ABSTRACT

REARTICULATING THE MISSION OF THE WRITING CENTER:
MAKING ROOM FOR LGBTQ PERSPECTIVES

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In this thesis I examine the connections among LGBTQ identity, queer theory, and writing center work. In chapters 1-3, I apply queer theory and the idea of performativity to classroom and writing center pedagogies. In chapter 4, I present and analyze data from interviews with three consultants who self-identify as either gay or queer. In doing so, I analyze how these consultants “perform” in the writing center; the extent to which they reveal or not their sexual identity to student-writers and colleagues; and how their perspectives seem to redefine or rearticulate understandings of possible missions for writing centers. I conclude by offering suggestions for how writing center administrators might better integrate LGBTQ perspectives in writing center practice, in consultant training, in writing center administration, and in the campus and community missions of writing centers.
REATICULATING THE MISSION OF THE WRITING CENTER: MAKING ROOM FOR
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CHAPTER ONE

THE POTENTIAL OF QUEER THEORY IN THE WRITING CENTER

I would like to begin with a brief reflection on how queer theory and writing center work have come together in my own life. When I came to Miami University in the fall of 2009, I was a new graduate student who was teaching first-year composition, working in a writing center, and “coming out” for the first time. So my identity, on multiple levels, was certainly shifting during this first semester. I was not sure what type of teacher I was or what type of consultant I was in the writing center, and becoming more comfortable with my gay identity—and making this identity public—seemed to complicate my professional and personal development even further. When in the classroom and in the writing center, I still feel a mix of emotions that I would certainly describe as anything but stable.

Yet in the midst of this instability that I still feel, queer theory has been helpful to me because, first and foremost, it advocates for the rights of LGBTQ people. Although queer theory sees identity categories as inherently unstable and although it is about much more than sexuality, I have yet to read or meet a queer theorist who has come off as homophobic. At the same time, queer theory has also been helpful—and indeed calming—because it seems to say that at a fundamental level, “It’s o.k. to be unstable!” Also, “You don’t have to be a perfect consultant or an awful consultant but can be somewhere in between.” One of the main ideas of queer theory is that our identities can shift or change—whether through the control of cultural norms or simply how we think about our own bodies.

In addition to queer theory, writing center work has also calmed me down. Although I have never explicitly said “I’m gay” to a student writer or to other consultants, the writing center is a space where I have felt more comfortable making my gay identity visible—perhaps more so than I have as a teacher in the classroom. For example, when I encountered, for the first time, a consultation in which a student was advocating for gay rights and the abolition of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, I felt liberated when I told him that I agreed with and supported his position. During
In this thesis, I interview other consultants and teacher-consultants to find out how their LGBTQ identities have impacted their work. I’m interested in the ways that they have “performed” as consultants and, in particular, the extent to which they have revealed (or not revealed) their LGBTQ identities. Yet I am also interested in more than the decision to “out” themselves. One of the fundamental ideas of performativity says that people inevitably perform roles or act in “scripted” (see Ahmed) ways whether they consciously choose to or not. So, I’m interested in the actions/experiences of my consultants that can be viewed as unscripted, period. Yet what do I mean by the word “script”? What constitutes a script—and what is an example of one? How does a person determine what scripted and unscripted actions looks like? Are scripts always a bad thing? And, perhaps most importantly, what is the potential of unscripted actions—what do we do with unscripted (queer?) moments.

Perhaps most obviously, actors follow scripts on stage as they read lines they are supposed to say or directions for how to act—where to move, how to interact with others, when to end a scene, etc. Though less obviously, there are other scripts as well, such as a teacher’s guide (or even a standard syllabus) which teachers feel compelled to follow in the classroom. Yet even beyond these types of scripts, we might consider cultural norms or rituals as a type of script as well. Thus, there are more visible and less visible scripts. And, there is also the distinction between “scripts” and “norms.” What the idea performativity entails, however, is that cultural norms, in themselves, become a type of script that can force people to act in certain ways—ways that often cause them to feel oppressed. For example, a person may feel the need to act masculine so that they don’t look gay (see Butler’s discussion of gender norms in Gender Trouble). Thus, the idea of performativity entails that we are performing all the time—whether we want to or not. There are scripts that we feel compelled to follow (consciously and unconsciously) and, again, some more visible and some less visible than others.

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1 Although I never formally said “I’m gay”, I felt like I may have been read as gay at the time. At the least, I felt like I was “performing” in such a way that revealed more of my gay identity.
2 See Sarah Ahmed’s The Promise of Happiness in which she talks about “happiness scripts.” As Ahmed describes, an example of a happiness script is a parent who may object to their child being gay because they just want him or her to be happy in a form of marriage (between a man and women) that is more socially accepted/normal.
In the context of writing center work, I would argue that one very visible script is consultant guides, such as Paula Gillespie and Neal Lerner’s *The Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring* or Ben Rafoth’s *A Tutor’s Guide*. These guides have helped consultants to better respond to the variety of questions with which students come into the writing center. They have helped us, as consultants, to alleviate the confusion, stress, and chaos in student’s lives—which is good thing. Yet at the same time, consultant guides are scripts that can constrain our actions as consultants—and even make the experience of working in writing centers boring at times (see my discussion of Boquet in chapter 3). For example, one idea is to meet writers where they are. Even though most writing centers do not consider themselves “fix-it shops” (North), consultants often still feel obligated to correct papers at the last minute or just focus on grammar, especially if that is work the student writer prefers. And beyond the student writers themselves, I would say that in the University structure as a whole, many teachers still perceive the writing center as a place where students merely go to fix bad grammar. Consultants do “perform” in ways that challenge this stereotype—by persuading the writer to look at early order concerns (Gillespie and Lerner), for example—but it can be hard to do so, in part because they feel compelled to follow the script (found in consultants training guides) to meet writers where they are. Yet, in addition to the script of a consultant guide (as well as the “fix-it shop” script), are there other scripts in the writing center that are perhaps less visible?

Perhaps the very job description of a consultant and the mission of the writing center are scripts that we don’t want to necessarily challenge, but certainly re-think. I agree that our “job” as consultants is to, in the famous words of Stephen North, “make better writers, not better writing” and that the “primary responsibility” of writing centers is to “is to talk to writers” (North 446). Indeed, one of the reasons why I love writing center work is because it’s all about building ideas through “conversation” (see also Bruffee; Harris). Yet I also I understand that these conversations do not happen in a vacuum: if nothing else, they are full of identity assumptions that may make it hard to even start a productive conversation. Indeed, identity assumptions and stereotypes—or cultural norms/scripts that are no less present in the writing center—could potentially make it hard for some students to even respect a consultant as a professional (as I describe in more detail in Chapter 4 when discussing Jose’s experiences). On the other hand, a student-writer might respect a consultant as a professional yet also see them as
something more—such as a friend, a mentor, a teacher, an activist. In these situations, conversations inevitably focus on more than just the topic of “writing.”

Inevitably, consultants are read in different ways by student-writers who don’t ever see them as disembodied voices whose job is to just generate conversation. At the least, consultants take on or “perform” multiple roles—some which they chose themselves, some of which others choose for them.

In my second chapter, I trace the development of the notion of performativity and talk about how it has been applied to and discussed in terms of classroom pedagogies. My reason for doing this is simply because queer theory and the idea performativity more specifically, have been applied to a much greater extent in the classroom and I argue that many of the ideas that apply to the classroom apply, albeit in context-specific ways, to writing center work. Recently, for example, Karen Kopelson has suggested ways that teachers can use performativity as a technique to make it less easy for students to make identity assumptions (i.e. performing a neutral role so that students don’t assume that the teacher is merely trying to promote a gay agenda). By looking at specific classroom studies, I will talk about how the act of teaching, itself, and any pedagogy is inevitably a performance that is read in countless ways—by both the teacher and the students.

My discussion of performativity in the classroom will provide a good starting point to then look, in chapter three, to the ways in which queer theory, performativity, and difference more broadly, have been discussed in relation to writing center work. After having looked at the classroom, it will be easier to see that more work can certainly be done to “queer the center,” as Harry Denny has argued in his pioneering work, and apply the idea of performativity, more specifically, to writing center work.

Moving from analyzing the work of others, in chapter four I present the perspectives of three writing center consultants whom I interviewed and who self-identify as either gay or queer. I apply the lens of performativity to understand and to draw connections and disconnections across and among their perspectives. In doing this, my discussion of performativity in the classroom will be helpful again. To me, writing center work is also a type of pedagogy that is read in countless and unpredictable ways by both consultants and student-writers. Thus, I will pay attention to the ways that the three consultants I interviewed perform in the writing center—within the space of the consultation and in the larger space of the writing center (how they
interact with co-workers, for example). Furthermore, I believe the way in which they perceive their roles as consultants—as well as how they perceive the purpose of a consultation or of the writing center more broadly—could certainly be understood as a type of pedagogy. So, I will try to understand what, exactly, their pedagogy is and the different ways in which people might interpret it. In looking at their performances, I will point out the multiple roles—which extend far beyond making better writers—that they have all already performed in their writing centers. Most importantly, I will pay attention to how their “performances”—that is, their actions/interactions with student writers and how they seem to perceive their pedagogy as consultants—work to make writing centers safer and more comfortable places for LGBTQ people. Yet I will also pay attention to the ways that they seem to expand or “rearticulate” the role of a consultant and the mission of the writing center.

Ultimately, then, in chapter five, I will argue that their actions or performances ask us, as a writing center community, to conceive of the writing center as a place whose primary mission extends far beyond helping students with their writing needs: although our job is still certainly still about making better writers, José, Aloysius, and Will ask us to see the writing center as a place that is more fundamentally invested in promoting student and consultant development in very personal, non-academic ways.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss my own subject positioning as a gay teacher-consultant on a campus that I have seen support the activist efforts of LGBTQ students—by at least allowing them to create student-run organizations and allowing LGBTQ activists to speak on campus. I realize that it has been easier for me to even have the opportunity to interview other LGBTQ people because I have been fortunate to live, study, and work on a campus that has allowed me to conduct research at the intersection of writing center work, LGBTQ activism, and queer theory. After doing this, I will also discuss what queer theory is, more specifically, and why I believe it has the potential to transform how we view the mission of the writing center.

3 In chapter four, I discuss José Muñoz’s theory of disidentification, which he describes as a strategy a person can use to rearticulate the roles they perform.
Subject-Positioning and University Setting: Situating myself and my study of LGBTQ Consultants and Queer Theory

As I begin to talk about my own subject positioning in this study, I want to make clear that I don’t see this as a single position. My perspective in this study comes from and constantly shifts among the multiple perspectives I hold from a number of different positions. These positions are thus unstable, complex, confusing—they are positions that I don’t fully understand and doubt that I ever will. As I write this sentence I’m simultaneously, among other things, a gay person, a boyfriend, a graduate student, a teacher, and a consultant (not to mention a son, grandson, brother, friend, etc.). Yet at times, am I one more than the other? In the classroom, I certainly consider myself a teacher. But while I’m teaching, am I less of a consultant? Am I less gay, especially if I don’t (and never have) formally “come out” to my students?

Although I would like to answer “no” to all these questions, I really can’t. When teaching, I’m much more directive with my comments in class than I would ever allow myself to be during a consultation. Furthermore, because I have never “come out” to my students, I feel as though my gay identity is suppressed to a degree—pushed to the background you might say. At the same time, my subject positions are always all simultaneously a part of me, and I can feel, on a very physical level, the pull of each of them—yearning to be seen, to be heard, to not be less than any other position. When I started a class discussion this past semester on the relationship between masculinity and gay identity in Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club*, I could feel—even though I did not “come out”— the presence of my gay identity fighting to be heard beneath my skin: I could feel it in the sweat on my palms, in the trembling of my voice, and in the visible fear the my students must have seen in my face as I brought up this topic.

When I “came out” last year, I at first felt a large disconnect between my gay identity and queer theory, especially as I was trying to figure out the complex and shifting nature of my multiple subject positions. Although queer theory was interesting and important to talk about in graduate seminars, I could not see its relevance to my everyday life. I saw queer theory as purely “academic”—as something distinct and separate from my participation in HAVEN (a LGBTQ graduate alliance at Miami), for example. More than this, I was frustrated by the very idea of “queering” itself. At a time when I was finally comfortable to be “gay” yet unsure as to the role of my gay identity in my academic and professional work, the idea of complicating identity categories felt, at the least, unproductive. I needed answers on how to maintain balance—to keep
my composure in the classroom—not more confusion. Certainly, I did not see queer theory as that which had the potential to comfort and help me in the same way that other “non-academic” outlets—such as meeting with other LGBTQ people at HAVEN events—could.

However, queer theory has come to mean much more to me and to help me develop in ways that I did not think were originally possible. Although I originally thought, for example, that queer theory was not concerned with identity or identity politics, I was wrong. Queer theory is all about supporting the multiple identities of LGBTQ people, but says that we need to be critical of the stability of identity categories—to pay greater attention to the people, ideas, interactions, relationships, etc. that don’t fit as neatly (or at all) into these categories and to be open to the continual process of identity change of which we all—straight and queer alike—are part.

I now realize that on-campus activist groups—such as HAVEN in my case—and queer theory have both functioned in similar ways in my own life. By attending HAVEN events and studying queer theory, I have felt more at ease with not only my gay identity but also the complicated nature of my unstable subject positions that I mentioned above. And I also understand that the visible presence of HAVEN and of other LGBTQ students has made it possible for me to study queer theory and realize its potential to operate in similar ways. In other words, then, my study of queer theory was contingent upon first understanding my campus and the possibilities—and certainly the constraints as well—that the LGBTQ community faces here.

When I say that Miami University⁴ is an active and receptive campus to LGBTQ issues, I do not mean to over-generalize or suggest that oppression does not exist here. Just last April, a Miami student was assaulted during a drag show sponsored by Spectrum⁵. Although this event technically took place off campus, the uptown bar where it occurred is only a block away from campus. And the effects of this crime certainly reached the Miami community—causing the LGBTQ community to question what had once been a safe and fun space for drag shows in the past. As a member of HAVEN, however, I remember, vividly, the response of the LGBTQ community. In the week following the beating uptown, I participated in an on-campus march and

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⁴ Miami University is a public, mid-sized residential Midwestern university. In 2010, the Oxford campus had an enrollment of 14,872 undergraduate and 2,395 graduate students.

⁵ Spectrum is the undergraduate LGBTQ organization on campus at Miami University
rally in which Miami students, faculty, staff, and community members marched throughout campus to speak out against hateful acts on campus. I also remember attending a meeting led by Spectrum before the rally in which students and faculty came together to discuss the ways that LGBTQ students and allies could best respond to the event.

Like any other college or university, Miami students face oppression and are vulnerable to attacks such as this. At the same time, I feel lucky to work on a campus where there is an active presence of LGBTQ students and student organizations that do not stand for hateful behavior and that attempt to bring the queer and ally community together—through informal gathering and larger campus events. During the 2010 school year, I was impressed to see such speakers on campus as Cleve Jones⁶ and Susan Stryker⁷, who each gave a lecture and led the Oxford pride parade. And in 2011, I was also impressed to see activists Calpernia Addams⁸ and Kate Bornstein⁹ invited to campus.

So, the visible and active LGBTQ community at Miami has helped to make it possible for me to even interview LGBTQ consultants and consultant-teachers that I will discuss. And, at Miami, it would be easier for consultants and teachers to apply my suggestions in this thesis that I think can at least help to make the writing center a safer place for LGBTQ people. At some campuses, (such as the conservative, religious-affiliated campus that Aloysius will describe in chapter four), it is difficult for LGBTQ students to even be visible. On these campuses it is certainly more difficult to attempt to re-think writing center and classroom pedagogy in the ways that I will discuss in the rest of this thesis.

**Queer Theory: What it is and What it Can Do in the Writing Center**

I will never forget when the first person I “came out” to, at the end of the night, gave me a copy of *Gender Trouble*—a pivotal queer theory text in which Judith Butler develops the idea of performativity—to read. Although I was flattered that one of my close friends gave it to me, I

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⁶ Cleve Jones is an LGBT activist who originally worked for Harvey Milk in San Francisco. He is also a leading AIDS activist who is well-known for creating the NAMES project AIDS memorial quilt.

⁷ Susan Stryker is a leading transsexual activist/scholar who has published on transsexual and transgender issues.

⁸ Calpernia Addams is an author, actress, musician, and activist for transgender rights and issues.

⁹ Kate Bornstein is a performance artist and gender theorist.
was also angry: the book seemed pointless. At the least, it was filled with language far too dense that was tough to even grasp. During that night, all I wanted to do was keep enjoying the evening and my thoughts beyond the academy—to gay bars, gay friends, and the hope of finding a boyfriend.

As I’ve described, like many LGBTQ persons who are just starting to “come out” and who seek a stable identity to come out to, I took issue with queer theory because it is, fundamentally, against the stability of identity categories. In A Geneology of Queer Theory, William Turner writes, “Queer theorists often read identity as a sort of language, or discourse” (32). For Butler, the term “gay,” for example, is a socially or culturally constructed category (as opposed to a “natural” identity category), though she says that people can perform in subversive ways that challenge stereotypical definitions of what it means to be gay. Certainly, not all queer theorists agree with Butler and they continue to argue with each other over the essentialist/constructivist debate. Yet what is frustrating for some people—at least it was for me at first—is that most queer theorists are not particularly concerned with solving this debate. Indeed, In Epistemology of the Closet, Eve Sedgwick argues that picking a side could be dangerous (43).

For the reasons I just described, the relationship between queer theory and LGBTQ activism is often tense. Some people no doubt view queer theory as a purely “academic” pursuit—one that, at the end of the day, does not have much relevance to their own lives and that can do little to affect change or to liberate actual people. In his famous “Hope Speech”, Harvey Milk called for people to be more open with their gay identities in public arenas and to act as “role models” for other gay people—to give them hope. Yet what is hopeful about queer theory? What is liberating about queer theory?

I have heard people question, for example, if Michel Foucault—who is arguably the first person to really develop a queer theory—is interested in liberation. I have even heard people call him a pessimist who does not even think change is possible, but this is just not the case. In The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, Foucault is certainly interested in liberation but argues that people need to better understand how power operates before they contest it. He does not believe in the sort of radical individualist-mentality that “free love” and “freedom of expression” will solve all of a person’s problems. For him, sexuality, itself, is a discourse that controls even our innermost desires and definitions of what happiness is. Through a Foucauldian perspective, creating change
is more difficult—more complicated. It is about understanding how “relations of power” (i.e. educational structures, health care systems, etc.) perpetuate, control, and alter the discourse of sexuality—by deeming certain behaviors or certain relationships more acceptable or valuable than others.

In this way, it seems to me that Foucault is deeply invested in liberation. And, in many ways, he is an activist in the sense that he recognizes that people—indeed bodies—must come together to fight for change. This is evident in the final pages of *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, when he writes, “The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures” (157). Although this final sort of call to action could be interpreted in a number of ways, he seems to suggest, at a basic level, that people need to work with and learn from one another—in a very embodied way—about how power operates and to contest it. In other words, for Foucault, activism seems to not only be about acting in extreme, detached, and violent acts; on the contrary, it is about calling attention to the ways in which sensitivity of the human body—the fragility of it in the face of others—and the reality that some of the most intimate connections with other bodies cannot be named, categorized, or every fully understood.

What I read as Foucault’s call for embodied action/learning/pedagogy is an important segway into my discussion of performativity. As I will make clear in the next chapter, no person is able to “perform,” whether subversively or not, without the help of other people. In *Undoing Gender*—a text in which Judith Butler really expands her discussion of performativity—she suggests that in the “face” of other bodies, people become vulnerable and “undone.” That is, they become confused, thrown off track, disoriented: at a basic level, the most intimate interactions between bodies lead people to act in unforeseen—definitely *unscripted*—ways.10

Reflecting back to my earlier discussion of “scripts”—particularly those that we find in the writing center—any consultant knows that a writing center session is not easy to control, yet this is often the fun part of consulting. Often, the most spontaneous sessions are the most

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10 Although I will be focusing on Judith Butler’s notion of performativity, it is important to recognize that Eve Sedgwick has also written about what she calls a “queer performativity”(61). In *Touching Feeling*, Sedgwick also talks about how the idea of performativity draws our attention to the fact that we are always vulnerable in the face of others.
productive (as consultants experience and as writing center theorists such as Elizabeth Boquet have argued). What has been less talked about, are the ways in which these unscripted interactions—especially those that in which the consultant becomes much more than a consultant and the conversation inevitably shifts away from the actual writing project that the student came in with—that might alter our very definition of the role of a consultation and the direction or mission of writing center work.

At the same time that writing center theorists and practitioners have worked hard to establish the writing center as a place with clearly articulated goals and missions, queer theory would ask us, as a community, to be critical of even our fundamental ideas and perceptions of whom we are and what we do as consultants. José Muñoz seems to suggest that we need to at least be critical of fully identifying with any role we perform and proposes that “disidentification”—a theory/strategy that I will return to in chapter four—might be safer. By critically examining writing center work through the lens of LGBTQ perspectives, I will show that the mission of the writing center needs to be expanded to include more diverse understandings of goals and to allow more diverse interactions between consultants and the writers with whom they work. Yet as I hope will be clear, I’m not trying to suggest that, as writing center workers, we should perform/take action to dismantle completely the current idea of the writing center; rather I see that we redefine it.
CHAPTER TWO

LGBTQ IDENTITY AND PERFORMATIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM

Teacher-scholars in many fields (e.g., communication, education, gender studies—I will focus most fully on those from writing studies) have argued that teaching and, indeed pedagogy, itself, is performative. On one level, they have said that the very act of teaching is a performance—in the ways, for example, that teachers inevitably become more than just teachers to their students by taking on multiple roles during a semester that they may have not originally intended to. On another level, they have also said that pedagogy, itself, is performative in the sense that students inevitably read the classroom (and the teacher) in different ways. For example, one student might perceive the classroom as a comfortable space where he or she can write about the experience of growing up gay and feel more liberated in doing so. Yet, another student might perceive the same classroom as a place of political indoctrination—a space where the teacher gets too personal and too assertive with his or her politics.

Given the complexity of the classroom, I would thus like to look at how LGBTQ teachers perform in a number of LGBTQ and queer pedagogies. In doing this, I hope to demonstrate (1) how LGBTQ teachers “perform”—that is, make rhetorically savvy decisions about how to approach and to reveal or not reveal their own sexual identity in unique and different ways—in the classroom and (2) why LGBTQ teachers choose to perform the roles they do—why they choose to reveal or not reveal their sexual identity—and how they approach homophobia in the classroom and in the institutional settings in which they work. I do this with the aim to then, in the rest of the thesis, apply some of these perspectives to writing center work.

Although Harry Denny has begun to discuss the ways in which there must be more fluidity to the role(s) that consultants perform, the performative nature of teaching and pedagogy has been discussed, to a greater extent, in the classroom. By starting with the classroom, then, it will be easier for me to turn to the writing center and discuss how consulting and the very nature of writing center work—which I see as a type of pedagogy—is also inherently and inevitably performative. After analyzing the diverse ways in which scholars have discussed why identity is performed and for different reasons in the classroom, I will show in chapter three how the idea of performativity can be applied to and is already at play in LGBTQ consultant practices—in the
rhetorically savvy decisions the participants in my study have made in the space of the consultation itself, within the larger space of the writing center in terms of how they interact with co-workers, and in their activist efforts within their university at large. Before jumping into the classroom or the writing center, though, it is first necessary to better explain in more detail the lens of performativity that I will be using.

**Performativity: Theoretical Foundations**

J.L. Austin was the first theorist to propose that words and actions are “performative” in the sense that they “do” something. Although this basic underpinning of his theory seems obvious, his larger clarification of it has had lasting effects, perhaps most obviously in the realm of queer theory. For the purposes of this study, the most important thing to take away from Austin is his distinction between what he terms “illocutionary” and “perlocutionary” acts, which he sums up nicely at the beginning of his tenth lecture: “Thus we distinguished […] the illocutionary act which has a certain force in saying something; the perlocutionary act which is the achieving of certain effects by saying something” (120). Put very simply an illocutionary act is “an action we do”—it refers to the fact that our words and actions have a purpose (a force) and may intend, aim, or expect a certain response from an audience (110). As an example, you could think of the illocutionary act as the actual words that come out of my mouth as a teacher. I might say to my class, “Our classroom will be a safe and respectful space yet one where we can openly disagree with one another.” Before I make this statement to my class, I have a specific intent in mind: I intend that the classroom will become one in which people can respectfully disagree with one another. However, the effects of my actions or words—or perlocutionary acts—are, at least in part, out of my control: my classroom may become a space filled with respectful yet assertive dialogue, but it could also become a space where my students are still afraid, regardless of my words, to disagree with me or other students in the class.

In *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, Judith Butler builds off of Austin’s argument that actions and words are “performative” and, in particular, his distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. Yet whereas I used the example of a teacher’s words and students reception of those words to demonstrate the difference between these two acts, Judith Butler uses the example of hate speech. What Butler argues is that hate speech has become so
injurious because of the ways in which it has been used again and again throughout society in derogatory ways.

Take, for example, the word “faggot.” People, to a certain extent, have become almost numb or unconscious of the actual power that the word “faggot” continues to achieve, simply because it is used so much and with such ease. That is, because it has been used so much, many people don’t stop to think about the innumerable effects that their words have—the actual harm they are committing when they say it—or even the actual meaning behind their words (indeed many people don’t even know what the real definition of a faggot is): but this is exactly Butler’s argument. It is only by being used within discourse—between people—that our words gain rhetorical leverage and the capacity to be harmful, yet the scary thing is that the power of discourse makes it difficult for us to act against the force of language and its effects.

To return to Austin, then, I would say that the powerful ways in which hate speech operates (as Butler makes clear) is an example of why we need to fully understand the difference between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts.

A key component of performativity—which can help to better explain the relationship between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts—is the idea of “interpellation” in Louis Althusser’s “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.” Althusser uses the idea of interpellation to describe how ideology constitutes and controls individuals and produces them as subjects (170). As an example of how subjects are interpellated within discourse, we might think of the idea of a “nation.” In Imagined Communities, Benedict Anderson (who clarifies and really materializes Althusser’s theory) finds that, regardless of the degree of inequality or exploitation that may occur within a community—regardless of the struggle between the proletariat and its bourgeoisie—the concept of a nation is always “conceived as deep, horizontal comradeship” or “fraternity” (7). It is the concept of fraternity, above all else, that interpellates people to passionately yet often blindly follow the interests of their nation. And as people are interpellated, this concept of fraternity leads them to feel like they are supporting a nation that is founded on and driven by principles that are rooted beneath the ways in which they are exploited. In this way, as human subjects we are interpellated in ways that we may not even be aware.

Another example of how we are interpellated is in how people have come to understand the idea of the “the family”—which Althusser would call an ISA (“Ideological State Apparatus”). Although the idea of “the family” (like the idea of “nation”) is not a physical power
that we can see, we can feel the effects of the way in which tradition has interpellated us to understand what a family is—most commonly a heterosexual man and women who create a child. And in by being interpellated for so long within this traditional understanding of what a family is, it is easy to become blind to those individuals and relationships that this definition excludes—such as two gay men who have a more difficult time trying to adopt a child. For Butler, then, hate speech operates in a similar way: “it is the very operation of interpellation.” Although the words “faggot,” “gay,” “dyke,” or “queer” are not embodied in a physical force that we can see, the ways in which our idea of them has been interpellated within discourse has had far reaching and injurious effects for LGBTQ people.

Beyond hate speech, performativity applies to the very gender of a person. Butler argues, in *Gender Trouble*, that even our conception of the more basic and seemingly natural gender distinctions “male” and “female” (so not just hateful words but ideas regarding how we understand identity) are also an operation of interpellation. For Butler, sex and gender (the categories of “male” and “female” and even the terms “straight” and “gay”) are socially constructed as opposed to natural or essential identity categories that operate outside discourse. Yet despite her belief in the socially constructed nature of identity categories—that our sex and gender is assigned to us by culture—she does not believe the human subject is powerless in the face of discourse. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler calls for us to “locate strategies of subversive repetition” (201). One example of subversive repetition (as I will discuss below in presenting Zan Meyer Gonçalves’ *Sexuality and the Politics of Ethos in the Writing Classroom*) is an LGBTQ speaker who repeats gay jokes in a manner that reveals how harmful they are to LGBTQ people.

Certainly, subversive repetition can be a useful and important way to combat homophobia, and it’s important to make a statement, as teachers and consultants, that we do not identify at all with homophobia—to assert that we are against it and will simply not tolerate it. The main reason why I started this thesis, after all, is because I’m interested in the unique ways that teachers and consultants perform in subversive ways that challenge homophobia in the classroom and in the writing center. Yet at the same time, I’m not looking for (or calling for) performances in which LGBTQ teachers and consultants act in subversive ways to challenge their professional roles or the mission of the institutions for which they work.
This is not to say, though, that consultants and teachers are not interpellated by the very nature—or direction or mission—of the places where they work. Often, the work environment itself can make it difficult for LGBTQ teachers to even address homophobia—or to feel welcomed, supported, or just safe in their professional roles. And, even if they do feel supported, any educational institution can always do more to combat homophobia in more visibly assertive ways. Thus, although I am not calling for writing center workers to undermine or counteridentify with their professional roles, I am interested in the ways that teachers and consultants “perform”—both consciously and unconsciously—in ways that seem to ask us to step back and say “Hmm, I have never thought about doing that as a teacher” or “Hmm, I have never thought about writing center work in that way.” In other words, I’m interested in the less scripted ways in which they perform—those performances that are “out of line” (Ahmed) with the current direction of their workplaces.

In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed is interested in lines and directions. She talks about how the term “queer”—“which”, she writes, “comes from the Indo-European word ‘twist’”—is a spatial term (67). Thus, she suggests that queer theory is fundamentally about how bodies inhabit spaces and how they follow, extend, and alter lines of those spaces. For example, any university has institutional lines—one of which is its mission statement. A mission statement, at a fundamental level, provides direction: it outlines a course of action—or, a script, you might say, that employees are in many ways required to follow. Yet, just putting a mission statement down on paper does not necessarily mean that the university actually supports, follows, or even stays in line with it. Although she does not talk about mission statements, specifically, Ahmed argues that institutions are not static. She says,

> It is important that we do not reify institutions by presuming they are simply given and that they decide what we do. Rather, institutions become given as an effect of the repetition of decisions made over time, which shapes the surface of institutional spaces.

(133)

To me, this statement seems hopeful. It implies that no matter how set in its ways institutions are, new decisions can alter how they look.

Now of course, you have to think about how power comes in to play here. Certainly, not everyone has the same decision-making power on any campus. As a graduate student, I have very little say, if any, in university-wide decisions. Yet at the least, Ahmed suggests that
institutions depend on the bodies that fill them to extend—or not extend—it’s lines, such as the very lines that you read on a mission statement, a point I return to in later chapters when analyzing the overarching mission of writing center work. The reality is that many teachers and consultants find themselves “out of line”, whether they want to be or not. Thus by drawing attention to the performances of gay and queer consultants that fall out of line—at least in some ways—or that seem to not quite fit current scripts of how a consultant should perform, I hope to provoke conversations that might lead us, as a writing center community, to add new lines to our mission statement.

In calling attention to these performances, though, I will point out the ways in which the consultants I interview never perform alone. As I began to discuss at the end of chapter one, Judith Butler’s larger discussion of performativity in *Undoing Gender* suggests that no one can ever perform (whether subversively or not) alone. For Butler, people need other bodies to perform (whether subversively or not) and it is how they relate to other bodies—that is, how they come in contact with them in space—that they, in many ways, don’t have control over. Yet this loss of control is a good thing for her. She writes,

> Let’s face it. We’re undone by each other. And if we’re not, we’re missing something [...]
> despite one’s best efforts, one is undone, in the face of the other, by the touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the prospect of the touch, by the memory of the feel. (19)

An obvious example of being “undone” is when you find yourself physically and emotionally attracted to a person—so much so that you feel overwhelmed, confused, ecstatic. Of course, we’ve all heard the script: “I’m helplessly in love with you!” or “I’ve fallen in love with you!” Although perhaps less obviously, teachers and consultants are continually undone—in the classroom and in the writing center. For example, in chapter four, José, a consultant I interview, describes a session he had with a student-writer in which he was able to “let go” of the constraints that he felt as a queer man outside the writing center. Indeed, this is one instance in which the participants in this study perform in ways that fall out of line with the nature of writing center work. In this situation, José seemed to really expand and redefine the role of a consultant, yet he does not do it alone.

In chapter four, I will return to my discussion of José and this particular experience—one that led him to see the writing center as a place where there are, as he explained, “queer pockets of possibility for the closeted tutor.” Ultimately, I’ll argue that the way in which he performs not
for but *with* student-writers could be read as an example of “disidentification”—a type of performance in which a person does not completely identify with a role in order to change or “rearticulate” it as something different (Muñoz). At the beginning of chapter four I will explain, in much more detail, this *type* of performance that José Muñoz talks about in *Disidentifications*. The reason why I do not want to go in depth here is because I did not originally intend to use the theory of disidentification as a lens to analyze the perspectives of the consultants I interviewed. Yet the theory has ultimately become a key component of my study and has helped me to better understand the potential of writing center work. In my final chapter, I will talk, in very specific ways, about how disidentificatory performances might alter the job description of a consultant and the broader mission of the writing center. Yet before doing this—and before even turning to my discussion of the performative nature of writing center work—I will examine the ways in which teaching is, and always has been, a performance.

The Performative nature of Identity-Based and Queer Pedagogies

In *Teaching Positions: Difference, Pedagogy, and the Power of Address* Elizabeth Ellsworth makes a compelling argument for why she thinks *any* type of classroom pedagogy is performative. A film scholar, she argues that gaps in understanding that inevitably exist between films and how audiences receive them is analogous to classroom pedagogies that are never received in uniform and rational ways (not rational because students and teacher emotions always get intermixed in the pathways of reception, in the same way a person’s response to a film is always, on some level, emotional). For example, Ellsworth points out how in the film *Jurassic Park*, the viewer is “never exactly who the film thinks s/he is” *and* that “the film is never exactly what it thinks it is” (26). Thus, like a film goer’s relationship to a film, Ellsworth finds that a student’s relationship to a curriculum is also unstable and unpredictable. Even if teachers think their pedagogies are neutral, she suggests that they never actually can be: “Even if teachers think they’re addressing students with a ‘neutral’ attitude or tone of voice… the terms of their address nevertheless attempt to “place” students within relations of knowledge, desire, and power” (47). And “this is true”, she further writes, “even in the presumably ‘democratic’ pedagogical practice of dialogue” (47). Like in the relationship between film and viewer, then, the fact that neutrality is never possible in the classroom suggests that there is never one stable understanding of any pedagogy that teachers may think they are able to fall back on or achieve.
And, because there will always be multiple modes of address (that the teacher is either consciously or unconsciously aware of) I conclude from Ellsworth that every pedagogy is inevitably performative.

As I begin to discuss the performative nature of specific classroom pedagogies and teaching styles, it is important to address the relationship between identity-based and queer pedagogies or what Karen Kopelson calls the “gay/queer binary” (17). In “Dis/Integrating the Gay/Queer Binary: ‘Reconstructed Identity Politics’ for a Performative Pedagogy,” Kopelson discusses the perspectives of specific scholars who argue for either identity-based pedagogies (those in which teachers assume the stability of identity categories and, therefore, often “come out” to students and/or develop LGBTQ themed courses) or queer pedagogies (those who call attention to the performative/unstable nature of identity).

This piece is significant because Kopelson was one of the first people to talk about the performative nature of pedagogy in composition studies. Like a queer theorist, she studies “performative conceptions of subjectivity” (18). In other words, she sees identity categories as inherently unstable, and, therefore, does not assume the autonomy or stability of LGBTQ identities in the classroom (or anywhere). Kopelson, unlike those who advocate for identity based pedagogies, takes the instability of identity as a starting point for her pedagogy—indeed, she talks about how the teacher is always performing, whether he or she wants to or not. Thus, I think Kopelson would agree with Ellsworth that the act of teaching and any pedagogy, itself, is always a performance. Yet the problem, for Kopelson, is that those who advocate for identity-based pedagogies don’t forefront the shifting/unstable nature of identity categories. And, many don’t think that identity is unstable at all—further strengthening the gay/queer binary.

At the same time, though, the term “dis/integrate” is interesting because it suggests that she is not trying to completely dismantle, get rid, or make a final call on the relationship between identity-based and queer pedagogies. Certainly, this is a very “queer theorist” move: as I said in chapter one, queer theory is not really concerned with picking sides or trying to end an argument, period. And, she also points out that queer theorists might not even like the fact that she is trying to bring the two sides together as well. “Queer theorists,” she writes, could object, of course, that any conflation of queer and identity-based strategies inevitably and quite dangerously neutralizes, or even negates altogether, the important
departures from identity upon which queer theories were founded, and through which they sought to enact a more radical project. (32)

Still, Kopelson has a solution: “To understand them [“queer and performative theories, pedagogies, and politics more generally”] not as antithetical identity politics at all, but as forms of radically reconstructed\(^{11}\), and continually negotiated, identity politics themselves…”(32). The key part of her argument is that she thinks teachers should never foreground identity just for the sake of doing it or without posing a critical eye: she suggests that, as teachers, we need to be constantly critical of identity categories and identity politics—paying close attention to who/what these categories and these politics include, and, more importantly, who/what they don’t include—in order to improve them and indeed create a more effective identity politics.

So, Kopelson is clearly not against identity politics but simply says that teachers, and really anyone, needs to be more critical of them—more critical of what they do and don’t do. At the same time, however, I don’t think her intent, in this article, was to merely act as a peacemaker or to ultimately only put the spotlight on identity politics. By drawing on José Muñoz, she also subtly yet provocatively argues that teachers need to see any pedagogy (whether” identity-based” or “queer”) as a performance—one that can always be critiqued and improved. And on the last page of her article she accentuates the unstable, unpredictable—certainly performative nature—of teaching and pedagogy when she writes, “Our acts, utterances, pedagogies, and selves may indeed suffer in spite of, and even against, our intentions” (33).

My reason for discussing Kopelson’s article at such length is twofold: on the one hand, it makes an even stronger argument for why teachers should see their classroom personas and pedagogies as performances. On the other hand, I also did so because the gay/queer divide has sparked disagreement of which type of pedagogy—identity-based or queer—is more political or more activist. Thus, as I now move on to look at specific pedagogies, I hope to demonstrate the ways in which they are all political/activist—in terms of their efforts to eliminate homophobia in the classroom and to really expand and indeed re-envision how people think about the role of the teacher and the purpose/mission of any pedagogy more broadly.

\(^{11}\) Kopelson is drawing from José Muñoz’s discussion of what he terms “a reconstructed identity politics” in *Disidentifications.*
Why LGBTQ Teachers Perform

Kopelson and Ellsworth are important because they lead us away from the question “Do teachers perform?” and towards the question “Why do teachers perform in the ways they do?” In viewing the performances of teachers in the studies I look at, then, I will pay particular attention to how the fluidity of teacher roles disrupts or complicates two significant binaries—the identity-based/queer pedagogy binary and the personal/academic binary—that are often discussed in the field of composition and rhetoric. In *Textual Orientations: Lesbian and Gay Students and the Making of Discourse Communities*, Harriet Malinowitz certainly takes on multiple roles as a teacher and her pedagogy also serves multiple purposes. In the index you can gain an immediate sense of the variety of purposes that she, alone, thinks her classroom/pedagogy serves. Her “writing classroom” is invested in the “resistance of dominant cultural narratives,” but it’s also interested in the “merging of public and private discourses” and in simply creating a “safe environment” for students (294). For example, when discussing the perspectives of heterosexual students who were in the course, she talks about one person who wrote in his midterm journal, “I feel really lost in this heterosexist society, and I need this environment to nurture my needs as a bisexual human being. I can hardly even write that word. It’s too scary” (137). Clearly, this student appreciated the space to think about and write about his identity in ways that he really did not seem to feel safe doing outside the classroom. The course became a chance for this student to reflect—in a very personal, intimate way—on his own life and come to terms with his bisexual identity. Yet more than this, the course allowed him to simply feel comfortable and to develop in ways that he couldn’t before he took the course.

In reflecting on this students’ journal Malinowitz suggests that one reason why he felt safer and more comfortable coming out as bisexual is because her the classroom was a place where “Identity’ was ‘uncommonly’ posited [...] as fluid and changeable…”(137). Thus, although she focuses more in identity-based issues and on coming out, Malinowitz’s approach is also one that is performative. Indeed, her course challenges both the teacher and the students to think about the roles that they perform and how they line up with the scripts of dominant cultural narratives. In this way, I would say that Malinowitz further “dis/integrates” the gay/queer divide: in the spirit of Kopelson’s solution to dis/integrate the divide, Malinowitz foregrounds identity in her classroom; yet, by allowing for so much personal reflection, her pedagogy naturally
encourages students to think about how their identities have shifted over time and within the course of the class, itself.

Yet more importantly than just helping students to recognize that identity is unstable, her performance as a teacher really expands and re-articulates the role of a teacher. At a most fundamental level, she seems to be interested in the personal, less academic, development of her students. Certainly, she merges private and public discourses, yet she seems to focus more on the personal. And, in many ways, the personal becomes this class’s subject material—the “text” that they are all working to better understand. In some ways, she suggests that a teacher can also become more of a counselor or mentor for students who might just need a space to better understand that they can be open with their sexual identities. Beyond just this, her performance and broader pedagogy seem to make a bold statement that the personal is always present in the classroom (whether the teacher decides to address it or not). The reflections she recounts and the stories she tells seem to say that teachers—and students—can never really be neutral in the classroom: everyone enters the classroom with personal narratives and deep-seeded emotional political views that don’t simply go away.

At the same time, the very presence of the personal can make it difficult for some teachers to even teach and open their students up to new ways of understanding. Malinowitz was fortunate to have a gay and lesbian themed course that most students wanted to be enrolled. Thus, it was easier for her to discuss LGBTQ identity and homophobia. Yet, what if you aren’t fortunate enough to have a gay and lesbian themed course (or, to think ahead, a gay and lesbian themed writing center consultation/session, if there could ever even be such a thing)? And, when discussing Malinowitz’s study I talked a lot about how her classroom was invested in the safety and development of her students. But, what about the safety and development of the teacher? What if the teacher (or consultant) does not feel safe themselves or at least hesitant about their ability to help students think more critically about LGBTQ identity and homophobia? The reality is that not just students, but teachers have needs. Especially if you don’t have a lesbian and gay themed course (or the security of tenure), the teacher may very well feel threatened by students and/or feel it is too risky to bring up LGBTQ issues. In these situations, student development—in academic and personal ways—is still important: after all, this is the job of a teacher. Yet, the reality is that the performance of the teacher/and pedagogy may have to look somewhat different from what it did in Malinowitz’s study.
In order to help teachers learn and to even just survive in the classroom, Karen Kopelson has suggested that teachers—especially the marginalized teacher subjects—might perform a neutral role in the classroom. In her pivotal CCC essay, “Rhetoric on the Edge of Cunning; Or, The Performance of Neutrality (Re) Considered as a Composition Pedagogy for Student Resistance,” Kopelson argues that a “pedagogical performance of neutrality” may be a more effective way to approach and educate students who seem to resist more overtly politicized “critical” composition pedagogies, especially when those pedagogies are influenced by the marginalized teacher-subject—the LGBT teacher, for example. Essentially, she argues that “coming out” as LGBT may hinder your opportunity, as a teacher, to make a critical pedagogy work and she suggests new ways to approach sexual identity in the classroom.

Kopelson’s approach is indeed rhetorically savvy and one that purposefully intends to trick students, although she is careful to make clear that she has broader goals to this type of pedagogy that are not all deceptive: “The performance of neutrality I am advocating,” she writes, “is a deliberate, reflective, self-conscious masquerade that serves an overarching and more insurgent political agenda than does humanist individualism” (123). To better explain why she does not see her pedagogy as completely deceptive, Kopelson bases the rhetoric she is calling off of Burke’s discussion of “cunning identifications” in a Rhetoric of Motives, as she describes it as that which “feigns one purpose in the pursuit of an eventual and seemingly opposed goal, rhetoric devised for specific ends and willing to proceed by ‘sly design’ in order to achieve them” (130). What this definition implies is that cunning rhetoric—although it suggests trickery or deception—should not be looked at in a completely negative way because its end goal (although achieved by “sly design”) may be beneficial to a student’s education. Kopelson hammers this very point home by noting how Burke’s broader theory of “identification” allows for a more positive or beneficial rhetoric that is on the edge of cunning (136). So even though a performance of neutrality may look deceptive, she “works from within [and her students identify with] the larger unit of action that is their [her students’] more active and productive engagement with difference” (136).

Now, the most immediate question I have when I read Kopelson’s call for neutrality and rhetoric on the edge of cunning is—is neutrality even possible? I think not. Teachers (and consultants) can never be completely neutral. Yet performing an approximation of neutrality may be possible. But even if it is possible, is it even ethical for teachers (and consultants) to do
so? I’m still not sure of the answer to this latter question, but I do think in some circumstances Kopelson’s call for a rhetoric of neutrality may be simply practical. Furthermore, I don’t think it is unethical in the sense that one of the main reasons why she is performing neutral is so that her students don’t make identity assumptions. So, it could be viewed as a sort of survival strategy, particularly for instructors who teach from less powerful or secure positions.

When I turn to my interview findings in chapter four, I will talk about how I see José, Will, and Aloysius performing in ways that help student-writers develop; yet, I will also be looking at ways in which they perform for themselves—for their own development as consultants (i.e. by telling other colleagues about their efforts to start an LGBTQ group on campus). So, in thinking ahead to this discussion, I find Kopelson’s performance of neutrality even more interesting. As teachers (and as consultants), we need to certainly think about and protect ourselves in the classroom—perhaps more so than we already do. We need to perform in ways that are more cognizant of our own safety—and our own development—as teachers.

Furthermore, when I first read Kopelson’s piece I’ll admit I didn’t like it, yet I respect it more now, especially as I have had the chance to teach more and to see how difficult it can be to even start a conversation about homophobia in the classroom and in the writing center. And when it comes down to it, I don’t think I am in a position to even judge the ethics of her pedagogy when I have tried to perform a neutral role, myself, in the classroom.

At the same time, I understand that even when I have tried to perform neutral in the classroom, it’s never really worked. For example, when I taught Fight Club—a book with rather clear homoerotic undertones— this past semester, I told myself that I would not get too emotional when I tried to start a discussion about the gay undertones of the text. Yet, when I actually walked into the room and tried to bring up the conversation, it was hard to contain my emotion when my class did not seem to be able to find anything gay about this text at all. I remember standing at the white board, palms sweating and unsure how to go on when this happened. What else was I going to talk about now for the rest of the class? I felt mad, yes, but also awkward, confused, distressed, even unwelcomed in my own class. As a teacher, I felt like I had failed in some ways. If I hadn’t, at least the lesson plan itself failed. In the words of Judith Butler, you could say that my performance as a teacher and my pedagogy itself was “undone” when I actually entered the room and faced my class.
In this way, I think Butler’s larger discussion of performativity—in which she says that we not only need other bodies to perform but that we are actually undone by these other bodies—suggests that even a performed neutrality never really works. In other words, even if a person performs neutral, Butler’s larger discussion of performativity leads me to think that the personal/academic binary always—indeed inevitably—breaks down in the classroom: a person’s identity and politics are always present, whether they want them to be or not.

Indeed, I think any teacher’s performance, as well as any pedagogy he or she chooses to enact, at least complicates the personal/academic binary. In *Subject to identity: Knowledge, Sexuality, and Academic Practices in Higher Education*, Susan Talburt seems to also highlight ways in which the personal can become political, even in pedagogies that are less identity-based.

Within this ethnographic study that explores the practices of three lesbian faculty members, her discussion of Julie’s pedagogy is intriguing, which she describes as one that “… appears to be ‘personal’ but that self-discloses performatively rather than confess representationally” (111). In the classroom, as Talburt describes it, Julie is not interested in being friends with her students and she resists centering her own identity as a person who has breast cancer and identifies as a lesbian. “Julie,” Talburt writes, “resisted […] using the ‘personal’ as a form of self-authorization, instead encouraging students to create their own connections to the process and content of the course” (83). Julie’s pedagogy—in the classroom anyway— is less identity-based. Though, at the same time, Julie is more than willing, and explains how, she has been a support to students struggling with sexuality and religious affiliation outside of the classroom. Although she did not formally come out to them in the classroom, she was willing to mentor students (who she felt knew she was queer). Even outside the classroom, however, she resists a confessional narrative: “we have these conversations where I don’t have to be confessional and tell them anything, but they can talk to me, lots of kids talk to me, and feel confident about that” (111).

When looking at Julie’s actions both inside and outside the classroom, it is difficult to peg what type of pedagogy she adopts. Talburt describes her pedagogy as a “personal depersonalization”, but to what extent is it identity-based? On the one hand, she resists foregrounding her identity and does not explicitly “come out” to her students both inside and outside the classroom; on the other hand, she allows her students to connect with and find a comfort in her queer identity outside the classroom. To me, Julie is yet another example of why
the divide between identity-based and queer pedagogies is false. The very oxymoronic classification of her pedagogy as both “personal” and “depersonalized” suggests that it is performative in the basic sense that she switches between both of these roles based on the needs of her students—she “self-discloses performatively,” based on student needs.

To me, a “personal depersonalized” pedagogy is important because it challenges the binary logic that we have to explicitly either “come out” or not to our students (either inside or outside the classroom) to address LGBTQ identity. Julie does not reveal her identity in the classroom but she also does not reveal it outside the classroom until she is asked to do so. At the same time, because she does “come out” when students want to connect with her, I would say that her pedagogy is identity based: yet again, the line is blurred between “coming out” or not “coming out.” On a more basic level, though, her pedagogy suggests that we may need to—and should be willing to—“come out” to our students outside the classroom (in office hours, for example) if that is what they need. What immediately strikes me about Talburt’s representation of Julie’s personal depersonalized pedagogy is the simple fact that it extends beyond the four walls of the classroom, challenging readers to consider the ways in which our performances and our pedagogies may be read beyond the classroom walls (or, in the case of consultants, beyond the beginning and end of the formal consultation session).

Continuing the idea of performance outside of classroom walls, in *Sexuality and the Politics of Ethos in the Writing Classroom*, Zan Meyer Gonçalves focuses on the experiences of LGBT students who serve as student speakers on the Speaker’s Bureau—a university based outreach program that attempts to combat homophobia and heterosexism on a large state-university campus. When talking to audiences, the speaker’s bureau members—all identified as LGB and/or T (Q was not used in the LGBT mix by Gonçalves)—draw on personal narratives (of the experience of being gay, for example) to move audiences. So, on one level, they do seem to talk about identity as a more or less stable thing (i.e. “Here is the experience of a gay person so that you will now be able to better understand the experience of gay people.”).

If anything, identity politics is at the center of the purpose of the Speaker’s Bureau. But at the same time, Gonçalves demonstrates how this group sought to address the limits of identity politics. Whereas identity politics is often viewed as something that encourages the performance of identity as “fixed, unitary, and essential” and that can lead to “exclusive definitions,” members of the group took steps to develop a discourse based on “coalition politics” rather than
“identity politics.” For example, although members were visibly seen as LGBT, the group (1) asked speakers to speak only for themselves, not all “gay people,” (2) encouraged speakers to “name and claim their own multiple identities and the process of how they have come to claim these identities,” and (3) worked to “add heterosexual allies to the bureau” (11). The speakers anchored their speeches around personal narratives, yet by not speaking for all “gay people” and suggesting that they had to negotiate multiple identities shaped by discourse, their speeches became more about social issues surrounding gay identity and homophobia than about personal confession.

This focus on non-exclusive language and the shift to coalition politics allowed members of the speakers’ bureau to disrupt normative discourses and the damaging effects of hate speech. Although they did speak from personal experience and use their lived experiences as LGBT people to their advantage, they also made it clear to audiences that their identities were an effect of and misconstrued by normative discourses surrounding LGBT people. And indeed, by locating what Butler calls “strategies of subversive repetition,” they were able to alter the normalization of hate speech and its effect on LGBT identity (201). For example, Gonçalves notes how Eric, a member of the speakers’ bureau, used subversive repetition to repeat jokes about “gay people” in a way that redefined those jokes as homophobic rather than funny (10, 48). I find this strategy important because it entails that a person who identifies as LGBTQ—and is visibly viewed this way by an audience—can use personal experience narratives as a way to perform their identity in subversive ways. It suggests that the category LGBTQ does not need to be erased in order to engage in “subversive bodily acts” that Butler describes in Gender Trouble (79).

Gonçalves’ ultimate purposes in analyzing how these members of the speaker’s bureau perform—when they try to persuade their audiences to join them in combating violence based on sexual orientation and homophobia more broadly—is to encourage writing teachers to think about ethos and the performance of identity differently in the composition classroom. She argues, “When we as teachers acknowledge that our students inhabit multiple identities, we can invite them to become conscious and aware of these multiple identities and the social forces that shape their performances of ethos” (4). Thus, she says that teachers should pay closer attention to how students (such as Speaker’s Bureau members) perform outside the classroom so that they
can help them to realize the ways in which they already perform multiple roles to relate to and persuade audiences.

I also think her text shows how important it is for teachers themselves to become more rhetorically savvy in the ways similar to those of the members of the Speaker’s Bureau. And, in doing so, it ultimately returns us to Butler’s discussion of subversive performances that I talked about at the beginning of this chapter. Like Butler, I think Gonçalves’ study suggests that teachers should use subversive acts of repetition to combat homophobia in the classroom. Indeed, teachers could learn to use some of the strategies that Speaker’s Bureau members, like Eric, used. Yet more than this, like Talburt, she also seems to suggest that teachers have the opportunity to expand the spaces into which their pedagogies extend. By arguing that students (and teachers) can learn from the public yet also very personal performances of Speaker’s Bureau members, she suggests that all teachers should be cognizant of the ways their pedagogies can (and most likely already do) extend beyond the four walls of the classroom.

At a more fundamental level, though, Gonçalves raises the idea of lines and scripts that underlie the idea of performativity at a most basic level. And, she raises Butler’s larger discussion of performativity—in which she argues that people need other bodies to perform and that they are inevitably “undone” by others. By focusing so much on the relationship between ethos and audience, she stresses that any person should constantly hold their performances in check—to be critical of the roles they perform. In saying this, though, she seems to say that any person is never fully in control of how he or she performs. Inevitably, any student or teacher (or consultant) is “undone” in the face of others. We need to be more aware of the fact that our performances as teachers, and our pedagogies, will fall out of line—certainly out of the lines of the script of any syllabus, whether we want them to or not. Yet, at the same time, as Gonçalves shows, this is not a bad thing: she suggests that, by better understanding our audiences, we can better understand that we are never only performing for but performing with them. And, indeed it is by performing with audiences—by allowing them to influence us in very personal ways—that our actions as teachers and our pedagogies not only fall out of line, but create new lines. It is by performing with others that we might see the role of the teacher, and the role of pedagogy, in new and better ways.

At the beginning of any course, a teacher has “lines” that they want to follow with a class. On a syllabus, a teacher includes lines that he or she might, literally, read to the class and
have them follow along. And at more of a departmental/institutional level, there are also lines to
follow—most of which are not determined by the teacher. For example, the mission statement of
the university they work for provides lines for them to follow.

Because of the dynamic interaction of rhetor and audience, teacher and student, writer
and consultant, things don’t always line up just right—whether consciously or unconsciously,
whether by their own desire or by the desire of others, teachers (and writing center consultants)
inevitably perform in ways that are out of line. Yet, as a queer phenomenology would also say,
falling out of line is not necessarily a bad thing. Sarah Ahmed argues that by drawing attention to
what is out of line, we have the opportunity to become more critical of the lines we follow and,
in the process, might add new lines.

In my next chapter, I pick up these lines in the context of writing center studies, moving
to discuss ways in which LGBTQ identity and performativity have been discussed. In doing this,
I will talk about specific scholars who have at least suggested that conversations consultants have
with student-writers are never neutral. Most recently, Harry Denny has argued that, as a writing
center community, we need to pay closer attention to the role that the identity of consultants and
issues of difference play in any session/consultation. In many ways, Denny and other scholars
have already said that any session with a writer is unpredictable and that we inevitably fall off
the scripts we try to follow as consultants. And, in the spirit of Gonçalves, they seem to also say
that consultants always perform with others—be they student-writers, themselves, or other
writing center colleagues.
CHAPTER THREE

LGBTQ IDENTITY AND PERFORMATIVITY IN THE WRITING CENTER

Writing center scholars have already analyzed productive ways to approach difference during a one-to-one consultation, suggesting new ways to not only move away from purely service-based models but to apply postmodern theories of subjectivity. Among these studies, there are certainly suggestions for how consultants can take on roles or “perform” in ways to better approach issues of difference in the space of the writing center. I think the first signs of this type of work are apparent in Kenneth Bruffee’s “Peer Tutoring and the Conversation of Mankind” in which, at a fundamental level, he suggests that a consultation is not just about the writer or the consultant but about the differences they share and what they learn through “conversation.” Furthermore, in arguing that we need to think of consulting as a conversation, Bruffee made the crucial argument that writing should be viewed as a “social artifact” or a process in which writers are not only in a conversation with the consultant, but also with various discourse communities (i.e. classes or individual majors). In this way, Bruffee definitely helped pave the way for others to apply a postmodern lens to the writing center and to think about how theories of power and subjectivity are at play in any consultation and in the greater space of the writing center.

Certainly, there are lines and scripts that we feel propelled to follow as consultants—both within the writing center and within the larger institutions in which writing centers are housed. The broader culture of any university greatly impacts—and in many ways determines—what the role of the writing center should be. This being the case, I want to begin this chapter by recognizing the fact that consultants, and writing centers themselves, are always performing within institutional constraints placed on them.

After doing this, however, I will turn to writing center scholars have already suggested that, as consultants, we should draw more attention to the ways that consultants already perform in unscripted ways. Most obviously, Elizabeth Boquet has said that writing centers are inherently chaotic and “loud.” Yet others, such as Jay Sloan and Harry Denny, have suggested that issues of difference can propel consultants and writing centers to act in unscripted ways. Denny, in particular, has talked about ways that we might “queer” the writing center.
By drawing attention to these scholars, then, I will set the stage for my fourth and fifth chapters—in which I will extend the conversation they have already started regarding the unscripted/queer nature of writing center work. In doing this, though, I hope to also extend this conversation in new directions—to suggest that we might want to queer and/or “rearticulate” the very mission of the writing center. To me, rethinking the mission of the writing center might make it easier to perform within and to challenge larger institutional constraints that I will now describe.

Performing within Institutional Constraints on the Writing Center

Following Bruffee, Nancy Grimm was one of the first people to explicitly apply postmodern theories of subjectivity to writing centers. She is also one of the first to suggest ways to put theory into practice to address issues of difference in the writing center. In Good Intentions: Writing Center Work for Postmodern Times, Grimm’s primary focus is on literacy education, in which she makes clear ways in which writing center workers can better approach difference—both in the writing center and the university. For example, she talks about how she has revised the training manual at the writing center where she works to, as she explains, reflect a less prescriptive and more strongly narrative-based approach to tutoring, one that I hope encourages our writing coaches to enter into exploratory discussion with students whose experiences they do not share. (51)

By entering into these exploratory discussions, a writing coach is certainly able to better understand and appreciate the multiple literacies that a writer brings to the table. In the final pages of her book, for instance, Grimm suggests that by having discussions with students we, as consultants, can help teachers and academia more broadly to accept, for example, Black Vernacular English as an acceptable form of personal expression (119). At the same time, her suggestions for how to improve literacy education are also important because they point to ways in which writing centers can approach issues of difference more generally.

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12 Although at the writing center I work at, we use the term “consultant” instead of “tutor,” other writing centers have adopted other terminology, such as “coach.” When referring to other studies, I will use and stay consistent with their terminology.
I think the most powerful point in Grimm’s book is when she recounts a roundtable discussion on race that she held at her writing center. She notes that, during this discussion, a member of the roundtable (which was comprised of all the writing coaches that worked at this writing center), said “racial fear on campus was signaled in small ways” and gave the example of white students who were frightened by a black male that they saw walking at dusk toward a residence hall (107). In response to this comment, Grimm talks about how the other writing coaches—who were all nice people definitely against prejudice—did not respond to this comment, despite the visible presence of an African American coach in the room who “was trembling, indeed shuddering…”(107). The room became silent, awkward—a place where difference was ignored and where unexamined privileges and biases could thus then prevail. The reason why Grimm brings up this scene is to argue against the what she calls the “Difference Doesn’t Matter” argument—which she describes as the “promise [in schools] that if one learns to think, talk, value, and write like the white middle class, then difference won’t matter”(105). So again, a big part of her focus is on literacy and how it is used in oppressive ways to make students feel like outsiders based on their language alone. Yet her discussion of literacy (of how it is perceived in academia) and the “Difference Doesn’t Matter” argument also relates to issues of difference that extend beyond literacy and purely academic discussions.

When I read Grimm’s account of this roundtable meeting, I wondered how many other times this type of situation has happened in other writing centers—even in meetings that were not designed to discuss race, specifically. How many other African American writing coaches have been left “trembling” in a normal staff meeting or after a session where a student writer made explicitly racist comments towards them? I also wondered how many LGBTQ coaches or consultants have ever felt uncomfortable, trembling, or simply unsafe in the space of a meeting.

Grimm thus importantly suggests that we need to consider that underrepresented student-writers and coaches (or consultants) experience oppression in the space of the writing center in ways that extend beyond issues of literacy. Beyond academics, these underrepresented students and coaches are affected and often hurt on very personal levels. Certainly, as Grimm says herself, “They [underrepresented groups] experience it [oppression] bodily and intellectually” (107). In the face of this reality, Grimm’s argument is important because she suggests that writing center workers should not be afraid and should attempt to “perform” in unscripted ways that (1) challenge institutional expectations of how a writing center should function and (2)
extend the role of helping students to more than just helping them with writing alone. She suggests, for example, that our role, as coaches or consultants, is also to ensure that the writing center is a safe place for underrepresented consultants who don’t feel comfortable at meetings. She suggests that, as consultants, we should not just focus on writing but also ensure that the writing center is a safe and libratory space, especially for coaches or students who feel marginalized and unsafe.

Grimm’s call for consultants to make the writing center a safe space that acknowledges and supports, rather than ignores, difference is crucial in and of itself. Yet for the purposes of this study—in which I seek to apply queer theory to understand LGBTQ consultant experiences in the writing center—Grimm’s book is also crucial because she talks about how we can turn theory (which is so often only discussed in theory courses or advanced graduate seminars) into practice. I would say that she is one of the first to say that what goes on in writing centers should not be completely separate from what goes on in the classroom. The writing center, for Grimm, is certainly more the a “fix-it shop”: it is a place that should extend the ideas of postmodern theory that students may have learned in the classroom—ideas that open writing center workers up to the reality that the space of the writing center (and that of higher education) is unfair and that they are in a unique position to challenge this unfairness and lack of attention to difference.

At the same time, it is not always an easy task to bring the classroom and the writing center together in a purely democratic fashion. An article that is important to read alongside Grimm is “Blundering Border Talk: An English Faculty Member Discusses the Writing Center at His Two-Year Campus,” in which John Tassoni essentially says that it may not be as easy as we think to extend postmodern theories, or even a “libratory” pedagogy, into the space of the writing center—especially when you are talking about writing centers at two-year colleges. What this article describes is Tassoni’s attempt to “subvert,” as he writes, “the traditional representation of the writing center as a supplement to coursework: he suggests that classrooms can help students enhance the discussions they have about their writing in writing centers” (267).

Tassoni asked his composition students to visit the writing center and to actually report back to the class how that experience went. In doing this, he hoped that, like in his classroom—where his teaching style is influenced by and incorporates a libratory pedagogy—students would be able to experience an extension of this libratory pedagogy or, at the least, engage in a democratic and dialogic consultation. Tassoni thus had “good intentions,” to use Grimm’s
phrase, going into this exploratory project with his class. Rather than ever wanting to “spy” on the writing center—which he was accused of doing, he had hoped to subvert the classroom/writing center hierarchy. What he found through this exercise with his class, however, was not what he had hoped to. He did not expect to find (1) that, in his students’ critical summaries of their visit to the writing center, they did not find the same level of “dialogic engagement” that students found in his class, and (2) that the writing center director would be angry with him for what she thought was his attempt to spy on the writing center (269).

In a four-page letter written to him by the director of the writing center, Tassoni was accused of not only having his students spy but for having a vision which the director thought was not aligned with the regional campus’s mission and the place of the writing center within that institution. Yet Tassoni agrees with her, at least in part. He agrees with her implication, for example, that he was “not aware that the campus’s writing center was specifically designed to assist developmental readers and writers” (271). At his two-year campus, the writing center reports to the Office of Learning Advancement (OLA) and so one of its missions is to specifically reach out to students in basic writing courses. In other words, the majority of the students at this writing center come from basic writing courses as opposed to college composition courses (like the one Tassoni was teaching).

I believe that Tassoni’s article is important is because he makes visible the “borders”, to use his language, that exist between writing centers and the institutions they support—borders that can be drastically different at different institutions. For example, on his two-year campus (even though he talks about how departments and different disciplines come in close contact with each other, even more so than they might at a four-year college) Tassoni’s classroom and the writing center were on two very different pages concerning what a writing center should be—in large part because of the OLA’s expectation that the writing center help students in basic writing courses. So, even if writing center directors or any workers are completely on-board with extending a libratory pedagogy into their writing center (I don’t know if this was the case with the writing center director in Tassoni’s article), the institutional location of it—and indeed job expectations—can make it difficult for them to make efforts to make the writing center a place where consultations are even just more dialogic.

Yet at the same time, even in writing centers that are specifically designed to help students achieve basic reading and writing skills (like the one that Tassoni talks about) there are
no doubt underrepresented students and consultants that fill these spaces. In staff meetings at the writing center in Tassoni’s article, I wonder if there has ever been a situation similar to the one that Grimm describes where the African American student was left trembling. In the same meetings, I wonder if there has ever been an LGBTQ consultant who has been left trembling—who has felt unsafe in the space of the writing center alone. Because these types of situations still likely exist in writing centers who have very specific purpose, it becomes all the more important to try and make the writing center a liberating space—as Tassoni continued to do even after the letter he received from the director. Although he understood and acknowledged that he did not fully understand the role of the writing center at his regional campus, he mentions that he tried to work with at least one subsequent director to “revive” the exercise he had his students complete where they critiqued the writing center. In other words, he has still tried to make classroom/writing center connections and has worked to subvert the classroom/writing center hierarchy, even in the unique institutional context that he describes.

To return to Grimm, I think that Tassoni’s article is a good example of why it is important to more writing center workers to “perform” in unscripted ways—and in ways that challenge institutional norms and constraints. Perhaps one of the reasons why the writing center director responded so harshly to Tassoni was because she was so set on the script—or the direction—that this writing center had been on for so many years.

Now, in saying this, I don’t mean to suggest that writing center workers should take on roles or perform in ways that are completely against the institutional mission of the writing center or that pushes writing to the side: I don’t mean to say, for example, that working to improve the basic reading and writing skills of students—which may in fact require consultants to be a little more directive in a consultation—is not important. At the same time, in order to more effectively respond to difference and make the writing center a safer place for LGBTQ students, in particular, I argue it is also becoming more important to stress that our roles as consultants can, and maybe should, extend beyond helping students with writing needs, alone. I submit that this is a practical step to take—one that could, in the long run, make writing centers look even more vital to the institutions they support.

At the end Good Intentions, Grimm importantly observes that in any institution there is now a higher demand for “increased services and expanded programs” (118). She raises the scenarios, for example, that the dean of a school could potentially want a mentoring program that
could compete with the existing writing center, or an African American student organization may want to develop a separate learning center (118). And she also suggests that these “pressing demands” are complicated when resources are low and when “assessment” becomes a more important topic on any campus (118).

Certainly today, financial resources are scarce on every college campus—and resource allocation is very much tied to assessment. This reality was made all the more clear to me after the last East Central Writing Centers Association (ECWCA) Conference I attended in 2011 at Western Michigan University, which was centered on the theme of assessment in the writing center. This conference was significant because the writing center community was able to expand the term “assessment” and complicate, in important ways, how we think about, define, and actually go about assessing writing center work. On the surface a person may think that assessment in the writing center is primarily, and mostly, about numbers—how many people do you actually consult? With how many disciplines does your writing center work? Yet at this conference, there were presentations that considered topics that may not immediately come to mind when you think of assessment in writing centers. For example, groups presented on ethics in the writing center and how to handle situations such as plagiarism—a situation that is certainly already “assessed” in a number of different ways in writing centers. And there was also a presentation/round table discussion on “queer consulting,” given by myself and other members of Miami’s Howe Student Writing Center, which instigated discussion on how to “assess” LGBTQ identity and issues of difference more broadly in the writing center (Dickerson et al.).

During my groups’ discussion of “queer consulting,” I talked specifically about how to put queer theory into practice in the space of the writing center. In doing so, I explained why I think it is necessary for us, as writing center workers, to envision our role as one that extends beyond helping students with writing alone. As I will discuss further in chapters four and five, I argued that our role as consultants should also be to create a safe space for underrepresented groups on campus and to perhaps even support and join with the activist efforts of LGBTQ students and consultants. In other words, I (with the help of my colleagues) suggested very practical ways—that I will continue to discuss in the next two chapters—to expand the services of the writing center through reenvisioning how to approach issues of difference in it. And in doing this, I suggested that we can use queer theory as means to re-envision the roles we “perform” as writing center workers.
Before this ECWCA conference, however, and before any of my own thinking about LGBT identity and queer theory in the writing center, scholars in the field of writing center studies had already laid important groundwork in this area. Jay D. Sloan’s “Closet Consulting” and Harry Denny’s “Queering the Writing Center,” for example, both address how sexuality and difference is, and out to be, a key consideration of our work as writing center professionals. In both of these pieces, they suggest ways in which it may be appropriate to re-envision writing center work and to put queer theory into practice in the space of the writing center. Thus before I move on to my own perspective on how I think we can put queer theory and, more specifically, the idea of performativity into practice in the writing center, I would like to discuss the work of those who have come before me.

Recognizing and Performing LGBTQ Identity in the Writing Center

One of the first people to write about LGBTQ identity in the writing center was Jay D. Sloan who, in “Closet Consulting,” recounts his difficult yet rewarding experience of consulting a student on a homophobic piece of writing. The first paragraph of this piece is perhaps the most powerful as it describes the emotional and physical effect that this experience took on Sloan:

and then he announced, ‘I’m going to write on the sin of homosexuality. ‘I took a deep breath and then forced what I hoped was a friendly, inquisitive expression to my face. Inwardly, however, my mind raced to negotiate hosts of personal and professional issues. (9)

Sloan vividly captures the fundamental issue that no consultant is ever a disembodied voice or resource to students who need help with their writing. Before his “mind raced to negotiate” what was going on, and before he considered how best to handle this situation in a professional manner, there was the “deep breath” and what appears to be a struggle to maintain his composure—to maintain “a friendly, inquisitive expression.” Before he rationalized what was going on he described his physical, personal, and emotional response to the situation—a response that was filled with uncertainly, fear, and doubt (9).

When talking with people regarding LGBTQ consultants and issues, I have at times been frustrated when—before anything else—the question of how to respond to students who express homophobic views comes up. I get frustrated when the immediate question centers on how we, as consultants, should respond to and maintain focus on the writing itself, as opposed to talking
more about the physical, personal, and emotional response of consultants in these situations. Now I don’t mean to say that, in these situations, it is not important to maintain a professional demeanor. Maintaining a professional demeanor—as opposed to the urge to personally attack the student—is crucial to maintaining a productive and meaningful session. Sloan, for example, makes clear that by maintaining a professional demeanor (by asking the student a series of questions that focuses on how he was addressing his audience in the paper), he was able to maintain a productive discussion and one in which he was actually able to connect with the student on a more personal level: “But as I watched him struggle with those questions, I did ask I began to actually identify a bit with young Earnest. I remembered myself as a college freshman….” (10). At the same time, even though it is important to remain professional and keep a focus on the writing, in my opinion, the writing center community needs to also forefront—to a greater degree—the physical, personal, and emotional responses of LGBTQ consultants to writing center work. So from my perspective as a gay consultant, the first question is not “How should we respond to the student?” which leaves the consultant out of the equation, but rather “What will be the best way for me and the student to negotiate this discussion?” which recognizes the complex dynamic of the consultant’s feelings and personal reactions.

One of the reasons why I find it important to forefront the personal impact of writing center work on LGBTQ consultants is because I see the writing center as a potentially pivotal and activist space, especially in homophobic institutional settings. On the one hand writing centers serve the institutions they support and they are often given clear instructions by these institutions. In “Blundering Border Talk,” for example, Tassoni points out how the writing center at his regional campus was specifically designed to work with students in basic writing courses. On the other hand, writing centers also serve their students and consultants. In considering this second service, writing center workers certainly come into contact, on a daily basis, with students who are frustrated with the expectations of professors or what they see to be too rigid expectations of the greater institutions where they study.

What is less discussed, however, are the situations in which students in the writing center are not just frustrated with professors’ classroom expectations but with oppressive nature of the greater institutions in which they study and live—both inside and outside the classroom. Less discussed are the experiences of the LGBTQ students who feel uncomfortable even being “out” on campus and who come to the writing center afraid—uncertain as to how the consultant they
work with may respond to their LGBTQ identity and/or pro-LGBTQ views in a paper. Less discussed are the experiences of LGBTQ consultants who—even if they are “out” and feel safe and supported in their writing center—work in institutions where LGBTQ identity is less accepted. Although Sloan never describes himself as “unsafe” on his campus, he admits that it was more difficult for him to take the students’ homophobic comment when he considered his activist efforts on campus as an “Out” graduate student at a Catholic Jesuit Campus:

I swallowed a little harder, thinking not only of my recent efforts as a liaison between the Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Group on campus and the Office of Student Affairs, and of our joint attempts to cultivate a more open and inclusive university climate (“Closet Consulting” 9).

When considering LGBTQ identity in the writing center, it is important that, as a community of writing center workers and scholars, we recognize and support the work of consultants, like Sloan, who attempt to make their larger institutions more inclusive.

In the next chapter, I will share the experiences of Aloysius, a graduate student who was also working in a writing center while trying to make his campus a more inclusive place for LGBTQ people. By sharing his experience, I hope to add to the conversation that Sloan has already started regarding the presence of LGBTQ consultants in the writing center, and to further argue why it is important that writing centers expand their services to include efforts to make the centers—and by extension the institutions they serve—safer places for LGBTQ students and consultants. When I come to the question of LGBTQ activism in the writing center, I will continue to accentuate the importance of maintaining a professional role when dealing with LGBTQ issues—as Sloan did during his session with the homophobic piece of writing. At the same time, however, I will also agree with Harry Denny who argues: “To have students understand the moral and intellectual merit of our partial perspectives is one of the best and lasting gifts we can provide” (Facing the Center 106). I will thus argue for a more assertive approach towards LGBTQ identity and issues—one that suggests that consultants cannot, and should never try, to be neutral—within the consultation itself, in the greater space of the writing center, and in the institutions that writing centers serve.

Whereas Sloan was one of the first to write about LGBTQ identity in the writing center, Harry Denny is the first to suggest that writing center consultants could take a more assertive and political response to LGBTQ identity and issues—and to indeed re-envision writing center work
as a form of activism itself. He was also the first to discuss specific ways to apply queer theory to the writing center.

I am most drawn to Denny’s work because, at a fundamental level, he recognizes that our roles as consultants and teachers of writing more generally are never neutral. In “Queering the Writing Center,” he importantly writes, 

In supporting writers, we never just sit side by side with them as purely writers; they come to us as an intricately woven tapestry, rich in the authenticity and texture of identities, but this cloth often requires something extra to be legitimated in the academy. (45)

By suggesting that we are never just assisting “writers” but rather a “rich […] texture of identities,” he implies that writers (and I would argue consultants as well) are never disembodied voices. Writing centers are filled with students (and consultants) marked by race, class, gender, and sexuality. They are filled with LGBTQ students who do not simply escape the “production and regulation” of sexuality in the writing center but find the same straight/gay binary thinking that queer theory attempts to dismantle (42). In other words, the same binary exists in the writing center, too. Thus by applying queer theory to the writing center, Denny certainly suggests that writing center workers can help to break down binary and homophobic ways of thinking.

In his article “Queering the Writing Center”, Denny writes that “Queer theory is not just about seeing homosexuals in writing centers or noticing the sexual politics that circulate through spaces” (60). He writes, we must “queer the dynamics that put forth […] intellectual practices as “normal” and others as not” (49). For example, he suggests that we can queer the writing center by recognizing the multiple and often non-academic literacies that students bring to writing centers. In terms of LGBTQ identity, Denny suggests that we can also practically apply queer theory by not being afraid to make our politics known to students during a consultation. He suggests that we should not be afraid to “come out” as LGBTQ or to simply say that we don’t agree, as a consultant, with a homophobic piece of writing.

Yet it is not simply an issue of being “in” or “out” of the closet for Denny. In his book *Facing the Center: Toward an Identity Politics of One-To-One Mentoring*¹³ Denny recognizes

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¹³ Although I’m focusing on Harry Denny’s discussion of sexuality and gender in his book, he also discusses other important issues of difference, including race, ethnicity, class, and nationality.
the complexity of identity in the writing center and the multiple ways in which consultants can perform in subversive ways, even if they don’t reveal their sexual identity. For example, Denny talks about how he is proud of friends of his who “live out and proud, without apology or invisibility,” yet he makes clear that “a whole other set of people have a performativity that also fundamentally challenges dominant codes of gender” (108). And he further writes that “To be visible, speak out, or perform gender and sexuality in oppositional ways is powerful and requires a self-assuredness and sense of safety that I don’t myself possess” (109). As a consultant and teacher who is not completely open with my gay identity both in the writing center and the classroom, I agree with Denny that the decision to reveal or not reveal your sexual identity is a very personal and complicated matter.

Within and beyond the question of “outing” yourself as LGBTQ in the writing center, I like how Denny also suggests that action against heteronormativity and homophobia can take many different forms and that the decision to take action in the first place is often highly influenced by and controlled by institutional constraints:

action can’t always be understood in such binary terms of assimilation and opposition. In some situations, the consequences of rejecting the hegemonic pose real material consequences: the loss of a job and earnings, the threat of violence, the possibility of isolation. (109)

At certain institutions (such as the one that Aloysius and José will describe in the next chapter), it’s simply difficult and even unsafe to be publicly open with your LGBTQ identity. As Aloysius will point out, it is a struggle for students at some institutions to even establish LGBTQ safe havens much less engage in any outwardly visible political activism on campus. At the same time, Denny takes an important step forward by suggesting that subversive efforts to affect change in the writing center—to use it as a space to combat heteronormative stereotypes and homophobia—need not necessarily manifest themselves as blatant and visible attacks from the margins. For example, Denny argues that his decision to neither foreground nor publicly reveal his sexual identity in the writing center (even though he is “out” to anyone who asks him) is also a form of action that is no less subversive (109).

What Denny seems to suggest here is that the very nature of writing center work and the role of the consultant or writing mentor—as a “middle person” who “helps students to navigate an academic terrain that can be uninviting and exclusionary”—is a subversive and queer act in-
and-of itself (‘Queering’ 61). Thus even though a consultant may not reveal his or her sexual identity or foreground his or her politics, Denny argues that the everyday practices of consulting—that include instigating productive dialogue and reflecting on the “dynamics of audience and rhetorical context”—can help students to better understand that “writing and identifying never stand alone outside a context or a community; they are always already constructed by both” (‘Queering’ 60). Through the lens of queer theory, for example, Denny has examined complex and often unstable contexts in which LGBTQ consultants find themselves. And, in doing this, he argues that writing center workers “must queer,” to use his words, “the dynamics that put forth particular codes of identity and intellectual practices as ‘normal’ and others as not” (49). Following Grimm, he also argues that we, as consultants, should not overlook the “literacy practices and educational capital”—which are often overlooked or devalued in classrooms—that students bring to writing centers. Like Grimm, he argues that we need to support and value these literacy practices and past educational experiences, even if the effort to do so comes up against institutional constraints. Beyond literacy, however, Denny also focuses on identity politics and suggests that consultants can use their job title—indeed the very nature of writing center work itself that promotes critical dialogue and that, in the spirit of Bruffee, teaches how knowledge is co-constructed—to challenge heteronormative stereotypes, reduce homophobic thinking, and make writing centers safer places for LGBTQ students and consultants.

Denny, and Sloan, have thus provided me with a firm foundation on which it has been easier to re-think the relationship among LGBTQ identity, queer theory, and the writing center. And, in Facing the Center, Denny has already begun the conversation—which I hope to extend in this thesis—of the unstable and performative nature of writing center work: this is perhaps most apparent at the end of his chapter on sex and gender in the writing center where he writes,

When a student, tutor, or even an administrator in a writing center confronts the question of whether to be assimilationist, oppositional, or subversive, each position carries with it assumptions about power, historical context, and rhetorical need. Rather than demand of someone that they just select one position instead of moving between them, a more sustainable response might involve strategic decisions about when to do one rather than another. (112)
At a fundamental level, Denny thus suggests that consultants perform in different ways and for different reasons. And in terms of the LGBTQ consultant, he certainly argues that you don’t have to be “in” or “out” of the closet to combat homophobia in the writing center: this point is made clear when he seems to argue that the very nature of writing center work is subversive. As I move on to my fourth chapter—in which I will look specifically at my interviews with three LGBTQ consultants and consultant-teachers—Denny’s discussion of the performative nature of the writing center, in particular, will be useful to think about the ways in which my participants “perform.”

In many ways, then, I will be extending Denny’s discussion of the performative nature of writing center work in my next chapter. At the same time, my discussion of performativity will be somewhat different from his because I will be analyzing my participants’ interview responses through the lens of Judith Butler’s discussion of performativity—in which she argues that performativity is not just about speech acts (it is not just about saying “I’m gay” during a consultation or to other writing center workers, for example) but about bodily acts (Undoing Gender 198). In my discussion of my interviews, I will thus pay particular attention to how bodies interact with other bodies and with the space of the writing center itself. In Undoing Gender, Butler writes that

We say something, and mean something by what we say, but we also do something with our speech, and what we do, how we act upon another with our language, is not the same as the meaning we consciously convey. It is in this sense that the significations of the body exceed the intentions of the subject. (199)

In this spirit of Butler, I will think about how the intentionality of the words and actions of my participants and how their words and actions are received by student writers, other writing center workers, and the greater institutions where they work. Furthermore, I will consider how my participants’ words and actions are influenced by the very space of the writing center—by how near or far they are from other bodies, for example, or by how the overheard conversations in a writing center influence how they respond to the writer with whom they are working. In doing so, I will ask as an inquiry question: To what extent does the very space of the writing center and the actions between bodies influence the ways in which my participants consciously and unconsciously perform?
As I have already suggested, my discussion of performativity in relation to my participants’ responses is also influenced by Sarah Ahmed—who is interested in the relationship between bodies and space, specifically—in *Queer Phenomenology*. Using Ahmed’s discussion of the intersections between phenomenology and queer theory as a lens, then, I will think about how the participants in this study orient themselves and perform towards not only other bodies in the writing center but towards the nature of writing center work itself. Ahmed is concerned with the importance of lived experience, but she is also interested in *lines* and the significance of digressions from patterned ways of looking at things—whether in terms of sexual identity or otherwise.

Perhaps one of the largest critiques of my own work—which I have already heard at a recent conference—is that the mission of writing center work is to assist students with writing. Thus, I have heard at least one person say that asking consultants to do more than this—to ask them to join the activist efforts of the LGBTQ community, for example—may be asking too much. But is it too much? What is the mission of a writing center and is this mission changing? As I turn to my interviews, I will consider these questions and the degree to which my participants line up with and perhaps digress from the ways in which we, as a writing center community, might think of the mission of writing center work.

In *Noise from the Center*, Elizabeth Boquet argues for a performative pedagogy that resists the idea of “scripted performance” in the writing center (83). She writes, “I much prefer thinking of the work of the writing center as random chaos, or maybe controlled chaos instead” (83). In making this argument, she points out the reality that consultant training manuals—which give “bare-bones” advice to tutors—are often negatively viewed by consultants simply because they are so scripted and outline ways to control and normalize writing center work. Boquet writes, “How and where do they [consultant training texts] prefigure the mutation, potential transformation, and re-organization of our systems of education? As far as I can tell they don’t. But they should” (85). I agree with what seems to be her argument here—that consultants can use the work they do in the writing center as a means to re-think and transform the very idea of education. For example, if it is possible to create a strong final product out of a less scripted writing center consultation, then couldn’t the very work of consultants be used as a starting point to re-think the scripted nature of pedagogy beyond writing centers?
I agree with Boquet that it can be damaging to think of the writing center as a place that attempts to control chaos. And I agree with her vision of the writing center that “might amplify, even distort, the noise of the academy” and challenge the idea that any pedagogy should be assessed in terms of “efficiency” alone (52). Certainly, as I read through and think about *Noise from the Center* again, I wonder if my participants’ perspectives—as I will be analyzing them as performative actions—may allow us, as a writing center community, to build on Grimm’s work and perhaps make further notes towards a performative pedagogy in the writing center.

As I’ve already suggested, I will thus pay particular attention to the ways in which my participants veer—if they do—from the scripted nature of writing center work. Yet at the same time, I’m also thinking about performativity on a somewhat different level than Boquet. Although I see chaos as a good thing, I’m concerned more specifically with the ways in which the identity of the participants in this study influences and is influenced by their interactions with other bodies and the space of the writing centers in which they work. I wonder how the ways in which they perform their LGBTQ identities might serve as a starting point to re-think how consultants and teachers might better combat homophobia in the writing center. Furthermore, I wonder if their performances might be used as a starting point to think about how the theoretical idea of performativity, itself, can be used to rearticulate the mission of writing center work.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE PERSPECTIVES OF THREE CONSULTANTS: PERFORMATIVITY AND DISIDENTIFICATIONS

After having looked at the ways in which teaching and consulting are both inherently performative—and also unscripted—I would like to use this chapter as a space to turn to the perspectives of three LGBTQ consultants. Part of my discussion will be about these consultants’ decision to “out” themselves or to reveal their LGBTQ identity during a consultation and in the writing centers where they work (or worked). Yet in doing this I will make clear—as I did when discussing the performances of LGBTQ teachers in chapter two—that a consultant (or any person) can be labeled as LGBTQ even if they don’t want to make this identity public. In other words, I want to make clear that it’s often not as easy, or even desirable, for a consultant to say, “Today I’m going to be gay in the writing center” or “Today I’m not going to be gay in the writing center.”

Particularly in the writing center—where bodies are in such close proximity to other bodies—the visibility (or invisibility) of LGBTQ identity is more complex, and perhaps less controllable. Even though a consultant may not make a formal declaration that he or she identifies as LGBTQ during a consultation or in the larger space of the writing center, that consultant still always embodies that identity. And, I also recognize that there is a continuum of ways that consultants can reveal or not reveal their LGBTQ identity. For example, they may not formally come out as queer yet perform a queer identity to make a student writer feel less intimidated during a consultation (as I see José doing). Or, they may not explicitly reveal their LGBTQ identity to student writers yet wish to discuss this identity and be open about it with other fellow writing center colleagues (as I see Aloysius doing).

At the same time, I will also be analyzing the reasons why the participants “perform” in the ways that they do. For example, if they choose to explicitly “come out” as gay during a consultation (as Will has) I will talk about why they chose to do this—the purposes and contexts for doing so. In addition, I find it important to also consider for whom they are performing. In many ways, especially during a consultation, the job of a consultant is to serve the writer and to help him or her with their writing. I’m thus certainly interested in ways in which the consultants I
interviewed perform for the writer—to benefit the development of that writer (whether academically or personally). Yet I’m also interested in the ways in which these consultants (as I see them all doing) perform for themselves—in ways that help them to develop as consultants and as people: that is, how they perform in ways that extend beyond the task of serving the student writer and his or her writing needs.

After analyzing the consultants’ perspectives on why and for whom they perform—I will discuss, in the final section of this chapter, the ways in which they (through their performances) seem to “disidentify” (a term that I discuss below) with the current environment and broader mission of writing center work (Muñoz). As I’ve said, I didn’t analyze my data with the intent that I would be reading the consultants’ performances as disidentificatory. The primary goal of my person-based research was to simply listen for the different ways in which the consultants I interviewed “performed”—I was always thinking about their responses through the lens of performativity. However, as I analyzed my data more closely—as I saw the ways in which they seem to rearticulate the very role of a consultant and the mission of writing center work—I saw how their performances might also be read as disidentificatory.

In the remainder of this chapter, then, I will first introduce the participants and study design. After doing this, I will better explain the theory of disidentification—which is a type of performance—and point briefly to how I see it at play in the consultants’ responses. Finally, and most importantly, I will share the words and experiences of three of the consultants I interviewed—who identify as either gay or queer—to analyze how they perform, why they perform, and, most importantly, for whom they perform. At the end of this chapter, I will also return to a more in-depth discussion of how my participants disidentify with writing center work.

**Study Design**

**Data Collection and Participants**

For this interview-based study, I recruited consultants or consultants-teachers who self-identify as LGBTQ. I focused on recruiting participants from Miami University, sending a recruitment email to all composition instructors and all writing center consultants. Ultimately, four people responded to my email and agreed to participate in one 30-40 minute interview
(although some interviews went longer than others). The names of the consultants I interviewed are Caroline, José, Aloysius, and Will. Although I had intended to use pseudonyms for all participants, Caroline and José preferred that I just use their real names. Aloysius and Will, however, are both pseudonyms. Also, although I only recruited people who are studying and/or working at Miami, two participants discussed experiences in writing centers at other institutions. Although I interviewed four people, I will only be discussing in detail the experiences of José, Aloysius, and Will. Caroline offered valuable insights, yet because of my focus on writing center issues, I am not including her in my larger discussion because she focused more on LGTBQ issues and classroom teaching rather than on writing center work.

Will self-identifies as a gay, white male undergraduate student majoring in English. Currently, he’s a consultant in the Howe Writing Center at Miami. Aloysius also self-identifies as a gay, white male who is currently a Master’s student in the English Department. Before coming to the Miami, though, he completed his undergraduate degree at a mid-sized, private, rural university affiliated with the Brethren Church—an institutional context that made it more difficult for him to find any type of safe haven to freely express his gay identity outside his writing center. However, his writing center, which is actually called the writing studio at his undergraduate university, was very supportive of his efforts to make his campus a safer and more supportive place for LGBTQ people. Finally, José self-identifies as a queer, Latino male, and he is a doctoral student in the English Department of Miami. Before Miami, he attended a large, public university in the south where he consulted in the writing center while completing his Master’s degree. Although José didn’t talk about any specific instances where his university actually tried to shut-down LGBTQ activists efforts—which did happen at Aloysius’s undergraduate institution—he did say that the small, southern town in which his school was located had a bearing on the papers people would actually write and bring into the writing center. He said that, in his experience, sexuality and gender were not even discussed in classes that were not specifically designed to teach them. Like Aloysius, then, he also seemed to suggest that his undergraduate university was more conservative and less welcoming of LGBTQ students and issues.

\[14\] See appendix for a complete list of interview questions.
Analysis

Once I had transcribed all my interview recordings, I conducted a thematic analysis—looking for patterns and similar responses to my questions. My analysis is shaped by my interest in the ways that José, Aloysius, and Will “perform.” As I already said, I’m more specifically interested in how, why, and, most importantly, for whom they perform. I was particularly surprised to find that all the consultants I interviewed described the ways in which they perform not only for the student writer but for themselves. All three of their performances extend beyond the job title of helping students with their writing needs. More than this, their performances work to assist student-writer and consultant development—on academic and personal levels. Thus, I analyzed themes focused on two larger categories—“performing for student-writer development” and “performing for consultant-development.” Under these two categories, I will certainly still discuss the question of how and why they perform. Yet, in creating these two larger categories, I will demonstrate the ways in which the interviewed consultants seem to expand the job description of a consultant; in doing this, I also set the stage for my final section of this chapter in which I will consider the ways in which the consultants’ performances might be read as performances that “disidentify” with the current mission of writing center work.

Just as Susan Talburt and Zan Gonçalves (see chapter two) noted when considering LGBTQ issues in the classroom, so too in the writing center consultation are the personal and the academic intermingling. Thus, when I say “Student-Wr iter Development” or “Consultant Development,” I am interested, certainly, in how the consultants help students with their writing needs and academic questions they might have. Yet I am simultaneously interested in how they also transcend both the task of helping students with their writing needs and more academic conversations/interactions. In other words, I am interested in how they help them on very “academic” and very “personal/non-academic” levels. And, I am also interested in how they use the consultation and the writing center as a space to better develop as consultants—on professional/academic and personal levels (indeed how these two levels become wrapped in one another).

Disidentification: A type of performance

In his book Disidentifications, José Muñoz is interested, like me, in performance and the idea of performativity—and he does a nice job of distinguishing between and finding overlaps in
“performance art” and performativity. What most interests me about this book, however, is his discussion of what he calls “disidentification”—a type of performance and a survival strategy. At a fundamental level, Muñoz talks about strategies that those outside the racial and sexual mainstream can use to negotiate and, often, just simply survive within majority culture: one way to do this, he finds, is to “disidentify” with dominant ideology. According to Muñoz, “disidentification” is “the third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within a structure nor strictly oppose it (11). He writes, “disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology” (11). In other words, disidentification involves assuming a sort of middle ground (which is certainly not neutral): it is a tactical position in which you do not completely identify or counteridentify with a dominant culture.

When I first read Disidentifications (in a Queer Theory course that I took right after completing my interviews), I immediately wondered the extent to which José’s, Aloysius’s, and Will’s perspectives could be read as disidentificatory performances. Certainly, the writing center is a dominant discourse/culture/ideology in and of itself. And, if this is the case, writing center workers are subjects of this dominant culture. Whether they realize it or not, consultants, when they take a writing center job, operate within a strongly established writing center culture.

Now I want to make clear that I’m not trying to depict the writing center as an authoritative, dominant power structure that aims to oppress its “subjects.” The writing center community, as I’ve found it both locally and nationally, is supportive and fundamentally invested in the development of both consultants/writing center workers and student writers. I also don’t want to overlook the fact that writing center scholars—including everyone I discussed in the previous chapter—have already been critical of and have actually worked to change the course of writing center work in positive ways. At the same time, less has been written about the ways that writing center workers (both within the space of the consultation and in the larger space of the writing center) have taken on roles or performed in ways (which I think all my participants have) that extend far beyond what seems to be the primary mission—to help students with their writing—of the writing center. And, I have not found anything written on the extent to which the very job title of a consultant—and the need to always keep the focus on the writing itself—can (and perhaps even should) be looked at as a negative thing. Could the very job description of a consultant make it difficult for consultants to feel comfortable (and even
survive?) in the writing center—especially for those LGBTQ consultants who are outside the racial and sexual mainstream?

Unfortunately in my interviews, I did not think to ask the consultants in this study if they ever felt constricted by their job title and expected job duties of a consultant. But as I read their descriptions of their experiences consulting, I see ways in which they perform to, and at the least, expand the role of a consultant. For these consultants, the writing center becomes much more than a place where they go to work every day to help students become better writers (although this is also important): it becomes, for example, a place where they feel protected from the homophobic environments of the conservative schools in which their writing centers are or were located and where they work to extend the activist efforts of LGBTQ groups that are not welcomed in their university’s broader culture. Thus, while they are always still consultants, I think that their performances seem to also re-envision or “rearticulate” the role of a consultant. In Disidentifications, Muñoz makes clear that the purpose of a disidentificatory performance is not to undermine dominant discourses but to “rearticulate such discourses within terms that are politically progressive” (15). In this way, if José’s, Aloysius’s, and Will’s performances are read as disidentificatory, this does not mean that they should be viewed as against writing center work.

It is most important to point out that all three consultants have found a great deal of support, especially for their LGBTQ identities in the writing centers where they have worked. Yet it is because of this very fact—that they have been so supported by writing centers that see not only student writing but student and consultant development as important—that I view their performances as disidentificatory: that is, I think the ways in which they perform with other writing center workers (to make the writing center a safer place for LGBTQ people, for example)—in ways that extend far beyond the task of helping students with their writing—is a disidentificatory performance.

At that recent ECWCA Conference where I gave a presentation on “Queer Consulting” with some colleagues, an audience member asked me if I thought it was asking too much of consultants to take on roles that extend beyond the task of helping students with their writing — for example, by taking actions within their writing center to promote the LGBTQ activist efforts of consultants on campus (Dickerson et al.). At the time, I was not sure how to respond to this question. Yet after having more time to think about it, I have a new perspective that I will
address in the final chapter of this thesis. For now, with the theory of disidentification in mind, I will turn to my discussion of Jose’s, Aloysius’s, and Will’s perspectives.

Performing for Student-Writer Development

Because I am talking about the ways in which José, Aloysius, and Will have “performed” for the student-writer, I will first focus on their interactions within the space of the consultation itself. In this section, I will pay a lot of attention to the question of “coming out” as LGBTQ during a consultation because the question of doing so, or not doing so, has certainly been on the minds of all three consultants at one point or another. When asked the direct question regarding whether or not he has ever revealed his gay identity during a consultation, Will said:

there was a consultation I had with a freshman or a first year, and she was writing something about her brother coming out and her perspective. I mean, obviously she had experience with it, and I don’t want to say “I know it all,” but it was just some of the things that I thought she was saying were just a little off in terms of the overall coming out experience. And so, I said, “Oh well, I’m gay and this is my experience so I don’t know about that necessarily.” (Will)

Of all my participants, Will is the only one who explicitly said that he has told a student, during a consultation, that he was gay. Yet even though he does come out as gay, it’s not as though he stopped the consultation to make a formal announcement or to tell his coming out story. It is interesting how he said he was gay but performed in such a way that did not seem to disrupt the pace of the consultation or the focus on the student writer. I also think it is interesting how he said “this is my experience”—he certainly did not attack the student-writer or simply say “You are wrong!” Perhaps by referring to his own actual experiences—by bringing this to the table—he was actually able to create a more productive and educational consultation.

In the above quote, it also seems to me that, beyond just being the consultant, Will also takes on more of a teacher-role in this situation, as he seemed to suggest:

I feel like, it’s that whole idea of the client’s identity as a writer in this space and respecting that and trying to work with that specific issue rather than the paper. But still, I would try to do what I felt is like, maybe my responsibility to say, you know, “Hey this is the correct terminology and you know, overall, I don’t necessarily agree with this.” (Will)
On one level, Will is certainly still a consultant here—while in conversation with the student-writer, he shares his perspective: that of a consultant who has a real stake in these issues as a gay man. You might say that, by saying “I don’t necessarily” agree, he is co-constructing knowledge with this writer in the spirit of Kenneth Bruffee. At the same time, he seems to become more of a teacher in the sense that, regardless of what the student wants to talk about in her paper, he still sees it as his “responsibility” to say something. Though, in doing this, he’s not trying to reprimand the student or to point out his superior knowledge.

Now, I want to make clear that when I say “teacher-role,” I’m not referring to the idea of the detached teacher at the front of the room who is less concerned with dialogue than with pursuing a certain agenda, regardless of student perspectives/how they would like the classroom to operate. I’m aware that many people admire the potential of writing center work to subvert the classroom/writing center hierarchy. Indeed, many consultants don’t want to become a teacher in the writing center. I use the term “teacher-role” simply because I see the participants in this study encouraging writer’s to look at and consider things that the student may not want to look at—especially things that ask students to question or think more critically about cultural norms (such as those that produce homophobia). Although Will does seem to meet the student where she is in the previous excerpt—helping her with what she want to work on—by sharing his experience as a gay man he also seems to ask her to consider broader cultural norms surrounding gay identity: I argue that this questioning of cultural norms occurs more often in the classroom than in the writing center. Yet again, Will never tries to over-power the student writer and by simply sharing his experience (as opposed to detailing on a white board or sharing a specific lesson plan on gay identity) I would say that his performance seems to rearticulate the role of teacher—he suggests that, as a teacher, sharing your personal experiences with students in the classroom (or teaching through a personal narrative) can be effective.

Whereas as Will said, directly, that he was gay to the student-writer, Aloysius described an experience in which he did not come out as gay yet felt like he may have reacted differently to a paper because he was gay. In response to the question regarding whether or not he had revealed his gay identity during a consultation, Aloysius explained:

I can’t really think of a time during a consultation [that I came out]. I do remember just one time that a student I was working with was writing a narrative about his own experience and he talked about how a policeman had pulled him over once and he had
got out of getting a ticket because the policeman told him he was cute. And the boy said something like, “I guess he was gay.” And I said, “Yeah, policeman can be gay.” That was it. But even then, it wasn’t like, “I’m gay, you have to acknowledge that in this meeting.” That, I think was the most that that ever occurred during a consultation.

(Aloysius)

Like Will, Aloysius didn’t stop the conversation to make a formal declaration that he is gay. And, unlike Will, he does not even directly say that he is gay. However, it seems that his gay identity certainly influenced how he responded to this student or how he performed in this situation—this is evident in the fact that he simply talked about this story in response to my question regarding the extent to which he has revealed his gay identity during consultations.

When comparing Will and Aloysius, though, I wondered why Will decided to directly reveal his gay identity and why Aloysius didn’t. One of the reasons why Will came out as gay was to further the education of the student-writer: by saying “I’m gay and this is my experience”, I think he was able to take on more of an educative role—to share his experience and teach the student something about the experience of being gay. Yet, even though he didn’t reveal his identity—at least as directly as Will did—I would say that Aloysius also takes on more of a teacher-role in another experience he talked about:

…there was a student who was writing about how war and sports were related for how they taught children, little boys, what it was to be a man. There was this essay, and the tone of it was sort of ironic, saying you know, “Oh, we teach little boys to play with toy guns or whatever and look what happens.” It wasn’t entirely endorsing that uber masculine perspective, but the student didn’t see the irony there. The student thought, “Well, this is just how it is.” And so, I wonder if maybe my sexual identity, being gay and being sort of, in a related sense, aware of the constructedness of gender roles—I wonder if maybe a different writing center consultant might have pointed him more to look at the irony of the piece. Because this was a writer that I worked with regularly and he didn’t usually have problems comprehending what he was reading. But at that point the irony of the piece just seemed to elude him and that was just something that I wanted him to focus on, to kind of see maybe where he was not being completely serious, and maybe, that was just because of my own personal bias against masculinity being about guns and wars and things like that. (Aloysius)
Like Will, Aloysius is still always a consultant, but he also performs a somewhat different role in this situation—one more closely aligned with a teacher as well. This student clearly did not come in to the writing center intending to want to talk about the ironic nature of his piece yet Aloysius found it important to still bring it up. The reason why I say Aloysius performs more of a teacher-role here is because he seems to be more concerned with helping the student-writer understand the idea of irony and the social-constructedness of gender roles. In other words their conversation seemed to focus less on the paper itself than on better understanding and comprehending gender roles. And although he did not come out as gay, it is clear in this quote that his gay identity was “revealed” and shaped the directions of the consultation in the sense that he wondered if another consultant who wasn’t gay would have interacted with this student in the same way.

The extent to which Will and Aloysius reveal or feel like their gay identities are present during a consultation is tied up with their desire to further educate student-writers in ways that seem to extend beyond just helping them with their writing needs—the needs that they originally came to the writing center to get help with, anyway. In addition to helping students with their writing, they are also concerned about teaching them about the experience of being gay (as Will does) or about the social constructedness of gender roles (as Aloysius does). They seem to be more concerned about the development of student writers—in a way that extends beyond just helping them with their writing and beyond purely “academic” conversations. For example, by sharing his personal experience of being gay, I think, on one level anyway, that Will is helping that writer to understand that learning does not occur in the classroom alone—it occurs through hearing the experiences of other gay people that cannot be understood through a textbook or classroom lecture. Indeed, by simply performing more of a teacher-role in the writing center, they communicate to students that learning can occur outside the classroom.

Like Will and Aloysius, José also transcends the role of a consultant—which I will get to eventually. I think it’s first necessary, however, to point out the ways that José performs in order to be respected and acknowledged as a consultant, alone. When I asked José the hypothetical question of how he would respond to someone who came into the writing center with a homophobic piece of writing, he began talking about an experience at his previous southern institution that he had as a consultant of color (Latino) with a student whose writing could be read as racist. He said:
whenever the person signed up for the appointment they just signed up for an appointment. Whenever they go there [to the writing center] it’s me that they have to work with. I had to work with this student before and he felt uncomfortable with me reading it. Every time that I tried to complicate anything, in terms of the logic of the paper or whatever, you know, just saying, “Have you thought about this or perhaps this phrasing” or “maybe you want to look at broader issues,” he felt like the place that I was coming from was not a place of a writing center consultant. It wasn’t coming from a place of “Here’s me helping your writing”: it was coming mostly from a place of “You’re Mexican.” (José)

As I’ve already made clear, I’m interested in the ways that the consultants in this study seem to expand the definition of what a consultant is—by taking on more of a teacher-role, for example. Yet in reviewing the above quote from José, I recognize that identity markers other than sexuality—such as race—can make it difficult for an LGBTQ consultant to even have the chance to perform as a consultant if the student writer, such as the student who dismissed José as simply “Mexican,” doesn’t see them as a consultant or as someone speaking with knowledge and investment in writing. In this specific instance, José seemed to be able to continue through to the end of the consultation but it was certainly difficult.

As José Muñoz makes clear in *Disidentifications*, it is even harder for people who are outside the sexual and racial mainstream to simply survive in dominant cultures—one of which, I would say, is the writing center. Indeed, in the quote I just shared, the student made it hard for José to simply consult with him—to perform his job as a professional because the student did not seem to respect him as such. Yet Muñoz is also all about strategy and specific tactics that people can use to survive within situations where they are not treated fairly or are oppressed. In the quote I just shared, I would argue that simply continuing to work with this student—continuing to perform his professional role despite the fact that he did not feel respected—is a type of survival strategy in and of itself. Though, in another situation he described, José seemed to suggest that performing a “queer” identity can also become a survival strategy. He said:

I don’t think of myself as an intimidating person but I think that people would. I mean, people often do. I’m a very tall, plush, person, so I think that, certainly, if they see a writing tutor who’s heavy and tall walking up to them, they’re going to think, “What the hell is going on?” you know, “Excuse me, what the fuck is going on here?” But I think
that, to some extent, there is a sense of that kind of comfort. I think that it almost plays against that kind of threatening or maybe intimidating work when I’m like “How are you doing?” and all of a sudden any kind of explicit deployment of queer identity becomes almost this way of undercutting that intimidation that students might at first feel if they are unfamiliar with me. (José)

In this situation, José suggests that “explicitly” performing “queer” can make it easier for him to work with students who may feel less comfortable or intimidated by him.

At the same time, I find José’s perspective here interesting because he suggests that “explicitly deploying a queer identity” could help him to make a student writer feel less “intimidated.” At a fundamental level, José is trying to make the student-writer feel less intimidated and more comfortable. And, in doing this, he seems to perform more of a mentor-like role—becoming someone who is not just there to help the student with his or her writing but to ensure that they feel safe, unintimidated, and comfortable. Now, others—such as Harry Denny in Facing the Center—have already described and understood writing center work as “mentoring” (instead of using the word “consulting” that I use). I, as well, like the word mentoring and think that, as writing center workers, it is always our job to mentor students with their writing. Yet, José seems to perform the role of a mentor in a way that extends beyond just assisting students with their writing: in addition to helping them develop as writers, he seems to forefront just making sure they feel comfortable. In doing so, he seems to expand the definition of a mentor in the context of the writing center.

On the one hand, then, I’m reading José’s explicit performance of his queer identity as a survival tactic that simply makes it easier for him to consult with students. Yet on the other hand, I think at least one of the reasons why he wanted to explicitly perform queer—to make the student feel less intimidated and more comfortable—suggests that a consultant’s role (whether he or she identifies as LGBTQ or not) is not just to consult (or mentor) students with their writing: he suggests that their role is to also ensure that students have a safe and supportive environment to develop as writers and as people.

Certainly, making clear to the student-writer that the consultation is a safe and supportive space is very important when you are talking about LGBTQ issues, specifically. In the following excerpt, it seems to me that José performs a mentor-like role again—not in the sense that he is any wiser than the student, but in the sense that he is eager to talk about and be supportive of
LGBTQ identity and issues. In this excerpt—which, I will also add, was in response to my question regarding the extent to which the sexual identity of a writer had ever influenced how he responded to him or her—José described working with a woman whom he identified as a person who was a lesbian:

I remember actually the paper she was writing about. I think it was about that song ‘Mr. Brightside’ by the Killers. And it was so interesting because, and again, you know, I went to a campus where the queer community or LGBT community was not very visible so whenever they [LGBTQ persons] came in, and, being closeted at the time, it felt almost, I felt this affinity or just association or something. Whether I was like, ‘Oh yeah, you know, let’s talk. It was almost within the parameters of the cubicle. All of a sudden there was a space for me as a tutor to just completely let go of those kinds of constraints or whatever because, I mean, here’s this person, right? I mean as a gay man, as a closeted gay man at the time, here is this system where people, random people, are coming in and seeing you and you might not see them again. So it’s almost like there are these pockets of queer possibility for the closeted tutor. I think that there’s this sense that, for a moment, you don’t have to be closeted and that’s so low stakes because you won’t see this person again. I mean, I think to some extent that student […] of course I made an assumption, right, and then of course it was confirmed by another tutor who had actually met this person at a bar in Huston, but I was like, ‘Oh yeah, I think you are or something or whatever.” But I just think rather than remembering what the paper was about or whatever help I was able to provide. I think that that was very interesting to see my reaction and just letting go a little bit. (José)

Although this is a long quote (and one that I will return to again in my next section) it is significant as it further demonstrates how José performs the role of mentor who, in addition to working with this student to help her become a better writer, seems to also be interested in ensuring that she has a space to develop as a person—one who may have felt unsafe or threatened in other spaces. When you think about why he remembered this consultation in the first place, it was not because of the particular paper she was working on: he remembers it because of the very non-academic, more personal conversation he had with her. Indeed by “just letting go,” he seems to almost forget that he’s a consultant during this time by making little points of connection from one LGBTQ person to another.
Now it is true that, in just letting go with this student, José was making an assumption about the student’s lesbian identity. Also, there is no way of telling, from this quote anyway, if the student even wanted to engage in the less academic/more tangential conversation that José started regarding the song. However, there is a sense that he wanted to help this student and to relate with her in ways that extended beyond the job of just helping her become a better writer. Especially on his campus, where the LGBTQ or queer community was not that visible, Jose was, at the least, providing a safe place for that student on a campus where he thought she may have also felt unwelcomed and even unsafe. By being in the consultation with José, this student may have felt better about herself as person who identifies as a lesbian—by talking about the queer nature of a pop music song. Yet what is perhaps even clearer in this quote, and is just as significant, is the way in which this consultation allowed José to better develop as a consultant and as a person, himself.

Performing for Consultant Development

José’s description of the writing center as a place where there are “queer pockets of possibility for the closeted tutor” really gets at the heart of the argument that all my participants seem to be making about consulting and writing center work more broadly—that our job, as consultants/writing center workers, is not to focus purely on the student-writer. Or, perhaps better said, the student writer and his or her development is certainly still significant—as I hope I’ve made clear in the previous section—but equally as significant is the consultant’s development on a professional and personal level. José, for example, describes his experiences while working at a writing center where the LGBTQ community was not visible, and, as his words suggest, he was happy in that broader oppressive context to find a space in the consultation where he could be himself—where he could reach out to and connect with fellow LGBTQ people.

The writing center is also an important place for mediating between theory and practice—to help accentuate and make visible the ways in which queer theory can be used to help make the world a safer place for LGBTQ people. Speaking specifically to the relationship between theory and practice, José said:

I think that the problem is whenever we try to use queer theory at that theoretical level to address issues of, you know, things that are happening… I cannot go to any of the
families of the recent victims of bullying and suicide and just read Butler to them. That would be of no comfort to those families. I can try to explain to the people who are voting on these things, but that will mean nothing to some extent. I think that we [as LGBTQ consultants] become these mediators between theory and practice. And I think, certainly, to really think about a radical and activist approach, we need to radically deploy theory in practical ways and find those ways in which queer theory can become this, you know, tool and object, that we can use to produce these kinds of better social conditions, not just on paper, right, but certainly in practice. So I think that this is our job, not as scholars but as people, as people who are concerned within that text of sexuality and the ethics of belonging. (José)

By saying that you can’t just read Butler to the families of the recent victims of bullying and suicide, José seems to point out the reality that queer theory is often viewed as not having much of a practical view. Though, by also saying that writing center consultants can become mediators between theory and practice, he suggests that they can help to turn queer theory into practice and to ensure that it can have real effects in reaching out to help people: he seems to make this point even clearer when he says that we need to “find those ways in which queer theory can become…tool and object.”

Perhaps one of the most obvious ways in which writing centers can better turn theory into practice is by supporting the activist efforts of its consultants, especially when these activist efforts are not supported by the larger institution in which the writing center is located. In my interview with Aloysius, he talked about ways that his writing center actually supported his activist efforts on campus:

And while in working at the writing studio, well, it was kind of strange because during my senior year at [my undergraduate university], several others and I were also trying to create a group for gay and lesbian students on campus. And [the writing center director] was part of the effort for that, she was really into it and thought it was just so wonderful so she would cut out articles from the newspaper and post them in the writing studio and things like that. So I would say that I never discussed it with people, but if they read the article they would know that I was working with the group to create a group for LGBT people on campus. It ended up not working because [my undergraduate university] is associated with the Brethren Church which, they’re very strict. I want to refrain from
saying that they’re backwards in many ways, but, so that eventually didn’t pan out. But, during that time that I was working there those efforts were made public [in the writing studio]. (Aloysius)

As I’ve already said, Aloysius has not directly come out as gay during a consultation. Outside the space of the consultation, though, he clearly reveals his gay identity to co-workers. I think that his decision to talk with his director about his group’s efforts can be read as a type of performative action: it makes a strong statement, particularly in his conservative, religious institution, that the safety of and development of its consultants should be a primary concern. More than this, I think telling his director about his group and getting her involved is also performative because, in doing so, he seems to suggest that the writing center can become an activist space. He seems to disrupt the assumption that writing centers only exist to support the institutions in which they are housed: he suggests that, in addition to serving and supporting these institutions, they should also become critical of them and work to support LGBTQ students/consultants who may otherwise not feel supported or even safe in the larger space of their universities.

Like José and Aloysius, Will also seems to perform in ways that don’t only support the student-writer, but himself as well. Although more subtle than the other two, Will seemed to suggest that writing center administrators should be as equally concerned with consultant development as they are with student-writer development. When I asked him the extent to which he has revealed his gay identity in the larger space of the writing center here at Miami University—to other consultants, for example—he talked, among other things, about his consultant training course. He said:

I do remember in a paper that I wrote for [the professor teaching the consultant training course] in which I said something about this guy that I’m dating as a footnote. I don’t know how it was relevant, it probably wasn’t. But, I don’t know, there is always that point in every class where you don’t necessarily proactively bring it up, but you are aware of like, oh, well, this came up for the first time in this class. I don’t know how I felt with the other consultants. I think that when it started with the newer ones [consultants]…I was definitely kind of worried about how it [being gay] was going to work out with everyone, definitely. You know, like I was wondering, “Is that going to be a problem?” (Will)
I think Will’s decision to add the footnote in his paper, although it was only a footnote, is also performative in the sense that he seems to be making a statement that there should perhaps be more of a space in consultant-training courses for LGBTQ students to talk about their experiences on paper and with other classmates. Although Will also said that, since he started working, his gay identity has not been a problem with other consultants, he did mention that he was at first afraid about whether or not it would be a problem. Thus, he suggests that it may be important to pay closer attention to consultant development—especially when they are the most new to writing center work during consultant training courses. Yet he also seems to simply suggest, like Talburt and Gonçalves, that it is never easy to untangle the personal from the academic/professional, even in consultant-training courses.

**Performances that Seem to Disidentify with Writing Center Work**

I want to reiterate that in all their writing center interactions, José, Will, and Aloysius are still always consultants. Indeed in order for their performances to be read as disidentifications, they must always remain consultants in some way. Yet as consultants, they perform in ways that seem to (1) expand the “job description” of a consultant and (2) re-envision the mission statement of writing centers more broadly. As gay and queer consultants who exist outside the sexual and racial mainstream, I also think their performances might be read as disidentificatory in the sense that they allow them to simply survive within the dominant culture that we call the “writing center community” and the heteronormative (often homophobic) environment of their larger universities.

For example, José’s disidentificatory performances at his previous, less LGBTQ-accepting institution, allowed him to simply survive and gain respect as a consultant. And, performing more of a mentor-like role might be read as disidentificatory in the sense that, although he still remains a consultant, this very performance allows him to become a person that is not only helping the student with his or her writing but helping him or her to simply feel more comfortable and more at ease as a person. For example, when he helps the student writing about the “Mr. Brightside” song—a situation in which he was more open with his gay identity—his performance is disidentificatory in the sense that it seems to say that a consultant is not only there to help a student with his or her **writing** needs: it suggests that the role of a consultant is
also to help *mentor* LGBTQ student writers, especially those who may not have a space to be more open with their identity on campus.

Indeed, I think it’s clear that José performs in ways that not only allow him to survive (and even just gain respect) as a consultant but that also seem to, at the least, expand the job description of a consultant. Furthermore, his performances also seem to re-envision the mission of the writing center, suggesting that writing centers should be invested in student-writer *and* consultant safety and development in ways that extend beyond helping them develop as writers or as professionals.

Certainly, the experiences of José and Aloysius on their more socially-conservative campuses point out the reality that writing centers are located on campuses that are not only heteronormative but also homophobic. On these campuses, the writing center may become one of the only spaces where LGBTQ students feel safe and free to express their LGBTQ identities. Thus I think that José and Aloysius, in particular, make a statement that the writing center should be willing to partner with the activist efforts of LGBTQ consultants and students on campus.

As I’ve already said, the ways in which José, Aloysius, and Will perform with/partner up with colleagues to make their writing centers safer places for LGBTQ people can be read as *disidentifications*: together—indeed by performing *with* each other—they rearticulate the writing center as a space that could potentially be more activist. For example, I think that Aloysius’ decision to tell his writing center director about the group for gay and lesbian students that he was trying to start is disidentificatory in the sense that, although he remains a consultant, his performance suggests that the mission of the writing center should include partnering up with marginalized groups on campus—especially those groups who are not recognized and shut down by the larger university. Now I do recognize that writing centers, in many ways, serve the greater institutions in which they are located. I also recognize that writing centers could get in trouble—perhaps even get shut down as a writing center—for publicly supporting the activist efforts of LGBTQ students and consultants. At the same time I think Aloysius, at the least, asks us, as consultants and writing center workers, to be more cognizant of the activist efforts of LGBTQ students and consultants that come to and work in writing centers.

Beyond making the writing center a safer and more supportive place for LGBTQ people, the consultants I interviewed also suggested that, as consultants, we should not be afraid to educate student-writers. For example, they say that we should not be afraid to bring up the
danger in heteronormative stereotypes and talk about the experiences of LGBTQ people during a consultation, even if the student-writer does not originally intend to have these conversations or to be educated on these issues.

By saying “Well I’m gay and this is my experience,” Will seems to disidentify with the idea that a consultation should only be directed by the student-writer (i.e. the idea that you only address what the writer wants to address in his or her paper). He seems to re-articulate the role of a consultant—and the mission of the writing center—by suggesting that consultants should not be afraid to share their own personal experiences and politics with student-writers, especially if they are making heteronormative or homophobic stereotypes and don’t seem to fully understand these stereotypes.

By this point, I’ve intended to have made clear the ways in which the performances of José, Aloysius, and Will might be read as disidentifications that seem to re-articulate the role of a consultant—as someone who is also a teacher, mentor, and activist—and the mission of the writing center. I think disidentification is about never fully identifying with the roles we perform and remaining critical of them. Thus, I’m interested in the ways in which the perspectives of the participants in this study seem to ask us to remain critical of, question, and not be afraid to redefine or “rearticulate” the role of a consultant and the mission of writing center work. What would it mean—for writing center practice, consultant-training courses, and relationships between writing centers and the larger universities they work with—if the core mission of writing center work involved much more than making better writers? What would an activist writing center look like? Should writing centers even join with the activist efforts of LGBTQ students at all? Should we, as consultants, disidentify with the role of a consultant and with the current direction of writing center work? In the final pages of this thesis, I will address these questions.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE CRITICAL CONSULTANT:
REARTICULATING THE MISSION OF WRITING CENTER WORK

In the last chapter, I talked about how José, Aloysius, and Will perform in ways that seem to expand the job description of a consultant and re-envision the mission of the writing center. Yet, in some ways, I feel like others have already said this. Certainly, others have already said that consultants are always something more than just a detached person helping a student with his or her writing—that consultants always carry with them the biases and ideologies of their own socially constructed positions. I even think that other scholars have already re-envisioned and have actually helped to change the mission of writing center work in important ways—such as Kenneth Bruffee’s call for “conversation-based” consulting, Nancy Grimm’s attention to the ways in which difference matters in any writing center, and Harry Denny’s recent work on LGBTQ identity and queer theory in the writing center.

At a fundamental level, I’m also trying to “queer” the writing center, as Denny has already started to do. Denny has even said that there is a type of performativity that exists in writing center work, when he talks about how important it is to remain cognizant of the different situations that ask us, as consultants, to respond in different ways. In this thesis, though, I’m more concerned with the ways in which the performatve actions of the consultants I interviewed ask us, as a writing center community, to be critical of and expand the very job title of a consultant and to not only queer but re-articulate the very mission of writing center work. For example, beyond existing to make better writers, the consultants in this study seem to suggest that writing centers should also be interested in student-writer and consultant development (in ways that extend beyond helping them improve and develop as writers).

Yet, what does all this mean? What might a rearticulated mission statement look like anyway? And, what might writing centers look like and do under this rearticulated mission. In this chapter, I will attempt to answer these questions as I discuss the broader implications of my study’s findings. In doing so, I will get very specific about what a rearticulated mission might look like. But I will also consider implications for consultant training/writing center practice, for understanding how to better work within yet resist institutional constraints on the writing center,
and for writing center administration. After doing this, I will think about new directions for further research at the intersections of LGBTQ identity, queer theory, and writing center work. And, finally, I will end this chapter with a final—more personal—reflection on I see my own gay identity, queer theory, and writing center work coming together in my own life after having written this thesis.

**What is the Current Mission of the Writing Center?**

In many ways, every writing center scholar that I talked about in chapter three has rearticulated the direction of writing center work, even if they don’t talk about “mission statements” specifically. Certainly, Steven North’s “Idea of the Writing Center” center has attempted to reverse stereotypes of what we do, as consultants, and to say that our primary responsibility is to “talk to writers” (446). But others have definitely added to North’s “Idea.” Kenneth Bruffee kept with the theme of conversation that North started but was new in stressing that consultants and writers should work together to produce knowledge. And, more recently, scholars such as Nancy Grimm and Harry Denny have argued that difference matters in the writing center and that we need to draw attention to the ways in which consultants can feel threatened or at least unwelcomed by student writers, colleagues, and the larger space(s) of their writing center/greater institution. Both Grimm in *Good Intentions* and Denny in *Facing the Center* mention how things such as race and sexuality greatly impact students and consultants—in the space of the consultation and the larger space of the writing center (in meetings and workshops, for example).

In addition to scholarship, I already see specific writing centers making it clear in their mission statements (or broader writing center websites) that they foster an environment that respects and supports diversity. At Michigan Technological University (where Nancy Grimm directs the writing center), for example, the very title of their writing center—the “Michigan Tech Multiliteracies Center”—immediately suggests that they support diverse writing styles and backgrounds. And their mission statement, itself, actually mentions cultural diversity. It reads, “At the Michigan Tech Multiliteracies Center, we work with students, faculty, and staff to address the challenges of learning and communicating in complex and culturally diverse
environments."\(^{15}\) Certainly, this statement importantly recognizes that writing—or “learning” and “communicating”—does not happen in a vacuum. It suggests that students need to navigate and better understand cultural diversity as part of the learning process. At Purdue’s writing center, they also specifically mention the word “diversity” on their website. One of the “goals” of the Purdue Writing Lab is “To promote responsible academic inquiry, critical thinking, and the expression of diversity.”\(^{16}\) The word “promote” is key here as it implies that acknowledging diversity is a continuous, active pursuit of the writing center. It suggests that they don’t merely recognize diversity but see it as something that students should actively engage with as part of their academic inquiries and broader critical thinking.

Beyond including the word “diversity” in a mission statement—which is an important step in and of itself—I have also found detailed descriptions on writing center websites get even more specific about what they mean by diversity. At Texas A&M their writing center includes, as a link directly below their mission, a detailed statement on diversity.\(^{17}\) And, at the George Washington University, their writing center mentions LGBTQ identity, specifically—as part of their “objective” they include the following statement:

The GW Writing Center holds the International Writing Centers Association’s policy on diversity that writing centers ‘inclusively serve all students, including members of underrepresented groups such as people of color, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, and people with a range of abilities, economic needs, and linguistic expression.’ (George Washington University)\(^{18}\)

So, it is clear that there are writing centers that include specific language in their mission statements and/or the larger spaces of their websites that acknowledge diversity and difference.

And, in addition to talking about diversity, I also see writing center mission statements (or goals or philosophies) addressing the idea of not only student but consultant development. At

\(^{15}\) [http://www.hu.mtu.edu/hu_dept/wc/](http://www.hu.mtu.edu/hu_dept/wc/)

\(^{16}\) [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/writinglab/mission](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/writinglab/mission)

\(^{17}\) [http://writingcenter.tamu.edu/about/mission/diversity-statement/](http://writingcenter.tamu.edu/about/mission/diversity-statement/)

\(^{18}\) [http://www.gwu.edu/~gwriter/](http://www.gwu.edu/~gwriter/)
Michigan State University, for example, the final lines of their “philosophy” statement make this clear:

In the Writing Center, less-experienced, less-practiced writers benefit from the greater experience and expertise of their peers; at the same time, consultants expand and enrich their general education as they read and discuss articles their peers are composing in a wide variety of fields and disciplines that they themselves may not have had the opportunity to study. (Michigan State University)\(^\text{19}\)

Certainly, I would think that Michigan State’s Writing Center is still focused on the writing that students are doing and the expertise that experienced consultants can offer them. Yet, what is no less important—and indeed what should occur “at the same time”—is the development of the consultant. Furthermore, what I find particularly interesting about this statement is that it implies that the writing center is a place where students or consultants can go to enhance their “general education.” Thus, the mission of Michigan State’s writing center is indeed to create better writers. But, they also seem interested in promoting the writing center as a space where students and consultants can further their education and development as people in ways that extend beyond the topic of writing, alone.

What I’ve endeavored to demonstrate by this point is that important strides have already been made to acknowledge LGBTQ identity and the idea of consultant development—in scholarship and in actual writing center mission statements. Indeed, the writing centers at the universities I just mentioned have already begun to rearticulate the mission of the writing center—pointing it in new directions. At the same time, however, it seems that many writing center mission statements do not even mention diversity or difference. And it also seems the idea of consultant development—although it is something that many writing centers already value and seek to advance—is not articulated enough in mission statements that I have looked at. On the one hand, then, I want to use this final chapter as a space to simply say that more work needs to be done to acknowledge difference and the idea of consultant development in mission statements. Yet, on the other hand, I also want to argue that if student development \textit{and} consultant development are equally important in the writing center, then it must be true that a

\[^{19}\text{http://writing.msu.edu/our-philosophy}\]
consultant is always much more than a person who is only there to help a student with his or her writing. For example, although José, Aloysius, and Will are always still consultants, they perform other roles as well—such as the role of a teacher, a mentor, or an activist. Thus, I want to call attention to the ways that consultants can perform (and certainly already do perform) in ways that extend beyond making better writers.

**Some Suggestions on How to Further Rearticulate the Mission of the Writing Center**

*Include more language that supports difference and the reality that not every consultant is heterosexual*

As I have said, I am not writing this thesis in an attempt to completely erase the current mission of the writing center in order to write a new one. What I am trying to do, rather, is to work with what is already there—that is, what I see mission statements, in general, saying (or not saying)—and “rearticulating” them, in the spirit of José Muñoz, in a slightly different way. Now, as I’ve said, writing is still what we, as consultants, do. Yet at the same time, we also clearly do more than this—as the perspectives of José, Aloysius, and Will seem to not only suggest but accentuate. So, in a rearticulated mission statement, I would want to somehow mention this “more than writing” work—such as ensuring and promoting consultant safety and development. Yet before doing this, as I’ve suggested, there are even more fundamental additions that I would want to make. Although I am now talking about the idea of consultant development, I do not want to lose sight of the fact that this thesis began by simply wanting to write about the experiences of LGBTQ consultants. First and foremost, then, I think that more mission statements need to simply include more language that recognizes difference and the idea that not every student-writer or consultant is heterosexual. In making room for this language, we might use as a model some of the language in the mission statements I discussed above.

*Mention the idea of consultant development*

Beyond including more specific language that acknowledges difference, I would also like to see more writing center mission statements explicitly mention the idea of consultant development. Here, we could follow the lead of the philosophy of the writing center at Michigan
State that I talked about. Yet perhaps we could be even more direct by adding the word “development.” Why not say, in the mission statement itself, something along the lines of this:

As a writing center, our pedagogy is invested in a truly collaborative project—one that ensures consultants can enter into a safe and comfortable learning space where they also learn from and develop as professionals and educators from the student-writers with whom they consult.

In many ways, a consultation should still heavily emphasize the needs of student-writers. After all, they are coming to us for help, most often with a very specific project and agenda in mind of what they want to get out of the visit. Yet, as José, Aloysius, and Will all suggest, consultants also have needs—indeed, so many consultants go into writing center work because they think it will help them to become better writers, educators, and even persons.

Furthermore, talking more specifically about consultant development in the mission statement might help to eliminate the stereotype of the writing center as a place where only bad writers go. On one level, consultants may certainly have more experience with writing and expert knowledge that they want to share with students. And, certainly, students want the consultant to be the expert at times: if they are writing a lab report, for example, they want someone who at least knows what a lab report is. Yet, at the same time, perpetuating the consultant-as-expert mentality also has a negative side: it can give off the impression that students only go to writing centers to fix problems with their writing or at least better adjust to the expectations of the teacher—to what is perceived as “normal” in the classroom. Thus, mentioning consultant development in the mission statement might make more explicit a writing center’s mission to create more of a culture in which the writing center becomes less of a straightening device—a place that corrects bad writers and gets them back on track—and more of a dialogic exploration. Consultant development can create the idea that, from the outset of the consultation, neither the consultant nor the student-writer is perfect and that this is ok. The consultation, in this way, would become less scripted—both the writer and the consultant could learn from each other in ways that they did not even know were possible until they came face-to-face with each other.

Emphasize the performative nature of writing center work

The idea of scripts that I am now returning to brings me to the third point that I would like to see added to a rearticulated mission statement—the performative nature of writing center
work. Certainly, we have all encountered students who come into the writing center at the last minute, just wanting to check if everything is all right before they turn it in. The reality is that many students come to the writing center stressed out: they want expertise, guidance, direction. So why talk so much about the need to be critical of the scripts that consultant’s follow—ones that have worked in the past to help student-writers? And, why so much talk about the inherently unstable nature of writing center work? Wouldn’t it be somewhat absurd to even mention the idea of instability/unscripted behavior in a mission statement?

Certainly, I do not want to do away with current scripts in the writing center or give the impression, in a mission statement, that students will not be able to find guidance, direction, or expert advice when they walk into a writing center. However, it is important, to say upfront in the mission statement, that the interaction between the consultant and the student-writer serves multiple purposes. For example, on the one hand, the consultant is guided by what the student wants to work on. Thus, I don’t believe that consultants should ever start conversations about LGBTQ identity or LGBTQ activism just because they feel like doing so. As José said in my interview with him, “it’s the student’s time and the student can use it in whatever way they want to.”

Yet, as Will and Aloysius suggested, the role of the consultant is also not to passively follow the agenda of the student, especially if he or she is perpetuating racial or homophobic stereotypes. In this way, when saying that I would like to see the idea of performativity in the mission statement, I’m talking about making it clear that consultants always do take on—or perform—multiple roles: although their job is to help students with their writing and what they want to work on, their job is also about taking on other roles as well. For example, Will and Aloysius seems to suggest that consultants can also take on more of a teacher-role—in which they don’t argue with but simply voice their concern over offensive or hurtful language and/or talk about the social-constructedness of language and cultural stereotypes with students. Yet there are also other roles. In my interview with José, he seemed to perform more of a mentor-like role as a writing center consultant—working to ensure that marginalized students are supported and have a safe place to express themselves, especially if the larger space of their university does not seem to really support them. And, as Aloysius further suggested—when he talked about how he made his writing center director aware of his efforts to start a group for gay and lesbian students on campus—consultants can become activists as well.
Beyond Just Words: What a Rearticulated Mission could Mean for Writing Center Practice

As I’ve already suggested, a mission statement is just a static document unless it is put into practice. So, I would like to talk about ways that a rearticulated mission could impact the current environment of writing centers in very visible ways. I focus, specifically, on implications for consultant-training courses and writing center practice more broadly. After doing this, I also consider how a rearticulated mission might allow us to think differently about institutional constraints placed on the writing center as well as writing center administration.

A Rearticulated Approach to Consultant Training

In my interview with José, he talked about how, as people (not just as consultants), we become “mediators between theory and practice.” In response to my question regarding what his thoughts were on the relationship between LGBTQ identity and queer theory, he said:

I think that we become these mediators between theory and practice. And I think, certainly, to really think about a radical and activist approach, we need to radically deploy theory in practical ways and find those ways in which queer theory can become this, you know, tool or object that we can use to produce these kinds of better social conditions, not just on paper right, but certainly in practice. (José)

I thought this statement was interesting because, in a way, I am trying to put queer theory into practice—the idea of performativity, specifically—in the space of the writing center. In saying this, however, I am not trying to suggest that, as writing center workers, we have an obligation to teach queer theory. Yet at the same time, consultants could learn a lot more about themselves—as professionals and as human beings—by analyzing their training/development through the lens of performativity. In other words, it could actually be beneficial to discuss the idea of performativity in consultant-training courses and to offer it as a tool that consultants can use to better understand and assess their development.

Now, in saying this, I don’t mean to suggest that students need to know everything about performativity. Certainly, I do not think we should have them read Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble or Undoing Gender. When I say that we should teach performativity, I simply mean to suggest that it could be beneficial for consultants to pay closer attention—and be critical of—the
multiple roles they will inevitably perform as consultants as well as the scripts that they will be following as consultants.

One way to teach performativity could be to simply do more role play in a consultant-training course—creating simulated consultations/situations in which the consultant might feel obligated to take on multiple roles. For example, if the class is comfortable doing so, it could be helpful to simulate a consultation in which a person comes in with a homophobic piece of writing. Or, you could simulate a consultation in which a gay student begins talking more about his own experiences growing up gay and his frustrations with his homophobic campus climate. Although it might not be appropriate or safe to have students do this activity in pairs (as a consultation would look), the teacher could present these scenarios to the class (either orally or in writing) and, together, everyone could talk about different ways to handle the situation. Or, you could even just have students individually reflect, in private journals, about the extent to which they think their role/job as consultant would look somewhat different in these situations. You could even ask them, more specifically, if they think they would take on multiple roles during these situations and if they think it is appropriate for consultants to also become activists in the space of the writing center. Also as part of this exercise, you could have students reflect on the fact that they will more than likely lose control of a consultation at one point or another—in being thrown off track by a homophobic comment, for example.

Beyond talking about the idea of performativity, it could also be useful to talk about LGBTQ identity and safety, specifically. In response to my question regarding what he thought could be done to improve consultant training courses, Will said,

I think something like the safe zone training\textsuperscript{20} they offer here is a good supplement to the training. I don’t think that it necessarily has to be part of the course or anything, but just having people converse on the basics—what is sort of appropriate and what is not. (Will)

Although Will says that safe zone training does not need to be a part of the course, specifically, he suggests that it should be a part of a consultant’s broader training.

\textsuperscript{20} Safe Zone training is a program offered at Miami in which professors, staff, and students have the opportunity to become a visible ally of the LGBTQ community. If you are safe zone trained, you are expected to be a resource to and a support for anyone who may not feel safe on campus or just simply need someone to listen. On Miami’s LGBTQ Services website, there is a list of safe zone members.
When I heard Will say this, I immediately thought that it might be a good idea for teachers to consider making safe zone training a part of consultant-training courses. Doing this might be one way to make our commitment to LGBTQ identity and LGBTQ activist efforts more visible in the writing center. This is only one step teachers might take, but it is an important way for writing centers to make it apparent that they are committed to the safety and rights of LGBTQ people: it could send the signal that, as a writing center community, we should not be afraid to visibly support the activist efforts of LGBTQ people. In response to my question regarding what he thought the responsibility of writing centers was to LGBTQ consultants and teachers, José had the following to say:

The queer community here at Miami is not hidden. And I think that, certainly, it’s something that they’re pushing the boundaries of the institution at all levels—at the university level, writing center level. I think that it [the writing center] should have as much of a commitment as it does to other things. And that also doesn’t mean that the commitment they have to English language learners is that good anyway. I think the writing center as an institution can always step up their commitment to all groups. (José)

One of the things José certainly says, here, is that consultants/writing center workers have a responsibility to LGBTQ people. And, particularly on campuses where there is more of a queer presence, he suggests that writing centers should join the efforts of on-campus queer groups—helping them in to push boundaries to create a safer and more supportive environment for LGBTQ people.

Yet, is this too much? In order to work in the writing center, should consultants have to join their colleagues in partnering up with LGBTQ groups? What if you have a brilliant consultant who is not homophobic but simply less willing to fully support LGBTQ activism in his role as a consultant? Should the writing center, itself, become an activist space? Throughout this whole thesis I have been interested, like Sara Ahmed, in lines. More specifically, I have paid attention to actions or performances—such as those of José, Aloysius, and Will—that I don’t think quite line up with or suggest new directions for writing center work. Here—in addressing the questions I just asked—I come to the question of lines again. Yet beyond just calling attention to what at first might appear out of line (such as the activist consultant), I must become, for lack of a better word, more realistic. I must step back and pay closer attention to the lines themselves—most importantly, the lines that say what is and what is not professional in the
writing center. For example, when considering if consultants and writing centers, themselves, should partner up with LGBTQ organizations, it is important to (1) really examine the lines that direct our understanding of what the professional role of a consultant is and what the mission of a writing center should be, and (2) to critically think about how far out of line (if at all) LGBTQ activism in the writing center would be.

On the one hand, *forcing* consultants to become activist consultants on LGBTQ issues, specifically, may be too far out of line. Yet at the same time, I think Will at least suggests that consultants should be able to join the activist efforts of LGBTQ people if they desire. He suggests that an activist consultant or an activist writing center may not be as out of line as you might imagine. Indeed, he says that, as a writing center community, we could potentially conceive of LGBTQ activism in the writing center as totally within professional lines. Thus, in this way, by simply thinking more deeply about actions or performances that lead us to question—or become more critical—of professional lines, perhaps the idea of what is professional and what is not might shift over time. In *Disidentifications*, José Muñoz seems to say, at a fundamental level, that we need to constantly be critical of the roles we perform—and not just critical but also attuned to the different ways in which, over time, we can alter or redefine the roles we fill and the institutions we support (or are forced to support).

**A Rearticulated Approach to Institutional Constraints and Writing Center Administration**

In chapter three, I talked about institutional lines and constraints that are placed on writing centers. In many ways, writing centers are required to follow certain lines and to act in ways that are deemed appropriate by the larger institution in which they are housed. Thus, it is certainly harder for writing centers to push boundaries and to disrupt or queer the mainstream. Yet even if it is difficult to queer the mainstream, talking about and supporting LGBTQ identity in the writing center is still a responsibility—one that is no different from a writing center’s responsibility to international students and/or ESL writers, for example. Furthermore, the consultants that I interviewed seem to say that it is possible to study and put queer theory into practice—or to see it at work—in very mainstream locations and not just in courses specifically about queer theory that are designed to discuss LGBTQ identity. In chapter four, I said that José saw “queer pockets of possibility for the closeted tutor” in the writing center, and I would like to return to this very provocative insight of his here.
Jose’s comment resonates with a point that Sarah Ahmed has made: that the straight world is already full of “queer moments”—moments that she says we should not “overcome” but rather “inhabit” (*Queer Phenomenology* 107). Thus, although it may not even be possible to ever truly queer the writing center (whatever that might mean), the idea of inhabiting queer moments/queer pockets suggests that we can highlight and continue to draw attention to moments that are queer or “out of line.” And by drawing attention to them and indeed by sticking with them—by suggesting, for example, that unscripted behaviors and a fluidity of roles in the writing center can be a good thing—there are certainly “pockets of possibility”. There is the possibility that consultants can simply feel safer and develop both professionally and personally in the writing center. There is the possibility that students will at least become more conscious of homophobic and hateful language in their writing. And, perhaps most importantly, there is the possibility that the greater institutions that writing centers serve will recognize that their campus is less willing to hide its queer identity.

When I started my research, I was surprised at how little work on LGBTQ issues existed in writing center studies as compared to the extensive publications on LGBTQ classroom pedagogies. Perhaps part of the reason why there has been so much work done on LGBTQ identity and queer theory in the classroom—and not in the writing center—is because classrooms are often less “determined” spaces (Banks an Alexander 89). In their article “Queer Eye for the Comp Program: Toward a Queer Critique of WPA Work,” William Banks and Jonathan Alexander talk about how it is often easier for the queer teacher to become the radical queer activist (89). Whether through performed neutrality or not, the teacher-scholars I cite in chapter two (e.g., Kopelson, Malinowitz, Gonçalves) are all fundamentally invested in combating heteronormative stereotypes and homophobic behavior in the classroom. And, more basically than this, many teachers (whether LGBTQ or not), see the classroom as a space to not necessarily challenge but certainly critique “administrative assumptions or controls” or at least the idea of what education is and what it can be (Banks and Alexander 89). For example, in my own teaching this past spring, I started off the semester by telling my students that I wanted them to also use my classroom as a space to really think critically about their role in the university as a student. I said that, no matter what major you are in, it is important to remain critical of your field of study and how you might work to change that field in positive ways. Indeed, queer theory would say that how certain groups come together and think about education—that is,
education as a discourse—becomes a form of power in-and-of itself that we need to at least always question and work to change in positive ways. I have found it more difficult in the shorter, more scripted space of a consultation to be as active in promoting critical reflection. And I imagine this is a difficulty that writing center administrators face as well.

As Banks and Alexander point out, “WPAs” (and again, I would add Writing Center Administrators) “exist in spaces where their actions invariably involve speaking to many different constituencies at the same time” (89). Writing center administrators still perform multiple roles (i.e. they can become not only directors/managers of consultants but also mentors to them), but these roles are often more pre-determined. As the most recent ECWCA Conference made clear, writing centers (perhaps more so than classrooms) are constantly assessed and have rather clear-cut expectations of how they should perform. Writing centers are in many ways the engines of Writing Across the Curriculum programs, for example, in which they try help create smoother dialogue among majors. And, in working with and assisting different disciplines—which, I want to make clear, is not a bad thing—whether through WAC initiatives or not, there seems to be less room to talk about differences or LGBTQ identity specifically.21

Yet, even if it is hard to queer WPA work or Writing Center Work, it is easy to share narratives and highlight experiences—as Banks and Alexander both do—of how these spaces are more queer (again, if not totally queered) than you may think. For example, I would argue that simply sharing Will’s narrative about how he tried to work with his writing center director to create a group for gay and lesbian students highlights the ways in which writing center administrators are making LGBTQ identity apparent and advocating for LGBTQ rights—even if the larger institutions they work for attempt to shut them down. Highlighting these narratives, I would argue, is a type of queering that could create new patterns of thinking about writing center work over time.

21 For example, when I recently picked up Terry Myers Zawacki and Paul M. Rogers’ Writing Across the Curriculum: A Critical Sourcebook, I was really not surprised to see that the terms lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer don’t come up once.
Implications for further Research at the Intersection of LGBTQ Identity, Queer Theory, and the Writing Center

My research is, obviously, just a starting point. Much more work is needed to study the perspectives of LGBTQ consultants. Even though I use the term LGBTQ a great deal, in reality the consultant perspectives I gathered were G and Q, so in future work I’d like to seek to interview more consultants across the whole spectrum, including straight allies. In addition, in further research into LGBTQ issues in the writing center, it would be beneficial to interview a number of different administrators—those who identify as LGBTQ and those who do not—to gain their perspectives on LGBTQ issues in the writing center. Indeed, Banks and Alexander end their article by simply hoping that there will be “room for the stories that others will tell” (98). And, perhaps most importantly, it would be beneficial to interview self-identified LGBTQ writers who visit the writing center to hear their perspectives and experiences. Gathering and sharing the perspectives of LGBTQ consultants, administrators, and writers is a type of queering and indeed an important step to take.

In addition to including more perspectives, I would also want to re-think my research methods. Because so much of the assessment of writing centers is based on numbers, I wanted to engage in qualitative research to think and write about writing center work. And, specifically, I wanted to use the method of interviewing to talk about LGBTQ identity because I did not want to essentialize my findings—I wanted to hear the words of José, Will, and Aloysius as much as possible on the page. However, other methods, such as a survey, could certainly yield some interesting findings as well. While I only focused on the perspectives of three consultants in this study, a survey could, if nothing else, increase the number of participants. And a survey might help gain insight from consultants who may not be as comfortable doing an interview and would wish to remain anonymous in a survey.

Beyond specific methods, though, I would also want to pay closer attention to my broader methodology in further research. I find it interesting that writing centers are in many ways not only positioned between disciplines but between “student affairs” and “academic affairs” in the university. So, those who do research on writing centers certainly do not all come from English or composition and rhetoric departments. And, people are certainly thinking about writing center work who are in student affairs. Thus, any person researching LGBTQ issues in the writing center—especially if they look more into the idea of student and consultant development—
should consider partnering with scholars in academic affairs and student affairs to build a sounder methodology. At Miami University, alone, I know that there are scholars in student affairs, such as Elisa Abes, who have done work at the intersection of queer theory and student development theory. So, it would be interesting to talk to people like her in the future—to gain their insights on how we might extend the idea of consultant development in new directions.

While I have suggested ways to further rearticulate the mission of the writing center in this chapter, these suggestions (like any mission statement, itself) are by no means static. Indeed, part of my project here is to simply call attention to the ways in which the mission of the writing center is, already, constantly shifting—for example, in the recent work of Harry Denny, in the mission statements I analyzed, and in the performances of José, Aloysius, and Will. Yet at the same time, I hope that other writing center scholars and practitioners will join me in further research on LGBTQ issues and the idea of performativity in the writing center. In doing this we can, most importantly, work together to make writing centers safer and more inclusive places. And, we might also help consultants to better negotiate the multiple roles that they already perform to ensure the development of student writers—and the development of themselves, as consultants.

A Final Reflection

In my opening chapter, I began with a reflection on how queer theory and writing center work have come together in my own life. Here, I would like to revisit this reflection because my views on writing center work and queer theory have certainly shifted after writing this thesis. Following the words of Nancy Grimm, I still believe that we need to theorize about writing center work. As my last section entailed, I think we need to continue researching the theoretical idea of performativity in the writing center—and perhaps even using the writing center to better understand and complicate the idea of performativity, itself. For example, performativity, in many ways, is about language and what we “do,” in the words of J.L. Austin, with words. Yet in drawing attention to the “more than writing” work that José, Aloysius, and Will seem to describe, I have begun to understand performativity as something that is not beyond language but that certainly encompasses the non-verbal. The writing center can help us to realize that, by studying the idea of performativity, we can better understanding how we can act (and not necessary speak) in ways that make people (not just student-writers) feel safe, at ease, and
comfortable with themselves. And, by studying performativity in the context of the writing center, I think we can certainly expand or rearticulate the definition of what LGBTQ activism is and what it can do.

At the same time, though, I think we need to be cautious whenever we attempt to turn queer theory (or any type of theory) into practice. Queer theory is useful to not only disrupt binary thinking (and to question what is culturally conceived as normal) but to also really think about—and complicate—what intimacy is.\textsuperscript{22} Thus, on one level, I see a potential danger in trying to read and make sense of the very personal interactions between consultant and student-writer that José, Aloysius, and Will described. In other words, by trying to make sense of their unscripted interactions, perhaps I’m forcing new lines on them—attempting to categorize their interactions that I should maybe not categorize (or attempt to make sense of) at all. On the other hand, though, trying to make sense of these interactions (as well as my own interactions) in the writing center—through the lens of queer theory—has allowed me to certainly see the writing center as a space that has the potential to not only support student writers and consultants, but to help them develop as people and to join their activist efforts.

\textsuperscript{22} See the final chapter of Michael Warner’s \textit{The Trouble With Normal}
Interview Questions

Interview Questions (for participants who had only consulted in a writing center and for consultant-teachers)

1. Can you describe some of your common practices in a writing center? Are there any writing center scholars or particular essays/studies (that you may have read in a writing center course) that have, in particular, influenced your perspective on writing center work?
2. To what extent do you feel it is important to make your sexual identity known to writers during a consultation or to the writing center that you work for more broadly? What, in your opinion, are the benefits/negative consequences of doing this? Are there any specific situations where it might be more appropriate to reveal your sexuality?
3. Have you revealed your sexual identity at all in your writing center work? If so, how did the writer or writing center staff respond to you? How did you perceive the writer and/or staff members as you revealed your sexual identity?
4. As a tutor, how would you respond to a person who comes into the writing center with a homophobic piece of writing? How would you respond to a writer who is supporting LGBT rights in a paper or project? In these situations, what (if anything) would you do differently to work with the writer than you would with one who is not writing specifically about LGBT people or issues?
5. Can you recall a time when the sexual identity of the writer influenced how you responded to him or her?
6. To what extent do you feel like your work in the writing center has positively impacted your identity? To what extent do you feel like it has threatened your identity?
7. What does the term “queer” mean to you (related to sexuality or not)?
8. How might you think of the term queer in the context of a writing center?
9. What are your thoughts on the relationship between LGBT identity and Queer Theory?
10. What do you think writing center practices can offer this relationship (between identity-based pedagogies and Queer Theory)?
11. To what extent do you feel like Queer Theory positively reinforces LGBT identity and LGBT Activist efforts?
12. Are there any LGBT and/or queer writers or studies that have influenced you?
13. Has your work in a writing center led you to approach these studies in a particular way?
14. LGBT issues and the impact of LGBT identities on the teaching and learning of writing have been studied extensively in the context of the classroom. What are the benefits of studying the impact of LGBT issues and the impact of LGBT identities on writing center work? How important is it to study the intersection of writing centers and sexuality studies?
15. What, in your opinion, is the responsibility of writing centers to LGBT writers? What is their responsibility to LGBT Teachers?
16. What do you think could be done in tutor training courses to better address LGBT issues and the impact of LGBT identities on writing center work?
17. How would you like me to describe you/protect your privacy when I write up my research?
Interview Questions (additional questions for consultant-teacher participants, specifically)

1. How do you approach sexual identity in the classroom? How do you approach your own sexual identity in the classroom?
2. Have you revealed your sexual identity to your students? If so, how did you perceive your students as you did so?
3. To what extent have you approached LGBT issues and homophobia in the classroom? If you have, how did your students respond to you?
4. What might an identity-based pedagogy look like to you?
5. To what extent do you incorporate queer theory in your classroom?
6. What are your thoughts on the relationship between identity-based pedagogies and queer theory? How strong of a tension do you think there is (and should be) between these two approaches in the classroom?
7. Have your experiences in a writing center influenced how you approach LGBT issues and LGBT identity in the classroom? If so, how?
8. To what extent have you brought writing center practices in the classroom to approach LGBT issues and the impact of LGBT identity on student writing? How have you done this?
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