Our Writing Group: How Low-Income Adults Built a University-Adjacent Writing Community

By

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Dedication

To my mom, Isabel Perez Kelenyi, for modeling persistence, grace, and confidence in systems not built for women of color. Because of you, I find my way through similar systems.

To my brother, Jasson Perez, for always charting your own path, for questioning and taking risks, for throwing expectations out the window in pursuit of what you want, and for trusting yourself to get there your own way. You inspire me.

To my son, Wilder Ellis Green, in hopes that you continue to blaze a new trail that is wondrously all your own. I love you.

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I wrote a lot of this dissertation in community with my Helen C. White colleagues. Thank you for the virtual and in-person writing groups and get-togethers hosted and attended by Emily

Abstract

Disarticulating conceptions of writers and good writing from the academy and elevating conceptions of writers as reflecting communities, as intellectuals with important ideas and images to share no matter their academic pedigree is of paramount importance to developing a sense of writerly self-efficacy, or "students' self-perceptions of their own writing competence" (Pajares & Valiante), in adult undergraduate writers. To do so, adult undergraduate students must be included and encouraged to participate in their postsecondary literacy curriculum and instruction if literacy courses, educators, and administrators are to honor and affirm the life experiences, resources, and intersecting identities that characterize adult undergraduates—that characterize *all* student writers. Research in lifespan literacies orients literacy researchers and educators to a more holistic conception of (adult undergraduate student) writers. Furthermore, community literacies research provides examples of wider, more inclusive approaches to working with adult learners that develop more localized understandings of the writers with whom they work. Building from work in these areas of writing studies, this dissertation project proposes an approach to understanding adult undergraduate writer experiences and identities that highlights the importance of localized understandings of students if institutions of higher education at large and literacy courses specifically are to support their ever-diversifying student populations effectively. Through a community writing group, this project aims to centralize adult undergraduate community writers' experiences to inform and ultimately enhance inclusive and culturally sustaining writing instruction in higher education.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

I am the daughter and the sister of "nontraditional" students who I never really considered "nontraditional." My mother and my older brother are some of the most intelligent, capable, and successful people I know; they are largely self-taught and have brought a lot of professional and "real world" experience to and from their college classrooms, such as workplace applications of course content and being primary single parents while attending school. To be completely frank, my mother's and brother's academic trajectories make me a firm believer that you are never "too old" to return to school, to learn something new, to chase your dreams; they prove to me that stereotypical academic pedigrees and trajectories are not requirements for advancement or achievement.

However, their academic experiences don't quite inspire the same positive beliefs in themselves: they are doubtful of their own efficacy many times, and they question their "fit" or preparedness to take advantage of opportunities sometimes—*especially* when it comes to writing because of the ways they conceptualize and find purposes for writing that differ from students entering college directly from high school and even instructors with a more narrow focus on what makes for academic writing. Thus, all the courses, instructors, and classmates my mother and brother have had throughout their undergraduate experiences likely have not helped them persist toward their degrees—my mom to her master's degree in public health administration or my brother to arrive at only 12 credits away from earning his bachelor's degree after 7+ years of hard work. They wrote their own tickets, followed their own paths to and through higher education.

And from my own experience as an educator, I can see how many courses, instructors, and classmates don't help in the quest for a higher education for adult undergraduate students.

That is, as I became immersed in the world of content standards and institutional policies and procedures, the reasons why I became a writing teacher (because I believe all students can achieve and because I wanted to share my sense of empowerment from and love for writing) seemed to easily get lost in the everyday hustle of ninth grade composition in a charter school environment deeply invested in white middle-class notions of discipline, scholarship, and honor. The lack of support and space to normalize and elevate individual experiences and struggles led me to contribute to the creation of "nontraditional students," as secondary students from my school dropped out, felt misunderstood and un(der)valued, and seldom found a sense of belonging and possibility in our classrooms. Both my mother and my brother have shared senses of unbelonging in academic spaces with me that have contributed to doubts about their efficacy, preparedness, and overall confidence both within and beyond the academy.

This correlates with other research on adult learners in postsecondary settings. In fact, adult undergraduate students have often been academically disenfranchised due to structural oppression and inequities such as colorblind racism, neoliberal disenfranchisement, and the literacy myth (Schrantz; Miller Brown; Lundberg et al.; Graff). These issues inform the deficit perspectives on adult undergraduates that undergird research on adult literacy and adult learners (Perry et al.) and how adult students are supported (or unsupported) in college writing classrooms and in turn how they view themselves as capable student writers. Systems of oppression are uniquely implicated in writing and writing instruction: writing (re)produces possibilities for inequity because it is not "a basic, ideology-free skill" (Adler-Kassner & Wardle 16). In fact, writing is infinitely caught up in the "messiness of political and cultural ideology" (Byrd 2).

So given that alternative pathways to and through higher education stem from and lead to more feelings of exclusion and the unique role that writing—as both an act and an action—plays in that exclusion as fertile ground for the perpetuation of power inequities (Brandt, *Literacy in American Lives*), how do adult undergraduate students—students who have taken alternative, perhaps nonlinear, paths to and through higher education and students who have some undergraduate college credits but perhaps not a terminal degree—persist in their writing endeavors? Furthermore, as a "remarkably heterogenous" group that can include veterans, currently or formerly incarcerated persons, gig workers, retirees, parents of grown and young children, the un- or underemployed, etc. (Scobey 111), adult undergraduates—with their family, work, community, academic, and other priorities and responsibilities— have not existed in one writing context for most of their (adult) lives, but instead have been existing in *multiple* simultaneously. So how do adult undergraduates come to *feel* like writers in any one context, let alone multiple?

In the powerful words of Raúl Sánchez, "Contrary to common sense, writing does not simply record or commemorate. As both an event and an object in the world, writing actively participates in the world, and the details of that participation are not easy to decipher" (78). This dissertation project aims to begin deciphering the details of that participation for adult undergraduate student writers in a community writing group and their writing projects. According to adult learning expert Michelle Navarre Cleary, literature on adult undergraduate students is quite limited, so writing studies scholars still don't know enough about the contexts in which adult writers with different academic trajectories develop confident writerly voices, the contexts in which people feel like writers. Yet adult undergraduate experiences of the barriers and affordances of writing in various contexts are not only unique, but uniquely important

because how these writers persist in their writing practice holds lessons for the creation of culturally sustaining literacy pedagogies for adults. And as the stakes for writing continue to rise as global information economies demand ever-increasing levels of literacy from individuals (Brandt, *The Rise of Writing*), such pedagogies become increasingly important to meet the needs and desires of adult undergraduates to use writing to affect change and build solidarity in their various communities/ contexts.

Thus, disarticulating conceptions of writers and good writing from the academy and elevating conceptions of writers as reflecting communities, as intellectuals with important ideas and images to share no matter their academic pedigree is of paramount importance to developing a sense of writerly self-efficacy, or "students' self-perceptions of their own writing competence" (Pajares & Valiante), in adult undergraduate writers. To do so, adult undergraduate students must be included and encouraged to participate in their postsecondary literacy curriculum and instruction if literacy courses, educators, and administrators are to honor and affirm the life experiences, resources, and intersecting identities that characterize adult undergraduates—that characterize *all* student writers.

Research in lifespan literacies orients literacy researchers and educators to a more holistic conception of (adult undergraduate student) writers. Furthermore, community literacies research provides examples of wider, more inclusive approaches to working with adult learners that develop more localized understandings of the writers with whom they work. Building from work in these areas of writing studies, this dissertation project proposes an approach to understanding adult undergraduate writer experiences and identities that highlights the importance of localized understandings of students if institutions of higher education at large and literacy courses specifically are to support their ever-diversifying student populations effectively. Through a

university-adjacent community writing group, this project aims to centralize adult undergraduate community writers' experiences to inform and ultimately enhance inclusive and culturally sustaining writing instruction in higher education.

Research Questions

As such, the purpose of this community-engaged participatory action ethnography of a weekly writing group for adult undergraduate students is to utilize the insights and participation of participants to uncover how to support these writers in reaching their writing goals, how to help them achieve a sense of writerly self-efficacy, how to help them *feel* like writers. To do this, I take a constructionist epistemological approach and ask, "How are writers' literacy desires expressed and practiced in the context of OWG?" Additionally, in order to narrow the focus of my study on the literacy desires of adult undergraduate students and better frame, honor, and stimulate the participation and action of my participants/ co-researchers in this project, I ask the following sub-questions: 1) Who are OWG participants' audiences and how do they understand and seek to reach these audiences? 2) How do the adult undergraduate students in OWG conceive of writing and literacy, and what tensions do they experience in these conceptions in relation to their institutional contexts (the community partner program they graduated from, publication venues, their workplaces, etc.)? 3) Through what kinds of practices, pedagogies, community relationships, and life experiences do participants in OWG come to think of themselves (or not) as writers? And to what ends do they write?

Methodology & Methods

Context

Housed in Upper Midwest University's[1] continuing education department, my community partner— Venture— is a two-semester six-credit humanities program offered to adults with a high school diploma or GED for free. Founded in the early 2000s, the program was modeled after the Clemente Course in the Humanities and Berea College. Venture's mission is to reduce financial barriers to continuing education for adult students, help students develop literacy practices that build individual student confidence, foster whole class community, and cultivate a sense of hope for the future. To date, approximately 75% of program graduates continue pursuing college coursework, and 25% of program alumni have earned a college degree or professional/technical certificate. Graduates of the program report increased academic confidence and experience greater financial stability since completing the program.

In order to align my research project with my values and goals to be involved with/in (rather than simply giving to) participants/communities and seek a balanced reciprocal relationship with others in my scholarly endeavors, I have built a strong relationship with the faculty, staff, students, and alumni of Venture. After getting to know the program over 18+ months as first a grant-writing intern and then as a Writing Center instructor specifically for program students, I recognized that after the initial two-semester course ends, opportunities to continue writerly development and build solidarity are limited. Thus, in Spring 2020, I developed and piloted Our Writing Group (OWG) to fill this gap by providing consistent time, space, and support for program alumni to write with others. OWG represents my effort to remain true to my

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[1] In order to protect the confidentiality of my participants and my partner program, I use location, participant, and program pseudonyms.

values and goals for research, allowing me to align my scholarly and personal aspirations with community and stakeholder objectives to increase access, benefit, and opportunity for those involved.

A weekly gathering of writers, OWG is an optional writing group for alumni of the Venture program with the goal to help adult undergraduate students feel capable of accomplishing their writing goals. In the following chapters, I detail how I used the three iterative phases that typically characterize community-engaged research (Flower) to inspire the evolution of OWG from its pilot version in Spring 2020 to its current iteration. That is, between the pilot in Spring 2020 and the 2020-2021 academic year, I altered my methodology to be more humanizing and social justice-oriented, to strive to empower the writing group members to achieve their literacy and social goals by working *with* the writers in the group from an asset-based perspective. I aimed to make my methodology more participatory by infusing *participatory pedagogies* into how group meetings are facilitated to support members in sharing their experiences and desires with audiences of their choosing through writing.

Theoretical Framework

Participatory pedagogies is an approach to literacy instruction, learning, and research that positions adult learners as agentic, builds on the resources that these students bring with them, and serves as a way to engage in writing activity. Rather than do away with the existing repertoires of (adult) students as adult learning theory or andragogy endorses (Kenner & Weinerman 90), I offer participatory pedagogies as a more developmentally and socially appropriate theoretical framework through which to support adult literacy and evaluate adult literacy programming because participatory pedagogies honor and stimulate the complexities of literacy practices and learning.

I came to participatory pedagogies through making (and correcting) a mistake in how I led the pilot version of the university-adjacent community writing group and through reading and reflection: I piloted the writing group in Spring 2020, first in person and then later virtually after COVID-19 hit. As more of a community-engaged ethnography where I was a facilitator, participant, and observer, the pilot writing group provided an opportunity to build meaningful relationships with participants and observe how they deepened a sense of self-efficacy through sharing writing goals, successes, failures, and writing products. Meetings began with write-ins, goal-setting, and discussion about healthy writing habits and solutions to writing difficulties, which sometimes included sharing writing. Then, as facilitator, I offered a writing mini-lesson, and I extended an "invitation to write" to members that incorporated content from the mini-lesson. Usually, there was not much time to write in community or engage in peer review with other members during meetings. After the COVID-19 lockdown, I knew something needed to change if the group was going to persist in a virtual format and going to be less of a class and more of a collective. Following the three phases that typically characterize community-engaged research— entering the community, collaborating with the community, and reflecting on the work with the community (Flower)— helped me recognize that the original iteration of the group was almost entirely centered around me as an expert or teacher, and therefore, it was not writer-centered.

Specifically, I used reflection as a means for assessing where the group had been, where we were now, and where we were going. It was this reflective practice as well as research on writing development across the lifespan (Bazerman et al.) and community literacies (Flower; Rousculp; Weis & Fine; Rowan & Cavallaro) after the pilot during Summer 2020 that inspired me to develop participatory pedagogies in an effort to better empower the writing group

members to achieve their literacy and social goals by working *with* the writers in the group from an asset-based perspective. Thus, taken from principles of community-engaged research, including participatory action research, as well as values from abolitionist, humanizing, and critical pedagogies, participatory pedagogies prioritize collaboration between educators and students, value the experiences and expertise of students and teachers equally, and position students as in control of their own literate/ educational journeys. I discuss the transformation of OWG activated by participatory pedagogies in more detail in the following chapters; meanwhile the rest of this section is dedicated to explicating participatory pedagogies.

Participatory methods in community-engaged research on adult literacy programs gain insight into the particulars of individual adult literacy programs and still contribute to community literacy at the same time (Wells). That is, the literacy practices and learning by (returning) adult students is best informed by community-engaged research that "respects the expertise and views" of instructors *and* students, researchers *and* participants (Wells 52). In this way, participatory research aims "to create knowledge *with* the research participants, and further, to create knowledge that will benefit community members" (Wells 53; emphasis mine). Whether research is involved or not, participatory pedagogies are informed by students themselves, treating them as "experts of their own educational experiences" (Bautista et al. 2), and, I add, their own educational needs and desires. In participatory pedagogies— as in (youth) participatory action research— the "perspective of [students], especially in working-class, urban areas is integral to our understanding of problems in [education] as well as approaches to transforming inequitable learning conditions and structures" (Bautista et al. 1). Therefore, participatory pedagogies aim to elevate the voices of students, encouraging them to use their experiences to "help reframe problems and solutions in education while simultaneously producing knowledge that is student-

centered and action-driven" (Bautista et al. 2). In this way, not only do participatory pedagogies "protect student potential," a value of abolitionist teaching (Love 78), but also cultivate and help wield that potential.

Like younger students, adult students are certainly not "'empty vessels' to be filled with the literacy content chosen by their instructors and curriculum developers," but rather should be treated as directors of their own learning "so as to gain the literacy skills most applicable to and needed in their own cultural and professional context," as advocated for by critical pedagogies (Straubhaar 194, citing Freire). Thus, collaboration between students and educators is necessary to "resist all-too-easy, one-dimensional narratives" (Tuck 417) of adult undergraduate students and instead account for and celebrate their "complex personhood," or "the contradictions," "the mis/re/cognitions," the "multiplicity of life's choices" (Tuck 421). Such work can only be done by helping students draw from their own "cultural frameworks, lived experiences, and diverse learning styles […] to transform power/ knowledge relations," as in humanizing pedagogies (Camangian 428). Pedagogies like this "[confront] oppression, [affirm] the humanity of the learner, and [use] literacy as a tool to transform their realities and subvert subjugation" (Camangian 428). Like humanizing pedagogies, participatory pedagogies also celebrate the power of the literacies students already practice, and like critical pedagogies, they aim to challenge "traditional conceptions of academic literacy and instruction" by privileging forms of literacy from nondominant communities (Gutiérrez 96). Thus, by combining participatory research with abolitionist, humanizing, and critical pedagogies, participatory pedagogies not only prioritize and celebrate the humanity of individual students but also help students from various backgrounds build affirming ways to connect across communities and enact social change by framing writing strategies and processes as literacy tools.

This is of the utmost importance for meeting the needs and elevating the desires of a diverse group of learners like adult undergraduates. Participatory pedagogies avoid a one-size-fits-all approach to (literacy) education by encouraging students to self-direct their learning, value and utilize their previous experiences, and create knowledge that can build students' capacities to solve problems and enact social change. Therefore, this is the framework I have used to guide the creation of Our Writing Group (OWG), a university-adjacent community writing group for alumni of Venture, a free humanities-focused, credit-bearing two-semester program for low-income adults who have experienced barriers to higher education. Writing groups, as contact zones and safe houses (Westbrook), as spaces of empowerment and power negotiation (Highberg et al.), as collectives that demand ongoing (re)definition to effectively include each individual writer (Mathieu et al.), present an opportunity for asset-based and self-directed learning for adult undergraduates because they encourage members to demonstrate previous knowledge and mediate new learning, develop skills and understandings directly useful to them, and enhance their self-efficacy and initiative—hallmarks of asset-based and self-directed learning (Hayes et al.).

Participatory Action Ethnography

Beyond creating reciprocal relationships with program alumni through OWG, I aspire for participation in OWG to empower members to confidently use writing to achieve their goals—whether those writing goals are academic, professional, social, and/or personal. As a researcher and educator, I'm less interested in how adult undergraduates experience writing groups and more interested in supporting them in reaching their writing goals, in helping them achieve a sense of writerly self-efficacy. *Participatory pedagogies* have allowed me to revise the group to help writers build connections across communities and backgrounds, honor and celebrate what

writers bring to the group, frame writing as a process that involves strategies and tools unique to each writer, and prioritize choice and literacy desires. And as a result, the group has been much more successful, as will be discussed in the following chapters.

In this dissertation, I investigate how participants' literacy desires are expressed and practiced in the context of OWG as well as learn more about their desired audiences, their conceptions of writing, and how those relate to the contexts in which they write. In addition, I identify what kinds of practices, pedagogies, community relationships, and life experiences help OWG participants self-identify as writers. I do this through participant-observation of OWG meetings and the co-composition of the meaning of multiple primary sources of information about adult undergraduate participants' writing experiences, including their stories about writing in various settings gathered through a series of semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 1 for the interview protocol), collaborative field texts written by group members, and pieces of writing written and/or shared during/ through group. During the 2020-2021 academic year, OWG meetings focused primarily on the writing projects of participants at three of the weekly meetings each month and specifically on conducting research (engaging in self-reflection, collaboratively composing field texts, etc.) at one weekly meeting per month. That is, during one group meeting per month, writers composed collaborative field texts about their writing experiences in relation to the writing group. This means that the members who signed consent forms to be my co-researchers had the opportunity to write in response to the same questions, such as "Why do I write?" and "How is OWG affecting what and why I write, if at all?" and "How do I want to use my writing?," together on a Google Doc (see Appendix 2 for a blank collaborative field text document), and they could see and respond to what others were writing in real time. The others used this time to compose individual writer's memos (cover letters explaining the inspiration,

purpose, and aims of a piece) about pieces written in group. Most importantly, writers signed up to facilitate group meetings in an effort to strengthen ownership over the group, build writerly confidence, and share individual writing interests and expertise with each other. In this way, as both members of OWG and facilitators, participating in OWG is "meant to enlighten and empower the average person in the group," encouraging each member to use their own interests and expertise to inspire each other to write (Berg 224).

Through collaborative field texts and co-facilitation of OWG meetings, my project has enabled my co-researchers and me to identify and investigate adult undergraduate student writing topics and experiences together, positioned my co-researchers "as experts of their own [writing] experiences," and used the information gathered to take action in ways that centralize their voices (Bautista et al 2-4). Additionally, the processes and products of this participatory action ethnography represent "an ongoing attempt to place specific encounters, events, and understandings into a fuller, more meaningful context" (Tedlock 455). That is, my co-researchers and I engaged in "firsthand interaction with people in their everyday lives [to] reach a better understanding of the beliefs, motivations, and behaviors" of adult undergraduate community writers (Tedlock 470). Finally, rather than framing writing strategies I shared as immediately useful to OWG members, participatory pedagogies in OWG intended to help members themselves "uncover or produce knowledge that [would] be directly useful to" them as they not only shared writing strategies, expertise, feedback, and experiences but also exposed the range of goals adult undergraduates have for their writing (Berg 224). To do this, beyond the regular opportunities to work on and share their personal writing projects as well as compose field texts about their writing experiences in relation to OWG, co-researchers engaged in co-analysis of their experiences and deidentified data gathered from semi-structured interviews, writing group

field texts, and corresponding primary researcher memos with me through co-presenting about OWG at conferences and on campus. This practice helped me to develop collaborative codes for analysis. Additionally, OWG writers shared their experiences and findings during OWG readings (open to partner, community, and university stakeholders), at academic and community conferences, and in OWG student publications (circulated to partner, community, and university stakeholders online). Increasing opportunities to share their writing, experiences, and ideas with wider audiences has positioned group members as experts of their own writing experiences and encouraged them to use the information gathered about writers and writing to take action in ways that centralize their voices.

Participants

The ten regular members of the writing group who agreed to participate in my research are graduates of Venture, the community partner program. The initial two-semester Venture program offers six credits in English, and some members of the writing group have now earned terminal degrees, others are currently taking courses toward terminal degrees at other institutions, and many are not currently enrolled in credit-bearing postsecondary coursework. Group members are teachers, parents, students, professionals, retirees, storytellers, poets, rappers, novelists, short story writers, kid lit authors, life-writers, community activists, and much more. Their ages range from early 20s to early 60s, they are primarily low-income adults of color, and they are either currently based in the Midwest or originally from the Midwest. All names, including Our Writing Group, Venture, and Upper Midwest University, are pseudonyms. Nine out of ten participants chose their own pseudonyms. The tenth asked me to. Please see Appendix 3 for a breakdown of participants' demographic information.

Data Analysis

In continued alignment with my values as a scholar and the values inherent in my theoretical framework and methodology, I planned to work with my co-researchers to thematically analyze de-identified data taken from six collaborative field texts, nine individual semi-structured writer interviews from December 2020 and January 2021, as well as writing published in our group's online publication to develop collaborative codes to use for analysis of the larger set of data. However, co-analysis during group meetings proved overwhelming to members and took away from the purpose of the group: to write and share writing. Upon realizing that data analysis was not as interesting and meaningful for group members as self-reflection (via collaborative field texts) each month, I changed course—also in alignment with my values as a scholar. That is, OWG is the members' group, not mine; it is meant to center members' literacy desires, not mine as a researcher. Thus, instead of collectively during OWG meetings, co-analysis occurred through conducting research presentations with individual participants and on my own using "theoretical thematic analysis" (Braun & Clarke) of the larger data set to identify instances of leadership and agency in group meetings, practices of soliciting and providing feedback, openness to risk in writing, participant beliefs in writing abilities, and instances of care and conflict in the writing group.

The larger set of data also includes over 30 single-spaced pages of researcher field notes from the Spring 2020 pilot writing group and the 2020-2021 academic year. The researcher field notes were taken during and after each meeting of OWG while the collaborative field texts were composed by co-researcher-members during one OWG meeting per month during the 2020-2021 academic year (as previously mentioned). The nine individual participant semi-structured interviews and the interview with one of the Venture co-directors from April 2022 took

approximately 90 minutes each, and they were recorded with permission from each interviewee. OWG meetings were not recorded so that participation in the group was not contingent on research consent.

Furthermore, in my data analysis, I have attended to the co-development of participants' writerly identities (through the lens of writerly self-efficacy) by the individual, their social context, and their relationships, as called for by social identity theory (Holland et al 16-17). To do this, I've work from an intersectional (Crenshaw) and desire-based (Tuck) view/ definition/ understanding of adult undergraduate students— desire-based in that it can "upend commonly held assumptions of responsibility, cohesiveness, ignorance, and paralysis" within this student group and "account for the loss and despair but also the hopes, visions, and wisdom of lived lives and communities" (Tuck 417) and intersectional in that it can account for the interaction of various identities—or "multiple grounds of identity" (Crenshaw 1245). My analysis has also been influenced by lifespan writing theories, which look at writing development as nonlinear and unpredictable, as informed by complex interactions between various motives, challenges, and opportunities for writing over time, which in turn inform writing practices, models, and skills that vary from person to person (Bazerman, et al.), and community literacies, which aim to take full account of people's literate lives, needs, and goals by asking what participants desire and need from writing curriculum and instruction. Therefore, this community-engaged participatory action ethnography is informed by feminist and critical theories in that it "strives for equity and liberation" (Crotty 182) by working *with* adult undergraduates from an asset-based perspective and aims to "bring about change" (Crotty 113) in writing pedagogy and instruction in higher education by helping alumni of Venture share their experiences, findings, and desires with audiences of their choosing. As such, my project aligns with the "two primary tasks" of

participatory action research: to cultivate knowledge useful to participants/ co-researchers and empower the average member of the group to use the information gathered to instigate "positive social change" (Berg 224). In the words of David Scobey, "Nontraditional students need academic opportunities that take full account of their lives, needs, and goals" (113). OWG, in its participatory, humanizing, and flexible pedagogies and methods, has aimed to do just that.

Ethical Considerations

However, as this project has engaged in a specific community that extends beyond the university, has encouraged engagement with/ in the research by participants, and has aimed to enact social change throughout the process and with the results, complex ethical issues inevitably arose. For example, maintaining confidentiality in a group setting can be especially challenging, so I have prioritized informed consent with the right to withdraw at any time throughout the research by regularly reminding co-researchers/ OWG participants of their rights and by checking in with individuals before using their de-identified data. Relatedly, I've balanced co-researchers' desires for privacy on the one hand and exposure and action on the other by using consent documents that offer the option of having co-researchers' names associated with quoted excerpts in publications and presentations that stem from this research (see Appendix 4 for IRB-approved consent document). Additionally, in participatory action research there is a fine line between empowerment and exploitation through co-research, which can stem from difficulties un-hierarchizing the relationship between me and my co-researchers because of positionality and previous relevant experiences and take the form of trauma-gazing. To guard against this, I've strived to be as transparent as possible with my co-researchers by naming these ethical issues directly and regularly so that my co-researchers and I could work together to avoid these slippery pitfalls as much as possible. There are examples of such challenges to distributed leadership and

transparency contained in each body chapter of this dissertation. Finally, when working with community partners, it's important to balance any critique that surfaces with actionable steps for improvement; to that end, members of OWG and I have drafted a memorandum of understanding with Venture to help protect against deterioration of a strong, professional relationship (see Chapter 3 for more details about this process).

Literature Review

The literature on adult literacy and adult learners demonstrates a pernicious deficit view of adult undergraduates. Perry and colleagues examine the "the taken for granted assumptions […] undergirding adult literacy research" in their 2018 article "The "Ofcourseness" of Functional Literacy: Ideologies in Adult Literacy" (76). They find that "deficit perspectives undergird much reporting of literacy scores and their assumed social consequences" (Perry et al. 90). We see this in descriptors of adult undergraduate students that regard them as underprepared and in need of assistance that Professor of Reading and Writing Dawn Graziani takes issue with in her 2016 dissertation research and as frustrated participants in higher education wading through an unfamiliar institutional context with little to no support that adult education expert Marion Bowl exposes. Such deficit perspectives also undergird seemingly innocent comparisons of adult undergraduates with traditionally-aged undergraduates (e.g., Hayes et al. 131) that can prevent educators and researchers from understanding older students in terms of their own abilities and achievements. Deficit-based or damage-centered (Tuck) views of adult undergraduates position adult learners as non-agentic, as unable to articulate and affect change in their own lives, as helpless without intervention by educators, researchers, policymakers, and/or institutions. Yet, these same adults have "survive[d] and thrive[d] in life" (Graziani) before (re)entering higher education.

Lifespan literacies research can help adult literacy pedagogy move away from treating adult undergraduates as "problems to solve" and nonlinear, alternate academic pathways as something to avoid, overcome, or prevent and instead take into more serious and positive consideration social influences on writing/ literacy development. A lifespan lens on literacy development highlights the unpredictable and nonlinear development of writing that takes a long, long time—a lifetime, if you will— that is not unlike the unpredictable and nonlinear academic trajectories of adult undergraduate students. Thus, theories of lifespan literacies orient researchers and educators to value the nonlinear, to respect and appreciate unpredictability in development. As Charles Bazerman and colleagues articulate in *The Lifespan Development of Writing,* developmental trajectories for writing are informed by complex interactions between various sociocultural, dialectal, intellectual, emotional, sensory, physical, motivational, and technological practices, models, and skills that vary from person to person and inform progress, stagnation, gaps, and even regression in individual literate repertoires. Furthermore, writing development is closely linked to the development of personal worldviews, or identities, that change and stagnate as people learn and experience new things (Sternglass). Thus, the research on writing development across the lifespan demonstrates that writing instruction must draw on the experiences of writers and their identities in order to be most effective (Bazerman et al.) rather than trying to erase, compete with, or (re)solve those prior experiences or ignore, change, or (super)impose upon writers' identities. Previous lifespan literacies research makes plain that writing pedagogies for adult undergraduates should aim to draw on their experiences to inform and ultimately enhance writing instruction in higher education.

Taking a long-term view of writing development aims to conceptualize the dimensions of writing development that apply across populations and settings by looking at the "embodied act

of writing," "the medium of written languages," "the contexts for participation," and "historical and cultural catalysts of writing development" (Bazerman et al. 8-10). This includes examining individual interest and confidence in writing as well as the awareness and control of the motivation behind writing, other types of development that interact with writing development, such as motor skills, neurology, cognition, and world experience, and environmental variables that encourage and restrict writing development, such as roles within the family and community, economic situations, and historical literate repertoires (Bazerman et al. 371-373). According to lifespan literacies research, "literacy development can be hindered by a lack of instructional and peer collaboration resources, draconian policies, rigidly scripted curriculum and language biases," and equity and opportunity deeply impact literacy development (Juzwik & Cushman 143). Writing studies scholars such as Charles Bazerman, Deborah Brandt, Paul Prior, Ryan Dippre, and Lauren Marshall Bowen among many others advocate for conceptions of writing and literacy instruction that honor writing in nonacademic contexts, that prioritize individualization and potential, that recognize and promote the myriad physical, social, and political components of literacy, that are grounded in the lives of learners. Thus, emerging theories on the lifespan development of writing productively bring into question labels like 'traditional' and 'nontraditional' and problematize easily measurable writing standards and the idea of a singular developmental trajectory that can make students feel unsuccessful or abnormal when nonlinear and unique pathways are actually quite 'normal,' especially when it comes to learning. Such theories support the idea that no one writing/ academic pathway looks the same, that benchmarks that influence what and how educators teach and that influence how students feel about their academic capabilities, and more specifically about their writing (their writerly self-efficacy), are arbitrary. In this way, theories of lifespan literacies support intersectional, identity-conscious

pedagogies that not only seek out and respond to the needs and desires of (adult) student writers but also recognize and talk back to the inequitable, marginalizing systemic conditions that impact educational and literacy developmental trajectories and inform hierarchical standards and benchmarks for writing achievement/ ability.

When educators and researchers of (adult) literacy take a more holistic view of writers and writing, they can consider and even prioritize presenting non-pathologizing accounts of writers and writing. This is of the utmost importance for research involving adult undergraduates given the aforementioned damage-centered, deficit-based views of and assumptions about this diverse (and understudied) student group. Community literacies research, or research that "extend[s] beyond mainstream educational and work institutions" to include work in "adult education, early childhood education, reading initiatives, or work with marginalized populations" (*Community Literacy Journal*), provides examples of literacy studies that take full account of people's literate lives, needs, and goals by asking what participants desire and need from writing curriculum and instruction. Studies in and of community literacies point to the significance of approaches to literacy research and instruction that elevate localized literacy/ learning experiences. For example, as Meyers argues in "'They Didn't Tell Me Anything': Women's Literacies and Resistance in Rural Mexico," "the lived experiences of minority groups like rural women" are important "to our understanding of their implicit and explicit responses to literacy" (869) because "formal literacy […] is experienced as both an oppressive force as well as a tool for resistance to other forms of oppression" by the four women from different generations in the same town in rural Mexico with whom she works (858). Couldn't this also be true for adult undergraduate students who take paths toward and away from academia (and therefore notions of formal literacy) for various reasons over the course of their lifespans? Beyond Meyers' case

studies, this is important because the women's narratives "highlight the socially dynamic nature of literacy" that make it "important to consider multiple expressions of power" (858). Community literacies research does just that by providing models for how to take identity-conscious and intersectional approaches to working with adults, not to mention the benefits of such approaches that make plain the complexities of individual literacy practices and literacy learning across diverse groups of adults.

Furthermore, community literacy research provides ways forward for literacy pedagogy to support and study adult literacy and adult literacy programs, as community engagement principles guide research and teaching in this writing studies field. Community engagement principles aim to bring teacher-researchers' and student-participants' own histories, knowledge, and agendas together to identify problems, collaborate to address them, affirm culturally unique ways of debating and performing knowledge, and promote new ways to represent and circulate information (Flower 229-232). Community literacies operate best by employing a "rhetoric of respect," or confidence in "a potential partner's own capability and in their agency to determine what they [need] or [want]" (Rousculp 27), in order to resist "academic versions of change and academic notions of empowerment" (Rousculp 88). This comes about by engaging in "community listening," or prioritizing listening to the community at hand before making a plan and taking action ethically *with* that community (Rowan & Cavallaro 27-28). By using principles of collaborating *with* others, respect, and community listening, community literacies research dedicates "theoretical and empirical attention to structures and lives" (Weis & Fine 174) rather than "isolated studies of individuals, cultures, or community life [that] write out structures, histories, and cumulative state neglect; camouflage circuits of disinvestment; and simultaneously fail to reveal the production and reproduction of privilege" (Weis & Fine 176). This is

particularly apparent in *American by Paper*, where Kate Vieira exposes how writing/ literacy regulates movement, how citizenship papers serve as "a material lynchpin in the process of writing and being written" by institutions (Vieira 9); in Ellen Cushman's *The Struggle and the Tools*, which challenges assumptions that people from nondominant communities lack critical awareness of systemic inequities and the potential of language to preserve and contest those inequities; and in Beverly Moss' confrontation of myths of African American illiteracy/ language deficiency and delineation of community texts that reconfigure relationships between speakers, writers, and texts in *A Community Text Arises.* All three of these monographs are examples of research on community literacy practices in which the researcher entered a community of racialized and/or working-class adults (as insiders for Vieira and Moss and as an outsider for Cushman), collaborated with community members to understand an issue/ answer a question, and reflected on that work in order to understand how lives and structures—how identities and axes of power—inform literacies. What community literacies work reveals, then, is that the complexities of literacy practices, literacy learning, and literacy pedagogy for adults can only be understood with the insights and participation of those adults, which *participatory pedagogies* affords.

Positionality

As the daughter and sister of "nontraditional students," I come to this research believing that more intentional and informed support for adult learners and the normalization of alternative academic trajectories to success as citizens, professionals, family members, etc. would be helpful for adult undergraduate students striving to accomplish their unique dreams. However, as a co-researcher working with adult undergraduate students to enhance adult literacy programming, I've needed to carefully attend to my proclivities to think in ways that are *too* asset-based, ways

that seek to solve and overcome rather than fully understand the issues that my co-researchers have uncovered and expressed.

Additionally, my experiences working with Venture students have provided windows into previous educational experiences similar to those perpetuated at my former workplace, a charter high school, that taught these students that they don't belong in academic spaces, they're not enough, they can't, they'll fail. Such experiences demonstrate the need for increased encouragement and understanding for these students to undo that previous harm—harm that I know I unintentionally contributed to as a secondary teacher, too. Now, as an educator in postsecondary settings, I work hard to name my experience as a 'successful' student with a 'prestigious' academic pedigree who followed a very traditional path and who self-identifies as a 'good' writer in my interactions with college students who have taken various paths to and through higher education, no matter the lines of difference that such acknowledgements may draw. This project has provided a way to begin to offset or reverse some of the harm I've contributed to and continue and improve the important work Venture does for students after the original course ends in a low-stakes, supportive environment. The community writing group for program alumni and this participatory action research project have afforded an opportunity to build the community around writing that I originally entered education to construct. Through staying true to the charge to normalize and elevate individual writing experiences and recognizing that my own 'traditional' trajectory is not actually the norm, I hope that this project and partnership with adult undergraduate writers will contribute to demystifying writing, debunking the myth that only some people are good at writing, and busting the stereotype that writing is a solitary activity.

My positionality as a heterosexual mixed-race cisgender woman from a middle-class background born and raised in Chicago and affiliated with the university's Writing Center has allowed me unique access to and connections with Venture alumni. Many program alumni were also born and raised in Chicago and moved to our smaller midwestern city, Upper Midwest City, as adults. Being a woman of color from Chicago (proper) has lent me unique credibility with my participants and other writing group members: there's a shared understanding of what it's like to grow up in Chicago, a large multicultural city that affects immense pride in its residents, and what it's like to be a person of color in our smaller, predominantly white city. The majority of the members of the writing group are also cisgender women (only two members are men), which makes my presence in the group unexceptional and my position as an instructor/ facilitator perhaps more unassuming. Finally, coming from a middle-class background with parents who both have college degrees has helped me follow a traditional academic path to and through my bachelor's and master's degrees and make the decision to pursue a doctoral degree in writing studies, which, in turn, has allowed me to accumulate 10+ years of writing center (and other 1:1 and small group tutoring) experience. My professional experience as a high school teacher and my position as a teaching assistant at the university strongly affiliated with the university's writing center make it so that writing group members view me as a professional writing instructor and greatly value (and sometimes even seek out) my input in and beyond writing group meetings, despite my efforts to un-hierarchize the power/knowledge relations in the group. As one participant put it in response to the question, How is OWG affecting what and why I write, if at all?:

> …I am able to get feedback from my peers and from a respected and professional PhD student who is has a background in composition & rhetoric, writing, tutoring and leadership from [Upper Midwest University] named Gabrielle Kelenyi. Her voice is upbeat and makes you believe in yourself and return on a weekly basis. She also posts

interesting writing material that pushes us to new and innovative ways to write"
(Collaborative Field Text, 3/1/2021).

Thus, I am uniquely accepted in the writing group despite not being an alumnus of Venture, not only because I founded the group but also because of the commonalities I share with group members and the affordances of the differences I bring to the group.

Conclusion/ Implications

The makeup of undergraduate student populations is continuing to change; in fact, NCES data shows overall steady or decreasing enrollment and predicted enrollment in nontraditionally- *and* traditionally- aged students in higher education ("Digest"), indicating that later enrollment and nonlinear academic

Figure 14. Fall enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by age of student: 1970 through 2028
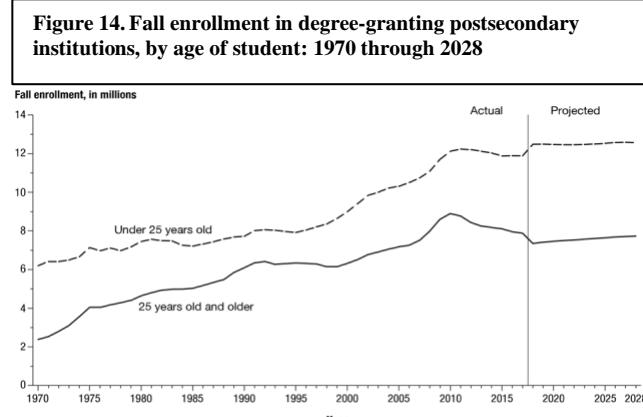
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS), "Fall Enrollment in Colleges and Universities" surveys, 1970 through 1985; Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System

trajectories may become more and more common in years to come (See NCES' Figure 14 to the right). Thus, we must begin to account for and support the heterogeneity of adult undergraduate experiences as many (more) students arrive or return to higher education classrooms with an incredible variety of prior experiences that affect what they want to learn and how they will learn it.

This dissertation project proposes a more nuanced, localized approach to understanding these experiences and literacy desires—adult undergraduate student writers' purposes, audiences, and contexts for writing as well as their conceptions of writing and literacy—through a university-adjacent community writing group increasingly run for and by members themselves. Thus, the results of this research project may help adult literacy researchers and adult literacy

programming move beyond the traditional/ nontraditional binary and rethink adult education from a more intersectional, individualized, asset-based, and participatory orientation. Participatory pedagogies offer such a framework—one that is considerate, empowering, and socially and developmentally appropriate for adults of all ages, stations, backgrounds, etc. This approach to literacy instruction, learning, and research positions adult learners as agentic, builds on the resources that these students bring with them, and serves as a way to engage in writing activity. I've found that participatory pedagogies in OWG have helped the adults in the community writing group develop and strengthen what writing researchers call writerly self-efficacy, or the confidence individuals have in their ability to successfully perform a writing task (Pajares & Valiante; Bruning and Kauffman). This is important for adult undergraduates because it helps equip OWG participants to recognize and talk back to the inequitable, marginalizing systemic conditions that impact educational and literacy developmental trajectories and inform hierarchical standards and benchmarks for writing achievement/ ability.

After providing more context about Venture and OWG in the next chapter, the remaining body chapters of this dissertation detail how the implementation of participatory pedagogies in OWG helps bolster participants' writerly self-efficacy through writing and facilitation, sharing and feedback, and going public. Specifically, Chapter 2 begins to detail the identity OWG is building in relation to Venture by demonstrating how the purpose, structure, and enactments of OWG are informed by and respond to Venture's literacy pedagogy. Then, Chapter 3 describes how the introduction of participatory pedagogies into Our Writing Group has helped the group become guided more deeply by members' literacy desires through writing and facilitation, which in turn helps enhance OWG members' writerly confidence by validating and affirming their literacy desires as important and worthy. Chapter 4 focuses on how OWG's feedback and

sharing practices combined with the makeup of its membership of Venture alumni make the group feel like a family of writers (rather than just a group of them). This is important because the sharing and feedback practices that take place in OWG positively impact members' writerly self-efficacy (Pajares & Valiante). Finally, Chapter 5 highlights the unique role that different ways that writers go public with their writing, not to mention the public's response to their writing, can play in self-identifying as a writer for members of OWG. The concluding chapter of this dissertation returns to the research questions forwarded in this introduction, citing moments from the body chapters that help reveal some preliminary answers. The conclusion also thinks about the implications of my dissertation research as a whole—namely for the field of Writing Studies, for literacy in higher education, especially for adult learners, and for community-engagement and community literacies.

Participatory pedagogies can help begin to account for and support the heterogeneity of adult undergraduate experiences and help educators and researchers think about adult literacy from a more intersectional, individualized, asset-based, and participatory orientation. In this case, my co-researchers/ participants are clarifying for me that writerly self-efficacy—feeling confident about one's ability to take on various writing tasks—may not be the goal for many adult undergraduate writers. Instead, writing groups like ours offer an opportunity to gain more confidence around the writing we produce and the processes we take to produce it. That is, Our Writing Group is a space where our unique individual writing processes are not only accepted but celebrated and where our writing products are treated as important manifestations and representations of the identities and values we want to put out into the world. When we come to understand writers writing (process) and writer's writing (product) this way, writers, literacy

researchers, and composition teachers can better support and enact inclusive and culturally sustaining conceptions of literacy in higher education.

Chapter 2 - Building on Hope: Writers Writing in Venture & Our Writing Group

A "New Age Way of Writing"

Dean Friends' smile spreads across the screen during our individual interview. His head tilts back and to the right of his Zoom box as if the weight of his smile and the knowledge it's about to spill are too heavy, but he tilts his head back up as he answers my question. I had asked how he would describe his education/ schooling and how that differed from his experience in Venture. He explains that "elementary school was lit" because "they had dodgeball there" and "easy math." He waits for my laughter to subside before purposefully "skipping over" middle school because it was "garbage" and moving straight into high school where he explains "we got the communication skills and the space available to grow and connect, which is really important." Dean's expression becomes serious as he reflects on how he didn't use that space as responsibly as he might now, but his face lights up again when he begins talking about Venture. He describes Venture as "amazing" because "there was no math" and "the whole thing was writing centric." Now Dean seems to have forgotten that I'm even there as he transports himself back into his experience of Venture just the academic year prior. He explains how he had never written before like he wrote for Venture:

> It wasn't like strict writing. The way [Stephanie] and [Phillip] did it, it was like this really like new age way of writing where like, the assignments were like formatted in a way that kind of looked like homework, but you had to write and it wasn't taxing to do it, because the stuff that they taught, you actually cared about, or at least I cared about.

Venture changed Dean's perspective on writing, he said, from writing in school as "a tool that teachers use so you can graduate and go get a job" to "a way to express yourself" in Venture. He added that Venture "re-liberated my ability to care about the English language and reading it and writing it" because "I could incorporate what I was learning in [Venture] in my hip hop lyrics.

[... Venture taught] stuff that, like, is actually applicable in real world knowledge. And it's like, oh okay, like, that was the first time where my personal life and writing could actually intertwine."

Dean's description highlights how Venture's literacy pedagogy offers something unique to its students: the boundary-crossing potential of writing at personal and social levels supported by a literacy pedagogy that accommodates the whole student in terms of history, identities, context, etc. That is, Venture's critical literacy pedagogy embraces students' whole lives; it "asks students to connect their lives to the classroom" (Collins 129). The implication of the potential of writing to cross boundaries of time and space on literacy pedagogy is room for positive risk-taking, for vulnerability that supports students in "exercising their power as thinkers, writers, and people" (Collins 129). Literacy education that embraces the whole person provides students with "opportunities to learn from, through, and while writing" and "redefine[s] the purpose of writing in terms of the need to foster in students reflectiveness and an awareness of themselves in the world" (Yagelski 24). Thus, during our interview, Dean recognized and appreciated that the pedagogy in the Venture course is concerned with the development of his whole person: Venture seeks to enhance students' sense that they can produce texts that can create change. Does it work, though?

In this chapter, I seek to answer this question by providing a profile of Venture, my community partner program, in order to showcase how its literacy pedagogy enhances students' sense that they can produce texts with social weight. I use Elenore Long's five-point framework for analyzing community literacy projects to examine Venture because her framework seeks to codify how community literacy programs engage issues of reading, writing, and boundary crossing "in ways and locales that make a difference" (3). This directly correlates to the guiding

question of this chapter: does Venture's critical literacy pedagogy enhance its students' sense that they can produce texts that can create change (or that can make a difference)? This question is important because adult undergraduate students, the very students the Venture program works with, have often been academically disenfranchised due to structural oppression and inequities such as colorblind racism, neoliberal disenfranchisement, and the literacy myth (Schrantz; Miller Brown; Lundberg et al.; Graff), and these issues inform the deficit perspectives on adult undergraduates that undergird research on adult literacy and adult learners (Perry et al.) as well as how adult students are supported (or unsupported) in college writing classrooms and in turn how they view themselves as capable student writers. Given that alternative pathways to and through higher education stem from and lead to more feelings of exclusion and the unique role that writing— as both an act and an action— plays in that exclusion as fertile ground for the perpetuation of power inequities (Brandt, *Literacy in American Lives*), it's important to determine how Venture's critical literacy pedagogy works to undo such feelings of unbelonging in higher education and beyond for the particularly diverse students the program serves.

I find that Venture's critical literacy pedagogy enhances students' sense that they can produce texts with social weight through engagement with the literacy myth (Graff). This engagement is a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it importantly helps to instill hope in students around the power of their writing. On the other hand, Venture's engagement with the literacy myth also has dangerous implications for adult students who are uniquely marginalized in higher education and uniquely susceptible to the ills of the literacy myth, which can feed into the cycles of poverty Venture attempts to disrupt given the rising demand for literacies in the information age (Brandt, *The Rise of Writing*). I provide specific examples of this engagement by focusing my analysis on an issue of Venture's student publication, *AdVentures*, because,

according to Long, one of the ways ordinary people— that is, not celebrities and politicians but people like you and me and the students in Venture— "stand to make a difference [is] by using our literate repertoires to go public" (4). *AdVentures*, published online and in print, is Venture's student journal that features excerpts of student work and pictures of Venture students; it is used in class to build speaking confidence and learn more about each member of the class as well as in grant applications and donor appeals. Thus, the student journal is a representation of its literacy pedagogy. This chapter ends with a Long-inspired profile of Our Writing Group (OWG) in order to demonstrate how OWG takes up the mantle of hope after Venture graduation but in ways that seek to resist the literacy myth. Ultimately, this chapter begins to detail the identity OWG is building in relation to our community partner by demonstrating how the purpose, structure, and enactments of OWG are informed by and respond to Venture's literacy pedagogy. Overall, I show how Venture is doing what it aims to do—reduce financial (and other) barriers to higher education for low-income adults in the community—but it does so in problematic ways because of its engagement with the literacy myth. Meanwhile, I illuminate how OWG's engagement with participatory pedagogies offers the beginnings of a remedy to the literacy myth trappings of university-community programs like Venture.

Writers Writing in Venture

In *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Local Publics*, Elenore Long offers a theoretical framework by which she compares and contrasts five community literacy projects. The framework consists of five points: a "guiding metaphor" or image that reflects the project, the "context" surrounding the project, the "tenor of the discourse" or "register" of the dialogue inherent to the project, the literacy practices that make up that discourse, and "rhetorical invention" or the means by which the project comes into being (16). It aims to help analyze how

"ordinary people go public" as well as the consequences of this action; with it Long hopes to "attend to the rhetorical dynamics at play when ordinary people go public" (16). Using Long's framework, I provide a snapshot of my community partner, Venture, and attend to the ways the program does and does not help students realize social change through writing/ literacy. Venture functions to encompass more people in the act of knowledge-making in writing studies, which advances and improves university-community relations. However, some of the ways in which it does so perpetuate the literacy myth, or the idea that with more or better literacy, (adult undergraduate) students can transform their lives (Graff).

Housed in Upper Midwest University's Continuing Studies Department, Venture is a two-semester six-credit humanities program offered to adult undergraduate students for free.[2] Founded in the early 2000s, Venture was modeled after the Clemente Course in the Humanities, a Humanities program founded by Earl Shorris and offered through Bard College for low-income students, and Berea College in Kentucky, a tuition-free four-year college. Long writes that metaphors allow literacy projects to craft their "presence;" guiding metaphors reflect the anchoring image of a project's purpose (17). Venture's guiding metaphor is taken directly from its name: the project is a quest, or an adventure. That is, over the course of two semesters each year, a group of thirty students set off on an adventure in English literature, philosophy, American history, and art history to demystify the challenges of higher education and invigorate students and their families to enter into academic conversations. The application of Long's framework to Venture reveals how the program's engagement with literacy and whole families crossing into academic discussion is codified as an adventure, an exciting mission. According to

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[2] In order to protect the confidentiality of my participants and my partner program, I refrain from citing the program's website and published oral history interviews throughout this chapter (and the dissertation as a whole), from which I gathered information to construct this profile of Venture. To cite personal interviews and lectures, I use participant and program pseudonyms.

Long, a project's distinctive features are ones that solidify the connections between the project's purpose and its guiding metaphor (17-18). Venture's distinctive features, demystifying and invigorating, describe how the program makes a difference in Upper Midwest City: the terms demystify and invigorate color the project's almost 20 year history, from its humble beginnings in a room at a branch of the local public library to its university-sanctioned classroom on the campus of one of the premier public research institutions of higher education in the country (Handel).

The demystification and invigoration of community and university are informed by Venture's context—its location and "broader features of social and cultural life" (Street as quoted in Long 18). The adventure of the students, faculty, and families involved in Venture has been one of depth instead of breadth as it seeks to improve the experience of low-income residents of a predominantly white city in Wisconsin under the prosperous umbrella of a predominantly white university. Venture's founder, Dr. Stephanie Robertson, has responded to many contextual factors with the evolution of the project from a two and a half hour class with dinner and on-site childcare on Wednesday nights to adding drama and music offerings, Monday and Tuesday night tutoring for the whole family, and ongoing financial, advising, and academic support for students and their families through the additions of the Venture Junior and Lasting Venture programs. The mission of Venture, shaped by Dr. Robertson's personal history and experience establishing humanities-based programs for adult undergraduate students, concerns itself with the politics of representation in the city in which it's located— one that is 78.6% white ("Race & Hispanic Origin") with 16.9% of its population living in poverty ("Income & Poverty")— and on Upper Midwest University's campus— whose student population is only 20.5% students of color (Academic Planning and Institutional Research) and where 40% of

students come from the wealthiest 20% of people (Chetty, et al.). That is, Venture not only offers a space for adult undergraduate students to exist ably in the academy by demystifying the type of knowledge and life experience success in higher education seems to require but also a space that invigorates adult students with economic barriers to contribute to "the world of ideas" (Handel).

Thus, we've established that Venture's purpose is to take away barriers to continuing education for adult students. While some of these barriers are financial, the program also aims to help students develop confident voices with which they can enter academic conversations and build community between university and community stakeholders. According to Elenore Long's framework, a community literacy project's purpose is accomplished through the establishment of a specific tone or "tenor" that reflects the performed attitudes of a project's stakeholders (Long 21). Throughout Venture's application process, during each and every class, and surrounding all things Venture is a tone of inspiring ambition. The literacy practices of the project reflect this tenor through publications and presentations that "foreground student voices" (Handel). Approximately four times a semester, Venture's student publication *AdVentures* is published online and in print. This student journal features excerpts of student work and pictures of Venture students; it is used in class to build speaking confidence and learn more about each member of the class. In addition, according to Venture Co-Director Phillip Handel, the poetry, prose, and essays by these student authors ambitiously help to transform perceptions of "good writing" and authorship in the wider academic community. Another way Venture foregrounds student voices is during presentations about the program, its mission, and the need for more programs like it. In fact, Dr. Handel— Venture's co-director— believes the best way for others to understand the program's impact is to hear about it directly from students.

Foregrounding student voices helps Venture avoid stereotypical constructions of reciprocity between university-community partnerships: while Upper Midwest University is proud of Venture, the university cannot co-opt or color its purpose and impact if Venture students are the primary voices sponsoring it. In this manner, the reciprocal relationship between the university and the students of Venture remains more local: Venture students help to broaden faculty teaching methods and philosophies; the support offered by Venture helps disrupt intergenerational cycles of poverty. That is, the program promotes a dual/ mutual demystification of higher education that inspires both the university and the community: it broadens university and community perceptions of who belongs in higher education classrooms, who contributes to academic discussion, and how to make meaningful contributions to the community. And the program's work to encompass more people in contributing knowledge to the fields of composition and rhetoric, community literacies, and writing studies is only just beginning. Its central metaphor, that of an adventure or endeavor, continues in the form of Venture Junior, Lasting Venture, and Venture Unbound. Venture Junior initiates a route to college, Lasting Venture helps students take advantage of other Upper Midwest University courses taught on or off the Upper Midwest campus, and Venture Unbound invests in prison education to reduce recidivism and enhance prisoners' self-sufficiency upon release.

These projects extend Venture's mission to instill hope and a sense of belonging in students and their families; develop students' voices, skills, and confidence; and cultivate a legacy of lifelong learning in students and their families. They represent Venture's commitment to the depth (rather than simply breadth) of their programming, and therefore their commitment to disrupting the rhythms of generational poverty. Furthermore, the program hopes to bring the lessons learned from its successes and challenges by beginning to publish academic articles on

its community engagement practices in the future (Handel). As such, Venture's adventure is not over even as it has had almost 20 years of successfully changing the lives of over 400 low-income adults.

Finally, Long's framework proposes that a community literacy project's "rhetorical intervention" illuminates "how a discourse permits people to respond to exigencies that arise within its discursive space" (Long 22). By helping its students develop confident writerly voices, Venture is changing the landscape of voices in the humanities (Handel). That is, Venture's focus on the humanities gives students a way to interact with/ in "the world of ideas" because the wide context of the humanities allows for personal connections to the course material (Handel). This builds student confidence by changing perceptions of what types of life experiences are valued in college-level classrooms. The analytical work required by studying humanities also encourages students to take a step back and evaluate both the subject matter and their own experiences. With developed confidence and critical awareness of self and others, the Venture course equips students to carry out its rhetorical invention—bringing the content back out to the community. This may take the form of photographs on the barbershop wall that spark conversations with patrons and history lessons for children, reading more to family members, or continuing to finish a degree. The point is that Venture is not just about getting students to complete a bachelor's degree (even though many do); it's about equipping students to productively engage with the world (Handel). The breadth and depth of the humanities allows for this engagement, as evidenced in the cyclical, inspirational, and transformative endeavors of Venture's student journal, *AdVentures*. Not only do students gain a sense of writerly accomplishment through its publication, but its multiple issues allow students to see their own growth as a student author over time (which can be transformational and inspirational) and write from a place of experience

to each incoming class and the wider Venture community (making *AdVentures* also cyclical and inspirational). In fact, *AdVentures* is frequently named as one of students' favorite texts from the Venture course (Handel).

AdVentures is one of the most prominent ways Venture uses the literacy repertoires of its students— and especially the repertoires that the course itself develops— to go public because it is shared online and in print with students, university and community stakeholders, as well as individual and institutional donors. Additionally, students' words from *AdVentures* issues are used in grant applications and program newsletters. This student publication is one of the foremost sources from which Venture foregrounds student voices, making it the one of the most salient ways the program and its students go public. Overall, Venture aims to take away barriers to continuing education for adult undergraduate students: while some of these barriers are financial, the program also aims to help students develop literacy practices that build individual student confidence, foster whole class community, and cultivate a sense of hope for the future. *AdVentures* is used to help Venture accomplish these aims. However, *AdVentures* focuses primarily on the positive outcomes of the Venture course and stories of overcoming, a focus that serves to perpetuate the fallacious idea that literacy learning usually (or worse, always) results in opportunity and success.

Venture's Critical Literacy Pedagogy

Social justice education expert Dr. Roger I. Simon asserts that pedagogy is more than the practice of teaching but a consideration of how educational "practice relates to future visions of community life" (371). Educational practice includes the instructional techniques and strategies, curricular and evaluative decisions, which are all informed by an educator's particular context. Through the coming together of all of these "aspects of educational practice," teachers "[specify]

a particular version of what knowledge is of most worth, what it means to know something, and how we might construct representations of ourselves, others, and our physical and social environment" (Simon 371). Thus, pedagogy includes "the details of what students and others might do together *and* the cultural politics such practices support" (Simon 371, emphasis in original). As demonstrated in the section above, Venture's critical literacy pedagogy is enacted and recorded in the pages of its student publication, *AdVentures*, and it is an important element of Venture to examine because it is the program's most prominent way of going public. Published online and in print approximately four times a semester, this student journal features excerpts of student work and pictures of Venture students; it is used in class to build speaking confidence and learn more about each member of the class. In addition, the poetry, prose, and essays by the Venture student authors ambitiously help to transform perceptions of 'good' writing and authorship in the wider academic community. Thus, issues of *AdVentures* hold accounts of "what students and others might do together" as well as espouse "the cultural politics" that support their work (Simon 371). In fact, the first issue of every academic year is written by the previous year's Venture graduates who write notes of welcome and wisdom to the incoming class. In this section, I focus on such an issue, namely the first issue of the 2019-2020 academic year of *AdVentures*, which was written by Venture alumni and distributed to the Class of 2020 on the first day of class in September 2019. I examine this particular issue of *AdVentures* because it was the last such issue published before the creation of OWG and its participant publications. What follows will explore the critical literacy pedagogy espoused by *AdVentures* and therefore Venture.

According to literacy studies scholar Deborah Brandt, literacy sponsors are "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit,

regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy– and gain advantage by it in some way" (*Literacy in American Lives* 19). As a literacy sponsor, Venture enables literacy for adult undergraduate students at or near the poverty line: it supplies reading materials, writing prompts, literacy instruction, feedback, and motivation to read and write to its students. Although altruistic in nature, Venture makes an economic investment in supplying its students with these items at no cost and gains more financial and political support from university administration by showcasing its students' 'success' at literacy learning in *AdVentures*, demonstrated at least in part through an uninterrogated subscription to and display of White Mainstream English. Thus, *AdVentures* reaps multiple benefits for Venture. It has to, largely because continuing studies programs at Upper Midwest University are in increasingly precarious positions given the tendency in higher education to cut programs that don't demonstrate sufficient progress or success rather than spend time, money, and effort to improve them. This particular issue of *AdVentures* benefits Venture on two levels—it demonstrates the 'success' of the Class of 2019 to stakeholders, which can garner more financial and institutional support for the program, and it demonstrates that literacy learning through Venture leads to 'success' for the new Venture students in the Class of 2020.

As a result, this particular issue of *AdVentures* orients the incoming class of Venture students to the literacy pedagogy of the Venture course, detailing how students and other Venture stakeholders work together and illustrating the culture of Venture. With its audience explicitly as the incoming class, this issue was given out on the first day of the Venture course in September 2019. Venture course instructors and program co-directors, Professors Stephanie Robertson and Phillip Handel, use this first issue to orient students to the Venture course as it contains previous student experiences and indications of the effort graduating from Venture will take. For example, student author Laci Edd, writes,

> The first classes were very hard. I was most of the time lost, but [Stephanie] and her team were nice, supporting people. Monday night was my tutoring time, and [Phillip] and his tutoring group were always sweet and patient. I started to be surprised with the good notes and impressions with my assignments from [Stephanie], and that gave me the strength to go forward and to just enjoy every homework that came.

Another student author, Caress Cooper, writes,

> I had a tough start due to a stressful teaching job, so that first semester was tough, but I made it. Some days I felt as if I wouldn't be able to go on, but God made a way. […] So do what it takes to complete the program. It's so worth it, and once you're a part of [Venture], you're always a part of [Venture]. Have fun, enjoy and stay encouraged. Also come to tutoring. I found it very helpful.

These excerpts illustrate how the first issue of the 2019-2020 academic year operates as a mode of social exchange between classes, as an exchange of wisdom between mentors and proteges. Additionally, this issue of *AdVentures* includes descriptions of Venture literacy practices: asking questions, going to tutoring, showing up to class even if your homework isn't done are regular refrains throughout the issue. As such, *AdVentures* operates as a cultural artifact of the Venture publication tradition, orienting students not only to the cultural practices of the course—such as showing up, sharing snacks, and learning about one another—but also the literacy practices of the course—such as not quitting when faced with writer's block, taking notes, and seeing your words and your name published in *AdVentures* every few weeks.

Furthermore, this particular issue illustrates an "obligation toward one's sponsors" on the part of Venture students because Venture determined "what, when, why, and how people [namely, the Venture Class of 2019 students] write" to the incoming class of 2020 (Brandt, *Literacy in American Lives,* 20). For example, in this issue, the alumni authors liken Venture to "winning the lottery," "some sort of Pandora," and "a new beginning;" the Class of 2019 acts as mentors, encouraging the new students to "remember that you are not alone in this crusade," and "Go to tutoring whenever you find the chance on Monday and Tuesday evenings." These

excerpts demonstrate alumni's appreciation for the opportunity given through Venture as well as their desire to further Venture's mission through their encouragement for the next class' successful experience. Thus, *AdVentures* in general, and this issue in particular, is a product of the writing processes students go through for assignments in the Venture course; it demonstrates the literacy learning that happens in the course like the development of literacy skills, such as engagement with texts as well as feedback from instructors. This issue of *AdVentures* also demonstrates a particular understanding of what 'success' through literacy learning can entail that aligns with the literacy myth (Graff): opportunity and advancement follow completion of the Venture course, and completion of the Venture course follows hard work. And again, this particular understanding of what literacy learning 'success' looks like is likely influenced by a need to remain relevant and efficacious in the eyes of both the university (to avoid cuts to funding and other support for the program) and donors (to persuade them to continue investing in Venture and its students).

As a product of Venture's educational practice that also includes descriptions of elements of the program's instructional practices, the first issue of *AdVentures* from the 2019-2020 academic year captures and perpetuates a very particular idea of literacy. That is, this issue of *AdVentures* paints a picture that literacy learning with Venture will inevitably lead to success (predominantly academically/ traditionally defined): it begins with four pages of pictures of Venture graduates from the previous sixteen years of the program and the statement, "Our graduates have earned associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees from the [local technical] College, [Upper Midwest University], [a smaller private local university], and other schools." Positive descriptions of hard work, small wins, valuable experiences, and second chances abound in the entries from the Class of 2019. This artifact is a clear illustration of Venture's literacy

heritage: the positive outcomes Venture achieves for low-income adult undergraduate students and the "literacy opportunity" the project seeks to restore to minoritized people in the area (Brandt, *Literacy in American Lives,* 7).

However, the pictures of Venture graduates, the encouragement to work hard and persist through the difficulties the two-semester course may pose, the advice that makes graduating from Venture sound easy if only you do these simple things every week are steeped in the literacy myth (Graff) and accomplish what literacy scholar Patrick Berry warns against: this issue of *AdVentures* communicates mainly the positive (and any negatives are framed as obstacles one can overcome with the help of Venture staff members, regular attendance, and tutoring); only opportunity lies beyond the successful completion of Venture… But how does the Class of 2019, upon writing these notes just after graduation, really know that? Literacy scholars, on the other hand, know that constantly changing expectations for literacy— standards of literacy that change at the whims of powerful literacy sponsors shaped by globalization, neoliberalism, supply and demand— mean that literacy learning does not always result in opportunity and success across the board. And this can be seen in the experiences of the Venture alumni who participate in OWG: many join because they've encountered obstacles to making writing a career and/ or continuing to write without the materials (prompts, books, time, space, encouragement, feedback, etc.) that Venture provided. However, they may not have joined OWG to begin with if Venture had not sprouted hope in them around writing— their ability to write something meaningful, their ability to connect with readers and listeners, their ability to use writing to heal. As such, this first issue of the 2019-2020 academic year of *AdVentures* suggests that the contexts (in this case, adult literacy programming for minoritized, low-income adult undergraduate students) for literacy can perpetuate the circulation of the literacy myth; however, this artifact

also suggests that the literacy myth may be a necessary evil since "hope is a necessary precondition (along with information and resources) that allows people to make investments that in turn affect economies," and, I would argue, investments that in turn effect change (Prendergast 18).

Consequently, Venture recirculates the literacy myth seemingly in order to change the perspective of its adult students, in order to help them believe in not only their ability to earn college credits but also in the good that comes from literacy learning. Many OWG participants reflect on how Venture was one of the first and/or only times that literacy learning involved more than technicalities like how many sentences make a paragraph or handwriting or grammatical conventions. Take, for example, the description of writing in school as "a tool that teachers use so you can graduate and go get a job" and the description of writing in Venture as "a way to express yourself" by Venture graduate and OWG member Dean Friends detailed at the beginning of this chapter. The pages of this issue of *AdVentures* demonstrate that just as much as Venture seems to capitalize on the literacy myth for economic gain in some ways, it also takes more student-centered and identity-(re)formation approaches to literacy that honor writing for writing's sake. Through its critical literacy pedagogy, Venture positions its students to choose how and why they learn literacy with Venture. *AdVentures* in general, but especially this first issue of each academic year, serves to instill hope in the members of the incoming class that they can determine their own trajectories and complete the Venture course if they just do their best.

On the other hand, this issue of *AdVentures* also features Venture student voices citing the success of Venture at affecting adult undergraduate student trajectories; it showcases the positive outcomes of the economic investment that Venture and the university have made in these students. And Venture profits off of that success, off of the words of its students: copies of

AdVentures are sent to donors; excerpts are featured in grant applications; and the fact that Venture graduates have earned various degrees from other colleges and universities after completing the two-semester Venture course has been used as the basis for expansion into prison education programming, most recently, as well as other free noncredit and credit-bearing courses offered to Venture students in the past. Meanwhile, the university at large benefits from the positive public recognition of helping "solve" the "problems" of low-income adult undergraduate students in the community. In this sense, Venture students are writing to complete the course *and* earn college credit *and* for Venture's economic gain. So the question becomes, Who really benefits from Venture? Can Venture students and Venture and the university all benefit at the same time? Can they all benefit equally or even equitably? In my estimation, the literacy myth makes it so that Venture and the university (even if unintentionally) benefit far more from the literacy gains of Venture students than the students themselves. That is, the value of the literacy myth is most evident in how it shapes the behavior of the adult learners at Venture to participate in (and contribute to) academic and/or professional progress (e.g. the celebration of finishing terminal degrees and securing jobs in the pages of *AdVentures*, on Venture's website, and in its promotional materials; students' personal literacy achievements are featured far less in these public-facing mediums, if at all). Progress— in terms of economic gain, program advancement and expansion, as well as bureaucratic endorsement— is all but promised to Venture and the university as a result of the literacy practices and products of Venture students; however, academic and/or professional gains for the adult students who complete the Venture course will not materialize without continued effort toward literacy learning, just as it is not promised for any college student. And so the "ideological agenda" (Davis 83) in higher education to maintain its "specifically antiegalitarian" nature (Corrigan & Vats 221) is revealed. In the current

neoliberal era, this means (adult) learners in higher education must respond to deregulation, or increasingly uncertain economic advantages and opportunities, by acquiring more and more literacies for less and less pay/ benefit.

Thus, we must ask, Is the literacy myth— and the tenuous hope it espouses— worth the cruelty of it (e.g., the encouragement to work hard and persist through any difficulties the two-semester course may pose because only success and opportunity await after the successful completion of Venture)? Is there another way? By creating important and intentional distance between itself (and therefore its participants) and the literacy myth, Our Writing Group (OWG) has (re/en)visioned itself to encourage literacy hope in its members while also challenging the problematic (i.e. white supremacist, ableist, sexist, homophobic, etc.) underpinnings of the idea that more or better literacies alone can change lives. OWG does so by focusing on the literacy desires of its participants as well as identifying and elevating the types of practices, pedagogies, community relationships, and life experiences that help OWG writers come to think of themselves as writers. The rest of this chapter seeks to detail OWG's (re/en)visioning process, or how and why the writing group came to incorporate participatory pedagogies as a way to honor and affirm the literacy experiences and desires of its members.

Venture's Literacy Hope in Our Writing Group

OWG was piloted in Spring 2020 as an optional writing group for Venture students and alumni with the goal to help adult undergraduate students feel capable of accomplishing creative, professional, and academic writing projects, including but not limited to personal memoirs, college applications, and workplace projects. With support from the Venture Program Co-Director Phillip Handel, I advertised OWG through emails to approximately 10 Venture alumni who Dr. Handel identified as especially interested in writing, detailing the virtues of writing

groups and seeking their input on its facilitation, resulting in seven participants for six sessions before the university suspended face-to-face instruction in light of COVID-19. From the start of OWG, members described a love for writing and a desire to write more, write better, and write their own stories. All agreed that they wrote more when they were enrolled in the Venture course, and they had written much less since graduation. All believed their writing had room for improvement, and all came with projects they wanted to write that ranged from personal autobiographies to short nonfiction stories to historical and political perspective pieces. From group participation, members of the OWG pilot sought writing inspiration, help with usage and mechanics as well as authorial craft, and feedback on their writing. Thus, from OWG participants' goals and needs, it is clear that the members of the group were not participating in OWG to work on academic or workplace writing (although they weren't against writing for these domains), but predominantly self-sponsored writing, writing of and for themselves, writing for writing's sake.

The first six in-person OWG meetings lasted 90 minutes and were attended by between four and six members each week (five of whom consented to participation in my research). Monday evening meetings began with write-ins, goal setting, and discussion about healthy writing habits and solutions to writing difficulties, which sometimes included sharing writing. Then, as facilitator, I offered a mini-lesson on writing craft, grammar/ punctuation, or genre in response to member questions and requests. After these mini-lessons, I extended an "invitation to write" to members, which typically included a prompt that encouraged them to practice the content from the mini-lesson. Usually, there was not much time to write in community or engage in peer review with other members during meetings after writing into the room, checking in with one another, and going through the mini-lesson (see Appendix 5 for an overview of pilot OWG

meetings). After the COVID-19 lockdown, we began to meet every other week instead of weekly and via Google Meet instead of in-person to talk about and share current writing projects. Upon the switch to virtual meetings during Spring of 2020, attendance dropped to one or two participants every other week. Nonetheless, those initial OWG members anecdotally suggested that the group offered helpful writing inspiration and helped them consider wider purposes and audiences while writing; they continued to ask for prompts and support via video conference and email during the first few months of COVID-19/ the rest of the semester.

For example, Caress Cooper, quoted in the September 2019 issue of *AdVentures* above, was a member of the pilot version of OWG. She joined OWG to accomplish her goal of writing her autobiography, which she had yet to truly start, but to which she planned to add descriptive pieces she'd already written. In an email after face-to-face meetings had stopped due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Caress explained that she does not enjoy virtual meetings and preferred to communicate via email rather than attend the virtual sessions; thus, she did not continue OWG in subsequent semesters), she shared her plans to use the time at home to work on outlining the chapters of her autobiography, a suggestion made explicitly to help her get started on her book during group. Caress describes herself as a relationship writer and enjoys writing explicit poetry that uses color to represent emotions and expressions. She shared that she wants to work on her autobiography, a poetry book, newspaper submissions; she wants to get her point across, have fun, and get stuff published as a result of participation in OWG. Publishing, and in particular self-publishing, was a common desire amongst members of the pilot OWG: most expressed interest in submitting their work to contests and newspapers and learning how to self-publish their personal narratives. Specific aims members hoped to accomplish through participation in OWG (as taken from survey responses during that pilot semester) included, "more specifics/

understandings about becoming a writer," "to have a clear vision of my ideas and get better skills on writing," and "encouragement."

This trend in the writing goals of alumni of Venture complicates the messages espoused by *AdVentures* as explored above: the alumni who joined OWG in Spring 2020 did not join the group in order to chase academic and/or professional opportunity and change their life trajectories through more literacy learning; instead, members carried the hope that the Venture course instilled and encouraged in them into Our Writing Group. It seems that members hoped to share their stories and affect others in ways similar to how what they read and wrote about in the course affected them. For example, according to Caress, her goal for her autobiography is for her friends and family to know her on a deeper level and for strangers to know more about her. Furthermore, after sharing writings from the previous week, participant Sol Edad and her husband Manuel (who was a member of the pilot group but did not continue in subsequent semesters) articulated the hope that their stories teach their audiences something about life: in Sol's case, she wanted to teach the value of forgiveness especially when it's hard, and in Manuel's case, he wanted to express how having children can change one's perspective in unexpected ways.

Instead of a stereotypical wealth-based economy (one that Venture as a program seems to participate in to some degree), members of the pilot OWG seemed to want to participate in a cultural economy through their writing. That is, members wanted to produce texts with social weight, texts that accomplish their goals, texts that can create change. I believe it is participation in Venture that helped them craft such goals. For instance, survey responses from pilot group members to the question "How has participation in Venture impacted your writing and/or your writing process?" include "It's always good to improve the skills of writing," "It has instilled the

desire to write (again). It makes me want to enhance my writing process," and "It helped me so much with organizing and encouragement to keep writing." Upon reading texts like "Letter from Birmingham Jail" by Martin Luther King, Jr., "Homemade Education" by Malcolm X, "Allegory of the Cave" by Socrates, and "The Story of an Hour" by Kate Chopin during the Venture course, students are asked reflection questions that encourage them to connect the ideas of these literary works and others to their own experiences and beliefs. Such student-centered and identity- focused prompts in conjunction with texts like those mentioned above demonstrate to students that they have experiences and ideas as valuable as Socrates, Malcolm X, MLK Jr., and Kate Chopin. In this way, Venture (precariously) balances two economic perspectives in its course: that of the literacy myth, which promises economic advantages as a result of literacy learning, and that of critical literacy pedagogies that treat writing as a pedagogical tool to build critical awareness.

Thus, despite the economic investment and gains Venture makes from its humanities-based college jumpstart program for adult undergraduate students, the Venture alumni who joined OWG in Spring 2020 came away from the program with a greater appreciation for the student-centered and identity-(re)formation approaches to literacy that honor writing for writing's sake than for the purported academic and professional opportunities completing the course presented. Now perhaps this is why they joined Our Writing Group, and my sample of alumni is biased because members sought out more opportunities to continue writing. Nonetheless, these findings from the pilot writing group indicate that literacy learning in the context of Venture extends value in both directions—toward professionally/ academically-oriented investment and wealth as well as toward inter- and intra- personal benefit and growth. From this, I gather that writing for professional and/or academic gain and writing for writing's

sake is perhaps best negotiated *through writing itself by writers themselves* because each of us has "differing views about literacy's social purposes and values" (Scribner 8).

Thus, it's important that the structure of OWG makes room for that negotiation by its participants so that whether members want to write for professional/ academic gain or personal benefit, OWG is a place that welcomes those literacy desires. Writing bridges the social and the personal: it allows for (and in fact, demands) the negotiation of the self and others; in this way, it connects the self with the world (Yagelski 14). The boundary-crossing potential of writing at personal and social levels is what members of OWG seem to be after, and this desire was presented to them by a literacy pedagogy that accommodated the whole student in terms of history, identities, context, etc.—Venture's literacy pedagogy. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, Venture's critical literacy pedagogy embraces students' whole lives by "[asking] students to connect their lives to the classroom" (Collins 129). The potential for writing to cross boundaries of time and space encourages student writers to take positive risks in order to "[exercise] their power as thinkers, writers, and people" (Collins 129). Literacy education that embraces the whole person provides students with "opportunities to learn from, through, and while writing" and "redefine[s] the purpose of writing in terms of the need to foster in students reflectiveness and an awareness of themselves in the world" (Yagelski 24). While Venture and *AdVentures* present a very particular set of outcomes for Venture graduates that is steeped in the literacy myth (both in the publication as well as on their website, which predominantly highlights students' and alumni's academic and job-related achievements), the pedagogy in the Venture course is more concerned with the development of the whole person: Venture seeks to enhance students' sense that they can produce texts that can create change.

Venture alumni join Our Writing Group because they enjoy how participation in Venture transforms their ideas of writing and provide space, time, and support for them to write socially important texts. OWG benefits from the hope Venture instills in its students, taking their desire to write texts with social weight and opening up possibilities for participants themselves to determine what they want to write as well as making room for their writing goals and their sense that they can produce such texts to evolve. Throughout the Spring 2020 pilot, I aimed to closely follow the three phases that typically characterize community-engaged research: entering the community, collaborating with the community, and reflecting on the work with the community (Flower). As a grant-writing intern for Venture, I engaged in pre-research (Rowan & Cavallaro), which was key to building intentional, lasting, and helpful partnerships with Venture faculty and staff, students and alumni, and UMU supports like the writing center and the humanities center. As facilitator of the pilot version of OWG, I engaged in intentional "community listening" (Jackson & Delaune) to realize opportunities to construct equitable, reciprocal relationships with writing group members that would facilitate identifying and achieving shared/ parallel goals. This yielded a preliminary understanding of group members' desires for inspiration and encouragement to write, feedback and opportunities to share their writing, and opportunities to (self-)publish their work. Finally, and most importantly, I used reflection as a means for assessing where the group had been, where we are now, and where we were going. It was this reflective practice after the pilot that brought me to alter OWG's structure and format to be more participatory, to strive to empower the writing group members to achieve their literacy and social goals by working with the writers in the group from an asset-based perspective— that is, celebrating the writing wisdom members already have wrought.

As a result, I infused participatory pedagogies into how group meetings are facilitated to support members in sharing their experiences and desires with audiences of their choosing through writing. The next section of this chapter gives a brief overview of those changes, again through the lens of Elenore Long's framework, to highlight how Venture has informed the way OWG operates. That is, OWG's structure, policies, procedures, etc. aim to allow for negotiation between writing for professional and/or academic gain and writing for writing's sake through writing itself by writers themselves; they seek to resist literacy myth co-optation by Venture's nonprofit precarity and the university's need to be seen benefiting the larger community. The introduction of participatory pedagogies into OWG helps guard against perpetuating the literacy myth and instead seeks to encourage students to write for their own purposes, whether those are driven by economical, social, political, cultural— or some combination thereof— intentions. Participatory pedagogies makes it so that Our Writing Group is open enough to hold any and all literacy desires, whether participants' conceptions of writing and/or their purposes for writing (the practice and the product) adhere to or challenge the literacy myth. The idea is that eventually, they will enhance their own personal nuanced understandings of how writing is a "social endeavor" (and not just an academic or professional endeavor) through participation in OWG because the writing group animates members to participate in one another's writing process by providing "document support" (through giving and receiving feedback), "knowledge or skill support" (through talking about writing with other writers), and "social and emotional support" (by celebrating each other's successes and empathizing/sympathizing with each other's difficulties) (Purdue Online Writing Lab). As such, participatory pedagogies position OWG and its members to disengage with the idea that writers in the group can and will transform their lives

with more or better literacy. Instead, they can simply do literacy in the group however they choose.

Writers Writing in Our Writing Group

Our Writing Group (OWG) extends the sense of community the Venture course builds by providing a collaborative writing community after Venture graduation. A community writing group for Venture alumni, OWG aims to help adult undergraduate students feel capable of and supported in accomplishing creative, professional, academic, and personal writing projects by offering a community of support for members' writing goals, including receiving, giving, and implementing feedback. Writing groups, as contact zones and safe houses (Westbrook), as spaces of empowerment and power negotiation (Highberg et al.), as collectives that demand ongoing (re)definition to effectively include each individual writer (Mathieu et al.), present an opportunity for asset-based and self-directed learning for adult undergraduates because they encourage members to demonstrate previous knowledge and mediate new learning, develop skills and understandings directly useful to them, and enhance their self-efficacy and initiative— hallmarks of asset-based and self-directed learning (Hayes et al.). Despite their documented importance, however, free community writing groups are not consistently available and accessible in the local community; OWG fills this gap for Venture students and alumni and provides an open-ended way to continue (and augment) the literacy work that Venture begins.

Additionally, OWG's structure and products aim to challenge typical ideas of what literacies are required for success, not only in higher education but also beyond, as many participants are not currently in (steady) coursework towards a degree. Like Venture, OWG wants to encompass more people in the act of knowledge-making, but outside of a formal classroom setting and/or experience; however, it also has a different aim to encompass more

people in who 'count' as writers and more processes in what 'count' as writing. Thus, OWG creates a space that invigorates adult writers with economic barriers to contribute to the world of writing, which is a bit different than the world of ideas that Venture opens for its students. It endeavors to go further to transform perceptions of "good writing" by decentering "standard" Englishes and stereotypical authorship by providing avenues for sharing writing with wider audiences and various conceptions of publishing. Finally, OWG is arranging more ongoing ways for Venture alumni to make meaningful contributions to the community by identifying and practicing various modes of participation in writing facets, from giving, receiving, and engaging with feedback to sharing writerly expertise to performing pieces for the stage and publishing them on the page. The similarities and differences between Venture and Our Writing Group are best examined through the identification and examination of Venture's and OWG's literacy pedagogies.

The overview given in this section is briefer than the illustration of Venture above because the following chapters go into greater detail about how OWG operates. Nonetheless, here I aim to orient readers to how participatory pedagogies empower members to confidently use writing to identify and achieve their literacy desires. Participatory pedagogies position OWG and its members to disengage with and resist the literacy myth.

Just as Venture's guiding metaphor stems directly from its name, Our Writing Group's guiding metaphor is also reflected in its name: OWG is a *collective* that values community, leadership, efficacy, participation, expertise, and a sense of family— all encapsulated in the word *our*. This is borne out of the context of the writing group: OWG continues the sense of community the Venture course begins by providing a collaborative writing community after Venture graduation. As previously mentioned, despite their documented importance, writing

groups are not consistently available and accessible locally. Similar to Venture's mission to respond to economic barriers to education for low-income adults, OWG responds to a gap for Venture students and alumni to continue writing in a supportive community: it encourages members to feel calm, capable, and in-control while writing, deepens their beliefs in themselves as writers, and debunks the myth that only some people struggle (or succeed) with writing. As stated above, writing groups operate as contact zones and safe houses (Westbrook), as spaces of empowerment and power negotiation (Highberg et al.), as collectives that demand ongoing (re)definition to effectively include each individual writer (Mathieu et al.). As such amorphous spaces, writing groups offer an opportunity for self-directed, asset-based learning for adult undergraduates because they encourage members to demonstrate previous knowledge and mediate new learning, develop skills and understandings directly useful to them, and enhance their self-efficacy and initiative (Hayes et al.).

As such, OWG's literacy practices are manifested in the structure of its meetings where members write in community, take turns facilitating meetings on topics of their choice, share their writing and give and receive feedback during meetings, and work together to publish the group's semi-annual journal, *OWG Oracle*. These manifestations of participatory pedagogies help writers build connections across communities and backgrounds, honor and celebrate what writers bring to the group, frame writing as a process that involves strategies and tools unique to each writer, and prioritize choice and literacy desires. They build on Venture's literacy practices— not quitting when faced with writer's block, taking notes, and seeing your words and your name published in *AdVentures* every few weeks– mentioned above— which serve as the inspiration for OWG as well as the impetus for Venture alumni to join the writing group. In their current iteration, OWG meetings run for 120 minutes via Zoom and are attended by 8-11

members each week, two of whom (Sol and Heaven) carried over from Spring 2020; they begin with a check-in and a short meditation or mindfulness exercise, announcements that include local and national publishing opportunities found by members, time to write with prompts facilitated by members, and time to share. Thus, OWG foregrounds student voices in ways quite different from Venture because what happens in group meetings are self-determined, or perhaps more accurately collectively-determined. Whereas co-directors Phillip Handel and Stephanie Robertson have a critical literacy curriculum that they follow with students and motives behind the presentations they make about Venture that feature student voices, writers in OWG share the responsibility of facilitating group meetings themselves. Without a curriculum to follow, standards to achieve, or donations to secure, OWG members strengthen their collective ownership over the group and build writerly confidence through the freedom and encouragement to share individual writing interests and expertise with each other. In this way, as both members and facilitators of OWG, participating in OWG is "meant to enlighten and empower the average person in the group," encouraging each member to use their own interests and expertise to inspire each other to write (Berg 224).

This informs the tenor of OWG's discourse— one of action rather than only hope, bolstered by gratitude for one another, encouragement to keep writing and facilitating, and desire to continue honing their authorial craft and share their work with larger audiences. For example, in one Spring 2021 meeting led by a member about self-actualization, Sol sincerely thanked the member-facilitator for explaining how writing can be used for self-actualization, or achieving one's fullest potential. Sol explained that this was "something my higher power needed to hear." Additionally, OWG member Miz Reverberate was encouraged during this session to incorporate listening to music while writing, which she had not done before, and shares about how she

actually enjoyed that change of pace. Finally, during this same meeting, Heaven shared a piece about "these damn feelin's" with the group and the power and struggle behind choosing to share one's feelings with others. Heaven encouraged any and all feedback for the piece, and group members responded by letting Heaven know she's not alone in being told to share her feelings one second and being told to stay strong the next; she's not alone in being unsure if someone else is worthy of knowing her feelings. Claudia pointed to the last three lines of Heaven's piece as especially powerful and in response to Heaven apologizing for using explicit language in her piece, all those who gave her feedback (4 members of the 9 members present that day) explained how it was an appropriate and compelling aspect of her piece. This meeting was not an anomaly among OWG meetings: members intentionally connect to and engage with the topics member-facilitators choose, reflect on and articulate what they learn from each session, and encourage one another in their writing endeavors throughout group meetings. Thus, the tenor of the group is one of collective action: writing together and expressing gratitude and love for the opportunity to do so each week.

Therefore, rather than framing writing strategies *I* share as immediately useful to OWG members, participatory pedagogies in OWG help members themselves "uncover or produce knowledge that will be directly useful to" them as they not only share writing strategies, expertise, feedback, and experiences with one another but also expose the range of goals adult undergraduate student writers have for their writing (Berg). Moreover, increasing opportunities to share their writing, experiences, and ideas with wider audiences positions group members as experts of their own writing experiences and encourages them to use the information gathered to take action in ways that centralize their voices. OWG accomplishes this through inviting guest facilitators to meetings that encourage group members to interact with and exchange ideas with

more established (read: published writers, writing teachers, directors of literary centers, etc.)
local writers and through our annual community reading where members read their work aloud
for a live invited audience. And Our Writing Group's participant publication, *OWG Oracle*, is
one of the most public ways members of the writing group showcase the rhetorical invention of
OWG: that is, the group goes beyond changing the landscape of voices in the humanities to also
change and challenge the expectations of those voices.

OWG's participant publication is a reflection and culmination of OWG's implementation
of participatory pedagogies because it is participant-driven. Each edition of the *OWG Oracle*
includes work by most but not all of our members, and it is a labor of love. Members submit
poetry, personal essays, short stories, and excerpts from larger works that address a wide variety
of topics in January/ February and April/ May of each year, along with a writer's memo that
explains the purpose of each piece, why it was written, and what the author hopes the piece will
achieve for readers. Submissions are then reviewed by me and the group as a whole to provide
feedback. In alignment with OWG's ethos, though, acceptance into the *OWG Oracle* comes as a
part of membership in Our Writing Group and the feedback we provide one another (and
especially my review as editor of *OWG Oracle*) aims to include as many members' pieces as
possible as they are meant to be received. As I wrote in the editor's note of the first issue of
OWG Oracle:

> At OWG, we believe in speaking your own language, sharing your stories using your own words
> in your own cadence. We are not in the business of whitewashing language nor are we in the
> business of promoting Edited American English. At OWG, we seek to avoid the love/hate
> relationship with language(s) that requires writers to leave their cultures, their families, their
> backgrounds, their (home) languages, their meanings and understandings and perspectives at the
> door of the classroom, or in this case the writing group. Thus, as an editor, I have not made any
> significant grammatical or punctuation edits to anyone's pieces; furthermore, all edits were
> approved by the writer first. Thus, I encourage you, dear readers, to read each piece with special
> attention to the voice of each writer. Those commas, capitalized words, ellipses, emojis, periods

and lack thereof are meant to be there to guide you to hear– no listen– to each piece in the way it was meant to reach you.

Importantly, *OWG Oracle* seeks to coach readers into examining and perhaps even disregarding their expectations of *published* writing, of *established* (read: published writers, writers who have something to teach us, writers with expertise and experiences to share) writers. Whereas *AdVentures* and Venture do conform to White Mainstream English, do believe that rules governing grammar, punctuation, usage, and mechanics in writing are necessary for accuracy and legibility, OWG and its *Oracle* eschew those ideas. We no longer focus on conventions at our meetings but instead on writing craft, inspiration, community, and practice. And as such, *OWG Oracle* encourages readers and listeners to "take each piece [...] as it is and be open to its message, its wisdom, its purpose," to "tak[e] time to discover" the treasures in every piece. In so doing, Our Writing Group challenges literacy-myth-fueled ideas of what types of writers and writing (can) make knowledge, what types of writers and writing are considered "good," what types of writers and writing (can) contribute meaningfully to a community. OWG believes it's all writers and writing. We believe in all writers and writing. And in addition to the values espoused by *OWG Oracle*, OWG's participatory structure enacts this belief. As such, Our Writing Group reveals more nuanced understandings about the value of literacies for adult undergraduate writers, turning assumptions based in the literacy myth about writing for academic and/or professional gain on their head and elevating writing for personal enrichment.

By moving through the main facets of OWG meetings (writing & facilitation, sharing & feedback, going public) in greater detail and showcasing how participatory pedagogies show up in those facets, which in turn reveals other important themes in relation to members' literacy desires (such as leadership and love), the following chapters of this dissertation will utilize the insights and participation of OWG members to describe participants' conceptions of writing and

literacies, their audiences, and the practices, pedagogies, community relationships, and life experiences that do and don't help them feel like writers. Overall, this deep dive into OWG will showcase how writing groups for adult student writers that utilize participatory pedagogies can offer a consistent community of practice that supports members in reaching writing goals through engagement with peers throughout the writing process and help empower adult undergraduate writers to use writing however they want and feel confident doing so by augmenting knowledge and skills directly useful to them—that members of the writing group themselves choose—and affirming that their stories and literacy desires matter.

Chapter 3 - Writing, Facilitation, & Leadership: Listening to Participants' Literacy Desires

"And it's also I learn a lot, you know, you know, like [Sol], with the five minute talk, I mean that's what she does. So like me sitting in and listening to her. I know, okay, this is what I can do. This is what I can, you know, learn from **so I've learned a lot from everyone in the group. Even if I don't say anything, they just help me without even knowing it.**"

- Echo Patois interview excerpt

More Like a Class than a Community Writing Group

The very first meeting of OWG took place around a circular table in a small back room at the Venture classroom space. As I smiled at each of the four writers who made their way into the room that evening, I felt more and more nervous. I wasn't sure how to behave in this new space with these new people. I was the odd one out, the only person in the room who was not a Venture graduate. The automatic comfort with one another that their Venture experiences granted did not extend to me. For a brief moment before the meeting started, I wondered if this pilot would actually work— could we build a writing group *while* we met as a writing group? Would folks keep coming while we figured it out?

We began with introductions that included everyone's name and the year that each person graduated from Venture. As the true newbie in the room, I introduced myself more thoroughly and talked about my affiliation with Venture (its dedicated writing center tutor), how I got involved (connecting with Dr. Phillip Handel after he gave a presentation about Venture in one of my graduate courses and becoming a grant writing volunteer soon afterwards to gain hands-on experience with the program), my family of "nontraditional" students (mom, dad, both brothers— all except me), and my graduate program and research interests (in community literacies, writing development across the lifespan, writing groups, and working *with* writers). I

explained why I wanted to create this group— to continue to build on the sense of community around literacies that the Venture course begins— and the benefits I saw in writing groups for creating a sense of community, building a writing practice, finding accountability, struggling together, giving and receiving feedback, and dedicating time to writing. After my introduction, we free-wrote for a few minutes on what each participant hoped to get out of OWG and how they imagined it would work. The four initial participants shared that they hoped to "learn more about grammar and punctuation," receive "inspirations" to write, and "gain an understanding of writing and skills to develop to make writing better" from their participation in OWG. I dutifully wrote all of this down, hoping to fulfill their requests and make OWG as meaningful and helpful for members as possible.

Given our discussion, I suggested that we meet for 90 minutes each week and structure our meetings as follows:

I. Weekly check-ins where members can share writing, inspiration, accomplishments, and/or questions that came up over the week.
II. Time to set goals for writing organized around a minimum, practical, and dream goal.
III. Time to write with options for feedback, sharing, and reading aloud; participants requested prompts for this part.
IV. Final check-ins and encouragement to set new goals for the week.

Participants agreed that this structure would work but requested options to learn new things and get feedback from me since I was "the expert." Despite my denial of that title right away, I wondered if my status as an outsider in the group combined with my position as an Upper Midwest University writing center instructor, made it so that that was the only role I could hold: expert or bust. I hoped that I could find my way into being considered just another member of the group eventually.

Despite this hope, I ended up fulfilling their expectations for me to be the expert at the very next meeting (and beyond) by bringing a printed agenda for everyone to follow along with

and take notes on and using a lesson from *Everyday Editing* by Jeff Anderson to teach about the serial comma. See Appendix 5 for the five agendas I constructed for and brought to our in-person meetings. Many participants shared that one of their biggest writing challenges was punctuation, and while I at least once challenged participants to think bigger than punctuation and instead "think about the messages they want to impart on their readers," I still focused many a mini-lesson on punctuation during the pilot writing group (three out of six in-person Spring 2020 meetings focused on punctuation). For instance, during the second OWG meeting, we had an intense discussion about the Oxford comma, and about whether using that last comma before the word 'and' in a list was the 'correct' way to separate items in a list. Most OWG members believed the Oxford comma was the 'rule,' but one participant adamantly disagreed. In the end, the participants looked to me to provide an end to the discussion; I took the bait, sharing that the Oxford comma "can reduce confusion, but it's ultimately a stylistic choice."

Thus, the pilot version of the writing group operated more as a class than a community writing group, as indicated by members referring to me as a "teacher" and the invitations to write as "homework." One participant, Heaven, stated that "it was easier for her to consider it [the invitation to write] homework because then she'll do it," indicating that OWG was not reflective of the goals to create a sense of community around writing, to overcome writing obstacles together, develop and share writing expertise *with* one another (rather than in a unidirectional or hierarchical manner). That is, even though Heaven chose to be in OWG and wanted to write, at the same time she seemed to need to almost trick herself into actually writing. As such, it became increasingly clear that participants in OWG weren't taking writing risks— trying new genres, new ways to invoke images, new purposes for writing, new punctuation patterns— of their own accord but because they felt (or needed to feel) it was required.

And therefore, OWG members were not developing or capitalizing on their own (new) writing experiences, ones that corresponded to their own individual and collective literacy desires. This is further supported by comments by another participant that same evening who said she could use the time in group to "get writing for this week's prompt done now." While the participants wanted inspiration to write, the class-like structure of the writing group manufactured that inspiration in an inauthentic manner and the actual writing they did (when they were able) didn't respond to the prompts/ invitations given with any consistency. Many times, instead, participants shared writing they had from previous occasions (and had not written that week) or shared that they wrote for purposes other than group (such as emails and text messages and work reports) or had not written at all. Thus, the invitations to try something new in their writing each week weren't being accepted in tangible ways.

So this inconsistency begs the following questions: Was OWG fulfilling its members' literacy desires, or their individual and collective aspirations for their writing? Did it make room for emerging and evolving ones? Would this structure and format for the group be sustainable? Technically, I would say that OWG was providing opportunities to gain greater awareness and facility with the conventions of White Mainstream English in the mini lessons and find inspiration through the invitations to write (even if those invitations weren't being readily accepted) in a traditional or expected classroom sense: the group was almost entirely centered around me as an expert or teacher, and the structure of the group subscribed to an andragogical learning strategy in that I tried to be *aware* of the diverse learning styles of the adult writers in the group, *frame* writing strategies as immediately useful to everyday writing tasks, and use my mini-lessons to show the 'correct' way to develop imagery, use dialogue, separate items in a list, etc. that competed with previous strategies and understandings of writing group members

(Kenner & Weinerman 90) rather than honoring the understandings of writing conventions and strategies they brought with them. As such, it reinforced traditional conceptions of academic literacy, instruction, and power/ knowledge relations that positioned me, the credentialed graduate student, as a sage on the stage and the group members, writers from various generations and with diverse lifetime writing experiences, as blank slates to be filled with knowledge. It was not the organic coming together of different writing expertise that characterizes writing groups, that allows for members of writing groups "to empower each other [and] negotiate the power dynamics that inevitably exist within the groups" (Highberg et al. 28). Nor was the pilot version of OWG writer-centered in ways that enhanced members' writing self-efficacy in an asset-based way and challenged them to un-learn school to think about writing differently—to think about it for themselves and their purposes beyond the academic and professional expectations that had characterized many if not most of their writing endeavors previously. Thus, it would not make room for members' emerging and evolving literacy desires, and the group would not be sustainable beyond my tenure as a Upper Midwest graduate student.

In this chapter, I ask the following question: how do writing and facilitation in OWG enhance OWG participants' sense that they are writers? I find that the introduction of participatory pedagogies into Our Writing Group has helped the group become guided more deeply by members' literacy desires, which I define as the aspirations members of the group have for their writing—both as a product and a process—within a critical literacy framework that understands literacy as enmeshed in power relationships. In turn, the group's grounding in members' literacy desires helps enhance OWG members' writerly confidence by validating and affirming those aspirations as important and worthy.

First, I discuss why desire is important in literacy— both in the practice and study of writing. Then, I detail how prioritizing multiple avenues for participation in all aspects of group meetings made room for OWG writers to exert greater collective leadership over the group. Seen through the lens of African American civil rights activist Ella Baker's teach-learn-lead praxis (Parker), I articulate how the writing group operates as a "free space" where members offer personal expertise by openly "question[ing] commonsense understandings" (Parker 25) of writers and writing and where members demonstrate leadership by "negotiat[ing] a group identity and establish[ing] group rules" (Highberg et al. 25) together in ways that honor individual and group literacy desires. I showcase how members' literacy desires inform the expertise that's shared during OWG meetings and how that expertise is affirmed and validated by other members' participation and engagement. Finally, I share an anecdote about the evolving relationship between Venture and OWG that accounts for writers' increasing agency in OWG and the limits of their agency in relation to Venture given the program's precarious balance of engagement with the literacy myth and utilization of writing as a pedagogical tool for critical awareness. Overall, this chapter aims to illuminate the relationship between participatory pedagogies and writing: members of OWG are learning about themselves as writers— learning about their literacy desires— through leadership in/of the writing group. Upon learning about themselves as writers, OWG members can more confidently self-identify as writers (even in the face of differential power relations).

Literacy Desires

To be fair, "every writing group, while engaging in meaningful and meaning-making talk about texts, operates in a particular context, and that context shapes the group, making certain demands on it" (Highberg et al. 25). Venture alumni have only known Venture classes and

classrooms, not *collectives* or *groups*. Additionally, alumni of Venture are not accustomed to sustained engagement since the credit-bearing two-semester Venture course and semester-long Lasting Venture course offerings all have end dates that coincide with Upper Midwest University's academic calendar. These "demands" on Our Writing Group, or the expectations set by members' previous Venture experiences, seemed to be impacting what members thought OWG could be, especially as the majority of (all but one) OWG members had never participated in a writing group before. Could this be impacting the scope and scale of OWG members' literacy desires? According to education scholar Ursula A. Kelly, schooling does shape desire, which she defines as "the shape our dreams and identities take in the social" (2). Thus, it would be fair to say that the scope and scale of OWG members' dreams and what identities they believed they could authentically don with regard to writing were at least initially influenced by the dreams and identities shaped (or allowed) by their previous Venture experiences, not to mention their experiences as low-income and BIPOC folks in the U.S. education system at large.

As discussed in Chapter 1, adult undergraduate students are predominantly positioned as non-agentic or helpless without intervention by educators, researchers, policymakers, and/or institutions. However, this "remarkably heterogenous" student group has wide-ranging and multifaceted lifespan experiences to draw from when entering new contexts, especially given how adult undergraduates simultaneously exist in and manage multiple (writing) contexts, such as familial, professional, community, academic, etc. (Scobey 111). Thus, a focus on participants' desires in OWG is an important step toward upending commonly held assumptions of adult undergraduate students—both their own and mine. This is of the utmost importance in the current era of racial strife and growing disparities because focusing on literacy desires guards against damage-centered (Tuck) treatments of OWG participants and instead "strives for equity

and liberation" (Crotty 182) by working *with* OWG writers from an asset-based perspective to "bring about [positive and constructive] change[s]" (Crotty 113) in their conceptions of writers, writing, and the social and political ideologies tied up in literacy (Wardle & Adler-Kassner; Byrd).

That is, as demonstrated in the Chapter 2, Venture espouses a belief in or certain tolerance for the literacy myth (Graff), a dominant ideology around literacy that, according to Professor of Rhetoric and Writing Studies Lauren Rosenberg's research with adult learners who are learning to read and write, is commonly engaged with by adult learners on the surface: Rosenberg's study participants expressed "a hope that education will undo 'illiteracy'" and its accompanying social ills (6), which is very similar to the idea that more or better literacy can transform lives (Graff). However, the four participants in Rosenberg's study "transcended dominant discourses by expressing alternative reasons for pursuing literacy" (just like members of OWG, as discussed in Chapter 2) and capitalizing on ways that their newly acquired literacies allowed them to "question dominant views" (7-8). To help guard against all-consuming engagement with dominant ideologies around literacy like the literacy myth and instead welcome and encourage alternative literacy desires, including those that are affective as Rosenberg illuminates, and make space for OWG members to question dominant views, I used the commitments and values that guide participatory pedagogies (see Chapter 1) to help OWG members "negotiate a group identity and establish group rules, implicitly or explicitly" (Highberg et al. 25) for Our Writing Group that honor their evolving literacy desires— whether those align with professional and academic progress or intrinsic, personal motivations to write. As a result, writers in OWG authentically inspire one another to write about diverse topics that

represent participants' literacy desires and encourage them to regularly take writing risks with regard to genres and topics. In the words of OWG participant Claudia Caruso:

> a lot of the stuff that we've done in [OWG] has been inspiring, like, you know, when people do their presentations, like I get inspired to do something. And so it [writing] does kind of come easy. I mean, it's not not as taxing emotionally, but it gets me excited, because I hope that the other members of the group can see like something done like that can get you excited, and you can write a really good piece of work, even though you didn't think you knew a lot about it at the time, you know, it was presented.

Thus, other members' engagement with the literacy desires brought to the group by individual members during their "presentations" is validating and uplifting, according to what members shared during individual interviews. Furthermore, by writing about new topics and in new genres, members are able to talk back to "the way[s] power has been acted upon" them (Rosenberg 9) by demonstrating their growing and capable literacy repertoires, by expanding their literate prowess, by, in Claudia's words, writing "a really good piece of work, even though you didn't think you knew a lot about" the topic at hand. Therefore, in the study and practice of literacy, desire is important because it multi-directionally (that is, for the facilitator sharing their personal writing interest and knowledge with the group and for the writers taking a writing risk to compose in new ways) validates and affirms writers' (evolving) writing expertise. If schooling (and in this case the facilitation of OWG by members) shapes "our dreams and identities" in social realms (Kelly 2) —shapes our desires— then member- facilitation of OWG is opening up wider possibilities for members' literacy desires and writerly identities.

Also important to OWG members' ability to talk back to "the way[s] power has been acted upon" them (Rosenberg 9) is carefully attending to what critical race and indigenous studies scholar Eve Tuck terms desire-based frameworks for research; she writes, "desire-based research frameworks are concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives" (416). Thus, this dissertation project's focus on OWG members'

literacy desires aims to avoid "damage-centered research" that would document adult undergraduate OWG members' "pain and brokenness" to show that (higher) education systems need to be held "accountable for their oppression" (Tuck 409). Instead, desire is important for this study of how Our Writing Group influences members' writing practices and writerly identities because their literacy desires guide the purposes and products of the writing group. Elevating members' literacy desires in this community literacy research project encourages OWG members to counter the oppression they've experienced in educational and social settings that told them they can't write or be writers without a formal degree, helping them develop greater confidence in their writing products and processes. Additionally, it puts the power to determine what they learn and do in Our Writing Group as well as how they learn and do it in members' hands rather than mine. Importantly, desire holds me, as a researcher, accountable to the writers with whom I work. Desire helps me interact with OWG members as adults and writers (not students or empty vessels, but as equals) and helps me avoid assuming what their desires are or even (perhaps unintentionally) ignoring them.

Now that I've articulated why desire is important in this literacy research as well as in the writing practices in Our Writing Group, this next section details how we collectively built the flexible and sustainable structure of OWG that makes space for members to come to realize and act upon their literacy desires. I discuss how the multiple avenues for participation in all aspects of group meetings made room for OWG writers to exert greater collective leadership over the group. Using Ella Baker's catalytic leadership philosophy that follows a teach-learn-lead praxis, I show how members develop and demonstrate expertise by sharing their experiential knowledge and contextually-developed skills with regard to writing products and processes as well as how OWG members enact leadership when they facilitate group meetings on writing topics of their

choice, which helps them to "see their own power" and proves the "Bakerian principle, 'strong people don't need strong leaders'" (Parker 85).

Invitations to Make Decisions

The first two meetings of Our Writing Group for Fall 2020 served as a sort of orientation to what the group could be for members. The first meeting began with a Zoom orientation, introductions with an icebreaker we call a 'go around,' and an overview of OWG. This overview explained the features of the writing group as follows:

- Weekly Meetings: Mondays from 5-7pm on Zoom
- Facilitators: Gabbi for the first few weeks, then YOU, too, with support!
- Workshops: Publication, Poetry, Fiction, Memoir, Life Writing?
- Ephemera: stickers & bookmarks with writing words of wisdom
- Alumni edition of *AdVentures*!
- Community Reading: Spring 2021

Using these bullets, I explained that the group would meet weekly on Zoom, and I would facilitate the first few meetings and then support members to lead meetings themselves on topics of their choice. This provided an opportunity to position attendees as writing experts in their own rights from the beginning and encourage members to think about the writing expertise they've built across their lifespans thus far as well as determine what other writing expertise they'd like to gain. Additionally, I explained that through a grant from Upper Midwest University's humanities center, we would be able to invite guest speakers to facilitate workshops on topics they're most interested in, create and print ephemera to commemorate their participation in OWG, develop and print our own alumni version of the Venture student publication (*AdVentures*), and an opportunity to share and perform their writing at a community reading in the spring (I discuss the ephemera, publication, and community reading elements of OWG in more depth in subsequent chapters).

After that, the bulk of that first meeting was spent creating OWG's statement of purpose, a document that would guide our group moving forward and reflect members' desires for the writing group. The idea of a statement of purpose was drawn from the suggestions Rebecca Schoenike Nowacek and Kenna del Sol make at the end of their piece in *Writing Groups Inside and Outside the Classroom*: Nowacek and del Sol suggest developing a group statement of purpose "[t]o avoid the conflicts arising from unarticulated agendas" (Highberg et al. 338). Thus, I briefly described a statement of purpose as

> a type of mission statement that defines our group's purpose that we can return to along the way to evaluate and guide our group actions. Such a statement helps us stay focused and helps new members determine if the group's purpose is in sync with their writing goals.

Furthermore, I explained that a statement of purpose should answer the following questions:

> Does the group get together to critique, for support, both or something else? What MUST meetings include? What should meetings NOT include? What are our writing community values? What are our writing community goals? What norms should be set about our writing and interactions?

We spent a significant amount of time answering these questions in a collaborative google document and then reviewing those responses together. During our review, we added more information as people expanded verbally on what they had contributed to the document and clarified what they meant along the way. Then, I took what the members had written and synthesized it to form a statement (see Appendix 6), which I brought to the group for approval at our next meeting a week later. The rest of our first meeting consisted of an explanation of my dissertation research and an invitation for members to participate in it as co-researchers and writing time in response to a prompt inspired by the Herstory Writers Workshop about the story attendees wanted to tell and what effect it would have on readers. We had time to practice describing aloud where our stories would begin before our time together came to an end.

Our second meeting of the Fall 2020 semester began with a review of the full statement of purpose. This provided an opportunity for any new attendees to add anything they thought was missing given the questions that guided its construction and for the group as a whole to vote on its approval. The statement of purpose passed unanimously, and we agreed that we would review it at the beginning of each semester both as a way to orient new members and as an opportunity for new members to add ideas that would help OWG align with their vision and desires for the writing group. Since its passing in September 2020, no changes have been made to OWG's statement of purpose in the three reviews since then.

Other than the review of our statement of purpose, the other main goal of this second meeting was to develop feedback and sharing policies and procedures for the group, a goal drawn from the experiences shared in "Community, Collaboration, and Conflict: The Community Writing Group as Contact Zone" by Evelyn Westbrook in *Writing Groups Inside and Outside the Classroom* (Highberg et al.). We took a similar approach to devising these policies and procedures as we did for the group statement of purpose. I told attendees that "Before we share our writing, we need to decide how we're going to give and get feedback so that it's fair, helpful, and encouraging!" and provided attendees with a few resources— academic and not-so-academic— to guide their ideas. Specifically, I shared University of Nebraska-Lincoln's webpage on Peer Feedback in Writing Groups, Hobbylark.com's "How to Give and Take Constructive Feedback as a Writer" blog post by author and creative writing tutor Beth Eaglescliffe, another community writing group's—the Writers Anon Taunton's Writing Group—page on "Giving And Taking Feedback On Writing," writer Eva Langston's page on how to start a writing group, and the University of Minnesota's page on "Getting the most from a writing group." Then, I gave attendees time to review those resources and asked them to respond to a

few guiding questions (Who gets to share each week? How will we communicate whether we're looking for feedback and what kind? Will there be time limits or page limits on sharing? Will we follow a certain procedure or format?) in a collaborative google document. After that, we combined the responses into a set of policies together in real time (see Appendix 7) and agreed to review these along with our statement of purpose at the beginning of every semester. At the time of this writing, one change has been made to this document, and it was to add an orienting opening statement to the policy document in Spring 2021. The group added the following statement to the document: "OWG is a space to write and share your writing. We follow the feedback policies below to make sure everyone gets a chance to share each week in a supported and positive way."

The rest of this second meeting was used to continue writing our "page one moments," the exercise inspired by the Herstory Writers Workshop, and share what we wrote using our new policies and procedures. The impetus behind these activities during the first two meetings of OWG in the Fall 2020 semester as well as the procedures taken to accomplish those activities are drawn from participatory pedagogies. I aimed to honor and elevate the expertise and views of the members through this process of (re)creating Our Writing Group. By asking members new and old what the purpose of OWG should be and how we would go about the main activities of the writing group (and putting their responses in writing), I attempted to model how participative spaces can question the status quo of structural power: just because I am a credentialed educator gaining formal expertise in the field of writing studies does not mean I should have any more of a say in the guiding principles of OWG than any other member. From the very beginning, I wanted to make clear that I value, trust, and affirm the knowledge, experiences, desires, and humanity of the writers in OWG and that the group was, after poet Claudia Rankine, "zoned" for

them, especially when so many other writing spaces are barricaded by student status, cost, location, and explicit and implicit certification (such as publication history, having a literary agent, awards, etc.).

During our third meeting, I introduced members to the OWG facilitator supports (templates for a meeting agenda and a slides presentation) and invited them to sign up to facilitate an OWG meeting on a google doc calendar. Our fourth meeting was our first reflection week where group members who had agreed to be part of this research contributed to collaborative google docs about their experiences in OWG thus far and other members wrote writer's memos about their previous work and/or revised or wrote more. I continued to facilitate research and reflection meetings once a month for the rest of the 2020-2021 academic year. Thus, I facilitated the first four OWG meetings in order to work with members to establish a structure for the group that would allow members to take increasingly more control over the group in order to ensure that it met (and would continue to meet) their needs and desires; developed clear protocols, guidelines, and training for soliciting and providing feedback with group members; provided more opportunities to try new writing techniques, strategies, and genres with support during group meetings; and prompted members to think explicitly about their writing abilities and reflect on changes in their writing confidence over time. I facilitated two more meetings before our first member-facilitated meeting took place during the first week of November 2020.

Claudia Caruso was the first member-facilitator of OWG, and because her meeting took place the day before election day, she chose to theme her meeting around voting. During the initial go around (her check-in question for everyone was "How are you? Have you been writing? Sick of politics?"), she shared that she didn't write during the week because she had

been working on researching information for the OWG meeting. She described it as getting "stuck in a black hole" because once she starts researching something, she goes down all these different paths and finds more and more information. She explained that she had over 10 pages of information across five or six different notebooks to share with us at first but that talking to me over the phone helped her narrow her focus on the suffragette movement.

Throughout the fall semester, cancer-survivor Claudia was technically homeless and living in a hotel through state social services on the southeastern coast of the U.S. The day of her meeting, the hotel's internet went down, and her phone data had not yet been replenished. Thus, although she had decided on the topic of the meeting and how she'd connect it to writing with me over the phone the Saturday before, she had to scramble to put all of the pieces in place on her slides template. Claudia arrived at the meeting a few minutes late, flustered, and "nervous as all heck." Knowing she would be nervous, she incorporated a breathing exercise into the meeting after the go around as a way to calm herself down. Claudia's meeting went really well: she took an approach that resembled a history class, likely because, as she mentioned a couple times throughout the meeting, she was sharing "stuff that you wouldn't normally learn in school. At least I [Claudia] didn't learn a lot of this stuff in my school." She began by asking the group if we knew the definition of a Quaker ("and not the oatmeal guy!" she clarified), and when a group member said no, Claudia launched into an explanation of their secular and nonsecular beliefs and how those beliefs translated into believing in equal voting rights. She then asked for the definition of suffrage, which I responded was the right to vote. Claudia leapt at this answer to build on it and launch into her narrowed focus on women's suffrage. Throughout this explanation, she gave a lot of information that was not reflected on her slides, but group members were rapt with attention in their Zoom boxes. They were quiet unless asked one of the

questions on the screen, such as for the definitions of quaker and suffrage or about Susan B. Anthony's appearance on the first dollar coin. Then, she showed the group two videos from Getty Images, one of a suffragette talking about women's rights and another propaganda video about women taking on greater roles in society.

Throughout the meeting, I shared my screen with Claudia's slides and showed the videos from my device since at this time Claudia could only join our meetings through the Zoom app on her smartphone. After the videos, we made our way to the prompts she'd devised: choose a picture (either from her slides or from Getty Images, for which she provided the link), and write about it. Claudia explained that this prompt was inspired by a creative writing exercise she had done at a women's shelter in the past; members could write about how the picture made them feel, write from a perspective of someone in the picture, and/or write like they were teaching others about what was going on in the picture. Claudia also clarified that writers could continue writing something else they were already working on, too. Even with the plethora of information and inspiration Claudia gave us, we had plenty of time: members learned a lot about women's suffrage, and the meeting provided space, time, and support to not only write but also get some distance from the tension and anxiety many were feeling on the cusp of the 2020 presidential election by focusing on *the right* to vote.

That is, most of the pieces shared that evening focused on the privilege and responsibility that comes with voting. Sol shared a piece about the change that can come through voting, finishing her piece with, "the truth is that not to be able to vote hurts a lot." Dean shared the beginnings of two poems about the right to vote, one that gave the conversation behind a photo from Getty Images and one that focused on his mom's vote. Joi shared a passionate call to action that encouraged listeners/ readers to vote. Throughout the sharing, Claudia was very focused on

giving everyone the opportunity to share their writing, inviting members to share by name. She

sometimes forgot to prompt feedback from the group members about a member's piece and

moved right into inviting more people to share what they wrote. As she asked members one by

one if they have anything they'd like to share, some of those who didn't remarked that they were

grateful for her facilitation and learned a lot. For example, in response to Claudia's invitation,

Echo said,

> I'm just here to support you, [Claudia]. I'm sorry that I'm late. But I also feel lost right now, I just saw a lot of pictures and been writing. And I'm just like, you know, let me just sit and listen tonight, because I have no idea what's happening, so don't mind me, I'll just react to things.

In response to this, Claudia gave an overview of her meeting and an orientation to the links to

her sources that I'd shared in the chat on her behalf. At his invitation to share, Arthur, who was

undergoing chemotherapy for pancreatic cancer but showed up to support Claudia, responded,

> No, I did not write anything. Just exhausted and really just mentally out of it. But my thoughts on seeing the women marchin' and the thought that came to me is that we have a long history of struggling in this country and that's pretty much it. But I do appreciate your research [Claudia] and doin' that. A lot of information I didn't know about. So thank you, and everybody else who wrote and shared. Thank you.

I took this opportunity to point out that Claudia did an amazing job as our first member-

facilitator and complimented her bravery for going first. I also pointed out that it went off

without a hitch and invited the rest of the group to give her a round of applause. After that round

of applause and various echoes of my sentiment from members, Claudia remarked, "Thanks

guys, I felt like I was gonna jump out of my skin the whole time." Notably, Claudia took

advantage of the space and freedom to tailor her meeting to her own needs through her breathing

exercise, her lecture-style delivery of information, and member-specific invitations to share.

As the meeting came to a close, I clarified that future member-facilitators did not have to

engage in as much research as Claudia did (or any research!); they could share something they

already know a bit about or simply devise prompts for members to write to. This inspired other

members to ask more questions about facilitation. Echo asked where the announcements each week come from, and I clarified that I usually gather and give those but that's also a chance for others to share information with the group. Sol remarked that at some point, group members will have to learn the technical parts because the goal is for members themselves to continue the group without me. Claudia responded to this concern by saying, "You know, it's actually not that hard, [Sol]." Then, she went on to talk about the slides template and how members can "put in your own words, basically […] add whatever text you want." Claudia admitted that she didn't know how to add the pictures, so I helped with that and thanked me for it. She reiterated that "it's not really that hard," and I repeated that I'm here to help members as they get used to facilitating, including helping members share their screens from appropriate devices. Nods and smiles abounded in the Zoom, and I showed the facilitation calendar on my shared screen as I encouraged more people to sign up. Heaven was already signed up for next week, but there was room on the calendar at the end of November and throughout December for others to facilitate. Sol encouraged Dean to facilitate, but Dean was hesitant because he arrives to our meetings late because of work. I took this opportunity to demonstrate my commitment to supporting members in their facilitation by volunteering to start the meeting for him until he arrives. With this hurdle removed and with a promise from me to work with him on his meeting, Dean agreed. Joi signed up for the meeting after his before the meeting came to an end.

In hindsight, I recognize that in an effort to support Claudia's facilitation, I jumped in too much rather than allowing the meeting to take on a new structure under Claudia's leadership. For example, I helped facilitate the go around by prompting people to pick someone to go next and unintentionally not trusting that Claudia and members themselves would remember on their own. Later, I stepped too far back from facilitation during the sharing part of the meeting and did not

prompt Claudia to uphold one of the purposes of OWG, which is to be a space to gather feedback on writing projects. Now, group members also could have interjected to ask for feedback when Claudia began to move on without asking if they'd like feedback (and if so, what kind), but member-facilitation was a new experience for OWG members listening and participating, too, and they may not have known how or felt uncomfortable interrupting their peer and redirecting the conversation (yet). As I had been the lead facilitator of the group for quite a while now, it was hard for me to gauge when to step up and when to step back in order for the group and the meetings to reflect members' motivations and desires but also to help members remain true to the group's stated purposes. I took this reflection and awareness with me into the next member-facilitated meeting, led by Heaven the week after.

Heaven, who identifies as a child of God, mother, and writer, is the only member-facilitator to ever use the agenda template to facilitate one of our meetings, and in future meetings she has opted to use the slides template like other OWG members. During our planning discussion the weekend before her meeting, Heaven expressed hesitancy about facilitating despite my compliments to her on her topic, the Wampanoag Indians in honor of Thanksgiving. She shared that she doesn't like the way she talks because she got teased as a kid and she gets frustrated when listeners can't understand her as an adult; she wished she didn't need to talk to facilitate the meeting. I did my best to reassure her that the other members of the group would be there to support her and that I would be there to help, too. We pressed on, and I shared my screen to show Heaven how I added her go around question, activities, the links to the videos she sent me via email, and the prompts we brainstormed together to the agenda template. Despite the reassurance I offered and Heaven's excitement at sharing her topic and inviting a local author to

speak at our meeting, Heaven arrived to the meeting and said, "I hope only two people show up" while we waited for other members to arrive.

When Arthur asked why, Heaven explained again that "honestly, I don't like to talk as I was explainin' to Gabbi. And I don't know, basically, I don't like the way I talk." Arthur replied that he thought Heaven's accent was "cool," and both Heaven's 10-year-old daughter (who was present for the beginning of our meeting to support her mom) and I agreed. Heaven went on to say that she puts a lot of concentration into what she's saying or reading aloud in order to get people not to pay attention to how she's pronouncing various words. She'd rather they pay attention to what she's saying over how she's saying it. Heaven also shared that this contributes to why she likes writing more than talking. Throughout this conversation, other people arrived at the meeting, and I thanked Heaven for being brave with us and steered the conversation back to OWG by suggesting we get started. Heaven took it from there by introducing herself and her topic to the attendees. Then, she asked members her go around question: What's one writing victory and one writing struggle you experienced this week? The meeting had begun.

After the first person shared their response, I asked how we should take turns sharing. Heaven directed us to take a popcorn approach, saying "whoever wanna go next." After everyone had shared and I shared the meeting announcements (three publication opportunities members could submit their work for), Heaven introduced her guest speaker, a local novelist, who was just joining the meeting. The author, who knew me from other Venture programming, asked me what she was supposed to do, and I asked Heaven, who asked if she could give the group some insights on what to do if we have writer's block, suggestions for ways into writing. She finished her prompt with, "what makes you want to write?" The guest speaker's portion of our meeting lasted approximately 25 minutes. During that time, Sol asked about the difficulty

and costs of publishing a book, I asked about how research is involved in writing a novel, and Sol also asked about the difference between a literary agent and an editor. The author shared with us about how thinking of writing as decision-making can sometimes help with writer's block; the importance of writing not to get rich and famous, but for the love of the process of writing more than the outcome of writing; the role of interviewing stakeholders and experts in writing novels; and the importance of talking to other writers, especially when writing is hard or when reaching out to agents and publishers. As the author shared her writing wisdom with us, members nodded in agreement, took notes, and thanked her for her answers. After she left, Arthur remarked, "that was nice," and others nodded and commented aloud in agreement. I asked, "what's next?" and Heaven again took the lead by introducing the next item on her agenda, which I began screen-sharing again.

Heaven began, "I will be talking about Thanksgiving and the main focus will be on the Wampanoag Indians." Then she explained the impetus of her research, which was wanting to know why Thanksgiving was so special. Heaven shared that she learned Thanksgiving is "the annual national holiday in the US and Canada celebrating the harvest and other blessings," and went on to share the history of its official status as a national holiday. Then, she transitioned to a focus on how Native Americans, and specifically the Wampanoag Indians, celebrate the harvest and care about the earth. She chose two YouTube videos to show, one that introduced the Wampanoag way of living and how members of the tribe keep those traditions alive today and one that took a more serious and honest approach to explaining the Wampanoag Indians and Thanksgiving. After I played these for the group, Heaven said,

> So after lookin' at that, I have a couple of writing questions. Answer them if you want, you don't have to answer all of them. The first one is, if you were to meet a Wampanoag Indian, what kind of conversation would you have? What would you bring up and not want to, and want to avoid? If you were to invite them to Thanksgiving, what would it be like? Write in the voice of a

Wampanoag Indian. Or continue to write whatever you was writin'. And this would be about 20 minutes.

I followed up with the exact time we would return from writing to share and give feedback. Heaven's writing prompts and 20-minute time allotment was projected on the screen during writing time.

Importantly, Heaven continued to facilitate this meeting with primarily only technological help from me. After my initial prompting of Heaven for specific directions during the go around and when her guest speaker arrived at the meeting, Heaven needed no other prompts or assistance from me as facilitator. In fact, when we returned from writing, she gave the time available and an open-ended invitation to share that reminded the group of our norms. She said, "For the next 20 minutes, who would like to share? But before you share, please let us know what type of feedback would you like." Again, these prompts and reminders were on her agenda that was shared via my screen, but Heaven seemed less wholly nervous than Claudia was and seemed to be more cognizant of and intentional about the differences between a class and Our Writing Group. Heaven was able to strike more of a balance between teaching others what she learned about Thanksgiving and the Wampanoag Indians and centering the writing and sharing and feedback purposes of OWG. I did my best to support Heaven in striking that balance by asking questions and deferring to Heaven from the very beginning. In turn, Heaven did her best to support the other writers in the group.

For example, after the first person shared (Claudia) and feedback was given, Heaven prompted, "Anyone else would like to go? It don't have to be about my presentation, it could be whatever you wrote or was writin'." This enabled Sol to feel comfortable sharing about an instance of racism she'd been turning over in her head and had tried to write about during our meeting. Her piece aimed to sort through "so much feelings," and Sol thanked Heaven for asking

a question she also asked about the meaning of Thanksgiving: "It's like what we're really celebrating, you know, like, if we go back in history it's like this, como se dice, massacre, like killing of millions of Indians." Afterwards, I shared a piece about a Thanksgiving memory before our time was up. I prompted the group to give Heaven a round of applause, and Sol remarked, "Thank you so much. That was wonderful." I let the members know that I would facilitate the next week as a research and reflection week and that Sol was signed up to facilitate after that. The meeting ended with smiles and goodbyes.

Viewing these initial meetings with African American civil rights activist Ella Baker's teach-learn-lead praxis (Parker), I see the writing group operating as a "free space" where members offer personal expertise by "question[ing] commonsense understandings" (Parker 25) of writers, writing, and writing groups, as well as where members demonstrate leadership by "negotiat[ing] a group identity and establish[ing] group rules" (Highberg et al. 25) together in ways that honor individual and group literacy desires. As the initial foundation-building meetings and these two first member-facilitated meetings indicate, while I provided a general structure for OWG meetings, participants have taken advantage of opportunities to exercise greater agency and leadership over the group, moving it away from the class-like structure of the pilot group and towards a collective. That is, the creation of the statement of purpose, feedback policies and procedures, as well as the opportunities to facilitate group meetings on topics of their choice have encouraged a more multidirectional exchange between OWG members rather than the more unidirectional exchange that characterized the meetings of the pilot group.

For instance, both Claudia and Heaven's meetings questioned commonsense understandings— of voting rights and the struggle for equal rights among groups of people in the United States in Claudia's meeting and of the accurate history of Thanksgiving and how the

Wampanoag Indians continue to pass on their way of life in Heaven's meeting. In turn, the writing shared in those meetings about those topics challenged the idea that one's vote doesn't make a difference and sorted through complex feelings about the history around and present day celebrations of the Thanksgiving holiday. Claudia and Heaven facilitated their meetings in ways that allowed OWG to highlight their interests and questions as individuals and that helped members learn new information, all while providing space, time, and support for OWG members to write about something new or their own stories. And these meetings are characteristic of other member-facilitated meetings of Our Writing Group. After some encouragement both from me and other group members and with some support, all but three of thirteen total members volunteered to facilitate group meetings throughout the 2020-2021 academic year, with some members facilitating more than once. Five volunteers facilitated meetings during Fall 2020, and seven members facilitated meetings in Spring 2021, with Heaven facilitating for a second time and Sol facilitating two more times that semester. With each successive meeting facilitated by OWG members, the writing group's identity as a *collective* that values community, leadership, efficacy, participation, expertise, and a sense of family was further solidified. Furthermore, its policies and procedures that promote asset-based and self-directed learning were further established, especially as I made more and more conscious efforts to step back and encourage OWG members to make the group their own as well as prioritized collective, democratic decision-making by members themselves about the group by prompting members to bring their ideas for OWG to our meetings for all members to have an opportunity to weigh in and decide on changes and additions together (I share some examples of this in the next chapter).

Ella Baker believed that "strong people don't need strong leaders" (Parker 85), and the participatory structure of OWG aimed to "create space for their [OWG members'] motivations to

drive" the writing group (Parker 90). The structures and materials I developed aimed to honor

and elevate the expertise and views of the members throughout the process of (re)creating Our

Writing Group, a process that included "tenaciously participative decision-making that tilt[ed]

toward" the expertise of the writers in the group, especially since it was their personal writing

development and desires at stake (Parker 91). The participative structure of OWG made room for

members to realize and respond to what they want to know and share with regard to writing—

their literacy desires. Thus, in addition to those described above, OWG members designed and

executed meetings about meditation, implicit bias, storytelling, self-actualization, humor, games,

the ego, songwriting, and character development, to name a few. In response, group participants

never failed to encourage other member-facilitators, thank them for sharing their interests with

the group, and remark about the rich variety of topics addressed each week. Additionally, after

Arthur led a meeting about meditation, the group collectively decided that short mindfulness and

meditation exercises would be a helpful grounding practice with which to begin our meetings.

Thus, we added that practice to our weekly meetings. And Arthur credits Dean for even getting

him to facilitate, saying "[Dean] fired me up to facilitate. I wasn't even gonna, I was on a whole,

my attitude was on a whole, I'm just gonna sit back and chill out." Other ways that OWG

members demonstrate leadership of the writing group is through bringing publishing

opportunities to share with the group, such as local writing contests and literary magazines

accepting submissions, and requesting topics for meetings, such as to learn about how to

compose sonnets and haikus or suggesting topics guest speakers can speak about. While

members of OWG requested meeting topics during the pilot version of the group, their requests

for topics situated me as teacher; however, during the 2020-2021 academic year, their requests

for topics are taken up increasingly by one another as they brainstorm ideas to facilitate their

own meetings and suggest types of guest speakers to invite to OWG meetings. As a result, the

group is increasingly run for and by members themselves rather than relying predominantly on

me as a writing instructor.

While facilitation allowed members to exercise more agency over OWG, it may have

served to provide *too much* inspiration. During individual interviews, the majority of

interviewees shared that they mostly wrote in response to the prompts given by their peers over

working on their own projects. To be fair, group members specifically joined OWG to be

inspired to write, and many members reported finding the prompts especially helpful: Song

shared that they're helpful because they're "an assignment," highlighting a continuing need to be

almost tricked into writing for some participants; interestingly, though, Echo shared that the

prompts provided an "escape" from the writing homework assigned in the Lasting Venture

introductory composition course she was taking at the same time, indicating that this need to be

tricked into writing was not shared by all OWG members (though she had "real" assignments in

the course she was taking to fill such a need); Sol shared that prompts make writing easier for her

in general.

Nonetheless, a greater balance between inspiration to make progress on their own writing

projects and inspiration to simply write would be more ideal. Instead, members seemed to want

to show support to their peers through responding to the prompts they came up with. As Dean

shared,

> It makes more sense to me that I reply to the prompts. And kind of like, show respect, I guess to
> the speaker or presenter about writing something that they are talking about it and showing them
> that like, you know what I'm saying, I got something from what you said. And here is my rebuttal
> to what you have been saying. So it's kind of like an open conversation, I guess.

Only three interviewees (of nine) shared that they sometimes worked on their own projects

during group writing time. Joi said that she mostly worked on her children's books and poetry

during OWG meetings. Miz shared that she wrote in response to a combination of prompts and her own day, depending on how she was feeling upon arrival to an OWG meeting; specifically, she said,

> I mostly have used the prompts. And I think it's a great idea to say that we can work on something we were working on because there has been one moment or a few moments that I've showed up and it was kind of like the frustrations of everyday life. But I brought that with me, and in my head it has blocked me from writing. So I kind of just dug up something. Yeah, I feel like sometimes it's easier to have those prompts. Just because it gets me thinking.

The sentiment about the option to continue writing their own story/ stories being nice but that the prompts were sometimes even nicer was shared by Claudia, too:

> Yeah, it was a mixture of both [the prompts and her own story]. Like, sometimes I wouldn't be in the mood to write about my story. So I would write something else, generally having to do with the prompt, or like, you know, what we had talked about prior to that point. I don't know, the facilitators did an excellent job in picking something that inspired me to write, so I tried to, like, stick with what they were doing because they put, you know, effort into making, you know, their stuff interesting. And I want to, you know, let them know that I appreciated what they did. And that, you know, you can pull something out of nothing when you're a writer.

In a sense then, responding to the prompts given by member-facilitators was a way to say something like 'I see you, and I appreciate you and your efforts' among the writers in OWG, and that sense of camaraderie and appreciation proved more important (and perhaps inspiring) than working on their own writing projects. This is not to say that members did not sometimes share their own work that did not correspond to the prompts given; in fact, Claudia, Joi, and Sol did so many times. However, the (unspoken) norm of group meetings was definitely a positive disposition toward writing for writing's sake. As such, the ways in which members of OWG participated in meetings— whether they were facilitating or writing or both— still encouraged them to write for their own personal economical, social, political, and/ cultural purposes, an intention behind the incorporation of participatory pedagogies in OWG. Furthermore, Claudia's comment about the prompts providing opportunities to practice "pulling something out of

nothing" as a writer indicates that rising to the challenges of writing about new topics each meeting helps her *feel* like a writer.

When guest speakers attended our meetings, such as published authors and local creative writing professors, OWG writers took great advantage of these meetings by asking thoughtful and practical questions of those guests with regard to the publishing process, composing query letters, developing a publication history, submitting work to literary magazines and contests, and overcoming rejection. In her interview, Joi mentioned that meetings facilitated by special guests were among her favorites because she learned about different opportunities to get her writing out there. By inviting guest facilitators with tangible experiences learning about the publishing process, finding inspiration to write, and continuing to submit their writing even after rejections from editors and the like, OWG resists the literacy myth and "the logics of neoliberalism [... that] focus on the 'potential' of a happier future [...] if [writers] just work hard enough" and ignore the material realities of these writers' literate experiences (Parker 78, citing Eliasoph). As the guest speaker who Heaven invited shared, "You know, if there's one thing you can take away from this is just, like, know that it's really hard. And for every book you see in the library, by the time you see a book, it looks so easy. It's not easy for anybody to write a book."

Developing awareness and expertise of the realities of life as a professional writer/ author (such as the persistence in the face of repeated rejections needed to get published or win a writing contest) through listening to and asking questions of writers who make their living by writing and teaching writing means that OWG writers can decide for themselves if that's a goal they want to pursue (and some OWG participants do!). Additionally, it makes clear that publication and literary fame may not follow participation in Our Writing Group, and hard work is not all it takes to publish one's writing. As a result, participants are clarifying all the things

that need to go right for a piece of writing to be formally published and determining how publication, then, should inform their sense of writerly self-efficacy— feeling confident about one's ability to take on various writing tasks. Importantly, the structure of OWG simply presents opportunities for members to gain more confidence around the writing they produce and the processes they take to produce it because all members are considered writers and all the writing processes we share during meetings 'count' as writing. The writing produced during group meetings is treated as socially important texts, as important manifestations and representations of the identities and values members want to put out into the world, as will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter about sharing and feedback.

Ella Baker's "leadership as teaching and learning" praxis (Parker 79) maps directly onto the structure of OWG, and the challenges that Communications Professor Patricia S. Parker identifies in Baker's praxis— such as finding "ways to address the problem of hierarchy in the relationships between outside organizers and researchers [in this case, me] and people in vulnerable communities [in this case, the low-income, un- or alternatively-credentialed, predominantly BIPOC alumni of Venture who join OWG]"— are attended to through the practices and values of participatory pedagogies, revealing OWG to be a sustainable and flexible writing group model. The structure of OWG meetings facilitated by members usually followed the same format/ set of activities as in the meetings described above (see Appendix 8 for a breakdown of the topics and activities of member-facilitated OWG meetings), which is still class-like. However, and very importantly, there is no hierarchical structure with a single teacher/ facilitator leading every meeting like in a class(room). As Dean shared in his individual interview,

> ...it [OWG] doesn't feel like a class. But it feels like a spinoff of [Venture], which I think is cool. Because then you don't get really graded for this. You just kind of get, like, appreciation from it if you appreciate what it is. So you get what you give in. And that's the biggest part of it.

I take this to mean that the biggest part of OWG for Dean is the collective leadership of it—"you get what you give in." The shared teaching and learning that's built into the structure of OWG does help members feel like leaders and writers. In the words of an OWG member in a collaborative field text from March 2021,

> Yessir, OWG definitely inspires me to be a leader because it inspires me to lift and encourage my fellow writers! It's healthy leadership because everybody has a role to play and nobody is more important than the next so we all have room to grow and inspire.

The co-facilitation of OWG by members themselves makes it so that everyone in the group has an opportunity to craft the writing group in their own vision— for example, "to use prompts that maybe others wouldnt think about," as another OWG member wrote in the same collaborative field text with regard to what they like about facilitating OWG meetings. Thus, facilitating meetings encourages OWG writers to "see their own power" and the success of each meeting proves the "Bakerian principle, 'strong people don't need strong leaders'" (Parker 85). In the words of Sol, "now that we can contribute, that everybody contributes, [it] feels more like our group, you know?"

That strength and power translates into the writing OWG writers produce during and because of group meetings. And the writing they produce cannot be separated from their purposes for writing. That is, when asked to reflect on their participation in the group, the vast majority of participants share the desire to use their writing to help others feel understood, feel loved, and feel better. Members' reasons or purposes for writing all fall into six categories: effecting change, entertaining others, healing themselves and others, informing themselves and others, inspiring others, and leaving something behind in the world. For example, in a collaborative field text from November 2020, one member shared,

> I would love my writing to illustrate the issues in the mental health system in the United States, especially for poor people. I would hope that it would help different institutions create better programs, and specifically adhere to laws about people with disabilities, as well as human rights in general.

In that same collaborative field text, two more members shared that they hope their stories facilitate "healing." Members share a belief in writing as a tool for self-expression and a tool to "create a better world." As another member wrote, writing is "sharing an experience, or experiences, that others may or may not be able to relate to, but can enjoy, and maybe learn something from it, or make them think about something in a different way." To make good on these beliefs (that is, to act on them), OWG members are demonstrating greater openness to taking writing risks, as indicated by members trying new genres and writing about new topics during meetings. For example, Arthur explained that OWG "sparked me to write again, because I wasn't even writing. I wasn't writing [...] I wasn't writing. And then I got to thinking about it, and more times I kept coming and kept coming, I was like, I want to have something to say, I want to share." And as a result, Arthur is writing his life story and sharing his journey through cancer treatment as a Black man in the American Midwest. Furthermore, members also take writing risks by submitting to various publications. For example, at least two OWG members submitted children's books to a call from Scholastic for BIPOC kid lit authors in December 2020. Additionally, at least two members also submitted work to a local literary review that same month, and ten of the eleven total members submitted poems, essays, and/or short stories to the two issues of OWG's publication during the 2020-2021 academic year. I delve more deeply into the writing OWG members publish in Chapter 5.

A big part of the writing risks OWG members are taking can be credited to having protected time to write as well as trusted folks to share their writing with before going public with it, key pieces of OWG's flexible and sustainable writing group model. Many of the writers'

least favorite part of OWG, according to collaborative field texts, is that the group meets only

once a week. Furthermore, in their individual interviews, Claudia shared that she writes the most

on Mondays because of OWG and Sol shared that finding time to write is what makes writing

hard. Sol continued on to clarify that OWG is the only time she has to write and pretty much the

only time she writes with others (except during the summer when she writes with her kids to

spend time together and prevent 'summer melt'). This corresponds to what she wrote in her

writer's memo for a piece she submitted to the *OWG Oracle*: "...as a writer, it is easier to write in

a community than alone. Also, I know that something that someone commented in the group

helped me to write this story and I know very well that the simple fact of having the specific time

to write is crucial for me." Beyond the time to write, this excerpt from Sol's writer's memo

demonstrates that the practice of writing in community with others and discussions that ensue

during group meetings are important parts of OWG. For instance, when asked about what she

especially likes about OWG in my individual interview with Song, she shared, "The different

styles that we have, because we have all these people that have different personalities, and I love

it [...] Everybody has different styles. So you get these different people, and then they have you

writing differently." This mirrors what someone else wrote in a collaborative field text:

> OWG affects how and what I write by keeping the brain in my head from turning into mashed
> potatoes. OWG challenges me to write differently and about different topics almost every week
> and this keeps me sharp so I don't slip too deep into familiarity. It also affects what I write outside
> of OWG because it gives me confidence as a writer so when I pick up a pen and paper in my
> spare time I have the trust in myself to know i'm not hot garbage because the [group] appreciates
> what I bring to the table just as much as I appreciate what the [group] brings to the table.

Similarly, Miz shared,

> Yeah the group helps me. I mean I'll be like, so inspired off of what I wrote. Like, what?! I wrote
> that! What?! Let's see what else! And then I'm like, so inspired to, like, pass it on as a message
> not boast about it, but like, look, look at what this, these works can do for you or what have you.
> [...] And so writing about that, learning through my writing, bouncing it off of all of you guys.

[...] And so like a lot of cool ideas just come from everywhere. And it, like, it puts layers back into my imagination about, like, the possibilities of just whatever.

Thus, the act of writing regularly and opportunities to engage in all facets of the writing process— from invention to publication— in community with others helps members of OWG more confidently self-identify as writers and enhance their writerly self-efficacy in ways that are meaningful to each individual member and that help them negotiate between writing for economic gain and writing for writing's sake independently. In fact, in response to the questions, "Do you feel like a writer? Why or why not?" the majority of the writing group members interviewed— seven out of nine— remarked that participation in OWG is at least in part what helps them feel like a writer, citing the camaraderie, feedback/ sharing, and regular writing practice as key elements of feeling like a writer that the group provides. As one writer wrote in a collaborative field text from October 2020, "This group helps me in many ways like getting feedback, inspiring me, and feeling part of something important. It is a good tool to keep writing every week."

The teach-learn-lead model that can be seen in the group's structure makes it so that OWG members "hold up each other up while another OWG peer is writing, leading, or reading…," making it so that "we are all a group of individual, collective and rising leaders." The group helps members "learn from others and [... grow] together to become better writers." In the words of another writing group member in a collaborative field text, OWG helps them feel like a leader even when they're not confident enough to take the lead because "I am not always sure what I can present that is helpful to others but I think the having the opportunity to do a presentation help us to be more confident and get in the leadership mood." This is because OWG is a space where "from start to finish we are allowed to articulate our feeling," a space that "makes room for errors," where members can "be real, to write [their] truth even if it is not a

pretty story." As a result, members of OWG are becoming more and more comfortable with facilitating meetings, with crafting OWG to align with both their individual and collective literacy desires.

Being a Part of Something Flexible & Sustainable

The number of member-facilitated meetings has steadily increased since Fall 2020 with five meetings facilitated that semester, six meetings facilitated in Spring 2021, and eight meetings facilitated by members in Fall 2021. Moreover, meetings during Summer 2021 were facilitated entirely independently by members. That is, whereas I normally used my Upper Midwest University-sponsored Zoom account to host OWG meetings during the academic year, meetings during that summer were hosted via Google Meet by Dean Friends and members took turns facilitating meetings on Mondays from late May through late August. I did not attend these meetings except for the last few during August. My institution-sponsored Zoom account meant that OWG meetings during the academic year could be hosted uninterrupted by time limits, and members would stay online during writing time. However, due to the 40-minute meeting time limit of Dean's non-institution-sponsored Google Meet account, members wrote offline for 20-35 minutes between the first half of the meeting (which included a go around, meditation, and topic introduction with prompts) and the second half of the meeting (which included time to share and give and receive feedback). Furthermore, members met via two Google Meet links each week since they could not re-use the link from the first half of the meeting. These technical limitations did not deter members of OWG from meeting every week throughout the summer and writing in community together. This is reflective of members' desire to be, in the words of a writer in a collaborative field text, "a part of something important," especially as the COVID-19 pandemic augmented isolation and decreased opportunities to connect with others. As members

shared in collaborative field texts from throughout the academic year, "OWG has been a great experience for me overall during the pandemic. I find a great community within the group, we laugh, we cry, we get angry...together," and "I also like being able to connect with people who I enjoy being around, even if it's just through a computer," and "OWG is a framework within which I can feel connected to other people who have had the [Venture] experience of self actualization through finding oneself in different writing mediums. I feel safe to be myself and know that most of us are trying to bring our best selves to the table. For me the writing is just an excuse to be connected with everyone." Continuing to meet on their own despite difficulties imposed by technology demonstrates members' commitments to connecting with each other and writing in community. It also demonstrates a shared conception of writing as an important tool of self-expression and interpersonal connection. OWG members feel like writers when they're in community with one another.

Meeting independently over the summer meant that I needed to find an asynchronous way to provide members with the slides and agenda templates each week. Thus, I developed a new calendar format that also included links to slides and agendas for each week, rather than having one template that members made copies of via google slides (this make-a-copy method was only accessible to some members while it was confusing and difficult for others who did not have great facility with the google suite of programs). The calendar contained the dates of each meeting, a space to sign up as facilitator and preview their topic, and links to the agenda template (which still followed the make-a-copy method) and the slides template (which led to a unique template for each meeting date). Members used this calendar diligently to organize OWG meetings, let people know who was facilitating when, and access their materials each week— demonstrating even more agency over the group than during the previous academic year with

me. Additionally, I developed an OWG point-people weekly checklist for Dean to refer to throughout the summer that provided suggestions for how to support the continuation of the group (see Appendix 9). This was followed less exactly, as Dean usually sent out the meeting link the day of each meeting and did not reach out to facilitators and members during the week. Similar to the first member-facilitated meeting of OWG back in Fall 2020, this was another moment where I seemed to be doing too much and members themselves exerted agency over the group to make it what they needed; Dean had it covered. Sending out the meeting link the day of each meeting worked out fine, and members were eager to help out and facilitate on the topics they were excited about and thus needed no reminders. The only issue I was contacted about over the summer with regard to OWG meetings was the Google Meet time constraint, for which OWG members had already figured out how to work around and continued to use that two-link method when I didn't have another solution to offer.

The success and challenges of OWG's summer meetings gathered helpful information that we used in Fall 2021 to develop a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to guide the relationship with OWG and Venture. As I continued to think about what OWG would need to sustain itself and meet members' needs and desires beyond my graduate tenure at Upper Midwest University, an MOU seemed like the best way to secure what OWG would need to continue to grow and thrive without me, such as a premium or university-sponsored Zoom account, support with recruiting new members, and publication and performance support. As I had previewed to members that this would be a next step, I encouraged them to make a note of what would make OWG better and easier to sustain throughout the summer. The biggest item that came out of that experience was the need for an online meeting platform that could accommodate the length of our meetings. During Fall 2021, we developed such an MOU through

a meeting I facilitated that introduced what an MOU is and what purpose it could serve and shared a draft of an MOU that I had begun as a requirement of the humanities center grant we had received the year prior. To this draft, we added the importance of an online meeting platform so that we could continue to include our members outside of the state (Claudia and Song) even if conditions eventually permitted the group to meet in person in a Venture classroom space in the future. Members also added the importance of having regular access to a trained writing center instructor at OWG meetings after I graduated and perhaps could no longer regularly attend. The MOU was supposed to be a way that OWG could maintain the autonomy the group enjoyed (not being subsumed by Venture or subjected to any of Venture's agendas, especially with regard to literacy myth co-optation by Venture's need for donors and the university's need to be seen benefiting the larger community) but also secure the support it needed to be a collective run for and by Venture alumni. In addition to the agency over the group granted through the incorporation of participatory pedagogies into its structure and function, crafting this MOU together was another way that OWG members exercised their agency over OWG's flexibility and sustainability for the future.

The MOU was not received this way by the co-directors of Venture. Because no other program under the umbrella of Venture— Lasting Venture, Venture Junior, Venture Unbound— had an MOU to guide its relationship with the core Venture course or its non-profit funds, Venture's co-directors were unfortunately confused and slightly offended by our document. My main point of contact with Venture, Dr. Phillip Handel, was the first to take a look at our MOU after we finalized it at the end of Fall 2021. He suggested that we not call it a memorandum of understanding because that would need to be shared with and approved by Venture's board of directors, so perhaps we could change what the document was called to a Partnership

Framework. Additionally, he noted that the document sounded formal and academic and unlike the members of Our Writing Group; he said it sounded like it was "ghost-written" because my name did not appear on the original document. Dr. Handel suggested that we include more member voices in the document as well before sharing it with Venture's founder and other co-director, Dr. Stephanie Robertson.

Dr. Handel's comments indicated a different understanding of a memorandum of understanding from ours at OWG: he indicated that it would need to be reviewed and approved by Venture's board of directors because an MOU was a legally binding document and would need to be signed by the co-directors. However, an MOU is actually a *nonbinding* agreement that expresses parties aligned intent or will (Adobe). This also contradicted his actions the year before when he signed the MOU crafted to receive the humanities center grant to support Our Writing Group. There was no discussion about getting the board of directors to approve that MOU; Dr. Handel simply suggested some edits about Venture offerings and supervised activities for children rather than childcare and signed it. Furthermore, his comments about the style and tone of the document being formal, academic, and therefore unlike the members of the group ("ghost-written") seemed to indicate a belief that members of OWG couldn't have written the document as well as a lack of respect for or understanding of what the document was trying to do— ensure the sustainability and autonomy of OWG. An MOU is a formal document, even if nonbinding. And during the OWG meetings where we worked on this document together, members indicated that they liked the "professional," "official," and "formal" style and tone of the document. With these comments, Dr. Handel almost seemed to be saying that if members' voices showed up more in the document, then the MOU would become seemingly less legitimate or official. I understood this feedback as an attempt (even if unintentional) to make the document

less clear and therefore less binding by taking out the academic research cited therein and adhering less closely to the genre conventions of an MOU. I see similarities between this interaction and what Dr. Bianca Baldridge, an expert in community-based education and critical youth work, writes about in *Reclaiming Community: Race and the Uncertain Future of Youth Work*. She exposes how the "conflict and struggle for control and power" in the nonprofit industrial complex undermine grassroots organizations and social justice efforts because "ideals and expectations for programs are often mismatched" (Baldridge 135). Because no other part of Venture had ever had an MOU to guide its relationship with the Venture program, this MOU was unexpected; OWG's ideal to be an autonomous collective of Venture alumni that still receives support from Venture but is not required to adhere to Venture's engagement with the literacy myth or directly susceptible to its nonprofit precarity was mismatched with Venture's idea that OWG was already solidly under its programmatic umbrella. As Dr. Handel asked during our discussion, It's part of the Venture program, isn't it?

I explained to Dr. Handel that this MOU was a gift from me to OWG to ensure its maintenance beyond me. While still an Upper Midwest University graduate student and a conduit between OWG and Venture and the university, I wanted to leverage my position to secure whatever was needed to ensure OWG's future when it possibly did not have such a program-university- group conduit. Thus, I wrote this *for* OWG but *with* their input and approval along the way. Additionally, we were working on getting this document finalized and signed now so that I could continue to take steps back from OWG and assist members in using the support provided through Venture and be available to troubleshoot any issues that arose. Nonetheless, I took Dr. Handel's feedback to the group. Members maintained that they liked how the MOU sounded and its academic style, but they were willing to change its name to a

Partnership Framework. Additionally, so that more of their individual voices showed up in the document, we added testimonials from individual members that explained how each deliverable we were asking for would help OWG thrive. Finally, we added a note to the beginning of the document that explained that as the founder of OWG, I wrote the majority of the document on behalf of Our Writing Group with their input and approval throughout the process.

With these changes made, Dr. Handel shared the document with Dr. Robertson, Venture's founder and his co-director, at the beginning of the Spring 2022 semester. As far as I understand, he did not share any context with Dr. Robertson, such as how the group had been working on the document for months and the changes we made to the document in response to his previous feedback. Thus, Dr. Robertson had questions about "the impetus behind getting a document like this together and signed" and if the group worried it would "not get the support it needs" from Venture (personal communication). I explained:

> The impetus behind getting this document together and signed is so that the university/ [Venture] support OWG needs is in place without me as bridge/ liaison. It was suggested as a way to ensure that OWG is sustainable beyond me by my mentor at [the humanities center]. If everything is in place, we can see how it works while I'm still around and attending meetings next year and troubleshoot anything that comes up. This is also to help it not fizzle due to not knowing what it needs or how to get it (hence the annual review of the document mentioned in the document). (personal communication)

Dr. Robertson responded by reducing our document to a two-sentence email; she wrote:

> Maybe we can accomplish the goals of the OWG group if [Phillip] and I send an email to the group stating something along these lines: "[Venture's] co-directors pledge to try to support the continuation of OWG as an exciting way for alumni to share their writing and to gain more autonomy over their voices. This support may include helping to find, sponsor, and/or fund an online platform (e.g. [UMU] Zoom account) and/or in-person space (such as the [Venture classroom space]) for OWG meetings, spreading the word to alumni both to recruit new members and to find audiences for readings, suggesting guests, considering budget requests, and providing (when asked) editorial suggestions for OWG online or print publications." We can't sign any legal-sounding document or commit to things like providing childcare, but I think an email including something like my simple two sentences above would make it clear that we want this group to continue. Suggestions are welcome! (personal communication)

In a phone conversation later the same day with Dr. Handel about Venture weekly tutoring, I brought up the reduction of months of work to two sentences. Dr. Handel explained that he believed this was not Dr. Robertson's intention and that she did not have that context. Upon Dr. Handel's explanation, I realized that he had passed along this document to Dr. Robertson without context or explanation as well as without describing the feedback and discussions Dr. Handel and I had about the document the previous semester. Thankfully, Dr. Handel did give Dr. Robertson more context after our phone conversation, and she sent another email acknowledging the time and effort that went into the document. She also wrote, "now that we understand it [the context], we'll be happy to sign with a few tweaks" (personal communication). These tweaks included adding more 'may' and 'can' language to the document, adding a version of her two sentences from the previous email communication to the end of the document, and a few sentence- and word-level changes. You can view the finalized Partnership Framework document that was signed by Venture's co-directors and representatives of OWG in February 2022 in Appendix 10.

The Partnership Framework document was inspired by OWG members' concerns over the sustainability of the writing group after I graduate. Members of OWG were ready and willing to lead the group, in large part thanks to increasing familiarity and confidence with facilitating meetings. For example, during our one-on-one interview, Arthur shared that facilitating his first meeting about meditation was inspiring:

> That was a- amazing. That was a skill that I, and I definitely moving forward in the future, definitely wanna do that a lot [...] Another great thing that's a blessing from you, from OWG, is that I know you talked about you know, when you done with school, and you was looking for someone to carry this on and into the future. And I definitely want to be one of those persons, if not the person to do that because I believe that this is my calling. And with your help, I'm sure that I definitely would, as long as my health keep being okay, that is something definitely I would love to do. And it'd be good to have somebody else's just in case I might get sick. Cuz you never know. [...] But I am, definitely want to be a part of that. In keeping this thing going. because

number one, I love. I love writing. And I love poetry and I just love the way how people express they self.

However, OWG members were concerned about how it would continue without my presence. As one member shared in a collaborative field text:

> Gabbi leading the group has been awesome, we couldn't have had a better person lead us into this process. I am really going to miss her positivity, laughter, and just her overall belief that we can become and are great writers. I plan to do whatever I can to help this group stay together, as well as welcome any other [Venture] Alumni that are interested in joining this fabulous group. Those are some HUGE clown shoes to fill, though.

Even after the very first member-facilitated meeting, as mentioned above, Sol remarked,

> I'm just thinking at some point, we will have to learn the technology part. But right now, you are here to present. Because I know that your goal is for us to continue this group without you, right? So I know that at some point, we'll probably have to know the technology. That enables whatever, this whole meeting, really.

Thus, the sustainability of the group was not only something I made clear from the beginning but also a concern that members wanted to address continually. The Partnership Framework was one way that I sought to listen to group members' concerns and desires and use them to guide the future of OWG. Furthermore, some of their literacy desires are reflected in their own words in that document, clarifying what it will take to make OWG sustainable and why.

The Partnership Framework built upon OWG's flexible structure that was inspired by participatory pedagogies and articulated here using Ella Baker's community engagement praxis. The guiding documents collaboratively composed and regularly reviewed and reapproved by OWG members and the open-ended nature of the OWG meeting format make it so that OWG is a place where all members can teach, learn, and/or lead according to their evolving literacy desires. In Sol's words during our interview, "I think it's very nice to have the different people presenting something different each day, each time. I think that was very helpful. I really, like that;" she credits OWG and Arthur for introducing her to meditation, something she's now "very

into." Additionally, she said, "I learned how to do a presentation, which I was very scared, but I did it." Thus, through OWG's flexible facilitation model, members learn "how to lead by gaining confidence through [their] writing and through [themselves]." The community of practice OWG provides, with its "consistency, inspiration and laughter" as another member wrote in a collaborative field text, reflects members' collective and individual interests, expertise, and desires by unconditionally believing in members' writing and leadership potential and making space for them to cultivate and wield that potential. At OWG meetings, writers self-direct their learning, value and utilize their previous experiences, and create knowledge that builds their capacities to solve problems, especially collectively.

Listening to writing group members and foregrounding their literacy desires—the aspirations members themselves develop for their writing processes and writing products that (hopefully) fly in the face of (or at least disregard or question) the status quo of axes of power— is built into the very fabric of Our Writing Group. As a result, OWG writers have been (and continue to be) deeply invested in crafting OWG's flexibility and sustainability since the very beginning of the Fall 2020 semester. However, the same cannot be said for the Venture course, understandably so. The Venture course is credit-bearing, and Our Writing Group is not; the Venture course aims to change its students' perceptions of and experiences with higher education and literacy, and Our Writing aims to build upon the literacy hope instigated by Venture to create opportunities for program alumni to take action with their writing; the Venture course necessarily adheres to academic and professional notions of success under a capitalist sponsorship model that requires the program to continually secure institutional and monetary support from Upper Midwest University and the surrounding community while Our Writing Group subscribes to wider, participant-determined notions of success. While OWG's practices

and routines intentionally strived to foster the agency of the group's participants, Venture's (necessary) engagement with the literacy myth and the program's nonprofit precarity— that is, its dependence on the good will and support of the university, its board of directors, its donors, and grantmaking agencies to continue to reduce barriers to higher education for low-income adults— seemed to have a limiting effect on OWG members' agency. Specifically, the partnership framework exchanges demonstrated the possible issues that can occur as a result of "misaligned expectations and mismatched ideology about the purpose" (Baldridge 173) of the literacy work with adult undergraduate writers that Venture does and that OWG does. The political implications of these issues are striking: in Venture, Dr. Robertson and Dr. Handel — two white, highly credentialed, one tenured and the other on the tenure track professors— decide what low-income, predominantly BIPOC Venture students' education looks like; they control the curriculum to a significant extent and propagate messages that the Venture course helps low-income adult students gain skills and become better people. Meanwhile, in OWG, members design their own curriculum to address and figure out for themselves what they need/ desire. And they do this really well. Yet, the debacle with the MOU is just one example where the careful and thoughtful decisions by members of OWG about what they need and desire as writers and leaders were doubted rather than trusted.

The doubt did not last, though. In an interview with Dr. Robertson a few months after the partnership framework was signed, I asked her about her reactions to the partnership framework. Dr. Robertson said "my first reaction is to worry about signing anything because I've been scolded [...] I've been told clearly that I can't sign. I have to get legal services to sign [...] And so I'm always very careful with anything that sounds legal." Clearly Dr. Handel's understanding of an MOU as a legal document was shared by Dr. Robertson, given her hesitation to sign anything

that even *sounds* legal. The fact that Dr. Robertson had been scolded or told not to sign anything

from administrators in her division gives greater context to her inclination to reduce the MOU to

a two-sentence email. She went on to say:

> […] once we got past some of that, I think the agreement to have in place something where
> students who are in the group can know they're supported is great. I was actually surprised that
> they weren't asking for more. Because we have, you know, a whole [Lasting Venture] program
> where we're helping so many students with the tuition and books and other expenses they have
> for going on in school or with other things besides school. So it falls neatly within that guideline.

Nonetheless, I do wonder about her comment indicating surprise that the members of OWG

didn't ask for more. Here again it seems to me, however positive or even benign the intentions

behind this comment are, the thoughtfulness and awareness of the members of OWG are being

underestimated. OWG members were careful about asking for only what they need for two

reasons: 1) out of consideration for all that Venture does for its students and alumni and not

wanting to direct funds away from perhaps more pressing needs, and 2) to not become too

dependent on Venture and instead maintain its autonomy.

This tendency to underestimate the members of OWG shows up again a few minutes later

in our interview when Dr. Robertson expressed continued concern over what will happen to

OWG after I graduate from my program—the express concern that drove the development of the

MOU. Dr. Robertson suggested having another conversation with me about what "the group

[would] be like without [me]," what it would "take to keep [me] involved in some way," and

"maybe help us set up a model that will work with things other than writing, too." And she

described that model as "both empowering and sustainable, yet manageable." At the same time

that Dr. Robertson doubts OWG members' ability to carry on leading the group without me, she

recognizes the promise of OWG as a model. When asked about the most meaningful part of

OWG from her perspective, she said, "The writing group is a pilot as to what could be done to

help keep our alumni encouraged to help them build that sense of community that they had while

they were in our program. And help them go on to kind of, uh, the next stage in their life." Overall, it seems that the efforts in the group to put equal stock into the experiences and expertise of both me—the writing studies PhD candidate—and the writers with whom I work— writers in their own right—were still a bit lost on Dr. Robertson. And this could be because Dr. Robertson hasn't and doesn't attend our meetings, so she can't *yet* truly understand how those important efforts tangibly manifest. I'm hopeful that this future conversation about the continuation of the group beyond my tenure at Upper Midwest University will help.

Importantly, OWG "is not only about writing. It's about writing, But it's so much more. And I need you to know that. […] And I think that this writing class in 2020 helped a lot of people, including myself, get through, get through." As Arthur indicates in the preceding quote, OWG is much more than writing and facilitation. The multiple avenues for participation in all aspects of group meetings that participatory pedagogies inspires in OWG makes the group a place where members learn about themselves as writers and leaders: where they're encouraged to take what they've learned about themselves, about life, about writing and share it with other writers and where they are encouraged to write about ideas old and new in more ways, for various audiences, to achieve diverse purposes— and feel supported and appreciated while doing so. Thus, the ways members of OWG take advantage of opportunities to lead the writing group and develop and share their expertise offer important contributions to understandings of literacy desires, especially those of adult undergraduate students. Members of OWG contribute to each other's critical understandings of literacy through the various aspirations they have for their writing processes and products, which help challenge uncritical understandings of literacy as adherence to comma rules (or White Mainstream English). An important way OWG members share their literacy desires that helps them *feel* like writers even more than facilitating and the

practice of writing is the sharing and feedback in which group members engage. The next chapter delves into how OWG members share their work and give and receive feedback in ways that build trust and help members feel a part of something bigger than themselves by contributing to a sense of the group as a loving and supportive family.

Chapter 4 - Sharing & Feedback: Becoming a Family of Writers

"And to know that I have support, and help on my, my, this writing journey, and what I want to do as far as writing is amazing. It's amazing, you know. **I recognize the blessings in it, you know, because and the opportunity, because I'm sure a lot of people who may be writers might not have the opportunity to express they writing before they submit it or, or have somebody proofread it or whatever.**"

- Arthur Nellan interview excerpt

"**Well, when I share my writing, I like the feedback. I feel like it makes me a better writer, it makes me to reflect on the things that the people point out. It helps me grow, definitely. And, but, also listening to other writers**, because, for example, there is a couple of people in the group that wrote with, they write with a lot of passion, and they use a vocabulary that is different than the one that I use. But it's beautiful. **And so it's just like, kind of like, wow, you know, like inspire me of like, I want to keep writing because I want to get to that level.** You know, or I want to keep writing because, yeah, I want to share something the same or, yeah."

- Sol Edad interview excerpt

Coming to Rely on One Another

March 9, 2020, was the last in-person meeting of Our Writing Group, but I didn't know it at the time. I'm sitting in the small back room at the Venture classroom space with Caress Cooper waiting for others to arrive. Caress is an especially eager OWG participant; a middle-aged Black woman who likes to participate in any and all things related to Venture, writing, and learning, she seems to pounce on these moments alone with me. She arrives early to wait for me, and she stays late after meetings are over to engage me in more conversation. So while we wait for the others, we decide to talk into the room rather than write into it since it was only us. I asked Caress what she wrote this week, if anything, and how it went. Caress' eyes lit up as she shared how "motivated" she was to add on to her "Love is Like" poem from last week and how "inspired" she was after talking to her boyfriend on the phone. As she demurely looked down at her piece of paper, she said that she was able to pull out the good things from a hard time— to

immerse herself in the "music" and "movement" of specific moments with her boyfriend in order to write.

This was all in response to feedback that Sol and I had given her about this poem last week. Last week, Caress' "Love is Like" poem was a reflection on her evolving relationship with her boyfriend, and she asked for feedback "on anything." So I encouraged her to describe specific memories and moments with her partner to add to the reflection and give readers more details to latch on to. Building on my suggestion, Sol suggested a deeper description of what it is like to be with her partner. During our discussion of her piece, Caress described her relationship as "atomic," and we encouraged her to think about describing the moment when they got back together and perhaps the tug-of-war in her mind when he apologized for his wrongdoings. Caress took notes while we spoke, and she said she would revise her piece for our next meeting. She warned us that it would be good and declared that her writing can be very "erotic."

Now Caress was eager to share just how much better her piece had become and the intense level of detail she had added. She described revising her poem as "the most beautiful part of her week." As she began reading, I noticed that her poem now began with many rich details and then the second half of the poem was less richly descriptive. As Caress read, Sol and Manuel arrived. After she finished reading, Caress said she was open to any and all feedback, so I shared with her what I noticed about the level of detail changing as the poem progressed. Manuel agreed with me and seemed a little uncomfortable— perhaps due to the poem's subject matter and perhaps due to just the nature of giving feedback on someone else's writing. Sol also agreed with my feedback, and then she added a suggestion to add more emotion to the piece. Sol pointed out that if Caress read this poem to her boyfriend, he might feel "used" because there's no mention of the deep feelings Caress feels when she's with him. Caress liked this idea a lot, though she

mentioned she already read a longer version of the poem to her partner. However, she wrote some notes and stated aloud her intention to revise again this week to make the second half more descriptive and add emotion to her piece. We moved on to hear from Manuel and Sol about what they had written that week and the meeting continued.

As I look back on this final in-person meeting as well as my field notes from the previous meetings in that small back room, I notice that I am almost always first to give a writer feedback after they've shared. It's almost as if I was afraid of any dead air between when they finish their piece and when they receive a comment; it's almost as if I was afraid of how other OWG members might relay their reactions to what their peer had just read; it's almost as if I felt a desperate need to model constructive feedback each and every time someone shared. But I also never chose giving and receiving feedback as a topic for one of our meetings. And in this pilot version of OWG, I was in primary control of those topics. Just as with facilitation of the writing group meetings, I rose to members' expectations for me to be the expert of the group without challenging or trusting them to be experts as well.

While many members of the pilot OWG group indicated that one of the reasons they joined was to get feedback on their writing, I also noticed that most members struggled to articulate what kind of feedback they desired. This might be a product of the feedback they received in the Venture course: Drs. Robertson and Handel provide detailed feedback to students in their Venture course—writing all over their homework and essays with reactions, suggestions, questions, and grammatical corrections. However, Venture students aren't necessarily asked what type of feedback they'd like to receive on their homework; this is largely assumed/ subsumed by the goals of the course and the particular assignment (discussed largely in Chapter 2). Thus, beyond help with grammar/ punctuation, members almost always welcomed any

feedback. Furthermore, most members sought feedback from me over other group members, as indicated at the first meeting when participants shared that they hoped to learn new things and get feedback from me specifically. Despite my encouragement for the group to be a space for us to rely on one another rather than just me, I didn't set up many opportunities for that to happen beyond opportunities to share.

For example, I encouraged writers who shared during group to specify what type of feedback they were looking for from the rest of the group. Recognizing that when other group members are mostly listening to writers read their work aloud and not seeing it on the page and they can't give much feedback on grammar/ punctuation, most group members resorted to saying they'd like "feedback on anything." Then, the feedback provided was largely positive, such as "I liked everything," which is wonderful but not very constructive. Rather than the writer pushing for more detailed feedback, it was me who encouraged listeners in the group to be more specific about what details they liked. Additionally, when the feedback provided was constructive, it was instigated by me first. Take for example Caress' piece about her "atomic" and tumultuous relationship: no group members had much to say about what could improve her piece or where she could take it further until I suggested that she "describe specific memories and moments with [him] rather than simply reflect." Only then did another group member, Sol, chime in to agree and suggest a "deeper description of what it is like to be with [him]." According to my observation notes, no one else offered (constructive) feedback beyond what they liked about the piece. While this pattern in soliciting and providing feedback might seem reasonable given that the writers were still getting to know one another after only six in-person meetings, I struggled as the facilitator to help strengthen OWG participants' ability to ask for what they wanted/ needed with regard to their writing and help strengthen their confidence to make suggestions without

hurting anyone's feelings or ruining the emerging camaraderie within the group. I also did not acknowledge and discuss with members what it meant for them (and writers in general) to share their writing, to be heard or read by others, and if/when that fact is simply enough.

Sharing writing from the week and giving and receiving feedback for all participants, which happened first during each meeting, took up almost half of our time together every week during the pilot version of OWG. This meant that, with the mini-lessons, we had no protected time to write during our group meetings. In turn, no protected writing time at OWG meetings led to some members not being able to write every week and coming to group with nothing new to share and feeling bad for it, which was counterproductive to the aims of the group to enhance writerly confidence for members. Without a sense of urgency or intention for the feedback asked for or given, practices of soliciting and providing feedback in OWG lacked specificity and direction, and members were not growing to feel qualified to give feedback to other members. With the clarified need for protected writing time during group meetings as well as more intentional training on giving and receiving feedback as writers, I asked, What is the role of sharing and feedback in writerly self-efficacy? And how can sharing and feedback practices help build and strengthen a sense of community within the writing group and avoid damage to writers' confidence and senses of safety and belonging in OWG?

This chapter aims to answer these questions by discussing how sharing and feedback have been theorized to impact "students' self-perceptions of their own writing competence" (Pajares & Valiante) in writing studies. Writerly self-efficacy is crucial for adult undergraduate writers because these writers have been uniquely vulnerable to the inequitable, marginalizing systemic conditions that impact educational and literacy developmental trajectories and inform hierarchical standards and benchmarks for writing achievement/ ability; that is, these writers

have been shown and told by arbitrary academic and writing-specific benchmarks that they are

not, in fact, (good) writers or students. They have been historically disenfranchised from literacy.

However, intentional sharing and feedback practices can help writers—and especially adult

undergraduate writers who have a lifetime of writing experiences to guide the writing they

produce and the feedback they give—recognize and talk back to the inequitable, marginalizing

systemic conditions that they've experienced in other academic and/or writing contexts.

Specifically, I take up Peter Elbow's teacherless writing class model because it is based on the

idea that writers "should learn how [their] words were actually experienced" by readers (78)

because it has at its foundation a sense of writerly competence, the idea that all pieces of writing

have an effect on readers. As such, sharing and feedback practices can help or hinder the growth

of adult undergraduate writers like those in OWG; thus, it's essential that these practices be

intentionally crafted to augment writerly self-efficacy and that writerly self-efficacy be seriously

considered in discussions of sharing and feedback more broadly.

In this chapter, I share how Elbow's teacherless feedback models served as the

foundation for the giving and receiving feedback training I facilitated for OWG as well as how

that training was taken up by Our Writing Group members over time. Using Tiffany Rousculp's

concept of "rhetoric of respect" and bell hooks' theorization of love, this chapter describes how

and why the sharing and feedback elements of OWG help members feel like writers because

these elements help build a sense of community within the group. I demonstrate how the group

operates with a rhetoric of respect and enacts love as an action in OWG meetings. At the end of

this chapter, I detail a discussion from an OWG meeting that demonstrates how the community

literacy practices of the Venture course serve as a foundation for OWG's implementation of our

feedback and sharing practices as loving and respectful, which deeply inform writers' confidence

and senses of safety and belonging in the group. Overall, this chapter showcases how OWG's feedback and sharing practices combined with the makeup of its membership of Venture alumni make OWG feel like a family of writers (rather than just a group of them).

Teacherless Feedback

Writing involves both social and cognitive processes. This is neatly summed up by the words of cognitive researchers Berninger and Winn: "The writing process is supported by a single system—the writer's internal mind-brain interacting with the external environment" (Berninger and Winn as cited in Wardle and Adler-Kassner 74). That "single system" includes the interaction of a "writer's motives with other spaces, traditions, values, ideologies, other humans, previous iterations of the genre, and the constraints and affordances of language itself" (Wardle and Adler-Kassner 71). Thus, the notion that writing is both social and cognitive intimates a connection between sharing and feedback— as social practices— and writerly self-efficacy— as a cognitive mechanism.

Writerly self-efficacy describes the confidence individuals have in their ability to successfully perform a writing task (Pajares & Valiante; Bruning and Kauffman). Given that both readers and writers play a role in the construction of meaning (Wardle and Adler-Kassner 75), a writer's success at achieving their purpose in a given writing task deeply depends on effectively reaching their audience; sharing and feedback practices can help enhance a writer's confidence that a piece of writing is doing the work they intend. Writerly self-efficacy is influenced by four sources: mastery experiences, identification of physiologi-cal and emotional states, social persuasion, and vicarious experiences (Bruning and Kauffman 161). All four of these sources of self-efficacy can be linked to sharing and feedback practices. The rest of this section will detail how sharing and feedback practices can help build writerly self-efficacy as

well as writing development. I cite heavily from Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle's *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies* throughout this section because it clearly and succinctly explains foundational ideas from the Writing Studies discipline about sharing and feedback in writing processes that members of OWG are coming to know through participation in the writing group. This section concludes by explaining how building writerly-self efficacy does not necessitate writing teachers but simply peer writers, revealing that writing groups can be a significant wellspring of writerly self-efficacy. This is part and parcel of the democratization of writing that Peter Elbow espouses in *Writing Without Teachers* and that OWG enacts in its flexible and inclusive practices, procedures, and policies.

One of the most significant sources of writing self-efficacy, according to writing researchers Roger Bruning and Douglas Kauffman, is "mastery experience;" they write: "writing successfully is the most basic route to developing writing self-efficacy" (Bruning and Kauffman 161). On the flipside, writing self-efficacy can also positively influence writing development/ writing success. As Dylan B. Dryer writes in his chapter, "Writing is (also always) a Cognitive Activity" from *Naming What We Know*, "the ways people think about approaching a writing task affect their experiences with it" (Wardle and Adler-Kassner 72), indicating that the more confidence a writer has going into and while completing a writing task, not only the better the writing product but also the more confident the writer becomes. This makes sense because as writers gain more and more writing experience, they learn how some writing skills, tools, and/or processes translate from one context to another and how others don't translate so easily. For instance, drafting and protecting writing time are writing practices that easily translate between tasks and contexts (Wardle and Adler-Kassner 60). On the other hand, disciplinary norms or rhetorical devices may not. The more writers write and read other writing, the better they become

at recognizing which literacy practices will be best suited to a specific writing task (Wardle and Adler-Kassner 60). Kathleen Blake Yancey summarizes how mastery writing experiences build writerly self-efficacy when she writes, "Through practice, we become familiar with writing; it becomes part of us. What we practice is who we are; if we want to be writers, we need to write. And in the practice of writing, we develop writing capacities, among them the ability to adjust and adapt to different contexts, purposes, and audiences" (Wardle and Adler-Kassner 64). Writerly self-efficacy soars as writers continue to practice and hone their craft.

However, self-efficacy in writers doesn't bloom in a vacuum. In fact, research demonstrates that writerly practice must go beyond simply putting pen to paper or fingers to keyboard or touch screen to include "engage[ment] with other humans" (Wardle and Adler-Kassner 65). As intimated above, because writing is a social practice as well as a cognitive one, writers must review their work in consideration of the task at hand *as well as their target audience(s).* Thus, true mastery experience in writing requires "garnering additional perspectives from other readers and collaborating writers" in order to engage in revision, in order to ensure the success of their written product (Wardle and Adler-Kassner 66-67). Sharing one's writing as well as giving and receiving feedback are critical parts of a successful writing process because successful writers— those with high levels of self-efficacy— have learned through practice that "revising, or the need to revise, is not an indicator of poor writing or weak writers but much the opposite—a sign and a function of skilled, mature, professional writing and craft" (Wardle and Adler-Kassner 67). This is true for a contributor to the May 2021 collaborative field text who wrote, "OWG has gifted me with a dynamic crew that activates the artist within. I am learning to be more comfortable with myself/my own voice. I feel confident in our zoom box whereas usually my confidence is silent. I do not share my writing with too many people, it's too complex

to be vulnerable, but I am starting to like the exposure with OWG." Overall, mastery experiences

may yield high levels of writerly self-efficacy, but readers— that is, other humans— must

somehow communicate to the writer that the piece of writing was successful. That is not to say

that writers can't also *feel* that a piece of writing is successful, but those instincts are bolstered by

social interactions over writing, such as sharing and feedback practices.

Another way that writers form their self-efficacy beliefs is via "identify-ing and labeling

physiological and emo-tional states tied to [writing] activities," such as managing anxiety,

overcoming apprehension, and finding flow in one's writing process (Bruning and Kauffman

162). This explains why OWG participants added and enjoy the mindfulness/ meditation practice

at the beginning of our writing group meetings— to more intentionally enter the right mindset

for our time together and let go of anything else from the day. As writerly self-efficacy

researchers Roger Bruning and Douglas Kauffman write, "The need to manage anxiety reactions

like these has led to a long history of clinical use of such techniques as progressive relaxation

and guided imagery to treat issues ranging from test anxiety to personality disorders" (162). With

regard to sharing and feedback practices, physiological reactions and emotions that the practice

of writing can bring up in writers can be mediated by "becoming aware that the text exists

outside the writer's projection and must convey meaning to readers;" this awareness can help

writers develop a more well-balanced attitude "toward the act of writing and what is produced,"

especially when it comes to revision practices (Wardle and Adler-Kassner 62). Rather than a site

of judgment or "a trap [… that exposes] all the writer does not know" (Shaughnessy 7), writers

engaging in regular sharing and feedback practices can come to regard the "emerging and

changing text" as "a site of negotiated work to produce the final document" that will fulfill a

writer's "ambitions" (Wardle and Adler-Kassner 62). As Miz shared during our interview, "...it's

really good to bounce ideas off of folks. And to come together having so many differences, and it's not like we have to agree together, we just have different views, and it's really cool to get different aspects of the story."

Regular sharing and feedback practices can also result in writers using their physiological and emotional states to "assess feedback on writing, asking whether suggestions are useful and how they might respond" (Wardle and Adler-Kassner 68). That is to say, feedback and sharing practices encourage reflection on a piece of writing by both listeners/ readers and authors themselves. Writers who are "attuned to conscious reflection make 'deeper choices,'" can better "tap into" how their identities are reflected in their writing and use that knowledge to make effective revision decisions (Wardle and Adler-Kassner 79). Miz also referenced this idea during our interview when she acknowledged that "being in [OWG] has helped me to like not silence that voice, not stop these emotions, but like to write them, to free them, to take the power from them, or to plug the community with my thoughts, my, my weirdness." Furthermore, when writers listen to/ read the work of other writers, they are exposed to new or different writing processes and perspectives that can enhance their writerly self-efficacy— both by encouraging them to try something new or feeling more secure in their own process. Thus, sharing and feedback practices combat the notion that "writing is an individual activity," which can "introduce anxiety" in writers of all levels and abilities engaging in various writing tasks (Bruning and Kauffman 167). As one person in OWG contributed to the May 2021 collaborative field text, "I am starting to realize that a lot of us come with a certain cycle or pattern as to why we hold back as writer's, as people, as artists, as voices silenced, as collective minds." Conversely, "well-managed collaborative approaches to writing would seem to have considerable potential for strengthening writing self-efficacy by offering models for decision

making, exposure to new perspec-tives on writing, and greater chances for suc-cessful

performance" (Bruning and Kauffman 167), similar to what Arthur and Sol share in the quotes

that open this chapter. Diverse decision-making models, perspectives, and a wider array of

writing strategies and tools come about through talk about writing, through sharing writing and

giving and receiving feedback on it, as writing center scholarship has shown.

  Sharing and feedback practices also play a role in the third source of writerly self-

efficacy: social persuasion, or "others expressing beliefs that an individual can perform

suc-cessfully" (Bruning and Kauffman 161-162). Specifically, "feedback on current

performance" rather than future-oriented goals and demonstrating abiding "beliefs in learners'

personal agency" bolster "social persuasion's effects on self efficacy" (Bruning and Kauffman

162). In other words, positive feedback on one's writing can help enhance writerly self-efficacy.

Furthermore, feedback on specific strategies that can improve one's writing "as well as regular

feedback regarding how well they are using such strategies" strengthens writerly self-efficacy

and writing development (Pajares and Valiante 163). This notion is supported by writing

researcher Shirley Rose in her essay, "All Writers have more to Learn," in *Naming What We*

Know: "learning to write requires conscious effort, and most writers working to improve their

effectiveness find explicit instruction in writing to be more helpful than simple trial and error

without the benefit of an attentive reader's response" (Wardle and Adler-Kassner 59). Feedback

from other humans, especially positive feedback and actionable feedback, can help persuade

writers as to what's working in their piece and what could be communicated more clearly

(Wardle and Adler-Kassner 65). Sharing, on the other hand, can help writers learn to "assess

texts written by others as well as their own work— both the processes used to create the texts

and products that result," helping writers become more aware of their purposes for writing and

the processes that help them achieve those purposes in various rhetorical situations (Wardle and

Adler-Kassner 67). Overall, previous writing self-efficacy research has found that "Stu-dents

receiving feedback had better revisions and higher self-efficacy than those who did not"

(Bruning and Kauffman 165), directly connecting writerly self-efficacy with sharing and

feedback practices. Social persuasion is well-represented in the following excerpt from my

interview with Joi in which she explains the impact of sharing her work in OWG:

> Um, it really, um, by letting other people read it really told me what I can improve on so I can be better. And so that's what helped me a lot, you know, as far as lettin' other people read it. And it also gave me the inspiration to keep on going, because when other people say, 'Yes, I think this is needed,' you know, 'you should you should pursue it,' you know, so that's what made me say, 'Okay, I'm gonna have to keep doing it, I'm gonna have to keep on,' you know, seeing, you know, lettin' other people read it, keep on getting the help, you know, keep getting the feedback so I can improve, improve, improve. So that's been my focus to make it better and better.

The second greatest source of writerly self-efficacy (after mastery experience) and the

one most present in writers' sharing and feedback practices is vicarious experience, or

"observ-ing others' performances and assessing one's capabilities in relationship to what is

observed" (Bruning and Kauffman 161). Writers learn best from writers with whom they can

strongly identify or from writers who they aspire to emulate (Bruning and Kauffman 161). Such

opportunities present themselves organically in collaborative writing groups where writers form

a community with other like-minded individuals looking for similar writing support; such groups

"foster self-efficacy and motivation" (Pajares and Valiante 167). Writing group participants learn

from the other writers in the group, who can serve as "skilled models [who] can supply

knowledge about what is required for successful performance and how to perform domain-

related skills, as well as information about a setting's rele-vant dimensions and strategies for

overcom-ing difficulties" (Bruning and Kauffman 161). Writing groups also offer a less

competitive learning environment where members can see "peer models make errors, engage in

coping behaviors […], and verbalize emotive statements reflecting low confidence and

achievement" that can help other members feel like they are not alone and/or be encouraged by other members' mastery experiences, which "can imbue other [members] with the belief that they too can achieve that excellence" (Pajares and Valiante 167). Both sides of this same sharing and feedback coin in writing groups can enhance writerly self-efficacy.

In her essay in *Naming What We Know*, literacy researcher Kathleen Blake Yancey writes that writing is "a practice situated within communities" (Wardle and Adler-Kassner 65). Some communities take the form of writers who are interested in similar genres who can provide "practice, advice, and modeling," as James Gee's "teenage writer of fan fiction" benefits from (cited in Wardle and Adler-Kassner 59). Other communities take the form of classrooms where teachers "make space for quality of failure [...] by treating failure as something all writers work through, rather than as a symptom of inadequacy or stupidity" (Wardle and Adler-Kassner 63). However, "although both modeling and feedback can improve writing skills and self-efficacy, coping models [typically gained through vicarious experience] seem to be most beneficial because they convey strategies for making practice more effective" (Bruning and Kauffman 165). Coping models are most effectively shared in individualized learning environments, like writing groups, where writers can "easily select the peers with whom to compare themselves" (Pajares and Valiante 167) and where writers can hone the "ability to theorize and question areas such as their processes, practices, beliefs, attitudes, and understandings about writing, along with the ability to consider why they made the rhetorical choices they did" (Wardle and Adler-Kassner 78). Sharing and feedback practices present the greatest opportunities for writers to engage in vicarious experiences that enhance their writerly self-efficacy, as they are able to identify writers who are similar to them and engage in important reflection on their own writing choices as well as act on their own writing aspirations in ways that are similar to and differ from

their peers. In other words, sharing and feedback practices, in writing groups especially, can give writers "the time and space to explore Thomas Edison's proverbial ten thousand ways that won't work in order to find the ways that do" in ways that writing classrooms cannot (Wardle and Adler-Kassner 63).

That is, despite Bruning and Kauffman's position "that advanc-ing writing self-efficacy as a goal for writing instruction can help [teachers] help writers become more motivated and resilient" (169), most writing instructors focus more on advancing (standardized) writing competence and skill development as instructional goals. This means that writers must find ways to get feedback that will enhance their feelings of confidence with regard to accomplishing various writing tasks rather than only (or predominantly) feedback according to (arbitrary) writing/ literacy standards. Importantly, collaborative writing groups make clear that you don't need teachers to enhance writerly self-efficacy. In fact, according to writing studies scholar Peter Elbow, "Teachers seem to play a big role in making it harder for people to write" (xii). In *Writing Without Teachers*, Elbow asserts that writers can make substantial improvements in their writing by sharing their work with fellow writers "in a supportive atmosphere, often with no response other than appreciation (to heighten their experience and enjoyment of the fact that others are hearing what they wrote)" and "get responses from readers based on the readers' efforts to understand the writing and enjoy it and tell the story of what was happening in their minds as they were reading— rather than trying to judge it and figure out how to make it better" (xix-xx). This is natural for community writing groups like OWG, according to Mathieu and colleagues in *Circulating Communities: The Tactics and Strategies of Community Publishing*, who write,

> When we have witnessed community writing groups, the participants will often stress the positive and productive elements of a piece— an image that works, a sentence that captures a local moment. In an academic class, the next move might then be to critique the piece of the writing as

> well— the word choice is a bit redundant, there is no satisfactory conclusion. This secondary move, the critique, will often not occur in community writing groups. Instead, there is a sense that positive comments can serve the same function of moving the writer toward their ultimate goal. For some students (and faculty), it can appear that no real work is being done. The key, however, is to recognize a different tradition of work, a different sense of collaboration is being enacted. [...] For the community writer, then, their writing goals are not enhanced through academic debate and college credit hours; they are not achieved at the end of a course cycle (13).

Clearly, writers' self-efficacy can improve with "being understood" and "hearing readers' experience of one's words and trying to have their experience" because "different readings help the writer see [their] text through more lenses" (Elbow xix-xx). Elbow's reader-based and writer-based feedback models served as the foundation for the giving and receiving feedback procedures taken up in Our Writing Group in order to enhance participants' writerly self-efficacy specifically and the democratization of writing more generally. The next section describes specific examples of feedback and sharing practices in OWG and how those practices help OWG go beyond just a writing group to feel like a writing family.

Invitations to Take Risks

As detailed in the previous chapter, the main goal of the second meeting of OWG in Fall 2020 was to develop feedback and sharing policies and procedures for the group. We took a similar approach to devising these policies and procedures as we did for the group statement of purpose. I provided members with resources to review and then asked them to write out their answers to specific questions (Who gets to share each week? How will we communicate whether we're looking for feedback and what kind? Will there be time limits or page limits on sharing? Will we follow a certain procedure or format?) in a collaborative google document. This process yielded our sharing and feedback policies (see Appendix 7), which aimed to "make sure everyone gets a chance to share each week in a supported and positive way." However, what these policies did not do was help writers in the group figure out *how* to give and receive

meaningful feedback on various pieces of writing, much of which is written in the moment during group meetings.

For example, Dean Friends facilitated one of our last meetings of the Fall 2020 semester, specifically the Monday after Thanksgiving. Dean's meeting was about an important topic: implicit bias. Because Dean worked until 5pm throughout the week and usually joined OWG around 5:30pm each week, I started this meeting for him. However, Dean had prepared everything and was one of the only members to really make the template slides his own at this point by changing the fonts, the slide titles, and adding his own images (this may have to do with Dean being the youngest member of OWG and the most familiar with Google slides, but that's just a guess). The meeting began with announcements from me that detailed upcoming deadlines for publication opportunities and time to fill out a form with members' mailing addresses to receive their ephemera (more on that and other ways OWG writers went public with their writing in subsequent chapters). Then, we moved on to Dean's go around, which he renamed on the slide "What's the word in the streets?" and asked "How was writing this week? How was your Holliday (if you celebrated one)? What is something coming up this week that you are excited for?" I encouraged everyone to answer any or all of these questions and mentioned that Dean would likely arrive during the go around. Dean arrived in time to share last and take over the facilitation from there.

After the "word in the streets," Dean introduced his topic by saying, "I kind of made this presentation about racial bias and kind of like how it feels to navigate in white America as a person of color." Then he went on to show two of three YouTube videos: the first one was a 16-minute TEDx video entitled "Implicit Bias -- how it effects us and how we push through" by Melanie Funchess; the second video was a 9-minute clip from "Anderson Cooper 360" on CNN

entitled "Where does racial bias come from?" that delved into implicit bias' impact on police work; and the third video (which we did not watch during the meeting) was a 2-minute showcase of reactions to a white man holding a Black Lives Matter sign in "the most racist town" in the United States, the headquarters of the Ku Klux Klan, Harrison, Arkansas. Dean described this last one as "a little jarring" and explained that he wanted to "kind of break the bubble that we find ourselves in [...] because we might not run into people who are rude to us everyday just because of the color of our skin." However, Dean switched gears after the second video and decided not to show the third because he wanted everyone to have at least 30 minutes to write and "enough time to share." Dean's overall aim for his meeting was to give members a chance to "go in depth, like break the hive mind of like 'this is my unique experience'" and talk about racism with each other. But first, he invited everyone to write "for a little minute." After explaining that "you can write about really anything," Dean provided the following prompts, if folks wanted them:

- Write an experience you've had about being racially profiled.
- Write about what it feels like for you to navigate through white America.
- Write about if you have ever racially profiled somebody who looks different than you.
- Continue something you have already have started.

We came back together after 30 minutes of writing time to share. Dean revamped the sharing slide of the OWG slides template from one that simply linked to and reiterated our policies and procedures with the title "Sharing is Caring" to a slide that had a new picture of a Black man with curly hair with his hand up to his ear as if trying to listen. Dean's slide was also titled "Sharing is Caring," but the bullets read: "What kind of feedback are you looking for? Would you like feedback at all?" When he asked if anyone would like to share, Dean also verbalized the ideas that his questions expressed, noting that some writers may not want any feedback on a piece of writing about what could be a touchy topic. Heaven shared first. She

began by stating, "I hope this answered the question," and continued on to tell the group a story about prejudice she experienced on her way to and at a job interview in a different neighborhood from hers in Chicago when she was "a teen or early twenties." And she shared that similar racist remarks were made to her and her niece while they were walking around our city, too: in both instances, someone told her that she should go back to where she came from. Heaven shared that this influenced her answer to Dean's prompt about how she navigates through white America: "Before I leave my house I always, you know, say a prayer. God to stay with me and everything while I'm leaving my apartment 'til I come back so that stuff like this, you know, won't happen because it's shocking for anyone to think like that about people because they're not the same color or have the same type of skin tone." Dean followed up with Heaven by asking how those experiences made her feel, and she responded that they made her feel "shocked" and "upset."

After Heaven shared how she felt, Dean acknowledged that Claudia wanted to share and thanked Heaven profusely for sharing her story. During his thanks, Dean called Heaven a strong, amazing, Black woman "no matter what some wild people in Chicago or [our town] say," and Claudia followed up to ask for more details about when the local experience happened and expressed her shock that it had only happened a few years ago. Claudia also apologized that Heaven had to go through that before Dean asked her again if she'd like to share. Claudia then launched into a story about an experience in the Venture course where she took offense to a guest speaker who asserted that "all white America is guilty of owning slaves" because her great-grandparents were too poor to own slaves when they arrived to the United States; the argument between Claudia and the guest speaker devolved from there in Claudia's story. After her story, Dean jumped in again to give feedback where he acknowledged that he is not white, so he can't speak from experience about white people's experiences of racism; however, he did kindly point

out, using metaphors, that in terms of statistics, "white people play the bench in racism. They play very good offense, when it comes to it, but the defense, it's like, you know what I'm saying, they don't get it because it's kind of impossible, almost." Dean followed that point up by thanking Claudia for sharing, especially for sharing something risky, or in Dean's words, "going out on a ledge." In return, Claudia thanked him for his presentation.

Dean moved right into Sol's volunteer to share from the chat, anticipating that Sol would "flip the script" on the entire conversation. Sol acknowledged that she'd experienced racism and also been racist herself. She shared a story about dating a Black man as a teenager and keeping it a secret from her Latine family and friends as well as a story about how her sister-in-law refused to shake the hand of a dark-skinned man from Ghana at a holiday party Sol and her husband hosted. Sol ended her reading by saying, "so, definitely it's a, it's a very important topic. And I'm very grateful to be here today. And to learn a little bit more about this. And thank you so much [Dean], because this is so important." Dean applauded Sol's honesty in her piece, especially with regard to admitting her own bias toward a person when she was younger; he shared how people can change and become intentionally better humans over time and that being a person of color does not mean that person can't also participate in bias and/or racism. After that, there was a bit of discussion about racism and about the next week's meeting before Dean's session came to an end.

Importantly, similar to the first member-facilitated meeting led by Claudia, Dean's is another meeting where not much feedback on members' writing is given. Dean moved from one member to another, and the only feedback that was given was from Dean himself (other than Claudia expressing shock at Heaven's story, but Dean also moved that along and encouraged Claudia to share). Furthermore, Dean's feedback was largely about validating folks' experiences

and responses to his prompts, which is important, but not one piece of feedback on folks' writing was given during this meeting. Not one person asked for more details, talked about a line or an image that stood out to them, mentioned craft or organization or engagement. Now, this could be a result of the sensitive nature of the topic, but that can't be said about other meetings during the Fall 2020 semester of OWG where similar discussions took place. Members talked about the content of the stories and poems and gave vague positive feedback like "I loved it," and "that was really good," and even "I can't wait to see where it goes." However, feedback given during these first meetings of OWG was not actionable or specific.

Even so, important to remember is that in this non-credit community writing group for alumni of a university-sponsored humanities program, writing is serving as the site for building social relationships between the very diverse members of OWG. As such, OWG's sharing and feedback policies—not to mention OWG's structure supported by participatory pedagogies in general— facilitate response to writing, but those responses don't always have to be about writing craft or producing actionable and specific feedback, as this meeting demonstrates. Instead, those responses can be about the content of a piece, the experiences writers share, what listeners learn about the writer as a human. This is especially meaningful for building long-term, trusting relationships among writers, as OWG is meant to help make happen. Members of OWG are involved in a sustained relationship with one another, and building trust between members can lead to not only more informed feedback but also influence how feedback is received. This relational progression in OWG is highlighted in the only one mention of feedback in all two of the collaborative field texts from Fall 2020 compared to five mentions of feedback across four collaborative field texts in Spring 2021.

The one mention of feedback from Fall 2020 illuminatingly stated: "[Writing is] a hidden talent, and I'm leery of sharing. Being misunderstood in real life, I can only expect to be misunderstood in my writing. It sometimes seems that people aren't willing to give me criticism about my writing." Even though members of OWG were seemingly unwilling to be critical and seemed to not know *how* to give actionable feedback, the trust-building that happened over the course of Fall 2020 needed to happen before feedback on craft could be given and would be well-received. The responses to and from writers in OWG (as opposed to their writing) likely contributed to mastery experiences that yielded a sense of writerly self-efficacy for members of OWG in that those responses communicated that a piece of writing was successful in reaching a reader/ listener in the group. In turn, OWG writers' instincts that a piece of writing is or is not successful are bolstered by the social interactions over writing facilitated by the group's sharing and feedback practices that happen in OWG. Furthermore, members of the group's writerly self-efficacy was also augmented through vicarious experience throughout Fall 2020 despite a lack of actionable and specific feedback; instead, vicarious experience was achieved through the act of sharing members' writing. In listening to other members' writing, members of OWG were able to gain a sense of other group members' performances and capabilities in relation to their own, establishing the group as both affinity-based and aspirational. This also helped members come to trust one another and provide a foundation for giving informed feedback and receiving feedback from others with best intentions.

Nonetheless, the fact that OWG writers seemed to not know *how* to give actionable feedback remained, not unlike other college-level writers in first-year writing and beyond who develop the skills to give and receive feedback over time and with direct instruction and practice in it. Upon more reflection on this and through conducting interviews with participants over the

winter break between Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 meetings, I recognized that OWG members might benefit from training on peer review similar to the training writing instructors give students in their classes for writing workshops and similar to the training writing center tutors receive. I conducted such a training for our second meeting of Spring 2021. At this meeting, we reviewed OWG's statement of purpose, as per our plan from the beginning of Fall 2020. Before we reviewed our sharing policies and procedures, however, I conducted a giving and receiving feedback workshop during our meeting. I began by explaining that this workshop was meant to "challenge us all to offer more critical and constructive feedback to one another" during OWG meetings. On the initial workshop slide, I also wrote that "this means being supportive and challenging one another to push our writing to the next level always. This means operating with the belief that no piece of writing is ever truly finished, just put away for a while. To do this, we can respond as readers and as writers to each other's work using our emotions and our opinions about what makes writing 'good.'" And aloud, I added, "And that's subjective, right? We each have our own idea of what is good."

The idea of responding as both readers and writers to a piece of writing using our emotions and opinions comes directly from Peter Elbow's teacherless writing class. The idea was to encourage members of OWG to understand that "practice in feeling scared about how [their audience] might react" as well as "learning how they do react" can be "liberating" because writers "discover the world doesn't fall apart" (Elbow 83). And so I went on to work with OWG writers to define peer review and its purpose as well as how peer review can help build a strong, inclusive community. Elbow explains this benefit of teacherless writing groups, and in effect teacherless feedback/ peer review, when he writes that members of the group come to know one another's "language, [...] way of handling words, so they can hear ideas, feelings, and nuances

that are only partially encoded in the words" (129) and share those with the writers so that, eventually, writers can "[begin] to acknowledge and then finally to experience [their] sending of some message, [and begin] to be able to stop sending it. Or— and this can be a very powerful move toward better writing— [they begin] to be able to send it louder and clearer" (132). Thus, I moved through my presentation to OWG by defining peer review as an opportunity for writers to articulate what they are trying to say in their pieces and a chance for real readers to tell writers what they're hearing and what isn't coming across clearly. OWG members at the meeting added that it's a respectful, noncompetitive, and supportive practice—clearly building on the trusting foundation built throughout Fall 2020 meetings. Furthermore, I explained that peer review is a chance for writers to engage with one another's ideas, choose the feedback they implement into their revisions, pull the curtain back on individual writing processes and the stages of various pieces, and can help writers practice openness, collaboration, and constructive critique.

I also provided OWG members with possible questions they can ask the members who are listening to their work, encouraging them to ask for what they need or what they're ready for, whether that's feedback on a particular part of their work or only praise for a particular draft. For example, I encouraged them to consider asking questions about the main idea listeners understood from their piece, how they can make their piece more effective or persuasive, and/or about what they gravitated to as readers and where they felt less engaged. In terms of giving feedback, I encouraged them to take on a reader's perspective instead of absolute judgment, and I provided the following sentence stem: "Instead of "this was bad," or even "this was good," try framing your feedback with something like, "when you wrote (THIS), I felt (THAT) because (REASON)." I also encouraged members to consider providing and receiving feedback as an opportunity to model kindness and respect for each other as writers and humans.

Finally, I ended my peer review workshop for OWG with the following reminders:

- As peer reviewers, we must remember to prioritize writing contexts instead of language standards and place more weight on ideas, use of evidence and details, and thoughtfulness. Don't forget how audience expectations and different contexts shape the choices we make as writers; producing standard academic English is, ultimately, a choice and not a requirement.
- Relatedly, academic writing standards and language practices can be used in ways that devalue other language practices and the people and communities they stem from. Thus, we must review and reflect on our feedback through this lens before sharing it with others.
- We all have work to do when it comes to learning how to respectfully and constructively point out confusion and ask questions that illustrate how word order and sentences construct meaning rather than correcting writing.

And with these reminders in mind, we engaged in some peer review practice right afterwards by sharing aloud or in the chat one glow (praise) and one grow (area for growth/ improvement) about members' own peer review practices. In other words, I asked OWG members to reflect on and share something they've done well when they receive and/or give feedback and something they'd like to improve, add, or do differently when it comes to giving and/or receiving feedback.

In response, Joi shared that she hoped to learn to "open [her] mind" to "other people's perspectives;" Sol said, "For me, I think one thing to grow, is that, I feel like, I need to be specific, because many times I just say, like, any feedback. I mean, always what I used to do, you know, anything feedback, whatever, but I think I need to be a little bit more specific;" and Song wrote in the chat that she'd like to get better at giving glows over grows. I shared that I wanted to work on not always being the first person to provide feedback to writers who share during group while Dean and Arthur shared that they'd like to be less general in the feedback they give to other members of OWG. After everyone who wanted to share their feedback practices glow and grow had done so, we reviewed our feedback policies and procedures. While we made no changes to the policies and procedures, the actual feedback practices during OWG meetings did change a bit.

For example, at the very next meeting, Heaven shared a piece of writing she wrote for the credit-bearing Venture introductory composition course she was taking that semester. Her piece was about the creativity of Black women in the south and throughout history from the pre-Civil War era to the Civil Rights era, throughout which she mentions many influential Black women creatives, and especially singers. At the end of the piece, Heaven asked for "any feedback," and Dean, Sol, and Song all responded with positive feedback and shared how the piece made them feel. Dean said that Heaven read her piece with "conviction" that commanded his attention and appreciation; Sol shared that the "good choice of words" in Heaven's piece made her feel "empowered;" and Song pointed out a specific question Heaven asked in her piece, "What if they weren't able to sing?," that made her feel "so grateful, eternally grateful." All three responses were very grounded in Heaven's piece of writing rather than simply the topic she wrote about. Furthermore, Heaven followed up to ask for "any bad feedback," which I rephrased as "areas of growth" and encouraged Heaven to remain positive. Song responded to Heaven's request by suggesting adding "some of the messages that were in the songs that the slaves used to sing where they were sending messages, when they couldn't read and write, when they were saying 'Swing low, sweet chariot,' and what that meant that they were going to be leaving and different messages going from some of the songs that they sang in praise." Here again, Song's suggestion is very specific and actionable, and Heaven was grateful for the concrete suggestion.

During this same sharing and feedback session, Song specifically asked for a glow and a grow after sharing her piece (but everyone who provided feedback only provided glows), and when Sol shared her piece about the connection between hands and the arc of an amorous relationship and the message behind it, she asked for "a lot of feedback" and expressed uncertainty about whether her message was clear, ending by saying "So I don't know, you tell

me. What did you think?" Here Sol asked for very specific feedback: did her message come across clearly to her OWG peers? Heaven responded by reiterating Sol's message back to her, saying, "I loved it. It sounds very romantic. How you just go on and with your feelings, how you want things, want to hold hands and you don't want to be alone when you die, you want to be with your husband 'til your last breath. I really enjoyed it." In this piece of feedback, it's clear that Sol's message was not only received but enjoyed by Heaven. I also responded in the affirmative, sharing that "the progression [of the loving relationship] came across to me as a listener for sure." When I proceeded to give Sol a suggestion to number the hands to express the movement of time, Sol pushed for more by asking for an example. After I provided one example, Song added to my suggestion and responded directly to Sol's specific feedback request as well when she said, "I like the way I could visualize everything, she was just so romantic, it was so romantic to me. And I could just see it happening, holding hands and all the good lovey dovey stuff. And also I thought about, like you said, numbering it, I thought about her naming the hands: the hand of matrimony, the hand of romance, the hand of caress on her face, or his face, and stuff like that. As opposed to um numbering." Sol's eyes and smile widened as Song spoke, and she expressed gratitude and excitement at our suggestions. Similar to Heaven, she had specific ways she could move her piece forward.

The specific training in giving and receiving feedback for OWG members strengthened the value of the group for members as well as the cohesion between members within the group. In a collaborative field text from March 2021, for example, one OWG writer likened the feedback given in OWG to the feedback they received in high school, "but it wasn't as healthy or constructive as this." In the same field text, another writer wrote that their favorite part of OWG is "when we share our writing and appreciate one another because it makes me feel good." Even

more specifically tied to the Elbow-inspired feedback we engage in at OWG, a member wrote, "I

like that I can reach the readers in the group, all in their own ways. I also enjoy when they like

my language, as I tend to overexplain things in my speech; it seems to be well received within

the group, as far as my writing goes." This writer specifically acknowledges and enjoys learning

how different members of the group understand and react to the writing they share; they even go

so far as to turn what they previously saw as a negative writing trait— over-explaining— into a

positive, given how it is received by other group members. It is clear that the feedback writers in

OWG receive not only brings members feelings of joy, but also feelings of confidence in their

own writerly style. Giving and receiving feedback in OWG enhances the writerly self-efficacy of

its members. In fact, writerly self-efficacy is distinctly referenced in relation to feedback in the

collaborative field text from April 2021. One writer wrote,

> Not long ago I got a compliment from someone in the group she told me that she can and that
> now I put more details in my writings and that she loves my style. Listening to those comments
> helps me to keep improving and also the feedback that I receive helps me to add more or shape
> my writing better because I know this community really cares for me so they are very honest and
> that helps me a lot.

Not only does the compliment this person received demonstrate a recognition of this writer's

increasing mastery of or facility with an aspect of their writing and engage in social persuasion

of this writer's prowess— significant sources of writerly self-efficacy— but this writer also

recognizes the positive impact that the feedback they receive in OWG has on their writing.

Furthermore, this writer's contribution to this field text also names an important element of

OWG that enhances the value of the feedback writers in the group receive: this "community

really cares for me."

Caring in OWG comes in the form of all members of the group operating with a "rhetoric

of respect." Community writing center director Tiffany Rousculp writes that a "rhetoric of

respect requires [...] maintain[ing] a solid faith in a potential partner's own capability and in their agency to determine what they needed or wanted" (27). Writers in OWG are encouraged to exercise agency over the feedback they give and receive, as represented in this writer's contribution to April 2021's collaborative field text— "We are encouraged to share our work and receive grow or glow feedback"— and in Sol's description of what she's learned from OWG in our one-on-one interview— ""I learned how to give feedback. I learned how to receive feedback, which was another thing. How to ask for a feedback, like being specific, what do I want?" For Rousculp, a rhetoric of respect allows the community writing center she directed in Salt Lake City, Utah, to "be a place of collaborative experimentation, a place to take risks without evaluation, where people from all different backgrounds could come to work on any kind of writing task" (47); a similar description could be used to describe Our Writing Group. The writing group is a space where writing is not evaluated but shared and responded to, where writers come to write in whatever mode feels right to them in that moment. The peer review training workshop that I offered to the members of OWG was meant to provide them with "the tool of awareness, with which they could navigate the unease of not knowing what to do" (Rousculp 77). That is, the training session aimed to position OWG members to become aware of their reactions to the pieces their peers shared, to attend to the "movies of their minds" as writers in the group read their work (Elbow), to know that "people are actually listening" as Song reflected on during our interview. Such awareness comes from operating with a rhetoric of respect that helps "[disconnect] expertise (and thus ownership) from the individual" and reduce "the fear of 'losing face' or failure [...], allowing us to try new things and to fail together" (Rousculp 84). We see this in Sol asking if what she was trying to do in her piece about hands actually worked and Heaven specifically asking for areas of improvement after they shared their

pieces in OWG. Both of these writers navigated the unease of risk-taking in their writing and perhaps having those risks fail by demonstrating their understanding of "literacy as a collective activity of rhetorical problem solving" and *trusting* the group to do that collective work with them on their pieces (Rousculp 58). Rousculp writes that trust is "central" to a rhetoric of respect (80). Trust is also central to bell hooks' theorization of the practice of love.

Being a Part of Something Familiar/ Familial

Love, according to hooks, is a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, and trust (195). While bell hooks writes about the practice of love as a move toward liberation from white supremacy ("The Practice of Love" 195), the practice of love in OWG points to sharing as a move toward liberation from low writerly self-efficacy. Seen through the lens of hooks' five factors of love, sharing in OWG is what moves the group beyond a collective and into something that feels like family where members demonstrate *care* for writing, for one another, and for themselves; demonstrate their *commitment* to causes and to one another; demonstrate their *knowledge* and expertise; take responsibility for the group; and build on their shared experiences from Venture, the writing group itself, and a shared commitment to the regular practice of writing in community to *trust* one another. This is nicely summed up in these two contributions to the October 2020 collaborative field text: "I think the biggest thing is that we trust the integrants of our group and we share similar experiences so I feel understood and relate," and "OWG is special because [Venture] helps us to feel we are one whole family so we can trust each other."

Viewing OWG sharing practices through the lens of hooks' five factors of love makes sense because the writers in the group *love* OWG. As one member wrote in the March 2021 collaborative field text: "I love everything about OWG but I love when people share their writing

because many times inspire me to keep writing." This writer finds the practice of sharing as a form of vicarious experience and social persuasion, two major sources of writerly self-efficacy. This is also represented in another contribution to the same collaborative field text: "I love hearing the different voices throughout the writing process, and I have gained many different perspectives about writing in general, and about my own as well." It also comes through in a contribution to the April 2021 collaborative field text: "The OWG also is the healthiest place to get feedback on writing that I've ever been involved with! There are no haters in the OWG so everything that is said to you about your writing is said with love so instead of deflecting critique you internalize criticism so you can come week after week with hotter material." These participants specifically mention sharing and feedback in OWG as practices they *love* as well as practices that enhance their writerly self-efficacy through giving more examples of authentic voices and perspectives, topics to write about, audiences to reach, not to mention greater understanding of their own writing processes. In the words of another contributor to the April 2021 collaborative field text, "It [OWG] has given me confidence in the writing that I have shared with the group."

As mentioned above, OWG offers an opportunity for group members to demonstrate care for writing, for one another, and for themselves. This is especially true during the sharing and feedback portions of each meeting where writers have a chance to connect with each other over the topics they write about, the genres they write in, the words they use, etc. The writers in the group can "be real, to write [their] truth even if it is not a pretty story" because they know they will be cared for, similar to the responses group members received during Dean's meeting about implicit bias detailed above; as a result of the care expressed when writers share during OWG, members feel as though they can learn from one another and "[grow] together to become better

writers" (April 2021 collaborative field text). Such growth includes their "physiological and emo-tional states tied to [writing] activities," another source of writerly self-efficacy (Bruning and Kauffman 162), which shows up in OWG writers' conceptions of writing as a form of self-care that can, as one contributor to the October 2020 collaborative field text wrote, "[make] me feel free of my ideas and [make] me feel good." As Dean shared during our interview,

> [Writing is] a fact of life at this point, Gabbi, because I can't stop doing it if I wanted to. Because it's the only thing that really gives me joy. It brings me an unmeasurable amount of grief and stress and anxiety every day. And some days, you wake up and you feel garbage. And then some days you wake up and you feel yourself, and it's all a mental game.

Both Echo and Sol said that writing improves their moods, even when they write about a topic that makes them sad or angry, and Heaven shared that the best part of writing is "the escaping from reality…" in their interviews. But beyond self-care, writing and specifically sharing writing is a form of care for others for the writers in OWG. As Echo stated during our interview, "I could at least make someone feel less shitty, even though I was feeling shitty when I wrote it. But my shittiness made you feel less shitty. So that's a win." This coincides with contributions to collaborative field texts that gave the following reasons for writing: to "[bring] hope, love, and healing" (November 2020) and to "encourage others [...] make people laugh [and…] inspire and motivate others" (March 2021).

The sharing and feedback practices in OWG encourage members to demonstrate their commitments to causes and one another. This happens through facilitation, as detailed in Chapter 3, but it also happens through sharing during group: "I don't like to be the center of attention, so I try to lift others to that point, help them be comfortable. I do like facilitating because it gives me the chance to use prompts that maybe others wouldnt think about" (March 2021 collaborative field text). What this writer makes clear is that both facilitation and giving feedback are opportunities to demonstrate one's commitments. When writers choose a topic to write about and

then choose to share what they wrote with the group, they are able to make that commitment

known to the group. When OWG writers listen to another member's writing and provide

feedback to that person that aligns with the feedback they asked for, they are able to demonstrate

their commitment to that writer's self-efficacy, their writerly growth, and the effectiveness of

their piece. For example, one contributor to the March 2021 collaborative field text wrote,

> We are mainly a positive bunch, and there's constructive criticism, which helps us become better
> writers in general. I've been told I'm too wordy, which isn't frowned down upon in the group,
> and that helps my writing self esteem, which helps me share more with the goup.

Feedback is frequently cited as members' favorite part of the group "because it helps me to

grow" (March 2021 collaborative field text). And members are committed to sharing their work

with one another, as evidenced by contributions to the May 2021 collaborative field text in

response to the sentence starter, "My least favorite parts of OWG are…" Contributors wrote:

> When I can write anything to share or help out more
> When I can't bring myself to contribute. When I don't want to share, even though that is why I am
> here.
> When I can't write anything to share
> When I come into the group setting with some anxiety and have to expose that fear, it's awkward
> and beautiful.

All four of these contributions demonstrate a commitment to sharing their work in OWG because

members of the group know that sharing helps them feel connected to one another through

vicarious experience and social persuasion, feedback helps them recognize and get closer to

mastery experiences, and sharing and feedback practices in group allow members to identify

their emotional and physiological responses to writing in a space where they can find

commiseration and/or celebration in community with other writers, as appropriate.

 bell hooks' third factor of love is knowledge, and in OWG, writers exchange knowledge

and expertise about topics that are important to or of interest to them through facilitation as well

as value the exchange of knowledge during the sharing and feedback part of each meeting. For

example, Claudia enjoys writing about nature and especially incorporating a lot of facts into her poems, short stories, and personal essays. Members who listen to the pieces she shares, including me, consistently remark about how much they learn from her work. This means a lot to Claudia, as she shared during our interview. In response to my question about the most useful or stickiest piece of feedback Claudia had received on her writing, she said:

> Um, well, it's kind of a conglomerate of what people have been saying in [Our Writing Group], that they can kind of feel like, whatever emote that I'm trying to get out of, like, you know, my depression poetry, or the you know, stuff about nature, you know, like, just like, oh, wow, I can totally relate to that, even though I don't, you know, like, for instance, the one about the spider like, you don't like spiders, but you were like, oh, it sounds kind of like a cute spider, you know, and it kind of changed your perspective, even if it was just for that moment. And so that was like, helpful to me, because I didn't think anything of it. Like I said, I was just kind of sitting on a bench. And I was like, Oh, what's that? You know? And so I was inspired to write about it.

Furthermore, sharing and feedback especially is a mechanism of OWG where members gain knowledge about writing— including conventions, genre, craft, techniques, and more. And this is really important for members, as one contributor pointed out in the November 2020 collaborative field text: "This one [This writing group] is more enriching because we listen and discuss. Others I've been involved in, no one else wanted to share. You can't learn by just listening all the time." So, members value the knowledge they gain from both listening to each other's writing and the feedback they receive. As Miz shared during our interview:

> I was like, trying to figure out what some of my words even mean, or thoughts, for instance, of my writing, and I bring it to OWG and I get all this different feedback, critiquing, you know, just any kind of like input, and it's not like I'm hungry for input, but it's like, it makes more clear of what I'm trying to say, my own writings that I wrote, so it's was very helpful.

When writers have the knowledge about how their writing is working for readers/ listeners— how it's being experienced— they can, in the words of Peter Elbow, come "out of darkness and silence" (77). For Claudia and Miz and most if not all of the writers in OWG, sharing their writing and giving and receiving feedback during OWG helps them *know* one another, their writing process, and a particular piece of writing better.

The final two factors of love from hooks are responsibility and trust, and these factors also show up in the opportunities to share and give and receive feedback that Our Writing Group provides. One writer in the group contributed the following to the March 2021 collaborative field text: "I like the group because it makes me accountable, as much as it can. I have also received positive feedback in sharing part of my story, which is scary for me, as I am a private person." As this writer intimates, the structure of the group, including (and specifically) the structures for sharing and feedback during meetings, make every member responsible for OWG. That is, while it's true that OWG members take responsibility for the group by signing up to facilitate meetings, supporting each other through those meetings, and encouraging other members to sign up to facilitate, they also take responsibility for asking for the feedback they're ready for when they share and responding to one another with feedback that respects each writer's preferences in that moment. As one participant wrote in the May 2021 collaborative field text, "OWG is different from any other group because we are really transparent when sharing. We cover everything without anyone clutching their pearls." By taking responsibility for being "transparent," writers in OWG make the group "a safe place to share our work," as one writer wrote in the March 2021 collaborative field text, and help writers "feel comfortable and safe when sharing [their] writing," "feel comfortable to share the very vulnerable parts of [themselves] with the group," as other writers wrote in the May 2021 collaborative field text. This is especially important for members of the group for whom sharing and giving and receiving feedback is still fairly new, as these contributions to the April and May 2021 collaborative field texts demonstrate, respectively: "This is the first writing group that I have been in, so it has been a positive experience overall. It's been different, as I am used to just writing for myself and not really sharing it with anyone," and "This is the first time I have shared

my writing with people other than in college." As is apparent from these contributions to the field texts, members of OWG trust one another to listen and engage authentically and with good intentions because they take responsibility for how the group functions— because they *love* OWG. That love— as a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, and trust (hooks 195)— helps the group to not only continue but flourish. The trust amongst OWG members is wrought from shared experiences from Venture, the writing group itself, and a shared commitment to the regular practice of writing in community.

Importantly, this was an intentional decision by group members. Not only did Venture Co-Director Dr. Phillip Handel suggest the group be only for alumni of the program in order to know who would be joining, but group members themselves voted to have the group be alumni only with the exception of when special guest facilitators joined our meetings. This decision was the result of quite a lot of discussion before said vote. The question first came up during planning for recruitment of new members in January 2021 from Dean, who asked, "Have you had to have been a part of [Venture] to be in the writing group or can it just be anybody?" I replied quickly with the rationale I had received back during the pilot semester from Dr. Handel, explaining that by limiting it just to people who have been a part of [Venture] makes the group a bit of a safer space because we know something about the people who are joining our group and that they have experience talking with diverse groups like Venture students. However, I followed that rationale up by saying that it doesn't need to be that way, though, if we want to invite other people to the group. I tried to leave it up to group members by saying, "It's not just my group." The conversation veered off in another direction without resolution, and to be honest, I felt guilty for not turning Dean's question back to the group right away. Instead, I reiterated the rationale from Dr. Handel, who was not a member of the group and never had been, without questioning

the power dynamics at play between me and Dr. Handel, between Dr. Handel and OWG members, as well as between me and the Venture alumni in the group.

Thus, I brought the issue back up a few weeks later during our meeting on February 1, 2021. I explained that I wanted to revisit the discussion about inviting new members because I wanted the way that we decided it to be a "little bit more fair and equitable, rather than putting people on the spot." I explained that the previous conversation felt unfair to me, and I apologized for that, describing how the membership question was asked, not definitively answered by the group as a whole, and then we didn't talk about it again— all without enough time to really think about it. In order to model a decision-making process that was more equitable and grounded in the participatory values of OWG, I invited the writers to engage in conversation about who could join OWG again but this time with attention to our statement of purpose. I pasted the link to our statement of purpose into the chat and pointed to the last line of the document that says "We, the members of Our Writing Group, will develop and take away writing strategies, ideas, and expertise to use not just for and in this group but to use and share with others out in the world of writing. We will pass it on." After rereading that line, I explained that I wanted us as a collective to make sure that we were considering what we want our group to do and what we want our group to be when we decide whether or not we want to invite people who didn't graduate from Venture into our group, if we want to open it up to family and friends of members of the group. Before I opened it up for group members to share their thoughts, I asked the following questions aloud: What do you feel OWG is for? How can we spread the writing love? And what would we as a group like to accomplish in the greater writing community? Are we inviting Venture family and friends into our group, and that's how we're spreading the love? Or maybe there's another

way that we can spread our writing love? And I invited members to think about how we can make sure the group was making good on that promise in our statement of purpose.

In response, the first couple members to speak brought up that having OWG be for Venture alumni only made it so that everyone who joined had the "same foundation." One member said, "We kind of all have this foundation with one another and sort of responsible to each other through [Venture]." They added that if new members who were not part of Venture joined, they should have extra support or "be mentored in some way or something." The next person to speak also said that "we all kind of have a base of the same experience through [Venture]. And there's just certain things that people don't understand if they're not in [Venture]." Both of these members were conscious that new people who had not come through the Venture program might get lost in Our Writing Group, to which I pointed out that I didn't graduate from Venture. I asked if we were giving these potential new members enough credit by looking at their lack of a Venture diploma as only (or primarily) a deficit.

After that another group member shared that there is "talent out there [...] that we can benefit from," and they added that in order to grow as a group, we may need to be "a little bit more flexible." This person ended their contribution to the discussion by saying that they had experienced plenty of exclusivity in the past, but that being accepted into Venture was a "dream come true" because they never thought they'd be able to go to college, let alone feel so welcome in a college class; they explained that making OWG only available to Venture alumni gives less opportunities for others to benefit from the group and the group to benefit from their "feedback" and "other ways of writing." This contribution brought up a lot more discussion. The next person pointed out that even though I hadn't graduated from Venture, I was familiar with the program and have worked with a lot of Venture programming, which gives me a similar foundation as

alumni of the program. This person liked the exclusiveness of the group being only for alumni of the program because having graduated from Venture is an impressive achievement; it makes people "excited" and "interested;" being a part of the Venture family comes with certain "expectations," so making the group available to alumni only "sets the standard." Members of OWG "set an example" and contribute to Venture's "brand."

The next person who shared their opinion talked about how hard they worked to earn their GED just to be able to apply to Venture after having heard about it from an alumnus. They talked about their growth as a Venture student and how the program helped them come to believe in themselves and believe they are smart. They agreed that having graduated from Venture gives members of OWG a unique camaraderie and encourages respect for one another because all members of the group know that this person put in a lot of effort to get where they are right now. They appreciate having something in common with other members of OWG even before they know each other. And they added that one way the group could "pass it on," as stated in our statement of purpose, was through encouraging others to take the next step to get their GED like this person did and apply to and graduate from Venture before joining OWG. This would mean that OWG isn't actually exclusive but honors all of the steps each member had to take in order to get where they are now rather than perhaps serving as a "back door" to Venture. The next member to share brought up what I had been thinking: what about professionals with bachelor's and master's degrees? They can't graduate from Venture because they already have college degrees; can they join Our Writing Group? Members responded that they might be good potential guest speakers for the group rather than members of the writing group.

When we took the vote, it yielded the following results:

Who can join OWG?
7 responses

- Venture Alumni ONLY
- Venture Alumni and their close family members ONLY
- Venture Alumni and their close friends and family members ONLY
- Anyone
- Unsure
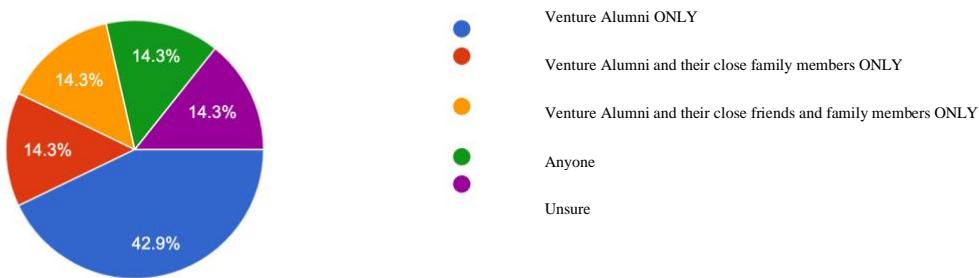
With seven responses, the decision was clear: Our Writing Group would be available only to

alumni of Venture. This decision helped preserve and solidify the practice of love that was

happening at each OWG meeting. I think the exclusivity piece is especially interesting and

important, though, especially with regard to operating with a rhetoric of respect. Unlike at the

community writing center that Tiffany Rousculp directed and wrote about in *Rhetoric of Respect*

where writing coaches believed in community members' potential and agency without

reservations, members of OWG were not willing (at least at this time) to extend and act with that

same rhetoric of respect beyond themselves. For me, this seemed counterintuitive because I think

I assumed that folks who benefitted from the opportunity Venture gives low-income adults

would in turn be inclined to spread more opportunities to others with or without degrees,

especially given their own experiences of exclusion that Venture aims to counter.

However, there is an application process to be accepted into Venture, and the program

only accepts about 30 students each academic year, from sometimes approximately 100

applicants. This process includes an application form, which has a written response question, as

well as an interview to determine 'fit' for the program. While there isn't space here to delve

more deeply into how the application process to even just get into Venture creates a sense of

prestige and formality or seriousness for the program, it is clear that Venture students and alumni feel the magic of the opportunity as well as the esteem the program lends folks involved. Additionally, there is also an "application" to OWG, as recommended by Dr. Handel, that does ask interested alumni to share in a few sentences why they'd like to join the group; however, in reality, this serves as more of an interest form to catch folks who visit our website. We gain most new members through the open meetings we host at the beginning of each semester, not via the interest/ application form. Either way, the members of OWG seemed to derive a lot from getting into and getting through Venture— from making it, if you will. So much so that they wanted that experience for other potential members of OWG as well, given our conversation and the outcome of the vote. Thus, most wanted to continue gatekeeping now that they had come into some decision-making power seemingly because they had once been gatekept— rather than taking this decision as an opportunity to dismantle gates and gatekeepers. This might have been too radical of an assumption or inclination on my part. That is, in all of the newness that was OWG with teacherless feedback, no set leader, no real homework, an abundance of choices and shared control over the group, it kind of makes sense that OWG writers would want to hold on to something familiar, something that helped the space stay safely family-like, as represented in this contribution to the March 2021 collaborative field text:

> OWG is a safe place for me to connect with other [Venture] students. We all went through a interview process to be accepted into [Venture] and now we are part of extended writing group together. So, when I share my stories, I know that my OWG peers have a special connection to the atmosphere that is being created…

Venture is very intentional about establishing feelings of community and family through self-to-text connections and personal writing prompts that help folks share and get to know one another in the class. Furthermore, Lasting Venture programming, including the introductory composition course, helps alumni of the core course develop a sense of camaraderie across

classes, not to mention the ways they make apparent how integral the baseline of graduating

from the core course can be for continuing on in credit-bearing classes with Venture. For many

students, Venture is one of the first and only times they've received wraparound support for

postsecondary coursework as well as one of the first and only times they've experienced success

in a postsecondary setting. As Claudia shared in her interview,

> Um, well, it definitely started out with [instructor] in [Venture], just kind of always having criticism, both positive and negative, and really just kind of like, being coach and coaching me along and being like, you can do this, like, just tweak these two things a little bit, and it'll be better. And so, you know, I emailed back and forth a lot with him, you know, about word choices and like, how I was trying to say something in a specific way, and I couldn't, like get it out the way that I wanted to, and like, you know, asking him like, what, what can I do to like, alleviate that pressure, in a sense, and, you know, I well Yeah, I learned a lot from him, like, you know, where to look for things and that sort of thing, like, you know, to my voice is like, the main thing, and like I don't know why I keep on forgetting that I have a voice but I do.

It's clear from this description that Claudia benefited greatly from this instructor's patience,

availability, and personal connection when she was in Venture. There aren't many educators

willing to patiently and lovingly go back and forth via email about a specific word in a way that

helps the student leave that interaction feeling that they have a voice and that it's successfully

coming through in a particular piece of writing. But from interviews and anecdotal interactions

with many alumni of Venture, this was a regular occurrence with this instructor and something

that they come to count on from Venture Co-Directors Dr. Stephanie Robertson and Dr. Phillip

Handel. It's this type of familial support that likely inspired a contributor to the March 2021

collaborative field text to write, "I feel OWG is an even playing field for us all, as we all relate to

being low income/on the poverty line." This baseline of experience is integral to members of

OWG feeling like the group is "a safe place for our thoughts, feelings, and ideas to be shared

with like minded individuals" (April 2021 collaborative field text).

This is really important, given members' experiences sharing their writing in other spaces with other people that have had detrimental effects on their writerly self-efficacy. For example, during our interview, Sol shared:

> …There was another group that somebody invited me to be part of with people that has already published books, and I thought maybe this group will help me, you know, but it's so intimidating. It's so intimidating and it's only, I mean, yeah, it's only in English and but most people is white, and I just have this difficulty like trusting, is it real? Or is it, it doesn't feel real. It feels kind of like business.

Thus, Sol makes clear that vicarious experience, or "observ-ing others' performances and assessing one's capabilities in relationship to what is observed" (Bruning and Kauffman 161), as a source of self-efficacy really does only work positively when writers are learning from other writers with whom they can strongly identify or from writers who they aspire to emulate (Bruning and Kauffman 161). In Sol's experience, the other writing group she tried was not such an experience because those members were too different and that made it hard to connect with and trust the other members of that group. On the other hand, sharing and feedback in OWG helps inspire Sol. In the same part of our interview, she said:

> Well, when I share my writing, I like the feedback. I feel like it makes me a better writer, it makes me to reflect on the things that the people point out. It helps me grow definitely. And but also listening to other writers, because, for example, there is a couple of people in the group that wrote with, they write with a lot of passion, and they use a vocabulary that is different than the one that I use. But it's beautiful. And so it's just like, kind of like, wow, you know, like inspire me, like, I want to keep writing because I want to get to that level. You know, or I want to keep writing because, yeah, I want to share something the same.

Sol's experience in OWG is completely different because it enhances her writerly self-efficacy by inspiring her to keep writing and helping her to, in her own words, "grow." Claudia shared a similar sentiment when she said that OWG has

> helped me with confidence in my writing, like I said, [...] I'm not very good at sharing my writing with people just because I don't know, a lot of people don't know me on that level, I guess. And so it's weird. But I also thought that a lot of people could relate to the stuff that I wrote in [Our Writing Group]. So that's why it inspired me to share.

Importantly, Claudia and Sol's comments demonstrate how their writerly self-efficacy— and that of the other low-income adult undergraduate members of OWG— is uniquely augmented by participation in OWG; what's possible in OWG is not possible elsewhere, or at least it has not been possible elsewhere for OWG writers before this. The sharing and feedback practices of OWG are important positive influences on members' writerly self-efficacy, but as demonstrated throughout this chapter, those practices would not work as well if it were not for the affinity-based constitution of the group. And OWG members knew this when they voted to keep the group for alumni of Venture only.

Thus, the makeup of the group as only alumni of Venture helps the group operate with love and a rhetoric of respect because it is building on the foundation that Venture constructs in its more formal programming (as discussed in Chapter 2). That foundation is key to the enhancement of OWG members' writerly self-efficacy that sharing in group and giving and receiving feedback in group helps cultivate. OWG's sharing and feedback practices offer opportunities for these writers to have meaningful mastery experiences and celebrate those with one another, have vicarious experiences of writers with whom they identify and can aspire to emulate, share and collaboratively address the emotional and physical experiences that writing can bring up for members, and provide one another the social support (or social persuasion, according to Bruning and Kauffman) that helps members remember that their voices and stories are important. The next chapters delve into ways that OWG writers act on that belief by going public with their writing.

Chapter 5 - Going Public: Challenges to Linguistic Justice in a University-Adjacent Writing Group for Low-Income Adults

This chapter was written as an article manuscript for publication; thus, it contains repeated contextual information about OWG.

Introduction

The important edited collection about community publishing *Circulating Communities: The Tactics and Strategies of Community Publishing*, edited by writing studies leaders Paula Mathieu, Steven J. Parks, and Tiffany Rousculp, was published over ten years ago in 2011. In this collection, community publishing is framed as "the consistent effort to develop pedagogies and practices which allow marginalized individuals and groups to self-organize and gain a platform to speak publicly on their own terms to the larger community" (Mathieu, et al. 10). According to Mathieu, Parks, and Rousculp, community publishing champions "community control over their own representations," which in turn allows it to help enact social change (Mathieu, et al. 10).

Furthermore, *Circulating Communities* makes plain the boon to writerly self-efficacy that community publishing can afford, referring to "the resonant meaning of 'being in print' that carries importance for many individuals" (2). The editors explain how 'being in print' helps situate various people—such as academics, politicians, celebrities, etc.— as "'intellectuals,' or at least as demonstrating that their lives have a value to others" (Mathieu, et al. 2). This helps being published gain a sense of prestige and makes the printed book, zine, journal, etc. one of "the most useable and accessible form[s] for [circulation amongst] friends, neighbors, and allies" (Mathieu, et al. 2).

Writing Studies scholars know that community publishing also offers benefits to university partners by showcasing the efficacy of their community engagement efforts. That is, through community publishing, community-university partnerships can achieve a platform for showcasing the benefits they provide to members of the surrounding community. But that is where community writing and publishing become entangled in hierarchized power dynamics inherent in the university: working under the conditions of what prison abolitionist and geography scholar Ruth Wilson Gilmore calls the "non-profit industrial complex," community-university programs are vulnerable to the exacting policies and procedures of university support, funding from federal and state agencies, as well as philanthropic donations. Thus, the nonprofit industrial complex places the burden to maintain donor/ university support on programs themselves rather than allowing them to solely (or at least predominantly) focus on serving communities.

Thus, even 10+ years after the important case studies in *Circulating Communities* made their debut, the challenges that community-university partnerships experience that Paula Mathieu wrote about in *Tactics of Hope: The Public Turn in English Composition* even earlier still rear their heads in community publishing projects. In fact, the inclusive conceptions of writers as well as movements championing linguistic justice in Writing Studies reveal that there is still much work to be done to reconcile the strategies of academic institutions with the tactics of community writers and community publishing. This article highlights the enduring nature of challenges to inclusive conceptions of writerly identity and enacting linguistic justice. It details a community-university partnership between a community writing group for low-income adults and the humanities-based, university-sponsored program from which writing group members have graduated.

I'm involved in the community writing group, called Our Writing Group (OWG), as a facilitator, participant, and observer. I founded OWG after developing a strong relationship with the faculty, staff, students, and alumni of our community-university partner, Venture, over 18+ months. Through my involvement with Venture, I recognized that after the initial two-semester Venture course ends, opportunities to continue writerly development and build solidarity are limited, but a writing group would provide consistent time, space, and support for alumni to write with others. After a promising pilot semester that was interrupted by COVID-19, OWG enjoyed the participation of eleven[3] consistent members over the course of the 2020-2021 academic year, the time period from which the data for this article is taken. By examining writing group participant interview responses about feeling like a writer, the evolution of writer's memos in the group's participant publication, and communications between the group and the university-sponsored program, this article highlights an abiding tension in university-sponsored community programs that challenges community writers' abilities to participate in public meaning-making on their own terms.

As stated above, participating in public meaning-making on writers' own terms is not only important to the mission of community publishing but also community writers' writerly self-efficacy. Writerly self-efficacy describes the confidence individuals have in their ability to successfully perform a writing task (Pajares & Valiante; Bruning and Kauffman). While writerly self-efficacy literature often addresses K-16 contexts and does not take into account race and class, I find it useful for thinking about the potential of community publishing for multiply-marginalized adult writers. Writing studies scholars have long held that writing (re)produces possibilities for inequity (Adler-Kassner & Wardle; Byrd). And this is especially true for adult undergraduates, students who have taken alternative paths to and through higher education, the

population written about in this article. Adult undergraduate students have often been academically disenfranchised due to structural oppression and inequities such as colorblind racism, neoliberal disenfranchisement, and the literacy myth (Schrantz; Miller Brown; Lundberg et al.; Graff). This exclusion negatively affects their writerly self-efficacy, or their perceptions of their own writing competence. For example, participants from this study have received messages throughout their education that they are not writers, let alone good writers. Nevertheless, writing is important to them because it allows them to share their stories, make sense of their experiences, and connect with others.

Furthermore, as Sara Guest, Hanna Neuschwander, and Robyn Steely write about in "Respect, Writing, Community: Write Around Portland," "The chance to be published is a huge and lasting boost of self-esteem" (51), directly linking community publishing with writerly self-efficacy. Community publishing can furnish community writers with readers, and interacting with readers corresponds with two of the four major sources of writerly self-efficacy: mastery experience ("writing successfully") and social persuasion ("others expressing beliefs that an individual can perform successfully") (Bruning and Kauffman 161-162). As intimated above, publication lends community writers unique credibility—it signifies success in writing and a belief in an author's writerly potential for both writers in the act of choosing to publish their work and readers in the act of collaborating with writers to arrive at shared meaning. Importantly, being read and arriving at shared meaning with readers can also be a way for writers to participate in community advocacy. As Mathieu, et al. write in *Circulating Communities*, "Putting 'community' into 'publishing,' then represents the work of individuals collectively organizing their voices into forums/ formats that challenge how they are perceived and understood within the larger culture" (4). Overall, as community literacies research has long

shown (Jacobi; Flower; Kuebrich), publishing can advance both writers' development as well as community advocacy.

The data presented in this article is taken from an ongoing IRB-approved community-engaged ethnography of OWG, a writing group led for and by low-income adult graduates of Venture, a university-sponsored humanities program. Through collaborative field texts written by group members, individual semi-structured interviews, pieces of writing by group members, and researcher field notes, the larger project aims to identify and investigate adult undergraduate student writers and writing, position participants "as experts of their own [writing] experiences," and use the information gathered to take action in ways that centralize participants' voices (Bautista et al 2-4). An important way the larger project enacts these aims is through community publishing. This article uses portions of the data collected for this larger project to understand how connections to the university help and hinder the writing group's ability to achieve their community publishing goal: to "self-organize and gain a platform to speak publicly on their own terms to the larger community" (Mathieu, et al. 10). After briefly introducing Our Writing Group (OWG) and its university-community partner program (Venture), I explain how OWG's efforts toward inclusive conceptions of writerly identity and enacting linguistic justice came up against and worked around structural forces that sought to limit those efforts.

Our Writing Group

Our Writing Group (OWG)[1] is a community writing group for alumni of Venture, a humanities-based, university-sponsored program, through which low-income[2] adults can earn six college credits. The writing group aims to help adult writers who've graduated from the two-semester Venture program continue (and augment) the literacy work that Venture begins in an open-ended way—that is, without necessarily moving toward a degree. OWG creates a space for

adult writers with economic barriers to feel capable of and supported in accomplishing creative, professional, academic, and personal writing projects.

While I participate in group meetings and provide training for members on the collective leadership of the group, I am not the leader of the group because it's not for me. In an effort to remain cognizant and transparent about the fact that, as a graduate student, my time in this special community is likely limited, members and I worked to create horizontal leadership structures that aim to set members of OWG up to maintain and sustain the writing group with or without a campus representative like me. Instead, I have worked to define a role for myself as someone who acts on behalf of the collective to help identify and secure resources from the university and Venture to help the group continue as a space where members feel comfortable and empowered to share their experiences and desires with audiences of their choosing through writing.

This role has not been easy to carve out: my positionality as a professional writing instructor affiliated with the university's writing center as well as my experience as a 'successful' student with a 'prestigious' academic pedigree who followed a very traditional educational path and who self-identifies as a 'good' writer work to position me as an 'expert' in the group. And members greatly value (and sometimes even seek out) my input in and beyond writing group meetings, despite my efforts to distribute the power/ knowledge relations in the group. However, my positionality as a heterosexual mixed-race cisgender woman from a middle-class background born and raised in Chicago lends me unique credibility with writing group members: because many OWG participants were also born and raised in Chicago and moved to our current city as adults, there's a shared understanding of what it's like to grow up in Chicago, a large multicultural city that effects immense pride in its residents, and what it's like to be a

person of color in our smaller, predominantly white city. The majority of the writing group members are also cisgender women (only two members are men), which may make my presence in the group and my position as an instructor/ facilitator perhaps more unassuming.

OWG's structure and products aim to challenge typical ideas of what literacies are required for success, not only in higher education but also beyond, as after completing the college credits associated with Venture, not all participants continue coursework towards a degree. Like Venture, OWG wants to increase access to higher education settings, resources, discussions and opportunities to those facing financial and other barriers. But unlike Venture, OWG operates outside of a formal classroom setting and/ or experience; it seeks to include more people in who 'count' as writers and more processes in what 'count' as writing. We do this by offering a community of support for members' writing goals, including receiving, giving, and implementing feedback; sharing writerly expertise through member-facilitation of our meetings; identifying and practicing various modes of and ways into writing; and performing pieces for the stage and publishing them on the page.

Thus, part of 'counting' as a writer and writing for OWG involves publishing. As stated above, publishing can advance both writers' development as well as community advocacy. In OWG, enhancing writerly development and engaging in community advocacy has involved honoring community voices, languages, and dialects. Writers in OWG have been willing to set aside conventional uses of grammar and punctuation for rhetorical purposes because it would allow for more authentic communication with their intended readers. Such forms of communication, however, conflicted with Venture, whose goals were to open a bit wider the door to a traditional humanities education— and not to transform or decenter White Mainstream English and standard conceptions of authorship. Venture is sponsored by the university and

donors with implicit (and often explicit) ideas of what writing should look like; meanwhile, OWG is adjacent, but not beholden to, those interests. In fact, OWG members had interests and agendas of their own.

Writers Desire Readers

These agendas and interests are especially apparent in a section of my interviews with participants focused around the idea of "feeling like a writer," a concept I adapted from the literature on writerly self-efficacy that emphasizes connections between being successful at writing tasks and writerly development. What these sections of the interviews revealed is that OWG writers' sense of self-efficacy—their sense of feeling like a writer—is deeply linked to a desire for readers (among other signifiers, like being paid to write). Community publishing can furnish community writers with readers; therefore, community publishing is important for writers in OWG because it provides them with a major source of writerly self-efficacy—readers. The rest of this section demonstrates and analyzes OWG writers' desire for readers before explaining how the group acts on that desire through its participant publication, *OWG Oracle*.

OWG participant Echo, who identifies as a multiracial woman, was 26 years old at the time of our interview in early 2021 and worked as a host at a local restaurant. When I asked her 'Do you feel like a writer?,' she eyed me suspiciously and said, "Define a writer. Do I write emails? Yes. Do I write books? No. Will I write a novel? Probably not. It will be too steamy. *Fifty Shades* has nothing on me. But I don't, I don't think I'm a writer. I don't know what makes you a writer." And when I replied that, in my opinion, what makes people writers is regularly engaging in the practice of writing and asked her if that changed her answer at all, she was more definitive: "No. I mean, I write, but do I— am I a writer that gets paid for it as a job? No."

However, when I asked Echo if there were times when she felt more like a writer than others, she had to think about it. Her eyebrows furrowed, and she reluctantly replied, "I mean, once I read back on old stuff I wrote, I'm always impressed that I wrote it. Or like when [my professor] reads my work back to me, I'm like, 'Wait I wrote, I wrote that? Okay! Come through, writer.' Like once, like when I'm writing it, I don't feel any different. I feel like this is just what I write. But when someone, when I hear it in someone else's voice when they read it back, it somehow sounds, like, different. I sound smart, like when I write like, 'Huh. Okay, look at you, putting your words together like that.'"

As found in previous literature (Matheiu, et al.), Echo's answers begin by connecting a writerly identity to writing books and getting paid to write; she is not paid to write (books); therefore, she is not a writer. However, she is able to see herself as a writer when she thinks about being read. Overall, her answers strongly suggest that she needs to be read in order to admit that yes, she is indeed a writer.

This is similar to how OWG participants Claudia and Sol—both poets and storytellers—answered the same question during their individual interviews; in fact, their responses shed more light on what it takes to feel like a writer. Claudia was 41 and experiencing homelessness at the time of our interview; she identifies as an Italian American woman, and she is the only white member of OWG. She shared with me that she was "warming up to the idea" of feeling like a writer because of Our Writing Group. She continued to explain that while she normally would not share her writing with many people, she feels more like a writer now "because [she has] people to share it with." Claudia's sense of being a writer is also at least partially dependent on being read, on sharing her work with others. In accordance with the literature on writerly self-efficacy— and particularly one of its sources, social persuasion (Bruning and Kauffman 161-

162)— as her readers/ listeners in OWG continue to treat her like the writer she is, instead of questioning her claim to the title due to a lack of formally published work or getting paid for it as her job, Claudia is more convinced that she is indeed a writer— because she writes and shares her writing with readers/ listeners.

Sol, a 36-year-old Mexican woman who works as a Spanish tutor and a community activist, also feels like a writer when she has readers. She said, "Well, I feel like when I am sharing my writing with others is when I feel like a writer." However, she went on to explain that she feels like a writer specifically with readers who know what it takes to face a blank page and create something out of seemingly nothing. Pointing to the importance of mastery experience— or successful writing experiences— for her writerly self-efficacy or confidence (Bruning and Kauffman 161-162), Sol explained that she experiences inner conflict when she has high expectations for herself to conform to a socially constructed idea of a writer as someone who can create something out of seemingly nothing at the drop of a dime, for any occasion, about any topic. But, as Sol says, writing and writers don't "work like that."

Feeling like a writer— confidently identifying as such— has to do with socially constructed definitions of the title writer and having an audience, according to Echo, Claudia, Sol, and Dean, who was 23 years old and worked as a Pre-K teacher's aide and poet/ rapper at the time of our interview. Dean identifies as a Black man. When I asked him if he felt like a writer, Dean told me:

> No, I don't feel like, I mean, [...] Does a cow feel like a cow? Like objectively, that's what you are, like, you know, you got the spots, but I don't feel. Like, I wouldn't go up to someone and say, like, I'm a writer. I'll go up to someone and say, like, I make music, or like I'm in a poetry group. But I don't go up saying, and say, like, cuz then, like, you know what I'm saying, they're just like, Where's the novel? Or like, you know what I'm saying, Do you have published work? And it's like, No, not really. And then that's kind of dismissive…

Dean knows he's a writer because he writes and shares his writing with others; however, his lack of formal publications leaves his claim of the title writer open to questioning by others outside of Our Writing Group and his rap group. Thus, Dean's answer is impacted by an entanglement of writer and publication that is not unique to him or other writers in OWG. English scholar Sue Norton dedicated an entire editorial in the journal *American, British, & Canadian Studies* to just this topic, asking, "So, in a writing-saturated world, in which the terms 'publishing' and 'uploading' can be regarded as nearly synonymous, what sorts of credentials must one possess to call oneself 'writer' without fear of contradiction?" (5). She decides on three characteristics that prioritize "activity over publicity" or publication that make one a writer (Norton 7). These characteristics are as follows: 1) writers compose, as in they deliberately (re)arrange their words to achieve a certain effect; during OWG meetings, members give and receive feedback on the composition of their pieces that encourages them to consider (re)arranging their words and ideas to achieve their goals for a piece. 2) Writers respect readers by giving them something to appreciate and interpret; writers come to OWG meetings because they respect readers and they want to give them something to appreciate and interpret; furthermore, the writers in OWG revise what they write in response to the feedback they receive in group because they respect the members of the group who are our readers/ listeners. And 3) writers "welcome payment, but tend to derive satisfaction from the pleasure of creation" (Norton 7); while many OWG writers would welcome payment for what they write— many a meeting has been devoted to how to get published, writing contests with cash prizes, and writing-for-work options like ghostwriting and script writing— we engage in community publishing because what we do in group is not meant just for us. As demonstrated above, the writers in OWG desire readers, and as our group statement of purpose states, "We, the members of [Our Writing

Group], will develop and take away writing strategies, ideas, and expertise to use not just for and in this group, but to use and share with others out in the world of writing. We will pass it on." Thus, the group's participant publication, *OWG Oracle*, aims to help the writers in the group themselves derive satisfaction from what they create but also share that pleasure with others.

But OWG writers also go further by directly addressing their readers in writer's memos that accompany each of their pieces in the publication. Writer's memos serve as accompaniments to the poetry, personal essays, short stories, and other pieces that grace the pages of *OWG Oracle*. Writer's memos can explain the purpose of a piece, why it was written, and what the author hopes the piece will achieve for readers. They are meant to help orient readers to a piece, give them important background information, and/or simply explain what inspired the writer. They also help members of OWG speak to their readers on their own terms. The next section details how OWG writers invoke their readers in these memos as well as how this seemingly simple act actually undermines white linguistic supremacy.

Invitations to Be Read

OWG's participant publication, *OWG Oracle*, is published in the winter and spring of each academic year. It is meant to reflect the ethos of OWG. A collection of poetry, personal essays, short stories, and excerpts from larger works that address a wide variety of topics as well as corresponding writer's memos, *OWG Oracle* is participant-driven. Everyone in the group can submit to the publication, and every piece submitted is workshopped and accepted for publication. Members choose their works; choose what editorial suggestions from me to take and which ones to disregard (per the group's collectively-devised sharing and feedback norms); and describe the purpose of each piece, why it was written, and what the author hopes the piece will achieve for readers in corresponding writer's memos.

Through the writer's memos and my editor's letters, each issue of *OWG Oracle* coaches readers into examining and perhaps even disregarding their expectations of published writing, of established writers. Rachel Jackson and Dorothy Whitehorse DeLaune's concept of "community listening" is useful for conceptualizing how the members of OWG are invoking readers with the writing they choose to publish and their corresponding writer's memos. Community listening is "a literate act that engages listeners as collaborators in meaning making across multiple sites" where "listeners work together with storytellers to construct and sustain cultural knowledge by building storied connections across difference" (Jackson & DeLaune 41). I aimed to encourage this work across difference in my editor's letters for each issue where I championed each writer's individual voice as well as their own writing conventions and intentional writerly decisions. I encouraged readers to "discover the wisdom, ideas, and encouragement" offered in the pages of each issue. Moreover, the predominantly BIPOC, low-income writers engaged their readers as collaborators in making meaning through their writer's memos, thereby acknowledging and even leveraging the fact that they come from different intersectional positionalities than their readers. For example, Sol's writer's memo for her piece "Although the Cage is Made of Gold, It is Still a Prison" challenges readers to "put themselves in they shoes of the undocumented immigrant" in the first issue of *OWG Oracle*. In so doing, Sol is constructing the experiential knowledge of the undocumented immigrant as similar to the experiential knowledge of worry we all gained during the COVID-19 pandemic, and as such, she is working to build connections across difference.

It helped OWG writers to think of writer's memos as a chance to directly address readers of their work. By the second issue, writers began to use these memos more purposefully. For example, in Song's memo for "A Reason to Smile," she explains to readers that the poem is meant to reflect her belief in the power of "a simple smile" to "warm someone's heart, make

their day or even save a life." In her memo for a poem entitled "Passing Off Normal," Puff challenges readers to rethink what's considered normal through a trip to the zoo. In still more examples, the writer's memo for Miz's piece "(taste)percep-tion" asks readers questions to help them think about how empathy can change our perception of feelings and actions in an effort to help readers think about how they feel and act in a different way; Heaven's writer's memo for "The Sound of My Relaxation" acknowledges that everyone relaxes differently and encourages readers to think about how they relax in terms of sounds; and Claudia's writer's memo for "The Skins I Shed as an Isabella Tiger Moth" mentions her specific consideration of people's familiarity with wooly bear caterpillars.

This important collaboration between OWG writers and their readers couldn't be done without community publishing because when one's writing is published, it lasts, it can travel, it has a farther reach than it would if it had stayed in a notebook or on a personal device. Community publishing is important to helping writers make meaning on their own terms; as stated previously, publication is mastery experience and social persuasion (Bruning and Kauffman)— it signifies success in writing and a belief in an author's writerly potential for both writers in the act of choosing to publish their work and readers in the act of collaborating with writers to arrive at shared meaning. I see this use of *OWG Oracle* writer's memos as reflective of OWG writers taking greater ownership of their texts and the work they want their pieces to do for readers (Parks 525).

Rather than a push-pull (Smitherman) between what you do as a writer and what a classroom or academic discourse community or particular reader might expect of you as a writer, OWG was fostering our own community that made our writing values and the purposes of our published pieces clear to anyone and everyone. And I sought to highlight this in the editor's

letters I wrote for each issue where I called attention to readers' expectations of writers, in the general sense of the term, and encouraged them to shed those expectations: "Thus, I encourage you, dear readers, to read each piece with special attention to the voice of each writer. Those commas, capitalized words, ellipses, emojis, periods and lack thereof are meant to be there to guide you to hear— no listen— to each piece in the way it was meant to reach you." In so doing, I sought to highlight how *OWG Oracle* worked to undermine White Mainstream English, a byproduct of white supremacy (Baker-Bell 6).

I use the term White Mainstream English in accordance with linguistic justice scholar April Baker-Bell to "emphasize how white ways of speaking become the invisible—or better, inaudible—norm" (3). And I see the editor's letters and the writer's memos as undermining that invisible norm. I find what writing and language assessment researcher Asao B. Inoue calls Habits of White Language (HOWL) helpful for showcasing how the editor's letters and writer's memos do this work. HOWL effectuate white language supremacy "when they are used as universal standards for communication, used to bestow opportunities and privileges to people" (Inoue 23). In breaking HOWL, *OWG Oracle* and its authors are disregarding a "worship of the written word [that] is not in any way associated with the ability to write well" but instead writing "according to a certain very 'white' standard in a certain very 'white' way" (Okun). In contrast, the writer's memos and editor's letters in *OWG Oracle* encourage readers to pay attention to and value "the wisdom that comes to us intuitively" (Okun) while reading each entry. Using the six characteristics of HOWL forwarded by Inoue, here I wish to briefly highlight how the simple act of including writer's memos with each piece and OWG writers' memos' invocation of readers supports linguistic justice by encouraging readers to listen to and engage with the perspectives of folks who do not speak or write in White Mainstream English (Baker-Bell 8).

First, by explaining to readers the purpose of, inspiration for, and rhetorical/ literary strategies used in a piece, writers in OWG do not make assumptions about readers' "access to the same languages, concepts, practices, capacities, histories, and logics that they [OWG writers] do" (Inoue 24-25). For example, Dean's writer's memo for "I arm wrestled racism" goes into deep detail about the WWE wrestling match that inspired his poem. By explaining these things to their readers, members of OWG published in *OWG Oracle* are not operating under an Unseen, Naturalized Orientation to the World—the first characteristic of HOWL. Second, through the invocation of readers in their writer's memos, OWG writers reject Hyperindividualism— the second characteristic of HOWL. They demonstrate that their writing is not just for their personal benefit but to benefit the community of readers their pieces reach by sharing what they've learned from group meetings and the writing process. For example, Claudia's memo for "Letter to Squanto" specifically mentions using terms introduced during a session facilitated by Heaven about Thanksgiving and the Wampanoag Indians throughout her piece. Overall, the writer's memos make clear that the pieces in each issue of *OWG Oracle* are written by an individual person who is not "neutral" or "apolitical," but someone who is racialized and gendered (Inoue 25). The information shared in writer's memos clarifies that each piece is not reflective of a Stance of Neutrality, Objectivity, and Apoliticality—the third characteristic of HOWL— but of individual experiences and ideas (Inoue 25-26).

Furthermore, in asking readers if certain rhetorical moves were successful and clarifying the intent behind their pieces of writing, OWG writers are relinquishing attachments to understandings of failure "as weakness or confirmation of inadequacy or a lack of control" (Inoue 26). For instance, Sol asks if readers were successfully transported to her wedding day in her memo for "Lipstick." Instead, writers who publish in *OWG Oracle* are acknowledging that

the success of their piece depends on both the reader and the writer— that the success of their piece is not only under the control of an individual who "is in control and rational," the fourth HOWL characteristic (Inoue 26). Moreover, the *OWG Oracle* writer's memos emphasize "interconnectedness with others, relatedness, [and] feelings" for the writer and readers rather than a perhaps more common rule-governed, contractual relationship between readers and writer that assumes "fairness as sameness and consistency," or "ones that treat every individual [reader and/or writer] exactly the same" (Inoue 27). This can be seen in Song's encouragement for readers to let her story inspire them to dream, be creative, and get their rewards in her memo for "Symphony Boyd's Award." The collaboration between reader and writer that the writer's memos invoke undermines the fifth characteristic of HOWL, Rule-Governed, Contractual Relationships.

Finally, OWG writer's memos espouse an orientation toward "the subjective and emotional" reader reactions to the pieces in *OWG Oracle* rather than the sixth characteristic of HOWL, Clarity, Order, and Control (Inoue 27). I find this especially apparent in Miz's writer's memos, which explicitly engage with feelings of fear, love, and doubt. For example, in her writer's memo for "Out my Wind-ow," Miz says, "In this poem, I'm asking you what the view is like, what's it like? What exactly is your interpretation of my window? My view is fogged; I do not see myself the way you see me: I love that and it saddens me." The memos in *OWG Oracle* explicitly work against the disembodiment of words, ideas, and language "from the people and their material and emotional contexts from which the language was created or exists" (Inoue 27), and instead articulates and embraces the contexts that inspired each piece. As Miz writes later in that same memo,

> I have transitioned between various stages of self and the process continues to fascinate me. When a piece like this comes from a deeply humbling and painful process, it is beautiful to

release, but more so, healing. This interpretation of myself no longer blocks the window OR my view AND the older version of me is no longer welcome to view. What is left is the imagination.

Therefore, as a group, OWG was making strides toward a more inclusive understanding

of writing that did not rely on hard and fast rules nor engage in hierarchized power dynamics

through the invocations of readers who were open, inclusive, and willing to meet the writers

where they were. And this is an empowering exercise: it yields "self-esteem, self-confidence,

potential crea-tivity and spontaneity," as linguist Neville Alexander has written about (quoted in

Baker-Bell 27). However, this was largely on our own. When we sought to publish the first issue

of *OWG Oracle* with support from Venture, the shifts in writerly perspectives that were

beginning to take hold were threatened. Bringing those shifts to bear outside of our Zoom space

proved more difficult than anticipated, as the group's first outside readers from Venture

responded to those invocations in ways that highlighted the systemic difficulties that challenge

efforts toward linguistic justice and inclusive conceptions of writers and writing that community

publishing was providing the group. The rest of this article details how OWG contended with

and even worked to revise often white supremacist and classist notions of who gets to publish

and what their voices should sound like in order to enhance participants' writerly self-efficacy.

Overcoming Tensions

One point of tension OWG faced in its publication of *OWG Oracle* was disagreement

about the role of White Mainstream English in the publication when I emailed the final draft of

the first issue to Venture for publication on the program's website. I focus on this particular

tension because it highlights how efforts for writers to feel like writers by being read in their own

voices were challenged. Because "people's language experiences are not separate from their

racial experiences" (Baker-Bell 2), the prioritization of White Mainstream English in the

feedback the group received on the first issue of *OWG Oracle* harmed the development of the

predominantly BIPOC OWG writers' writerly self-efficacy. However, because "many teachers do not realize that standard English is a byproduct of white supremacy" (Baker-Bell 6), it's important to note that Venture was not intentionally discounting OWG writers' identities. Instead, their prioritization of White Mainstream English is more likely the product of the push-pull community-university partnerships face in the midst of the "nonprofit industrial complex" (Gilmore). To be clear, the challenge here is larger than Venture's feedback: it is the implicit and explicit justification of Anti-Black Linguistic Racism, white linguistic supremacy, and linguistic injustice under neoliberalism, and more specifically in this case, the nonprofit industrial complex.

While we no longer engaged with White Mainstream English in OWG and the editing of the writing in the publication reflected this, for our community partner Venture on the other hand, White Mainstream English lends legitimacy to their work with low-income, BIPOC community members in the eyes of their donors, the university, and other stakeholders. This legitimacy underpins the use of "Eradicationist Language Pedagogies" and "Respectability Language Pedagogies" in classrooms, adhering to respectability politics and perpetuating racism (Baker-Bell 28). As stated before, Venture works under the conditions of the "non-profit industrial complex." This means that this high-profile community-university program is vulnerable to the "sternly specific funding rubrics and structural prohibitions" of university support, funding from federal and state agencies, as well as philanthropic donations; it means that due to "the unprecedented expansion of government agencies and services (1933-1973), followed by an equally wide-scale attempt to undo many of those programs at all levels," non-profits "have had to conform to public rules governing public money, and have found that being fiduciary agents in some ways trumps their principal desire to comfort and assist those

abandoned to their care" (Gilmore). Venture's adherence to a carefully managed image that

subscribes to White Mainstream English in the student work they publish/ publicize probably

feels necessary: the program does not want to lose the financial and institutional support to

provide free credit-bearing courses and resources to low-income adults in the community

because the program truly cares about the students it serves.

Thus, expectations for publishing student work on Venture's website highlighted how

writing is still wrapped up in the hierarchized power dynamics inherent in the university that

Paula Mathieu wrote about in *Tactics of Hope*— both for the program alumni writers with whom

I work and for me as a graduate student with precarious access to these alumni, support from or

endorsement by the program itself, and tolerance for and acceptance of my project. I recognized

that as a graduate student engaged in an independent research project not sponsored by Venture,

I was able to engage in more flexible methodologies/ pedagogies that were working to enhance

participant agency and writerly self-efficacy in OWG. But Venture—with its likely unintentional

covert participation in white linguistic supremacy and ties to the nonprofit industrial complex—

seemed to be threatening the group's progress, and therefore the shifts in writerly perspectives

taking place for participants.

Venture's feedback email about the first issue of *OWG Oracle* expressed concerns about

copy-editing and languaging. To clarify again, the feedback email from Venture is

institutionalized white linguistic supremacy's vehicle here— Venture is not white supremacist,

nor do I believe the program is intentionally trying to send "anti-Black [or anti-BIPOC]

messages that imply that their [OWG writers'] language is deficient, wrong, or unintelligent"

(Baker-Bell 27). While the program is not white supremacist, white supremacy culture (Okun) is

baked into some of its practices and policies, just as it is baked into the policies and practices of

capitalist society in the U.S. And the feedback email to OWG about the first issue of *OWG Oracle* demonstrates the problematic elevation of White Mainstream English by Venture. So while the following paragraphs use quotes from this feedback email written by one of Venture's co-directors, it is my belief that the directors are/were unaware of the harm— the "linguistic double consciousness or negative attitudes about themselves and their linguistic, racial, cultural, and intellectual identities" (Baker-Bell 27)— that this feedback, steeped in white linguistic supremacy, could perpetrate against writers in OWG.

The email begins by stating how "THRILLED" Venture is about the formation of OWG and how "treasured" each entry as well as each of the writer's memos in the first issue of *OWG Oracle* is. It specifically asks me to share the entire note with OWG. Then, each contributing writer is congratulated by name before going on to express enthusiasm "to a) have more people read what you've written, b) see more of your work!" But then the email takes its turn. It says, "Before we can add the *OWG Oracle* to our [Venture] website or link to it in an e-newsletter, I would recommend a few changes." It mentions the misspelling of Venture on the front cover (yikes!) and how the staff at Venture have "learned the hard way to run drafts of everything past each other and other pairs of eyes so that we catch whatever we can before it goes to print." The rest of the email gives "a few samples of where I think you'll want to make some edits before the newsletter goes online," qualified by the fact the list is the result of only "a quick reading catching a few things." A list of thirteen "sample editing suggestions" follow before the message concludes with an "entreaty" to the group to take their pieces to the Venture tutors "to make sure all the words are the ones you want. That has nothing to do with voice—it just has to do with accuracy." The email also offers photos of the writers from Venture events to include in the

publication instead of stock images and another paragraph of gratitude and encouragement for the group's work before concluding.

I contend that this feedback email demonstrates Eradicationist and Respectability Language Pedagogies forwarded by linguistic justice scholar April Baker-Bell. Under these approaches, Black language and other Englishes are not acknowledged and treated as inferior (Eradicationist Language Pedagogies) or acknowledged but used as a way to learn White Mainstream English (Respectability Language Pedagogies) (Baker-Bell 28). Neither of these approaches challenge Anti-Black Linguistic Racism nor linguistic injustice more generally. In the paragraphs that follow, I return to Inoue's Habits of White Language (HOWL) because I find it a helpful lens through which to look at the feedback email and identify the language pedagogies that are practiced by Venture to appease the nonprofit industrial complex. The HOWLing that the message performs reveals the nonprofit industrial complex tension with linguistic justice that is so acute in this exchange. Seen through the six characteristics of HOWL (Inoue), I assert that the feedback espouses a "worship of the written word" that elevates a "very 'white' standard," thereby discounting OWG writers' "[abilities] to write well" (Okun).

First, the message describes the "business" of Venture as "editing writing for correctness and clarity." In so doing, it displays an unseen, naturalized orientation to the world in that there is an assumption in that statement about what is correct and clear that relies on "a standard that is both associated with but understood as separate from Whiteness and White bodies" (Inoue 25). Second, I see the "editing suggestions" as elevating the idea that the best *OWG Oracle* for Venture to put on its website will be the result of each individual piece adhering to White Mainstream English as much as possible. The benefit to the community or group, as Inoue writes, is secondary. Thus, the political statement and act that the editing of the publication was

attempting to make is less important than the personal betterment 13+ suggestions included in the feedback email are providing for the writers. I understand this to reflect Hyperindividualism, or the idea that "the point of society, school, the classroom and its activities is to serve the interests and growth of the individual, not the community" (Inoue 25). In these ways, the feedback espouses alignment with Respectability Language Pedagogies in its adherence to respect for correctness and clarity that "surrenders to whiteness" (Baker-Bell 28).

Third, when the email says that these suggestions have "nothing to do with voice—it just has to do with accuracy," it erases the unique rhythms, pauses, ideas, and connections each writer is intentionally and even unintentionally creating— parts of their individual voices. As Dean shared during our OWG meeting discussing the feedback, he has never really understood the difference between periods inside the quotation marks or outside the quotation marks (one of the suggestions for him was to place his punctuation marks inside quotation marks). He went on to say, "it makes more sense if it's outside the quote, 'cause the quote ended." Nonetheless, the suggestion that these suggested edits have nothing to do with voice reveal the Stance of Neutrality, Objectivity, and Apoliticality characteristic of HOWL— one that represents a "one-size-fits-all mentality" where "[f]acts are just facts, not created or manufactured by people or processes or language" and "[c]ontexts and histories are deemphasized or ignored" (Inoue 26). Furthermore, the list of individual corrections that identify each writer by name signals the fourth Habit of White Language: an orientation to the Individualized, Rational, Controlled Self. The email message puts each writer's 'mistakes' or 'typos' on display as potential weaknesses or inadequacies over which they should exert control or risk being perceived as unprofessional or unpolished (Inoue 26). Making the changes suggested in the email would be writing in an "approved (or predefined)" manner (Inoue 26) and replace OWG writers' writing with White

Mainstream English (Baker-Bell 28), thus playing into unfair and uninterrogated expectations of established/ published writers that are forwarded under Eradicationist Language Pedagogies (Baker-Bell 28).

The 'corrections' forwarded in the email underscore a formal or tacit contract between individuals (in this case, a contract between writer and reader that uncritically upholds White Mainstream English), aligning with the fifth HOWL characteristic—Rule-Governed, Contractual Relationships (Inoue 26-27). Finally and also relatedly, the suggestions value "rigor, order, clarity, and consistency" in the form of "a dominant, standardized English language that comes from a White, middle-to-upper-class group of people" (Inoue 27), aligning with the sixth Habit of White Language, Clarity, Order, and Control, which describes a "[focus] on reason, order, and control as guiding principles for understanding and judgement[4] as well as for documents and instances of languaging" (Inoue 27). As such, the email upholds both Eradicationist and Respectability Language Pedagogies in its treatment of OWG writers' languaging as inferior and its failure to acknowledge let alone challenge linguistic injustice or white linguistic supremacy (Baker-Bell 28).

That is, at no point did Venture acknowledge or interrogate their administration's positionalities during their communications with the writing group. They did not recognize their positions as white, professional-class, tenured and tenure-track professors of English speaking to a graduate student of color and low-income, predominantly BIPOC adult writers. And this makes Venture's HOWLing all the more loud. As OWG makes decisions as a collective, we drafted a response together at our next meeting and took a week to look over and make decisions about the changes suggested. As a member of the group and a campus-based advocate for it, I chose to, above all else, honor members' ownership of the group and its publication and not allow for our

community partner program to exercise undue power or pressure over it through these expectations and requests for changes.

After a lengthy and compassionate discussion, the authors featured in the publication decided to comb through the publication once more to make decisions about the items pointed out in the email and find any other writing that did not adhere to White Mainstream English. However, everything was painted as a decision, and some writers chose to edit their work, other writers chose to make some changes, and still other writers chose to leave their work as it originally appeared because, in the words of our response to Venture, "they reflect our identities as BIPOC, people who speak languages other than English, and humans who make mistakes. We also feel that our pieces, as they are, reflect our humanity and the rhythm in which we think, speak, and write." We also changed "[...] nor are we in the business of promoting Edited American English" to "[...] and we seek to decenter Edited American English" in the editor's letter. The publication was eventually posted on Venture's website, and group members are pleased that it is available to reach more people that way.

Nonetheless, the way that first issue of *OWG Oracle* was published was not without issues. The name of the group was miswritten as the Lasting Venture Writing Group instead of Our Writing Group, and my name was misspelled as XXX instead of XXXX. Additionally, Sol's picture and a quote from her writer's bio ("Thanks to [Venture] I find my passion for writing and my purpose in life, which is putting on paper my voice and ideas to strive for equity. I am changing the world by writing diverse children's books and I'm working on a collection of short stories about my life as an immigrant.") was featured at the top of the webpage, which made her feel uncomfortable— as if she were the only member of the group or the main member of the group. We had to ask for these issues to be resolved. The mistitling of the group's name and the

feature of Sol's quote can be tied again to pressures of the nonprofit industrial complex and how it places the burden to maintain donor/ university support on the program itself. These pressures urge Venture to (likely unintentionally) erase OWG's identity/ self-naming in an effort to clarify the affiliation of OWG with Venture for donors and stakeholders.

The group's incorrect title and misspelling of my name had already gone out via email and could not be corrected, and they added a photo of Dean to the bottom of the webpage but kept Sol and her quote at the top. The irony of the paragraph in the feedback email about running drafts past one another to catch issues before they go to print was not lost on the members of OWG. A few months later, Claudia sent me an email about a book club lesson facilitated by Venture about censorship that used alterations of Emily Dickinson's poems as an example. Claudia wrote that it "took me back to the edits that [they] wanted for OWG, many included in the edit were how people used dashes to accentuate the pauses...which is what the publishers omitted and changed. [they] gave specific examples, and titled the handout 'censorship', which i found both fascinating and curious. like hmmm" (personal communication).

Conclusion

Thus, the experience of publishing our first *OWG Oracle* was a learning experience for both me and the members of OWG. As a graduate student with a limit on how long I will be in my current community, I am constantly considering how I can set up the writers with whom I work to maintain and sustain this writing group when I eventually must leave. I am repeatedly asking myself how I can position members of the group to respond to similar issues in the future and to recognize them for what they are— reassertions of white supremacist power and neoliberalism's underpinning of the nonprofit industrial complex. How I go about this is especially important given the power dynamics at play between a program that 'gave them a

chance' and alumni writers in or from marginalized positions who perhaps feel as though they need to 'be grateful' for that chance. I also ask how I can position members of the group to respond to similar issues in the future that honor their values and their writerly identities. One of the ways we tackled this issue is by creating a publication space— a Google site— that does not rely on Venture, one that is managed for and by members of the group.

This experience inspired me and members of OWG to think critically about *why* we were publishing work and our identity and ethos as a group of writers. During our discussion of the feedback the group was given, many members expressed a desire to "be real" with their work, to challenge readers to "transcend" judgment, to "be the future." Some writers were concerned on Venture's behalf with regard to donors and students who might read *OWG Oracle*. They struggled with finding a balance between being authentic, knowing that all writers make mistakes, and having the publication be used for study and publicity purposes. In the end, however, OWG writer Miz made a point about seeing "the survivor in that language" with all its accents, pauses, typos, and the like as well as setting an example for younger writers who may be discouraged by strict adherence to White Mainstream English. Dean also pointed out that OWG is a *writing group* and not a *class*. These ideas really resonated with others, and members of the group left the meeting with the intention to preserve the professionalism of the first issue of the *OWG Oracle* as well as the distinct identity of OWG as different or separate from Venture through individual editorial choices— some of which would adhere to White Mainstream English and some of which would not.

I interpret these decisions as enacting the orientation change advocated for by writing studies scholar Steve Parks who advocates for moving from exchange value (or the exchange of one text for another) to use value (or value being determined by a communal process to

determine a literacy product's use) in community publishing (524). Rather than simply wanting to put out a publication, this experience helped members of OWG decide how they wanted their publication to be used, what values it would espouse, and then they made editorial decisions accordingly. For the next issue, we also made publication decisions accordingly by developing our own OWG Google site to publish our work. This meant that swear words in various pieces would not need to be bleeped, that we wouldn't have to check with Venture before publishing each issue, that writers could language about topics without consideration of Venture and its donors. Thus, this orientation change has helped OWG develop a "model of aesthetic and cultural production that not only provides alternative cultural products for use inside and outside our classrooms, but also alternative systems of production for our students and community partners" (Parks 516). That is, the biannual publications are founded on a belief in "the right of communities to create their own aesthetic self-definitions" and serve to "[expand] access to the means of [literate] production" (Parks 516). OWG writers are in control of how they go public, what they go public with, why they go public, and take advantage of opportunities to learn how to do this public work themselves as a collective. Putting the power to go public in the hands of OWG writers themselves helps OWG revalue publication and the title writer, moving it from something only outside readers/ listeners determine to something that is collaboratively achieved between writers and readers. Such a reorientation to publishing one's writing helps empower OWG writers to go public with their writing on their own terms.

We did share the website with Venture, but the link has never made it up on the alumni page of the program's website. It has, however, been shared via the alumni listserv to recruit new members and invite Venture stakeholders to OWG events.

Gathering regularly with writers at our weekly meetings is one way that helps members of OWG feel like writers but showcasing their work through publication also does. As I wrote earlier in this piece, writers desire readers, and *OWG Oracle* is an opportunity for writers in OWG to directly interact with their readers— to share their insights, truths, experiences, and lives with others through their writing. *OWG Oracle*, especially after the rollercoaster ride with the first issue but also with the increasingly detailed writer's memos, reveals that writers in Our Writing Group are intentionally arranging their words on the page to achieve desired effects, aiming to give readers something to appreciate and interpret; they're happy to be published in the group's publication, but the activity of the group is even more important to members; it showcases the love, leadership, and hope that characterizes Our Writing Group *and* it provides an opportunity for each writer to be recognized by others as just that: a writer.

Notes

1. All names used in this article are pseudonyms, including Venture and Our Writing Group (OWG). Participants of the writing group chose their own pseudonyms while I chose the pseudonyms for the group, our community partner, and its co-directors.
2. To apply for admission into the Venture program, a prospective student must be at least 18 years old, have a high school diploma or GED/HSED, and demonstrate financial need (income at or near the federal poverty level).
3. Ten of the eleven members of OWG that year agreed to participate in my research.
4. Dr. Asao B. Inoue spells judgement with an 'e' intentionally to signal the actor implied in the act of judging.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

Heaven: "Um, it got me out of my comfort zone. Because like I said, without me having to tell someone exactly something about me, I could tell I could read it to 'em. **I could read myself to people, to get them to know me, to understand, to see what I'm seeing, to taste what I'm tasting, and to hear what I'm saying.** And not just listen to what I'm saying—cuz if you gonna listen to what I'm saying, you're gonna always find mistakes. **But if you're gonna hear what I'm saying, you won't be able to find mistakes of how I'm readin' or pronouncin' because you just hearin' everything**."

Gabbi: "So it's like the focus on the writing has helped you in terms of like having people listen to it with only focus on the writing not a focus on how you're saying it or anything like that."

Heaven: "Yes."

Returning to Questions

As the exchange above shows, one of Heaven's literacy desires is to be heard. She wants what she experiences to simply be understood by others through her writing. Heaven doesn't want her readers to focus on the mistakes she makes but instead to focus on the pieces of herself and her experiences that she's trying to share via her writing. The previous chapters demonstrate that similar desires to be heard and understood are shared by many if not all of the members of OWG. This concluding chapter aims to briefly summarize and synthesize the information contained in the previous chapters by returning to the central questions forwarded in the Introduction and will conclude by discussing the implications of this research with OWG and directions for future research.

In the Introduction to this dissertation, I asked, 1) How are writers' literacy desires expressed and practiced in the context of OWG? 2) Who are OWG participants' audiences and how do they understand and seek to reach these audiences? 3) How do the adult undergraduate students in OWG conceive of writing and literacy, and what tensions do they experience in these conceptions in relation to their institutional contexts (the community partner program they graduated from, publication venues, their workplaces, etc.)? And 4) Through what kinds of

practices, pedagogies, community relationships, and life experiences do participants in OWG come to think of themselves (or not) as writers? And to what ends do they write?

First and foremost, the literacy desires of writers in OWG are expressed and practiced through facilitation of OWG meetings, sharing their writing and giving and receiving feedback during those meetings, and by going public with their writing. That is, OWG writers *want* to write, and they want to write to help themselves and others feel understood, feel loved, and feel better. As mentioned in Chapter 3, members' reasons or purposes for writing fall into six categories: effecting change, entertaining others, healing themselves and others, informing themselves and others, inspiring others, and leaving something behind in the world. The practices of the writing group detailed in each chapter—writing and facilitation, sharing and feedback, and going public—make space for these writers to express and practice their desire to write for their chosen purposes only (instead of for degree attainment or achieving accreditation/ credentials as in Venture courses, which are credit-bearing). In OWG, writers are not held to imposed standards or curricular requirements—the only mandates for their writing are ones individual members impose on themselves. Thus, their literacy desires to use their writing to impact themselves and others, as discussed in Chapter 2, are centered in OWG through the practices of the group.

Importantly, none of the reasons for writing expressed by OWG members require a standardized understanding of *accuracy*, as Heaven's comments that open this chapter imply. Instead, they simply require generous readers/ listeners, as showcased in Chapters 4 and 5. Thus, the audiences that writers in OWG are writing for are themselves and others like them. In collaborative field texts, members mention writing for others who feel challenged by society, others who are interested in political issues and equity, "the survivors of the world who were

silenced and are now lost and found" (March 2021 Collaborative Field Text). Many times OWG members expressed a desire to write for anyone who would read/ listen—they simply expressed a desire for readers (see Chapter 5). And they understand their audiences to be "people like me and people like you. Anybody who appreciates writing, either written or vocalized and has a heart is who I write for" (March 2021 Collaborative Field Text). So in addition to writing for other Venture alumni, their family, and their friends, writers in OWG describe their audience as "any and everyone that desire change because we all dream and have faith for a better tomorrow" (April 2021 Collaborative Field Text).

Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate that OWG not only provides a ready and willing group of listeners/ readers who have similar life experiences and are interested in similar topics but also provides opportunities to reach wider audiences through opportunities to go public with their writing. This is important to members of the group who desire to reach "anyone that takes the time to read and understand what I'm writing about as well as be encouraged by it" (May 2021 Collaborative Field Text). Beyond the *OWG Oracle* discussed in Chapter 5, writers in OWG participate in OWG Community Readings, too, which provide an additional way to reach other readers/ listeners.

The first OWG Community Reading encouraged group members to share what they've been working on with a wider audience and gain experience presenting their work. Venture donors, family and friends of members, Venture students and staff, guest facilitators, and members of the wider community were invited to attend the reading at the end of the Spring 2021 semester. The vision was to provide members of OWG with the opportunity to read/ share their work in front of a live audience and showcase the beauty that is our OWG family. We also invited others, namely guest facilitators of OWG, to read alongside us. The event was held over

Zoom in May 2021, and one of our guest facilitators who taught us about writing jokes served as our volunteer emcee. Seven members of the group chose to participate, and to avoid technical difficulties, we decided to show videos of them reading their work rather than read them live. Our emcee and I encouraged attendees to respond to each reading in the chat between performances. We had about 20 people in attendance, including both Dr. Robertson and Dr. Handel as well as members' family and friends.

The OWG Community Reading provided members with a chance to show others what we do each Monday evening during Our Writing Group meetings. It was a warm and happy event, with lots of chat participation. Writers were able to showcase the breadth and depth of their writing practice as well as their personalities in their 5-minutes-or-less videos. They were pleased with the turnout and with the event as a whole, recognizing it as a celebration of their connections over writing as well as all their writing accomplishments over the course of the academic year. As Song wrote in an email directly after the event, "Everyone was super Amazing I cried I felt like we were graduating. I'm so glad we are family" (personal communication). Since then, we've held one more community reading in Spring 2022, which was hybrid and enjoyed 40+ attendees.

Chapters 2, 3, and 5 demonstrate how the adult undergraduate students in OWG conceive of writing and literacy and the tensions they experience in these conceptions in relation to the institutional context of Venture, the community partner program they graduated from. The structures and procedures of OWG seek to resist the literacy myth that Venture programming seems to propagate (for better or for worse). Instead of engagement with the literacy myth, writers in OWG desire to take action with their writing—both the act of it and its products. And in so doing, they encompass more people in who 'count' as writers and more processes in what

'count' as writing. Thus, OWG creates a space where adult writers with economic barriers contribute to the world of writing by transforming perceptions of "good writing" and stereotypical authorship as well as advocating for themselves as writers by ensuring the longevity of OWG under the Venture umbrella.

Finally, Chapters 3, 4, and 5 showcase the practices and relationships that help participants in OWG come to think of themselves as writers. Participatory pedagogies provide the mechanisms by which members lead the group, the values with which they give and receive feedback on their writing, and the encouragement to go public with their writing. Through participation in OWG, members learn about themselves as writers, and upon learning about themselves as writers, OWG members more confidently self-identify as writers. As writers, then, they can create texts with social weight, texts that accomplish their goals, texts that can create change—outside of the more traditional classroom spaces of Venture and without the expectation that more, better, or different literacies can transform their lives (Graff). Instead, in OWG the literacies that writers come to the group with are enough, and they can pick and choose other literacies to acquire themselves instead of adhering to expectations set by the university, Venture stakeholders, or anyone else.

Implications & Future Directions

The practices and relationships that help participants in OWG come to think of themselves as writers happen primarily through participatory pedagogies, an approach to understanding and elevating adult undergraduate student writers' purposes, audiences, and contexts for writing as well as their conceptions of literacy in a variety of writing spaces. Participatory pedagogies— writing pedagogies based in love, respect, and horizontal power relationships— is the asset-based, inclusive approach to literacy instruction/learning that guides

the purpose and procedures of Our Writing Group and helps it meet members' literacy desires. This approach helps OWG validate and affirm the literacy expertise and desires the group's adult undergraduate members bring with them, which helps enhance OWG members' writerly confidence. The findings from this dissertation research with this group support participatory pedagogies as Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies (CSPs) conceptualized specifically for adults; PPs stem from a similar guiding question as CSPs, but as theorized by Paris and Alim, CSPs are predominantly conceptualized for youth[3]. But what about the unique needs of adults who perhaps have been broken and/or made whole through education, whose opportunities to "survive and thrive" in education have been disenfranchised?

Participatory pedagogies extend CSPs to include adult learners and emphasize making space for adults to see *themselves* as whole and love *themselves* through self-direction of their learning. They manifest in OWG through its collective leadership structure guided by its collaboratively devised mission statement and procedures as well as shared facilitation responsibilities. Prioritizing multiple avenues for participation in all aspects of group meetings—such as serving as facilitator, writing to a prompt, sharing writing in group, and/or providing feedback to other members—makes room for OWG writers to exert collective leadership over the group. Thus, participatory pedagogies encourage members' literacy desires to inform the expertise shared during OWG meetings and help members affirm that expertise through their participation and engagement, thereby enhancing OWG members' writerly confidence.

By placing the power to determine the purpose of OWG and how the main activities of the writing group are executed, the structure of the group models how participative spaces can question the status quo of structural power (Freire and Faundez): as showcased in the body

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[3] "What is the purpose of schooling in pluralistic societies?" (Paris & Alim 1).

chapters of this dissertation, just because I am a credentialed educator gaining formal expertise in writing studies does not mean I should have more of a say in OWG's activities than any other member. This move to affirm their writerly expertise is especially important for adult undergraduate students, a student population about which composition scholars still don't know enough (Navarre Cleary) but who are arriving or returning to postsecondary classrooms (Digest of Education Statistics, 2018) with a variety of experiences that affect what they want to learn and how. Rather than do away with adult students' existing repertoires as adult learning theory endorses (Kenner and Weinerman), participatory pedagogies offer a more developmentally and socially appropriate framework to support adult literacy and evaluate adult literacy programming. Participatory pedagogies honor and stimulate the complexities of literacy practices and learning by combining principles of community-engaged research as well as values from abolitionist, humanizing, and critical pedagogies. This approach to adult literacy learning/ instruction prioritizes student-educator collaboration and values the experiences and expertise of students and teachers equally, as in community-engaged literacy research participatory methods (Wells; Bautista, et al.). It positions students in control of their own literate/educational journeys, as advocated for by critical pedagogies (Straubhaar). Participatory pedagogies avoid a one-size-fits-all approach to (literacy) education by encouraging students to value and utilize their previous experiences as in humanizing pedagogies (Camangian) and create knowledge that can build students' capacities to solve problems and enact social change with the same creativity, courage, and urgency of abolitionists (Love).

This nuanced, localized approach is of the utmost importance for meeting the needs and elevating the desires of a diverse group of learners like adult undergraduates. Participatory pedagogies holds potential for helping ensure student investment in postsecondary literacy

courses and help demonstrate courses' and instructors' investment in student writing purposes and desires as well as students' experiential and cultural knowledge. Furthermore, participatory pedagogies offer opportunities for instructors, researchers, and administrators to gain nuanced understandings of adult undergraduates. In *Learning to Question*, Freire encourages educators to "re-do" what he's done not by following him but by developing practices that respond to the limitations and affordances of unique teaching contexts. Participatory pedagogies provide such a framework by aiming to accept unique individual writing processes and celebrate them, offering a perspective through which writing products are treated as important manifestations and representations of the identities and values writers want to put into the world. When we come to understand writers' processes and products this way, writers, researchers, and educators can better support and enact inclusive and culturally sustaining conceptions of literacy in higher education.

Therefore, participatory pedagogies as showcased in this dissertation has implications for the field of Writing Studies, for literacy in higher education, especially for adult learners, and for community-engagement and community literacies. For Writing Studies, participatory pedagogies makes space for adult learners to question dominant views and display leadership in writing spaces or contexts. In the context of OWG, the commitments and values that guide participatory pedagogies help OWG members' "negotiate a group identity and establish group rules, implicitly or explicitly" (Highberg et al. 25) for Our Writing Group that honor their evolving literacy desires— whether those align with professional and academic progress or intrinsic, personal motivations to write. As a result, participatory pedagogies can help writing studies scholars create ways for writers to be authentically inspired to write about diverse topics that align with

writers' literacy desires and encourage them to regularly take writing risks with regard to genres and topics.

For literacy in higher education, participatory pedagogies' elevation of writers' literacy desires makes space for students from different positionalities to counter oppression they've experienced in educational and social settings that told them they can't write or be writers without a formal degree, helping them develop greater confidence in their writing products and processes. Important to OWG members' ability to talk back to "the way[s] power has been acted upon" them (Rosenberg 9) is carefully attending to how participative spaces can question the status quo of structural power. As such, by centering and elevating students' personal expertise, adult undergraduates can openly "question commonsense understandings" (Parker 25) of writers and writing.

Finally, participatory pedagogies puts the power to determine what participants learn and do in Our Writing Group as well as how they learn and do it in members' hands rather than mine. Importantly, participatory pedagogies' elevation of desire holds me— as a researcher, facilitator, and participant— accountable to the writers with whom I work. Participatory pedagogies can help community-engaged and community literacies researchers interact with participants as adults and writers (not as students or empty vessels, but as equals) and help us avoid assuming what their desires are or even (perhaps unintentionally) ignoring them.

I come to this research (and I opened this dissertation) as the daughter and sister of capable and impressive adult undergraduate students. An approach that valued what my mom and brother brought to their college writing classrooms may have helped them develop a greater sense of belonging rather than forcing them to overcome imposter syndrome. I conceptualized participatory pedagogies to respond to this possibility and to showcase how adult education in a

university-adjacent space can be "a process through which people could find purposeful and democratic unity with others to solve their collectively-defined problems [... that] develop[s] naturally from the people themselves, from the ways they could and would learn, and [could] be reinforced constantly" (Adams and Horton 206-207). In the future, I'm eager to see how participatory pedagogies take shape in other settings for (adult) writers, like writing workshops and credit-bearing composition courses. And as a community-engaged scholar, I'm interested in how participatory pedagogies—as an approach to literacy instruction, learning, and research that positions adult learners as agentic, builds on the resources that students bring with them, and serves as a way to engage in writing activity— affords ways writing researchers' work can be upheld beyond the completion of their projects.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – OWG Interview Protocol

These questions have been adapted from *Literacy in American Lives* by Deborah Brandt.

DEMOGRAPHICS/ CONTEXT: Participants will be asked to tell me about themselves, first. These questions are designed to help facilitate this process.

- Where are you from? Where do you live now?
- Where did you grow up? How would you describe it?
- Where do you live now? How would you describe it?
- How old are you, or when were you born?
- Where did you go to school? How would you describe your education/ schooling? How did your teachers describe your abilities in school? What was your general attitude towards school? How is this similar to and/or different from your experience with [community partner program]?

- What is your occupation? How would you describe your trajectory to this current position? What is your general attitude towards your work?
- What languages do you use? When/ how did you learn these languages?
- Tell me about your family: what was it like growing up, and how is it now?
- What were your hobbies growing up? What are they now?
- Who have been the most influential people in your life thus far?
- Tell me about your life now: what is a typical day for you like, and who do you spend it with?
- What is your greatest accomplishment or proudest moment?

WRITING MEMORIES: Participants will be asked to tell me about their experiences with writing while growing up, first. The questions below are designed to help facilitate this process.

- What are your first memories of writing?
- Describe a vivid memory or two you have of writing when you were young.
- What kinds of things did you write about in school? At home?
- Did you ever keep a diary? Why or why not?
- What writing do you remember your parents and/or siblings (immediate family members) doing when you were young?
- What do you remember of being taught to write—where did it happen? When? By whom?
- Do you have memories of struggling with writing? Describe.
- Do you have memories of succeeding with writing? Describe.
- Do you have memories of being tested on your writing or with writing? Describe.
- Do you have memories of sharing or performing your writing with others? Describe.
- Do you have memories of your family using writing for any traditions or holidays? Describe.
- Do you have memories of writing with others? Who? When? Explain.
- What language(s) did you use when writing when you were young?
- Would you say your experiences learning to write/ writing were typical for your usual social group?
- In your opinion, how did learning to write (in elementary/ high school, college courses, at home, on your own, etc.) influence the way you write now?
- What's the best (most useful, stickiest, or most enlightening, etc.) piece of feedback you have received on your writing? Describe.
- What's the worst (most hurtful, rudest, most misunderstood, etc.) piece of feedback you have received on your writing? Describe.
- What was your general attitude towards writing while growing up? Has it changed over time?
- What do you think has influenced your writing the most over time? This could be a person, an experience, a character trait—anything!

CURRENT WRITING PRACTICES: Participants will be asked to tell me about their recent writing experiences, first. The following questions are designed to help facilitate this process.

- How would you define writing? Who and/or what has influenced this personal definition?
- How would you describe the ease or difficulty of writing for you? How did you come to this understanding of writing?
- Tell me about the last thing you wrote.
- When do you write the most now? What do you write?
- Do you write at work? For whom? Explain.
- Do you write at home? For whom? Explain.
- Do you ever write for self-education? Explain.
- Do you write with others? Explain.
- How does writing make you feel? Does it vary between types of writing you do?
- What kinds of writing do you feel successful at? What types of writing do you not feel successful at? Are there types of writing you can do but don't feel confident about? Explain.
- What has influenced the types of writing tasks you feel you can and cannot do?
- Would you say your current writing practices are typical for your social group?
- What writing does your family do?
- Does your family use writing for any traditions or holidays now?
- Describe a time when you used writing to get something you needed.
- What language(s) do you use when writing?
- Describe your writing process. Has it changed over time? How do you feel about your process?
- Describe a vivid memory or two you have of a successful writing session in the recent past.
- Describe a vivid memory or two you have of a difficult writing session in the recent past.
- How would your life be different if you didn't know how to write?
- Do you feel like a writer? When/ why?
- Have you ever taught someone how to write or about writing? Describe.
- How do you feel about writing now?
- How would you describe your writing and/or yourself as a writer now?

OWG-INFLUENCED WRITING PRACTICES: Participants will be asked to tell me about how participation in [community partner program] and OWG has shaped their writing practices, first. The following questions are designed to help facilitate this process.

- What writing did you work on during OWG meetings? Explain.
- How has [community partner program] influenced your writing (your definition of writing, your writing process, your feelings associated with writing, your success or difficulty with writing)?
- What was the most meaningful thing you wrote for [community partner program]? Why?
- What was the most meaningful thing you wrote during the OWG? Why?
- How has OWG impacted you as a writer and/or your writing process?
- How has sharing your writing with others and/or reading the work of others impacted you as a writer and/or your writing process?

- What are a few specific things about OWG that have especially helped to support your writing and/or your writing process?
- What are a few specific things about OWG that could be improved to better support your writing and/or your writing process?
- What did you accomplish during OWG and/or what is something you learned from participating in OWG?
- Is there anything else you'd like to share about you, your experience in the writing group, your writing, or [community partner program]?

Appendix 2 – OWG Collaborative Field Text Form

OWG Field Text
[date]

Instructions: Choose a different color font and free write in response to one or more of the following questions/ prompts. You can begin with any question; you do not need to answer them in order. You may choose to write anonymously or sign your name next to your response(s).

If my writing had the power to change the world, what would I want it to change? What effect would it have?

Why do I write?

How is OWG affecting what and why I write, if at all?

Who is my audience for my writing? Why?

How do I want to use my writing?

Does OWG inspire me to be a leader? Why or why not?

How is OWG similar to or different from other writing experiences I've had?

What is my definition of writing?

I feel like a writer because…

I don't feel like a writer because…

My favorite parts of OWG are… My least favorite parts of OWG are…

Appendix 3 – Participants

Name[4]	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Gender	Occupation	Relevant Educational Background	Relevant Writing Background
Arthur Nellan	44	African American	Man	Writer, Reiki Practitioner	HS diploma (2018); college credits from partner program (class 2018); college credits from local community college (2018); Reiki Certification (2021); currently planning to apply to local community college	OWG member since Fall 2020; published through partner program and OWG; wants to write for a living
Claudia Caruso	41	Italian American Caucasian	Woman	Environmental and civil rights activist, writer (gasp!), community organizer	HS diploma (1998); college credits from partner program (class of 2007); attended college 2007-2010	OWG member since Fall 2020; published through partner program and OWG; writing since early childhood as a coping mechanism; matter;" positive writing school-based and social writing experiences
Song Byrd	62	African American	Woman	retired Telecommunications Officer for a University Campus Police Unit	High school graduate; Secretarial Certificate; college credits from partner program (class of 2006)	OWG member since Fall 2020; published through partner program and OWG; author of a collection of poetry and a motivational book that can both be purchased on Amazon
Dean Friends	23	Black	Man	Pre-K Teaching Assistant, Writer/ Poet/ Rapper	High school graduate (2016); graphic design college credits from local community college (2017); college credits from partner program (class of 2019)	OWG member since Fall 2020; published through partner program and OWG; member of a local rap group; wants to write for a living

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[4] All names, including "Our Writing Group," are pseudonyms. Nine out of ten participants chose their own pseudonyms. The tenth asked me to.

Echo Patois	26	Multiracial	Woman	Cook/ Host	High school graduate; college credits from partner program (class of 2019); intro to composition credits through partner program (Fall 2020); college credits and pre-requisites for nursing program at local community college	OWG member during Fall 2020; published through partner program; likes writing but finds it difficult to get started, especially independently; participates in regular letter writing with other women whose partners are in the military
Miz Reverbe rate	36	African American	Woman	Student, creative, community member, mother, provider, sister, friend, daughter, counselor consultant, resource, teacher, healer, healing-seeker, constant giver/ sometimes receiver, high viber	High school diploma (2003), local college (2003-2004), college credits from community partner (2014), intro to composition credits through partner program (2019)	OWG member since Spring 2021; published through partner program
Puff Ball	60	Black	Woman	Classroom Assistant, Student	High school diploma (1979); college credits from partner program (class of 2006); currently enrolled at local community college in liberal arts transfer program; inducted into Phi Theta Kappa honor society (March 2021)	OWG member since Spring 2021; published through partner program; Writer's Institute Poetry Contest winner (2017); has been writing poetry since the 6th grade; plans to write and publish a book one day

Heaven Ize	49	Black/ African American	Woman	Child of God, Queen, Mother, Writer	High school diploma (1990); college credits from home city (1990-2004); Urban League Career Readiness & Computer Class (2013); Rose Program for parents at local college (2017); college credits from partner program (class of 2019); intro to composition credits through partner program (Fall 2020)	OWG member since Spring 2020; published in OWG and partner program publications; a poem and story were featured in a local newspaper in relation partner program; always identified as a writer and a reader.
Sol Edad	36	Mexican	Woman	Spanish Teacher, Activist	GED Certificate (2005); Introduction to the Childcare Profession at local community college (2005); Early Childhood Music and Movement Association, Cycle of Seasons Program, and Teacher Training Course (2008-2015); Satellite, SIDS course (2004-215); Community Coordinated Child Care, Launching into Literacy and Math Institute (2005-2010); College credits from partner program (class of 2017); intro to composition college credits through partner program (Spring 2018); Black music and American Culture college credits through partner program (2018); Filmmaking workshop through partner program (2019)	OWG member since Spring 2020; published through partner program and OWG; University-sponsored Write by the Lake Workshop and Retreat (2017); University-sponsored Writers' Institute Conference (2017); Selected Keynote Speaker for YWCA Eliminating Racism Empowering Women Conference; Selected Keynote Speaker by UW Writers' Institute Conference; Winner of city-wide Poetry Contest; story published at Vocal.media; selected for 2+ stories for the Inside stories podcast; Winner of the local Moth storytelling slam; author of selected story by the local public library; author of selected story for Wisconsin Public Radio; selected keynote speaker for local community writing center's Celebration of Writing

| Joi Aych | 50+ | Black | Woman | Special Education Assistant, local school district; Mentor, Online Verbal Abuse Journals; Advocate for Survivors of Domestic Violence and Abuse | High school diploma; college credits from a college of art and design (2009-2012); college credits from partner program (class of 2006); intro to composition credits through partner program (2007); Visual Communication Media Fine Art Associates degree (2008); Special Education Assistant Training (2017); YWCA web/app developer training & employment program (2017) | OWG member since Spring 2020; published through partner program and OWG; self-published three children's books about domestic abuse/ violence and self-confidence |

Appendix 4 – Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
Research Participant Information and Consent Form
Title of the Study: A Qualitative Study of a Weekly Writing Group for Nontraditional Students
Principal Investigator: Kate Vieira (phone: 608-334-9908) (email: kevieira@wisc.edu)
Student Researcher: Gabrielle Kelenyi (phone: 773-742-0763)

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH
You are invited to participate in a research study about writing groups accessible to nontraditional students.

You have been asked to participate because you identify as a nontraditional student—a student 25 or older without a college degree.
The purpose of the research is to determine how writing groups accessible to nontraditional students influence members as writers. This study will include students 18 or older without a college degree.

This research will be conducted at [OWG] through observation of peer interactions during writing group meetings in-person and online via Zoom, pre- and post-writing group student self-assessments at the beginning and end of the semester, optional literacy history interviews, and examination of voluntarily submitted student writing artifacts.

You will be photographed during your participation in the in-person and online [OWG]. Additionally, if you choose to participate in an optional literacy history interview, you will be audio taped during that interview. Only members of the research team will see photographs and hear audio recordings as part of analysis; the researcher, her advisor, and audiences of research presentations will see photographs and hear and/or read about information gathered from your interviews and surveys as part of research presentations. The photographs and tapes will be kept for 7 years before they are destroyed.

WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?
If you decide to participate in this research you will be asked to participate regularly in writing group activities (the researcher will be observing activities such as giving and receiving feedback, sharing writing with others, risk-taking in writing, and writer productivity), complete pre- and post- writing group self-assessments, optionally analyze de-identified data, volunteer for an in-person interview if available, and voluntarily submit writing artifacts to the writing group facilitator who will analyze them for evidence of the beliefs indicated on the self-assessments and influence of writing group participation on student literacy desires/ goals.

You will be asked to complete 2 surveys or self-assessments. You may volunteer to complete 1 or more interviews. You may participate in analyzing de-identified data.

Your participation will last approximately 2 hours per session and will require 12 sessions which will require 24 hours in total.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?

Participants may reveal personal, sensitive, or identifiable information when responding to open-ended questions on the self-assessments and during the optional interview. Participants will have the opportunity to review field texts, publications, and presentation materials about this research to ensure that such personal, sensitive, or identifiable information gathered from the self-assessments and optional interview(s) is removed from research presentations and publications. There is a risk of a confidentiality breach for what you say during [OWG] meetings online and in-person because these meetings represent portions of this research that are happening with others (such as giving and receiving feedback, sharing writing with others, etc. during writing group meetings); therefore, the research team cannot guarantee confidentiality for information gathered from [OWG] meetings. Additionally, even with the use of a password, Zoom is not a completely secure platform, and the research team cannot guarantee confidentiality because of the use of this third-party application for virtual meetings. While the hope is that participants keep everything confidential, a confidentiality breach is a possibility for writing group activities.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?

We don't expect any direct benefits to you from participation in this study.

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

While there will probably be publications as a result of this study, your name will not be used unless you want it to be. If you participate in this study, we would like to be able to quote you directly. Because publication may be important to members of this study, we would like to give you the option to have your name associated with quoted excerpts.

If you agree to allow us to quote you in publications, please initial the appropriate statement at the bottom of this form. The first statement gives permission to quote you directly in publications without using your name. The second statement gives permission to quote you directly and use your name.

The researcher and her advisor will have access to the research data; other study participants will have access to the research data with your express permission. If you agree to allow your de-identified data to be analyzed by other study participants, please initial the appropriate statement at the bottom of this form.

Your confidentiality will be protected by the use of pseudonyms, should you choose that option below, and the secure storage of all data including audio files and photographs on separate password-protected flash drives that will be kept in a locked safe in a locked office. Participant information collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research after you leave today you should contact the Principal Investigator Kate Vieira at 608-334-9908. You may also call the student researcher Gabrielle Kelenyi at 773-742-0763.

If you are not satisfied with response of research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Education and Social/Behavioral Science IRB Office at 608-263-2320.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you begin participation and change your mind you may end your participation at any time without penalty. If you'd like to withdraw your data at any time, including images and audio recordings, please contact the student researcher, Gabrielle Kelenyi at 773-742-0763 or kelenyi@wisc.edu.

Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research and voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of Participant (please print):_____

_____   _____
Signature   Date

_____   I give my permission to be quoted directly in publications without using my name.

_____   I give my permission to be quoted directly in publications using my name.

_____   I give my permission to have my de-identified data used in data analysis with other study participants.

Appendix 5 – Pilot OWG Meeting Agendas

February 10, 2020
- I.   Writing Into the Room (5-10 min)
  - A. Think of all the writing you've done this week. Begin by making a list of everything you've written in the last 24 hours. Writing includes everything you've written—text messages, social media updates, emails, grocery lists, your introduction for today, etc.
  - B. How'd writing go this week?
    - 1. Look back at your list: what was easy to write and what was more challenging? Why?

- II.   (Re)Introductions (20-25 min)
  - A. For class today, you were to write an introduction of yourself in whatever form felt most right for you (poem, paragraph, comic strip—anything!).
  - B. Share your entire piece in groups of two or three; as you listen to one another, think of one GLOW for each member of your group and share it with them.
  - C. Share your piece with the entire group; if your piece is more than one paragraph long, just choose one to share.

        D. Time for questions, compliments, and explanations.

III.   *Everyday Editing*: The Serial Comma (30 min)
        A. Invitation to Notice: what do you notice?
            1. His room smelled of cooked grease, Lysol, and age. – Maya Angelou, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1969)
        B. Serial Commas help combine sentences and expand ideas by using sensory detail—specific nouns or vivid verbs; they establish patterns.
            1. Commas can separate items or actions written in a series.
            2. Lists of three or more items or actions.
            3. Two items or actions are a pair, not a list, and do not require commas.
            4. The "oxford comma," the one before and or or at the end of the list reduces confusion, but it's a stylistic choice.
        C. Invitation to Imitate: imitation lets us try on some things powerful writers do that we may never have tried.
            1. Hector's room smelled of gym socks, Hot Cheetos, and lies.
            2. In imitation, I like the pattern of what the writer does, and then I fill in the parts with images from my own mind or my own life.

IV.   For Next Time: Letter to Writing (5 min)
        A. Option 1: Write about how you view yourself as a writer. You can craft this as a statement directly to your readers. Are you comfortable when you face the blank field of a new Word document? What place has writing had in your life? Do you need writing to live? How does writing help you live? How do you generate ideas, ground inspiration, or motivate yourself to write? How do you write? These are questions to get you started, but these aren't questions that you need to answer. Come up with metaphors and stories from your life or the world around you that express your thoughts and feelings about writing and about yourself as a writer.
        B. Option 2: Write a letter to writing. Tell it how you feel about your relationship with it, about how writing shuts down or starts up your brain, about how you'd be nice to it if it wasn't so _____. Talk to it like a friend, a parent, a nemesis, the love of your life, the person next to you at the diner, the person flirting with you at the club, the person seated next to you while you're stuck on the tarmac, the nurse taking your blood pressure, the cop cuffing your wrists... Use this assignment as an opportunity to explore your life-long relationship with the English language and the writing process.

February 17, 2020
    I.   Writing Into the Room (5-10 min)
        A. Self-Assessment Survey
        B. How'd writing go this week? What makes writing easy for you and what makes it more challenging? Why?
    II.   Writing Accomplishments (15-20 min)

A. For our meeting today, you were to write a letter to writing or a description of yourself as a writer. Share that experience with us! If you wrote something else, share with us about that!

B. What was easy and what was challenging in writing your piece? What are your favorite parts of your piece and what aren't you so keen on? Why?

III. *Everyday Editing* (30 min)

A. More Invitations to Notice & Imitate the Serial Comma

1. Her cleats, shin pads, and sweats were in her backpack, slung over her shoulder and heavy with homework. – Peter Abrahams, Down the Rabbit Hole (2006)

2. I walked back to my room wet and dried myself with a pair of jeans. I put on long underwear, pants, a long-sleeved shirt, shoes, and my parka. I stood in front of the heater. – Willy Vlautin, The Motel Life (2007)

3. Then I heard a scrape, a thud, and a yelp. – Bryers, Duffy, and Meyers, The SOS File (2004)

4. The place holds the odor I love. Of wood and stale sweat and chewing gum and more sweat and of the tough rubber skins of all the basketballs ever dribbled here. I breathe deep to take this inside me. – Tony Johnston, Any Small Goodness (2003)

B. Serial Commas help combine sentences and expand ideas by using sensory detail— specific nouns or vivid verbs; they establish patterns.

1. Commas can separate lists of 3 or more items or actions written in a series.

2. The "oxford comma," the one before and or at the end of the list can reduce confusion, but it's ultimately a stylistic, authorial choice.

IV. Invitation to Write & For Next Time (5 min)

Let me tell you something.

When you are a kid, you think you are going to remember everything. You think you are going to remember everyone who sits next to you in class and all the things that crack you up. You think you are going to remember the place where you live and all the things that make your family yours, and not the family down the hall or across the street. You think you are going to remember every punishment and big test and rainy day. You think you will remember how you feel being a kid. You think you will remember so well that you will be the best grown-up who ever lived. And you might.

Or you might be… old enough to get a kind of amnesia. Memories are like days and bones and paper: they can turn to dust, and they change if not preserved.

…Who knows? Maybe you can use my stories. Maybe they will help you unpack your own more carefully, just in case the strange and improbable day should arrive that you forget what it was like to be a child.

Though I hope it never does.

-Esme Raji Codell, Sing a Song of Tuna Fish (2006)

A. You pick whether your let me tell you something is about a person, place, or something else of your choosing. The only rule is that you start with the line Let me tell you something about _____.

    B. Take this opportunity to practice your craft through the use of sensory details and practice using the serial comma!

February 24, 2020

I. Writing Into the Room (10 min)
    A. Self-Assessment Survey (if you haven't already taken it)
    B. How'd writing go this week? What makes writing easy for you and what makes it more challenging? Why?
    C. What are your goals for our meeting today?
        1. At a bare minimum, what would you like to accomplish?
        2. Ideally, what would you like to accomplish?
        3. In your wildest dreams, what would you like to accomplish?

II. Writing Accomplishments (30 min)
    A. For our meeting today, you were to begin with the line, "let me tell you something."
        1. Choose a few lines (a paragraph at most) to share with us.
        2. Then, share the experience with us! That is, tell us what was easy and what was challenging in writing your piece; share with us your favorite part or ask us a question about your piece.
        3. If you wrote something else, share with us about that!

III. Invitation to Write/ For Next Time (20 min)
Using narrative writing as a way to explore ideas and understand our own experiences gives us the chance to practice using rich description and reflection to show (not tell) about how we come to understand things (a)new.
    A. Option 1: Think of a time in your past when you became disillusioned with a person or persons, or with a place, or for that matter with anything that you previously admired (this can be a pastime like traveling or button collecting, or this can be a person like Michael Jackson or your older sibling). Maybe someone you admired did something you disagreed with and you stopped liking him or her because of this. Maybe you were living a particular lifestyle—say, one that left you unhappy—and suddenly realized it was empty and unsatisfying compared to the richer life you could have been living. How did this moment help you gain a new perspective or understanding?
    B. Option 2: For this option, practice your qualitative research skills by identifying someone to interview about a concept of your choice (consider concepts related to your interests, such as politics, authorship, teaching, parenting, or even dating). Whoever you interview, this person should have a clear relationship and/or personal experience with the idea you've chosen to explore. You might consider interviewing a roommate, a teacher, a friend, or a family member. You can record the interview with permission from the interviewee and use that recording to tell a narrative that weaves together your thoughts and the thoughts of the interviewee about your topic. In your narrative piece, you might consider describing the process of preparing for, conducting, and reflecting on the interview experience as well as how the abstract idea you've chosen to discuss stays the same and/or evolves over the course of the conversation.

<u>March 9, 2020</u>
I.   Writing Into the Room (10 min)
    A. Self-Assessment Survey (if you haven't already taken it)
    B. What did you write this week? How did it go?
    C. What are your goals for our meeting today?
        1. At a bare minimum, what would you like to accomplish?
        2. Ideally, what would you like to accomplish?
        3. In your wildest dreams, what would you like to accomplish?

II.   Writing Accomplishments & Strategies (20 min)
    A. For our meeting today, you were to revise your disillusionment narrative to show (not tell) and compose a poetic distillation of your piece (or another one).
        1. Choose a few lines (4-5 sentences at most!) to share with us.
        2. Then, share the experience with us! That is, tell us what was easy and what was challenging in writing your piece this week; share with us your favorite part or ask us a question about your piece.
        3. What strategies did you use to help you write/ revise this week? What walls did you come up against? Share some of your writing strategies with us or help others overcome some of the barriers they've faced.
        4. If you wrote something else, share with us about that!

III. *Everyday Editing*: Using Dialogue (25 min)
    A. Invitation to Notice (see below)

The Elements of Dialogue			
Setting	Characters	Discussion	Punctuation

    B. "Good dialogue encompasses both what is said and what is not." – Anne Lamott
        1. Writing dialogue is not only about giving people things to say, but also about the actions they do while they are talking.

2. Writers are selective; they choose to write only about what's important, and they delete things that don't move the story along.

   C. Invitation to Imitate: Write about any place you eat and talk using dialogue.

      1. This could be a break room, restaurant, kitchen or dining room table, anywhere!

IV. Invitation to Write/ For Next Time (5 min)

   A. In whatever form feels right for you, answer the following question: What conversation do you want to have with the world?

      a. You might consider SHOWING (not telling) your audience about this conversation and why it's important…

         i. what it sounds like, feels like, looks like, tastes like, smells like…

         ii. use dialogue to illustrate it.
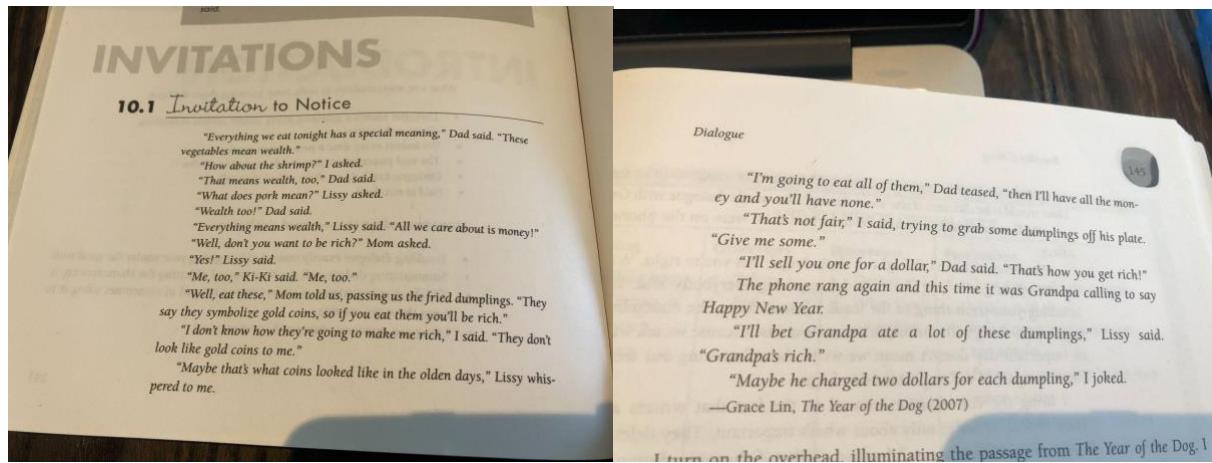
Appendix 6 – OWG Statement of Purpose

[Our Writing Group] Statement of Purpose
Fall 2020

We, [Our Writing Group], meet to learn from one another and support one another in our writing endeavors. This means that we listen thoughtfully to one another and give each other kind, constructive writing suggestions to not only make what we write better, but to help all of us become better writers. Therefore, our feedback and suggestions are grounded in our reactions as readers/ listeners and our own experiences and expertise as writers.

We commit to sharing our materials with one another for easy reference, to being open to multiple and new perspectives, to asking questions, and to using our time together to share, give and receive feedback, and most importantly to write.

As a writing community, we value honesty, and we trust that what happens in our group stays in our group. We value each other as friends and teachers; we all come to this group as learners. We respect each other as people, writers, teachers, and learners.

Our writing group norms include:

- **We believe that the writer is the owner of their own work, and therefore we trust them to make writerly decisions that are right for them and their piece, even if we don't agree.**
- **We believe every member should be able to speak freely during group meetings, and we will assume the speaker's/ writer's best intentions as the audience/ listeners.**
- **We believe in waiting for authors to ask for feedback, and we will encourage authors to be specific about what type of feedback they're looking for, if any.**
- **We believe we should always find something positive to share about someone's writing.**
- **We believe that this isn't a competition but a space to share and be supported, so we will be open to and encouraging of different writing styles and taking writing risks.**
- **We believe in lifting each other up and not putting each other down; therefore, we commit to learning to just listen to each other's words and emotions.**

We, the members of [Our Writing Group], will develop and take away writing strategies, ideas, and expertise to use not just for and in this group, but to use and share with others out in the world of writing. We will pass it on.

rev. 9/26, approved 9/28, reviewed and reapproved 1/11/21

Appendix 7 – OWG Feedback Policies & Procedures

OWG Feedback Policies & Procedures
Fall 2020

- Ideally, everyone who wants to share should be able to share each week.
- Writers can choose to share their page or read aloud or both.
- 1-2 pages single-spaced/ ~3-5ish minutes "limit."
- Writers must share whether or not they want feedback, but it doesn't matter if it's before or after they share.

Audience members each share feedback once: this should be positive and constructive feedback, according to what the writer requested.

approved Fall 2020, reviewed and reapproved Winter 2021

Appendix 8 – Member-Facilitated OWG Meetings Breakdown

This breakdown includes meetings from Fall 2020, Spring 2021, Fall 2021; Summer 2021 is not included because I did not attend those meetings. Finally, guest facilitators are not represented in this breakdown unless invited by a member.

Fall 2020

Date & Facilitator	Go Around	Treatment of Topic	Prompts

11/2/2020 Claudia Caruso	How are you? Have you been writing? Sick of politics?	Topic: Women's Suffrage Movement
		Activities: Definitions of key vocabulary and history of the movement and 2 Getty Museum Website/ Database videos
		  1) Interview with a woman about women's rights
		  2) Propaganda video about women's independence in society
			Choose a picture: write about it
			You can:
			Write how the picture makes you feel.. can be a poem or whatever format you'd like to put it in.
			You can also…
			Write from a perspective of someone in the picture.. could be as if you were there and talking about it from the future; to someone else. A family member, a friend, the photographer. Be creative!
			(Share example from past experiences)
			Or… you can write like you're teaching others about what was going on.

11/9/2020 Heaven Ize	What's one writing victory and one writing struggle you experienced this week?	Topic: Thanksgiving & the Wampanoag Indians
		Activities: Local author talk about writing and publishing and 2 YouTube videos
		  1) The Wampanoag Way by Scholastic
		  2) The Wampanoag Indians and Thanksgiving by Pat Spray
			If you were to meet a Wampanoag Indian, what kind of conversation would you have? What would you bring up and what would you avoid?
			If you were to invite them to Thanksgiving, what would it be like?
			Write in the voice of a Wampanoag Indian.
			Or you can continue working on your own, individual project

11/23/2020 Sol Edad	Your name and the name of your favorite movie. Why is your favorite movie?	Topic: 5 Storytelling Elements Activities: Digital handout explaining the 5 elements and 3 video examples with subsequent discussion of the videos 1) Ted Talk by author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie about the danger of a single story 2) Moth StorySLAM video of The Extra Mile by Nestor Gomez 3) A Radio Extra from The Moth	A child accepts a dare… The cab driver suddenly turned left instead of right and I had no idea where he was taking me... Tell us about a time someone tell you or you tell someone a hurtful truth… Or work on your own project!!
11/30/2020 Dean Friends	How was writing this week? How was your Holliday (if you celebrated one)? What is something coming up this week that you are excited for?	Topic: Implicit Bias Activities: 3 YouTube Videos 1) TEDx Talk on Implicit Bias by speaker Melanie Funchess 2) CNN Special on Where Racial Bias Comes from by host Anderson Cooper 3) Holding a Black Lives Matter Sign in America's Most Racist Town by Rob Bliss	Write an experience you've had about being racially profiled. Write about what it feels like for you to navigate through white America. Write about if you have ever racially profiled somebody who looks different than you. Continue something you have already have started.
12/14/2020 Arthur Nellan	How was writing this week? What challenges did you face? What successes did you have?	Topic: Meditation Activities: Arthur told his own meditation story and showed 1 YouTube Video 1) TEDx Talk on Sound Meditation by speaker Alexandre Tannous	Write about a time when you could have used meditation. Write your own meditation or write about how to create a meditative lifestyle. Write about ways you already meditate (think about activities that bring you peace): how do they make you feel? Be descriptive! Or continue working on your own project!

Date & Facilitator	Go Around	Treatment of Topic	Prompts
2/15/2021 Heaven Ize	What's something you're proud of from this week?	Topic: Ken Johnson, game inventor & how to use your imagination Activities: YouTube Video of Ken Johnson talking about how he uses his imagination to invent games	If you were to meet KJ, what questions would you ask him? Write him a letter. If you were to invent a game, what game would it be? How is writing like inventing a game? Play a game with your writing.
2/22/2021 Joi Aych	How are you?	Topic: Character Development Activities: Prompts to get to know your characters better and encouragement to use meeting time to write for a local contest	Spend 10 minutes writing a letter from a character in your novel to you, the author, explaining why you should write about them! This serve three purposes: 1. As you write, it helps you get into the mindset of the character. 2. It's motivating to know that your character wants you to write about them. 3. It's good practice for when you will need to send a letter to an agent or publisher.
3/15/2021 Song Byrd	What's your favorite song or musical artist and why?	Topic: Lyricist Activities: Definition and description of what lyricists do; game to guess who the highest paid lyricist is and how much they make; tips for writing lyrics and a YouTube video about How to Write a Song: Tips for Writing Lyrics to Music by Berklee Online	Our assignment is to listen to one of the instrumentals listed below [2 YouTube videos and one mp4 file were given in the chat] and write lyrics for a song, commercial jingle, theme song for a television show or play. OR listen to the music and write the lyrics you sense or feel. You can write a poem, song lyrics, or letter.

3/22/2021 Sol Edad	What is humor? What do you find funny?	Topic: Guest Facilitator–Sol's friend who is a comedian Activities: Definition and description of types of jokes and humor techniques; videos of Sol's friend doing stand up comedy plus subsequent group discussion/ analysis	Write a funny story Write about something funny that happened to you Try to write a stand-up comedy bit Try to write a joke
4/12/2021 Miz Reverberate	Write about your ego in the form of an animal. If your fear were a color, what color would it be? Why?	Topic: The Ego Activities: YouTube video by speaker Carl Jung on the Psychology of the shadow projection	What are the qualities you most dislike in other people? Other words, how do you project? Is your "shadow" your friend or enemy? It doesn't have to be an opponent. How is ego relatable to the saying "it was a dark and stormy night?"
4/26/2021 Sol Edad	Tell us what do you do to state positive or reduce stress.	Topic: Laughter Therapy Activities: Definition of laughter therapy and 4 laughter exercises (two facilitated by Sol and 2 facilitated by YouTube videos) 1) Pass the Laughter 2) Copy the Laughter 3) 1 Minute Laughter Exercise YouTube video by Brain Power Wellness 4) Laugh Therapy YouTube Video of a comedian with a bit entitled "My son thinks he is white"	CHALLENGE! Chose a topic. Write one short paragraph about your topic. Chose a song, one that you know the verse perfectly by memory. Change the lyrics of the verse of your song using the words of your paragraph. Work on your stuff or write about something very funny that happened to you.
One more meeting after this was facilitated by a member-facilitator who did not consent to be a part of the research component of OWG.			

Fall 2021

Date & Facilitator	Go Around	Treatment of Topic	Prompts
9/20/2021 Claudia Caruso	Wednesday, September 22 is the autumnal equinox, which means there will be equal day and night hours. What is your favorite part of the fall season?	Topic: Rachel Carson & Writing Letters Activities: Description of Rachel Carson and her books and YouTube Videos about Silent Spring and DDT (at this point, Claudia was able to secure a Chromebook and showed these videos herself; they are not reflected in her slides)	Continue with your own projects If you could write a letter to someone who is alive or dead, who would you write to and why? What would you write about? Have you ever written a letter to a public official? Who was it, and why did you write the letter? Did you get a response? Pen a letter to someone who you think could affect change in your community. It can be about crime, the potholes in the roads, the lack of trees in your neighborhood, or something else that is important to you and your family.
10/4/2021 Sol Edad	Tell us one thing you know about Hispanic Heritage Month	Topic: Hispanic Heritage Month Activities: 2 YouTube videos about Hispanic Heritage Month and an article on Babble about Hispanic versus Latinx Heritage Month 1) Hispanic Heritage Month Is Confusing (And That's Okay!) by Cracked 2) Yo Soy Chicano: The East LA Student Walkouts of 1968	Pick up where you left off… What would you change in the education system today? What other celebrations do you think should exist and why? Write a shore story about a time you participate in a rally that was memorable.

10/11/2021
Heaven Ize
	If you was given a chance to enter one or two of your writings to be picked in the Literature Nobel Prize, which one(s) would you chose?	Topic: Nobel Literature Prize 2021 Winner Abdulrazak Gurnah
		Activities: 2 YouTube Videos interviewing Abdulrazak Gurnah and discussing his body of work
		   1) BBC News interview with author
		   2) SABC News coverage of award
			Can you take yourself into your own thoughts in your Own head and pull out something you would write about?
			If you met Mr. Gurnah, in person or virtually, what type of questions would you ask him? Write him a letter.
			Finish whatever you was writing or working on.
			Write about the qualities that you believe a piece of literature that wins the Nobel Prize should have.
			Write about winning.

10/18/2021 Claudia Caruso	Do you believe in/have any superstitions?	Topic: The Evil Eye Activities: Description of evil eye charm and protection it's believed to provide; delineation of three types of evil eyes; information about signs someone has given you the evil eye; the history/ origins of the evil eye and how it appears in different cultures	Had you ever seen an evil eye amulet before today? What did you think it was? What is your opinion of it now that you learned about it today? Is it something that you would purchase for yourself, or for someone in your life? Why or why not? Have you ever given anyone the side eye? Are you going to think twice about doing it from here on out? Or would you concentrate more on sending bad vibes to someone? Why? Write about your own superstitions. Where do you think you got them from? Family? Reading? Life in general? Do you think they help you or harm you? Continue working on whatever pleases you...

11/15/2021 Heaven Ize	What are you grateful for today?	Topic: What do Wisconsin means in Native America? Activities: Review of Wisconsinhistory.org's page on the name Wisconsin; listening to a WPR piece entitled, "Why Is There A 'Wau' In So Many Wisconsin Place Names?"	Have you ever visit a place that was so FUN or was a GREAT EXPERIENCE?! If so, tell how you would persuade or convince someone that they should visit that same place. Is an "eye 4 an eye" a good basis 4 determining an appropriate punishment? Y or Y not? Write & explain. Write & explain how language, art, music, beliefs, and other components of culture can further global understanding or misunderstanding? Describe the ways cultural and Social Groups are defined and how they changed over time? Fin. What you were Writing. Or, if you've been havin time 2 yourself, write about whatever you've been reflectin on.
11/22/2021 Arthur Nellan	How has your writing been this past week? What challenges did you face? What successes did you have?	Topic: Arthur's Sankofa Trip from the Summer Activities: Definition of Sankofa; sharing of pictures from the trip and connection to recent treatment of critical race theory in the news; explanation of what he learned at various Black history museums in Philadelphia and Washington D.C.	Write about a trip that you took that inspired you. Write as if you lived during a time period other than your own-- consider during slavery, the Jim Crow era, etc. Write about one of the pictures [Arthur] shared. [link to these were shared in the chat] Pick up where you left off.

12/13/2021 Heaven Ize	Have you ever heard of slanglang? What do you know about givin' dap?	Topic: What's the meaning of Dap & Dap Me Up? Activities: 3 YouTube videos about Dap 1) The Secret of Dapping by CBS Sunday Morning 2) A funny video giving a beginner's guide to Dap 3) A follow-up video to the one above about giving Dap during COVID	Make up your own slang lang. Write a story that features someone given' dap. Write an acrostic poem for the phrase "Dap me up." Explain dap to an alien in 2065. Write about how dap saved your life. Pick up where you left off.
12/20/2021 Miz Reverberate	What is something YOU DID NOT know about yourself that you have come to find out…	Topic: Know th(eye)SELF! AND KNOW the meaning of words Activities: YouTube video of "Rasta Man" explaining how our words create reality	"Nothing to excess" "Surety brings ruins" What does Socrates mean when he stated, "know thyself?" Write a message to throw in a bottle and into the Atlantic Ocean-unknowing YOURself. Describe silence in words or alternative meanings. Work on completing everything for tonight's submission [reference to OWG Oracle].

Appendix 9 – OWG Point People Weekly Checklist

<u>OWG Weekly Checklist</u>

<u>Saturday</u>
- Create a meeting link (Google Meet or Zoom—whatever works) and send a reminder email to OWG members with the meeting link.

<u>Monday</u>
- Host the meeting via Google Meet or Zoom-- OWG meets from 5:30-7pm CT online!
- Remind next week's facilitator that they're facilitating (during the meeting and/or afterwards via email) -- supports (slides and agenda template) for each week can be found <u>here</u> [linked to Summer Calendar].
- If there's no facilitator signed up, ask for someone to volunteer at the meeting. If no one does, please step up yourself!

~~Thursday~~
- ~~Reach out to the next facilitator to see if they need any support in preparing for the upcoming meeting. Help as necessary/ asked.~~

Troubleshooting: call, text, or email Gabbi :)

<u>Point People</u>
Dean (email included here)

Appendix 10 – OWG & Venture Partnership Framework

Our Writing Group (OWG) & Venture Partnership Framework

The purpose of this document is to ensure clear expectations between both OWG and Venture. Both parties sign and date this document to indicate they are in agreement with the terms and expectations. This document was composed by Gabrielle Kelenyi, founder of OWG and PhD candidate in Composition & Rhetoric. This partnership framework agreement has been approved by the members of OWG, with several members adding their own rationales to the resources and deliverables therein.

Community Partner: _____**Our Writing Group (OWG)**_____
Community Partner Lead Contact(s): ___**Sol Edad & Dean Friends**_____
Community Partner Lead Contact Email: _____
Community Partner: _____**Venture**_____ _____
Community Partner Lead Contact(s): ___**Dr. Phillip Handel & Dr. Stephanie Robertson**_____
Community Partner Lead Contact Email: _____

Project Goals (narrative): OWG is a weekly gathering of writers with options for feedback, sharing, publication, and performance. OWG is a community writing group for Venture alumni with the goal to help adult students feel capable of and supported in accomplishing creative, professional, academic, and

personal writing projects. OWG extends the sense of community the Venture course builds by providing a collaborative writing community after Venture graduation.

Research demonstrates that believing in one's own writing abilities increases graduation rates for returning adult students, who have often been academically disenfranchised by structural inequities. Writing groups help foster such confidence by offering community support for members' writing goals, including receiving, giving, and implementing feedback. Despite their documented importance, such writing groups are not consistently available and accessible in our local community. OWG fills this gap for Venture students and alumni: it encourages members to feel calm, capable, and in-control while writing, deepens their beliefs in themselves as writers, and debunks the myth that only some people struggle (or succeed) with writing. Writing groups, as contact zones and safe houses (Westbrook), as spaces of empowerment and power negotiation (Highberg et al.), as collectives that demand ongoing (re)definition to effectively include each individual writer (Mathieu et al.), present an opportunity for asset-based and self-directed learning for adult undergraduates because they encourage members to demonstrate previous knowledge and mediate new learning, develop skills and understandings directly useful to them, and enhance their self-efficacy and initiative—hallmarks of asset-based and self-directed learning (Hayes et al.).

Two-hour meetings begin with check-ins and a short meditation or mindfulness exercise, announcements that include local and national publishing opportunities found by members, time to write with prompts facilitated by members, and time to share. Writing group members sign up to facilitate group meetings in an effort to strengthen ownership over the group, build writerly confidence, and share individual writing interests and expertise with each other. In this way, as both members of OWG and facilitators, participating in OWG is meant to encourage each member to use their own interests and expertise to inspire each other to write. Members have also invited guest speakers to facilitate workshops and answer questions about publishing, humor, novel writing, poetry, etc. So far, writers have anecdotally suggested that the group offers helpful writing inspiration, helps them consider wider purposes and audiences while writing, (re)consider educational opportunities, and feels like a safe and supportive space to develop their craft and achieve their writerly desires. OWG publishes a journal of members' writing, the *OWG Oracle*, twice per year, and hosts a community reading once per year.

Community Partner (include outcomes and impacts): Research indicates that the stakes for writing are rising as global information economies demand ever-increasing levels of literacy from individuals. In light of this research, part of Venture's mission is to help students develop confident voices with which they can use writing to effect change and build solidarity in their communities/ workplaces. OWG supports this mission by providing consistent time, space, and support to write with others as well as avenues to publish and share member writing with wider audiences. Traditional Upper Midwest University students are afforded similar support through free writing groups at the Writing Center, student and campus publications, and open mic and performance events on campus throughout the academic year. Venture students and alumni should be afforded the same opportunities.

Resources & Deliverables: Our Writing Group is open to alumni of Venture, and it accepts new members twice yearly—once per academic semester. The open call for new members will be circulated to Venture's alumni email list by a member of Venture's staff, ideally one of the co-directors of Venture, and members of OWG will invite new members to join via the alumni Facebook group. If there are other avenues through which the call can be circulated to alumni, Venture will make those avenues available to OWG.

Having an alliance with Venture would be beneficial for many reasons to OWG. Each year, more people are added to the Venture family, and to have access not only to the new Venture family members, but also the alumni, will further enrich OWG. A Venture co-director will be OWG's liaison

to communicating with everyone in our growing Venture family. We have decided collectively, within OWG, that we will accept members once per academic semester, and allow people to visit to see if it is a good fit for them as writers (usually the first month of each semester). – Claudia Caruso & Miz Reverberate

OWG develops a participant publication twice per year similar to *AdVentures,* the student publication attached to the Venture Course. Members of OWG choose pieces to publish in this magazine and accompany each piece with a writer's memo. Members of OWG have final editing rights to the *OWG Oracle*, but they may seek proofreading support from Venture staff. Individual OWG authors may choose whether or not to accept proofreading suggestions from outside readers, such as Venture staff members and volunteers. The OWG publication is an opportunity for participants to share some of the knowledge they build together and perspectives generated through writing in community on different topics throughout the year. Venture may use OWG writing published in the *OWG Oracle* in their newsletters and link the OWG website (where the OWG Oracle is housed) on the Alumni *AdVentures* landing page, the *AdVentures* landing page, and/or the Lasting Venture landing page on the Venture website for current students, other alumni, and university and community stakeholders to access it. In such circulations (on the Venture website and in Venture newsletters and updates), Our Writing Group should be referred to as Our Writing Group and/or OWG, and the group's publication should be referred to as the *OWG Oracle* and/or *Our Writing Group Oracle*.

Being a part of the Venture family is really important to all of us. We all have forged relationships built off of trust and understanding with Venture faculty and staff, and having them to use as a resource for OWG now, as well as in the future, will help strengthen our writing skills, as well as our confidence in using our voices to say what needs to be said. We take pride in our writing, and being able to showcase it where not only other Venture alumni can view it, but also our friends, family, and especially friends of Venture that help us with support via funding, community events, and other Venture functions. We will accept all feedback with love and grace, but it will be up to each individual writer as to how the edits will be used (or not used) in their pieces, because sometimes we may feel that certain edits take away integral aspects of our writing voices. Many of Emily Dickenson's poems were posthumously edited and published, which altered not only her cadence, but also altered the feelings she elicited through her work. In some poems, the editing of her punctuation and structure completely altered the piece! Readers of the **OWG Oracles** *will be able to travel with us on our writing journeys, and see improvement in our abilities as writers. – Claudia Caruso*

During the COVID-19 pandemic, OWG runs via Zoom and members join from their homes. During in-person instruction, OWG may run concurrently with a Venture tutoring night at the Venture classroom space. No matter what the modality, OWG will utilize an Upper Midwest University Zoom account, facilitated by Venture, to continue to support OWG members who reside outside of the community or those who can only join virtually as well as to conduct OWG business, such as recruiting and coordinating guest speakers. Additionally, OWG may request Venture sponsorship at the Venture classroom space for their in-person meetings and may explore options for children's activities through Venture Junior.

This would help make OWG better because it will allow us to connect in person and be able to get the help we need and questions we may need answered. With utilizing and meeting in the classroom of Venture, we would be able to add others including Venture alumni members that may also want to be a part of OWG. Though covid is still here, we can still be able to connect in person in the classroom by keeping our distance and mask on. – Heaven Ize

OWG is part of an IRB-approved dissertation research project under Gabrielle Kelenyi, through which testimonials and feedback about Our Writing Group are regularly collected. Testimonials, feedback, and

other quotes about OWG and Venture will be regularly shared with Venture for use in updates, newsletters, and the Venture website to help promote OWG and ContinuingQuest. Such testimonials should not be used to predominantly spotlight individual writers but rather OWG and/or alumni programming as a whole. Upon completion of Gabrielle Kelenyi's research, members of OWG and a Venture Co-Director will work together to try to secure regular visitation and/or support from an appropriate Upper Midwest University Writing Center Instructor or a Venture literacy instructor at OWG meetings.

This would help make OWG better because sometimes OWG members have questions about writing strategies, processes, genres, and choices that Upper Midwest University Writing Center Instructors are specifically trained to answer. - Gabbi Kelenyi

In conclusion, Venture will encourage the continuation of OWG by providing help finding in-person meeting space, an online platform such as a UB Zoom account, and a Writing Center staff member or literacy instructor to regularly attend OWG meetings. Venture can feature OWG writing published in the *OWG Oracle* as part of their online updates, electronic newsletter, and other stakeholder communications.

OWG is important to me because it helps me get through rough times. Writing is a form of therapy for me.The last two years have been hard so I enjoy listening to my fellow writers who inspire me every Monday evening. – Arthur Nellan

Owg is a haven of expression. No hyperbole. It is a place to continue your literary pursuit after you complete Venture Humanities. It's a routine that provokes thought and offers the necessary domain for alumni to share their passionate ideas through writing. To me, OWG positively influences me to continuously improve upon my craft in a supportive environment. If left to my own devices (no scientist), I could go a whole week without writing anything for one reason or another but since I'm in OWG I can rely on creating at least 4 pieces a month. – Dean Friends

Budget: As part of its encouragement of alumni activities, Venture can use funds from either of its nonprofit funds to support expenses for OWG such as a Zoom account, Writing Center instructor hours, and printing.

How will Venture be recognized as a sponsor and partner?
Venture will be recognized as a sponsor and a partner through mentions throughout the OWG website (including hyperlinks where possible/ appropriate), listed as a sponsor on OWG publications, and with words of gratitude during OWG Community Readings.

Participants: The target audience of OWG is adult writers who want writing support, specifically alumni of Venture.

This target audience aligns with Venture's mission to build multiple viable pathways to education within a family literacy model and help students develop confident voices with which they can use writing to effect change and build solidarity in their communities/ workplaces. OWG provides consistent time, space, and support to write with others and develop a sense of writerly self-efficacy that helps members meet the demand for ever-increasing levels of literacy in our evolving global economies.

Annual review of and updates to this Partnership Framework will take place by the end of November every year. Venture's co-directors pledge to try to support the continuation of OWG as an exciting way for alumni to share their writing and to gain more autonomy over their voices. This support may include helping to find, sponsor, and/or fund an online platform (e.g. UB Zoom account) and/or in-person space (such as the Venture classroom space) for OWG meetings,

spreading the word to alumni both to recruit new members and to find audiences for readings, suggesting guests, considering budget requests, and providing (when asked) editorial suggestions for OWG online or print publications.

Signatures:
Community Partner (OWG): _____Date: _____

Community Partner (Venture): _____ _____Date: _____ _____