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The Social Lives of Citations: How and Why Writing Center Journal Authors Cite Sources

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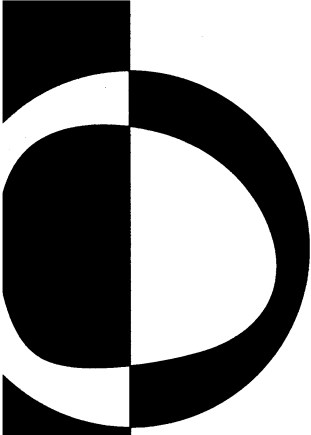
Neal Lerner & Kyle Oddis

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Abstract

Whether we are building on a knowledge network of who and what has come before or are showing the gaps and spaces that our work fills, citing sources is at the core of intellectual work. For *The Writing Center Journal (WCJ)*, a previous study found that 81% of works cited appeared only once, and the remaining set of references refer largely to insider sources, limiting the field's uptake in research and scholarship outside of writing center studies. This follow-up survey and interview study investigates more closely the social scene of citation and finds that in a field as relatively young as writing center studies, *WCJ* authors' allegiances to any particular body of knowledge do not necessarily overlap, thus precluding true disciplinary formation. Still, writing centers might represent *anti-disciplinary* spaces in their practices, their research, and their core beliefs, offering potential collaborations with other on-campus partners outside of disciplinary structures. Knowledge making in writing centers, then, potentially offers a new model of academic and

collaborative work, one that represents the values writing centers have long embodied.

Introduction

Citing sources is at the core of intellectual work. Whether we are building on a knowledge network of who and what has come before or are showing the gaps and spaces that our work fills, our citation practices contribute to what Bryce Allen, Jian Qin, & F. W. Lancaster (1994) call the "persuasive community" of academic writing. Patterns in citation practices have been of interest to scholars in a wide variety of disciplines, including rhetoric and composition (Rose, 1996, 1999; Lucas & Loewe, 2011; Mueller, 2012), business communication (Reinsch & Lewis, 1993; Reinsch & Reinsch, 1996), technical communication (Smith, 2000), communication studies (Case & Higgins, 2000), computing and sociology (Harwood, 2009), and agricultural botany and agricultural economics (Thompson & Tribble, 2001), or as a way to understand disciplinary differences (Karatsolis, 2016). Lucas & Loewe (2011) use Kenneth Burke's conversational "parlor" metaphor to describe the role of citation analysis: "In a Burkean sense, bibliometric analyses aim to observe, trace, and map the published conversations after they occurred, and as they moved from parlor to parlor" (p. 268). Taken as a whole, these studies demonstrate the importance of citation practices, whether as a way to characterize the knowledge domains of a particular field or journal or to ensure that the intellectual work of particular scholars gets an opportunity to join the larger conversation. As Shirley K. Rose (1999) tells us, "every time a scholar . . . incorporates another writer's words or ideas to advance her own thesis, she maps the field of her discipline. She draws boundaries, circumscribes the territory of her field of discourse, and determines who is within and who is without" (pp. 192–193). This essentially social function of citations is part of the larger social construction of knowledge in any field. In the case of citation practices, however, those bits of accepted, rejected, and repackaged knowledge have names and dates attached.

Patterns in citation practices also act as barometers of how a field positions itself with respect to other fields or in the larger social landscape. Are the citations largely inward looking and self-referential; i.e., characteristic of a field that Clement Y. K. So (1988) describes as dominated by "closure" (p. 239)? Are the citations largely disparate and one-off, perhaps indicating a field without an established intellectual core? When it comes to *The Writing Center Journal* (*WCJ*), an analysis of works cited entries from its first 30 years of publication, 1980 to 2009,

indicated both of these conditions were true. The key finding was that *WCJ* authors

> either rely on citations that are not taken up by subsequent authors or refer to a set of "insider" readings that function largely to affirm established beliefs and run the risk of casting the field as largely talking to itself, not to be taken seriously by related and affiliated fields. (Lerner, 2014, p. 68)

One manifestation of this phenomenon is the tenuous nature of writing center studies. Anne Ellen Geller & Harry Denny (2013) find that research is only conducted by those few with exigency to do so, while Dana Lynn Driscoll & Sherry Wynn Perdue (2012) find that few *WCJ* publications qualify as the type of RAD research (replicable, aggregable, data-supported, following Haswell, 2005) that more established fields might view as substantive.

Data from CompPile.org supports this view of writing center publications as largely for the consumption of a writing center audience. As shown in Figure 1, from 1975 to 2015, published academic works outside of *The Writing Center Journal* and *Writing Lab Newsletter* (i.e., articles and book chapters in more widely circulated composition/writing studies sources) referring to writing centers largely peaked in the late 1990s, then, except for a brief resurgence in 2006/2007, have fallen steadily since then.

Figure 1. Number of CompPile.org Records with "wcenter" as Key Term, Excluding Those Found in *WLN* and *WCJ*, 1975–2015
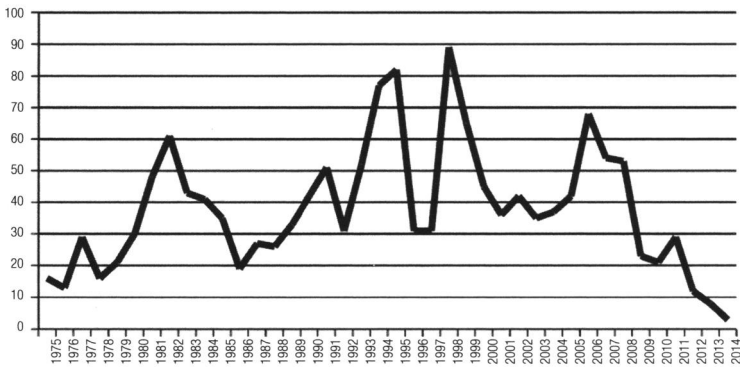
While this phenomenon is consistent with overall citation trends in the humanities (see Larivière, Gingras, & Archambault, 2009), for writing centers as intellectual sites, it represents a continuation of writing centers as "our little secret" as Elizabeth H. Boquet (1999) points to. In an era in which writing centers are still cast as specific sites only to work with specific populations of students, the ambition to be the "centers of consciousness for writing on our campuses," as Stephen M. North (1984) offers, is largely unrealized. Further, in the current climate of administrative "efficiencies" and the folding of writing centers into larger academic support units, at threat are the possibilities for knowledge making in writing centers. And that is a shame, given how writing centers are such rich sites for those possibilities, whether the questions being investigated are about student learning and motivation, diversity and difference, literacy and language, or a host of other topics that are the day-to-day content in every writing center worldwide and at every instructional level.

An understanding of citation practices or of the nature of a particular kind of knowledge making in writing center scholarship can shed light on the limits and possibilities of the field, particularly of the field's quest for disciplinary status. Citation practices offer evidence of the social positioning of writing center scholarship, both to readers familiar with writing center work and to readers outside of that social circle. Authors' citation practices, then, are potentially emblematic of larger tendencies in knowledge production and are a possible "canary in a coal mine" to better understand the scholarly wellness of a field. As Rose (1999) writes, "citation analysis helps us understand who we are. By showing us how we construct ourselves as a knowledge-making community, citation analysis helps us understand how we maintain ourselves as a professional community" (p. 200).

In this article, we build on "The Unpromising Present," triangulating our findings on what appears in Works Cited lists against survey and interview research with *WCJ* authors. We explore how and why those authors cite sources and what they see as the current state of knowledge making in writing center studies. Overall, our analysis of the role of citation practices shows that citing sources in writing center studies is a complex, multi-faceted social activity. As we show in Figure 2, citations enact a relationship between article authors, intended readers, and citations themselves, but each of these elements has its own complexities: *WCJ* authors bring intentions for knowledge making and particular histories as members of or outsiders to the field. *WCJ* readers cover a wide range from undergraduate peer tutors, to PhD students, to writing center directors and researchers. Finally, citations might

convey authority, alienation, or novelty. When this dynamic occurs in a field as relatively young as writing center studies, the overlap between these components might only be slight, and the larger goal of advancing disciplinary knowledge is not necessarily foremost in any author's mind. The goals are much more local, the imagined audiences fairly narrow, and the cumulative effect consequential mostly for a small set of writers and readers.

Figure 2. The Social Scene of Citation in *The Writing Center Journal*
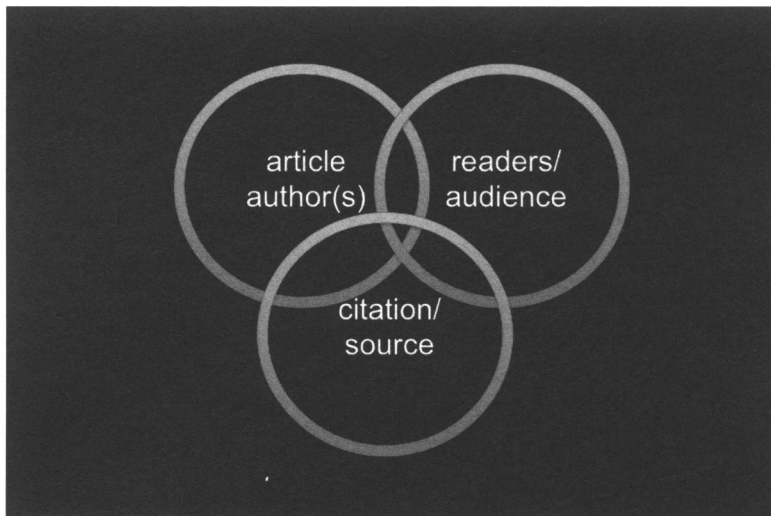
While this finding casts doubt on the solidity of writing center studies as a discipline, in this article we argue that an *anti-disciplinary* understanding of writing center work might ultimately be the best path forward. Writing centers are often already collaborating with other campus units not necessarily seen as existing disciplines (e.g., offices of study abroad, community engagement, or experiential learning), and such work has visibility as "high-impact" practices on student learning (Kuh, 2008). Knowledge making in writing centers, then, potentially offers a new model of academic and collaborative work, one that represents the values writing centers have long embodied and speaks back to the limiting and regulatory functions of traditional academic disciplines.

In what follows, we first describe our research methods and then present what we learned from the combination of surveys and interviews.

Methods of Data Collection

After obtaining IRB approval,[1] we collected data for this study in two phases: 1. a survey of authors who have published in *WCJ* in the last 10 years and 2. discourse-based interviews with 11 of the authors who responded to the survey.

    ***WCJ* author survey.** To better understand why *WCJ* authors cite sources, we distributed a survey to 81 authors who had authored or co-authored articles from 2005 to 2015 and for whom we could obtain contact information (with the assumption that authors in the most-recent time period were more likely to recall their citation practices in their published work than authors from earlier time periods). From that group, we received 51 completed surveys or a 63% return rate.

    Our survey contained three primary sections that each asked respondents their main motivations for citing sources. The first section was an open-ended response ("Please list what you see as your primary reasons for citing sources"), the second section asked authors to rate the importance of the 12 reasons for citing sources that Amy E. Robillard (2006) presents in her synthesis of citation function in composition literature, and the third section asked authors to rank Robillard's (2006) 12 reasons by importance (see Appendix A for complete survey).

    Our analysis of the survey consisted of triangulating the responses between the three sections (which were largely consistent) and determining the most frequent reasons that survey respondents offered for citing sources.

    ***WCJ* author interviews.** At the end of the survey, *WCJ* authors could indicate if they were willing to be contacted for follow-up, 60-minute interviews; 30 total (or 59%) assented, and ultimately we arranged interviews with 11 of those authors, 9 of whom were individual authors and 1 two-author team, who were interviewed together. We compensated authors for their time with $50 Amazon gift cards. To control for publication frequency as a key influence (e.g., less-experienced authors feeling the need to establish the kind of ethos that experienced authors might feel they have already "earned"), we chose these 11 based on a range of how widely published they were, using CompPile.org entries as data. Publications per author ranged from 0

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1   Northeastern University IRB# 15-04-17.

to 71 publications, with a mean of 12.9 publications. We then created three groups of authors based on frequency of publication and chose to interview four authors in the least published group, four in the middle group, and three in the most highly published group.

The interviews were held via Skype and recorded with Call Recorder (http://www.ecamm.com/mac/callrecorder/). These discourse-based interviews (Odell, Goswami, & Herrington, 1983) consisted of walking the authors through their *WCJ* publications from beginning to end and having them recall to the best of their abilities why and how they cited particular sources (if they did not remember, they were asked to tell us that). They also responded to several general questions about knowledge making in writing centers and one question regarding the findings of the first phase of this study:

- How and what are you thinking about your readers when you cite sources?
- How would you describe the *WCJ* "discourse community"?
- How would you characterize knowledge making in writing center studies?
- Premise of Phase 1: *WCJ* knowledge building is based largely on a disparate set of references (81% occur only once) or a very small body of insider knowledge. Not healthy for the future. Reactions?

All audio files were transcribed, and we then conducted grounded-theory analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) for patterns in citing behaviors and themes in the authors' responses to the open-ended questions.

Findings

Survey of *WCJ* authors' citation practices. As we noted in the methods section, our survey had three parts: 1. one open-ended question about why *WCJ* authors cite sources, 2. a rating of each of Robillard's (2006) 12 reasons for citing sources, and 3. a ranking of Robillard's (2006) reasons. In terms of the first part, as shown in Table 1, two-thirds of survey respondents essentially endorsed the social nature of citation practices (to situate the author and the readers as part of a larger conversation) as in the following responses:

- "To describe work (similar, different, related) that has already been done."
- "To help readers locate my ideas in relationship to those of other scholars in the field or beyond the field."
- "To enter a conversation with previous sources."

Table 1. Survey Responses to "What Do You See as Your Primary Reasons for Citing Sources?"

Reason for citing sources	# of responses	% of responses
Connect (situate; conversation)	34	67%
Create/advance an argument (evidence)	23	45%
Establish ethos/credibility	22	43%
Expand readers' knowledge	19	37%
Give credit	15	29%
Advance discipline	3	6%
Demonstrate/make visible thinking	1	2%

The next two most frequent reasons—to offer evidence for an argument and to establish ethos/credibility—are practices that mark academic writing as a particular genre (Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006, pp. 5–8). For survey respondents, all of whom are teachers of academic writing, the language to describe these reasons was quite consistent:

Evidence
- "Providing evidence to support my claims."
- "To provide support for arguments/positions taken in my own work."
- "The most important reason for me to cite sources is to provide evidence for claims."

Ethos
- "To establish my credibility as an author, to show I did my homework."
- "To demonstrate that I know what of relevance has previously been published in *WCJ*."
- "Demonstrate I have understanding of field/concept."

We should note that responses we coded as "advancing the discipline" were offered by only three survey respondents. For this question, at least, *WCJ* authors were thinking much more locally about their use of citations rather than broader motivations to expand that social circle.

For the second section of the survey, respondents were generally aligned with their open-ended responses. As seen in Table 2, the six reasons given the highest ratings are quite similar to what appears in Table 1, the open-ended responses.

Table 2. Mean Responses to Robillard's (2006) Reasons for Citing Sources (5 = Always; 1 = Never)

Provide evidence for your claims.	4.5
Give credit where credit is due.	4.5
Establish relationships among texts.	4.3
Provide readers access to source material.	4.2
Establish your expertise as an author.	4.2
Affirm your membership and participation in a particular discourse community.	4.1

Similarly, in the third part of the survey, when asked to rank Robillard's (2006) reasons for citing sources, respondents' highest-ranked reasons largely overlapped with their ratings of each individual reason. In other words, none of Robillard's (2006) other motivations for citing sources made it into the prioritized list:

1. Affirm your membership and participation in a particular discourse community.

2. Establish relationships among texts.

3. Establish your expertise/credibility as an author.

4. Give credit where credit is due.

5. Provide evidence for claims.

6. Provide readers access to source material.

We should also note that we asked one more open-ended question in our survey following the ranking of Robillard's (2006) 12 functions of citation. In response to "What additional reasons do you consider when citing sources and how frequently do you consider those?," *WCJ* authors offered particular awareness of audience (and obligation to that audience) and of how they position themselves as authors creating particular ethos for their readers. In terms of that audience, responses included the following:

- "I have to. A reviewer tells me, 'cite this,' so I do it. Or, another version of that is that I anticipate that the reviewer/editor will expect me to cite such and such a source, so I do even though I don't think it's very important or necessary."
- "I always make sure I have cited anything of relevance published in the journal to which I am submitting my paper.

> . . . A paper that evidently was written for no journal in particular runs the risk of seeming to disregard any journal to which it is submitted."

- "Sometimes I cite a source because it's expected or because a reviewer or editor tells me to."

Some authors described the role of ethos and the ways they need to build credibility with readers:

- "It is important to come to an independent understanding of the meaning and value of the texts we cite. Otherwise we are really no better than the students in that citation project, who only cite the introductions of articles."

- "I also think it's very very different how you engage scholarship when you're new to a field than when you've been kicking around for a while. I am not concerned with establishing my credibility now, and I certainly don't 'backward design' essays in the manner I describe here."

- "Those authors who publish articles but who are obviously not aware of other research in their areas seem not to care about the ideas of others. I think that our field should be better than that and that our publications should not encourage work that is not fully researched."

- "Citing sources can be a useful tool for pushing an agenda forward without having to take on full responsibility for an idea or ideology."

These views of the social nature of citations offered us particular directions for follow-up questions in the interview phase of our study, which we report on next.

Interviews with _WCJ_ authors. The interviews offered _WCJ_ authors an opportunity to articulate and reflect more extensively and more specifically on why they cited in certain ways (in terms of form and function) and why they chose to cite certain articles or scholars in particular. The interviews also provided opportunities for authors to discuss their intended _WCJ_ readers, as well as the discourse community of writing center studies and the ways that knowledge making occurs within it. Many interview responses reaffirmed what the survey suggested—authors used citations to establish themselves as members of an existing writing center discourse community though views of the community itself were quite varied and, at times, sobering. We saw three primary themes emerging from our interviews:

1. *WCJ* authors in our study see readers as disparate, often root-ed in practical needs, and this wide variety can be, at times, frustrating.

2. *WCJ* authors in our study often struggle with a tension be-tween appealing to and drawing on work outside of the field and being accepted as an insider.

3. *WCJ* authors in our study on the whole believe that drawing on literature outside of writing center studies is essential to making their arguments and advancing the field.

In terms of who *WCJ* authors see as *WCJ* readers and how to characterize the writing center discourse community more generally, some authors had very specific ideas of their imagined audience: some authors viewed themselves as part of that audience, some did not, and some seemed to present contradicting/multiple audiences. Most prominent was the wide array of potential readers for this scholarship, from undergraduate peer tutors, to research-oriented faculty, to writing center directors coming with backgrounds in fields other than writing center work:

- "In *Writing Center Journal*, there are still a lot of people who may be entering the field within the last several years, maybe within the last 5 or 10 years. They've had a number of graduate courses in the area. They got some experience in working in writing centers. They are people who may not be as familiar with the context or the foundational pieces in the field."

- "Since so many creative writers are in this business too, it's not just composition people, you know?"

- "As I'm writing I'm thinking, 'Am I talking to my tutors here or am I talking to the field?'"

- "The discourse community, I think it's one that is interesting. Because one of the tricky things . . . is that structurally, we come to the field with so many different sets of training. It's a little bit tricky because on one hand, I just said to you, 'Well, we all know each other, but it's a small enough world that if you go to a few conferences, you'll probably have met most of the people who are active in the field.' On the other hand, we are framed in so many different ways."

- "The *WCJ* community is composed mostly of people who are either nascent professionals or experienced professionals in that field within rhetoric-composition. There are a number of people who subscribe to the journal who would

consider their area of expertise and interest in related fields not directly related to writing center work. It falls under the general umbrella, rhetoric-composition, more extensively."

- "To describe the discourse community is to say there's not a single set of training that defines writing center studies. In most cases, it's not like we have our own departments. It's tricky."

- "The people in the field, they can't appreciate the more meticulously-researched stuff. And I don't mean that because they are stupid. They are just doing things, they have other priorities."

These potentially conflicting goals of *WCJ* readers could be a source of frustration for some authors, and characterizing *WCJ* readers and the writing center discourse community often revealed authors' perceived relationship between themselves and this social circle. This author-reader relationship was fraught at times, whether it was an author's feelings of "outsider" status or frustration over the slow process of change in the field itself, or an author's perception that the writing center community lacks direction or even promise, or the belief that conflicting demands detract from an author's ability to conduct research:

- "I'm trying to name things both out of insecurity—because I want to look like one of them—and . . . because I can't start with the real theoretical stuff. Otherwise, it's going to be, 'Did you write this for another journal, and you're just trying to turn it into a writing center essay?'"

- "As a scholar, to be very blunt, the writing center world started to feel like a dead-end to me. People will read what you wrote and they may even cite you, but they will never actually take up your stuff and do anything with it."

- "The honest answer is quite often I'm thinking, 'Nobody will read this.'"

- "Honestly, there is some piece of this that's just me trying to express something meaningful about the work that we do. I love writing center work. I want to participate in the scholarship about it, and I want to see it progress in meaningful ways. Part of that just means wrenching it out of this kind of provincial place that it's in. I don't know. I've gone through different things of just feeling frustrated with it."

- "I think that writing center people, we're an insular group. I'm stating the obvious, and I think that we feel safe. . . . Part of it is the fear that, 'I'm not good enough for that,' but another part of it is just that, 'I like the insularity of this

group.' On the one hand, on the intellectual level, I can say of course that's not a good thing for the discipline. On the other hand, it's what I feel comfortable with. Maybe that's what is happening with other people. I guess it could be too that people maybe submit their things to other journals and they aren't accepted, or people's sense is too narrow. So it's almost like what has come first, the chicken or the egg?"

Perhaps as a result of the perception that the field could be too insular, authors frequently pointed to choosing certain articles or authors in attempts to offer promising frameworks for research, which generally came from their own disciplines or were informed by authors' particular backgrounds and interests. These moves expanded boundaries for what might be included in the field and acknowledged the narrowness of writing center literature. In a field as young as writing center studies, the result of which is that many *WCJ* authors do have primary training and experience in other scholarly fields, it is not a surprise to see authors make these connections. However, a repeated theme in our interviews was insider-versus-outsider knowledge or authors' development of ethos to show readers that they belonged to the field but at the same time to advance the field's knowledge by drawing on external sources. Along these lines, while many authors identified themselves as *WCJ* readers, "writing center scholar" did not always seem to be their primary identification. In other words, some authors saw themselves *secondarily* or even *thirdly* as writing center scholars and saw their scholarship within the field as either an outcropping of their primary fields, a branch of those fields, or as something else that could inform or be informed by the work being done in them:

- "I have a literature background, English literature. . . . Many aspects of this article I suppose reflect that, in the close-reading approach that I do. We have a certain way of doing scholarship, but also a certain set of theoretical approaches and readings that we have."
- "Part of me thinks, 'If there was—if I take that more social science approach that seems so easy but that doesn't fit with early writing center work—there's also not a ton of work on [this topic] just in the field anyway. . .'"
- "I probably have a bit of a habit, but it's a little bit purposeful, too, of going to scholars outside the field. Partly, I have to, because there's not enough scholarship in the field."
- "Something that's been important to me is making sure that we're citing high impact work from outside the field,

whenever we can, not just from within the field, because we don't have a strong research tradition in our field."

- "I think what that reflects is where we've come from, which is from within English departments in particular. That the tendency has been to cite internally or not to go out to fields that really should be related to us, but aren't structurally within the university."

- "Part of what I think we can do in writing centers is say, 'OK, are there other fields using concepts that we want to use?'"

- "I guess, in a way, it's sort of establishing my authority, but not authority in our field, you know?"

Some authors were quite deliberate in choosing literature from outside fields, motivated to draw readers' attention to these texts:

- "He seems like a person I want people to know is out there. I want them to read his work, and that work is really critical to understanding what I'm trying to bring into the body of writing center scholars."

- "This is a pivotal text. . . . It's outside the world of writing center scholarship, but their concept . . . seem[s] really critical to me for writing center scholars to understand."

- "It's all audience, audience, audience. How are you going to entice somebody from writing center land into picking up some of this stuff?"

- "One of the big reasons I cite, particularly if it's a little-known scholar or a little-known text, is to promote that person's work."

Drawing on work from other fields was often the result of an author's background and training outside of writing center work. This influence is further demonstrated in that many authors discussed how their dissertation work—even if completed decades ago—informed the approaches they highlighted in their articles:

- "You tend to draw from your own educational experiences. What did you write about when you were doing your dissertation, and what books did you read when you were in graduate school? How has your institution shaped your research trajectory and focus in particular ways?"

- "A little bit of my own personal history and that is my dissertation was on [this topic]."

- "This is one of the awkward parts, I would say. This actually was a chapter in my dissertation, and I would say that my dissertation research methods are very loosely called case study methodology. No matter how many years away the

dissertation was, there's something foundational about that work, that we can easily draw on in a certain way."

Perhaps the notion of "I'm one of them" that gets reinforced through repeated use of certain foundational writing center works becomes so important because of this lack of primary identification with writing center studies. This phenomenon reflects what we saw in the survey responses—that foundational texts are cited because they serve as a means of establishing oneself as a member of the writing center discourse community writ large; however, as many authors pointed out in the interviews, what is considered "foundational" can also be stagnating or represent a fairly narrow disciplinary canon when the primary reason for citing is to establish membership in the community:

- "You wonder whether some of these become such icons that if you cite it then what you're doing is you're identifying yourself as a complete novice. Nobody cites Euclid anymore, but he's still out there."
- "Some of the most respected works become hardened as part of our dogma in some ways. In other words, everybody has to cite Stephen North, right? It may just be also because we have tutoring manuals out there with articles in them and those are the only exposure some people get."
- "There are certain people that get chosen, and they are central, and they have a voice, and it's really loud, and it's hard to get past that."

Finally, *WCJ* authors we interviewed spoke more broadly about the field in relationship to its research, noting that tensions exist between authors reluctantly identifying themselves as researchers and the lack of stability of dominant research methods, particularly theoretical versus empirical methods:

- "I think a lot of these people who have published, at some point, do not identify themselves as researchers. . . . They don't see it as a core part of their identity. If they're in English, or composition studies, their work in the writing center isn't always acknowledged as appropriate for their tenure review, so they're kind of interlopers. You referred to it as, 'a brief stopover'. . . or they were only in writing center studies for a short time, or their core agenda had to be something other than writing centers."
- "I feel like I want to be known as a writer first probably, a scholar second maybe, and a writing center person third. Although that's not necessarily the way it is."

- "My impression is, right now, that there's a renewed focus on empirical research in the field, which I'm interested in, and it also concerns me."
- "To some degree, theory has gotten a bad name for various reasons in the field. Because theory is associated with lore or un-rigorous approaches, there's been so much more moving—which I think is great—towards RAD research. . . . I'm a big fan of all of that, but at the same time I feel that we are not going to just get rid of our theoretical issues by simply doing empirical research. That in everything that we learn from other fields is that the two go sort of hand-in-hand. Not always easily, but that you have to. You do empirical research, you gather data and then you generalize from that. You get and see how that relates to, if it confirms or complicates the current theoretical conceptions."

We do want to note that not all authors offered negative perceptions or voiced frustrations. One was quite hopeful about where writing center research was heading, while being mindful of the challenges:

> In many ways the future is bright, in the sense that we have a lot of interest in developing new knowledge and exploring new ways of gaining information, gaining knowledge about what it is we're doing and how to do it. Along the way though, we have to look critically at what we've done before in order to be determining, as we take on new forms of scholarship, what can we take and what can we leave from what we've done before. That's going to be hard.

This cycle of reflection and reassessment would seem to be well within the everyday activities of many who are drawn to writing center work and who contribute to its scholarship. Challenges, of course, are ever present, whether university reward structures that often work against such a long view, the realities of job configurations that do not allow time and resources for extended scholarship, or a field in which its members do not necessarily have a shared set of educational experiences or foundational beliefs (and theory and research that led to those beliefs). In the course of conducting this research, we found ourselves embracing this author's view, particularly in terms of the dynamics of knowledge making. As we next describe, rather than a sign of disciplinary failure, *WCJ* authors' citation practices might speak to the anti-disciplinary nature of the field, a position many writing center researchers and practitioners might easily embrace and that is well aligned with the field's priorities, values, and goals.

Discussion: Making Knowledge in Writing Centers—An Anti-Disciplinary Model

In the first phase of this study, we found that 81% of the articles cited in *WCJ* over its first 30 years were "orphan" citations or cited only once. Our survey and interviews offer a possible explanation for this phenomenon: Many *WCJ* authors identify primarily with their own disciplines while being "also interested in" writing center work. Many authors also highlighted a tension between empirical and theoretical research in their responses regarding knowledge making in the field, a tension that is in some ways created by the many approaches authors used to include both theoretical and empirical methods and by the wide range of potential *WCJ* readers.

Given this unsettled state of knowledge making, it makes sense, then, that a disproportionate number of articles were cited only once. All authors seemed to feel their field-related citations could offer something useful to writing center work in terms of theory or practice, and, yet, there wasn't much overlap or uptake occurring between disciplinary approaches. Further, in our survey, only 6% of respondents described the purpose of citations as to "advance the discipline." These practices do not seem wholly productive in terms of knowledge making—disciplines have certain conventions but also certain social values that citations reinforce while simultaneously excluding others (Rose, 1996). Further, when authors consistently cite work outside of the field, they risk alienating some readers, as Rose (1996) describes:

> When a reader of scholarly literature encounters citations of work with which she is not familiar, the citation promises her that she can achieve closer identification with the author and the rest of the disciplinary community by reading that source. . . . If readers are in a critical, gate-keeping frame of mind, they may dismiss a writer (whether they do so legitimately or not) as "not of the community" if he or she fails to cite a work they consider important or does cite a work they do not respect. Thus the citation choices meant to foster identification have the potential for creating division. (p. 41)

In *Academic Tribes and Territories*, Tony Becher & Paul R. Trowler (2001) note that "attitudes, activities and cognitive styles of groups of academics representing a particular discipline are bound up with the characteristics and structures of the knowledge domains with which such groups are professionally concerned" (p. 42). Based on our research, when it comes to writing center studies, those "knowledge domains"

seem disparate and unsettled, calling into question whether writing centers would satisfy the criteria as an academic discipline.

This instability returns us to the initial problem presented in "The Unpromising Present" and at the start of this study: How can a writing center be the "center for writing on our campuses" when the field itself seems to lack a center? And if there is a center, do the field's citation practices highlight a "self-referential" yet "disparate" center at best? As one author suggested, perhaps we are "not as disciplinary as we think we are." What the interviews lent words to is that the disparate social lives of citations might characterize this phenomenon.

But we now wonder if this state of disciplinary affairs is necessarily a bad thing or if the lens of disciplinary status is the wrong one to look through. In many ways, the instability we found in our study is also reflective of the work of writing centers themselves, which are perhaps not disciplinary or even inter-disciplinary as they are anti-disciplinary. What we mean is that many of the values of writing center work (e.g., student-centered learning, students as partners in knowledge construction, meaningful attention to issues of difference) and often their status in our institutions go against traditional ideas of disciplinary formation. Certainly, *WCJ* authors' citation practices represent traditional disciplinary methods, but as we've shown, the effect is quite inconsequential: Even when *WCJ* scholars try to cite non-mainstream scholars, very few or no other *WCJ* authors take up those citations. Still, what we wonder is if the greatest effect might be on the reader, not necessarily other authors. In other words, disparate *WCJ* readers—as our interview participants identified—bring multiple motivations and needs to their engagement with *WCJ* scholarship. The ways reader-writer interaction might create knowledge for the field is a phenomenon unaccounted for in traditional disciplinary formation.

Furthermore, what our research and others' (e.g., Geller & Denny, 2013; Caswell, Grutsch McKinney, & Jackson, 2016) show us is that the path of seeking traditional disciplinary status—build undergraduate and graduate programs around writing center studies, seek internal and external funding for such programs, generate subsequent generations of scholars with research agendas firmly set in writing centers—is fraught with obstacles, both internal and external. Anti-disciplinary paths might feature—far more than is currently the case—significant collaborations with students, faculty, and staff across campus, whether those colleagues occupy traditional disciplinary roles (e.g., academic departments) or other kinds of campus roles (e.g., offices of community engagement, student affairs, institutional research, university libraries), all in the service of investigating topics such as race and racism, institu-

tional authority, and the hegemony of standard language practices: issues of long significance to writing center theory, research, and practice.

It also occurs to us that the anti-disciplinary nature of writing center studies mirrors the day-to-day realities of most writing centers: tutors at a variety of instructional levels from a variety of disciplinary orientations working with students at a variety of instructional levels from a variety of disciplinary orientations. We know that this mix is often a strength: Bradley Hughes, Paula Gillespie, & Harvey Kail (2010) find that the collaborative learning central to writing center pedagogy contributes to tutors' "deep learning that endures years, even decades, after graduation" (p. 14). What, we wonder, is how our field's scholarship might reflect its anti-disciplinary practices even more strongly than it does now.

Writing center scholars calling for an "outlaw" or oppositional stance vis-a-vis our institutions and their mainstream language practices is not new (e.g., Riley, 1994; Davis, 1995; Grimm, 1999), despite periodic reminders that we might be more complicit than we think we are (Denny, 2010; Grimm, 1996; Grutsch McKinney, 2013). Still, the anti-disciplinary nature of the field speaks to the limits of citation practices and the ways that such practices might restrict, rather than expand, what "counts" as knowledge. As Sara Ahmed (2013) notes, citing sources is "a rather successful reproductive technology, a way of reproducing the world around certain bodies." Such reproduction runs the risk of "making certain bodies and thematics core to the discipline, and others not even part." Eve Tuck, K. Wayne Yang, & Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, the authors of the "Citation Practices Challenge," further describe the dangers:

> Our practices of citation make and remake our fields, making some forms of knowledge peripheral. We often cite those who are more famous, even if their contributions appropriate subaltern ways of knowing. We also often cite those who frame problems in ways that speak against us. Over time, our citation practices become repetitive; we cite the same people we cited as newcomers to a conversation. Our practices persist without consideration of the politics of linking projects to the same tired reference lists.

In *WCJ*, we certainly saw evidence of the "same tired reference lists" being replicated again and again (particularly when it came to citing North's (1984) "Idea of a Writing Center"). However, as we noted, we also saw 8 in 10 references being cited only once. While this phenomenon might be characteristic of a field that has only a narrow core of accepted knowledge and a large disparate sweep of seemingly unrelated

references, we also see these citation practices as potentially anti-disciplinary or as resisting standard disciplinary norms.

To be anti-disciplinary is to work outside of what is valued by traditional academic disciplines, particularly when what is valued represents narrow conceptions of who is authorized to create knowledge and in the face of regulatory structures that limit that knowledge making—in other words, when the idea of disciplinarity is futile or even harmful. In resisting classification of work that looks like what is "normally valued," writing center work is perhaps some sort of resistance: to be anti-disciplinary captures the tension between wanting to fit into that traditional mold because that's what we're used to doing (and others tell us that's what we should value), and mounting some sort of resistance within a space that isn't so easily colonized by any one set of practices.

Along these lines, one particular feature of research conducted in writing centers—a feature far more common in writing center research than in other fields—is the opportunity for undergraduates to be those knowledge makers (Fitzgerald, 2014) and to publish that research in venues such as *Young Scholars in Writing* or edited collections. Still, what Lauren Fitzgerald (2014) points out is that our citations are far less likely to include references to undergraduate researchers, including citation practices by the undergraduates themselves. Fitzgerald (2014) challenges us to consider what knowledge making in writing centers might look like if this practice were to change:

> What would happen, I wonder, if undergraduate writing tutors stopped citing giants of writing center studies—the Bruffees, Norths, and others . . . ? And what if, instead, the giants on whose shoulders peer writing tutor-researchers stood were those of other peer writing tutor authors? What kind of authorizing would happen then? How would the boundaries of the field and our collective understanding of what we do be redrawn? (p. 30)

In addition to embracing more fully the role of student knowledge making, perhaps the future of writing center scholarship needs also to embrace a realization that writing center studies can't look like *any* of the disciplines that people come from, though it might draw from parts of them. Just as there is not a single set of training that defines writing center studies, there is not a single discipline that writing centers resemble in their work. In other words, perhaps the question to ask is not "How do I make writing center scholarship fit into the neat category of its own discipline?," but rather "How do I make the type of research I want to do actually happen? How do I make the case that the writing center is a valuable site for research?" Further, embracing the writing center as an anti-disciplinary space could mean resisting what Eve Tuck

& K. Wayne Yang (2014) describe as the "conquest and the colonization of knowledge" common to much social science research. Perhaps it also means not calling our inquiry "research" as this label immediately limits site, method, and subject of inquiry. In Tuck & Yang's (2014) words,

> Research is just one form of knowing, but in the Western academy, it eclipses all others. In this way, the relationship of research to other human ways of knowing resembles a colonizing formation, acquiring, claiming, absorbing, consuming. In the current neoliberal moment, there are few spaces that remain dedicated to human curiosity and human inquiry aside from research. This component of research is valuable, and worth sustaining, yet we must simultaneously protect and nurture other nonresearch spaces/approaches for curiosity and inquiry. (p. 237)

As a field, we're at a decisive moment. We see great opportunities as institutions are rethinking disciplinary spaces, but as it stands now, many writing centers are more aligned with academic resource spaces that are somewhat marginal and not particularly scholarly. Thus, if writing center work is going to have an impact, it has to look different. Perhaps the anti-disciplinarity of the writing center space allows us—and even implores us—to resist audience expectations and make the discourse more vibrant than it has been up to this point. One thing seems clear, at least, and that is that in order to make progress, we need to rethink scholarship at the "center," rethink what frequently citing it does beyond establishing oneself as a member of a (somewhat poorly-defined) community, and make a clearer case for what promise writing centers have as anti-disciplinary spaces. These moves might never achieve disciplinary status for writing centers, but that goal will surely not matter if instead we achieve the goals of writing centers as true intellectual sites and models for how best to learn and teach writing and how best to study and represent that knowledge.

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Appendix A: Writing Center Journal Author Citation Survey

The purpose of this research is to investigate author citation practices in *The Writing Center Journal*. To answer the following questions, please consider and refer to the *Writing Center Journal* article(s) that you have published in the last 10 years. Thanks for your help.

Please list what you see as your primary reasons for citing sources.

Amy Robillard ("'Young Scholars' Affecting Composition: A Challenge to Disciplinary Citation Practices." *College English* 68.3 [2006]: 253–270) identifies the following functions of citation in scholarly writing in composition studies. For each function, indicate how frequently it contributes to your reasons for citing sources in your *Writing Center Journal* publication(s):

Provide readers access to source material.
Never   Always
1   2   3   4   5

Establish relationships among texts.
Never   Always
1   2   3   4   5

Establish your expertise as an author.
Never   Always
1   2   3   4   5

Provide evidence for your claims.
Never   Always
1   2   3   4   5

Affirm your membership and participation in a particular discourse community.
Never   Always
1   2   3   4   5

Align yourself with a particular school of thought.
Never   Always
1   2   3   4   5

Counter those who might criticize your ideas.
Never   Always
1   2   3   4   5

Give credit where credit is due.
Never   Always
1   2   3   4   5

Give legitimacy to potential disciplinary contributions, particularly those of little-known or up-and-coming scholars.
Never   Always
1   2   3   4   5

Acknowledge one's indebtedness to others.
Never   Always
1   2   3   4   5

Indicate your respect for the cited author's work.
Never   Always
1   2   3   4   5

Show how others have shared their work with you.
Never   Always
1   2   3   4   5

What additional reasons do you consider when citing sources and how frequently do you consider those?

Of the reasons listed above for citing sources (both Robillard's and your own), what five do you see as most important?

We also plan to conduct follow-up interviews with interested participants. These interviews will be conducted via Skype and last for 60 minutes. Participants will receive a $50 honorarium. If you are willing to participate in that follow-up interview, please leave an email address so that we might contact you.

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