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Theory In/To Practice: Addressing the Everyday Language of Oppression in the Writing Center

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Introduction

In 1998, Catherine Prendergast observed that, although composition scholars sometimes identify a subject by race or ethnicity, "the legacy of racism in this country which participates in sculpting all identities—white included—is more often than not absent from the analysis of that writer's linguistic capabilities or strategies" (36). Since then, more composition and writing center scholars have tackled racism and related issues of marginalization, inequality, and oppression in their work. Scholars have still given very little attention, though, to ways that racist and otherwise oppressive systems shape the everyday language of writers. Our own research stems from a single but far from simple question: how can tutors

better identify and challenge the everyday, often subtle, language of oppression in their own discourse and in that of other tutors and writers in writing centers? In what follows, we share our story of beginning to address this question where our fellow tutors tend to start: firsthand experiences of writing and working with writers. In this essay, we first review other approaches to addressing oppression in writing centers and explain why we decided to begin with everyday language, student writing, and tutoring practice. We then discuss our process of forming the two-list heuristic that comprises the focus of our essay and reproduce the heuristic as the primary document readers can take away from this piece. The first list, "How Language Can Perpetuate Oppression," identifies some common ways in which the language of tutors and writers can reflect as well as support oppressive systems. We've titled this list "How Language Can Perpetuate Oppression" rather than "How Tutors and Writers Perpetuate Oppression" not to downplay tutors' and writers' complicity in sustaining oppressive systems but rather because we want to emphasize that an individual's uses of oppressive language are often both unintentional and inseparable from broader discourses that reinforce oppression. The second list, "How Tutors and Writers Can Challenge Oppression through Attention to Language," outlines several practices for identifying and addressing oppressive language in writing centers. We have made tutors and writers, rather than language, the actors in this second list in order to emphasize that these individuals can be empowered to challenge oppression through specific attention to language even when that language is unintentional, subtle, and complexly intertwined with oppressive systems. After we introduce the two-list heuristic and explain its genesis, we discuss each item on the lists in turn. Finally, in our concluding section, we demonstrate how the heuristic has sparked provocative reflection and strengthened tutoring practices in our center.

In this essay, then, we argue that other writing centers can also use these lists as a heuristic for fostering productive dialogue about language, oppression, and resistance. The lists developed organically from the experiences of tutors in our writing center and are thus specific to this location. Whereas others might see the locally bound

nature of the lists as a limitation, we see it as a strength. The lists are not meant to function as authoritative universals. Rather, as a heuristic, the lists might prompt tutors at other institutions to follow the process we will describe to make their own lists from scratch. Alternately, tutors might begin with a discussion of our two-list heuristic, but then revise and adapt it, making it their own source for knowledge-creation based on their experiences. Ultimately, we hope that the lists will foster dialogue across as well as within institutions, thereby building on the anti-oppression work already occurring in individual writing centers and in regional and international networks of writing center practitioners.

What is the "everyday language of oppression"? How do we define it, and why have we taken it as our focus? By "oppression" we refer to systemic inequalities and discrimination based on sites of difference such as race, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, sexuality, and/or (dis)-ability. We define "everyday language" not as informal language but rather as common language, the sort of speech and text that we see every day on college and high school campuses. The "everyday language of oppression" is subtle as well as ubiquitous. Therefore, it often goes unnoticed, not being recognized as oppressive at all and/or not receiving as much attention as more extreme forms of oppressive language such as threats or hate speech do. We focus on the everyday language of oppression in writing centers because, like the authors of *The Everyday Writing Center*, we want to root our research in the common experiences of tutors and writers. We thus analyze the language that tutors and writers commonly use in their conversations and their writing. While students' academic language may differ from their everyday speech, we still classify the language of student papers as "everyday" when it is language that commonly occurs in student writing and that would not generally be seen as expressing an extraordinary or extreme view. Our observations and research demonstrate that individual instances of everyday oppressive language are inseparable from larger oppressive systems. Whether or not individuals consciously adhere to the values of oppressive systems, the language of these systems inevitably influences the language they use, and individuals who work in writing centers, whether as directors, tutors, and/or writers, are no exception. In

Facing the Center, Harry Denny observes that "In writing centers, [he] came to see everyday oppression, natural and exercised without effort" (21). Denny heard oppression in the rhetoric of faculty, tutors, and students whose voices made their way into the writing center (21). If writing center practitioners listen, we are confident that they too will hear the everyday language of oppression in their centers. As we further define and discuss the everyday language of oppression throughout this essay, we aim to better equip our readers to identify and challenge it.

As a tool that enables careful attention to the everyday language of oppression, our two-list heuristic uniquely contributes to the approaches of a growing number of writing center scholars and practitioners committed to anti-oppression work. Writing center scholars have taken three major approaches when addressing oppression. First, with Nancy Grimm leading the way, some scholars call for the recruitment of diverse staffs to improve tutoring quality while also combating the systematic inequalities that have caused many writing center staffs to look uniform and/or to fail to reflect the populations of students they serve (Denny; Grimm, *Good Intentions*; Grimm, "New Conceptual Frameworks"; Kilborn; Weaver). Some scholars—including undergraduate tutors—also stress the need for writing centers to support the diverse tutors they recruit, especially when those tutors experience discrimination from other staff members or from writers who, having been influenced by systems of discrimination, are sometimes skeptical about the abilities of African-American, Hispanic, multilingual, female, or other demographics of tutors (Grimm, *Good Intentions*; Harris; White et al.). The second approach writing center scholars advocate—often in combination with the recruitment of diverse staffs—focuses on staff training that guides tutors into a greater awareness about systematic oppression. Within this approach, writing center directors, teams of tutors, or staff from partner institutions, such as multicultural centers, lead tutors to do one or more of the following: engage with scholarship on systematic racism and other forms of oppression; analyze cultural and institutional artifacts as markers of systematic oppression; or reflect, via surveys, personal stories, or other tools, on their own complicity in oppressive systems, intercultural competence (and

room for growth), and positions of privilege as well as marginalization within dominant societies, institutions, and discourses (Barron and Grimm; Condon; Dees, Godbee, and Ozias; Denny; Fremo; Geller et al.; Kilborn; Kynard; McDonald; White et al.). Like the second approach to addressing oppression in writing centers, the third stresses the systematic—not just personal—nature of oppression and calls for greater awareness and reflection by writing center staffs. However, it more specifically pushes for increased reflection about privileged discourses, power dynamics, and forms of oppression at play in tutors' and writers' experiences in the writing center itself (Barron and Grimm; Bokser; Davila; Dees; Denny; DiPardo; Godbee, and Ozias; Innes; Johnson; Rihn; Town).

The work we discuss in this essay builds most directly on this third approach to addressing oppression since it emerges from attention to tutors' firsthand experiences in the writing center and their reflections on those experiences. Yet our approach diverges from others in that it models how tutors' experiences and reflections can become the basis for a staff development tool, the two-list heuristic. Tutors may feel more ownership of this type of a locally produced text than they would of scholarly texts or other outside texts dealing with oppression. At the same time, as a heuristic, and especially when paired with scholarship and other resources, the tutor-generated text might prompt richer reflection than simple sharing and discussion of experiences would. By advocating increasing levels of reflection through the heuristic and multiple occasions for dialogue with other tutors, our approach seeks to simultaneously empower and challenge tutors so they might expand their awareness about oppression as well as their strategies for resisting it in their own writing and in their conversations with other writers.

In addition to creating a heuristic by drawing on tutors' experiences and reflections, our approach is also set apart by its specific focus on the language of tutors and writers. Even the most subtle instances of oppressive language emerge from and contribute to oppressive systems. Therefore, our attention to the particular language of tutors and writers compliments rather than opposes strategies proposed by the writing center scholars who charge writing centers to expose and confront systematic oppression.

Geller et al. aptly critique tutoring textbooks that discuss racism by "addressing simply language" and fail to consider racism as anything other than "individual prejudice" (97). However, we propose that we can address "simply language" without addressing language simply. Victor Villanueva observes in "Blind: Talking about the New Racism" that "'figures of speech' are 'figures of ideology' are 'figures of thought' and 'figures of often unintentional censorship'" (6). As Villanueva demonstrates, everyday figures of speech are inextricably related to the ideologies of oppressive systems, which affect one's thoughts, censorship (intentional and unintentional decisions that privilege certain voices while discriminating against others), and actions. Harry Denny argues, "To combat oppression is just as local and individual as it is global and collective" (26). It will take local as well as large-scale efforts to challenge systematic oppression. By exposing and addressing the figures of speech that comprise the everyday language of oppression in writing centers, tutors can confront their own complicity in oppressive systems, challenge discourses that support oppression, and work toward more just and equitable relations within and beyond their centers. Tutors can indeed productively address structural oppression by carefully attending to the actual words of individuals in their writing centers.

Some writing center directors may object that they do not have time to tackle oppression with their tutoring staff at all, let alone to collaboratively create or revise a heuristic for addressing oppressive language. However, our conversations with tutors from our own staff as well as tutors working in other writing centers demonstrate the need for explicit training and the value of collaboration if tutors are to improve their ability to identify and address the oppressive language from which no writing center can escape. These tutors acknowledge that experience and education enable them to recognize only some forms of oppressive language while they inevitably fail to notice others. We conclude that all tutors can increase their awareness of oppression's various influences over language, but only through intentional efforts. Our interactions with these tutors, moreover, attest to the benefits of approaching these efforts collaboratively with other tutors since many of these tutors have become better able to see, scrutinize, and expand their own perspectives through dialogue

with one another. At the close of *Facing the Center* Denny asserts that "the writing center exists" for people and for language, for "the faces that come to the center," and "the conversations we reward and make time for" (167). When writing centers do not make time to address oppression, they miss an opportunity to enrich the people as well as the discourses that occupy their spaces.

Methods and Heuristic: Focusing on Tutors' Experiences to Build Collective Knowledge

In developing our intentional, collaborative approach for addressing oppression in our center, we decided to begin with our staff's firsthand experiences as writers and tutors. We agree with Geller et al. that writing center practitioners sometimes "rely too heavily" on manuals and "mock" situations and that the most powerful type of learning happens by way of "reflection-in-action" (21-22). We therefore focused on tutors' own writing as well as that of students with whom they had worked in actual tutoring sessions. While we certainly support bringing scholarly discussions of oppression into the writing center, we also believe that tutors can build knowledge through attention to their own practice, which they can in turn improve through that knowledge. Beginning with attention to tutors' and writers' practices not only yields valuable knowledge but also enables tutors to bring a positive sense of authority and ownership to discussions about oppression. Our conversations with tutors have not always been comfortable (conversations about oppression rarely are), but tutors have been eager to engage because they want to reflect on their practice.

Context

Even as we hope that many writing centers will benefit from practice-based discussions about oppression that draw on the two-list heuristic we have developed, we also recognize that our data will be unique to our setting. We therefore turn briefly to a description of our center. At the University of Connecticut Writing Center in Storrs, Connecticut, two faculty directors lead a staff of approximately eight

graduate and twenty-five undergraduate tutors representing more than fifteen fields of study. In our roles as graduate student assistants, we serve as liaisons to our home departments (Mandy to English and Shan-Estelle to Anthropology), develop writing center programs, and tutor alongside undergraduate colleagues. In addition to fostering a team-of-peers identity for our joint graduate and undergraduate staff, our center encourages tutors to see themselves as peers to the writers they tutor. Our staff strives to learn from the writers they tutor and also seek tutoring themselves. In terms of demographics, the staff represents a variety of national, racial, class, gender, sexual orientation, religious, and other identities. The staff has become more racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse over the last few years as the directors follow the lead of writing center scholars such as Nancy Grimm in recognizing the value of multiple literacies and recruiting intentionally.

We acknowledge the real force of demographics resulting from power structures that privilege certain populations over others. At the same time, we want to complicate reductive readings of demographics. Mandy is a white Protestant with working class roots in the rural Midwest. Shan-Estelle is a black woman from Connecticut and Virginia who grew up in a working class family and is Ivy-League educated. While working on this project, we have discovered ways in which these positions influence our perspectives on oppression, but we have also learned, from each other and other colleagues, to question our assumptions about demographics. We hope that our research will prompt critical approaches to all matters, including demographics.

From Focus Groups to Our Two-List Heuristic

To study ways that tutors grapple with the everyday language of oppression in their own writing and when working with other writers, we conducted two focus groups of tutors from our center in fall 2008 and two additional focus groups in fall 2010. Conducting interviews with individual tutors, we believed, would have been less effective, as focus groups could facilitate the sort of collaborative thinking that the tutors had already honed well in a practicum group for new

tutors and during all-staff training sessions. To form the 2008 focus groups, we used systematic random sampling, selecting every fourth tutor and inviting him or her to participate. Two undergraduate tutors participated in the first focus group, and an additional two undergraduate tutors and one graduate student tutor took part in the second group. Even with our admittedly small initial sample size, these groups reflected well the varying disciplines and backgrounds of our staff at the time. The tutors also varied in the amount of time that they had worked at the writing center, with some tutors having joined the staff just a few weeks prior to our focus group meetings and others having worked in the center for years.

At the start of each focus group, we announced our interest in the everyday language of oppression and received tutors' consent to participate in the group and audio record the session. We then prompted a brief conversation about aspects of the tutors' identities, cultures, or experiences that influence their perspectives. In each of the focus groups, tutors shared where they were from as well as their social class positions, racial affiliations, personalities, and family make-ups. They considered how these factors affect their interests and values as well as what they notice or fail to notice in regard to oppression. We followed by asking tutors to think together about what might influence the perspectives of other students at the university. As the tutors in each group discussed perspectives of other students, they commented—and sometimes disagreed—on the racial, regional, class, and political perspectives that seem more and less dominant on campus. Tutors who saw themselves as part of a particular minority noted that their perspectives from that position were underrepresented and, at times, discriminated against. One tutor from the American South, for instance, described her frequent encounters on campus with offensive and inaccurate stereotypes about the region, which generally went unchallenged by other students and instructors. We hoped that this initial conversation about perspectives would position the subsequent dialogue about oppressive language in the writing center within a larger context and would encourage tutors to think in a peer mindset.

For the majority of the focus group sessions, we prompted tutors to share times when they became aware of ways in which their

own language and that of students they tutored were influenced by oppressive systems. We also asked tutors to describe their responses when addressing such language. By analyzing the focus group transcripts and generalizing the tutors' observations, we generated our two lists, now titled "How Language Can Perpetuate Oppression" and "How Tutors and Writers Can Challenge Oppression through Attention to Language." The focus group participants affirmed our interpretations of their discussion as represented by the lists and helped us to use the lists as a heuristic with our staff.

Primary Document

A Two-List Heuristic for Addressing the Everyday Language of Oppression

How Language Can Perpetuate Oppression

1. Avoids discussing difference
2. Erases differences
3. Assumes uniform readership
4. Minimizes significance of discrimination
5. Speaks of oppression as only in the past
6. Exoticizes
7. Presents stereotypes as evidence
8. Disrespects sources from "other" perspectives
9. Fails to distinguish sources' views from writers' own
10. Misunderstands or misrelates sources' views

How Tutors and Writers Can Challenge Oppression through Attention to Language

1. Clarify meanings together
2. Express understanding of one another's meanings
3. Discuss meaning and use of sources
4. Pose counterarguments
5. Maintain a non-combative tone
6. Address language without accusations of intentional oppression
7. Name the "elephant in the room"
8. Learn to better identify and address language that perpetuates oppression

The above heuristic appears in the form we presented to our own 2008 staff following our initial creation of the lists, though our staff has since suggested revisions. In the discussions of the two lists that follow, we similarly reference only material from the 2008 focus groups and from interactions with our staff during the 2008-2009 academic year when we were initially developing the heuristic and the staff was just beginning to engage with it. We chose to represent and discuss the lists in this way in order to represent the lists' formation and their nascent heuristic function in our local writing center context. After our discussion of the original lists, this essay's conclusion draws on findings from our 2010 focus groups and more recent staff development to demonstrate how the two lists have developed into a more robust heuristic in our center. Our conclusion also offers guidance for other centers interested in using the lists.

Discussion of List 1: How Language Can Perpetuate Oppression

To form and annotate the "How Language Can Perpetuate Oppression" list, we drew mainly on the transcripts of the 2008 focus groups, along with other conversations with tutors and our own experiences. The list is not meant to be exhaustive but to isolate common patterns, to provoke discussion, and to prompt the identification of additional patterns. Some of these moves, such as "Misunderstands or misrelates sources' views," are ones that writers often make even when they are not evoking oppressive attitudes. Many writers, teachers, and tutors will readily recognize these tendencies and will have discussed them before. We highlight them here because we see them as especially common in writing that includes the everyday language of oppression and because we feel writing center practitioners can better understand oppressive language as well as these common moves by studying them in tandem.

1. Avoids Discussing Difference

During the 2008 focus groups, tutors discussed their own and other

writers' hesitancy to speak at all about demographic differences. The tutors explained that they and their fellow students want to be polite and politically correct, and they sometimes fear that simply bringing up any differences of, say, race or gender would make them come across as racist or sexist (even if they approached the matter sensitively and recognized the socially constructed and in other ways problematic nature of these categories). Sociologists Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and David Embrick identify the "minimization of racism" as one manifestation of "color-blind racism" (7-8). They explain that Whites who see race as a matter of the past often accuse those who discuss race of "playing the race card" and thus being themselves racist in a "reverse discrimination" sense (7-8). The tutors in our focus groups and the writers they describe seem to similarly fear accusations of "playing" race, gender, or other demographic "cards" and thus skirt these subjects.

As previously noted, like most people, we sometimes misread the significance of demographics, but simply avoiding all discussion of difference is certainly not the answer to this problem. How can tutors and writers critically engage the socially constructed and value-laden categories that influence their perspectives if they do not name them at all? During the focus groups, tutors shared stories of working with writers who so feared offending others that they avoided discussions of difference even when their writing situations clearly called for them. For example, one tutor described a session in which a writer avoided identifying the gender of an author about whom he was writing even though, the tutor said, "it was really important to know that [the author] was a woman . . . it was the only way [the writer's] sentence could make any sense." Since the subject of this student's paper emphasized her perspective as a woman, the student could not write coherently without acknowledging the subject's gender. In the tutor's reading of this scenario, the writer felt so pressured to avoid topics like gender that he "skirt[ed] an issue" central to his paper, practicing obfuscation rather than the respectful discussion of difference called for by the situation.

Another tutor observed that she becomes even more hesitant in addressing race and other differences when the writer with whom she is working acts "uncomfortable" and is unwilling to talk about

the issue. She argued that tutors need to not only overcome their hesitancy but also learn "how to model" productive discussions of differences. "If we don't set the tone," she explained, writers will continue their strategies of avoidance. The "How Tutors and Writers Can Challenge Oppression through Attention to Language" list provides strategies that can help all tutors and writers discuss differences themselves and model such discussion for others.

2. Erases Differences

Some tutors in the focus groups observed that writers not only erase differences by avoiding discussions of difference altogether but also by ignoring some significant differences while attending to others. For instance, tutors described writing (by themselves as well as by others) that presented "Asian" or "female" identity as importantly distinct from "non-Asian" or "male" identity but that completely ignored important differences among broadly defined categories of "Asians" and "women." Mandy herself has been called out by fellow tutors and writers when she made assumptions about their interests based on their race or ethnicity while ignoring other important aspects of their identities such as political commitments and family relationships.

One's language can also at times erase differences between the human categories one names. For example, Mandy once tutored a writer who compared attitudes about education in the experiences of Richard Rodriguez, Alice Walker, and the writer's own Italian immigrant grandfather. The writer read Rodriguez as obsessed with education, Walker as negligent of education, and his grandfather as inhabiting a perfect middle ground; he drew on his grandfather's business success as evidence. The student oversimplified and at times misread Rodriguez and Walker. Moreover, he failed to consider how or why his grandfather's experience differed in crucial ways from that of Rodriguez, a Mexican American man, or Walker, an African American woman. His line of argument called for questions like, "Why would Rodriguez need to act differently to achieve success in the academy than the writer's grandfather acted to secure business success?" and "How might the very definitions of education offered

by Walker and the grandfather differ because of gender, race, culture, or other factors?" By oversimplifying the experiences of Rodriguez, Walker, and his grandfather, the writer disregarded significant differences among them. He not only put forth an underdeveloped argument but also participated (albeit most likely unconsciously) in social structures that perpetuate inequalities by marking some differences as worthy of attention and others as not.

3. Assumes Uniform Readership

In both focus groups, tutors noted that they and other writers often give little, if any, thought to the audiences of their papers, perhaps because the assignments instructors give often fail to clarify these audience(s). Tutors also noted their own and other writers' tendency to assume that theirs is an audience from the same demographic and/or ideology as themselves or to assume that their audience will hold perspectives viewed by the writers as dominant. As an anthropology instructor, Shan-Estelle routinely comes across students who write about "our culture" when comparing a behavior or belief of another culture to their own. Her students also signal their assumption that readers will be from "their culture" when they use pronouns like "we," "us," and "our." Even as she consciously tries to acknowledge diverse perspectives, Mandy has also been challenged at times by her graduate instructors for using similar pronouns in course papers and class discussion about minority-authored literature. Harry Denny observes a similar trend among writing center administrators who often speak about how "we" administrators and tutors—assumed to be white, middle/upper class, and native English speaking—can learn from "them," minority writers (5). During a staff meeting stemming from the focus groups, one tutor from our center observed that "Pronouns say a lot!" They do, and the habit of using them in ways that exclude certain readers is hard to break.

Pronouns are not the only means through which writers demonstrate assumptions about readers. For instance, Mandy tutored someone whose assumptions rested in an adjective. The writer was working on a personal statement for a physical therapy program. In the prompt for the statement, the program made clear its valuing of

diversity and asked applicants to reflect on their experiences with diversity. The writer had appropriately chosen to write about an experience in an actual physical therapy setting where she had worked. In the draft she discussed with Mandy, she reflected on her handling of socioeconomic class diversity in that setting. She keenly analyzed the setting's location and the major populations it served: relatively wealthy clients affiliated with a local university and rural working class clients. She focused on a female truck driver with whom she worked several times and whom she vividly described. Throughout her statement, however, she referred to the truck driver's language and behavior as "inappropriate." Without qualifying her terminology, she seemed to assume that the admissions committee reading her statement would view the woman in the same way. But a committee from a program that strongly promotes diversity would likely challenge the writer's simple categorization of working class behavior as "inappropriate" in physical therapy clinics.

4. Minimizes Significance of Discrimination

Writers may at times minimize the weight of discrimination when they avoid discussing difference, erase differences, or assume they can speak of their readers as a single unified group. One of Mandy's former academic writing students minimized discrimination through all of these means in an essay comparing his experience as a white child getting briefly separated from his parents in a big box store to James Baldwin's account in "Stranger in the Village" of his experience being "lost" in an all-white Swiss village (a town wherein he was referred to as the devil because of his black skin). This student minimized the racism Baldwin experienced by equating it with his own relatively minor experience of distress. Whereas this student implicitly minimized the scale of racial discrimination that Baldwin experienced, others might minimize the significance of discrimination by explicitly accusing marginalized subjects of exaggerating their experiences of discrimination. For instance, in their discussion of the minimization of racism, Bonilla-Silva and Embrick describe Whites who claim that non-Whites blow racial discrimination out of proportion. These Whites figure their contenders as dwelling in the

past and reading race into situations where it is irrelevant; they figure themselves, in turn, as more enlightened since they have overcome discrimination and discussions of it (7-8).

Unlike those who sidestep important differences, thereby downplaying the significance of discrimination, writers sometimes minimize discrimination while strongly emphasizing differences. For example, one of the tutors in our focus groups shared about working with writers (and teachers, by way of their assignments) who minimized discrimination in debates surrounding homosexuality. Because their assignments asked them to, the writers emphasized "sides" of various debates—about marriage laws, military policy, etc.—while wholly ignoring concerns about discrimination. Having personally experienced severe discrimination because of her sexual orientation, the tutor felt frustrated by such assignments. Prior to the focus group, however, she did not feel comfortable getting into discussions about discrimination with students during tutoring sessions, so she stuck to other issues, such as their use of sources.

5. Speaks of Oppression as Only in the Past

Previous scholarship—by Grimm, Barron, Denny, Villanueva, and Geller et al.—has effectively made the case that oppression still exists and that writing centers have a responsibility to address it. Like Bonilla-Silva and Embrick, we argue that minimizing racism—and we would add other forms of oppression—by viewing it solely as a past problem perpetuates injustice and even threatens to undo civil rights accomplishments. Hence, we include "Speaks of oppression only in the past" as a problem. During our focus groups, tutors nodded in recognition when Mandy recounted how a former student started a paper: "Spike Lee made this movie back in 1989 when racism was still a problem in the United States." Whatever the dates referenced—whether 1989 or the nineteenth century—tutors report that writers frequently speak of oppression as occuring only in the past. Perhaps writers feel they can speak with more academic authority on a subject if they position themselves as removed from it. We do not have the space here to fully explore reasons why writers figure oppression as taking place only in the past. We can say, though, that

this is one of the most common enactments of the everyday language of oppression on our campus.

Tutors in the focus groups shared not only about other writers but also about their own tendency to speak of certain forms of oppression as matters of history. One tutor provocatively described his shifting attitude towards sexism. He used to think that there was "no such thing" as sexism, that "sexism has been fixed." He credited a sociology class with helping him to realize that sexism is "alive and well" and spoke of his ongoing attempts to recognize sexist attitudes among women as well as men. His candid story demonstrates how broader discussions of oppression can naturally emerge when tutors share about their practices as writers and tutors.

6. Exoticizes

Shan-Estelle's anthropology students frequently exoticize other cultures, not unlike professional anthropologists who for decades primarily studied cultures they characterized as "primitive." When Shan-Estelle's students exoticize, they tend to focus only on what they see as extreme differences between themselves and the "others" about whom they write. They also pass value judgments on these "others" and their cultural practices, often with labels like "weird," "strange," "abnormal," and "extreme." The students' exoticization inhibits their ability to relate to cultural "others" as well as their ability to engage differences with accuracy and nuance.

During the focus groups, the tutor who described writers addressing homosexuality debates also suggested that these writers' assignments promote exoticization. Writers are meant to engage the debates objectively, considering how they apply to a group of removed gay "others." This tutor suggested that such assignments frame homosexuals as a strange and separate part of the population in much the same way that some of the anthropology papers Shan-Estelle has seen describe "other" cultures as "strange" or "abnormal."

Recall also Mandy's experience with the student who described a truck driver's behavior as "inappropriate" in her application to a physical therapy program. This case highlights the way in which one's language might normalize one's own experience when exoti-

cizing the experience of perceived "others." As the writer described working in a physical therapy setting with a patient whose loud speech and cursing the writer labeled "inappropriate," the writer never labeled, let alone scrutinized, the physical therapy setting as the middle class or white collar space she implied it to be. Her normalization of the physical therapy setting's middle class culture served to further exoticize the truck driver's working class behavior.

7. Presents Stereotypes as Evidence

No writer can fully escape the powerful influence that stereotypes play in every society. In a 2007 entry on the Northeast Writing Centers Association's blog, Kevin Lamkins discusses an experience tutoring a writer whose language seemed to reference the stereotype of "African Americans . . . as entertainment for whites" as evidence for her argument in praise of a particular dance production. Shan-Estelle once tutored a writer who similarly relied on stereotypes for evidence and produced a shallow argument as a result. The writer had begun her project with a provocative research question asking how gender influences men's and women's expectations about marriage. As she pursued the question, though, the writer relied on the stereotype of men as breadwinners and women as housewives. Instead of exploring the reasons why these ideas are stereotypes and questioning the ways that men and women adhere to or reject these socially constructed roles, her paper presented them as facts. She described this household configuration as "traditional" but did not consider the origins of this "tradition" or articulate its role in her analysis. Both Lamkins's and Shan-Estelle's experiences are ones in which writers seem unaware of their reliance on stereotypes and thus unable to consider possibilities beyond the stereotypes or, equally important, to analyze the origins or significances of the stereotypes themselves.

Like anyone else, tutors on our writing center staff cannot escape the pervasive power of stereotypes and rely on one another to identify and confront them. During the focus groups, even as one tutor was in the midst of acknowledging his limits in recognizing certain types of oppression, it took another tutor to call him out for the sexist

stereotype present in his continual references to scientists as male. At our staff training session after the focus groups, some tutors challenged others to scrutinize their own stereotypes of the international students whose stereotypes and "culturally-based prejudices" they were describing. Another tutor who had overheard one of Mandy's tutoring sessions pointed out that Mandy had failed to notice and may have been complicit in stereotypes of sexual assault victims coming across in the paper discussed in that session.

8. Disrespects Sources from "Other" Perspectives

One of our focus groups discussed the tendency among many writers to refer to published women writers by their first names, and some members of the group read this practice as discriminatory. They observed that, as writers new to academic discourse learn the convention of referring to authors by their last name, they "slip up" more often when referring to women than men. These tutors see slip-ups as significant, even if they are unintentional. Mandy's experience anecdotally supports their observations. For instance, in the previously discussed paper that erased differences between Richard Rodriguez, Alice Walker, and the writer's grandfather, the writer consistently referred to both of the men (including his own grandfather) by their last names but always used "Alice" for Alice Walker, the paper's lone female subject. More recently, Mandy taught a writing course wherein several students referred to male writers by their last names while writing "Barbara" in reference to Barbara Ehrenreich.

In a 2009 academic conference presentation, writing instructor Katie Silbereis demonstrated how extensively one's language can disrespect sources from perspectives perceived as "other." Silbereis described her composition students' response to an assignment that asked them to engage Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* and Chinua Achebe's essay "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*." Silbereis had encouraged her students—the majority of whom were white and male—to approach both texts critically and was surprised when nearly all of the students wrote of Achebe's position in belittling tones while praising Conrad's literary genius. Notably, most of these students also failed to analyze specific

material from either text even though the assignment asked for such engagement. Instead, the students cast both authors into simple type: Conrad, the white canonical author of unquestionable merit; and Achebe, the whining African making too big a fuss over racism of the past.

In this case, as in the cases of writers referencing women authors by their first names, the disrespected perspectives are often but not always perceived as "other" than the writer's own. Some of the students who referred to Barbara Ehrenreich by her first name in Mandy's class were women, and while the majority of Silbereis's students were white, tutors in our center have sometimes observed students of color writing dismissively of authors from their own racial and ethnic demographics. Whether or not writers consider perspectives like "female," "African," "gay," or "disabled" as other than their own, they do often figure them as "other" than a perceived dominant or "normal" perspective and attend to them with less respect as a result.

9. Fails to Distinguish Sources' Views from Writers' Own

As we pointed out when introducing this list, some of the moves it describes are not limited to situations involving oppression but are generally commonplace. Failing to distinguish sources' views from one's own is an especially common pitfall for novice academic writers who often feel that they should share material only from other, more authoritative sources rather than clearly contributing their own voices to issues. Readers can feel offended or even oppressed, though, as well as just confused, when writers fail to distinguish their own views from the views of sources that rely on oppressive perspectives. Take, for instance, some of the papers from Silbereis's class wherein students described Africans as "savages" without clarifying that this was actually Conrad's descriptor. Whether or not they found Conrad's depiction problematic, many students likely did not mean to claim the term "savages" as their own or come across as sharing Conrad's views. However, when they failed to properly attribute terminology to Conrad or to analyze the terminology in their own voices, their positions remained unclear. They also missed out on an opportunity to expose and confront oppressive language, a practice

that might have led them to a greater awareness of their own positions in relation to oppressive systems.

Several tutors who participated in our focus groups made similar observations about a group of writers they had recently tutored from First Year Experience classes who had attended a lecture on hip-hop music and the links between hip-hop musicians and political activism. The tutors frequently saw drafts of reflection papers about this lecture that included descriptions of hip-hop as "violent," "dangerous," or "crude." At first, the tutors assumed the writers held this position, but then they realized through further discussion with the writers that they were trying to summarize a common white middle class American view of hip-hop described in the lecture. In the words of one tutor, "instead of saying 'Hip-hop was seen as dangerous,' he [a writer] just wrote, 'Hip-hop is dangerous.'" This same tutor, along with others, explained that some writers also clearly stated or implied that they personally believed hip-hop to be "dangerous" or "vulgar." Whether they wanted to align or distance themselves from the position described in the lecture, had they attempted to better articulate distinctions between their own ideas and ideas belonging to specific sources, all of these writers could have more critically examined race-based assumptions and values.

10. Misunderstands or Misrelates Sources' Views

In addition to not distinguishing their own thoughts from those of their sources, the writers responding to the hip-hop lecture frequently misunderstood and/or misrelated the views of the lecturer. Shan-Estelle tutored one of these writers. When she asked where the "hip-hop is dangerous" idea came from, the writer defensively replied, "Well, that's what the lecturer said." Several tutors in the focus group saw similar responses. They also reported that most writers could not initially answer their questions about why the lecturer would say "hip-hop is dangerous" or whether or not this was the lecturer's own belief. After much more conversation with the writers, the tutors deduced that the lecturer had been describing the beliefs of many white middle class Americans and that these beliefs differed drastically from his own. The examples from the hip-hop lecture pa-

pers aptly demonstrate the way in which writers commonly 1) fail to recognize or identify a source's own views, and 2) fail to clearly reference the intermediate sources referenced by their primary sources. Some of the First Year Experience students seemed to genuinely believe that the lecturer thought hip-hop was dangerous, asserting "that's what the lecturer said." Others sensed a disparity between the lecturer's view and the views he referenced but did not know how to sort out these differing views in their own prose. The case of these writers also demonstrates the way in which the last two items on this list often merge together. Writers who completely omitted the voice of the lecturer as an identified source consequently had no means by which to consider the various sources at play in the lecturer's discussion of hip-hop. Learning to examine more of the sources (direct and indirect) at play in their own language can help tutors and writers alike to not only make their views more clearly understood but also expose and address the complex networks of influences that generate oppressive language.

Discussion of List 2: How Tutors and Writers Can Challenge Oppression through Attention to Language

Tutors in the 2008 focus groups shared their strategies for addressing the everyday language of oppression when we explicitly asked them to, but, more often, they organically wove discussions (and sometimes heated debates!) about tutoring strategy into their conversations about the oppressive language they see in their own and others' writing. We have compiled a list of strategies primarily by drawing on the 2008 focus group materials and our own experiences. As with the list of language patterns, many of these strategies are ones that tutors already use in contexts that do not involve oppressive language. Tutors in our center have found it helpful to consider how tried-and-true strategies can play out in contexts involving oppressive language. All writing center tutors likely need training in how to better recognize manifestations of the everyday language of oppression, like those discussed in the previous section, so that they can apply effective tutoring strategies (with which they may well be

familiar) in those situations.

1. Clarify Meanings Together

Tutors in the focus groups reported that they often ask fellow tutors and writers to clarify their meanings when they sense oppressive language at play. They ask, "What do you mean?" "What are you trying to say here?" or "Why do you say this?" Tutors see this strategy as crucial since it enables them to maintain an open, non-accusatory stance and enables writers to take charge of their own reflection about their writing. When writers address questions about meaning, they also begin to address issues of oppression embedded in their lack of clarity. As discussion of the previous list demonstrates, tutors frequently see the language of everyday oppression when writers are unclear and vague about their own or their sources' perspectives, the subjects about whom they write, or their intended audiences. In many cases discussed in the focus groups, tutors found that their own and others' language came across as unclear because the writers themselves were actually still unclear about their ideas. In those cases, asking "What do you mean?" does not prompt definitive one-sentence answers but rather sparks conversations and more questions that can provide writers with scaffolding for developing, and sometimes challenging, their ideas and positions as well as their prose.

2. Express Understanding of One Another's Meaning

Our center encourages tutors to see themselves as readers, a test audience for writers. Therefore, some tutors in the focus groups had shared their interpretations of student writing with the writers, a somewhat more personal—and perhaps more directive—way to clarify meaning than open "What do you mean?" questions. For instance, when working with the writer applying to a physical therapy program, Mandy let the writer know that when she read her lines about the truck driver's "inappropriate" behavior, she sensed, from the writing, that the writer judged the woman's behavior as inappropriate by some authoritative outside standard and thought that it would be inappropriate in any setting (since the writer did not say that the behavior was inappropriate just for the particular physical

therapy setting she described). After expressing her understanding of the text and indicating that she knew this conveyed meaning may not have been intentional, Mandy asked the writer, "Is that what you meant to say?" This question led to a conversation about the writer's physical therapy setting, what this setting valued and why, and other settings where the truck driver's behavior might have been completely appropriate.

During this session, the writer and Mandy both identified subtle forms of class discrimination they had not thought about before and questioned their own complicity in that discrimination. Tutors in the focus groups observed that interactions are more difficult when writers actually hold and want to express the oppressive stances coming across in their writing. One tutor noted, "I think that if a tutor sees a prejudice then it's not our place to tell [writers] that their prejudice is wrong because...it's their belief system. But if [writers] are saying something that is prejudiced that they don't know is coming off as prejudiced, then we do have a responsibility to tell them." Other tutors felt ethically obligated to challenge oppressive views in addition to clarifying them with writers, and they used some of the strategies discussed below.

3. Discuss Meaning and Use of Sources

Just as the tutors in our center are trained to see themselves as readers of writers' work, they are also trained to see reading skills as inseparable from writing skills. We were not surprised, then, when tutors in the focus groups frequently described discussions with writers about the texts writers engaged and the strategies tutors suggested for reading those texts. When writers fail to distinguish their own perspectives from those of their sources or write about sources in a confusing manner, tutors generally ask writers to "step back" and orally describe the content of their sources. In a similar vein, when writers are confused about the meaning of sources, tutors sometimes ask writers to review their notes on sources or the original sources themselves. Such strategies, we believe, help writers improve their reading comprehension. Once writers begin to better understand the meaning of their sources in this manner, tutors work with them

to clarify their use of sources with questions such as, "Which source says this?" "Do you agree with this writer?" and "How do you react to that perspective?" When working with the First Year Experience students who wrote about the hip-hop lecture, for example, tutors prompted writers to distinguish their views from the lecturer's and also asked questions such as, "Is that what the lecturer believes, or is he referencing others?" While all of the tutors in the focus groups had engaged writers in conversations about their sources, one tutor in particular viewed such conversations as essential. She explained that she always asks, "What's your source?" as a way to get writers to clarify their use of sources but also to see the need for more evidence to support their positions (and, possibly, to see flaws in their positions). Beginning with questions about sources, she said, also enables her to keep some personal distance when writers express oppressive views and/or views with which she disagrees. She seeks to avoid directly critiquing writers' arguments, but she finds that talking about sources can function as an equally effective (and, for her, more comfortable) way to get writers to clarify their sources and question their positions.

4. Pose Counterarguments

This tutor, along with some others in the focus groups, did not feel comfortable posing counterarguments with writers, but others saw this strategy as one of the most effective ways to encourage writers to think critically about their ideas and consider more diverse perspectives. When commenting on an earlier draft of this article, a colleague asked, "Isn't [posing counterarguments] a common tutorial and pedagogical strategy in general, as old as Socrates, and generally valid?" We reply, "Yes!" We have already noted that many of the strategies we discuss are not new and apply to tutoring in general even as they also serve additional roles in addressing oppression. We also imagine, though, that some writing center practitioners will feel uncomfortable with this strategy (despite its tie to Socrates) since they may view it as overly directive for peer tutoring or, like the tutor discussed above, as just too personal. Posing counterarguments—like any other strategy—can become too directive; tutors, for instance,

might tell writers which counterarguments to include in a paper and give a detailed outline of how to respond to those counterarguments. However, posing counterarguments does not need to be overly directive. Along with most of the tutors in our focus groups, we see posing counterarguments, in the spirit of a peer reader, as an effective strategy and, in some cases, the best strategy for addressing the everyday language of oppression.

One tutor observed in her focus group that tutors may best tackle oppressive strains in a writer's argument by "just bringing up the multiple ways that people could argue and those [counter] arguments could be valid." Other tutors in this focus group also spoke in general terms about the effectiveness of raising "other perspectives"—posing "counter audiences," if you will—who might take offense at a writer's argument. During informal conversations around our center, several tutors have recounted tutorials wherein they drew on their own subject positions as readers to pose specific counterarguments. For instance, one tutor explained to a writer how she would find fault with part of his argument "as a woman." Many tutors on our staff seem comfortable speaking personally and somewhat confrontationally, but tutors do not always rely on direct personal experience to raise counterarguments. One tutor, for example, recalled raising a counterargument that an atheist might make to a writer who assumed a uniformly religious readership even though that tutor is not an atheist. In her tutoring, Mandy has also encouraged writers to draw on their own and others' experiences to pose counterarguments to sources, including sources that discriminated against groups with which the writers identified.

5. Maintain a Non-Combative Tone

Tutors who are comfortable with counterarguments and confrontation still seek to maintain a positive, collaborative tone. The focus groups recognized that hostility can quickly render a session unproductive as well as uncomfortable. Even the tutor most vocal about his commitment to "say[ing] what [he] think[s]" noted that he does not tell writers, "I think you're wrong," but instead readily shares his opinions and asks questions like "Why do you say this?" In "Center-

ing Difference," Jay Sloan describes himself as a nonjudgmental reader and someone who "posed no threat" to a writer (65). Tutors in our focus groups similarly recognized the importance of maintaining an open-minded and non-threatening posture with writers as they pose counterarguments and deploy other strategies for addressing oppressive language.

6. Address Language without Accusations of Intentional Oppression

Accusing writers of being oppressive, for example by making statements such as, "you're being very sexist here," will clearly counteract the tutoring goal of maintaining a non-combative tone. Tutors also want to avoid accusations since, as we discussed in the opening of this article, writers often do not intend to express the oppressive stances that their language conveys. Moreover, some tutors in the focus groups felt that offending writers or putting them in a defensive position would compromise the tutoring relationship and the writers' receptivity to their feedback. As we have talked with tutors in the focus groups and informally, we find ourselves frequently returning to the importance of rapport building. The experience of tutors in our center suggests that asking students about their lives beyond their writing and creating a non-judgmental atmosphere of trust, while always important for peer tutoring, is especially key in fostering productive conversations about oppressive language. Because tutors in our 2010 focus groups and recent all-staff discussions have significantly developed our consideration of tone and rapport, we save further attention to these issues for our conclusion.

7. Name the "Elephant in the Room"

We take the name of this strategy directly from the focus group transcripts. As tutors in one of the focus groups discussed writers' and tutors' tendency to avoid discussions of difference—often out of fear of coming across as discriminatory or non-politically correct—one tutor observed, "It's like, there's an elephant in the room here, and it's called race." This same tutor acknowledged that tutors "have to

know how to model" respectful talk about race and other sites of difference. Writing center practitioners can begin this modeling through some simple naming. One tutor worked with a student who was "so afraid of talking about [race]" that he "didn't talk about it at all" in his paper even though the assignment asked him to summarize and analyze a lecture entirely about race relations. During the tutoring session, the tutor identified the subject of race as well as the student's hesitancy in addressing it. As a result, the tutor and writer had a productive dialogue, attending to what the speaker actually said about race and why, along with the student's response. Our writing center staff has come to see again and again the importance of tutors' willingness to openly discuss sites of difference and oppression with one another as well as other writers if they are to increase their collective awareness, understanding, and ability to confront oppressive language.

Sometimes tutors' demographic markers are the elephants that need naming. In the focus groups, some tutors came to see their limits in failing to recognize class discrimination only after they came to name themselves as middle-upper class. Another tutor realized that he is unlikely to notice assumptions rooted in identities that he shares, such as "male," "Catholic," and "Irish American." These tutors demonstrate that naming one's perspectives can play a significant role in identifying certain forms of oppression as well as the gaps in one's viewpoints.

8. Learn to Better Identify and Address Language that Perpetuates Oppression

Even as they identified patterns of oppressive language in writing and shared methods for addressing such language, the focus groups also repeatedly referenced tutors' limits in identifying oppressive language as well as their desire to improve their strategies. Everyone who participated in the focus groups co-created knowledge that immediately influenced their practices as writers and tutors, but they all left knowing that they had much more to learn. As we have emphasized throughout this article, our lists are meant to serve as a springboard to further knowledge, reflection, and resistance to oppression.

Going Forward: The Lists as a Heuristic in our Own Center and Beyond

While the 2008 focus groups revealed forms of oppressive language that tutors were already observing and responding to, the groups also generated new knowledge, new strategies, and new language for identifying and addressing effects of oppressive systems on language. Our staff continues to develop their knowledge of oppression and strategies for resisting it. In fall 2010, two years after our initial round of focus groups and staff training around the everyday language of oppression, our staff revisited the two lists during a staff training session and subsequent online discussion. We were taken aback by the tutors' insights as they, more than ever before, embraced the work of challenging oppressive language as their own. Since we were, by this time, shaping our work to share with audiences beyond our own center, we also gained Institutional Review Board approval for an additional round of focus groups with tutors, which we conducted shortly after the fall 2010 all-staff training session. We again used systematic random sampling to select participants for two focus groups. One focus group consisted of four undergraduate tutors and one graduate tutor; three undergraduate tutors participated in the second focus group. Whereas the information tutors shared during the 2008 focus groups enabled us to create our two-list heuristic, tutors in the 2010 focus groups drew on their experiences as writers and tutors to elaborate on the staff's engagement with the heuristic and to identify questions, concerns, and goals for our staff going forward.

As other writing centers similarly work to better identify and address the everyday language of oppression, they can use our two lists as a valuable heuristic for sparking new knowledge and strategies. We have created a blog with the same title as this essay to compliment the *Antiracist Writing Centers* blog and serve as a forum where writing center practitioners can share insights they generate as they use and adapt the lists. When we first presented the lists at a 2008 staff training session, tutors annotated them with their own experiences. They also debated what challenging oppression as a writing center could look like and how involved (or not) they wanted to be in such work. While the lists certainly became a knowledge-generating

heuristic for our 2008 staff, our 2010 staff offers a better model for other institutions since most of them (like tutors at other writing centers) were not involved in the lists' initial creation; by fall 2010, most of our 2008-2009 staff had graduated. The tutors still on board had worked with the directors to build a staff community that is more diverse and tightly knit than ever. As they worked with the lists, the 2010 staff emphasized the following: the value of addressing oppression through deep attention to language; the roles of education, rapport, and receptivity when discussing oppressive language; and whether the terminology of "oppression" provides the best frame for the kind of work we have been discussing throughout this article.

Unlike the 2008 staff, which was very concerned with differentiating intentionally and unintentionally oppressive language, most tutors on the 2010 staff emphasized the effects of oppressive language regardless of writers' intentions. Many of these tutors therefore challenged one another to avoid just making language "sound nicer" without addressing the underlying assumptions that make it oppressive (whether those assumptions are the writer's own or not). One tutor in the 2010 focus groups said that she, on the one hand, thought it was "not at all useful" to show a writer how to be politically correct and described a tutoring experience that confirmed for her that she "couldn't care less about fixing student language" unless she and the writers were "actually talking about the issues." On the other hand, she saw oppression and language as intricately related and was incredibly frustrated when she voiced her "very real feelings" of being oppressed by language only to have friends respond by dismissing her as being too worried about political correctness. She gave the example of a roommate's frequently using words like "gay" and "homo" in a derogatory way. As a bisexual woman, the tutor felt "uncomfortable" around this roommate; she altered some of her behaviors and was constantly worried about how she would be treated if the roommate discovered her sexuality. Now the tutor does not think the roommate was "intending to oppress" her, but, she says, the language the roommate used did oppress her. "Language is powerful," the tutor said, and she wants tutors and writers to recognize that power.

This tutor and others articulate the value of focusing on a writ-

er's language as a unique, effective way to address oppression. They find that focusing on writers' own words makes them "much more receptive" and "less defensive." As one tutor, a self-identified "social advocate," said in her focus group, "you can't make a closed-minded person open-minded in forty-five minutes," but, by focusing on their language, you can show writers "opposing views" and "alternative paths" so they have more approaches to choose from. As our staff considers just what tutors can do in their forty-five minute sessions with writers, they are also considering how our center's work of attending to writers' specific language differs from other types of diversity and anti-oppression programming on campus. Tutors cannot, in a single tutoring session, delve into all of the ways oppressive systems impact our society. They can, however, foster peer dialogue about very particular, personal, and often subtle expressions of oppression, thereby contributing uniquely to larger anti-oppression work.

Based on our 2010 staff's insights, the next time our staff works with the lists in our center, they will need to add at least two items to the "How Tutors and Writers Can Challenge Oppression through Attention to Language" list: 1) Be willing to teach and learn from one another, and 2) Leverage respect, sensitivity, and understanding to open conversations about difference. Many tutors have observed that their role as peers should not preclude them from drawing on their own experiences and education to teach others, just as they ought to be open to learning from the writers with whom they work. In our 2010 focus groups and online discussion, several tutors shared experiences of working with writers who were very receptive to learning. In the online discussion, one tutor summarized a conversation she had had with other tutors during the staff training session. In these tutors' experiences, she said, "ignorance and unawareness" were more often to blame for oppressive language in writers' work than "intolerance and animosity." "However," she noted, "on the list there was nothing about educating the student about the issue at hand." She continued, "Sometimes it's difficult to change your writing . . . especially if no one challenges your beliefs or word choice." Another tutor wrote, "Allowances must also be made for those who WANT to write without prejudice, but don't know HOW." The majority of writers and tutors in our center are receptive to learning from one

another so as to more critically engage their own language and ideas. Some tutors, though, express frustration with fellow staff members and visiting writers alike who, as one tutor put it, don't seem interested in "listening at all."

Though their approach will not solve all questions about receptivity, tutors in the 2010 focus groups argued that a tone of respect, sensitivity, and understanding can increase receptivity and bolster an atmosphere of peer learning. Rather than just maintaining a non-combative tone, as suggested by our initial "How Tutors and Writers Can Challenge Oppression through Attention to Language" list, these tutors use supportive comments, shared experiences, and humor to build rapport, often leading to productive dialogue. Shan-Estelle and one of the tutors in our 2010 focus groups even reported telling writers that they sounded "like a jerk" (both used the same phrase on different occasions), a move that on the surface seems to conflict with the strategy of using a non-combative tone. However, in the context of tutorials in which they had built relationships with writers by engaging them openly and humorously, these tutors in fact showed a great deal of respectful camaraderie as they addressed oppressive language. They helpfully remind other writing center practitioners that they do not need to always take themselves so seriously as they engage in this seriously important work.

As they strategize toward building respectful rapport with writers, tutors on our 2010 staff frequently raise questions about linguistic ownership. Tutors respect writers and want writers to respect themselves as owners of their own words. At the same time, tutors understand that many voices influence the production of any individual's writing. For instance, one tutor in the focus groups described working with a writer who framed her paper as an analysis of Latin American governments' relative "success" in "dealing with" indigenous peoples. Through respectful dialogue, the tutor and writer exposed dominant perspectives at work in the writer's approach. Afterward, the tutor recalled wondering, "Why did she state it that way? Is it what was being taught in her class? Is it something from her high school education? Or is it something she learned at home?" Others in this group further explored the influence of teachers, observing that "a lot of people write what the teacher wants" or "what

they think their professors think."

Some tutors felt that instructors sometimes perpetuated oppressive language in student writing, particularly when they actually insisted on or were perceived by their students to be insisting on shallow political correctness, "colorblind" ideology, or restrictive adherence to dominant discourses. A few tutors spoke of personal experiences with such instructors. Resonating with scholars like Carmen Kynard, Nancy Barron, Bethany Davila, Andrew Rihn, and Donna LeCourt, who envision writing tutors and instructors as challenging, not just serving, privileged discourses, one tutor argued, "Sometimes the authority figure isn't necessarily right, and it's likely important to get across to our tutees that it's okay to deviate from authority because new ideas aren't going to come up out of nowhere." This tutor also spoke to the ownership issue, suggesting that learning to own one's ideas, rather than just parroting others, is essential to college writing. When writers claim that their work repeats their teachers' or another source's ideas, Shan-Estelle sometimes replies, "But you wrote that; it's yours. Now let's talk about what you actually think." As writers find more agency, they come to see more clearly where their words entwine with oppressive discourses and can begin to identify possibilities for resistance.

As tutors address oppressive language, what are they doing exactly? Resisting oppression? Combatting discrimination? Working towards social justice? Since our project so robustly recognizes the significance of language, it makes sense that our staff continues to debate the best terminology for characterizing this work. We have been convinced by other scholars in the field—notably Frankie Condon—that "oppression" rather than "prejudice" (a term we had used in earlier stages of this project) is the right word for describing the effects of the language we are studying since these effects are systemic, ideological, and tied to many more histories than the term "prejudice" (often used to express personal bias) is able to convey. Many on our staff agree, and as they dialogue with tutors who do not see oppression as the best descriptor for this work, we see their debate about terminology as inseparable from their debate about practice (for instance, their exchange over whether or not tutors should help writers sound more politically correct). Some tutors at

our writing center join other tutors we have met in seeking positive terminology—and thus positive mindsets and practices—for this work that represents tutors and writers as not just resisting, combatting, or working against something bad but also (or instead) working toward something good, such as social justice or equality. Some tutors on our 2010 staff suggested that we talk more about "raising awareness," a positive phrase that resonates with the staff's newly articulated commitment to teaching and learning from one another and other writers.

Our staff's emphasis on education and awareness confirms our sense that we should now pair our two-list heuristic with published scholarship. Geller et al. recommend having tutors read scholarship that prompts discussions of race, systematic racism, whiteness, and white privilege (97). By referencing their suggested reading list and other sources, tutors in our center can select texts to read as a staff that will enable us to compliment our practice-based approach. Tutor-selected readings in critical pedagogy could especially further writing center practitioners' understanding of a tutorial's ability to expose ideology and power dynamics at play in discourse. In addition, one of our directors suggested Thomas Recchio's article on Bakhtinian "heteroglossia" in student papers, a piece that may especially appeal to tutors now as they discuss writers' agency in relation to the many voices that influence an individual's words. Jay Sloan's article "Centering Difference: Student Agency and the Limits of 'Comfortable' Collaboration" may likewise have special relevance for our staff as they consider issues of receptivity and rapport. As our fellow tutors express a renewed sense of themselves as peer educators and learners, our staff might also add to their development some activities suggested by Condon, Fremo, Geller et al., and Cynthia White et al. that can increase awareness of their own complicity—as individuals and writing centers—in systems of oppression and help keep them from slipping from peer to expert mode. Through sustained analysis of systematic oppression, writing center practitioners can increase their awareness that they are never completely outside of oppressive systems even as they seek to be more reflective, critical, and resistant from within.

Wherever we go from here, we will strive to keep tutors in the

driver's seat. Barron and Grimm argue that training around race—and we would add other sites of oppression—is more likely to succeed when tutors are invited "as designers rather than as recipients of an imposed diversity experience" (72). Tutors drew on their experiences to create the knowledge that led to our heuristic. We are excited to see our current staff taking ownership of this work, and we will encourage them to collectively design ongoing training, programs, and actions. Thus far, the most fruitful dialogue in our center happens when our staff revisits, revises, and recreates our two-list heuristic. We are eager to hear about the critical conversations the lists will provoke at other writing centers.

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