested in studying how writing center tutors interact with students based on age. The perceptions tutors have towards students often shapes how they interact with those students, and I am interested in studying how age might affect (if at all) tutor-student interaction in the writing center. I would like to conduct short, follow-up interviews with some participants. **If you are willing to speak with me further about the issues in this survey, please include your e-mail and name in the spaces provided at the top of the page.** Interviews will take roughly 45 minutes, and you will remain anonymous in any publications. Thanks for your participation!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Sex: Female\_\_\_ Male\_\_\_
2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Number of semesters worked at the writing center: \_\_\_\_\_
4. How many student-writers do you typically work with per week?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Please rank how important you think the following are in working with a student based on your experiences. Rank according to 1 as most important and 6 as least important.  
  
Sex/Gender \_\_\_\_\_  
Race \_\_\_\_\_

Religion \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Sexual Orientation \_\_\_\_\_

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_ rank: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Roughly what percentage of non-traditional student-writers (26+) have you worked with throughout your time in the Texas State Writing Center?

0%    1-25%    26-50%    51-75%    76-100%

7. How many non-traditional students do you work with per week?

0    1-10    11-20    21-30    31-40    41-50  
50+

8. What are the ages of the student-writers you work with most frequently?

Ages: 17-20    21-25    26-30    30+

9. Briefly describe the process or ritual you go through when you sit down to tutor

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For the questions below, please place  $\checkmark$  or  $\times$  in the appropriate column to demonstrate how strongly you agree or disagree with the statements. You will find space for comments after each statement if you would like to comment further about your response.

	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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10.	The writer's gender affects the success of the tutorial Comment: _____ _____ _____				
11.	The writer's age affects the success of the tutorial. Comment: _____ _____ _____				
12.	The writer's ethnicity affects the success of the tutorial. Comment: _____ _____ _____				
13.	I enjoy working with non-traditional writers. Comment: _____ _____ _____				
	<b>Statement</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
14.	I do not enjoy working with non-traditional writers. Comment: _____ _____ _____				
15.	My experiences suggest the writer's age has an impact on the tutorial. Comment: _____ _____ _____				
16.	Writers who are 26+ are more difficult to work with Comment: _____ _____ _____				
17.	Writers who are 26+ are easier to work with Comment: _____ _____ _____				

Based on your experiences working with non-traditional student writers (26+), please complete the following statements. If you have no actual experiences with non-traditional student-writers (26+), what are your perceptions in regards to the following statements?

18. Working with non-traditional writers (26+) means:

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19. Working with younger writers (25 and younger) means:

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20. I appreciate working with non-traditional writers (26+) because:

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21. I appreciate working with younger (25 and younger) writers because:

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22. I find it difficult to work with non-traditional writers (26+) because:

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23. I find it difficult to work with younger writers (25 and younger) because:

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24. Additional comments:

## APPENDIX B

### Consent Form

#### Negotiating Authority: Age in the Writing Center

You are invited to participate in a study of “tutor talk” at the Texas State University Writing Center. In this study, I attempt to understand how a writer’s or tutor’s age may shape writing center tutors’ perceptions of and actions towards student-writers. My name is Courtney Werner, and I will be conducting this research as a part of my master’s thesis for the MA in Rhetoric and Composition program. You will be one of four (4) interview participants in this study. If you would like to contact me with any questions throughout any stage in the research or publication process, please feel free to contact me at [cw1300@txstate.edu](mailto:cw1300@txstate.edu) or (610) 417-8040.

You have been asked to participate in this research because you filled out a previous survey in conjunction with this project and agreed to allow me to contact you for further participation. You have also been asked to participate as an interviewee because your responses on the survey were particularly interesting or summed up a variety of tutors’ responses. If you decide to participate, I would ask you to allow me to interview you for a period of about 45 minutes. There will only be one interview, but I ask that if questions come up in regards to one of your responses that you allow me to contact you for further qualifications. The interviews will be tape recorded for later transcription. A summary of the findings will be provided to participants upon completion of the study if requested.

Your decision whether or not to participate in the interview process will not affect your future relations with Texas State University of the Texas State University Writing Center in any way—neither negatively nor positively. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue your participation and withdraw any information you have supplied at any time without prejudice. If I use any information gained from your interview, you have the option to remain anonymous in any publications. If you do not specifically express your wish to remain anonymous, I may use your first name in publications. If you expressly desire to remain anonymous, I will use a pseudonym when referencing any of your responses, and I will not include any information that may single you out as the interviewee.

Although there is no compensation for participating in this interview, you may learn more about your own ideas about how age influences work done in writing centers. Because you have the option of remaining completely anonymous, this project has no risks. However, if any questions in the interview make you uncomfortable in any way, you may choose not to answer those questions. You do not have to supply a reason for choosing not to answer a question.

All pertinent questions about the research, research participants’ rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants, should be directed to one or both of the IRB co-chairs, Dr. Eric Schmidt (512-245-3979 – [es17@txstate.edu](mailto:es17@txstate.edu)) and/or Dr. Lisa Lloyd (512-245-8358 – [LL12@txstate.edu](mailto:LL12@txstate.edu)), or to the OSP Administrator, Ms. Becky Northcut, at 512-245-2102.

You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

You are making a decision about whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. Should you choose to discontinue participation in this study, you may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Questionnaire for Ashly Bender

- 1) I've arranged this interview because your survey was particularly interesting to me. You are the youngest tutor to respond to the survey, and I'd like to give you an opportunity to discuss your survey answers more fully.
- 2) You say on the survey that you don't think any of a writer's physical or demographic attributes impact the tutorial—either race nor gender nor age. Can you elaborate on your response a bit? Why don't you think any of these things affect the success of a tutorial—and maybe can you explain how you interpret the phrase “success of the tutorial?”
- 3) You also wrote on the survey that you think neither non-traditional or traditional students are easier to work with. I get the feeling you see no difference here—why is that? Why isn't one group of students easier to work with than another?
- 4) You also claim non-traditional students can be “more willing to be present.” Can you say a little more about that?
- 5) You saw on the survey that working with non-traditional students means working with someone who has more experience. What do you mean by that? By more experience?
- 6) Can you tell me about your initial reaction when you find out one of your appointments is older than you are? Is there a difference if the person is one year older or 5, even 10 or more years older?
- 7) What goes through your mind when you are faced with tutoring a non-traditional student?
- 8) You also say that working with non-traditional students means working with students who are older than you. How does the fact that the student is older than you affect how you think about your position in the tutorial? Do you begin conferences differently if the student is older or younger than you expect? Tell me about how your conference ritual *might* change depending on the student's age.
- 9) You say on the survey that traditional students are disinterested—they probably don't have their prompts and they might use cell phones during conferences. How does your view of non-traditional students differ from this?
- 10) Can you tell me a story about the most rewarding experience you've had with a non-traditional student/writer?
- 11) How about your most challenging experience with a non-traditional writer?
- 12) What do you think these stories say about your tutoring?

- 13) As we discussed a little earlier, you say non-traditional students have more experience than you do. Can you discuss that a little more?
- 14) So then, how does a writer's life experience affect what she is writing about and how you talk with her about her writing?
- 15) Can you tell me a story about a tutoring experience with a non-traditional student-writer where you learned something?
- 16) You say you can joke with traditional student writers more easily, make them feel more comfortable in the tutorial this way. How then, do you act with non-traditional students? Do you think that changes the tutorial process and your own mannerisms?
- 17) How does the age of the student-writer you're working with make you feel about yourself?
- 18) You say that sometime non-traditional student-writers are resistant to you, that they "don't respect [your] knowledge base." Can you say a little bit more about that? Can you tell a story about a time when you felt this way in a tutorial?
- 19) How do non-traditional students make this attitude known to you? Is it explicit or implicit?
- 20) Tell me a story about helping a non-traditional student take a new look at her or his writing process. Do you ever suggest different techniques, even as simple as PIE, and how do non-traditional student writers react?
- 21) Your final comment on the survey was that you don't pay attention to age, gender, ethnicity, etc; you pay attention to attitude. Do you think age can affect a student's attitude?
- 22) Do you think your age affects your attitude towards tutoring or schooling at all?
- 23) Would you like to give any final comments on anything we've talked about, or anything we haven't touched on?

## APPENDIX D

### Interview Questionnaire for Ryane Hopper

1. I've arranged this interview because your survey was particularly interesting to me, and I'd like to give you an opportunity to discuss your survey answers more fully.
2. You say on the survey that you do think a writer's demographics sometimes affects a tutorial—if they are writing about the opposite gender or are ESL students—and you also say age affects the success of the tutorial: You strongly agree that it does and you go on to say younger students will make any change suggested, but non-traditional students often contest your suggestions. Do you think this is a general pattern? Can you tell me a story about a particular non-traditional student you worked with where this struggle occurred?
3. Why do you think non-traditional student-writers tend to contest your suggestions?
4. At the same time, you say you enjoy working with non-traditional student-writers—why do you enjoy working with them, especially in light of your comments about their arguing your advice?
5. You say you agree that your experience shows age can impact the tutorial, but not always. Can you elaborate a little? Maybe tell me a story about an experience where age did affect the tutorial and another when it didn't?
6. You also say non-traditional students are both easier and harder to work with, at times, than traditional students because sometimes they don't understand academic expectations—they are less knowledgeable about how to play the academic game and can find it hard to analyze texts. Can you talk about this a little more, maybe give me a story to illustrate your point?
7. How do you communicate academic expectations to these students? Especially when, as you say, you work with “writers' vast experience.” Can you also elaborate on that phrase a little more?
8. Why do you think non-traditional students are more concerned with learning and improving writing overall rather than just earning an A?
9. How does this assumption affect how you approach the tutorial?
10. Can you tell me about a particular time when, as you say on the survey, you felt a non-traditional student asked you questions to “test” you?
11. How did that make you feel about yourself/your tutoring?
12. How do non-traditional students make this attitude known to you? Is it explicit or implicit?
13. Can you tell me about your initial reaction when you find out one of your appointments is older than you are. Is there a difference if the person is one year older or 5, even 10 or more years older?

14. What goes through your mind when you are faced with tutoring a non-traditional student?
15. Can you tell me a story about the most rewarding experience you've had with a non-traditional student-writer?
16. How about your most challenging experience with a non-traditional writer?
17. What do you think these stories say about your tutoring?
18. Can you tell me a story about a tutoring experience with a non-traditional student-writer where you learned something?
19. Do you act differently in a tutorial with non-traditional students than you would with traditional students?
20. How does the age of the student-writer you're working with make you feel about yourself?
21. Tell me a story about helping a non-traditional student take a new look at her or his writing process. You said you suggest different techniques—even as simple as PIE—how do non-traditional student writers react?
22. Do you think your age affects your attitude towards tutoring or schooling at all?
23. Would you like to give any final comments on anything we've talked about, or anything we haven't touched on?

## APPENDIX E

### Interview Questionnaire for Keri Fitzgerald

1. I've arranged this interview because your survey was particularly interesting to me, and I'd like to give you an opportunity to discuss your survey answers more fully.
2. You say on the survey that you think religion is the most important demographic of a student in the confines of a tutorial is religion. You were the only tutor to say this, so I thought I'd ask why you think that is, and if you can give me any examples of tutorials where this was especially important?
3. How do you define a successful tutorial?
4. On the survey, you say age rarely affects the success of the tutorial. You also say you enjoy working with non-traditional student-writers because you yourself are a non-traditional student. Do you think that these are connected? Why or why not?
5. Can you elaborate on your experiences as a non-traditional student tutoring in the writing center?
6. Do you think your age affects how you connect with other students?
7. Do you enjoy working with non-traditional students more than traditional students because you are a non-traditional student?
8. You say sometimes a writer's age affects the tutorial mainly because non-traditional students have life experience that may conflict with what is learned in the classroom. Can you elaborate a little more? Tell a story of a time when this was true—a particular vivid story?
9. On the survey, you say non-traditional students are sometimes more difficult to work with because their life experiences conflict with that of the classroom. How does this make tutoring more difficult?
10. You say that non-traditional students are easier to work with, in general, because they are usually in college because they want to be, not because of parent expectations. How does this translate into "easier to work with" in the writing center? Can you tell a story contrasting the difference you see here between traditional and non-traditional students?
11. How do non-traditional students make this attitude known to you? Is it explicit or implicit?
12. How do you help these students negotiate these problems?
13. Does your age affect how/if you sympathize with non-traditional students' experience/classroom dilemma?
14. You say non-traditional student-writers are serious about their education—how do you know this to be true?
15. Where do you think your assumptions about traditional students' apathy toward college/writing center tutoring/ writing in general come from?

16. How does that make you feel about yourself/your tutoring?
17. Can you tell me about your initial reaction when you find out one of your appointments is older than you are. Is there a difference if the person is one year older or 5, even 10 or more years older?
18. What goes through your mind when you are faced with tutoring a non-traditional student?
19. Can you tell me a story about the most rewarding experience you've had with a non-traditional student-writer?
20. How about your most challenging experience with a non-traditional writer?
21. What do you think these stories say about your tutoring?
22. Can you tell me a story about a tutoring experience with a non-traditional student-writer where you learned something?
23. Do you act differently in a tutorial with non-traditional students than you would with traditional students?
24. How does the age of the student-writer you're working with make you feel about yourself?
25. Tell me a story about helping a non-traditional student take a new look at her or his writing process. You said you suggest different techniques—even as simple as PIE—how do non-traditional student writers react?
26. Would you like to give any final comments on anything we've talked about, or anything we haven't touched on?

## APPENDIX F

### Interview Questionnaire for Dayna Patterson

1. I've arranged this interview because your survey was particularly interesting to me, and I'd like to give you an opportunity to discuss your survey answers more fully.
2. What was the writing center you worked at before like? Where was it? Did you see more, less, or about the same amount of non-traditional students there?
3. You say on the survey that you race is the most important factor that affects working with students and age is second most important? Can you elaborate on this a little more?
4. How do you define a successful tutorial?
5. You are one of the few tutors to claim that 51-75% of the students you work with are non-traditional. Why do you think that is?
6. Can you elaborate on your experiences as a non-traditional student tutoring in the writing center?
7. You say that sometimes you're more hesitant to give critical feedback to students depending on age. Why? Can you elaborate on this a little more? Do you think your age affects how you connect with other students?
8. Can you tell me a story of a time where you felt hard-pressed to offer critical advice because of age?
9. Do you enjoy working with non-traditional students more than traditional students because you are a non-traditional student?
10. Why do you think it's more challenging to work with non-traditional students? What makes it so difficult?
11. Can you tell me a story about a particularly difficult session you had with a non-traditional student and tell me a little bit about what made it so difficult?
12. You also say you enjoy working with non-traditional students—what do you particularly enjoy about it?
13. Can you tell me a story of a session with a non-traditional student that you particularly enjoyed and why you enjoyed it?
14. On the survey, you say non-traditional students are sometimes easier to work with—is it because, as you say, they tend to be more mature? What exactly do you mean by more mature?
15. You also say they have more writing experience—what kinds of writing experience do they bring to the table?
16. You say their writing experience and age also can make it difficult for you to work with non-traditional students because they are “set in their ways.” Can you talk about this a little? Maybe tell a story about a non-traditional student-writer who was set in her ways?

17. You say non-traditional students often teach you something—what kinds of things do they teach you? Why do you enjoy learning from them? Can you tell me a story about a session in which you really learned something? A vivid story?
18. Your final comment on the survey is that you are less intimidated by student-writers when you are older than they are. Why do you think that is?
19. Can you tell a story about a time you were particularly intimidated by a student older than you? What intimidated you about this session/student?
20. Can you tell me about your initial reaction when you find out one of your appointments is older than you are. Is there a difference if the person is one year older or 5, even 10 or more years older?
21. What goes through your mind when you are faced with tutoring a non-traditional student?
22. Can you tell me a story about the most rewarding experience you've had with a non-traditional student-writer?
23. How about your most challenging experience with a non-traditional writer?
24. What do you think these stories say about your tutoring?
25. Can you tell me a story about a tutoring experience with a non-traditional student-writer where you learned something?
26. Do you act differently in a tutorial with non-traditional students than you would with traditional students?
27. How does the age of the student-writer you're working with make you feel about yourself?
28. Do you think issues of age should be discussed in writing center training? Why or why not?
29. Would you like to give any final comments on anything we've talked about, or anything we haven't touched on?

## APPENDIX G

Exemption Request 22-87463  
Northcut, Susan R on behalf of ospirb  
Sent: Thursday, February 21, 2008 2:16 PM  
To:  
Werner, Courtney L  
Cc:  
Jackson, Rebecca L  
Attachments:  
Exemption Request

Based on the information in the exemption request 22-87463, which you sent Tuesday, January 22, 2008, your project has been found exempt.

Your project is exempt from full or expedited review by the Texas State Institutional Review Board.

--

Institutional Review Board  
ospirb@txstate.edu  
Office of Sponsored Programs  
Texas State University-San Marcos  
(ph) 512/245-2102 / (fax) 512/245-1822  
JCK 420  
601 University Drive  
San Marcos, TX 78666  
Texas State University-San Marcos is a member of the Texas State University System

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## VITA

Courtney Lynn Werner was born in Effort, Pennsylvania, on May 11, 1984 to Catherine A. Werner and Gilbert C. Werner. In 2002, Courtney graduated with honors from Pleasant Valley High School and pursued an undergraduate degree. In 2006, Courtney graduated with honors in Writing and Religion from Moravian College and Theological Seminary, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, having earned a Bachelor of Arts. Courtney was offered admission to Texas State University-San Marcos in the Master of Rhetoric and Composition program in fall 2006.

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This thesis was typed by Courtney L. Werner.

