Writing Center Tutors' Perceptions of Social Justice Issues: A Multiple Method Qualitative Study

Elizabeth L. Witherite
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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WRITING CENTER TUTORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES:
A MULTIPLE METHOD QUALITATIVE STUDY

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Elizabeth L. Witherite
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
May 2014
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Title: Writing Center Tutors’ Perceptions of Social Justice Issues: A Multiple Method Qualitative Study

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Following literature by Grimm (1999), Denny (2010), and Condon (2012), this study explored tutors’ perceptions based on Bell’s (2007) framework, which described similarities among various manifestations of social injustices, by considering the research question: How do peer tutors experience and conceptualize social justice issues within the context of tutoring sessions in the writing center? Data were collected from eight participants through interviews, concept mapping tasks, and social category ranking tasks, yielding 8.5 hours of audio-recorded data and 145 pages of transcriptions.

Findings included evidence that tutors experience social injustices as occasionally insurmountable barriers to tutoring. This research also revealed that some injustices are more visible to tutors, participants recognized oppression as manifesting in language, some tutors seek explanations for injustices, and most tutors defer to higher authorities (i.e., professors, academic discourse). Based on these findings, I argue that presumptions must be openly discussed and reconceptualized by all writing center stakeholders.
Before any particular individuals, I must acknowledge that my work has been inspired and encouraged primarily through my faith. Guidance, wisdom, and compassion have been and always will be there any time that I am humble enough to ask. Have I earned this grace? Of course not. Yet when I understood that I would be forgiven for any and all sins if I turned to a better way, I realized that moving forward is possible.

I once tutored a student in the IUP Writing Center who said to me, “it takes a village to write a dissertation.” When I consider all of the individuals who have helped me through the thesis writing process, I see just what she meant. My village is full of mentors, family, and friends; as with many things in life, though, the lines between the categories often blur. First, I would like to thank my mentors: Dr. Ben Rafoth, who has been such a wonderful, helpful, encouraging adviser and has the patience of a saint; Dr. Gloria Park, who has changed the way I see the world and helped me discover my own analytical skills; Dr. David Hanauer, who provided indispensable feedback on the development of my thesis; and Dr. Sharon Deckert, who I am honored to have as a member of my thesis committee. I would also like to thank Dr. Veronica Watson, Dr. sj Miller, and Dr. Ron Shafer for their guidance years ago, which led me to pursue studies in social justice and dream of a better world. Finally, I will be forever grateful to Kyle Nuske, John Grant, Leigh Ann Dunning, and Becky Driscoll, who each encouraged and enlightened me throughout the process of writing my thesis.

I have also been blessed with a wonderful MA TESOL cohort. Everyone in our cohort has helped me through this journey in one way or another, and they have shared their thoughts, hearts, and kindness with me in ways that I will never forget. To Tati,
Catherine, Meghan, Berry, Sherry, Muna, Suad, Rossella, and Mohammed: thank you for all of your kindness, for all of the laughs, and for being with me during my MA TESOL journey. Dear Jocelyn, my honorary sister, it is your strength, faith, and love that has carried me through so much, and you have reminded me often that I need only to look to God for any answer I seek. Did you know that I have worn your woven bracelet around my ankle from the start to the finish of this thesis? It will come off some day, but there is another from you, woven around my heart, that will always remind me of the blessing that is your lifelong friendship. Dear Najah, you, too, are my honorary sister. You have taught me so much about thoughtfulness and kindness, and from your guidance, I have also built my faith. The way that you use your knowledge to better understand God’s hopes for us inspires me every day. Dear Tarah, also dear to me as a sister, your passion for social justice has driven me to continue this work. Thank you so much for your patience, and for our many conversations where we tried, and gradually were able, to find words for those realities that have exasperated us for so long.

To my wonderful family: I know you waited three years to see me while I was in South Korea; thank you for waiting even longer while I composed this piece. To Bap and Jaron: you have both prevented me from getting scurvy; without you, I would have had serious vitamin deficiencies from eating only crackers over the keyboard. Thank you for always surrounding me with “home,” no matter where I am. Bap, you’ve always inspired me to put myself in someone else’s shoes; thank you so much for always reminding me of the love that God would want me to show everyone on earth, no matter what. Jaron, thank you for your unconditional support and your willingness to drop everything to discuss my concerns, doubts, and subheadings at all hours. You are truly my better half.
I could not have completed this thesis without Mama Pam, whose Sunday-at-noon phone calls allowed me to recharge and dream of life after thesis. Mom, I don’t know how you did it, but you always managed to say just what I needed to hear each time we’ve talked. Your spirit guides you in beautiful ways, and I am so thankful that you share your heart with me, as well.

Dad, thank you so much for always welcoming me home with a bear hug and a cup of tea, understanding when I had to dash off so suddenly to revise a chapter, and calling me regularly to make sure that I hadn’t gone completely crazy. I can always tell by the way you smile at me that you’re so proud of me, and knowing that gave me the energy to see it through.

If I would list how much everyone has helped me, this thesis would quickly reach 300 pages. I’ll let you each know how you have helped me, but for now, I’d like to say thank you to all of my participants and to Jeff, Amanda, Carissa, Robin, Devin, Joseph, Chris A., Damon, Eli, Bradley, Christian, Jay, Ethan, Hayden, Paige, Alejandro, Granddad, Casey, Ramsey, Paula, Grandma Johnston, Heather, Zander, Marcia, Candy, Craig, Aiden, Chris S., R.J., Ginger, Ron, Bernie, John and Tammy, Janice and Tom, Janessa, Laney, Gracie and Ella, Dee, Charlotte, Rich and Geneva. Finally, I would like to thank Joe, who taught me how to goose-step and read the instructions first, and Papa, who showed me how to build my own worlds and still loves me just the way I am.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Each year, thousands of writing center tutors, directors, and assistants attend writing center-related events around the world. For 2014, the International Writing Centers Association (writingcenters.org) has listed more than 20 major conferences, including locations in Germany, Dubai, Ontario, Tokyo, and many locations in the United States. Since the initial proliferation of writing centers around the mid-1970s, writing centers have become increasingly popular academic amenities (Harris, 1990). As Harris noted, the popularity of writing centers may extend from distinct “trends and traditions,” including the traditions of sharing knowledge and ideas among otherwise unaffiliated writing centers, “incorporating collaborative learning” in the tutorial context, facilitating “tutors’ personal enrichment,” and fostering a humanizing environment by “being people-oriented” (1990, p. 27). These socially-sustainable tenets underlie many seminal essays on writing center practice and theory, including articles by North (1984), Bruffee (1984), Kail and Trimbur (1987), Ede (1989), Lunsford (1991), Murphy (1991), Gillam (1991), and Cooper (1994).

Statement of the Problem

Despite such positive underpinnings, more recent scholars, such as Denny (2010), Greenfield and Rowan (2011), and Condon (2012) have begun to question what Grimm (1999) dubbed “Good Intentions” of writing center theorists and practitioners. In their books, these authors used critical theory and personal experiences to highlight ways in which everyday practices can obstruct social justice, which Bell (2007) defines as a “vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are
physically and psychologically safe and secure,” (p. 3). Furthermore, authors such as Bawarshi and Pelkowski (1999), Weaver (2004), Rihn (2009), and Cain (2011) have noted that writing centers embody “contact zones,” which are defined by Pratt (1991) as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power,” (as cited in Bawarshi & Pelkowski, 1999). It is perhaps no surprise that in the tutoring session, where two individuals meet to negotiate meaning, conflicts relating to ideologies, identities, and power dynamics may arise in various forms of social injustices.

Despite the presence of theoretical literature on social injustices in tutorials, minimal empirical research has been conducted in relation to social justice issues in writing center contexts. Furthermore, the existing research on social justice issues in tutoring sessions is limited in terms of purposes, methodologies, and outcomes. Though Wilson (2011) and Suhr-Sytsma and Brown (2011) contributed valuable information on how language use and perceptions perpetuate social oppression, and Werner (2011) considered tutors’ perceptions on working with nontraditional students, it is necessary to develop more knowledge about social justice issues which arise in tutoring sessions. Without understanding more about the current state of social justice issues in the writing center context, we cannot fully actualize the optimistic tenets to which writing centers and tutoring aspire.

**Research Question**

Because tutors are the writing center’s representative agents, who enact their personal beliefs as well as the values of the writing center, understanding their perceptions is crucial for interpreting how social justice or injustice may manifest in the
tutorial. While Wilson (2011), Suhr-Sytsma and Brown (2011), and Werner (2011) did consider tutors’ perceptions, the current study proposes a more inclusive and in-depth investigation to explore answers to the research question:

- How do peer tutors experience and conceptualize social justice issues within the context of tutoring sessions in the writing center?

**Significance of the Study**

This study proposes to make several significant contributions to the extant knowledge on social justice issues in tutoring sessions. Within the scope of the literature that I have found on this topic in this context, my methodology and theoretical framework are unique. First, I have met each participant individually, and I have assured each participant of his or her strict privacy and confidentiality. Suhr-Sytsma and Brown’s (2011) study presented useful information about tutors’ perceptions on “the everyday language of oppression” through focus groups; however, the current study intends to explore tutors’ views more thoroughly through their own voices and in terms of individual complexity. To better understand how tutors conceptualize social justice issues in tutoring sessions, I have opted to use a concept mapping task in my methodology. Concept mapping allowed participants of the study to create complex visual representations of their conceptualizations (Borg, 2006; Kane & Trochim, 2009; Maxwell, 2013), which each participant subsequently described in even more detail.

Also in my research, I have considered social oppression\(^1\) collectively, in terms of how marginalization manifests in various forms, such as racism, sexism, classism, etc.

My rationale for researching multiple instances of social oppression (rather than limiting

---

\(^1\) In this thesis, I use ‘social justice issues,’ ‘social injustice,’ and ‘social oppression’ interchangeably (based on Bell, 2007). I understand that some perspectives may require distinction between these terms, but for my purposes, these labels consistently represent obstructions to social justice.
this study to racism or sexism, for example) is based on Bell’s (2007) assertion that considering social oppression collectively allows us to consider the ways in which hegemony is systematically instigated and maintained. Furthermore, as Bell writes, coalitions may be built among those who are marginalized for ostensibly different reasons (i.e. social categorizations). When we inclusively consider all forms of social oppression, the democratic scales shift, and it becomes clear that social oppression is everyone’s problem.

In embracing an inclusive perspective, I do not intend to depreciate the significance or historical context of any particular form or forms of social oppression. Rather, I believe it is important to sincerely consider forms of oppression that may not cause oneself to personally feel marginalized. Social oppression functions by emphasizing social divisions; therefore, I believe that it can be most effectively challenged through building cross-categorical alliances (Bell, 2007).

In order to prompt tutors’ perceptions on a wide variety of social oppression issues, I have included in the data collection session ten category cards, based upon social categorizations from the literature. These categories include Race and Ethnicity, Gender, Sexual Orientation, Class and Economic Status, Nationality, Language, Religion, Physical or Mental Abilities, Age, and Weight. By considering social categorizations collectively in the context of social oppression, I hope to raise awareness of social injustice as an issue that negatively affects all individuals, including those individuals who may simultaneously benefit from other groups’ social oppression (Bell, 2007). Also, by inclusively considering multiple categories of social oppression, I hope to highlight ways that disenfranchisement manifests similarly for different people.
In another sense of maintaining a comprehensive perspective, I have endeavored to create a methodology that remains open to tutors’ inclusive and individual views. To this end, I have included blank cards to supplement the established categories mentioned above; this way, participants have had the opportunity to add to these categories in any way that they consider relevant. Also, in the concept mapping task, I have allowed participants as much time as they wished to fully explore the concept of “social justice issues in relation to one-on-one tutoring sessions.” Finally, I have constructed a methodology that has yielded a great amount of data, including more than 8.5 hours of audio-recorded data, which yielded over 145 transcribed pages of participants’ discussions. The topics that I discuss in this thesis have been retained specifically to answer my research question, though I believe that many more questions may be explored through the extensive remaining data.

![Figure 1](image-url)  
*Figure 1.* How this study’s methodology corresponds to the research question.
**Personal Motivation**

My awareness of social justice issues first developed as an awareness of my own marginalization as a female. From a very young age, I noticed that objectifying images of women and derogatory references to females disturbed me and distorted my self-image. It was only in my undergraduate studies, though, that I started to become aware of the systematic effects of *racial* oppression. Each day after my African-American Literature class, I would return home shaken by overwhelming realizations of what it meant to be white in the United States. After graduation, I moved to South Korea to teach English to elementary school students. In my third year of teaching, I started to become concerned about the unintentionally marginalizing effects of my instinctive and improvised pedagogical philosophies. I had been hired as a “native English speaker,” privileged for my *linguistic* affiliation, but my background in English literature hardly prepared me to empower young minds. Around the same time that I recognized my enduring passion for teaching, I admitted that I needed more knowledge to be an effective educator. This realization led me to pursue my MA studies in Composition and TESOL.

In the first semester of my MA program, the director of the writing center contacted me to see if I would be interested in working as a tutor. In need of a part-time job, I happily accepted. Even though it was financial need that initially led me to tutoring, I was consequently inspired by the possibilities of collaborative learning, negotiating meaning, and sharing my enthusiasm for learning in one-on-one sessions.

Around the same time, in my Intro to TESOL course, I told my professor that I was interested in studying “fairness.” She simultaneously scared and surprised me with her frank response: “what’s fair for you isn’t necessarily fair for someone else.” Her
words left me unsettled, until somewhere in one of the assigned articles, I came across
the term ‘social justice.’ As I began reading more studies related to social justice, as well
as diversity and multiculturalism, I realized that marginalization is more widespread than
I had ever imagined. At first, I found this realization disheartening. How could I
possibly make a difference in a world that is so full of prejudices?

As I continued to tutor in the writing center, I noticed more and more situations
that seemed to exhibit social injustice. When one student was trying to list as many
social media applications as possible, I suggested Pinterest. He bluntly replied: “No,
Pinterest is for girls.” I flinched, but I didn’t argue. In another scenario, I felt unsettled
as I tutored an African-American student who was analyzing television commercials in
terms of racial stereotyping. I wanted to address the presumptions that I felt were evident
in her essay, but I also worried that could not do so without privileging my own
whiteness-affiliated view. Again, I remained silent, as I doubted my thoughts and the
appropriateness of my potential input. Despite these kinds of destabilizing experiences,
though, I continued to see tutoring as a practice that could revolutionize and humanize
education. In other sessions, I noticed my developing openness to considering alternative
views and my increasing ability to rationally discuss a wide range of ideological topics.

In the summer between the semesters of my two-year program, I wandered into a
thrift store and found, on a shelf in front of the other books, a first edition of Adams, Bell,
initially expect that it could be very helpful to me (considering the fortuitous
circumstances that led me to it), this book has served as a foundational text for my thesis.
Bell (2007) argues that considering the collective characteristics and effects of oppression
can enable us to build coalitions across socially constructed boundaries while still respecting diversity. With this goal in mind, I began to see my thesis as a way to raise awareness of social injustice and to posit a conceivable vision of actualizing social justice.

**Organization of the Study**

I have organized this thesis into five chapters, including the present introductory chapter. In the next chapter, I review the available literature that pertains to the study. Major subheadings in the second chapter include social justice, the writing center context, theoretical literature on social justice issues in tutoring sessions, and existing research on social justice issues in tutoring sessions.

In the third chapter of this thesis, I present a more detailed description of the methodology that I chose to explore answers to the research question. Also in the third chapter, I explain the theoretical framework for the study, and I provide justifications for my methodological and analytical choices.

In the fourth chapter, I describe the results of the study. This chapter is divided into two main sections relating to the research question: data that reveal ways the participants conceptualize social justice issues and data that reveal ways tutors experience social justice issues. I have divided the section related to tutors’ conceptualizations according to each participants’ individual data; in this section, I also include a brief description of each participant. In the section concerning tutors’ experiences, I discuss the data according to major emerging themes. Also in the fourth chapter, I present the results of the category ranking task, which I consider for the purposes of crystallization in the fifth chapter.
In the last chapter, I discuss the results of the study and posit conclusions based on connections to extant literature. The main themes pertaining to participants’ conceptualizations of social justice issues include indications of specific categories of social oppression, indications of others’ voices, consideration of causes and/or effects of social justice issues in tutorials, and deference to higher authority in the university context. Main themes pertaining to participants’ experiences of social justice issues include repositioning, emotional distraction or repression, and avoidance of issues. Also in the fifth chapter, I present implications for writing centers, methodological implications, pedagogical implications, and suggestions for future research. Finally, I disclose the limitations and delimitations to the study, followed by my concluding reflections.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to investigate how writing center tutors experience and conceptualize social justice issues within the context of tutoring sessions. In this chapter, I discuss the key concept of social justice and its inverse, social oppression. Next, I present information about the context of the writing center and tutoring paradigms. I then discuss a review of theories and research related to social justice issues in writing centers. Finally, I relate a summary of the literature to the current study, which aims to address a lack of sufficient research in the subject. Despite a considerable amount of theoretical literature on the topic of social justice in writing center contexts, there is a lack of empirical research on tutors’ perceptions of issues that arise in tutoring sessions and that have implications for social justice.

Social Justice

The concept of social justice began to gain traction in the second half of the nineteenth century and around the turn of the twentieth century, when authors such as Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, and W.E.B. Du Bois “told the story of modernity with a subtle regard for its two sides”: the triumphant story of human progress and the obscured oppressive effects of social systems (Lemert, 2004, p. 23). These authors’ critical representations of social phenomena, Lemert contends, is the reason why their works are canonized classics today, while writings by nineteenth century authors such as Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer have not retained comparable significance. Each of the latter authors posited a singular and optimistic perspective: a viewpoint which emphasized only the story of perpetual progress in social growth (Lemert, 2004).
Since then, focus on critical reconsideration of social structures and institutions has become increasingly more prevalent, especially in the realm of pedagogy (e.g., Bhatti, Gaine, Gobbo, & Leeman, 2007; Chapman & Hobbel, 2010; Hardiman & Jackson, 2007; Hawkins, 2011).

According to Bell (2007), social justice “includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure,” (p. 3). This definition may appear to echo the singular and optimistic perspective posited by Comte and Spencer, but it is important to note that social justice is postulated as a goal which does not reflect the present state of society (e.g., Barry, 2005; Bell, 2007; Howard, 1999). The actual status of society is elaborated by Bourdieu (1991), who hypothesized that various forms of resources are unequally distributed.

**Diversity and Social Oppression**

Social justice and diversity are often considered concurrently, as disproportionate distribution of resources often correlates with group memberships (Steinberg, 2009; Adams, Bell & Griffin, 2007). Steinberg (2009) identifies several diversity (group) categories such as race and ethnicity, sexuality and gender, social and economic class, religion, physical diversity, and urban and rural diversity. An individual’s membership within or exclusion from categories such as these may correlate with access to forms of resources. Social systems assign meaning to group memberships; some memberships are privileged while others are oppressed.

Social oppression can be divided into external and internal varieties (Hardiman & Jackson, 2007). External social justice issues exhibit characteristics of institutional and systematic discrimination (Friere, 2005). Examples of institutional constructs which may
be subject to external social oppression include immigration policies, prohibitive medical
care costs, and school curricula. Further examples of institutional and systematic
discrimination include “Christian symbols, holidays, and rituals… integrated into public
affairs and institutions,” such as government, schools, and corporations, despite secular
rhetoric\(^2\) (Bell, 2007, p. 12).

Internal social oppression, on the other hand, originates in individual
consciousness, including personal opinions, statements, and orientations (Hardiman &
Jackson, 2007). Internalized social oppression may manifest in one’s use of stereotyping
and connotative language. The use of colloquial phrases such as “that’s gay,” in
references of disapproval, and “hot chick,” in reference to a female, may reveal
individual attitudes towards certain groups of people (i.e., homosexual individuals and
women). Though external and internal social oppression may be distinctly
conceptualized in theory, their relationship is mutually dependent and supported via
language. According to Weaver (2004) how we use language is not neutral, though we
may be more or less aware of the underlying implications of our own words. Social
oppression is therefore often perpetuated, often unknowingly, by individuals via everyday
language (Suhr-Sytsma & Brown, 2011).

As Suhr-Sytsma and Brown (2011) noted, writing centers represent a forum
wherein individuals’ socially relevant beliefs are often made salient in the negotiation of
meaning. Tutoring sessions deal with texts: most obviously with students’ own writing,
but also with academic discourse in a broader sense. Such texts are never neutral
(Bawarshi & Pelkowski, 1999), and the negotiated tutorial session represents a context in

\(^2\) I personally identify as a Christian, and I feel that it is important to recognize systematic ways that
Christianity is privileged in the U.S. context. This is indicative of our challenge to de-center, as Condon
(2012) argues is necessary for inclusive critique.
which underlying ideologies are likely to surface. However, because social oppression is often obscured in presumed ‘norms,’ it can be exceedingly difficult to identify. To determine whether or not a social situation is oppressive, it may be helpful to consider whether the circumstances exhibit the following characteristics of social oppression.

**Characteristics of social oppression.** Social oppression is most often identified (*when it is identified*) according to distinct categories such as race, class, gender, etc. However, for the purposes of this study, it is advantageous to consider social oppression collectively to better reveal the multifaceted ways that oppression systematically occurs. In *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, Bell’s (2007) chapter lists five distinguishing characteristics of social oppression: it is pervasive, restricting, hierarchical, complex, and internalized.

*Pervasiveness.* Social oppression is pervasive because it “fuses institutional and systematic discrimination, personal bias, bigotry, and social prejudice in a complex web of relationships and structures that saturate most aspects of life in our society” (Bell, 2007, p. 4). In other words, it is recursively perpetuated both internally and externally in relation to the individual.

*Restriction.* Social oppression is restricting, as it exhibits rigid parameters for both privileged and marginalized groups (Condon, 2012). George Orwell’s short story *Shooting an Elephant* illustrates the theme of restriction upon the privileged group when the narrator, a representative of British colonial rule in India, realizes that his actions are confined to his subordinates’ expectations to maintain the hegemonic structure of colonialism. In oppressive social categorizations, dominant and subordinate groups are both confined to socially determined constraints.
**Hierarchy.** Within systems of social oppression, privilege and subjugation are stratified. Bourdieu (1991) describes various forms of capital, or resources which are unequally distributed from person to person. Bourdieu’s various forms of capital include economic capital, such as money and possessions, social capital, such as group memberships, relationships, and influence, and cultural capital, which indicates skills and education levels. Forms of capital may be correlated to categories of identity such as race, gender, etc. For example, it may be statistically more likely for men to earn higher wages than women, or for white people to have greater access to educational resources when compared to black people. Such unequal distribution of resources provides disparate opportunities at the expense of others, though such benefits may not be acknowledged or even suspected. According to Bell, “Dominant or privileged groups benefit, often in unconscious ways, from the disempowerment of subordinated or targeted groups” (2007, p. 5).

**Complexity.** Social oppression is complex because identities are complex. For example, I personally identify as a white female. My whiteness may be unmarked in terms of dominant social positioning, while my gendered identity as a female places me in a marginalized category. Depending on context, one identity may become more salient than another (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Therefore, an individual could be identified simultaneously as a member of the dominant group (considering one identity) and marginalized (considering another aspect of identity).

**Internalization.** Presumptions generated within systems of social oppression are internalized by both privileged and marginalized individuals. In a hegemonic paradigm, the dominant view is accepted as common sense by all (Bell, 2007), and it is perpetuated
through discourse (Bell, 2007; Bruner, 1990; Gee, 1996). Bruner’s (1990) theory of cultural psychology, wherein narrative form (stories) are essential to understanding social norms, describes social parameters as learned inductively through linguistic forms. We require the social world as an initial and ongoing source for knowledge, yet disparity is built into information. Because familiar narratives are considered normative, whether or not they actually reflect hegemonic presumptions, social oppression is often perpetuated unknowingly.

**The Writing Center Context**

**Writing Center Purposes and Practices**

**Purposes.** The writing center was chosen as the context of this study because it has been considered in many influential readings as a potential forum for critical discussion of extant power dynamics, knowledge dissemination, and literacies within the academic environment (Bruffee, 1984; Cooper, 1994; Ede, 1989; Gillam, 1991; Harris, 1990; Healy, 1993; Kail & Trimbur, 1987; Lunsford, 1991, and more recently by Condon, 2012; Denny, 2010; Greenfield & Rowan, 2011). Writing centers are often funded by institutions of higher learning, yet the ways in which educational goals are conceptualized and accomplished within the context are unique. Grutsch McKinney (2013) writes:

> There is little denying that writing centers in their various iterations are non-traditional when compared to the typical institutional approaches to education; writing centers have no teachers, no lesson plans, no requirements for attendance, no credit, no schedule, no requirements for what should be taught, and no grades. (p. 38).
Furthermore, Grutsch McKinney cites Perdue and James’ (1990) notion that writing centers themselves are often marginalized due to their vulnerability on the periphery of the academic domain. The present study, therefore, seeks to discover participants’ perceptions of marginalization (in terms of social justice issues) within a context that may itself be considered marginalized. Bawarshi and Pelkowski (1999) maintain that this marginalized status renders the writing center “a contact zone in which students and staff learn to negotiate multiple subject positions as they rhetorically negotiate multiple discourses within and outside of the academy” (p. 44). Because writing centers can be places where tension manifests between radical and conventional pedagogies – tension which enables dialectic significance – it is an apt location to explore how social oppression is perceived (Raines, 1991; Shafer, 2012).

Although the history of writing centers dates to the laboratory movement in the first half of the twentieth century (Lerner, 2009), since the 1970’s they have often, though not always, served a traditional academic agenda, including assimilating remedially-labeled writers who did not or could not adhere to academic writing conventions (Bawarshi & Pelkowski, 1999). Thus writing centers were, for a time, conceived as places to “fix” writing in deference to a “Standard English” norm. Since postmodern conceptualizations of educational paradigms have gained popularity, however, much literature has indicated an ongoing attempt to redefine the purpose of writing centers (e.g., Ede, 1989; Boquet, 2002; Devet, 2011; Geller, Eodie, Condon, Carroll, & Boquet, 2006). Carino (1995) discussed the varying titles designating an on-campus location where students may seek writing assistance; such places have previously been known as writing clinics and writing laboratories. Each label shift reflects evolving theory behind the
purpose of writing centers, though writing centers retain some vestige of the original assimilationist image due to continued economic and habitual dependency upon modernist institutional practices.

As the modernist model of education has drawn critique for its traditional hierarchical paradigm, writing center proponents have sought to reconceptualize the context in an effort to better facilitate a postmodern view of education. Bruffee’s (1984) seminal essay posited the idea that writing center tutors have the opportunity to positively transform perspectives on academic participation, while Cooper’s (1994) article suggested that writing centers may help redress unequal access to resources by enabling the collaborative building of knowledge. Kail and Trimbur (1995) compared tutoring as a supplement to the academic hierarchy versus tutoring as a fundamentally alternative paradigm which subverts dominant ideologies of authority. More recently, Clarence’s (2012) essay hypothesizes that the practices of writing centers may be reshaping practices within classrooms due to emphasis on reading and writing as contextualized acts in which individuals hold various interests.

Despite more than half of a century in practice, Jackson and Grutsch McKinney (2012) assert that writing center practitioners are still working to define the purpose of writing centers. One might presume that the purpose of writing centers would be firmly rooted in writing, and most literature seems to support this notion, yet Pistone’s (2010) observational study revealed that some students also attended the center to seek help deciphering professors’ expectations and feedback. Though seminal texts may have guided the conceptualization of writing centers, there is much debate over implications. For example, Bawarshi and Pelkowski (1999) argued against North’s (1995) notion that
tutors ought to help change writers, Condon (2012) noted that Grimm (1999) left too much responsibility upon the shoulders of marginalized students, and Truesdell (2008) cautioned against Bruffee’s (1984) theory, as it perpetuated the same stratified systems that it sought to critique. Writing centers and writing center theory, largely developed alongside postmodern theory, certainly exhibit recursively critical views on their purposes.

Practices. Geller et al. (2006) described the writing center as a hotspot for negotiation and resistance where collaborative learning can take place (p. 12). The techniques which lead to such manifestations are obscure, however, as there are no official, widespread guidelines for writing center practices; even subjects such as ‘appropriateness’ may be relative from one center to another (Geller et al. 2006; Weaver, 2004). Based on a survey of 141 U.S. writing centers, Jackson and Grutsch McKinney concluded that “institutional contexts vary to such a degree that the only thing writing centers have in common is tutoring,” (2012, para. 6). Though each writing center observes more or less unique tutoring practices, most writing centers adhere to the paradigm of one tutor working with one tutee. This may be considered the most fundamental work for a tutor, though tutors often handle a myriad of everyday tasks including the production of information about writing strategies and conventions, in the form of printed handouts, workshop demonstrations, internet resources, etc. (Jackson & Grutsch McKinney, 2012).

Writing center practices may be just as elusive as writing center purposes. Many students who visit the writing center express a desire to ‘improve’ their essays, but Nelson-Burns and Wilson’s (2007) qualitative study of 1,611 conference summaries
revealed that nearly half of the students who visit writing centers were unable to describe what kind of help they sought. For many students who visit the writing center, ‘improvement’ may translate to changing an essay to better conform to the conventions of academic discourse (North, 1995). In this sense, writing center practices may be located on the border between assimilation and empowerment, by elucidating expectations and conventions of the dominant discourse (Gillam, 1991).

**Perceptions of Writing Centers**

It is no wonder that perceptions of writing centers would vary greatly, considering that writing center purposes and practices vary to a great degree. Several recent articles indicate that students’ and faculties’ perceptions of tutoring may be contrary to seminal theories based in writing centers. After a four-semester study of trends in writing center usage, LaClare and Franz (2013) concluded that the majority of students who visited a university writing center in Japan viewed “the service as product-oriented,” (p. 5). Whether or not this stance also applies within the U.S. context, it is undeniably consistent with the widespread notion of writing centers as an editing service for students. However, the objective of improving a paper runs contrary to North’s idea that “Our job is to produce better writers, not better writing,” which is one of few tutoring mantras that continues to withstand the test of time (Boquet & Lerner, 2008). More critically, however, the mere fact of improving a paper ignores more fundamental questions related to power and values, such as: What are the ideas contained in the paper, and where does the writer stand in relation to them? What language and style does the writer use to communicate these ideas, and who does this language belong to? Without consideration
of these questions, tutoring may simply be another supplement to the generation and transmission model (Kail & Trimbur, 1995) or banking model (Freire, 1970) of education.

While LaClare and Franz (2013) highlighted students’ perceptions of tutoring as being at odds with an idealized purpose, Odney’s (2012) dissertation also considered students’ perceptions of tutoring. In the latter case, Odney found that basic writers may abstain from visiting the writing center because they prefer instructors’ responses to tutors’ feedback. Once again, the underlying perceptions indicate that writing centers may be relegated to the margins of the institution. In this sense, some students’ perceptions may preclude their participation in the writing center at all. Parisi and Graziano-King (2011) also addressed the utter ambiguity surrounding varying and sometimes contradictory conceptualizations of tutoring, which may be attributed to perceptions about collaborative learning in general.

Tutoring Dynamics

The fundamental attribute of tutoring is the one-on-one session, where a tutor and a tutee meet to negotiate form and/or interpret meaning. Considering that the purposes, practices, and perceptions of writing centers can vary widely, it is perhaps unsurprising that the dynamics of tutoring sessions can also vary. Nicklay’s (2012) study intended to explore sources of tutors’ feelings of guilt which sometimes arose after sessions; the author concluded that tutors’ reflections and assessments of sessions were fundamentally dependent upon the individual structure of the particular writing center, as well as its position within the larger university. Furthermore, how tutors are situated within the writing center context can change according to tutors’, tutees’, and even instructors’ expectations of tutors (Thonus, 2001).
While the title of “peer tutor” seems to imply an emphasis on common ground between a tutor and a student (Scott, 1992), tutors tend to be ascribed an ‘expert’ status while tutees are often cast as ‘novices’ (Scott, 1992; Geller et al. 2006). Characterizing peer tutoring in only expert/novice terms is problematic, however, as Waring (2005) argued that acceptance or rejection of the expert/novice label can be more volatile than occurrences in a classroom. In an observational study at a research university in the eastern U.S., Waring found that the tutee was more likely to accept advice, and thereby the novice status, in the tutor’s feedback on writing style or formatting. However, the same tutee tended to resist suggestions related to content. Waring posited that the tutee may have positioned herself as the expert in terms of the subject matter, considering that the content reflected her academic field. Based on Waring’s (2005) study, tutors’ and tutees’ negotiated identities and familiar literacies may be relevant to how each individual is situated in a tutoring session.

**Tutors’ roles.** In any given tutoring session, a tutor’s actions can be affected by countless variables. Thompson et al. (2009) argued that writing center lore, pervasive notions about best practices and procedures which are passed from veteran to novice tutors, tends to stipulate that tutors ought to be collaborative, not directive. The idea that a tutor should be cooperative and deferential to students’ needs and knowledge echoes seminal articles by Lunsford (1991/2008), Ede (1989), and Brooks (1991). However, more recent quantitative research may imply that it is impossible for tutors to avoid being directive, and that students who meet with tutors appreciate more substantial guidance (Thompson et al. 2009). In this sense, tutors may be constricted between top-down tutoring ideologies and the tutees’ expectations and needs.
To facilitate negotiation of writing in a tutoring session, tutors may use an array of strategies including verbal and nonverbal communication (Thompson, 2009), motivational scaffolding (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2013), and linguistic politeness (Bell, Arnold, & Haddock, 2009). Each of these topics underscore an intention of building rapport with a tutee, and Mackiewicz and Thompson (2013) specifically discuss the importance of fostering and maintaining students’ motivation in a session. Thus, a tutor’s role may include awareness of social norms and expectations as necessary to support productive tutoring dynamics. Bell, Arnold, and Haddock’s (2009) qualitative observational study revealed that tutors’ rhetorical strategies changed over multiple sessions with the same tutee, which implies further evolution of tutoring dynamics in tandem with ongoing collaboration.

In summary, a myriad of complex factors can influence the social and productive elements of a tutoring session, and each participant’s positionality can greatly impact the communication taking place. Considering that no texts, including the written text as well as statements, are neutral (Bawarshi & Pelkowski, 1999; Janangelo, 2010), it is easy to see how social justice issues can manifest in the complex circumstances of tutorial sessions.

Social Justice Issues in Writing Centers

Within the past several years, focus on diversity has become more prominent in literature related to writing centers. Since Kilborn’s (1994) exposition concerning challenges which arise in relation to the multicultural context of the writing center, Rihn (2009) discussed that incorporating diversity in a non-diverse writing center context is particularly important for extending potential criticality envisioned by authors such as
Gillam (1991/1995) and Grimm (1999). “Subjects of difference, be they race, gender, sexual orientation, or anything else, are rarely going to be comfortable to discuss,” yet, Rihn argued, such discussions are essential to challenging dominant paradigms (2009, para. 7). Okawa, Fox, and Chang (2010) discussed the importance of increased recognition of diversity and critical reflection in tutor training, while Denny’s (2010) *Facing the Center* called for critical consideration of oppressive instances in tutoring sessions that same year. Denny’s (2010) book specifically discussed identity categories such as race and ethnicity, sexuality and gender, class, and nationality, and the author argued that as particular identities become relevant in the writing center context, embedded assumptions underlie the tutorial.

The diverse and multicultural characteristics of many writing centers have prompted several authors, such as Bawarshi and Pelkowski (1999), Weaver (2004), Rihn (2009), Werner (2011), and Cain (2011) to consider the context as a “contact zone,” originally described by Pratt (1991). Contact zones are “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power,” (Pratt, as cited in Bawarshi & Pelkowski, 1999). Within the contact zone of the writing center, multiple identities are likely to surface with potentially conflicting consequences. Several authors have discussed accommodating individuals as members of specific groups or identities, such as Valentino’s (2012) article concerning student veterans’ needs, Nan’s (2012) suggestions for working with Chinese ELL students, and Hirschhorn’s (2007) recommendations for tutoring ESL students and students with learning disabilities.
Studies of social oppression, however, extend beyond studies of diversity in terms of social biases and consequences. For example, because an individual’s weight “induces societal prejudices about character and ability,” Smith (2012) calls for focus on fat studies within the context of writing centers (para. 4). Fat studies, Smith explains, detail ways in which discrimination occurs on the basis of body size. “Unlike racism and sexism,” Smith writes, “fat stigmatization is not itself stigmatized”; social sanction of fat shaming results in perpetuated stereotypes which affect power dynamics in interaction just as any other category of diversity (para. 17). Smith’s article further underscores similarities among various categories of social oppression in terms of how appearance affects social presumptions, and the author also delineates categories of oppression which are socially sanctioned or rejected.

Discrimination based on sexual orientation is another form of marginalization that is not unanimously condemned. Denny (2010) and Doucette (2011) detail the ‘invisibility’ of sexual diversity in higher education and consequently in writing centers. Denny particularly extends his argument to the broader circumstances of systematic oppression, as he notes that “ways of knowing seem natural, but their contingency becomes apparent when their assumptions come into proximity to others marked by racial, gender, class, sexual, national, and other forms of difference,” (2010, p. 104).

In this study, I identify with Denny’s inclusive position, as I consider viewing social oppression in collective terms to be important for increasing broader awareness and action. Doucette (2011), Denny (2010), and antiracist authors such as Villanueva (2011) and Condon (2012) argued that the status quo is exclusive and blind to identities outside of the ‘norm.’ Because of this situation, I agree with Bell’s (2007) claim that it is
important to build cross-diversity coalitions to facilitate eradication of social oppression. Though my experiences of marginalization as a female cannot exactly translate to an understanding of oppression such as racism, which I do not inherently face as a white person, I can consider my own marginalization to understand the importance of addressing all forms of marginalization. Condon (2007) writes that, “whites who come through desire or of necessity to anti-racism must-decenter, must recognize and account in some public way for the partiality of our perceptions, our experiences, our knowledge – those stories we tell about ourselves and others” (p. 22). De-centering, in my perspective, may be facilitated by scaffolding upon extant understanding; in my case, my experiences as a marginalized female may allow me to remain open to other forms of oppression.

My understanding of sexism comes from experience as well as academic influences, while my understanding of racism has been primarily built upon literature and critical discussion. Theoretical and reflective literature on social oppression based on race and ethnicity is relatively abundant in relation to the tutoring context. Articles and books by Grimm (1999, 2011), Condon (2007, 2012), Ozias and Godbee (2011), Geller, Condon and Carroll (2011), Greenfield (2011), and Diab, Godbee, Ferrel, and Simpkins (2012) have approached racism in the writing center from a race theory perspective which deconstructs the systematic perpetuation and effects of racialized oppression. Some authors, such as Dees, Godbee, and Ozias (2007), extend the discussion of racism to suggestions for addressing race and racism in the tutorial. In their article, the authors highlight evasion of race in tutorial discussions, which further reinforces social investment in invisibility of social justice issues. It is precisely because social justice
issues are systematically discounted, with significant and derogatory effects, that research must be conducted to elaborate and reveal the current social paradigms. While the aforementioned literature is essential for fostering awareness, empirical research on ways that racism manifests in tutorials is conspicuously lacking.

Social Justice Research in Writing Centers

While theoretical information concerning racism and further social categorizations in writing centers is prevalent, corresponding research is surprisingly minimal. Some studies, such as O’Leary’s (2008) article on gendered discourse in the writing center, Valentine and Torres (2011) discussion of the effects of diversity on tutorials, and Johnson’s (2011) consideration of tutors’ and tutees’ racial perceptions, feature limited or pilot studies which seem to confirm a broader theory presented concurrently in the article. Perhaps Kerri Jordan noted this trend of minimal, confirmatory research when she declared a substantial lack of writing center research in her keynote speech at the 2013 Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association conference. Jordan (2013) called for much-needed empirical research to balance and assess abundant theoretical literature.

Among the minimal existing empirical research on social justice issues in writing centers, the majority seems to be focused on language. This approach may be apt, as Greenfield (2011) noted that racism, and perhaps additional categories of social oppression, is “deeply entrenched in our discourses about language,” (p. 34). Language can sometimes reveal underlying attitudes about race, ethnicity, and nationality, as evident in Wilson’s (2011) study. Examining 41 English faculty members’ and 103 tutors’ perceptions on written language forms, Wilson’s research revealed faculty
members’ and, to an even greater degree, tutors’ profound disgust towards forms of African American Language. In the same study, “Nonstandard European American English” (p. 183) such as sentence fragments was met with less disdain, while participants tended to excuse issues like missing articles on the basis that the writers were likely ESL/ELL students with varying proficiencies.

Language perceptions seems to be a popular topic for dissertations, as evident in work by Taylor (2009) and Chang (2012), but Suhr-Sytsma and Brown’s (2011) article in *The Writing Center Journal* specifically targeted oppression in language according to tutors’ perceptions. Through data from four tutor focus groups, the authors composed a two-list heuristic identifying ways in which tutors view how language can perpetuate oppression and how tutors and writers can challenge such oppression. While this study has added more understanding on the topic of social justice issues in the writing center, it is essential to consider tutors’ in-depth considerations on these issues, specifically on salient categories of social oppression, which have been discussed in theoretical literature.

Werner briefly addressed social categorizations in a 2011 study on “perceptions of age in the writing center,” (para. 1). The author conducted surveys and subsequent interviews on tutors’ perceptions of non-traditional students in tutoring sessions; in the responses, additional categories of sex/gender, religion, and sexual orientation also emerged. The author argues that “age differences during a writing center tutorial session sometimes impede or strengthen a tutor’s ability to connect with a writer as peers,” (para. 4), yet tutors seemed to initially perceive age, as well as other social identity categories, as irrelevant to tutoring. The notion of which social categories tutors perceive to be
relevant or irrelevant to tutoring sessions is one aspect which is addressed in the current study.

A final consideration which is addressed in the present research is perceptions of tutors’ roles in relation to issues of oppression. One such study was described by Weaver (2004), in which Wangeci JoAnne Karuri asked 26 tutors at the 1994 NWCA Conference: “When you are in a conference dealing with a paper you find offensive, do you think it is your job to discuss and debate the issue with the author?” (as cited in Weaver, p. 30). In response, half of the participants answered affirmatively, 23% said no, and 27% replied that they would discuss but not debate the issue. At the time of the current study, almost 20 years have passed since Karuri’s inquiry on tutors’ perceptions of their roles. The issues of tutors’ perceptions on social justice issues, their views on oppression and offensiveness, and their opinions on their own responsibilities in relation to these issues must be explored in depth.

**Relationship to the Current Study**

As social justice issues are increasingly addressed in theoretical writings related to writing centers (e.g., Greenfield & Rowan, 2011; Condon, 2012; Smith, 2012), scholars have been studying hegemony from various perspectives including writing center policy (Nicklay, 2012) and assessment (Gofine, 2012). While such top-down approaches are valuable for considering the conceptualization of social justice in one-on-one tutoring sessions, it is also essential to consider the views of the tutors, who enact relevant beliefs in this context.

Since social justice issues can be deeply personal, an individually structured methodology could facilitate participants’ candid responses. With a greater emphasis on
tutors’ individual voices, as elaborated via a confidential data collection method, this
study aims to investigate the research question: How do peer tutors experience and
conceptualize social justice issues within the context of tutoring sessions in the writing
center?

A potential benefit of the research conducted in this study is that participants may
gain increased awareness of the implications of social justice issues. Furthermore, on a
personal level, this research allows tutors’ voices and concerns to be heard while
maintaining their anonymity. The broad conclusions of this study will be shared with the
writing center director, staff of tutors, and various writing center communities when the
study is concluded. I will ensure anonymity for all participants, so participants may be
confident that their concerns are being considered on a broader scale while their
individual identities are protected. Information collected in this study may inform
subsequent writing center policy and procedures, thus fostering a more constructive
educational environment and minimizing instances of social injustices.

Summary

This chapter has presented background information about the concept of social
justice, as well as its implied inverse, social injustice (social oppression). The context of
the writing center was discussed in terms of its purpose and procedures, as well as social
perceptions related to these topics. A presentation of theoretical literature on social
justice issues in the writing center context was followed by a synopsis of relevant
empirical research within the context. Finally, I proposed that, based on lacking evidence
to support the current state of tutors’ perceptions on social justice issues, the current
study is a necessary prerequisite to actualizing the goal of social justice. In the next
chapter, I present the methodology intended to explore ways in which tutors conceptualize and experience social justice issues in the writing center.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I describe the methodological approaches chosen to address the research question: “How do peer tutors experience and conceptualize social justice issues within the context of tutoring sessions in the writing center?” First, I discuss my motivation and positionality as a researcher. Then, I present an explanation of the theoretical framework for the study followed by details about the chosen methodology, its rationale, and actual procedures. Finally, I summarize the data analysis process.

To better understand how tutors experience and conceptualize social justice issues within the context of the writing center, this study uses concept mapping, interviews, and a social category ranking task to attain rich qualitative data. Rich data enhances the validity of the study due to extensive qualitative information (Maxwell, 2013), while the use of multiple methods allows for triangulation (Perry, 2011) or, more accurately in this exploratory methodology, crystallization of data sources. Crystallization differs from triangulation in that the former seeks to acknowledge multifaceted complexity, while triangulation tends to be employed with the intent of seeking a more complete description of a phenomenon (Ellingson, 2008, p. 22). Rich data and crystallization are therefore apt means of validating this particular study, which is not intended to generalize its findings to a larger population. The purpose of this study is rather to explore the complex and multiple ways in which the individuals chosen for the study may understand the concept of social justice within the particular context of writing center tutorials.
Researcher’s Motivation and Positionality

The idea for this study is based upon my experiences as a graduate tutor in the university writing center. Since I began my work as a tutor over a year ago, I have been inspired by writing center policies and seminal theories which propose that collaborative learning (in the form of peer tutoring) can be a potentially empowering alternative to more traditional approaches to education (e.g., Kail & Trimbur, 1987; Ede, 1989; Lunsford, 1991; Gillam, 1991). As a teacher-scholar, I believe that writing center ideologies often concur with post-method pedagogical concepts, including the acknowledgement of disenfranchising social structures and norms. While I pursued a more in-depth understanding of systematic marginalization in my coursework, I began to notice complexities in tutoring sessions that I had not previously perceived. Understanding that my own perceptions of salient instances of social oppression may be limited by my personal identity, I decided to explore which instances fellow tutors may consider relevant.

Because the participants in my study included my coworkers, I would be considered an in-group member of the population. Van Peer, Hakemulder, and Zygier (2012) refer to this situation as ‘participatory,’ wherein the researcher can “get an insider’s perspective” on the phenomena being studied (p. 73). This positionality is considered preferable for mutual understanding of tutoring procedures and incidents, and my established rapport with participants may have helped to facilitate their willingness to share information with me. On a similar note, though, my ongoing position as the participants’ colleague could have affected the content of their responses. To facilitate participants’ candid responses, I shared anecdotes about my own personal and sometimes
uncomfortable experiences to construct a research atmosphere predicated upon mutual trust. My understanding of what is expected of tutors and how ethical implications can arise in this context have shaped the overall design of this study, while a review of theoretical concepts have also guided the focus of data collection procedures.

**Theoretical Framework**

In order to create the interview protocol, I sought to define the key concept, *social justice issues*, as clearly as possible in consideration of the participants’ potential connotations. Based upon readings included in the literature review (e.g., Condon, 2012; Greenfield & Rowan, 2011; Grimm, 1999), I formulated a working definition of *social justice issues* (social injustice) as unfair, oppressive, or offensive incidents. Examples of such incidents can include stereotyping, discrimination, and/or prejudices, which, along with other attributes, often characterize social oppression (Hardiman & Jackson, 2007).

Viewing social justice issues collectively, as opposed narrowing focus to one or a few distinct categories, is a pragmatic decision. According to Bell (2007), when various forms of oppression are perceived collectively, the democratic scale shifts so that the majority of individuals may identify as marginalized in some form. By acknowledging the collective consequences of social injustice, Bell notes, “coalitions among diverse people” seem to offer “the most promising strategies for challenging oppression systematically” (p. 6). The overarching purpose of this study is to gather information that may affect subsequent writing center policies and procedures; therefore, the consolidation of “social justice issues” is intended to raise awareness of the pervasive nature of hegemony.
Individual Categories of Social Oppression

While viewing social justice issues collectively is a significant conceptual decision, a comprehensive study of social justice must also recognize individual social categories, which are sometimes exclusively represented in literature. Such categories include race, gender, class, and religion as noted in Bell’s (2007) *Theoretical Foundations for Social Justice Education*. To these categories, I have added ‘sexual orientation’ based on Denny’s (2010) book, *Facing the Center*, and ‘weight’ as identified in Smith’s (2012) article, *Making Room for Fat Studies in Writing Center Theory and Practice*, which highlights weight as a factor which affects social perceptions and presumptions of individuals. Finally, based on my understanding of hegemonic categorizations, I included ‘nationality,’ ‘physical or mental abilities,’ and ‘age.’ To verify that these categories are appropriate for this study, I have sought peer review, including critical feedback from academic conference attendees, mentors, and professionals in education and writing center fields.

The nine categories that I found in the literature (Race and Ethnicity, Gender, Class and Economic Status, Religion, Sexual Orientation, Weight, Nationality, Physical or Mental Abilities, and Age) were posited and met with approval by attendees of my research proposal presentation at the National Conference for Peer Tutoring in Writing (NCPTW) on November 2, 2013. Afterward, based on my understanding of ways in which individuals might make judgments of others based on ‘language,’ I also added this as the tenth category. To ensure inclusion of additional categories, I have included in my methodology an opportunity for participants to reject or amend these categories, or to provide additional categories as they see fit.
Research Design

Because this study seeks to explore how participants experience and conceptualize social justice issues in tutoring sessions in the writing center, a qualitative methodology was chosen as apt to provide detailed, subjective accounts of social phenomena (van Peer, Hakemulder, & Zyngier, 2012). This form of methodology allows explorative consideration of individual and personal experiences as well as beliefs, values, and social contexts (Perry, 2011).

In an effort to understand how participants conceptualize social justice issues, I opted to use concept mapping and subsequent discussion. Concept mapping was the first procedure in data collection, since the categorically-focused interview could have lead the participants’ responses if it was conducted first. The concept mapping task was originally developed as a pedagogical tool in the mid-1980s (Maxwell, 2013), though it is increasingly acknowledged among researchers as a means to more precisely represent the complexity of concepts or theories (e.g., Borg, 2006; Kane & Trochim, 2009; Maxwell, 2013). Kane and Trochim (2009) and Maxwell (2013) specifically acclaim the use of concept mapping by researchers to visually represent a theory before conducting research.

To understand how participants experience social justice issues, I conducted a semi-structured interview, which was partially guided by the results of a category ranking task (see Data Collection Procedures below for more detail). The intimate nature of interviews allows trust to be built between the researcher and the participant, thus fostering an environment in which participants may share their opinions and perceptions (Harrison, 2009). Interviews further allow the researcher to understand how participants
understand reality and particular situations (Yin, 2009), such as incidents of social
injustice in tutoring sessions.

Study Location and Population

The research location was at a public university in the mid-Atlantic United States. According to the university’s website, there were almost 15,000 students, including over 2,000 graduate students, enrolled in the fall 2013 semester. The website provides further information about diversity on campus: among these enrolled students, approximately 75% were White, slightly over 9% were Black, almost 6% were international students, approximately 3% were Hispanic, and approximately 2% identified as multiracial or ‘other’ ethnicities. The website states that less than 1% of students were Asian, American Indian, and Pacific Islander. The university website also disclosed information on gender of enrolled students; during the semester when I collected data, slightly over 55% of students were female, while slightly over 44% of students identified as male.

More specifically, the context was a university-funded writing center located on the mid-size campus. The center, which opened in 1987, recruits tutors from the student body (as paid or volunteer tutors) as well as community members (including professors emeriti, graduates, etc., as volunteers only). At the time of this study, there were two retired faculty tutors, one adult community member tutor, eight graduate tutors, and fourteen undergraduate tutors working in our writing center. For student tutors, the writing center uses a selective hiring process based on faculty recommendations and writing samples. Tutors are not required to complete a tutor training course before they begin their work as tutors; instead, tutor education takes place in 1.5-3 hour meetings.

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3 These ethnic identifiers are borrowed verbatim from the university’s website, which is not specifically cited to protect the participants’ identities.
once before classes begin and approximately three more times throughout the semester. Tutors are also encouraged to discuss tutoring practices and concerns with the writing center director and/or the assistant director, as well as with fellow tutors.

Potential participants were chosen for purposeful and convenience sampling, since I was attending this university throughout the data collection process. The general population of the study was current writing center tutors who had worked in the particular writing center for at least six months. Potential participants between the ages of 18 and 45 were recruited, and there were no gender restrictions.

The initial contact email (with attached informed consent form: Appendix B) was sent to eligible individuals (see Appendix C for initial contact email). Potential participants who agreed to participate in the study were asked to choose a relatively quiet and semi-private meeting location for data collection. I suggested to each participant that we could meet in a group study room at the library, unless the participant requested a particular alternative location. I met all but one participant in private study rooms in the library. In the private study rooms, each participant and I sat at a large table, upon which the participant constructed the concept map and performed the category ranking task. I met one participant, Lucy, in a private office on campus. In this data collection session, Lucy constructed her concept map on a desk, but she did the category ranking task on the surface of a sofa because there was more room for her organization.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Data were collected from each participant in a 60-90 minute data collection session. The three main methodological procedures included a concept mapping task, a semi-structured interview, and a category ranking task (see Figure 1 in the first chapter
for a representation of how the methodology addresses aspects of the research question).

At the beginning of the session, I informed the participant of the purpose of the study. I then told the participant about the data collection process and his/her rights to decline participation at any time. Furthermore, I assured the participant that if he/she chose to participate, his/her identity would remain strictly confidential; a pseudonym would be assigned, and no identifying information would be shared with anyone outside of the data collection session. I then discussed the informed consent form; if the participant indicated that he/she understood the informed consent form and wished to participate, I asked the participant to sign the form at that time.

**Concept Mapping and Discussion**

The data collection sessions began with the concept mapping task to visually represent the participants’ conceptualization of social justice issues in tutoring sessions. To begin the concept mapping task, I showed the participant a sample concept map on mammals (i.e., from Borg, 2006; See Appendix E). Discussing the sample concept map, in terms of its features, was a key part of the methodology, as not all participants were familiar with concept mapping. At this point, I noted how the sample concept map included individual terms or concepts in boxes, which were connected via lines to show relationships between terms or concepts. I also noted that brief descriptions of the relationships could be seen adjacent to some of the lines.

Next, I asked the participant to “construct a concept map representing social justice issues in students’ writing as discussed in tutoring sessions.” I defined social justice issues, in this context, as “oppressive, unfair, or offensive issues.” At this point, I specified that “only one-on-one tutoring sessions in the writing center” were to be
considered, and that the concept map’s topic “could include things in students’ writing or
discussion of writing that the participant considered unfair, oppressive, or offensive.” I
noted that as an example, “this could include stereotyping, discrimination, or prejudices”
(See Appendix D for the data collection checklist). The definitions and examples
suggested in the prompt were based on terminology in literature from Bell (2007),
Hardiman and Jackson (2007), Grimm (1999), Condon (2012), and Greenfield and
Rowan (2011).

After positing the topic of the concept map, I explained how the participant could
construct the concept map based on Kane and Trochim’s (2009) procedure: he/she could
“write a word or phrase on each post-it note and then arrange the concepts” on the large
sheet of construction paper “in any way that visually represent[ed] how” he/she
“[understood] social justice issues (oppressive/unfair/offensive issues) in students’
writing and discussion of writing in tutoring sessions.” I also encouraged each
participant to write or draw on the construction paper to show how each item is related.
Once the participant confirmed that he/she understood the activity, I stopped observing
the participant for approximately 15-30 minutes to allow the participant to construct the
concept map. At this time, my attention was diverted to writing field notes, so that the
participant could freely and independently construct the map.

When the participant informed me that he/she had completed the concept
mapping task, I asked for his/her permission to record the subsequent discussion and
interview. The first recorded content for each participant was his/her unstructured
discussion of the content of the concept map (10-30 minutes). During this discussion, I
prompted the participant to explain the relationships between the concepts that he/she had written on the concept map.

After the concept mapping discussion was finished, I carefully placed the participant’s concept map between blank sheets of the same size construction paper in a large, sturdy bag (to protect the map until I returned home). I stored all concept maps together in a secure location in my home until I had met all of the participants. After I had obtained all concept maps, I scanned each of them several times using a large-surface, high resolution scanner in the university library.

Organization Task and Semi-Structured Interview

The semi-structured interview in this study lasted for approximately 30-45 minutes per participant, and it began with questions on demographic information and the participant’s perceptions of his/her role as a tutor (see Appendix F for interview protocol). The next part of the semi-structured interview was designed to elicit anecdotes related to the participants’ specific experiences in tutoring sessions.

Because I could not know, prior to the session, which social categories each participant has experienced, I first asked them to rank the social categories mentioned above, from most to least relevant (specifically: Race and Ethnicity, Gender, Sexual Orientation, Class and Economic Status, Nationality, Religion, Physical or Mental Abilities, Age, Weight, Language, and a blank card). More specifically, I read each card aloud (in random order, blank card last) and placed it on the table. I then read the following selection from the Interview Protocol:

4 For the purpose of this study, I consider an anecdote to be a specific event or incident as described by a participant using the first person singular pronoun (referring to oneself) and third person singular pronoun (referring to one particular student in one particular tutoring session). For further details concerning how I selected anecdotes for analysis in this study, see the heading “Data Analysis Procedures” below.
The blank card represents any category or categories that are not already represented. Please organize the cards in order of how often the topic has been relevant in tutoring sessions that you have experienced. If you feel that a category or categories are not relevant to tutoring sessions, you can place them to the side. At this time, I also told the participant that he/she could write additional categories on the blank cards, and that more blank cards were available if necessary. I again diverted my attention while the participant organized the categories.

During this task, several participants asked if they could rank categories together; to this, I replied that it would be better to have one category per rank, but they could keep categories in the same rank if they felt that it was necessary. When the participant had indicated to me that he/she was finished with the task, I quickly jotted field notes to preserve the ranking order. Next, I asked him/her to explain how he/she ranked the cards (i.e., which side was most/least relevant). Then, beginning with the most relevant category, I asked the participant to share any specific anecdotes that he/she could remember that were related the category.

After we had discussed each of the categories in the order that the participant had ranked them, I again asked the participant if he/she would like to add any additional categories. Then, I continued through the remainder of the interview protocol, which included questions about whether or not it is a tutor’s responsibility to discuss oppressive or offensive language, and whether the tutor has experienced marginalization in tutoring sessions. At the conclusion of the data collection session, I offered to send the participant a copy of my MA thesis when it is completed. I also reminded participants that the
information they have shared in the session will remain confidential. Finally, I sincerely thanked each participant for his/her participation in the study.

Data Analysis Procedures

The first step of data analysis included compiling and transcribing audio-recorded data (Yin, 2011). For this step, I used a broad transcription method, which is appropriate for thematic analysis. I finished the transcriptions within one month of the data collection sessions. To transcribe, I used an add-on extension, called Transcribe software, for Google Chrome. This application allowed me to load audio files directly from my digital recorder and then use keyboard hotkeys to slow down, speed up, rewind, or fast-forward the audio as I typed the transcriptions in a textbox in the same window. The eight hours and 37 minutes of total audio-recorded data yielded 145 pages of transcribed data. In the transcriptions, I divided each participants’ data into four subheadings: Concept Map Explanation, Semi-Structured Interview, Category Ranking Task, and Closing Interview Questions. These subheadings allowed me to more easily reference particular segments of the transcribed data.

I used data from the “Concept Map Explanation” section only as necessary to elucidate the concepts and relationships evident on each participant’s concept map. Thus, the data were disassembled from the larger context of the audio-recordings and transcriptions, so that I could reassemble them in order to answer part of my research question, concerning how tutors conceptualize social justice issues in relation to tutoring sessions (Yin, 2011). While individual consideration of participants’ concept maps did answer my research question, some “pattern codes” also emerged among the grouped concept maps (Saldaña, 2013).
Because such a vast amount of data was generated by the interview and subsequent transcriptions, my first step in analysis was to narrow the data in such a way that could effectively answer the other part of my research question, concerning how tutors experience social justice issues in relation to tutoring sessions. First, data were drastically reduced by excluding generalized impressions or examples (e.g., “Lots of white males come in who...”) and examples outside the one-on-one tutoring session (e.g., instances before or after sessions). At this point, 34 total anecdotes remained, which concerned only singular, specific experiences (e.g., “I worked with one particular student who...”). At that point, I noticed that though such anecdotes may explain how tutors conceptualize social justice issues, not all of them included information about how tutors experience social justice issues. Therefore, I further narrowed specific anecdotes to include only those in which the tutor mentioned how the social justice issue affected that particular session. At that point, 11 anecdotes remained. From these anecdotes, I developed thematic pattern codes (Saldaña, 2013), which were then checked by my colleague, who is conducting her own research on social oppression, to ensure inter-rater reliability (Perry, 2011). Finally, I have elaborated findings in a conclusion based on the analysis of data.

Summary

This chapter has provided information about the purpose of the study, the researcher’s positionality, and the theoretical framework which informs the concepts related to the study. This chapter has also explained the methodology and justifications for methodological choices in light of their potential to answer the research question.
Finally, a detailed description of the data procedures was discussed, and the data analysis procedures were introduced.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This chapter presents data collected from eight participants who, at the time of the study, were working as writing center tutors in a public university in the mid-Atlantic United States. The data collected is intended to explore the research question: how do peer tutors experience and conceptualize social justice issues within the context of tutoring sessions in the writing center? First, I present a brief summary of participant demographics. Then, I discuss data collected from participants in two sections: each participant’s conceptualization of social justice issues in tutoring sessions (as demonstrated through the concept map) and ways that the participants experience social justice issues in tutorials.

I therefore present the first section (each participant’s conceptualization) on a case-by-case basis, since each participant’s concept map exhibits unique features. In the second section (participants’ experiences), I present ways in which the participants experience social justice issues in two parts: in a general sense that corresponds to the outcomes of the category ranking task for each individual, and in a more specific sense through selected anecdotes collected from all participants. In the section concerning participants’ experiences with social justice issues, I have organized data not in a case-by-case basis, but according to themes that emerged from coding the anecdotes. I have opted to present the data in this way because not every participant shared anecdotes that fit the criteria for expressing how he or she experiences social justice issues, while some participants shared multiple anecdotes that fit the inclusion criteria. Finally, at the end of this chapter, I provide a summary of the chapter.
Participant Summary

As stated in the previous chapter, only writing center tutors who had been working at the writing center for at least six months were invited to participate in this study. Eight individuals agreed to participate in the study, and all participants were U.S. citizens who spoke English as a native language. Five participants were graduate students; three participants were undergraduates. Six participants were female, while two participants were male. Two graduate tutors had previously worked at writing centers on other campuses during their undergraduate studies (See Table 1).

Table 1

Participant Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Academic Status</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Experience in another writing center</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gretta</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elliot</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syd</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I met with all participants in private locations on campus during the second and third weeks of November, 2013. All participants chose their own pseudonyms. I have organized the table above (Table 1), as well as the following descriptions of data from each participant, in the order that I met with each participant. In the first week, I met with Gretta and then Lucy. Over the weekend, I met with Mark, Julia, and Elliot, in that order. Then, during the next week, I met with Syd, Claudia, and Charles, respectively.
The order of participants mentioned henceforth, therefore, is essentially random as based on the chronological order in which I met with each participant.

**Gretta**

I met with Gretta, a female graduate tutor, in a private group study room in the library on a Thursday evening. In the interview, Gretta explained that she decided to work at the writing center for professional development: specifically “to boost [her] CV and... to try and get more ingrained into activities on campus,” (November 14th, 2013). She also mentioned that working at the writing center was recommended to her by the director of her academic program.

In our meeting, Gretta spoke with familiarity and enthusiasm on the topic of social justice. She used air quote hand gestures frequently to differentiate between her own views and terminology which, though commonly used in a broader social sense, she recognizes as problematic and/or oversimplified. Gretta’s consciousness of tutee’s identities, particular forms of social oppression, and social labelling are all evident in her concept map.
**Gretta’s Conceptualization of Social Justice Issues in Tutorials**

Figure 2. Gretta’s concept map (November 14th, 2013).

Gretta’s concept map includes 19 total items. On the map, Gretta divided social justice into three subheadings: “can include → stereotypes,” “racism (of speech and writing styles),” and “can include → prejudice.” In the interview, Gretta acknowledged that she “divided it into almost three types based off of [the prompt] examples.” In the following paragraphs, I present each of these three main categories as they correspond to Gretta’s discussion of her concept map: stereotypes, racism, and prejudice.

**Stereotypes.** The term “stereotypes” is subdivided into four categories: “mentally disabled students,” “ESL students,” “urban city stereotype,” and “rich kid’ stigma.” In the interview, Gretta clarified that “it’s not necessarily that [she] agree[s] with it; it’s just that is what the general consensus seems to be on that topic” (November
14th, 2013). Each of these four subcategories then proceeds to “Not expecting decent English skills.” As she elaborated on this category, Gretta said that:

When I have ESL students and urban city stereotypes and the rich kid stigma, I don't necessarily expect decent English skills.... It's not even that it's my own definition of English and how it should be; it's just that I'm trying to predict what other people are expecting from them so they don't get a bad grade. (November 14th, 2013)

In her explanation, Gretta discussed expectations based on interpretations of a tutee’s identity. She also mentions her concern, as a tutor, about predicting professors’ expectations. Gretta elaborated further on this point, as she said, “I try and make it seem like: if I were the teacher, would I give this a good grade?” (November 14th, 2013).

In the previous example, Gretta expressed one way that she may be invested in social hierarchies, even as she is able to identify and criticize other instances of social oppression. I have included this quote as an example of how participants’ statements can be mutually conflicting, though I have opted not to further explore this notion because I feel that it may obscure the purpose of my research question. However, these types of contradictions in each participant’s transcripts could be considered from the existing data in light of another research question.

Racism. Under the next concept map category, racism, Gretta included “of speech and writing styles” in parenthesis. She explained: “there is a notion that I can identify someone simply by the way they talk, and I can know a lot about them without having actually known them” (November 14th, 2013). Again, in this instance, Gretta is
alluding to ways in which her own expectations of a student can impact the context of a tutoring session.

From the subheading of racism, Gretta drew arrows to three items: “Black English Vernacular,” “‘Broken English’[in quotes]” and “code switching.” “Code switching” proceeds to another item, “Not allowing L1 ‘interference’.” Gretta used quotes around ‘Broken English’ as well as ‘interference’ to illustrate a divergence between her own view and others’ perspectives. Under the same subheading of racism, both of the other terms, “Black English Vernacular” and “Broken English,” are followed by arrows which point to one item: “constructing English corrections to ‘Standard [American] English’.” Here again, Gretta frames ‘Standard American English’ in quotes to denote her awareness of and resistance to the socially constructed notion. In her explanation, Gretta reiterated that professors may require “what you would call Standard American English,” though she admitted that “a lot of it is presumption, because I presume that these teachers are going to mark off for that” (November 14th, 2013).

Prejudice. Gretta’s third subcategory, “prejudice,” is further divided into three items: “‘foreigner’,” “working class,” and “accents (not ‘mainstream’).” Gretta’s use of quotes around the subheadings ‘foreigner’ and ‘mainstream’ again represents her opposition to ways in which these terms may commonly be used. The tag entitled “Foreigner” proceeds to “possibly from richer families.” In the explanation, Gretta noted that she may expect foreign students to come from a wealthy family: “I make this presumption of: OK, if you’re over here, your family probably sent you over, and if that’s the case, you probably have money” (November 14th, 2013).
The subheading “working class” proceeds to a bulleted list which includes “1st [generation] college students,” and “reputation of not knowing what they’re doing.” According to Gretta, she identifies with working class, first generation college students, though she is sometimes frustrated when she perceives that “they just don’t seem to be trying as hard” (November 14th, 2013). In the discussion, Gretta presented a dichotomy of socioeconomic class:

So I understand that that is a problem for me, is that I see these people and I'm like, 'well I'm working class and you're rich,' and it's almost like 'I have to be against you.' Or, if you're working class, and you see, 'I'm working class, just like you, why can't you work harder to show these people;' it's almost like a weird divide. (November 14th, 2013)

Also evident in this quote is Gretta’s admittance that investment in the dichotomy “is a problem” for her. Here, Gretta reveals self-reflection through critical awareness of her own habitual tendency toward a divisive mindset.

**Gretta’s Category Rank Order**

According to the category ranking task, Gretta listed Race and Ethnicity as most relevant to social justice issues in the writing center, followed by Class and Economic Status. She then identified Gender, Nationality, Age, Physical or Mental Abilities, and Language as third through seventh most relevant. Gretta excluded Sexual Orientation, Religion, and Weight from the relevant categories (see Table 1).
Table 2

*Gretta’s Category Ranking Task Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Additional Categories in Same Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Race and Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Class and Economic Status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Physical or Mental Abilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NR</td>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Weight</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* NR = Not Relevant as determined by participant.

**Lucy**

I met Lucy, a female graduate tutor, in a private office on campus on a Friday morning. Lucy explained to me that she originally began tutoring when she was an undergraduate because her school offered a writing center tutoring course which met requirements in both of her majors. During the course, however, she realized ways in which she further valued the opportunity: “I always wanted to be a teacher, and I always felt like this is my way to give back to the university and to help students. So that’s kind of why I got into it” (November 15th, 2013). Based on her previous positive experiences with tutoring as well as involvement in writing center conferences, Lucy was motivated to continue working as a tutor during her graduate studies.

Throughout our meeting, Lucy seemed relaxed but very attentive. As she explained her views to me, she leaned back in a desk chair and stretched her arms above her head. Her eyes widened as she elaborated on certain topics. In her concept map, Lucy’s understanding of social justice issues in tutoring sessions includes sources of social injustices as well as both intentional and unintentional aspects.
Lucy’s Conceptualization of Social Justice Issues in Tutorials

Lucy’s concept map of social justice issues in tutoring sessions includes 15 items. The central item is “social justice issues in students’ writing as discussed in tutoring sessions,” which branches into two subheadings: “can be → unconscious” and “can be → conscious.” When I asked her to explain the concept map, Lucy said that she “broke conscious down into implied and explicit, or unconsciously implied or explicit. They’re all kind of working together here,” (November 15th, 2013). To clarify, I asked her, “Do implied and explicit apply to both conscious and unconscious?” She responded, “yes,” and I asked her to elaborate. She replied:
Because I think sometimes students are conscious of it, but they want to hide it, so... then it might just be more implied, because they're conscious of it, but it's not like right up in your face... I feel like sexism is like a big one, like they'll just use ‘he,’ maybe, instead of saying ‘he or she,’ and that's just kind of an implied way, but they've made the conscious decision to do that. (November 15th, 2013)

When I asked her about examples in the unconscious sense, she said elaborated, “[That] would be more like... they [tutees] use 'he,' but they don't mean it.” Lucy further posited that “they're used to saying 'he,' and they're used to their professors using 'he,' and it's just kind of something that happens... They don't think anything of it.” As an example of an unconscious, explicit instance of a social justice issue, Lucy said, “I mean, we do this all the time in our speech, like I'll say something like, um, 'hey, guys.' I'm very unconscious of that” (November 15th, 2013).

From any of the combinations of unconscious/conscious and implied/explicit, Lucy’s concept map extends to five categories: “Age(ism),” “racism,” and “sexism” as well as perceptions of individuals based on “physical characteristics,” or whether individuals are “members of organization [examples] (sorority, honors society).” In the interview, Lucy clarified that each category of social presumptions (manifestations of social injustice), are caused by five additional items along the bottom: “university culture (professors, university [policies]),” “backgrounds ([examples] parents, past schooling, religion),” “popular news media ([examples] Buzzfeed, [The Huffington] Post),” “TV, movies, celebs,” and “peers.” In other words, Lucy is describing ways in which an individual’s social context may lead them to participate (consciously or unconsciously) in socially oppressive perceptions. She stated that such influences, including the academic
context, social background, prevalent forms of media, and peers, “are what’s causing this stuff,” (November 15th, 2013).

Lucy’s Category Rank Order

When I asked Lucy to consider and rank the category cards, she made two additional categories: “Physical Characteristics” and “Majors, organizations on campus.” Lucy ranked Physical Characteristics, including the provided categories of Weight and Age, as the most relevant categories of social justice issues. She then ranked Gender as second, Race and Ethnicity as third, and Majors, Organizations on Campus as fourth most relevant in tutoring sessions. For her fifth ranking, Lucy included Physical or Mental Ability as well as Language. Lucy said that the sixth through ninth categories, Sexual Orientation, Nationality, Religion, and Class and Economic Status, “were very hard to put in a row, because... these are things that come up in papers a lot.” I then asked Lucy, “When they come up in papers, how does it become a social justice issue? Is it the category itself, or is it certain ways of representing?” Lucy responded:

If they write something about the Iraq war... instead of saying the word, 'Arabic,' or 'Arab countries,' they might say 'Muslim countries'... and then the tutor might feel like that puts them in a tough position... and similarly with religion, there might be a paper about abortion... because they... might put something in like, ‘in my church, abortion is considered an abomination; you will go to hell.’ So as a tutor reading that, you have to say something like, ‘we need to back that up; that's your belief.’ When you're writing, that's your person, right? It's so personal.

(November 15th, 2013)
Table 3

*Lucy’s Category Ranking Task Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Class and Economic Status</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Categories in italics were produced by the participant.

**Mark**

At noon on Saturday, November 16\(^{th}\), 2013, I met with Mark in a private group study room in the campus library. Mark is a male graduate tutor at the writing center. During the interview, Mark told me that he began working at the writing center for several reasons, including confidence in his own writing based on instructors’ positive feedback, a helpful experience as a tutee in the writing center, and his own need for a job at the time he applied (November 16\(^{th}\), 2013).

During the data collection session, Mark sat across the table from me. His manner was very polite, yet also warm, caring, and reflective. Mark’s concept map includes problematic things that a tutee might do as well as unjust circumstances that might affect a tutee’s success in writing (and thereby the tutorial). He also incorporated his own reflective emotional responses to social justice issues.
Mark’s Conceptualization of Social Justice Issues in Tutorials

Figure 4. Mark’s concept map (Nov 16, 2013).

Mark’s concept map includes 20 total items. At the top is the concept of “social justice issues in tutoring sessions,” which Mark subdivided into three sections: “oppressive,” “unfair,” and “offensive.” These three items are parallel to the prompt, in which I operationally defined social justice issues as “things in students’ writing or discussion of writing that you consider unfair, oppressive, or offensive.” Mark also connected the three subheadings (oppressive, unfair, and offensive). This is because, as he stated, “if something’s oppressive, it’s also unfair. I mean oftentimes, when something’s unfair, it’s offensive. So I think they all kind of relate to each other,” (November 16th, 2013). Mark continued on to say that many of the items beneath each subcategory also relate to items under the other headings. From this point, I present
Mark’s discussion of his concept map in the order that he discussed each item. Mark discussed the items on his concept map from the right side to the left side, top to bottom.

**Offensive.** Two items are listed under the heading “offensive”: “Not giving credit to the researchers & fully taking the credit,” and “Things in writing that attack who I am.” Under the first subheading (Not giving credit to the researchers & fully taking the credit), another item, “Frustration,” is listed; “Frustration” then proceeds to “temptation to form judgments.” On the topic of crediting sources, Mark first mentioned a scenario:

One thing that I find somewhat offensive in student writing is when they are not giving credit to the researcher; they're like fully taking credit that's their ideas...

Because if they just plagiarize their paper, that in itself, I don't find that offensive.  
(November 16th, 2013)

In his example, Mark differentiated between plagiarism in general (which, he noted may or may not be offensive *per se*) and specific circumstances in which he would consider plagiarism offensive.

Mark then explained the relationship between offensive instances of improper citing practices and “frustration,” which he listed as a subsequent item: “So when this happens, how does it make me feel? ... It gives me a lot of frustration because... I feel like we can’t even get to [discussing content] because I'm feeling sort of offended based on that” (November 16th, 2013).

The result of frustration leads to the next item, “temptation to form judgments.” Mark explained that in the aforementioned frustrating situation, he may be tempted to make judgments about the student with whom is working. He continued: “I really try hard not to form those judgments, but that temptation is there,” (November 16th, 2013).
The second subheading under “offensive,” is “Things in writing that attack who I am.” As an example, Mark mentioned that a tutee’s essay might attack his religion. Though he may perceive such issues as offensive, Mark denied that it would be malicious or even intentional: “I mean obviously that’s not their intent because they don’t know me,” (November 16th, 2013). Whether or not the tutee may be aware of the offensive issue, the circumstances lead to the next item: “hinders rapport.” As he explained the connection, Mark said, “I'm not gonna tell you, I'm not gonna say, 'oh I think that's really offensive,' because if I say that, it's like well then, we're done. We're basically done, because where can we go from there?” (November 16th, 2013).

The subcategory “hinders rapport” proceeds to two further categories: “hinders ability to be helpful,” and “makes me feel uncomfortable.” In Mark’s perspective, rapport is crucial to the dynamics of tutoring, and it must be established first: “that’s what I like to do at the beginning of the session: build that rapport.” (November 16th, 2013). A threat to rapport can thereby translate to a threat upon the helpfulness of the tutor; “If you can’t reach the students, you don’t have that rapport, then it’s not gonna matter,” (November 16th, 2013). The other associated category, “makes me feel uncomfortable,” reveals Mark’s negative feelings associated with situations in which rapport may be threatened due to (unknowingly) offensive content in students’ essays.

**Unfair.** The next subheading, “unfair,” branches into two items: “Focusing on my appearance” and “Judging me when I share personal info or experiences.” Both of these items are also subsequently connected to “Makes me feel uncomfortable,” which I previously mentioned. In situations where Mark feels that a student is paying excessive attention to his appearance, he explained, concerns can arise which affect the purpose of
the session. The second subcategory (“Judging me when I share personal info or experiences”) relates to situations where Mark may sense that a student is judging him when he shares personal knowledge or experience with them. In consequence, the feeling of being judged “hinders rapport, hinders [his] ability to be helpful.” Furthermore, when he feels that his helpfulness is hindered, he said, “when I'm not being helpful, then I kind of feel like, well, I'm not doing what I'm being paid to do, what I'm volunteering my time to do” (November 16th, 2013). In reflecting on situations in which he would feel judged by a student, Mark rhetorically asks, “Like why am I here? Because it makes me feel like well, if I'm not helping anyone, what am I doing as a tutor here? I shouldn't even be here,” (November 16th, 2013).

**Oppressive.** In the discussion of his concept map, Mark mentioned that issues under “offensive” and “unfair” tended to be “things that are negative that the student does.” In contrast, Mark explained, “an oppressive side... was more of things that make [him] feel empathy for the student.” Mark’s examples in this category include some circumstances which might affect a student’s academic achievement.

The subheading of “oppressive” on the concept map leads to two items: “Lack of opportunity/resources to develop as a writer” and “Professors unwilling to help.” Related to lack of opportunities or resources for writing development, Mark discussed divergent educational backgrounds:

I have students who come in... and they say, 'well in my high school, I didn't learn any of this...' part of that is just related to maybe socioeconomics: where they grew up, different schools, different resources... but it still makes me feel like they've been oppressed in that way. (November 16th, 2013)
Mark compared this category to the next ("Professors unwilling to help") because both situations put the student at a disadvantage. In the case of professors who are unwilling to help, Mark perceives that some student’s professors may “push them off” on the writing center because they are personally reluctant to provide writing support (November 16th, 2013).

Beneath these two categories is another item, “Empathy for student.” Mark did not draw a line to connect this item to the items above it, but in the discussion, he revealed that it his empathy for a student is a consequence of “Lack of opportunity/resources to develop as a writer” and “Professors unwilling to help.”

Extending from “Empathy for student” are two items: “Feel like I have to do more” and “Builds rapport.” Even though there may be more pressure on him when he feels that he must provide more support in a session, Mark does feel that it can be personally rewarding, because he may greatly help the tutee. Under “builds rapport,” which can be facilitated with increased empathy, Mark wrote that it “can lead to a better session” because, as he previously mentioned, stronger rapport can lead to better focus on writing.

**Mark’s Category Rank Order**

For the category ranking task, Mark listed Language as most relevant to social justice issues in tutoring sessions, Nationality as second most relevant, and Age as third most relevant. Next, he listed Race and Ethnicity, Gender, and Weight as third through sixth most relevant. From seventh to tenth most relevant, he selected Physical or Mental Abilities, Class and Economic Status, Sexual Orientation, and Religion, respectively.
Table 4

*Mark’s Category Ranking Task Results*

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<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Religion</td>
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**Julia**

On a Saturday afternoon, I met with Julia in a reserved group study room at the library. Julia is a female graduate tutor; she began working at the writing center because she was moving to the area and needed local employment (November 16th, 2013). Tutoring offered a position that fit her needs, but she also enjoys tutoring: “I mean I like it; I’m very glad that I work there” (November 16th, 2013).

Julia’s passion for social justice issues was evident throughout our meeting. Her frustration with social oppression manifested in semi-rhetorical questions, such as “How do you approach that?” “What do you say to that?” and “What are you supposed to do at that point?” (November 16th, 2013). Her detailed and extensive examples often included analyses based on critical theory; indeed, she mentioned at the beginning of the session that “racism is very close to [her own] research” (November 16th, 2013). Julia’s concept map demonstrates her awareness of abundant categories and examples of social justice issues. After explaining the content of her map, Julia clarified that it was by no means exhaustive:
I feel like there’s a lot that I didn’t put on here that I could have. But I feel like then this map would be in six dimensions.... It’s like an infinity of things that connect. But I didn’t; my categories don’t include ‘power’ or things like that.

(November 16th, 2013)

Julia also used quotation marks around particular terms and phrases to demonstrate quotes or ideologies that she critiqued.

**Julia’s Conceptualization of Social Justice Issues in Tutorials**

![Julia’s Concept Map](image)

*Figure 5. Julia’s concept map (November 16th, 2013).*

Julia’s concept map includes 43 items. In the discussion, Julia identified six main categories: “racism, sexism, linguistics, socioeconomic class, sociocultural issues, [and]
gender” (November 16th, 2013). She discussed each of these categories in a clockwise manner, beginning at the top left of the concept map.

**Racism.** Within the category of racism, Julia first mentioned the item, “U.S. ideologies of race”: “since our students are writing in a US context, I think this is where some of them, some of this comes from” (November 16th, 2013). She continued to say that this item included “phenotypic characteristics,” the next item on the context map, which would include “skin color, hair traits, body build, etc.” (November 16th, 2013).

According to her explanation, Julia then “broke it up into four categories from there.” The first of these categories is represented by the item: “black vs. white → power of whiteness → (i.e. ‘one drop theory’),” (November 16th, 2013). On this topic, Julia described an incident in which she tutored a white male student whose paper was about the power that he possessed as a white person. She also described a more common experience of tutoring individuals who “position themselves for identifying with being black because of this theory” in a self-reflective sense (November 16th, 2013). Julia then moved to the next item: “black to crime/poor/uneducated,” which, she explained, is a common association in papers she has seen. The next label, “black → Africa → ‘country’,” indicates how some writers have referred to Africa as a country, not a continent, and that writers may refer to African people as “black,” (November 16th, 2013).

In the next column, Julia included two items, “Asian → Chinese,” and “‘Oriental’ people,” which both denote marginalizing ways that students have referred to people of Asian descent as “Chinese” (despite their actual nationality or cultural background) or “Oriental.” Julia also referred to national and cultural stereotyping in the next label,
“Hispanic → Mexico,” as students have presumed the titles to be interchangeable. Julia noted that she has witnessed the phrase representing the next item, “‘Border jumpers’,,” in students’ writing, too. At this point in the discussion, her exasperation was already clear:

How do you take this? Because they're writing a persuasive paper on how there should be stricter border laws, but then these terms like this... the difference is you’re supposed to be writing a paper to defend border controls, not on separating races or whatever. You know what I mean? Like separating people. (November 16th, 2013)

Based on more examples of problematic phrases that Julia has seen in essays, she included “Middle Easterners are scary/mean/,” as the next item. On this topic, Julia said, “they [students] kind of position themselves... I haven’t seen this in their writing so much, but just as in discussions of their writing... like U.S. versus middle east... They’ll say that middle easterners are scary or they’re mean,,” which, she noted, are stereotypes “based on their characteristics and where they’re from” (November 16th, 2013). The last two items in this subcategory are “in betweeners ‘I’m not black’ → not what he said” and “I’m not white.” Julia did not discuss these items at length, because it was a situation that developed when a student interjected while Julia was being tutored at the writing center.

**Linguistics.** Under the subheading “Linguistics,” Julia first talked about the item “Accented English,” which is exemplified by quotes on the next two labels: “Teachers/students ‘don’t even speak English’,,” and “‘Asians are the hardest to understand’.” Julia stated that she has heard fellow tutors make statements like these about tutee’s linguistic abilities, and she has heard both tutors’ and tutees’ disapproving
comments on professors’ speech. She continued on the latter point: “And then that relates to how they understood their assignments, and how they couldn't, they perceive that they couldn't go to their teacher and talk to them because they couldn't understand them” (November 16th, 2013). Under the item titled “Political correctness,” Julia listed “Bilingualism code-switching,” and then gave another item as an example: “‘Why do Asians only hang out [and] speak in Chinese?’” Julia said that this is an example of the kind of statements she occasionally hears within the writing center. Julia reflected upon a tutor’s role when perceiving such stereotyping: “Where is your position... because as a tutor, you already have that authority role, so when do you say, ‘don't do that’?”

**Sociocultural issues.** The first item that Julia discussed under “Sociocultural issues” was “religious differences,” and she included another item, “Christianity vs. Islamic/Muslim” to represent a specific experience that she had in a tutoring session. I discuss this anecdote in the next section of Julia’s data presentation. The next items that Julia mentioned were “Political stances” and “nation vs. nation.” She clarified that she “sees more of this than I’ve seen actual Republican versus Democrat” ideas in tutoring sessions (November 16th, 2013). Under “nation vs. nation,” is the label, “U.S. vs. ‘Middle East’,” which Julia had mentioned when she explained the racism subheading. The last item in this category is titled, “‘Are you a Russian spy?’” which is a quote from a paper that Julia read in a tutoring session; I will elaborate on this anecdote in the next section.

**Gender issues.** Julia proceeded to explain her concept map in a clockwise fashion, so “Gender issues” was the next subheading that she discussed. The first item is “Arguments against Gay Rights,” which, she said, has been a regular theme in writing.
She gave an example of one such paper, which I more thoroughly discuss in the anecdotes section, which corresponds to the next item: “lesbian O.K. gay males not O.K.” In that case, the tutee’s essay had advocated that female homosexuality is acceptable, but male homosexuality is not. For the label, “Male vs. female-ness,” Julia clarified: “it's like males are powerful, things like that. You know, positioning males to be like the power figures. And I don't know if this is, this might not be intentional,” (November 16th, 2013). On the next item, Julia had originally written “Gay Bashing?” but she crossed out the word ‘bashing.’ She explained her uncertainty about the term: “People say ‘gay bashing,’ which I don’t like that phrase, but it kind of encompasses what it is, meaning transgender discrimination” (November 16th, 2013). Julia’s next item, labeled “Transgendered discrimination ‘what is it?’,” refers to “derogatory terms and things like that that are associated with being gay or with being transgender, these gender issues” (November 16th, 2013). The last item under this subheading is “Stereotyping women [and] men based on __.” This item also represents another anecdote that I discuss in the section on Julia’s experiences of social justice issues in tutoring sessions.

**Socio-econ Class.** The next heading on Julia’s concept map is “Socio-econ[omic] Class.” In the data collection session, Julia first discussed the bottom item: “low vs. high income individuals/family/community/countries,” which corresponds to another specific incident which I will present in the next section. There are two more items under this subheading: “‘The Third World’,” and “‘China owns us’.” Both of these items represent phrases that Julia has heard in discussions of essays while tutoring students.

**Sexism.** In our meeting, Julia elaborated on how she chose to separate “gender issues” and “sexism” into two categories:
[Sexism] kind of relates to gender issues, but I feel like it’s stronger because in the writing, there will be 'he' as in female and in relation to - and I just put for example - professional like police 'man,' or 'she' female lunch 'lady.' So in the writing, there will be a lot of pronouns like that used that distinguish female characteristic, even if they're not even talking about a profession or something like that. (November 16th, 2013)

This quote explains one of the items, which is listed as “professional [and] personal roles (he) as male → ex. police ‘man’ (she) as female → lunch ‘lady’.” Another item, “The author was female student wrote ‘he’ repeatedly,” relates to another specific anecdote. The last item under the subheading of sexism is “female-tasks, roles, identities less significant.” Julia explained: “then that comes with a whole other thing about how US society puts males in a certain position and females in a certain position with professionalism and credibility, and power comes into it and all that stuff.”

Julia’s Category Rank Order

Julia ranked Gender as the most relevant category in relation to social justice issues in tutoring sessions. She chose Sexual Orientation as second most relevant. For the third most relevant ranking, Julia selected both Nationality and Race and Ethnicity. Julia’s fourth category was language. She then ranked both Class and Economic Status and Religion as fifth, though she expressed uncertainty about her ranking of Religion. Finally, Julia ranked Physical or Mental Abilities, Age, and Weight as sixth, seventh, and eighth most relevant.
Table 5

*Julia’s Category Ranking Task Results*

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<th>Rank</th>
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<th>Additional Categories in Same Rank</th>
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**Elliot**

Elliot, female undergraduate writing center tutor, met with me in the library on a Saturday evening. Elliot told me that she had been interested in working at the writing center since her freshman year, when she had a friend who worked there. She had heard positive things about the writing center from her friend: “whenever she would talk about her job, it just always sounded like, I should do that!” Elliot also decided to apply to work the writing center because she had been unsatisfied with her prior job as a language tutor on campus. After she was hired, Elliot was very happy about her choice: “I really lucked into it, because it’s an awesome job. It’s like the best job I’ve ever had” (November 16th, 2013).

In our meeting, Elliot expressed that she wanted to participate because she feels that social justice and oppression are important issues that are not sufficiently discussed. She spoke evenly, and it seemed clear to me that she had previously reflected upon marginalizing issues which can arise in tutoring sessions. Elliot’s map prominently features relationships (represented by arrows and their adjacent clarifications) between
individuals and circumstances involved in tutoring sessions, and how the participants and broader context can manifest in social justice issues.

**Elliot’s Conceptualization of Social Justice Issues in Tutorials**

*Figure 6. Elliot’s concept map (November 16th, 2013).*

Elliot’s concept map includes 15 total items. The central item is “Social justice [with a frown emoticon],” which leads to four subheadings (discussed counter-clockwise): “influenced by → Professor’s expectations,” “demonstrated by → Topics of writing (esp[ecially] narratives in comp[osition] courses),” “can be complicated by → Tutor’s style, personality,” and “can be complicated by → student’s writing background/self-esteem.”
**Professor’s expectations.** The subheading, “influenced by → Professor’s expectations,” extends to four more items in the subheading, and it is also connected via double arrow to another subheading (i.e., “Professor’s expectations ← each influences the other → Student’s writing background/self-esteem”). Of the four items within the category of professor’s expectations, two are examples: “Example: inner city (Philly) students are poor writers; they write how they speak,” and “Example: L2 writers need a lot more help with grammar.”

Elliot elaborated that “students would pick up on” professors’ marginalizing expectations and that such expectations might be spoken directly to tutoring staff (November 16th, 2013). This notion is represented on the concept map as “sometimes → explicitly stated to tutoring staff and/or students (UNFAIR/RUDE).” However, Elliot expressed that more frequently, a professor’s expectations may be inferred, which is signified in the next item: “usually → implied in how professor describes the student; WC, or marks the paper.” Elliot elaborated:

If a professor tells a student, 'you need to go to the writing center...’ If they describe the writing center as a 'fix-it' sort of: I mean that implies unfair expectations that they have of the student and of us and of their own job as a professor. (November 16th, 2013)

**Topics of writing.** The next subheading that Elliot discussed is connected to the central term, “Social justice” with an explanation of its relationship to the item, specifically: “demonstrated by → Topics of writing (esp[ecially] narratives in comp[osition] courses)” Elliot explained that in this sense, she was primarily referring to core curriculum English courses which are required for all undergraduate majors.
For the first item under this subheading, “can be → stories about discrimination, stories about witnessing discrimination”, Elliot remarked that stories about experiencing or witnessing discrimination are examples of essays which specifically discuss social justice issues. Elliot said that those kinds of stories, which tutors may encounter in tutoring sessions, can potentially be the result of prompts which don’t necessarily specify discrimination as a topic. Elliot posited that it’s “not that the professor was like, ‘write about that time when you've been discriminated against’,” but that “the prompt has usually been like, ‘write about a difficult thing in your life,’ or ‘write about a time when you were faced with adversity’,” (November 16th, 2013). In such cases, she continued, the broader context of the student’s scholarly experience can affect his or her inclination to express issues of discrimination in writing. This notion is expressed in the second item under the subheading, “willing to share depends on classmates, prof, maybe tutor.”

**Tutor’s style, personality.** The next subheading is connected to the central term, “Social justice” as “can be complicated by → Tutor’s style, personality.” It is also connected to the previous heading via double arrow (i.e., “Topics of writing (esp. narratives in comp courses) ← may be misunderstandings in some cases → Tutor’s style, personality”). Elliot clarified the meaning of this subheading:

I feel personally like I've been the wrong reader at times for certain topics... and the tutor's style and personality can be a good thing, because maybe the student needs to be sharing an experience or something, one of their topics, but I think it's, in my case, it's been a challenge. (November 16th, 2013)

Elliot then mentioned that a tutor’s style or personality can be interpreted by a student according to “how similar a tutor acts [and] appears to a student’s prof[essor],” which is
the first item under the subheading. Elliot gave an example that if “you just appear to be the same kind of authoritative role” like a student’s professor may embody, that might not be “as helpful as someone who would be more listening or something.” (November 16th, 2013). In the final item under the subheading, Elliot listed several potential personality traits that could affect the dynamics of the tutoring session: “Good listener? Empathetic? Bossy? Rude? ‘Know-it-all’?”

**Student’s writing background/self-esteem.** When she reached this subheading, “student’s writing background/self-esteem,” Elliot explained that “there’s also a relationship between that and professor’s expectations” (November 16th, 2013). This subheading is connected to “Social justice” via arrow: “can be complicated by → Student’s writing background/self-esteem.” Two items are listed under the subheadings, and both are examples of potential sentiments which students may hold of themselves: “Example: ‘My English isn’t good, my teachers say’,” and “Example: ‘I’ve never been a good writer’.” According to Elliot, both scenarios represent tutees’ viewpoints which could complicate social justice issues in tutoring sessions:

I've had students that have had experiences, L2 writers in particular, where they're really frustrated with their professor for having a certain expectation... that you write flawless English just like they expect the same thing of their other students... I never know if I should advocate for the professor's way of doing it and try to educate the student, or if that's not what they need? It's really tough. (November 16th, 2013)
Elliot’s Category Rank Order

Before ranking the categories, Elliot added one more item: “Familiarity with U.S. Academic System.” She noted during the discussion that this category included academic level or experience. Her final category ranking first included Language. Next was Elliot’s category, Familiarity with U.S. Academic System. Elliot’s third through eleventh categories were Class and Economic Status, Nationality, Race and Ethnicity, Physical or Mental Abilities, Age, Gender, Sexual Orientation, Religion, and Weight.

Table 6

Elliot’s Category Ranking Task Results

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<td>9</td>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Religion</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Weight</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Category in italics was produced by the participant.

Syd

I met with Syd, an energetic female undergraduate tutor, in a private room in the library on a Wednesday evening. With a big smile, Syd told me that she began tutoring at the writing center to meet the requirements of her scholarship. She continued to profess that tutoring is simply an enjoyable experience to her: “I love writing, and more than anything, I love helping people love English and grammar and writing... I love this job so much,” (November 20th, 2013).
Syd was very animated throughout our discussion; she often used hand gestures to emphasize her explanations and descriptions. She laughed often, though sometimes with incredulity when reflecting upon an experience that, from her perspective, revealed blatant marginalization. Syd’s concept map includes several specific categories of social oppression, delineation between intentionality and unintentionality, and several additional causes and/or effects of social justice issues in tutoring sessions.

**Syd’s Conceptualization of Social Justice Issues in Tutorials**

![Syd’s concept map (November 20th, 2013).](image)

*Figure 7. Syd’s concept map (November 20th, 2013).*

At the center of the top of Syd’s concept map, the central term, “Social justice issues in tutoring sessions” extends to four categories, or “issues.” From several issues, Syd proceeds to examples which more specifically demonstrate the problem. In her
explanation, Syd then discussed the remaining items in terms of “reasons as to why these [social justice issues] happen,” (November 20th, 2013). Therefore, I discuss the items on Syd’s concept map in terms of “issues” (which include ten items at the top of the concept map) and “reasons” (which include seven items at the bottom of the map). Including the central item, “Social justice issues in tutoring sessions,” Syd’s map contains a total of 18 items.

**Issues.** Syd identified the first four items as “Gender/sexual identity issues,” “Ethnicity/Cultural issues,” “Racial issues,” and “Socioeconomic issues.” She noted that Ethnicity/Cultural issues and Racial issues “sort of go together, but [she] separated them in terms of actually international people versus within the United States,” (November 20th, 2013). Syd then presented several examples, beginning with those proceeding from Racial issues: “example → ‘A back-woods redneck’ ‘uneducated black kids’, ” and “‘oppression that Middle Eastern women face’”; the latter example, she explained, also applies to Ethnicity/Cultural issues. In these examples as well as several others, Syd used quotations around phrases to indicate that such a phrase may be in a tutee’s paper.

From Socioeconomic issues, Syd referred to another example: “example →

“‘This law would mostly affect poor people because they have the worst diets’. ” She noted that this was an actual quotation from a paper that she had encountered as a tutor, which will be further elaborated in an anecdote which relates to Syd’s experiences of social justice issues in tutorials.

Extending from Gender/ Sexual identity issues, there are three items: “‘his or her’ versus ‘they’,” “politically correct ways to refer to tender subjects, body parts, etc.,” and “‘All women’ ‘men at large are incapable of...’.” Syd noted that issues of gendered
pronouns as well as taboo body parts are often relevant in essays related to specific disciplines, such as the education field in relation to gender pronouns and sociology in relation to using politically correct terms for certain body parts or functions.

**Reasons.** From each of the four types of issues is connected via arrows to the first item which encompasses “reasons as to why [the issues] happen,” which is “Almost always a result of → Overgeneralizations” (November 20th, 2013). Syd subsequently divided Overgeneralizations into two possible circumstances: “can be → Purposeful,” and “can be → Accidental/not purposeful.” Syd described purposeful and accidental as “two facets” of overgeneralization (November 20th, 2013).

The four items towards the bottom of Syd’s concept map include conditions in which overgeneralizations (whether purposeful or not) may occur. The first of these items, “one-sided research/insufficient research,” includes arrows which directly connect it with both purposeful and accidental facets of overgeneralization. The next item, “simply uninformed/knows no better” extends specifically to the unintentional side of overgeneralization: “can lead to → Accidental/not purposeful.” The notion of a student who is “simply uninformed” also proceeds to a previously discussed example: “oppression that Middle Eastern women face’.” She elaborated that some tutees may “only understand the American side of that.”

According to Syd’s concept map, another source of overgeneralizations is represented by the item: “Blatant, motivated stereotyping,” which proceeds to “purposeful” as well as the aforementioned example, “This law would mostly affect poor people because they have the worst diets’.” The final item on the concept map is “insufficient vocabulary,” which extends to purposeful as well as accidental, and two
aforesaid examples: “for instance → politically correct ways to refer to tender subjects, body parts, etc.,” and “‘A back-woods redneck’ ‘uneducated black kids’.” This last item, insufficient vocabulary, may be a result of an individual’s background context and exposure to or unfamiliarity with particular terms.

**Syd’s Category Rank Order**

Syd ranked Race and Ethnicity as the most relevant category in relation to social justice issues in tutoring sessions, followed by Class and Economic Status. She then listed Gender, Sexual Orientation, Nationality, and Language as third through sixth most relevant. For seventh most relevant, Syd listed both Age and Physical or Mental Abilities. Finally, Syd ranked both Religion and Weight as eighth most relevant.

**Table 7**

**Syd’s Category Ranking Task Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Additional Categories in Same Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Weight</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Claudia**

I met with Claudia in a secluded classroom on campus on a Thursday evening. Claudia, a female graduate tutor, described herself as “assertive.” In our meeting, she was focused and serious about the issues that she discussed, though she did laugh or smile occasionally. Claudia said that she had originally began working as a tutor because she “was looking for a leap from [her previous] job,” which she described as a “horrible
job with pizza” (November 21st, 2013). After she began tutoring and learning about writing center philosophies, she said, “it’s like I was hooked.... It was fun doing that, it was fun learning. It was stressful, but it was great.” At the time of the study, she had tutored at two universities.

Claudia’s concept map is constructed in a portrait page orientation, as opposed to a landscape orientation, which was used by each of the other seven participants. At the end of her explanation of the concept map, she mentioned that she “wouldn’t have enough room” to include her conceptualization if the paper had been in landscape (November 21st, 2013). As it is, one item does slightly extend off of the bottom of the paper.

The contents of Claudia’s concept map are approximately sequential from the top to the bottom of the map. First, she indicated individual traits and circumstances brought to the session by the student and tutor, respectively. She then discussed some of the complexities which arise within a session based on the context of the student’s text, which she clarified as “the essays and the ideas within them” (November 21st, 2013). She also discussed certain attentiveness and strategies that may help tutors deal with social oppression in the text. Finally, she suggested potential results of sessions in which social justice issues were salient.
Claudia’s Conceptualization of Social Justice Issues in Tutorials

Figure 8. Claudia’s concept map (November 21st, 2013).

Claudia’s concept map features 21 total items, beginning with the central term, “Social justice issues in tutoring sessions.” Claudia wrote “student” on the top left side, and “tutor” on the top right side to indicate that most items on the left side relate to the student’s circumstances, while most items on the right side refer to the tutor’s. I will discuss Claudia’s concept map in terms of “problems,” as indicated by the items to either
side of the central term, “power in message (text) negotiation,” under which Claudia has listed several specific categories and traits of each tutorial participant, and “results” as the final subheading listed in the figure.

**Problems.** To the left of the central item, “Social justice issues in tutoring sessions,” Claudia listed, under “student,” one item which contains several concepts: “Problem(s): perpetuating neg[ative] thoughts/ideas; reflection of acquired beliefs/perceptions.” Mirrored on the right side of the concept map, Claudia listed, under “tutor,” one more item which also contained several ideas: “Problems: personal comfort in session; withholding combative emotions; can I change this idea? Focus on writing.”

**Power in message (text) negotiation.** Proceeding from the central term is the item, “Power in message (text) negotiation.” This subheading represents Claudia’s focal shift to “the power and message in the text” because, she explained, “for me, and I think a lot of people do, too, consider the text the actual thing you’re looking at as a reflection... of how you process things, how your logic and your cognition” is constructed (November 21st, 2013). The subheading radiates via arrows to five other items. Three of these items, listed directly below “Power in message (text) negotiation,” are social classifications or categories: “race/ethnicity,” “sexual pref[erence],” and “gender.” Each of these categories proceeds to another item: “session.” It is significant to note that the items above “session” (including social classifications, power in the text, students’ as well as tutors’ problems, and social justice issues in the session itself) have been mentioned before the session; therefore, it may be inferred that Claudia sees the prior topics as extant and brought to the session.
Aside from the social categorization items, “Power in message (text) negotiation” also proceeds to two more items, one of which is labeled “student,” and the other which is labeled “tutor.” Under the title of “student,” there is a bulleted item: “Display of power: ideas/beliefs; personal opinions; attached to experience or upbringing; cultural values; personal/understanding.” Claudia elaborated on this item in the discussion:

What I mean by this is bringing in this text, the student has produced something: whether it's a final, whether it's a draft, the student has taken the time to consider a topic, consider a question, and produce something based off his or her own beliefs. (November 21st, 2013).

Though this may be especially true in position papers, she explained, it is also true in research, for example. On the concept map, there are actually two arrows connecting power in text negotiation to the student’s display of power; one of these arrows indicates that the student’s power is “somewhat elevated.” In the discussion, Claudia explained that the student’s status in a tutoring session is relatively higher than it would be in a classroom context, because “the dichotomy [between tutor and tutee] isn’t as strong” as it would be between a student and an instructor in the classroom (November 21st, 2013).

The remaining item under the theme of power in text negotiation, which is specified as relevant to the “tutor” on the concept map, begins with an item that also features a bulleted list: “Display of power: corrective training; obligation to student during session; remedy/identify conflicts.” This item also proceeds from “Power in message (text) negotiation” via two arrows, one of which indicates that the tutor’s power is “elevated” in a session. Claudia explained that “The tutor is still in an elevated position of power, because they're coming to you for help, but it's not necessarily, you
don't have the final say with things, you can only guide someone” (November 21st, 2013).

The tutor’s display of power continues to two more bulleted lists, which represent the session and the self. The first item is “Session: obligated to clarify meanings; improve power of student’s thoughts message,” and the second item is “Self: personal morals and beliefs; politics; temptation to use.” Claudia further explained what she meant by the items under “self”:

There's where the static, the gray area, is because... a lot of people debated whether you should totally separate yourself or whether you should just fight as much as you can to try to get the student to see your side of the story. But that takes the focus off of the student and puts it on yourself.... On my last bullet, I have 'temptation to use this power' as a way to kind of put a student in a vice grip and say, 'no, you listen to me; this is what's going on...' So one of the only things I've ever heard to remedy both of these things, the fight between the session and the self, is playing devil's advocate. (November 21st, 2013).

As Claudia mentioned, both the items including the session and the self are connected to the next item: “devil’s advocate: Make them prove its validity; balance emotion with questioning.” The last item, which proceeds from the previous, reads: “The power of questions!” This final item indicates advice for tutors to remember: a potentially productive reaction to social justice issues.

**Results.** The final subheading, “results,” contains particularly positive outcomes from instances of social justice in tutorials. This subheading is divided again into “student” on the left and “tutor” on the right. Under “tutor,” the first label presents a list
of potential outcomes from encountering social justice issues in tutoring sessions:
“exercise in patience, flexibility, and emotional control, skills; provides opportunities for
new perceptions and ways of thinking.” Though encountering social justice issues may
affect a tutor’s personal comfort (as mentioned under the first subheading), Claudia
indicates that such negotiation of meaning can result in personal development. The next
item represents another possible effect: the tutor “uses semi indirectness effectively.”

Between the columns of “tutor” and “student,” there is one item which applies to
both individuals: both participants are “exposed to different perceptions; good and bad”
as a result of negotiating socially-relevant meaning. Claudia explained:

Both of them have to, they grow in some way. I mean whether the tutor or the
tutee gains another perception, and whether he or she throws it out the window,
that will come back... Same thing with the tutor... you're gonna have a foundation
to springboard from [in future sessions]. (November 21st, 2013)

Under “student,” the first item lists two effects of negotiating meaning in tutoring
sessions: the student is “exposed to feedback” and “challenged to find sources.” The
subsequent item adds that the student therefore “argues more effectively,” while the item
thereafter clarifies that the student “may not change his [or] her stance immediately.”
The final item in this sequence reads: “ideas planted; new ways to approach topic;
GROWTH.” Here, Claudia’s concept map ends on a decidedly optimistic note.

Claudia’s Category Rank Order

Claudia added one additional item to the categories: Educational Background.
She explained more about the category in our discussion: “The amount of education that
a student has received prior to the session.” Furthermore, she continued, it “has a huge
influence on their perceptions: not cognitive abilities, but abilities to balance things, to weigh things... how much energy he or she's going to give to this specific assignment,” (November 21st, 2013).

For the ranking, Claudia chose Race and Ethnicity as the most relevant to social justice issues in tutoring sessions. She ranked Class and Economic Status as the second most relevant, and she included Educational Background as third. Gender, Sexual Orientation, Religion, Nationality, Physical or Mental Abilities, Language, Weight, and Age represented each of the fourth through eleventh most relevant categories.

Table 8

_Claudia’s Category Ranking Task Results_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Category</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Race and Ethnicity</td>
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<td>Class and Economic Status</td>
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<td>Educational Background</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Weight</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Age</td>
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</table>

*Note.* Category in italics was produced by the participant.

**Charles**

Charles is a male undergraduate tutor, who met with me at the library on a Friday evening. During the data collection session, he told me that he became a tutor because he “wasn’t getting enough of looking at papers and talking about writing” in his coursework. His passion for writing as well as tutoring was evident to me throughout our discussion. It appeared to me that Charles had spent some time considering social justice issues
before our meeting. As he explained incidents in which he had witnessed marginalizing speech or texts, he often shook his head and widened his eyes. He spoke evenly, though with exasperation when describing incidents where he perceived social injustice.

Charles’s concept map incorporates ways in which students as well as tutors may breach or protect social justice within the tutoring session. Most of the items on his concept map represent scenarios in which social justice would be upheld or threatened.

**Charles’s Conceptualization of Social Justice Issues in Tutorials**

![Figure 9. Charles’s concept map (November 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2013).](image)

Charles’s concept map includes 11 items, which he divided into subcategories. Charles began the explanation of his concept map by designating “two different categories: social justice issues in writing and social justice issues in the discussion of writing,” (November 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2013). On the diagram, he specified that the student is largely responsible for breaches or protection of social justice in writing, while the tutor is largely responsible for breaches or protection of social justice in discussion of writing.
One item is listed in the middle, but Charles has specified on the map that it is “not most important, just in the middle.” This item, which refers to issues both in writing and in discussion of writing, is “insulting professor or other groups, overgeneralizing subject groups.” In reference to the remaining parts of the concept map, I will discuss the elements of the concept map with regard to the two major subheadings: in writing and in discussion of writing.

In writing (by student). On the left side of the concept map, Charles references instances of social justice issues in writing, which he posits to be the responsibility of the student, as he or she brings the text to the session. Charles has divided this subheading into two further categorizations: “breach of [social justice]” and “protection of [social justice].” There are four items under breaches of social justice in writing: “teacher prompt: don’t take sides,” “autobiographical info,” “outside influence,” and “conclusions drawn from research.” Charles elaborated on the first item, “teacher prompt: don’t take sides”:

The student might take that to mean that they're not allowed to portray one side or another in a negative light, and it could be that they understand that it's a social justice issue, and they're just taking their professor's advice to a different level.

(November 22nd, 2013)

In this case, the professor’s expectations and the student’s understanding of the assignment may or may not be consistent. The item labeled “autobiographical information,” Charles explained, could result from a student’s conclusion based on a personal experience, which may not accurately represent a group or category of people. This item relates to another, “conclusions drawn from research,” in that both may breach
social justice by presenting insufficient evidence to support the student’s perspective on a social phenomenon. Charles furthermore indicated that the item in the middle of the concept map, which references overgeneralization, “can come from” students drawing “larger conclusions than should be from the research provided” (November 22nd, 2013). In terms of “outside influence,” Charles explained that the student’s view could be affected by other sources, such as forms of media that (overtly or covertly) promote connotations or judgments.

Under the subcategory “protection of [social justice]” in writing, Charles included two items: “teacher prompt: don’t take sides,” and “arguing as member of social group for justice.” The first item is identical to an item previously listed under “breach of social justice”; Charles explained that it “could go either way, because... in having to write about both sides, the teacher can sort of push these social justice issues on students who might not be willing to challenge their previously held notions,” (November 22nd, 2013). The other item, “arguing as a member of social group for justice,” applies to instances wherein a student may use a writing assignment “as a platform for conversation” about a social justice issue which personally affects them due to their membership in a marginalized group.

In discussion of writing (by tutor). On the right side of his concept map, Charles focused on social justice issues in the discussion of writing that, he noted, may often be the responsibility of the tutor. Charles also divided this category into two further subcategories: “breach of [social justice]” and “protection of [social justice]” in discussion of writing. The first subcategory, which indicates ways in which the tutor might breach social justice, includes two items: “acting as a professional instead of a
high-level peer. Power dynamics,” and “assumptions about the reader by autobiographical [information]. Leading questions; e.g., Did you have a 1 parent household.” The first item speaks to the role of the tutor; Charles notes that there is a range of expectations on the part of the tutee:

When students come to us for help, they don't want us to be flipping through our guidebooks trying to find the answers; they want us to have the answers, but they also don't want the answers pushed upon them, and they don't want to be treated as members of some... lower level social group. (November 22nd, 2013)

The second item, in which a tutor might make a presumption about the tutee based on inferences from the content of the text, would also be a breach of social justice according to Charles. Similarly, Charles notes that posing presumptuous questions based on an essay is problematic, “because it’s very possible” that the topic is “not something they wanna talk about, and especially with some tutor who is seen as a stranger looking at your paper,” (November 22nd, 2013).

The final category on Charles’s concept map relates to the “protection of [social justice]” in the discussion of writing. There are two items in this subcategory: “addressing [social justice] issues in writing as problems with student writing,” and “addressing students [and] encouraging [social justice] discourse within papers, especially conclusion [paragraph].” Concerning the first item, Charles supports the notion that tutors can protect social justice by maintaining focus on how issues manifest in writing. He explains:

I think this is one of the big problems with discussing social justice issues in the writing center, is it's not our job. We're here to help students become better
writers, but part of writing is expressing your thoughts, and being more complex thinkers is a really important part of being good writers. (November 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2013)

In his quote, it is also evident that Charles views social justice issues in tutoring sessions as a corollary of tutors’ primary objectives. In our discussion, Charles explained that the paper can be considered “a third party,” or an intermediary between the negotiation of the two individuals. “If you start to talk about social justice and say, 'you think the wrong thing,' you're not changing anything,” Charles rationalized in his discussion. He continued: “for the student to believe that there is separation [between his or herself and the essay], it makes it a lot easier for us to work with ideas as if they don't belong to the student,” (November 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2013).

The allusion to how social justice issues can be addressed by tutors via focus on writing is also evident in the second item: “addressing students [and] encouraging [social justice] discourse within papers, especially conclusion [paragraph].” In his explanation, Charles noted that he sees discussions of conclusions as particularly apt situations for urging students’ consciousness of social justice issues as relevant: “It's a really good place to say, ‘look at the evidence that I've provided. Here are the problems; here are some solutions that could be proposed’,” (November 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2013). To engage in this potential means of protecting social justice in the tutorial, Charles underscores awareness of natural opportunities in the context of the discussion.

**Charles’s Category Rank Order**

For the category ranking task, Charles listed Language as the most relevant category to social justice issues in tutoring sessions. He then ranked Race and Ethnicity as well as Class and Economic Status as second most important, though he clarified that
he considered both of these categories to be “a sort of part of the language,” (November 22nd, 2013). Charles ranked Nationality as third most important in relation to social justice issues in tutoring sessions, and he also noted that he considers nationality to be correlated to language. For the fourth through ninth most relevant categories, Charles chose Sexual Orientation, Religion, Gender, Physical or Mental Abilities, Age, and Weight, respectively.

Table 9

Charles’s Category Ranking Task Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Additional Categories in Same Rank</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Language</td>
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Category Ranking Trends Among Participants

The category ranking task was intended to prompt specific anecdotes as told by each of the participants; therefore, results must be interpreted within the limitations of the intended purpose. Furthermore, several participants commented that choosing the ranks was a difficult task, so their responses may be conditional. Even so, there are several notable trends, which become particularly evident in the mean and mode ranking averages among the research participants. The table below (Table 9) displays participants’ rankings according to individual as well as average rankings (note that ‘1’ indicates the highest rank):
Table 10

Category Ranking Averages

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<th>Category</th>
<th>Gretta</th>
<th>Lucy</th>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Julia</th>
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Note. ‘Per’ indicates number of respondents who included each category; Gretta opted to exclude three categories as not relevant to social justice issues in tutoring sessions.

As table 10 shows, according to the mean average, participants ranked Race and Ethnicity the most relevant category in relation to social justice issues in tutoring sessions. Second most relevant was Gender, followed by Class and Economic Status as third most relevant. Fourth through tenth most relevant are Language, Nationality, Sexual Orientation, Age, Physical or Mental Abilities, Religion, and Weight. Considering the mode (most frequent) average of the category rankings, both categories of Race and Ethnicity as well as Language were designated by three participants as most relevant to social justice issues in tutoring sessions.
Additional Categories. In the data collection sessions, three participants opted to include additional categories for the ranking task. In their respective data collection sessions, Lucy introduced two more categories, “Physical Characteristics” and “Majors, Organizations on Campus,” Elliot included “Familiarity with U.S. Academic System,” and Claudia added “Educational Background.”

Physical Characteristics and Majors, Organizations on Campus. Lucy ranked one of her own categories, Physical Characteristics, as foremost relevant to social injustice in tutorials. She also included Age and Weight alongside Physical Characteristics because, she explained:

I think the first thing that both tutors and tutees, kind of look at, is first physical characteristics, which include some of the categories that you already had, like weight, age. But I think, you know, as people, we just sum each other, you know, we quickly judge each other on how we look. (November 15th, 2013)

From Lucy’s perspective, both the tutor and the tutee make judgments about each other before the session even begins, and such presumptions necessarily affect the outcome of the session.

The other category that Lucy produced, “Majors, Organizations on Campus,” refers to group affiliations among the student population. According to Lucy’s explanation, this category is somewhat thematically similar to Physical Characteristics; both tutors and tutees make preliminary judgments about each other according to perceived affiliations within the university context. Lucy elaborated that “both of the students [tutor and tutee] go to this school, and they have certain ideas about what those organizations or what those majors look like.” She also gave some examples, including
statements that a tutor might say such as, “I worked with this science major; you know how they are,” and “I know sorority sisters from that sorority, and they are partiers,” (November 15th, 2013). The categories that Lucy contributed reflect her understanding of each individual’s presumed knowledge of the other prior to their actual interaction. Additional categories, introduced by Elliot and Claudia, represent another dimension of knowledge that tutorial participants bring to the session: their experience in academic or educational contexts.

Educational Background and Familiarity with U.S. Academic System. Two participants, Elliot and Claudia, proposed additional categories that reflect a similar general idea: an individual’s understanding of academic discourse. Elliot explained her rationale behind her category, “Familiarity with U.S. Academic System”: it relates to “their familiarity or how I perceive their familiarity of the system to be” (November 16th, 2013). In Elliot’s depiction, a tutee’s actual experience could be equally as significant as his or her perceived experience; the important aspect may therefore be the effect of relative positioning between the tutor and the tutee. Claudia’s category, “Educational Background,” more specifically emphasizes a student’s actual experiences:

The amount of education that a student has received prior to the session... has a huge influence on their perceptions: not cognitive abilities, but abilities to balance things, to weigh things... [like] an issue's importance, how much energy he or she's going to give to this specific assignment... different educational backgrounds provide so many different perceptions. (November 21st, 2013)

Claudia’s explanation of “Educational Background,” then, is less focused on how it positions the student relative to the tutor. Rather, Claudia’s category refers to knowledge
and prioritizations that a student brings to the session as such understanding would affect how the student relates to the assignment or goal of the session.

**Participants’ Experiences of Social Justice Issues in Tutorials**

In this section, I present selected anecdotes according to themes which emerged in the anecdotes themselves. Though each participant shared a significant amount of examples to illustrate his or her experiences of social justice issues in tutorials, I include only singular, specific anecdotes (e.g., “I worked with one student on a history paper who...”) framed within the context of the one-on-one session. I have opted to omit generalized impressions or examples (e.g., “Lots of students talk about...”) and examples outside the one-on-one tutoring session (e.g., instances before or after sessions). Furthermore, to purposely target how tutors *experience* social justice issues, I have narrowed specific anecdotes to include only those in which the tutor mentioned how the social justice issue affected that particular session.

After reducing the number of anecdotes, I developed thematic codes, which were then checked by my colleague who is conducting her own research on social oppression. Three themes emerged in the selected anecdotes: tutors noted that as a result of social justice issues, they may adjust their positions, experience emotional distractions, and/or avoid the issue by evading focus on content.

**(Re)positioning**

Claudia and Elliot both shared anecdotes in which they each felt compelled to reconsider their positions that they had brought to the sessions. Specifically, each of them shared stories about the necessity of changing their approaches to the sessions prior to actually tutoring. In Claudia’s example, she had a tutoring session with a man who
had “worked as an engineer for 30 years.” She described the context of the session: “He made it very clear right off the bat, that I have experience, I have this, I have all these years, I have a 401K going and you don't even have anything,” (November 21st, 2013). According to her explanation, she understood that authority was a salient factor in the session. She described how her perception of the student’s prejudgment affected her approach:

I'm like, “well, you're here because your professor needs you to adapt to these newer styles. APA, MLA, college has changed a lot since the last time you've been here.” So I had to kind of establish my credibility with him without being, after identifying his insecurities with his own situation, making him feel comfortable, identifying the source, the reason why he's here, and then just going in from there. (November 21st, 2013)

In her explanation, Claudia experienced the social justice issue (which might be identified as ageism⁵) as an obstacle which she overcame by establishing her credibility and thereby more evenly redistributing power dynamics.

In Elliot’s example, she worked with a man in his “late fifties to early sixties,” who she did not immediately identify as a student:

The first time he ever came in, it was over the summer, and I was like - this sounds terrible, but - I was like, “Oh, are you here to fix something?” because he had all his maintenance stuff on; he's a maintenance guy at [our university]. And he was like, “no, I actually have a paper,” and I was like, “Oh, oh, OK, sorry.”

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⁵ Many of the retained anecdotes do not neatly fit into any particular social categories, or they fit multiple categories at once. I discuss this topic further in the fifth chapter.
Elliot’s response may also fall into the category of “emotional distraction,” since she was admittedly embarrassed by the question she had asked the tutee. Her response also reflects repositioning, though, as she explained that she had presumed more about his academic abilities based on his appearance:

And then I think I assumed that because he was like a maintenance guy and he was a little bit older, that he would be good at writing, and I don't know why I thought that... And then he pulled out his paper, and I had to completely reframe how I was approaching the session because he was at a pre-college level of writing.

In this anecdote, Elliot identifies her own presumptions as the source of the social injustice. In comparison, Claudia had noted in her anecdote that she had been the target of injustice, rather than the source.

In two more anecdotes, Julia and Elliot discuss their shifting positions as tutors based on the context of the session, and ways in which their perceptions affect and are affected by social justice issues. Julia described tutoring a student whose essay was “arguing that... women could marry women, but men could not marry men” (November 16th, 2013). Julia further explained:

There was evidence of support, I guess, the credibility of it... The student was supporting it with stereotypes, for sure. But the stereotypes were coming from sources... and I didn't ask why? I wanted to, but I didn't feel like it was appropriate at the time because it was just looking for, in the session, we were just looking for correct citation information. (November 16th, 2013)
Julia’s story also alludes to another theme, emotional distraction, but in this case, I have included it under repositioning because it illustrates one way that embodying the tutor role may stipulate the individual’s available positions. Also, in this anecdote, Julia experienced a sense of losing authority. Her personal voice was constrained by the context of the session.

Related to the topic of how the context of the session or the tutor role can affect positionality, Elliot also shared another anecdote, in which she described two alternative situations: “In the one, I was totally silent; I let it go. And in the other, I picked a fight with the student.” She continued to explain the difference between each scenario:

You know what - this is terrible - but the reason I picked the fight was because I was personally being oppressed... And then in the other case, it was one student... talking about how people from this other country in Asia are all this stuff, and I was like, “well, I don't know? Maybe? I'm not touching that one.... It didn't have anything to do with me, so I let it go.” (November 16th, 2013)

In this case, Elliot’s positionality as the victim of social injustice and a witness of social injustice affected her experience and response to the issue. However, Elliot also explained further conditions of the situations:

The one where I picked the fight, it was pretty early on, I had a good bond with the student, so when I say “pick a fight,” I don't mean like I was, “roar!” but it was more like, “hey!” You know, we kind of had this good back-and-forth, and then in the other case, I didn't know the student at all; it was the first time I'd ever talked to them.
In her clarification, Elliot’s positionality, and thereby her responses to each social justice issue, was dependent upon a myriad of complex, mutually affecting variables. One notable element of Elliot’s depiction is her reference to her own emotional response, which also ties to the next theme, Emotional Distraction and Repression.

**Emotional Distraction and Repression**

The subcategory of emotional distraction and repression refers to scenarios in which tutors experienced conflicting emotions because of a social justice issue in a tutoring session. In some cases, tutors reflected on decisions to suppress such emotions, as they felt it was necessary to continue with the session.

The first anecdote, which Syd shared in the interview, illustrates her emotional response as a target of social injustice. When Syd was a new tutor, she introduced herself to a doctoral candidate, who had brought in his dissertation for feedback. Because she is an undergraduate student, Syd was concerned that she might not be helpful enough to work with him. She described the incident:

I told him, “I'm only 18, so I'll offer you what help I can. I like to think I'm good at grammar...” But then all the sudden, when I told him, he said, “oh, don't tell me that, because then I'll start flirting with you...” Yeah, *that took me off guard a little bit.* (November 20th, 2013)

In Syd’s explanation, she experienced the incident as destabilizing, and she implied that it also affected her positionality in the session.

While Syd’s anecdote clearly delineates who is marginalized in the situation, Charles described a complex scenario in which directionality may be unclear. In his
depiction, Charles “was working with a student who was... Very VERY enthusiastic about his paper.” Charles elaborated:

I don't even know if it was a mental disorder or not. It was just, he had a very hard time picking up on explicit verbally stated social cues. So I would say, “I can't work on this paper any more. We're busy, so we're going to have to cut it after this sentence”.... And then he would continue in this sort of fast-paced [way]; very, it was, it was sort of unsettling... It eventually wound up I was working with him about 55 minutes of a session, but I just had to keep pressing, and it was really, it was really mentally taxing, actually...” (November 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2013)

Charles identified this scenario as a social justice issue that related to the category of Physical or Mental Abilities in the category cards. Though Charles expressed that the effect of the situation as emotionally difficult for him, he emphasized that it’s “sort of our responsibility [as tutors] to sort of make these concessions for the way that people's minds work... but also to understand our limitations” (November 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2013). In this case, Charles perceived the social justice issue as nobody’s fault \textit{per se}, though the effects may be tangible.

In the next two anecdotes, Elliot and Claudia both share their experiences, which resulted in each tutor’s heightened sense of self-consciousness. In Elliot’s case, she worked with an African-American student whose essay described her experience of being racially profiled in a predominantly white town. Elliot explained:

\textit{I could feel myself blushing during that session; I kind of slid in my chair a little bit.} I was like, “don't, it's not you; it's not your fault. It has nothing to do with
you.” But just because I'm white, it was like, “uggh...” I remember thinking that was a weird session. (November 16th, 2013)

Here, Elliot described how the content of a student’s essay elicited her emotional response, which was profound enough to make the session feel “weird” in an overall sense. In Claudia’s experience, it was her perceptions of the interaction between her and the tutee triggered her emotional response. Claudia described the situation:

I had a student [who brought an essay] about Judaism... And the focus of her paper, we were looking at organization. So I was questioning the placement of certain things, and she felt as though I was attacking things, because I kept trying to draw parts out and ask, “well, why did you put this here instead of here?”... I was sitting there like, “Oh my God, oh my God, check what are you doing. All body language, like do I look interested? Check my wording.” All those things all at once. (November 21st, 2013)

Claudia’s depiction illustrates how she experienced the issue in terms of self-doubt.

In the final anecdote under the subheading of emotional distraction, Claudia discussed tutoring a student who was also one of her classmates. She explained that prior to the tutoring session, she had witnessed the student “arguing with [her] professor... about the cerebral makeup of different races” (November 21st, 2013). Furthermore, the student had brought an essay to the writing center based on the same topic, and Claudia was his tutor. She elaborated:

He was almost [emphasizing his position] more so because that professor embarrassed him in front of everyone... It was just, it was tough. So that was one of those things where I just kind of like submerged emotion and just worked on his
writing and just talked to him about it... some people might argue that's the wrong thing to do, but I didn't know what else to do. I just made a decision and went with it. (November 21st, 2013)

In this anecdote, Claudia indicates the presence of her distracting emotion by noting that she felt the need to repress it. This scenario also connects to the final theme in how participants experience social justice issues: avoidance of issues. In Claudia’s case, she experienced the issue in terms of diverting emotion and resisting mention of her reflections.

Avoidance of Issues

The last theme that I discuss in relation to how tutors experience social justice issues relates to ways in which tutors may distance themselves from the issue by avoiding discussion of content. Two participants’ anecdotes clearly demonstrate this subheading; in these circumstances, Gretta and Lucy express unwillingness or inability to engage in discussion of content due to social injustice circumstances. In Gretta’s anecdote, she discussed working with a student who she believed to be autistic: “He didn't tell me explicitly, but in his paper, it said: ‘I was born with autism’,” (November 14th, 2013). Gretta explained how she felt that “he was combatting everything [she] said,” and that “he would pick out things that [she] thought were fine and start talking about why he thought it wasn't” (November 14th, 2013). She reflected on her response to the situation:

I wanted to genuinely give him a fair [session], but after knowing he was autistic and realizing that this was going to go on for the rest of the paper, I may have omitted some things that I would have originally said like “OK, you might need to fix this” or whatever... I know that it's not fair for me to just kind of give up in the
middle of a session, and it's not that I even did. It was just that I had this presumption of “This is gonna be a really long day” because he's gonna say this and this for the rest of the paper. (November 14th, 2013)

Like Charles’s anecdote related to his emotional distraction due to the events of a tutoring session, Gretta’s example is also complex. In her anecdote, however, Gretta seemed to identify herself as the source of the injustice where she said, “it’s not fair for me to just kind of give up.”

On a similar note, Lucy reflected on how her avoidance of discussing content may have been unfair to her tutee. First, she described the context of the session:

[The student] was writing a research paper, but he wrote a little narrative in the beginning... about how his friend got shot in a hunting accident... and he starts writing [after the narrative] about how he is very pro-guns, and he doesn't agree with ever, EVER getting rid of guns... And so, my own reaction to that... I'm thinking: “how can you ever think that?” (November 15th, 2013)

Lucy strongly disagreed with the student’s stance in the essay, which indicated emotional distraction, as well. Her focus in the anecdote, however, extended to how her emotional response led her to avoid the issue entirely:

Anyway, so we went through the paper... but to be honest, I didn't even want to talk about the content with him. I just wanted to talk about more grammatical things because they're safe... I concentrated on the words, because I did not feel comfortable talking about the content at all, even though I definitely saw that there were some, like, just blanket statements about people... So instead, I only talked about the writing, and very basic things about the writing. I didn't even
talk about organization because I did not want to get into the content AT ALL.

So I stuck to just grammar, and I don't think I did that kid a very good service, as a tutor. (November 15th, 2013)

Based on her description, Lucy may have first felt that the student’s view was misguided, but she concludes with critical self-reflection. In the end, she seemed regretful that she maintained distance from her conflicting reaction.

Summary

This chapter has presented data collected with the aim of exploring answers to the question: How do peer tutors experience and conceptualize social justice issues within the context of tutoring sessions in the writing center? Recurring topics in tutors’ conceptualizations of social justice issues include:

• indications of specific categories of social oppression
• indications of others’ voices
• consideration of causes and/or effects of social justice issues in tutorials, and
• deference to higher authority in the university context

I discuss these themes more thoroughly in the next chapter.

Additional themes that occurred in fewer participants’ conceptualizations of social justice issues include sexism in gendered pronouns and considerations of intentionality. I mention these themes in the next chapter, but I do not thoroughly discuss them, since they emerged in fewer than half of the participants’ data.

Considering how tutors experience social justice issues, the mean averages of the category ranking task showed a general picture of which issues tutors see as relatively more or less relevant in tutoring sessions. In relation to more specific ways in which
tutors experience social justice issues in tutoring sessions, analysis of anecdotes revealed that tutors experience repositioning, emotional distraction and repression, and/or an urge to avoid discussing content with the intention of avoiding the issue. In the next chapter, I discuss these findings in light of the implications and limitations of the study. Furthermore, I suggest avenues for future research based on the results of my research.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I first present a summary of the research process, followed by a discussion of the data introduced in the previous chapter. Next, I discuss implications for writing centers as well as pedagogical implications drawn from the findings. At the end of the chapter, I also provide concluding reflections.

Research Summary

This study has intended to explore answers to the research question: How do peer tutors experience and conceptualize social justice issues within the context of tutoring sessions in the writing center? To address this question, I collected data from three sources: participants’ concept maps (and their explanations), semi-structured interviews, and a category ranking task. Because the participants constructed their concept maps as the first task in the data collection session, I intended for topics included in their concept maps to indicate their understanding of social justice issues with minimal prompting. After each participant constructed the concept map, he/she explained it in an audio-recorded discussion.

Before and after the category ranking task, I asked participants specific questions relating to their demographic information, backgrounds, views of tutors’ roles, and their experiences in tutoring sessions (for a complete interview protocol, see Appendix F). To prompt participants’ recollection of specific anecdotal experiences, I asked them to complete the category ranking task. We subsequently discussed the participant’s experiences pertaining to each category (as well as additional ones as designated by the
participant) in the order of which categories he or she had deemed most to least relevant. The entire semi-structured interview was audio-recorded.

When I designed my research, I was hesitant to provide a list of categories to participants because a static list may or may not have reflected their own experiences. However, I also felt that it was necessary to present social categories to the participants to prompt their specific recollections. Therefore, in a random order, I introduced ten category cards, including Race and Ethnicity, Gender, Sexual Orientation, Class and Economic Status, Nationality, Religion, Physical or Mental Abilities, Age, Weight, Language, and blank cards for the participants to rank from most to least relevant in relation to their experiences in tutoring sessions.

Originally an effort to moderate redundancy, the category ranking task yielded a general picture of the social justice issues which participants perceive to be most relevant to tutoring sessions. Thus, the results of the category ranking task serve to triangulate or, more accurately, crystallize results from the other two data sources (Ellingson, 2008). During the data collection session, I quickly noted the order of the category ranking task after each participant indicated that he/she had finished the ranking task.

Discussion

In this section, I discuss themes that emerge across several or all participants’ concept maps, the participants’ social category ranking results, and participants’ anecdotes that refer to singular, specific incidents. Furthermore, I relate these findings to existing studies related to social justice issues in writing centers, and I posit possible reasons for the results as based on additional references.
Themes in Tutors’ Conceptualizations of Social Justice Issues

Because the prompt for the concept mapping task indicated specific forms of social justice issues (stereotyping, prejudices, etc.), which may have led participants’ responses, I have opted not to include ‘forms of social injustices’ as a theme in the discussion, though mention of forms did arise in several participants’ discussions (e.g., stereotyping). The major themes that emerged from participants’ concept maps include indicating specific categories, indicating others’ voices, consideration of causes/effects of social justice issues, and deference to higher authorities in the university context. I also note two additional themes, acknowledgement gendered pronouns as sexism and considering intentionality of social oppression, though these themes appeared in only two or three participants’ data.

Indicating specific categories. Since each participant constructed his or her concept map before I mentioned any specific categories (race, gender, socioeconomic class, etc.) in the data collection session, it is significant that five out of the eight participants did include specific categories of social injustice on their maps. For example, Gretta included racism, and Lucy noted ageism, racism, and sexism as well as judgments based on physical characteristics, which she included as a category in the ranking task. Julia indicated racism, linguistic discrimination, sociocultural issues, gender issues, socioeconomic class issues, and sexism. Syd identified four categories of social oppression: gender/sexual identity issues, ethnicity/cultural issues, racial issues, and socioeconomic issues. Claudia also noted categories such as race and ethnicity, sexual preference, and gender as characteristics of tutoring participants, which can affect the tutoring session. Furthermore, though Mark, Elliot, and Charles did allude to certain
categories in their discussions of the concept maps, though they did not explicitly indicate the category on their maps.

The fact that participants spoke of social justice issues in terms of specific categories indicates that they are largely aware of the existence of oppression, most notably in terms of racism and, perhaps to a lesser degree, issues related to gender. The participants’ consideration of these categories corresponds to the mean averages of the category ranking task, in which Race and Ethnicity was ranked most relevant in tutoring sessions (2.5; 1 being most relevant, 10 being least relevant), and Gender was ranked second most relevant (4). Though gender was ranked second according to the mean average of participants’ category rankings, it was barely so; the mean averages reveal that the difference of relevance between Gender and Race/Ethnicity \((4 - 2.5 = 1.5)\) is greater than the difference between Gender and the next three ranked categories: Class/Economic Status (4.13), Language (4.25), and Nationality (4.74). According to the results of the mode rank, Race and Ethnicity was still deemed most relevant (along with Language, which was also ranked as the most important factor by three participants), while Gender was not ranked consistently among any participants.

One possible explanation for participants’ awareness of racism as a social justice issue may be the prevalence of discussions related to this category in the broader context of our American society. As I mentioned in the literature review, there is a significant amount of references on the topic of racism in tutoring (e.g., Condon, 2007; Condon, 2012; Dees, Godbee, & Ozias, 2007; Diab, Godbee, Ferrel, & Simpkins, 2012; Geller et al., 2006; Geller, Condon, & Carroll, 2011; Greenfield & Rowan, 2011; Grimm, 2012). In contrast, I was able to find only one reference (O’Leary, 2008) which specifically
discussed gender as relevant to social justice issues in the writing center context. A comparison to the prevalence of social justice issues in the social context beyond writing centers would be necessary to determine whether this could be an explanation for the results of this study.

Each of the four participants who mentioned gender issues on the concept maps (Lucy, Julia, Syd, and Claudia) is female. Since their gender would mean that they are marginalized in this category, it is possible that gender issues were salient to them due to their own experiences of discrimination. This explanation would also need to be explored with further research, since two female participants (Gretta and Elliot) did not mention gender on their concept maps.

Another possible explanation for the results of the ranking task and presence of specific categories on the concept maps may relate to the visibility and/or stigmatization of certain forms of social oppression. Lucy noted the difference between overt and covert social connotations in her discussion of “Physical Characteristics” as an additional category in the ranking task. In her ranking, she listed Age and Weight on par with Physical Characteristics because, as quoted in the previous chapter, “we quickly judge each other on how we look” (November 15th, 2013). Her insight is consistent with Smith’s (2012) article, in which the author discusses how “weight induces societal prejudices about character and ability” (para. 4). Smith highlights ways that individuals are judged according to their appearance before interaction has even begun to take place. O’Leary (2008) writes that “in a writing conference conversation, particularly if it is between strangers, the social identities that could affect conversation often correspond to the physically apparent characteristics that identify different persons as belonging to
different social groups” (p. 60). On a similar note, the participants of the current study (all U.S. citizens) may perceive visible markers of Race and Ethnicity, Gender, and perhaps Class and Economic Status (the top three categories according to the mean average) as most relevant because they can precede verbal interaction.

Furthermore, as Smith (2012) also noted, some forms of social oppression are culturally stigmatized, while others are justified. Smith writes that “unlike race, gender, and sexuality, fat people are, in a sense, supposed to be stigmatized and marginalized, at least until they lose weight” (para. 7). Based on this notion, the mean averages of the category ranking task may or may not correlate to forms of social oppression which are looked down upon, and those forms of oppression which are normalized in the broader social sense. Racism may be seen as particularly objectionable, while marginalization based on weight (ranked least important according to the mean average) may be largely condoned. More research must be done to discover whether or not tutors’ perceptions of social oppression bears any correlation to the visibility and/or social stigmatization of its manifold categories.

**Indicating others’ voices.** On their concept maps, five participants (Gretta, Julia, Elliot, Syd, and Charles) indicated examples of others’ voices and/or viewpoints. Several participants signified others’ hypothetical statements with quotation marks; such marking effectively distanced the participant’s own perceptions from either another individual or the status quo. In most circumstances, either a student’s writing (e.g., “This law would mostly affect poor people because they have the worst diets” from Syd’s concept map) or verbal statement was signified (e.g., “Asians are the hardest to understand” on Julia’s concept map). In some cases, the example represented a professor’s statement or attitude
(e.g., “Inner city (Philly) students are poor writers; they write how they speak” on Elliot’s map). In some instances, the exact source of the sentiment was unspecified (e.g., Greta’s item, “Broken English,” which she described as a more generally used phrase).

Gretta, Julia, Elliot, and Syd specifically used quotation marks on certain words or phrases on their concept maps, which denotes utterances that they have already or could potentially hear or see in a tutoring session. Charles also presented an example of a presumptuous question, which a tutor might ask of a student: ‘e.g., Did you have a 1 parent household?’ In each of these cases, the participants indicated their allusions to others’ voices either via quotation marks or via clear designation of the word or phrase as an example. Lucy and Mark also indicated theoretical statements, which would be made by other individuals, in their discussions of the concept map. Claudia, however, did not use any such examples; in contrast, she focused on labelling the phenomena.

The participants who alluded to others’ perceptions indicate their consciousness of how oppression can manifest in language. Whether originating from ubiquitous labelling based on social norms or a particular individual’s specific words, such quotes are identified by several tutors as speech acts with oppressive implications. The notion that social justice issues manifest via language in tutoring sessions correlates to Suhr-Sytsma and Brown’s study, wherein the authors developed “a two-list heuristic for addressing the everyday language of oppression” in the writing center (2011, p. 22). Through focus groups with tutors, the authors recognized ten ways that “language can perpetuate oppression,” as well as eight ways that “tutors and writers can challenge oppression through attention to language.” In the current study, it is clear that tutors may be able to identify instances of social oppression as it manifests in language. As Julia
repeatedly remarked in her interview, however, “What are you supposed to do?” (November 16th, 2013). Hawkins (2011) noted that visibility of social justice issues is “necessary but perhaps not sufficient” (p. 105). This finding indicates that participants are able to identify certain examples of socially oppressive language, though they may not have posited responses.

**Causes and effects.** Of the eight participants, five participants’ concept maps indicated causes and/or effects of social justice issues in tutoring sessions. More specifically, Lucy, Elliot, Syd, and Claudia speculated about the *causes* of social injustices in tutoring sessions. Claudia also incorporated the *effects* of social injustices that arise in tutorials, while Mark also discussed how instances of social justice issues could affect the session.

**Causes.** On her concept map, Lucy suggested that instances of social oppression are “due to” several categories related to social context, such as university culture, social backgrounds, media, and peers (November 15th, 2013). Elliot noted several factors, including those which are “influenced by,” “demonstrated by,” and “can be complicated by” circumstances which precede issues of social justice in the session (November 16th, 2013). Syd listed “overgeneralizations” as the primary cause of social justice issues, and she continued on to list several more factors which contribute to overgeneralization, including motivation to use stereotyping and insufficient awareness, research, or vocabulary (November 20th, 2013). Finally, Claudia, like Elliot, observed that both the tutor and the tutee begin a session with extant “problems” that affect power dynamics and consequent text negotiation (November 21st, 2013).
The consideration of causes of social injustice on these participants’ concept maps reflects how these tutors seek to understand the ways in which social oppression is created and maintained, and the conditions in which social oppression can manifest. Half of the participants in the study speculated as to why social injustice took place; their deliberation might represent their conceptualization of social injustice as systematically perpetuated since they presumed causal explanations. More research would be necessary to confirm or refute this hypothesis.

**Effects.** Two of the eight participants specifically alluded to the effects of social justice issues in tutoring sessions. At the bottom of Claudia’s concept map, she discussed hypothetical “results” of social justice issues arising in tutoring sessions. Claudia viewed the emergence of social justice issues as yielding potentially positive outcomes: by encountering instances of social oppression, both the tutor and the tutee can learn from the experience. Mark also discussed the effects of social injustices in tutoring sessions, though his focus specifically included ways in which social injustices experienced in tutoring sessions could have a negative emotional impact. Furthermore, Mark considered ways in which perceived injustices can impede progress in the session by affecting trust and rapport.

Mark and Claudia’s mention of how social justice issues can affect the circumstances of the tutorial points to their understanding that such issues have tangible consequences. The fact that only two participants alluded to the effects of social injustice in tutoring sessions surprised me, since oppression is a problem specifically due to its harmful effects. That most participants did not mention social oppression’s effects could be due to the wording of the prompt that I provided. If it really is an oversight by the
participants, however, it signifies that there is an essential element missing. If this is the case, perhaps tutors feel that the effects are obvious or that social oppression is a negative phenomenon particularly because it is stigmatized (Smith, 2012) and not due to its actual consequences. Further research would be necessary to understand tutors’ motivations in negotiating social justice issues.

**Deference to higher authority in the university context.** On the concept maps as well as in participants’ descriptions thereof, each participant referenced at least one way that a tutor would or could allude to academic influences beyond the session itself. For example, sometimes tutors referred to professors’ expectations or requirements. In Gretta’s case, she evaluates perceived social justice issues in terms of the professor’s possible responses to the text. She stated, “I try and make it seem like: if I were the teacher, would I give this a good grade?” (November 14th, 2013). Julia noted allegiance to details of a professor’s assignment and expectations as she said: “you’re supposed to be writing a paper to defend border controls, not on separating races or whatever” (November 16th, 2013). Furthermore, Elliot specified that social justice [issues] are directly “influenced by → Professor’s expectations,” on her concept map (November 16th, 2013).

In other cases, tutors noted academic credibility or appeal to potential challenges by a hypothetical audience. In the section on Syd’s experiences of social justice issues in tutoring sessions, she indicated that she had to tell a student, “we’re probably going to have to find some other sources” as a means of drawing attention to social injustice in a student’s writing without positioning herself in opposition to what she had read (November 20th, 2013). Similarly, in Claudia’s explanation of acting as the “devil’s
advocate,” she described how the tutor could argue against a perceived problem in a student’s paper from an ostensibly more objective perspective (November 21st, 2013). In Lucy’s discussion of her concept map, she referred to a similar tactic of differentiating between ideological and research-based statements: “as a tutor reading that [a claim based on a belief], you have to say something like, ‘we need to back that up; that's your belief’,” (November 15th, 2013). Through their deference to higher forms of authority in the academic context, these tutors demonstrate understanding of their work is positioned submissively to the broader academic context. Furthermore, by alluding to requirements set by professors, the university, or academic discourse conventions in a broader sense, the tutors reveal their concerns for circumstances outside of the session.

Though this finding indicates a hierarchical nature of tutors’ conceptualizations of social justice issues (Bell, 2007), tutors often deferred to higher authorities to bolster support of a counter-argument against perceived social justice issues. The practice of deferring to sources of higher authority may be an effective way to frame critique in terms that students will seriously consider, yet it also raises another issue: what if a higher authority is a source of social injustice?

Several participants also noted how social circumstances and/or positioning of students could lead to manifestations of social injustices. Lucy also indicated that “university culture,” including professors and university policies, could manifest social justice issues because it affects tutorial participants’ social schema. On Charles’s concept map, he further indicates ways that a professor’s essay prompt may cause social justice issues to arise in tutoring sessions. Finally, Mark specifically noted that circumstances in
which “professors [are] unwilling to help” students is an example of oppression that can affect the tutorial.

These tutors’ concerns indicate their awareness of harsh academic realities. Bawarshi and Pelkowski discussed a related dilemma in their (1999) essay: “many writing teachers have the understandable fear that students will not survive or succeed” if they do not conform to conceivable requirements set by the student’s next instructor (p. 51). In an equally limiting sense, tutors may resist discussion of hegemonic implications due to concerns that a professor might emphasize linguistic “forms, features, fields, and functions” over socially relevant content (Hawkins, 2006, p. 104).

This finding may also relate to an additional category, which was posited by two participants in the category ranking task. Elliot suggested that students’ “Familiarity with U.S. Academic System” is relevant to tutoring sessions, and Claudia also included “Educational Background” as a factor can affect social justice dynamics. Both of these participants demonstrated their awareness of how academic literacies, discourses, and conventions affect the tutorial. From this perspective, a student’s expectations, based on their educational experiences, could affect his or her position in the tutoring session. In other words, what a student has learned in the classroom could affect social justice issues in the tutorial.

**Additional themes for consideration.** The following themes appeared in fewer than half of the participants’ concept maps, but their implications may be relevant in discussions of social justice issues in tutoring sessions.

**Sexism in gendered pronouns.** Three participants, Lucy, Julia, and Syd, specifically noted in their concept map explanations that they consider gendered
pronomes (e.g., he/she) to reflect a social justice issue related to sexism or discrimination based on gendered identity. According to this theme, some tutors may be aware of the idea that social oppression is built into everyday language (Suhr-Sytsma and Brown, 2011). These tutors acknowledge the **pervasiveness** and **internalization** of social oppression, as described by Bell (2007).

On this note, in the current study, I felt conflicted when using gendered pronouns to describe the participants. In the data collection session, I did not ask participants about their gender affiliation. Constrained by linguistic and ideological expectations, I felt compelled to follow conventions and label the participants according to the pronouns which seemed most apt in my own judgment, though this dilemma represents an issue related to the pervasiveness of social justice.

**Consideration of intentionality.** Two participants, Lucy and Syd, indicated on their concept maps that social justice issues in tutoring sessions could be either intentional or unintentional. Specifically, Lucy noted that social justice issues in tutoring sessions can be “conscious” or “unconscious,” while Syd clarified that social injustice can be “purposeful” or “accidental.” These tutors’ inclusion of intentionality indicates that some tutors may conceptualize social justice issues as complex, in that someone can participate in marginalization whether or not he or she is aware. This finding could inform not only tutor training, but theoretical implications as additional characteristics of social oppression.

**Themes in Tutors’ Experiences of Social Justice Issues**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, several specific anecdotes from the participants’ data revealed that tutors respond to social justice issues in tutoring session in
several ways, ranging from neutral experiences to negative experiences. First, tutors may adjust their positioning (in relation to a student) according to the circumstances of a social justice issue. Tutors described needing to establish credibility (as in Claudia’s experience with an older student who, she felt, resisted her advice due to her youth), re-evaluate first impressions or presumptions (e.g., Elliot’s assumption that an older man would be a proficient writer), and exercise personal or professional discretion in choosing when to address social injustice (as in Julia’s decision not to address perceived social oppression). Accordingly, tutors may experience social justice issues in terms of reassessing their presumed roles or responsibilities. This notion implies that tutors do come into sessions with presumptions about their own roles and expectations of the students with whom they work. Moreover, this way of experiencing social justice issues in tutoring sessions is neither inherently negative nor positive.

Second, tutors may experience emotional distraction or repression because of perceiving social injustice in a tutoring session. Tutors described scenarios in which they experienced negative emotional responses, including awkwardness, mental exhaustion, extreme self-consciousness, and rejection of emotional intuition. These experiences occurred regardless of the direction of oppression; in Charles’s experience, for example, he felt that the social justice issue was nobody’s fault, while in Elliot’s case, she felt a strong sense of shame as she read about a tutee’s experience of being racially profiled. Syd plainly identified the tutee’s utterance in terms of how it marginalized her; Claudia’s first anecdote, in contrast, referred to a situation in which she sensed that the tutee felt marginalized in the session, which thereby affected Claudia’s own response. Tutors in this study experienced social justice issues concurrently with anxiety, which is not
altogether surprising, considering that social oppression is restricting for all individual affected: whether they find themselves privileged or marginalized (Bell, 2007). When Nicklay (2012) explored tutors’ guilt after certain sessions, the author found that such outcomes were significantly affected by the writing center context.

Finally, in situations where social justice issues become salient for a tutor, he or she may experience an unwillingness or inability to engage in discussion of content. Gretta and Lucy both reflected on situations in which they could not bring themselves to thoroughly examine the content of their tutees’ essays, though they also both indicated that they felt they had not provided as much help as they otherwise would have. The urge to skim through content, rather than parse ideas more carefully, may be analogous to Dees, Godbee, and Ozias’s article on “patterns of evasion” when dealing with critical discussions of race in the writing center context (2007, para. 5). The authors describe ways that writing center faculty members may divert the topic from issues of race to issues of language, for example, and that such rerouting strategies contribute to the perpetuation of oppression by obscuring the focus. As the participants in the current study experienced, however, diverting the objectives of the session seemed necessary to mitigate the overwhelming difficulty of maintaining analytical dialogue. Though participants’ conceptualizations demonstrated that they may defer to higher authorities to highlight alternative perspectives, Gretta and Lucy’s anecdotes demonstrate a sense of individual defeat.

An additional finding from the retained anecdotes is that instances of social injustice may not neatly correlate to particular social categories. For example, when Lucy described the session in which she disagreed with the tutee, she noted that diverging
views may result from gender, socioeconomic class, and geographical location at once. Furthermore, as Claudia and Elliot added additional categories related to academic familiarity in the ranking task, the inclusion of categories could be endless depending on which critical lens is chosen to evaluate the situation. This outcome further emphasizes the importance of considering the characteristics of social oppression in conjunction with delineated categories (e.g., racism, sexism, etc.) to more fully explore the complexity of social justice issues.

**Category ranking task results.** Prior to conducting the study, I presumed that the most relevant categories, as deemed by the participants, would more or less reflect the greatest number of specific anecdotes. In actuality, though, the content of participants’ specific anecdotes did not correspond to the results of the category ranking task. Furthermore, not all of the anecdotes translate to individual categories. Some anecdotes appeal to several categories at once, such Lucy’s experience, which could be considered in terms of gender, socioeconomic class, etc. Others can’t be easily classified in terms of the social memberships which are relevant, such as Elliot’s description of the circumstances that compelled her to critique one tutee’s claim, but not another.

The fact that tutors’ experiences in this study do not neatly ascribe to conform to predetermined categories underscores the need to consider social oppression from perspectives beyond those categories, including the characteristics inherent to all forms of social injustice. Though participants ranked Race and Ethnicity as the most relevant category according to the mean averages of the category ranking task, race was definitely *not* implied as a factor in at least seven of the eleven anecdotes. Also, categories which were specifically implied as factors in participants’ anecdotes included Age in two
scenarios, Physical or Mental Abilities in two scenarios, and Religion in one scenario, though these three categories were, on average, considered less relevant than any other categories (excepting Weight, which was ranked last) in the ranking task.

One possible explanation for the ostensible lack of anecdotes related to issues of Race and Ethnicity could be tutors’ reluctance to discuss race, as previously mentioned in Dees, Godbee, and Ozias’s (2007) essay. As authors such as Grimm (1999) and Condon (2012) noted, raising the topic of racial injustice, particularly, can be as uncomfortable as it is vital. Since oppression is internalized by all members of society (Bell, 2007), discussing a highly-stigmatized form of oppression (Smith, 2012) could come with the possibility of instigating oneself as part of the widely-despised problem.

Another possible explanation for the disproportionate representation between relevancy rankings and anecdotal content could be that the most memorable instances are those which are characterized by less familiar circumstances. If Race and Ethnicity is truly the most relevant social category in relation to tutoring sessions in the given context, tutors may have constructed a more generalized view of the ways in which race and racism affects sessions, while the rarer instances of issues related to Age, Physical or Mental Abilities, and Religion could seem more striking in their relative rarity.

A third explanation for the category ranking task results is based on Werner’s (2011) study of tutors’ perceptions of age, where the author found that “tutors did not see age as problematic or complex when they first began to tutor” (para. 12). Many of the anecdotes that were retained in the results occurred towards the end of the data collection session. It is possible that participants initially did not perceive the lower-ranked categories as relevant, though their inclusion of scenarios based on the categories in their
anecdotes might represent participants’ later reflections on ways in which they are, in fact, relevant to social justice issues in tutoring sessions.

**Conclusion**

Based on the aforementioned discussion, I draw several conclusions from the research conducted in this study. First, the tutors who participated in this study are generally aware of particular social justice issues, though their awareness is limited and may coincide with the visibility and/or stigmatization of such issues as prevalent in the broader U.S. context. For example, more than half of the participants acknowledged social injustices pertaining to race or gender, yet none of the participants referred to social injustices related to physical or mental abilities before they were prompted. Second, participants are generally aware that social injustice often manifests in language, though they are often at a loss as to how they should respond. When they do respond, participants noted that they often appeal to forms of higher authority (professors, academic conventions, etc.) to underscore their argument. On a related note, though, the participants also noted that those same forms of higher authority can sometimes be a source of oppression. Finally, half of the participants considered causes of social injustices in their concept maps; this indicates that some (but not all) of the tutors understand social justice issues to be systematic, causal, and largely explicable.

I also draw further conclusions from the research as it relates to tutors’ experiences of social justice issues. When the participants experienced social justice issues, they reported reactions ranging from neutral to negative. Moreover, participants described their responses as a barrier to engagement in the session. In the case of neutral responses (e.g., where the tutor must reevaluate his or her approach without any feeling
of guilt, shame, etc.), repositioning could be accomplished successfully and with minimal effect on the outcome of the session. In cases where the participants felt either emotional distraction or even emotional incapacitation, though, they experienced the issue as hindering the fundamental purpose of the session. Because social justice issues can lead to awkwardness at best and completely obscure the goals of the session at worst, addressing these issues should be an ongoing goal of writing centers as well as the larger academic community.

Implications and Recommendations

Writing Center Implications

Hawkins (2011) writes that “education is deeply linked to social systems, and a stand-alone approach to ‘fixing’ schools is unlikely to affect substantive change” (p. 103). This idea extends also to writing centers, as social justice issues permeate discourse as well as the institutional structure that supports the center. Efforts to challenge social injustice, then, must be ongoing and substantial.

In the writing center where this study took place, tutors are not required to complete extensive training before they begin tutoring; rather, training takes place in several two to three hour meetings throughout each semester. Two tutors in this study mentioned that they had previously worked in writing centers where they were required to take writing center theory and practice courses before beginning their tutoring experience. Whether or not tutor training is accomplished prior or concurrently to tutoring, the implications of social justice issues must be addressed to better prepare tutors for the challenges that can arise when meanings are negotiated in the session. Rather than giving occasional lip service to these issues that underlie the tutorial, it is
necessary to foster and sustain an open discussion about tutors’ conceptualizations and experiences of social justice issues.

Potential content of such a discussion, in terms of tutor training, could be to promote awareness of social oppression in concurrence with strategies to combat it, as Suhr-Sytsma and Brown (2011) suggested. Another possibly beneficial topic would be to explore various categories of social oppression, and to compare those categories which are visible (such as race, age, and weight) to those which are not always visible (such as religion, ethnicity, and language).

**Pedagogical Implications**

Diversity in the writing center extends from diversity in the broader university context; therefore, the findings from this study have particular implications for ways that social justice issues may be considered in terms of pedagogy. First, academic faculty need to be aware of what the writing center does – and doesn’t – do. This is not a novel idea; Kilborn (1994) noted the importance of a consistent vision of the writing center goals among university faculty and writing center staff 20 years ago, yet, as explained in the literature review, the purposes and practices of writing centers remain debatable at best. Divergent views on writing centers’ purposes mirror a comparable dilemma in pedagogy as described by Hawkins: one school of thought “focuses on... language forms, features, fields, and functions” and the other major camp supports framing education in “culturally and linguistically responsive ways” (2011, p. 104). In both the writing center and the broader educational context, it is time to take responsibility for the repercussions of our practices.
This is certainly not a simple task, as Hawkins writes, “understanding and enacting social justice practices is not easy, intuitive, or aligned with current educational discourses” (2011, p. 188). However, it must be considered that tutors look to professors’ expectations and requirements to delineate the content of sessions. Just as the student may defer to the tutor (as well as professor or academic conventions) as a higher authority (Geller et al., 2006; Smith, 1992), the tutor may subsequently defer to the professor as a reference in promoting social justice. When tutors have an opportunity to defend social justice, they need to know that they can rely on professors for support in critiquing content first, and then standardized forms.

One important step to minimizing perceptual divergences is to build coalitions between writing centers and professors. Especially professors who require or request that students go to the writing center should speak with writing center faculty or staff to make sure that their expectations are consistent with the mission of the writing center. By maintaining open lines of communication, both representatives of the university and the writing center can benefit from interdisciplinary insights on best practices.

**Methodological Implications**

When I collected data for this research, I found that inclusive consideration of perceptions on social justice issues tends to expand rapidly and yield extensive amounts of data. In accordance, those who wish to conduct empirical research related to social justice issues may plan to systematically narrow the raw data before analysis or use computational software to facilitate coding.
Directions for Future Research

Based on the results and my experiences of this study, I would recommend several studies to expand our understanding of social justice issues in the writing center. First, the current study has considered data through limited means of analysis. The same data could be reconsidered using a variety of different analytical methods, such as discourse analysis or different coding techniques, to yield further findings. Finally, Hawkins (2011) also noted a schism between teachers’ theory and practice in her study. To translate this notion to the current study, though we now know how tutors may experience social justice issues, we do not yet know if their actions are consistent with the ways that they describe them. An observational study would be necessary to determine the similarities or differences between what tutors say compared to what they do in situations characterized by social justice issues.

Limitations and Delimitations

One of the limitations of this study is the number of participants. Because eight individuals participated from one university writing center, the findings of this study cannot be generalized. Also, the tutors who consented to participate in this study do not reflect the demographics of the population. At the time of this study, there were two retired faculty tutors, one adult community member tutor, eight graduate tutors, and fourteen undergraduate tutors working in our writing center. The participants of this study, however, were disproportionately graduate students (five), while the remaining participants (three) were undergraduates.

Hawkins noted in the discussion of a study on implementing social justice teacher education that, though the participants willingly discussed and spurned social injustices,
“it is not clear, however, exactly what meanings teachers ascribe to ‘social justice’,” (p. 120). At this point in time, our understanding of social justice issues is still limited and mostly relegated to discussions of critical pedagogy (e.g., Bhatti, Gaine, Gobbo, & Leeman, 2007; Chapman & Hobbel, 2010; Hardiman & Jackson, 2007; Hawkins, 2011). Therefore, tutors’ responses may have been guided by their best guesses based on limited consensus of what social justice really is.

In the course of attempting to research tutors’ conceptualization and experiences of the highly abstract topic, social justice issues, I had to make decisions which may have included or excluded certain aspects from the study. First, the way that I defined social justice issues could have affected the outcomes of the study. Another issue is that I did not assess participants’ responses in terms of whether or not they truly reflected social justice issues. As a result, it is possible that participants referred to situations that they simply found awkward or embarrassing which might not have actually involved any social oppression. To better understand the results of the current study, it would also be helpful to identify issues that relate to social justice, specifically, and those which reflect awkwardness or embarrassment without necessarily involving social injustice. Finally, I did not analyze directionality of social justice: who “causes” social injustice in particular anecdotes, and who feels the effect.

On a related note, there may be some remaining ambiguity concerning whether the concept mapping results could truly represent how participants conceptualize social justice issues in tutoring sessions. The participants have certainly described social justice issues, and most participants have also demonstrated how they understand various elements of social justice issues to be related, yet the findings of this study may not
accurately demonstrate how the participants conceptualize social justice issues in tutoring sessions. In this study, I have not addressed the different ways (conceptual, descriptive, anecdotal, etc.) that participants referred to social justice issues, though this topic might be further addressed using the existing data.

**Concluding Reflections**

Discussions of social justice consider foremost how we view relations to the other: which ought to be as subjects, not objects (see Glissant, 2010, and Todorov, 1999, for elaboration). When we ascribe group memberships to others, often casting ourselves as different, we must be careful to consider what we forfeit for the sake of convenience. Labelling others may be our conceptual inheritance, since, as Bruner (1991) theorized, the narratives that we depend upon to construct our schema of the world are rife with implied meanings. Such underlying meanings constrict our understanding at the same time that they enable us to engage in complex communication. As a result, an individual can quickly assess a situation without considering all of the variables and complexities that attend to it. This can be incredibly convenient, but it can also obscure realities that conflict with our limited, subjective views.

Preconceived notions about the other nullify the other’s voice. Yet how can we expect others to listen to our struggles when we are unwilling to listen to theirs? I believe this to be the primary hurdle of actualizing social justice: the foremost reason that oppressed peoples are not further mobilized in coalitions against social injustice. What about someone, engaged in an ongoing fight for the right to unionize, who uses the word “lame” or “gay” to describe something that they don’t like? What about a misogynistic anti-racist? Many people proselytize for their own rights; they can identify and object
against the ways that systematic oppression causes them to suffer. At the same time, their own marginalizing habits may perpetuate others’ suffering. When you disenfranchise people (or simply stand by while others do so), you effectively legitimize your own disenfranchisement.

This thesis represents my own attempt to move away from being a feminist who turns a blind eye towards the injustices that I don’t personally have to face. As a female, I feel the ways that society restricts me on the basis of my gender, though I have to repeatedly decide to keep my attention on forms of injustice that do not marginalize me. The goal is not to completely understand another’s experiences, but to foster compassion and empathy to enact a more holistic vision of social justice.

In his Letter from a Birmingham Jail, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote that “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” (1963, para. 4). If we limit views of social oppression to highlight only certain forms of marginalization, then we risk enacting the same inequalities that we claim to oppose. We must practice a vigilant empathy to realize that when we suffer, we are not alone; others also wish for positive change. In the words of Dr. Cornel West: “justice is what love looks like in public.”
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APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

November 5, 2013

Adelay Elizabeth Witherite
577 South 6th Street, Apt. 3
Indiana, PA 15701

Dear Ms. Witherite:

Your proposed research project, "Social Justice in the Writing Center: Tutors' Perceptions & Tutorial Incidents," (Log No. 13-113) has been reviewed by the IRB and is approved. In accordance with 45CFR46.101 and IUP Policy, your project is exempt from continuing review.

It is also important for you to note that IUP adheres strictly to Federal Policy that requires you to notify the IRB promptly regarding:

1. any additions or changes in procedures you might wish for your study (additions or changes must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented),
2. any events that affect the safety or well-being of subjects, and
3. any modifications of your study or other responses that are necessitated by any events reported in (2).

The IRB may review or audit your project at random or for cause. In accordance with IUP Policy and Federal Regulation (45CFR46.113), the Board may suspend or terminate your project if your project has not been conducted as approved or if other difficulties are detected.

Although your human subjects review process is complete, the School of Graduate Studies and Research requires submission and approval of a Research Topic Approval Form (RTAF) before you can begin your research. If you have not yet submitted your RTAF, the form can be found at http://www.iup.edu/page.aspx?pid=91683.

I wish you success as you pursue this important endeavor.

Sincerely,

John A. Mills, Ph.D., ABPP
Chairperson, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Professor of Psychology

JAM:jeb

CC: Dr. Ben Raffo, Thesis Advisor
    Ms. Brenda Boal, Secretary
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research study of Writing Center tutors that I am conducting as a tutor and master’s student at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania. My research is supported by Dr. Ben Rafoth, IUP Professor and Director of the Writing Center. If you have any questions concerning the following information or the study, please contact me at tstl@iup.edu.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how tutors experience and perceive social justice issues (instances of oppression, offensiveness, or unfairness) within the context of tutoring sessions in the Writing Center. This study concerns social categories such as race and gender, and how these factors manifest in tutoring sessions.

Data will be collected from each participant in one 60-90 minute data collection session. The session will include a concept mapping activity, an interview, and a task to organize social justice categories. In the interview, I will ask you about your experiences as a tutor, ethical considerations that arise in tutoring, and how you respond to issues such as racism or sexism in students’ essays.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw at any time by verbally telling the interviewer. If you choose to withdraw after the session, you may inform me or Dr. Rafoth through email, and all information pertaining to you will be destroyed. Whether or not you choose to participate, your identity will be kept strictly confidential. Only the principal investigator (Adelay) will know your identity; your name or any other identifying characteristics will not be shared with any other person.

If you consent to participate in this study, please sign and return the statement provided.

Principal Investigator
(Adelay) Elizabeth Witherite
M.A. Student, TESOL
110 Leonard Hall, IUP
Indiana, PA 15705
Phone: 814-418-5471
Email: tstl@iup.edu

Co-Investigator
Dr. Ben Rafoth, Professor
Director, IUP Writing Center
217 Eicher Hall
Indiana, PA 15705
Phone: 724-357-3029
Email: brafoth@iup.edu

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724-357-7730).
VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM:

I have read and understand the information on the form, and I consent to be a participant in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this informed consent form to keep in my possession.

I understand that the interviews will be audio-recorded unless otherwise indicated: YES / NO

_________________________________________  ______________________________
Participant’s Name *(please print)*                            Participant’s Signature

_________________________________________  ______________________________
Date                                                Phone Number

Email Address: ____________________________________________

Best days and times to reach you: ____________________________________________

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature.

_________________________________________  ______________________________
Date                                                Investigator’s Signature
APPENDIX C

INITIAL CONTACT EMAIL

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Adelay Elizabeth Witherite. I am a second-year MA TESOL student at IUP and a tutor at the IUP Writing Center. I am currently working on my Master’s thesis, which will focus on social justice issues in the writing center.

You have received this email because, as a current or former IUP Writing Center tutor, you are eligible to participate in my study. I’ve chosen to study tutors’ experiences in tutoring sessions because the writing center is a unique, university-affiliated context where ideologies are negotiated between two individuals. As a participant, you could have the opportunity to confidentially share your thoughts and concerns about oppressive, unfair, or offensive issues that can arise in tutoring sessions. In my research, I will ask participants to do a concept mapping task and then share information about specific tutoring experiences in an interview. The whole session is expected to take approximately one hour.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. I would be the only person to know if you choose to participate or not, so there is no pressure to participate. Out of approximately 35 potential participants, I am seeking 8-10 actual participants, so if you cannot or prefer not to participate, it is no problem. If you do choose to participate, your identity will be strictly confidential. You will be assigned a pseudonym and no identifying information will be shared with any other individual.

I hope to conduct the sessions throughout the month of November, especially on Mondays, Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. I will ask each participant to meet me in a semi-private, quiet location such as a group study room at the library. For your information, I have attached a copy of the informed consent form, which includes some more information about the details of the study and participation. You may read through it if you are interested in participating, and I will bring a copy to our meeting if you choose to participate.

You may note that Dr. Rafoth, the Director of the Writing Center, is listed as my co-investigator. To protect your privacy, though, Dr. Rafoth will not be aware of your participation or lack thereof, and he will not be aware of any information that may identify you. Only anonymous information will be shared with the intention of minimizing social injustice in writing centers.

Thank you very much for your consideration. If you are interested in participating or if you have any questions, please let me know by emailing me at tstl@iup.edu.

Sincerely,
Adelay Elizabeth Witherite
APPENDIX D

DATA COLLECTION CHECKLIST

Information for Participants
- Purpose of the study
- Social justice: oppressive, offensive or unfair issues in 1:1 tutoring sessions
- Data collection process
- Participant’s rights: amend, retract, withdraw (tell or email me or Dr. Ben)
- Confidentiality & pseudonyms
- Informed Consent Form

Concept Mapping Task
- Sample map: Mammals
- Social justice issues in students’ writing as discussed in tutoring sessions
  - Things in students’ writing or discussion of writing that you consider unfair, oppressive, or offensive
  - Examples may include stereotyping, discrimination, or prejudices
- PERMISSION TO RECORD
- Explanation of concept map

Semi-Structured Interview
- Background questions
- Rank cards according to relevancy of categories you have encountered
  - Very relevant to not relevant at all
  - Irrelevant cards to the side
  - Blank card(s) optional
- Final questions, closing
APPENDIX F

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction

“The purpose of this interview is to explore how tutors experience and conceptualize social justice issues in tutoring sessions. More specifically, these questions are directed towards information about 1) the content of students’ papers, essays, etc. which you have read as a tutor in the writing center and 2) your discussions with students about their writing during tutoring sessions. This study is not intended to investigate the work environment, including writing center policies or the actions of anyone else who works in the writing center.”

Demographic Information and Background

1. [For students] What is your academic year and major?
2. How long have you worked (did you work) at the Writing Center?
3. Why did you decide to work at the Writing Center?
Seek to find information on relevant circumstances or experiences which may suggest areas of inquiry.
4. In your opinion, what is the role of a tutor in a tutoring session?

Category Organizing Task: Introduce category cards⁶. Read each card aloud and place it on the table. Ask the participant if he or she understands each category.

“The blank card represents any category or categories that are not already represented. Please organize the cards in order of how often the topic has been relevant in tutoring sessions that you have experienced. If you feel that a category or categories are not relevant to tutoring sessions, you can place them to the side.” Allow several minutes for the participant to complete the task. “Please explain how you have organized the cards. What experiences have you had based on each category?”

5. Are there any other categories that you would like to add?
6. Is it a tutor’s responsibility to discuss oppressive or offensive language with a student?

Reflective

7. Has a student made any presumptions (positive or negative) about you, your attitudes, or beliefs based on the categories that we have talked about, or any other categories?*
8. Have you ever felt that a student made a presumption about you because you are a (graduate/undergraduate) student?*

Wrap-up

Thank you very much for your help. As I mentioned previously, your contribution to this study will be kept strictly confidential, and your responses may help guide future writing center policies and procedures. I would be happy to send you a copy of the final report when it is finished.

⁶ Ten cards denote: Race/Ethnicity; Gender; Sexual Orientation; Class/Economic Status; Nationality; Language; Religion; Physical or Mental Abilities; Age; Weight; and [Blank] (for participants’ suggestions).