Chapter 6. Expressing Yourself and Your Message: Motivations and Identities in Writing for Publication

Part I: Crossing the Threshold

> *We all have self-motivations … what we're interested in, what we value, what our identities in value speak to.*
>
> *– Matt, Expert scholar*

> *Even though writing it might be cathartic or feel good or make me proud or pleased or anything like that, I also want to think about how it might be taken by other people, other readers that I respect. … I think about how I want to be known in the field. If people are going to recognize my name, I want the thoughts that surround it or the ideas or the stories that surround it to reflect my commitments and my values.*
>
> *– Gina, Emerging Scholar*

What makes academic writers continue to publish, long after they no longer have external (extrinsic) reason to do so? What motivates people to write at all, especially in such a challenging writing context such as publication? How can the power of writing and academic publication help grow human knowledge, improve our practices, or create a more just and equitable world? These are the kinds of questions that many people ask when they are choosing to write for publication. As this book has already demonstrated, particularly in our last chapter, writing for publication is challenging, requires high levels of expertise, and is time consuming—and yet, as this chapter will explore, writing for publication is also extremely meaningful, motivating, and inherently rewarding. As we will examine, all writers have multiple motivations for writing for publication, leading to our threshold concept:

> ***Threshold Concept:*** *Writing for publication is identity work where all writers have layered extrinsic and intrinsic motivations, being closely connected to identity, values, and the work they want to do in the world.*

What does it take for someone to cross the threshold, to realize the power of writing as an agent of change and knowledge building, not only for themselves but for their field or the world? We can return here to the discussion of Kellogg's three stages of writing (explored in Activity 5.3) that discusses the different ways that writing is used: to demonstrate other's knowledge, to demonstrate new knowledge for oneself, or to demonstrate new knowledge in the world. Expert writers have a

different relationship with their writing—they realize that their writing is done to solve problems, build new knowledge, and create change. They are empowered to use that writing not only in their own lives but for something beyond them, and this is deeply tied to who they are as scholars and as people. This represents a major shift from a novice to an expert—emerging scholars articulate the publication process as opening their eyes to what writing for publication does, how it works, and how it shapes their desire to continue to create more new human knowledge. Thus, in order to cross the threshold, we can consider the following:

Table 6.1 Crossing the Threshold

Writer-as-Student	**T**	**Writer-as-Expert**
Writing to demonstrate knowledge, to work out ideas, or to get a grade.	**H**	Writing to leverage change, solve problems, or generate new human knowledge.
Writing may or may not be tied to identity; students may see writing primarily as a means to an end (grade, degree).	**R** **E** **S** **H**	Publications and writing are part of a scholarly identity that helps pursue an agenda in a field. Publications as artifacts of professional work and contributions.
Writing is often extrinsically motivated by grades, deadlines, and coursework.	**O** **L** **D**	Writing may be intrinsically or extrinsically motivated, with multiple, overlapping reasons to publish. For senior scholars, publication is often elective and enjoyable.

We can see above that the writer-as-expert has a radically different relationship with their writing than a writer-as-student. As you begin to explore this chapter, I would encourage you to keep your own identities and motivations in mind:

- Why are you choosing to read this book?
- Why did you seek an advanced degree in your chosen field and specialization area?
- Why are you seeking to learn to write for publication or deepen your writing for publication practice?
- What are you burning to say, and how is that tied with your overlapping identities: as a scholar, a teacher, a professional, a parent, a child, a human being?
- How do you want to build new human knowledge, solve problems, or enact change in the world?

The Psychology of Motivation

Before we begin delving into stories and data from our writers, let's examine a bit of the psychology surrounding motivation as this sets up the necessary framing for the rest of the chapter. Think about your own motivations: what is driving your

actions right now? Why do you put energy into certain things? What encourages you to act? Four major factors are tied to motivation as described by Gary A. Troia et al. (2012):

1. Self-efficacy, or the belief that you are able to accomplish a goal
2. Your interest and value in a task
3. Your ability to set and meet goals in line with your skill level
4. Attribution, or your ability to accurately attribute your success or failure to the correct causes, and accept your own role in that success or failure

If we look at these four things tied to writing for publication, we can see that an expert is able to bring these four things to the table to be able to continue to be motivated to write and persist in writing through various challenges and difficulties (such as years of revision!) Three of these are covered in other sections of the book (self-efficacy and attribution in Chapter 7; goal setting, Chapter 8). This chapter thus focuses on interest and value as tied to identity. Allan Wigfield and Jacquelynne S. Eccles (2000) identify at least four categories of interest value that motivate people (utility value, intrinsic value, attainment value, and cost)—the first three of these will be defined and discussed in this chapter to help you successfully cross the threshold.

Part II: Writing for Publication Motivations among Emerging and Expert Scholars

This chapter explores three **writing for publication motivations** that both emerging scholars and experts identified. They are:

Publish or perish. One motivation that presses people to write is the most pragmatic—if they do not achieve publication success, it can have severe negative consequences such as failing to land a desired job, failing to make tenure, or not being able to advance in one's career. This is typically the version of motivation that is presented to emerging scholars, perhaps at the cost of others.

Change in the world and knowledge building. A second motivation that is tied deeply with personal identity and personal value systems—these writers write because they have something important to say, an important change they want to make, and the work they see as critical in the world. This change is directly related to aspects of identity, culture, a desire to do good in the world, and the belief in the power of building new human knowledge and publishing for that goal. For some, this is more about answering burning questions or continuing on a research trajectory, and for others, it is about using their research to make change.

Intrinsic benefit. Our final motivation has to do with the pleasures of writing: joy, curiosity, and a desire to improve. Other intrinsic benefits include experiencing the flow state (Chapter 4) and simply deriving pleasure from the writing process itself.

While I am presenting these motivations as separate for the sake of this discussion, the three categories are not mutually exclusive; writers often have multiple, sometimes conflicting motivations (e.g., the thing you should write to get published vs. what you really want to write) or motivations that are layering and overlapping. I will also say that these motivations are likely highly influenced by two things 1) the field that individuals come from (writing studies, which has interdisciplinary roots in both the social sciences and the humanities and 2) data being collected in the midst of a strong push for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) that spanned 2020–2022. Motivations and influences may look differently in other fields and at different time periods. Thus, as you read these examples, you can consider how these may fit or diverge from your own disciplinary experiences. Let us now consider each of these motivations in turn—as you are reading, consider how these different perspectives might align with your own goals for writing.

Publish or Perish Motivation

Many scholars are motivated to publish because it is required to secure a tenure-track job, to get tenure, or to stay marketable. At the time when I was collecting this data and writing this book on the heels of a global pandemic, these concerns were more pressing than even five or ten years ago. Careers in academia are less certain than ever before, with retrenchments, university closures, and the erosion of tenure all happening at an increasing rate. Given this new and more difficult landscape, the publish or perish motivation is not limited to emerging scholars but is also expressed by some expert scholars.

The publish or perish model, which underlies much of the publishing done earlier in a career, is motivated primarily for the physical rewards and career success that publishing brings. This model is directly tied to **utility value** which focuses on value that comes from publishing in order to accomplish pragmatic goals (Janman, 1987; Troia et al., 2012). The publish or perish model is therefore tied to certain kinds of **extrinsic motivation,** when an individual does something because external factors, goals, or constraints require them to act (Hennessey et al., 2015). One of the major challenges with writing for publication, as this book has explored, is that extrinsic motivation often breeds a lot of suffering: anxiety, stress, writer's block. Intrinsic motivation is often highly rewarding and allows one to mitigate and not focus as much on the negatives of writing for publication.

The survey respondents demonstrated the reality of the publish or perish motivation. Of the 198 respondents, 48 percent of said they were required to publish (95), with another 5.1 percent (10) indicated that they should be publishing to get a better job and/or that publication is not required by strongly encouraged.

As an emerging scholar on the job market, Danny is acutely aware both of the pressures of publication and how those pressures manifest in terms of the publish or perish model. She recognizes that publications put her in the public eye and

are important to how people view her: "I'm also very cognizant of the fact that I'm going on the market this year, I've already started sending apps out, this is something that a lot of people are going to read, what if it makes me look stupid or something." She extends her discussion later in the interview,

> I feel sometimes it is this push for graduate students to publish … a lot of the papers that I had done before it was all about publication. We went into it with this fear almost or pressure … pressure of writing for a particular journal. Knowing that it's a journal that's a top-tier journal is really intimidating because for me I can't write in that type of setting.

As we can see from Danny's discussion, she points to mentoring of senior scholars to push beyond publications for the sake of publications.

Dan, an expert scholar, offers pragmatic reasons for continuing to be driven by the publish or perish model of motivation even though he is tenured with job security. His motivations are tied to his working-class identity, where he says,

> Honestly, I grew up working poor … given the conditions, given my kids are still in school, I want to make sure that we've got a nest egg and everything … I'm always looking for if the bottom falls out because it used to when I was a kid a lot. Do I have enough to move on? Do I have enough to be marketable? … If the worst happens and for whatever reason I get cut, I need to know that I can go into the market as published as possible.

In Dan's case, his working-class identity keeps him focused on the pragmatic reasons for publication, and publication gives him more security, particularly in insecure times.

After the immediate threat of the job search and tenure/promotion is over, many scholars often find a shift away from publish or perish motivations to more intrinsic or personal ones. At the time of her interview, emerging scholar Nadia, who had recently moved into a new full-time position post-graduate school, shares the major difference in motivation from graduate school to full time employment,

> I find that I enjoy research and writing a lot more now that I'm out of graduate school … I feel pretty freed up not having the pressure and just being able to work on things that I really want to do. … I find that it helps me … stay looser or something, to follow what I'm interested in. I discovered on the other side of things that I do really enjoy it. I found it very stressful in grad school, but now, I enjoy the process a lot.

Likewise, Ryan, an expert scholar, shares a longer view of writing for publication now that he has tenure and promotion, "I've developed a much healthier

relationship with publication, which is to say once the career threat is removed it's actually easier to think about each part, each thing that I write as less important. If I write an article and it's wrong, then it's not the end of the world 'cause I still have more career to sort of go back and revisit and revise and do all those things."

These extrinsic motivations tied to writing for publication, both in terms of job market and tenure success, obviously put a great deal of pressure on individuals—hence the emphasis in this book on cultivating healthy relationships with writing. But, for many, even the fear of publish or perish cannot override the intrinsic motivations in writing that are deeply tied to identity, life purpose, and finding joy.

Change in the World and Knowledge Building Motivation

For all emerging and expert writers, publishing to enact change in the world or contribute to human knowledge was a critical motivating factor. All scholars I interviewed see publishing as identity work, and motivations to continue to publish are tied to who they are, what they value, and the cultures in which they live and work.

For emerging scholars, I asked them to describe their article and its relationship to their growing scholarly agenda and identity. For my six expert writers, during our final interview, I specifically asked them, "What motivates you to continue to write and publish?" Within these responses, two key categories emerged.

Writing to Support Marginalized Voices and Overcome Oppression

Many of the scholars in the study used writing for publication to either support individuals and communities with marginalized identities (which may include themselves) or undo systematic biases and oppression perpetuated by people of their own race.[5] We see differences in how emerging scholars vs. expert scholars are able to leverage aspects of identity based on their length of time in the field and growing expertise.

Emerging scholars exploring identity: Emerging scholars and expert scholars both do the work of supporting marginalized identities and exploring their own identities in relationship to writing. But in the two sets of interviews and articles, there is a marked difference in terms of confidence and the overall bigger picture when it comes to this work. Emerging scholars are in the initial

5. I suspect these particular categories align in the way they do due to the current cultural and academic turn in many fields towards supporting individuals with marginalized identities and privileging those voices, which was very prevalent at the time of the study. As individuals are deeply shaped by larger cultural events and paradigms, at another point in history, perhaps the specifics of the motivations would look different but would be no less compelling. They also align with the kinds of scholars that I had studied—for example, those in the hard sciences may have very different reasons for writing, but those motivations are still tied to their identities.

stages of exploring this work and are still thinking about what can be accomplished with publication.

Gina, an emerging scholar who has German, Hungarian, and Puerto Rican heritage, published an autoethnographic piece about her own challenged experiences in learning to write. She shares her publication with her family:

> My in-laws read it and said that it made them tear up, and it was the most "Gina" piece that they could ever imagine … Friends and colleagues reached out to me … That made me feel my experiences mattered. Again, with counter-story and critical race theory which is what I'm reading a lot of right now which is why I'm thinking about that is that my experiences aren't actually unique. They are representative and that was helpful to me because I went into this thinking that my experience with writing was unique and that it needed to be shared … I think that there were things for people to latch on to and feel I'm not alone.

In the interview, Gina goes on to share several other pieces-in-progress that all use the counter story lens; through this first publication she has found voice and motivation in leveraging her identity and is continuing to do so in in-progress publications. As we can see from this powerful story, Gina is articulating an emerging understanding what publications and writing for publication can accomplish and how it can serve different people and make change—and how her own experiences and reception of the first article can play a role.

In a second example, Danny, an emerging white scholar, discusses the complications in leveraging her identity in relationship to her article examining publicly available data, social justice, and technical communication,

> I am writing about super serious stuff that also like I said, I'm a white lady and this really affects people of color. I have a lot of privilege in that space and I am trying to walk the line of using my privilege to be able to get in this space and make comments that other people can't without talking over others. I'm very cognizant of that line and trying to walk it as best I can.

Danny finds it challenging to negotiate these spaces, relying heavily on her faculty mentor and peers for support, but ultimately, placing her article in a top journal in technical communication.

In both of these cases and in the other narratives in the study, we can see how these emerging scholars are using publication to find their voice and leverage their identity. These experiences are part of the social apprenticeship (Beaufort, 1999) that that so many emerging scholars are experiencing through mentoring and scholarly identity formation. As Danny and Gina continue to publish, write, and articulate their own identity as scholars, their ability to make change will grow. To see this in action, we now turn to the expert scholars.

Expert scholars leveraging identity for change and knowledge building: The only difference between the emerging and expert scholars is that experts, in terms of the Change the World motivation, have more experience in doing this work, are able to articulate it with more certainty, and have a greater sense of the power that publication brings. In the following cases, the primary reason these scholars write is to leverage their own privilege to understand how to prevent social, political, and educational oppression and support diversity.

Expert scholar Ryan engages in rhetorical analysis of fascism, demagoguery, and fake news. He indicates that part of his motivation to write stems from his privileged identity as a middle-class white man; he ultimately is working to protect democracy from future horrors that could be perpetuated by people of his race and gender:

> But the communities that I represent are often perpetrators of horror. … Hitler was not a monster on his own, he was surrounded by a whole constellation of people that made it possible, that made it desirable, that made it logistically available for him … So, I think part of writing about fascism is for me at least try to think about how does it become desirable to undermine your whole democracy by way of democracy. … How does it become a thing that average, ordinary men on the street sort of think, "This is our option, this is you know… it's either this, it's either them or me"?

Through this, Ryan leverages his identity across multiple articles and a larger scholarly agenda to raise awareness and prevent the rise of fascism. He also has made the decision to engage in writing and speaking on these issues for the public, frequently writing for popular press and being an expert consulted on television news stories.

For expert writer Heather, who is writing on minority, first generation, low-income STEM students, a connection to her own background and identity is important. In her first interview, Heather shared about the barriers to being a woman, feeling silenced, and experiencing misogyny as one reason she did not go into a scientific field. By doing research on minority students in science, she is able to amplify their voices in a way hers was not—and produce research that can support minorities choosing and staying in scientific fields. She also recognizes that much of her work is about advocating and creating safe spaces for minorities in science. She says,

> I've heard from certain people many times: do we really need to teach black students how to write like white men in order to succeed in the field? Shouldn't we change the field? I say, yes, we need to do both. You can't expect somebody in a position of power who doesn't even know they're in a position of power to

> make changes for somebody else when they think all that person needs to do is step up and do the same level of work.

Heather's own career trajectory has included being in a position of support to develop programs to support minority science students as well as support them in her publications.

Matt, another white male expert scholar, also seeks to undo systematic biases against marginalized communities through his ongoing scholarly agenda with Wikipedia, particularly in addressing Wikipedia's gender and racial gaps. He notes:

> The problem with Wikipedia is that most of the people who have inclination and time and resources to edit are representative of a very narrow and homogeneous demographic. That white, male, highly-educated demographic has created these particular systemic biases. Those systemic biases are really at odds with this … very ambitious and inclusive project … I think that's why I work with it because I want to actually open it up to more diverse people.

As part of his agenda, Matt offers "Wikipedia-edit-a-thons" at his university, encouraging individuals in the campus community to bring more gender and racial representation to Wikipedia. He notes, "I was telling my edit-a-thon people the other day, 'Look around and look at how much more diverse you are than me.' … So I think bringing it into education for me has always been about exposing the encyclopedia to a more diverse population of potential editors which could therefore actually bring it towards something that would be more inclusive."

In each of these compelling stories, we see how a desire to change the world, leveraged with one's positionality, privilege and/or identity creates a dynamic motivation for continuing to publish. But the other thing that is happening for experts is that this research does not exist for the sake of publication—all three of these scholars are building and leveraging expertise to make broader change: Ryan through public discourse, Heather through university programming, and Matt through edit-a-thons to change very visible and publicly accessed web resources. In this way, the publications form a portion of the work that they are doing and the expertise they are bringing. These examples embody the concept of praxis (Hesse-Biber, 2011), the bridging of theory/research with practice.

As we can see in these two sections, the difference the narratives of change from emerging scholars and expert scholars is that expert scholars are able to leverage their expertise, where emerging scholars are just starting to explore it through early publication.

Writing as a Way to Deepen the Field's Knowledge and Satisfy Burning Questions

Another change-making approach is working to build knowledge in the field knowledge on issues deemed to be important, valuable, and directly tied to the

identity of the scholar. In these two stories, we can see how an emerging and an expert scholar use their own identities and experiences to build knowledge in areas where they see critical need.

Amal, an emerging scholar, leverages her identity to deepen the field's knowledge about writing and educational conditions in her home country in the Middle East, and she does so because of her unique experiences and identity as a transnational, Arab scholar who identifies as multilingual and neurodiverse. She says,

> I feel that my set of experiences are unique and I have access to a particular group of people that nobody else has. I come from a country that is a barren land when it comes to research, and I have so much work that I can do. … When I was in the [United] States I was also discriminated against in many different ways, but then I managed to discover the privilege in my marginalization because I'm marginalized, I'm also privileged because I have insider access to many different things that nobody else has.

Amal recognizes the importance of publishing about students in her home country due to the fact that very little research exists. But she also seeks to leverage her difficult experiences of marginalization for the good of multilingual students.

Alice, a retired expert writer, describes her lifelong scholarly commitment to understanding the relationship between reading and writing and integrating reading instruction more fully into the writing curriculum. This agenda drives her to write for publication in her retirement and encourages her to work to address social problems. Alice says, "This a choice. I'm not going to be promoted anymore, I'm not getting any more pay … I'm doing it because I really believe this is a huge problem." Later in her interview, she continues to explain how she sees a critical loss of reading ability tied to the function of our democracy and recent political events unfolding in the United States,

> I feel like I have something to say. I've been banging this drum about reading these many, many years. … Now when people ask me about the new book, "What are you writing about?" I was at a party last week and I said, "I'm writing about January 6th,"[6] because what happened on January 6th is a byproduct of a failure in education. … we failed to develop in students the kind of critical literacy that would have stopped people from doing what they did on January 6th. I've always thought reading is really critical to everything else … I'm really on a mission and

6. Alice is referring to January 6, 2021, when supporters of incumbent President Donald Trump entered the United States Capitol building to prevent Congress from formalizing the victory of Joe Biden.

> that's why I'm doing it. That's why as long as I still think I have something to say, I'm going to keep doing it.

For Alice, her career-long emphasis on reading isn't simply about supporting critical literacy, like Ryan, it is about building knowledge of teaching and learning in critical ways to preserve democracy.

Writing as an Adaptive Technology

Stephanie, who is a tenured full professor focusing on creative writing pedagogy, also indicates that for her writing is about important work in the world. But she also has another motivation to use writing as a medium for levering that change, tied to her own identity. Stephanie indicates that writing is the best medium to be heard and because that medium can help her overcome gender and age-related barriers. She says,

> I have a lot to say and I feel like this is the best way I can be heard. I don't always feel heard in my personal life. I feel heard but in my professional life, but I don't feel as heard when I talk. But when I write, I feel listened to and heard. … Being a woman in my department has been very hard. I have not been listened to. There were many times when I was just completely dismissed … So, having this outlet where I can speak and be heard and listen to and compliment it even is actually really important to me because I don't feel it professionally necessarily.

For Stephanie, writing becomes a kind of adaptive technology where her words—rather than the body she carries—allow her to leverage change in the world.

Heather shares a similar angle dealing with her own identity, tied to her working-class background and being a woman:

> Writing for me is a way of thinking through my ideas and having a voice. I think I've said to you in the past that I'm from a working-class background that's very misogynistic and I'm used to being silenced. I'll say that and writing has always been a place, whether it was a diary or my own short stories or whatever, but a place where nobody could tell me I was wrong. I mean, they could if they read it but they weren't allowed to. … I love the process of being able to take what's in here and put it on the page and really think through. It brings me a lot of joy; that's why I write, for fun.

For these scholars, writing is a particular kind of tool that strips away problematic gender barriers and allows them to be heard as the scholar and professional that they are. Writing is uniquely situated to this and is literally disembodied in ways that are particularly helpful for marginalized individuals.

Writing to Honor a Person or Legacy

A final reason people write is in honoring a person who passed away or carrying on someone's legacy, which could be a former mentor, friend, or advisor. Stephanie, an expert scholar, describes the loss of Wendy Bishop, who was instrumental in exploring the same area that Stephanie is writing in—creative writing pedagogy. Stephanie says,

> Wendy Bishop died that year and that was actually really huge for me … I think I had a very strong sense after she died that I needed to carry on the work that she had done. … So I spent a lot of time that year thinking about how are we going to make sure this work doesn't die and that we carry this forward. … because, she was in [my] first book, I think some of that bravery came from a strong—came from her. I said to myself, "I have to step forward now and do this stuff because she's not going to be here to do it."

For those that have this motivation, it can be an extremely important force that drives you forward in clear ways.[7]

As this section has explored, despite the challenges of writing for publication—the rejections, the long revision, the difficult peer reviews—people who choose to publish, and continue to publish, often do so out of deep-rooted ties to their own identity and to leverage positive change in the world. This is, in some ways, the ideal of the production of scientific knowledge—the drive to see change, to understand, and to discover.

Part III: Concepts and Activities for Shaping Your Identity as an Expert

The question of "why do you write" is a complex one, where writers navigate between the external pressures of "publish or perish" with their own goals, curiosity, and aspirations. All writing for publication is identity work, which returns us to our threshold concept:

> ***Threshold Concept:*** *Writing for publication is identity work where all writers have layered extrinsic and intrinsic motivations, being closely connected to identity, values, and the work they want to do in the world.*

We can see this threshold concept weaving through the major themes

7. This this motivation is very important to me and is part of the reason that this book was written. The untimely passing of my own dissertation director, mentor, and friend, Dr. Linda Bergmann, encouraged me to publish work that carried on her legacy and in some cases, replicating and extending her work. This book is one of those outcomes.

explored in the first part of this chapter, and being able to cross the threshold includes understanding:

- Publish or perish is an extrinsic motivational factor that impacts emerging scholars and some expert scholars. As scholars move from graduate school or gain tenure and continue in more secure positions, motivations turn more intrinsic
- A wide range of extrinsic motivations exist for scholars tied to their desire to use their research to leverage change in the world
    - As part of this, many scholars seek to publish in relationship to their personal identities (privilege or minority status, ethnic and racial background, religious identity, language status, etc.)
    - Many scholars identify change in the world, particularly at the intersection between their disciplinary knowledge and areas of social concern, such as political upheaval
    - Scholars also write because they have curiosity and burning questions and they recognize that writing for publication is a core way of building the fields, and their own knowledge. This is tied directly with their desire to leverage change.
- Writing may be used as an adaptive technology for those of marginalized status who may not be heard or well-received when speaking or using other forms of discourse attached to their bodies
- Scholars may also write to honor a person and carry on a legacy of those who have passed
    - Scholars also recognize that writing offers substantial intrinsic (internal benefit), writers are motivated because writing brings them joy, allows them to get into flow states, and build their own knowledge and craft as writers.

As we began to explore in this chapter, being able to articulate and enact a scholarly agenda and write successfully for publication involves a number of factors. We might even think about these in terms of a modified hierarchy of needs: the most basic concern is having one's material and labor conditions more stable so that a publish or perish model is less pressing. Despite this pressing publish or perish motivation, which is necessarily where nearly all emerging scholars begin, emerging scholars were excited to talk about publications in terms their identities, the work in the world they wanted to do, the questions they have they want to answer, the problems they want to solve, and the intrinsic benefits they found in writing. Thus, this chapter has demonstrated a trajectory of motivation that moves beyond the material realities of publish and perish. Consider where you are on your own journey.

Publication is also deeply tied to the identities, lived experiences, and backgrounds of the writers—each successful writer chooses an area of research and field that allows them to meaningfully engage in the creation of knowledge, do

important work in the world, help themselves and others, build knowledge, satisfy their curiosity, and/or leverage their work to help others. One of the distinctions that makes an expert writer an expert writer is how that record of publication leads to the ability to articulate and enact a complex research agenda, one that is tied to specific work in the field that is important to the scholar and is tied to the scholar's identity. Understanding and being able to start articulating that agenda is one of the ways you can successfully cross these thresholds.

This chapter has offered you a roadmap for how to cultivate a meaningful, healthy relationship with academic scholarly agenda by exploring the motivations of writing beyond the publish or perish model and offering a range of support to begin to develop your own long-term motivations and enjoyment of writing. To me, the benefits of writing experienced here are why I sit down to write every-day—to make change in the world, to help further my own knowledge, to satisfy my curiosity, to grow as a person, to honor my mentor's legacy, and to experience the joyfulness of writing. Activities in this chapter help you engage with your own motivations and identities in writing for publication.

Establishing a Scholarly Agenda

One of the major motivations for writing is also found through emerging scholars gaining experience with how academic conversations work and the power of publication. Once emerging scholars experience even one successful publication, their relationships with their identities, their topics of interest, their field, and their scholarly agenda deepens. With each successful publication, they are able to better articulate and understand who they are and what they value and their relationship with writing grows.

Articulating a scholarly publishing agenda is deeply tied to one's identity and work is a developmental process, a process supported by mentoring, peers, and direct experience. As we have explored, you may not be fully free to explore the things that really matter to you (which may not be as marketable). This was expressed clearly by one of the graduate student survey respondents:

> I really struggle with academic writing, but I think a large part of that is that I'm still in the schooling phase where I can't fully focus on what I'm feeling passionate about. While my dissertation topic is a passion, it's its own kind of beast and is more draining than exciting to write, and it takes all my time so I can't indulge in publications I'd be more emphatic about.

This emerging scholar has things they would like to write, even seeing some publications as an "indulgence" until school is over, and the dissertation is complete.

But another reason is that it takes time for an emerging scholar to understand the power and impact that publications can have on the field. A good example

of this is in Gina's experiences with her first article, described above. It was only through the successful publication of her first article that she was able to understand the power and voice that publication gave her—and fueled from that empowering experience, she began working on other publications.

Identity-based motivations transcend a single writing project—they are tied to a longer-term engagement with a scholarly trajectory and other related work in the world that is important and meaningful to their identity, that continues to shape that identity, and that allows them to cultivate further expertise. Different articles, research projects and related service or teaching projects help them address these issues over time. If you are struggling with motivations beyond a publish or perish mindset, you might recognize a "not yet" moment here (see Chapter 7) and a chance to grow into such an agenda.

For many fields, the specialization you develop as a scholar is often directly tied to a particular expertise for broader work you do as faculty member or in service to your university, community, or profession. This isn't always the case, but typically speaking, the more you are able to align these different parts of academic life, the more effective you will be, especially when attempting to land your first full time academic position post-graduation. Most people who pursue writing for publication are doing so with part-time or full-time appointments in higher education, and thus, for many at non-R1 institutions, publications may be tied to the other work we do with students. Let's look at three such scholars as examples of how this specialization may tie to the kinds of work they end up doing.

For example, emerging scholar Emilio, who recently moved into a new role as an assistant professor after graduation, is able to clearly articulate his research agenda as follows,

> As a scholar, my work focuses largely on students' development of conceptions around writing and writing misconceptions that students might have, as well as developing identifications around writing or relationships around writing. … When students come with beliefs or emotional or relational and identification almost, statements like, "I hate writing" or "I'm not a writer"… How do these statements reflect on the way students engage with their writing practice? And, how does that change as they develop more accurate conceptions about how writing is used in professions, degrees, disciplines? Thus, a lot of my work tends to be within the writing in the disciplines, writing across the curriculum field, and draws a lot from recent scholarship developing in threshold concepts, activity theory, communities of practice. *This scholarship overlaps with writing centers and the work I do here as a space where students are doing some very intentional and deep negotiating with writing. In the writing center, students work with*

> *the writing consultant and are being challenged in terms of their thinking about writing process especially and conceptions about who writes and how writing might be done.* (My emphasis added)

In Emilio's case, we have both his specific scholarly agenda, and how he sees his scholarly agenda linked to the work he does as a writing center director and individual supporting writing in the disciplines in his new job. That is, Emilio is thinking about—and articulating—not only what he's interested in as a scholar but how that specific research interest is tied to the specific work he was hired to do.

Emilio's case illustrates an important principle with regards to scholarly agendas: the need to articulate the relationship between a scholarly agenda that demonstrates alignment with the needs of the university and program (who might hire them or who is thinking about hiring them). The further the scholarly agenda is from any specific work that people are hired to do, the more challenging the job market process may become.

You might hear from faculty in their comfortable tenured positions that it is best to pursue your passions and interests, and that choice should be the only thing driving what projects you work on and what you write. However, given today's job market realities, I believe that one should be more pragmatic—passions and interests are wonderful, but not if the specialization is so unmarketable that you cannot find a job. One piece of advice I give my students is this: do your dissertation and focus your primary scholarly agenda while in graduate school on things that will get you hired but that still directly align to the work of the field that you want to do and see yourself doing. If you are excited about teaching writing, do something in line that makes you a better teacher of writing. If you are excited about technical communication, do a dissertation in usability and UX experience. Think first about the dream job you want to have (your future self, see above activity), the work you want to do every day, and make your choice on a publishing agenda based on that work. The alternative is to work on a topic that has immediate and important benefits to stakeholders or in your community, where the applicability and importance is clear.

You can always develop a sub-specialization later or do that quirky fun project you have in mind for something that is not as high stakes as a dissertation. But choosing specializations that are very far removed from the work you want to do after graduation will make it much more difficult for you to land a job where you might engage in that work. I suggest you balance what you are interested in with what the job market is looking for (which you can easily find out by reading job ads from the last few years) and use that to help decide on which of your many interests you want to focus on. Remember your scholarly agenda is a lifetime pursuit—there will be plenty of time to explore other areas of interest at later points.

The specialization area that you choose doesn't just impact the kinds of jobs you might take, but it also connects to your place within the broader discipline,

which would include the conferences you might attend, the journals you would read/publish in, the people in the field you would be connected to, the conversations and initiatives in the field you might join, and the ways you might write about your own work.

Let's say you decide to choose a specialization in a less well-known area of the field, something that isn't immediately tied to the core work of your field. If that's the case, you will need to work to articulate and build connections between the work you do, and the kind of work people want to hire you to do. Let's look at a few hypothetical examples from writing studies, my field:

> Roger wants to write a dissertation on the discourse of climate change resistance. From this, he might generalize this work and speak about its connection to environmental writing, but also public rhetoric and national discourse. He could argue that this kind of work would be useful to universities that are working on environmental initiatives, and also tie his work to public rhetoric and rhetorical theory as a whole.
>
> Mary is interested in how people develop or lack agency through their use of language in online health forums. This would tie her work to the rhetoric of health and literacy, and she might be an excellent candidate to teach in a program that has outreach to nursing or medical professions or asks for a writing specialist in those areas.
>
> Finally, Jin is working on a project exploring the linguistic landscape of a rural community in Korea; this would position him to teach courses in sociolinguistics and better support students from rural communities in English Language courses.

While these three projects are less "direct" than those above, they still have clear paths to a broader professional expertise—and those working on the projects are able to articulate that expertise and frame their work in terms of it. In other words, they can negotiate between the broader work of the field and the specific project.

Developing an Academic Specialization and Sub Specializations

Now that we've considered topics and choices, the next question is: how do you develop your scholarly specialization? How does this tie to the specific writing that you do? In most fields, emerging scholars are shooting to develop one primary specialization (what their dissertations are based on and what their first few publications are based on) and one to two secondary specializations. While primary specializations are always tied to dissertations and publications, secondary specializations may be tied to service or teaching specific areas or other

community-based or industry expertise. Your academic specialization comes from a few places:

- **The research of your advisors and mentoring.** Many emerging scholars have agendas in place because of who they work with: your faculty mentors specialize in certain areas, and in joining them (joining their labs, research programs, or as individual mentors) you are apprenticing to that particular broad knowledge area.
- **Your dissertation.** Your dissertation is assumed to be in line with your primary specialization; you can, over time, shift into new and diverse areas, but generally this sets the tone for the first part of your career post-graduate school, certainly, if you are in higher education or seeking a tenure-track job, till post tenure.
- **Your presentations and publications.** The most effective way to be considered an expert on a topic is to publish an academic peer reviewed journal article on that topic. Presentations have far less institutional capital but can still establish a scholarly record, over time, of regular work in an area (see next point).
- **Experience.** You can also establish specializations through the work you do directly. This is especially true for specialized work that is practical and hands on (like assessment, public service, or administration). The more work you can do, the more vita lines you have, the more likely you are to demonstrate "expertise" in an area. Sometimes experiences that allow you to develop expertise come to you, but other times, you must seek these things out.

To establish and maintain an academic specialization or sub-specialization, each CV line counts. A research specialization is not a single project; rather, it is a sustained and evolving inquiry into a larger topic area; it is something that you are regularly engaging with and thinking about (and not just with your dissertation, but beyond it). Some questions for you to consider are:

How might your dissertation lead you to other interesting studies? How might a new setting make for a good replication or extension of your dissertation work? These kinds of questions can help you set the stage for what is to come.

Likewise, establishing your scholarly identity and specialization, then, come through two things:

- Lines on a CV or resumé that demonstrate your specialization through research, teaching, service, and so forth.
- Articulation and framing. Your specialization isn't just about what you do, but how you are able to articulate it to others. Even if you have an amazing topic and area, if you aren't able to coherently talk about that area to a group of people, you are unlikely to be successful in promoting yourself and in establishing your expertise. You will likely have to talk to different kinds of audiences about your specialization, which might include other

specialists in the same area, other members of your field, other academics and administrators in different fields, individuals not in academia with a wide range of backgrounds. Towards that end, you want to have a sense of the practical, direct, and tangible benefits of your specialization and be able to articulate this to a number of different groups.

Graduate students also often want to know how many specializations you should have. I recommend that you have one primary specialization and one to two sub-specializations (at least one should be teaching or administrative focused). Here's the thing: if you are hired into a tenure track position, your new institution expects you to be really good at one thing. Ideally, they are going to hire you in part because your specialization offers something new to them, something that they need, or is in line with their program in some way. At the same time, they also want to see that you are experienced and well-rounded and can contribute to many different initiatives on campus. And yet, if you do too many things in too many different areas, particularly with publication and presentations, you appear scattered and not a "focused" scholar. Achieving this balance, then, takes careful consideration.

Activity 6.1: Prompts for Exploring Intrinsic Motivation and Scholarly Agendas in Writing for Publication

The following questions for reflection or discussion with peers can help you examine your own intrinsic reasons for writing and the work you would like to do in the field. You can use these questions as a guide to help shape your own reflections on a scholarly agenda.

1. What are problems you see in the field that you feel may need to be addressed?
2. What unique experiences, identities, or perspectives do you have that may serve you in publication? How can you leverage these perspectives?
3. What is the message or work you want to do in the world?
4. What are you curious about? What questions remain unanswered from previous data collected, investigations, or previous work you've done?
5. What are you really excited to create/share/do in terms of the field?
6. What were the reasons you decided to pursue a path within academia, and how might those reasons play into a scholarly agenda?

You can combine this with Activities 6.5 and 6.6 later in this chapter.

Activity 6.2: Envisioning Your Future Self

Using the discussion questions above, write a short narrative describing your future self as a scholar, in five or 10 years. Use the language of certainty ("I am

…", "I will do …") vs. the language of possibility ("I hope to …" or "I'd like to …") as you craft your narrative. The narrative can be specific or less specific, but in it, really explore the kind of work you'd like to do in the world, particularly when you have less pressing extrinsic factors at play.

This activity draws upon the "future self" and "pedagogy of possibility" literature (Galloway & Meston, 2022; Nurra & Oyserman, 2018) to ask you to write a narrative or tell a story to envision your future self. Future-self pedagogy is powerful because it helps you envision—and then take steps to enact—the future. But it is also difficult. When I've done future-self activities with my own graduate students, they often describe the challenges present in trying to envision their futures as scholars. The key to this activity is to see it as a chance to dream—the sky is the limit!

Activity 6.3: Explore Writing as an Adaptive Technology

As we can see from many of the narratives, writing is also poised as a unique tool to help scholars overcome systemic biases that are present, biases often tied to who they are as people: women, minorities, people with disabilities, people experiencing agism, multilingual scholars or even those new to the field and finding their voice.

One term that can be used for this is "adaptive technology" which in the most traditional sense refers to technologies that assist people with disabilities, such as a screen reader or screen magnification for a person with blindness. In a recent article on self-sponsored writing, Heather Lindenman et al. (2024) noted that writers explicitly choose to use writing to mitigate identity-related factors such as speaking with a lisp. We see a similar approach being used by marginalized scholars—they use writing as an adaptive technology to circumvent marginalization based on the body they present to the world.

For scholars who are in the majority, they are very cognizant of their power and voice and work to use their privilege to leverage change on behalf of others, do work in the world to support people, and seek a more just and ethical society. Consider your own identity in the world and consider the following questions in reflective writing or in a small group setting:

- Have you experienced a time where you felt silenced because of who you are or how you present?
- Have you experienced issues in feeling heard or seen?
- How might writing for publication allow you to have voice or visibility in ways you haven't considered before?

Consider the narratives presented in this chapter—who do you most align with and why? Consider your answers to these questions in light of your experiences or plans in writing for publication.

Activity 6.4: Your Relationship to Writing

Take time to explore the intrinsic benefits of writing by considering your previous experiences with writing, your relationship, and the times that you have enjoyed your own process. Much of enjoyment comes not only from the act itself but the mental state and framing through which we approach a situation. To use a metaphor shared to me by my grandfather, it's as easy to stack wood with a smile on your face as it is in anger—either way the wood gets stacked, but you only enjoy it with a smile. Thus, consider responding or talking through the following prompt: You and scholarly writing are in a relationship. Describe that relationship.

After you write your prompt, reflect on the following:

1. What does responding to this prompt teach you about your relationship with writing? Are you neutral, positive, adversarial, or some other quality?
2. From this, do you feel you need to make any changes to improve your relationship with writing? If so, what changes might you want to make?
3. Would you give a different answer for another kind of writing in your life (e.g., personal writing, blogging, poetry). If so, reflect on the differences.

Activity 6.5: Articulating Your Agenda and Identity

In order to explore your own growing scholarly agenda, consider the following activity. First, complete Activities 6.1 and 6.2 above. These will help you establish who you are and what you are hoping to do with your publications and envisioning your future self. From that activity, work to articulate your scholarly agenda. You can use the following template:

My research focuses on [broad topic]. I study this because [problems, issues, or other reasons that matter. Specifically, I study [topic] using [methods]. This allows me to offer [solutions.]

Optional for some scholars: My identity is [x] which ties to [topic].

Activity 6.6: Academic Branding and Sparkle Words

Part of how you can articulate your agenda and appear like a focused scholar is by establishing what I call your "sparkle words," that is, words that are cornerstone to the work you do.[8] You might think about these as your core search terms or keywords that help you describe your work. Another way to think about this is that you are developing your own unique "academic brand," and your sparkle words are the key terms that are associated with your particular brand. Some examples from my field, writing studies, might include:

8. I am indebted to Dr. Rick Johnson Sheehan, who taught me this term while I was a doctoral student assisting him with grant writing seminars at Purdue University.

> Digital writing, digital rhetoric, multimodal composition, writing transfer, second language writing, translingualism, writing assessment, indigenous rhetorics, public rhetoric, metacognition, individual learning differences, writing centers, composition pedagogy, feminist theory, queer theory, critical pedagogy, open access

An example from sociology might look like this:

> social organization, refugee studies, social change, human ecology, environmental sociology, population and demographics, medical sociology, urban sociology, law and society, industrial sociology, computational sociology.

One strategy to help establish your academic brand is to make sure that every publication, presentation, or workshop that you do includes your sparkle words. So, for myself, as a learning transfer scholar, I work to make sure that every publication, presentation or workshop that I offer as the words "transfer" in them; this helps establish that I am working in a core area over time, which is obvious in my CV. But it also helps me with being consistent in my own work.[9]

Sparkle words are all about association. When someone reviews your CV or sees you give a presentation, they will likely associate you with a few keywords. Over a period of time, these keywords can become incredibly helpful in helping you market yourself and in promoting your own research agenda. That's in the future—for now, think about the core words that you want to define your work. You should select no more than three to four terms; any more than that and you'll start looking scattered.

Create a list of sparkle words or keywords that are associated with the scholarly agenda you want to explore. Review the agenda you created with the "articulating your agenda and identity" activity above and revise it based on those sparkle words.

Activity 6.7: Venn Diagram of You and the Field

In Chapter 5, we explored a Venn diagram that put your work in conversation with other work in the field. You can use a similar activity here, but instead of thinking about a single project, think about your agenda as a whole.

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9. It is common in some disciplines for conferences to have edgy or strange themes—which work well for the conference but don't always translate well in the long term. Given the importance of establishing your own academic brand, I would strongly suggest staying away from putting conference theme titles in your presentations. Five years from now, nobody will remember the theme of a particular conference, like "Soaring Even Higher" but they will still be reading the lines on your CV. If you want to tie your work to the conference theme, do so in the body of your proposal, not in the title.

As part of this framing, you might return to the Venn diagram activity in Chapter 5, only in this case, rather than exploring a specific article, you can use this same activity to explore the entirety of your specialization (see Figure 6.1).

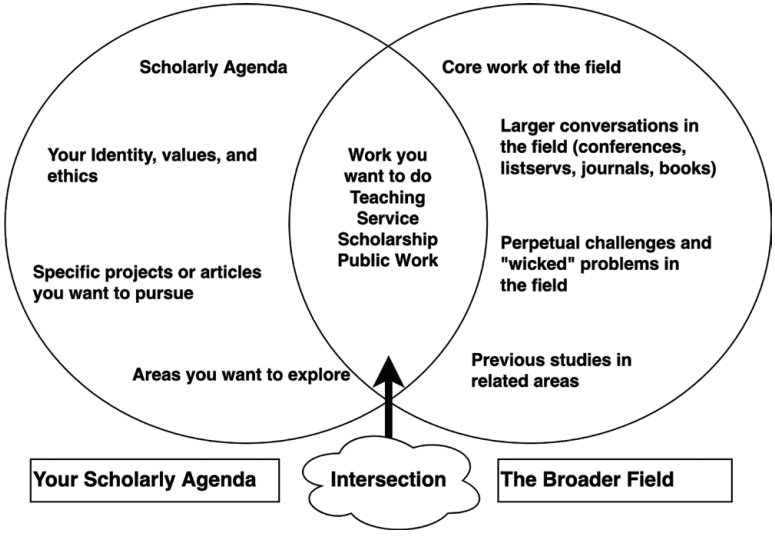

Figure 6.1 Intersection of your agenda and the broader field.