CHAPTER 9.

MOVING BEYOND "A BASKET OF SKILLS AND A BUNCH OF PUBLICATIONS": DEVELOPING A WRITERLY IDENTITY THROUGH FACILITATING FACULTY WRITING GROUPS

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Abstract. *We explore how facilitating writing groups impacts faculty identity, particularly for women faculty members. Drawing on data from a large women's writing program, the chapter discusses how facilitators balance the dual role of participant and leader, and how these experiences help resist competitive pressures in academia.*

Writing is central to the tenure and promotion processes of faculty from all disciplines, yet few faculty members self-identify as writers, instead understanding themselves as teachers, professors, or researchers (Banks & Flinchbaugh, 2013; Elbow & Sorcinelli, 2006). Writing, for most faculty, is an activity in service of their professional identity—something they must do, and do well, but not an integral part of their identities. This limited understanding of writing is at odds with the field of writing studies, which understands writing as a means of developing and expressing professional identity. As Estrem (2015) has explained, "Writing—as a means of thinking, a form of inquiry and research, and a means for communication within a discipline—plays a critical role in … identity transformation and expansion" (p. 55). The subject of developing professional identities through writing is common in scholarship about graduate writers (Curry, 2016; Martinez, 2016; Pemberton, 2019). However, there is a tacit assumption that faculty have done this complex identity work and now have fairly static, fully formed professional identities, an assumption that belies the shifting, contingent, evolving nature of identity and the developmental processes faculty continue to experience.

The centrality of writing to the development of professional identity is just as important for faculty as it is for student writers, yet little research addresses faculty writerly identity. This gap in the research is unsurprising, given the dearth of research on faculty writers in general, which this collection seeks to bolster. Tarabochia (2020) and Werder (2013) have argued that the intrapersonal dimension, which Werder (2013) describes as "how one views one's sense of identity" (p. 281), is central to faculty writers' development, understanding identity as part of the more comprehensive construct of self-authorship. Tarabochia and Madden (2018) found professional identity to be a concern of early-career faculty across disciplines as they try to establish themselves as scholars in their chosen fields. Writerly identity, or what Williams (2018) called "literate identity," has implications for writers' agency, "the perception, drawn from experiences and dispositions, that the individual can, in a given social context, act, make a decision, and make meaning" (p. 10). Although Williams studied student writers, the interconnectedness of writerly identity and agency can be extended to faculty writers. Moreover, there is evidence that writing programs geared toward enhancing faculty writing productivity are more effective when faculty understand themselves as writers (Banks & Flinchbaugh, 2013). Wells and Söderlund (2018) and Tulley (2018) have performed important empirical inquiries into rhetoric and composition faculty's experiences with writing for publication. However, more research is needed to explore the formation, expression, and development of professional and writerly identities for faculty across disciplines. In addition, further inquiry is needed to examine writing support structures that could enhance the development of faculty's professional and writerly identities.

Lee and Boud (2003) found evidence suggesting institutionally embedded multidisciplinary faculty writing groups could support this growth. They described writing groups as local sites of practice where academic identities were developed, as they "reposition participants as active scholarly writers within a peer-learning framework" (p. 198). Their investigation focused on faculty writing groups centered on peer feedback. Although this structure is the most common described in the literature, many models exist with varying membership, purposes, activities, and other dimensions (Haas, 2014). Further work is needed to investigate whether other writing group structures, such as "write-on-site" groups where participants meet to work independently, may serve faculty in similar capacities.

Most of the existing literature focusing on writing groups and professional identities is not based on empirical research; instead, it relies heavily upon the authors' personal experiences in a group, primarily as participants but also as writing program administrators or faculty development specialists engaged in faculty support. Little research provides perspectives other than the authors'; a

notable exception is work by Tarabochia and Madden (2018). Research using qualitative methodologies has the potential to increase the perspectives involved in the research beyond the authors' personal experiences and increase the diversity of the writing group participants under study.

WRITING PROGRAM BACKGROUND

This study explored a large-scale writing program developed at an institution during its transition to Carnegie Tier 1 status. We describe the group as women-centered because it is designed to support faculty who identify as women, and conversations and materials often focus on this population. However, the program is open to faculty of all genders and academic appointment types. The women-centered nature of the group is significant because of gender disparities in tenure and promotion found throughout academia (Misra et al., 2011), including among faculty in language fields as found in a survey of MLA members (Modern Language Association, 2009). The MLA report indicated that tenured women faculty dedicated two fewer hours per week to research compared to men; conversely, they dedicated more time to course preparation (1.8 hours per week) and grading or providing feedback on student work (1.6 hours per week). Although these disparities may seem small, "over the years the accumulation of these microdifferences may add up to the major inequity that is the substantial difference in time between men and women attaining the rank of professor" (p. 2). Considering gendered differences in time spent on research, writing programs have the potential to help address the larger structural issues that affect women faculty.

The program in this study currently serves approximately 100 faculty members from 11 colleges and more than 30 departments. The largest user group is assistant professors, but faculty of all ranks, including those who are not tenure eligible, are represented. The program's primary activity is meeting weekly for write-on-site groups; therefore, for the purposes of this study, we refer to the "writing program" when considering the administrative or holistic qualities of the program and "writing groups" when referring specifically to activities that occur in the virtual and physical writing group spaces. Other program activities include writing retreats, professional development events, and networking events. The program is structured such that faculty members are divided into approximately 10 writing groups, each of which is led by a faculty facilitator. Each group meets for three hours each week: 15-30 minutes of discussion time, usually centered on a brief reading or discussion topic, followed by independent writing time. Faculty commit to participate in one semester at a time, but the majority stay in the program for multiple semesters, and many continue to

participate for much longer; about half of current members have been in the group for more than two years. The authors offer a detailed description of the group's structure and benefits, as well as its women-centered focus on feminist principles in other publications (Sharp & Messuri, 2023).

Over the course of the program's history, 20 faculty have served as facilitators (typically 10 to 11 serve in a given semester). They are recruited by the program co-directors based on their past experiences as strong participants in the group. Only one facilitator was invited to lead a group without prior participation because her history of winning grants made her a logical fit for a grant writing group being developed at that time. Program co-directors intentionally recruit facilitators from diverse personal backgrounds and from various departments and ranks, though they are typically already tenured to protect junior faculty from dedicating time to an additional service commitment. Most facilitators serve for multiple semesters; several have chosen to continue in this role for several years.

Prior to the beginning of each fall or spring semester, faculty facilitators are assigned to one writing group with 6 to 15 faculty members; most groups have 10 to 12 members. Each week, facilitators are responsible for leading 30-minute discussions at the beginning of the writing session as well as maintaining regular communication among group members and assisting in the administration of the group (e.g., building a "syllabus" of readings used during meetings, planning writing retreats, administering surveys to participants, and writing reports to program sponsors). To recognize their labor, facilitators receive a modest stipend of $500 per semester, compensation that was enabled by recently established permanent funding from the provost's office and the research office.

METHODS

STUDY DESIGN

In the present study (IRB 2019-60), we examined faculty facilitators' experiences and identities linked to their role as leaders in a women faculty writing program. Because facilitators take leadership roles in these writing groups and dedicate their intellectual and emotional labor to sustaining the program, they are a particularly rich group to study when considering the effects of writing groups on faculty's writerly identities. During the focus groups, participants were asked questions about their experiences facilitating a group as well as how those experiences influenced their professional identities as faculty members and writers. The focus groups, which were conducted virtually, were recorded and transcripts were created.

PARTICIPANTS

Within a span of a month, we conducted four virtual focus groups with three participants in each group (total participants = 12). Participants were from a wide variety of disciplines, including English (n=2), education (n=2), STEM (n=1), law (n=2), history (n=2), anthropology (n=1), Russian (n=1), and communication studies (n=1). Participants included five full professors, five associate professors, one assistant professor, and one retired associate professor. Three of the participants also served as administrators (i.e., department chair, associate department chair, associate vice president of research, interim vice provost) during a portion of the time they were facilitators. One-fourth of the sample identified as women of color. Most of the sample had facilitated four or more semesters, two participants had facilitated during one semester, and two had facilitated three or fewer semesters. Seven of the participants had facilitated in both the face-to-face groups and virtual groups; four facilitated face-to-face groups only and one facilitated virtual groups only. At the time of participating in the research, half of the participants no longer served as facilitators. One facilitator took a position at another university, several became administrators, and one (the assistant professor) was asked by her department to stop facilitating because she had too much service outside of her department. Some facilitators led general writing groups that were open to all writing program members, while others led groups dedicated to women faculty of color, faculty writing grant and fellowship applications, and parents of young children. All but one had been involved in the writing groups as participants before becoming facilitators.

ANALYSIS

We watched the focus group video recordings and read the transcripts from the focus groups multiple times. As we engaged with the data, we kept running notes of the ideas and concepts emerging from the data. We drew on the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965), whereby each relevant idea in the data was compared to previous ideas and either integrated within a previously noted idea or added as new idea/concept. Then, we threaded together the ideas to develop broader themes.

POSITIONALITY

Our analyses and interpretations were necessarily influenced by our identities and experiences. Both of us are white, cisgender women from the United States, identities which are especially important to consider in the context of a

women-centered group with members (including the study participants) who have diverse intersecting identities. As program co-directors, we hoped to create space for facilitators with different racial, ethnic, linguistic, and national backgrounds. That diversity is reflected in our participants, who were from that pool of facilitators. As authors, we recognize the limitations of our personal perspectives, and, in response, we have intentionally highlighted the voices of our participants through our extensive use of direct quotations.

Our institutional appointments and disciplinary backgrounds are also reflected in this research project. Kristin is the Managing Director of the Writing Centers (a staff position at her institution) with a research background in writing studies. Elizabeth is Director of the Women and Gender Studies Program and Professor of Human Development and Family Studies. As co-founders, former facilitators, and current participants in the group, we came to this project with personal experiences of the writing program as well as existing relationships with study participants. We needed to consider how our own personal and professional investment in the program might influence our interpretations of our findings. Therefore, in writing this chapter, we critically and recursively reflected on how our perspectives related to the focus group data with the intention of mitigating potential bias.

FINDINGS

Writing group facilitators indicated that participating in the writing group, whether in the role of member or facilitator, strongly affected their writing practices, resulting in significant changes in their understandings of themselves and others as writers. Facilitators described joining the writing group, and specifically forming a writing community and learning more about others' writing practices, as "transformative" and a "paradigm shift." Throughout the focus groups, there was a sense that the act of joining the group caused the most significant shifts in both writing practices and scholarly or writerly identities. However, facilitators noted that taking on the leadership role of facilitator enhanced their identities as scholars and writers. The significance placed on the role of facilitator versus member was most pronounced in those who had facilitated for several years versus those who only facilitated for a semester or two.

Group Identity

Facilitators felt a very strong sense of identification with the writing program. In the context of a question about professional identity, a facilitator said that "being part of the program is part of your professional identity … whether you're

a participant or facilitator." Another called it "a big part of my identity as a faculty member" at our institution. For one person who has participated since the group's inception and facilitated for one year, identification with the writing program superseded identification with her department, which is typically a faculty member's strongest affiliation:

> I don't have a very strong connection to my department at all, but I feel very connected to people across the university because we've been in writing group together, and I've always said the writing group ... [is] my [home].

This affinity with the writing group led some facilitators to take on the leadership role because they felt a desire to contribute to the group. One facilitator said, "I feel like it was kind of my duty to ... give back to the program what I thought it had given me." Another noted that this sense of identification with the group is common to many program participants and could motivate others to act in a leadership capacity as needed: "I have the sense that any of us would do it ... if a group needs to be led by somebody, then we step in, and we do it."

Several facilitators, especially those who served in that role for several years, said their sense of identification with the program grew stronger when they moved from program participant to facilitator, in terms of both how they understood themselves and how they were viewed by others. Several noted that after they became facilitators, they were more likely to promote the writing group to others, especially faculty in their departments and faculty who were new to the university. One called herself "the champion for" the program to others in her department; another said she had become "an ambassador of the program." Facilitators also indicated that acting in this leadership role enriched their connections with other group members as they developed stronger one-on-one relationships beyond what members typically develop with one another. Several spoke about their emotional investment in their group members' writing, enthusiastically recounting members' accomplishments that felt like personal victories. One facilitator's enthusiasm was palpable as she talked about her group member's recent book coming out: "I was so excited, and I ... bought the book, and ... it arrived, and I was just, like, *so excited* ... because, you know, we had been in group together for years, and I had sort of been with her on that journey." She went on to explain that, in general,

> I feel like I spend more of my professional time thinking about what other people are doing and just being more ... emotionally wrapped up in that experience, and I think that's been a really good thing, I think that there's ... kind of a soli-

darity that comes from that, and also just a lot of professional satisfaction in seeing other people succeed.

Some facilitators commented that they were specifically motivated by promoting the success of other women. As one explained,

I love this program, I'm committed to this program, I believe in what we're doing, and I'm excited to be a part of … the people who are trying to push it forward even further … I find that work really rewarding … particularly in this [context] because I felt like I was helping … women in particular, and it was making the university a better place.

Here, the women-centered focus of the group contributed to the facilitator's identification with the group as well as her sense of satisfaction.

Professional Identity: Mentors, Leaders, and Administrators

When asked about how leading the writing groups influenced their professional identities, facilitators offered a variety of answers, including seeing themselves and others seeing them as mentors, leaders, and administrators. They considered how the program helped them reflect on their identities as leaders and (possible) administrators in the future.

Mentors

One of the central features of the writing program is the bi-directional mentoring that occurs within the groups. Women faculty of different ranks and different disciplinary backgrounds are intentionally placed in each group to encourage mentoring. Among facilitators who discussed their identity as mentors within and beyond the writing groups, there was an overarching sense that they found value in both mentoring and learning from other women faculty in the writing groups. Almost all facilitators indicated they had acquired new writing techniques as well as time and energy management advice from women in their groups. For example, several facilitators discussed learning to set smaller writing goals and developing more effective goal setting strategies in general. One facilitator told us that she learned from other women the "aggressive use of the Outlook calendar to block out time when no one can schedule a meeting" as one way to get more of her writing completed.

In addition to learning from other women faculty, the facilitators enjoyed the opportunity to mentor and contribute to the success of women faculty members. In the words of one facilitator, being a facilitator "augments the part of my

professional identity that speaks to mentoring and supporting other colleagues" and "supplements" other mentoring roles she has.

In the context of the mentoring aspect of their professional identities, several facilitators indicated that the multidisciplinary nature of the groups made their work especially rewarding. One facilitator explained that she liked "mentoring" and "helping … other faculty … not just in my department or discipline or college or anything like that." Similarly, another facilitator felt that as writing group facilitators, we are "providing a real contribution to advance scholarship … all across departments. That feels pretty good."

A few facilitators specified that they especially appreciated the opportunity to mentor junior colleagues. In particular, those who were further along in their careers saw it as an opportunity to share wisdom with junior faculty. One explained, "I had been experiencing ageism and sort of a dismissal within my home department" and was gratified to find that group members found her "seasoned advice actually useful." Another said the mentoring role has "allowed me or given me the space to start embracing the fact that I'm an elder professor and being okay with that, and that does have some value." She found this perspective especially rewarding in the context of working with more junior faculty, saying,

> I'm humbled. … They're amazing. They're doing such wonderful work that it's like, God, I wish I was that smart when I was in their place, you know? … We women are doing so much good and such amazing research that we really are contributing to the university, to the knowledge base, to the web of knowledge, and I just think everybody should know about it.

Leaders

Facilitators felt that this leadership role empowered them to shape the writing program. One commented, "I appreciate the fact that I was now at the decision-making table, at the big kids' table" and helping to make decisions about the syllabus, reports to sponsors, and other matters that affected the entire program. Others said they felt "empowered" to take care of issues they had noticed, ranging from "creature comforts," such as snacks and room temperature, to managing the conversations at the beginning of each session. One facilitator felt empowered because she was able to enhance what the program had previously offered her as a member. For example, she was able to get her group members parking passes, and she provided snacks at every session.

With this leadership identity, many facilitators felt an increased sense of responsibility, which some found stressful or anxiety-provoking, but others

found rewarding. One facilitator said she possessed a "hostess" mentality in which she felt obligated to ensure everyone was okay and getting what they needed. Because of the hostess role, some of the facilitators indicated that they were able to get more research done when they were members than when they were facilitators. A related theme was the sense of obligation to model productive writing practices to the group, often based on the readings and discussions shared with group members. Common examples facilitators noted included planning their writing sessions, focusing on writing during group meetings, completing the assigned readings, and identifying additional writing times during the week. Many facilitators talked about the challenges of managing discussions at the beginning of each session, especially ensuring that participants did not steer the conversation in an unproductive, negative direction; interrupt others; or dominate the discussion. These dominators, or "super talkers," were mentioned in every focus group and were considered disruptive because they "hijacked" conversations, silencing other voices and causing discussions to run long, impinging upon dedicated writing time. Some facilitators found managing such situations challenging because, as one explained, "I am just a peer … it's not like when you're teaching a class." They shared techniques they found successful, such as setting a timer or inviting other members to contribute to the conversation.

Acting in the role of facilitator caused some to inhabit leadership roles, even when they were not otherwise inclined to do so. One noted, "I don't necessarily see myself as an authority figure, but sometimes the facilitator situation requires, like, a little bit of 'authoritating.'" Another said she does not typically see herself as a leader, but this group challenged her to take on a leadership role outside of her comfort zone: "I'm not a leader in any sense, in any way, and so it is pulling me out of … my natural introvert, reticent, 'I'm going to sit in the back row'" means of interacting. Taken together, these themes suggest that performing the facilitator role in and of itself is a form of leadership development.

Administrators

As facilitators self-identified with the writing program, so, too, did their colleagues, department chairs, and other administrators identify them with this work, especially as it applies to faculty development and diversity, equity, and inclusion. One facilitator noted that this recognition has created "more service opportunities for better and for worse," an experience shared by several in the focus group. One facilitator was asked to facilitate a similar writing group for faculty of all genders in her department. However, she declined the request to facilitate because she believed the group would replicate gendered dynamics that occur elsewhere (e.g., women being expected to contribute food, conversations

centering on competition instead of collaboration). Another said she became known as the "gender mentorship writing person" and was asked to chair a gender equity task force. She later moved to a different institution and was nominated to be the Associate Dean for Faculty Development within her first three months. She commented that her involvement in the writing program "created a lot of opportunities quickly" in her new setting. This identification of facilitators with the writing group benefited the program as well, as when two facilitators leveraged their positions as administrators to assist the program in gaining permanent funding from the institution's upper administration.

Several of the facilitators held administrative positions in their departments or in upper administration, either during or after their time as facilitators in the writing group. One facilitator identified "synergies" with her role in the research office, as it allowed her to encourage writing group members and especially junior faculty to apply for funding they may not have known about otherwise. However, several of these women who were no longer facilitators left due to time constraints related to these administrative responsibilities, an example of one downside of facilitators gaining the leadership skills needed to succeed as administrators. Women faculty (these facilitators included) already have disproportionate service loads, and adopting new administrative roles may leave them with little time for writing.

In a few cases, facilitating the groups helped create an identity perceived by others that suggested the facilitators were capable administrators. As previously mentioned, one facilitator was nominated for an administrative role just a few months into her position at a new institution. Another facilitator started warming up to the idea of being an administrator—something she had avoided for most of her career.

TRANSLATING WRITING PRACTICES TO OTHER CONTEXTS

Facilitators also translated their experiences with the writing group to other contexts. As one facilitator explained, "I found several levels of using my facilitating skills and applied them to my other duties." The experience of facilitating enhanced facilitators' domain knowledge related to writing, as well as their mentoring, leadership, and administrative skills, allowing them to translate that knowledge to other contexts.

Facilitators took their administrative knowledge of the writing groups and used them as the basis for similarly structured groups for other faculty in a facilitator's department, for faculty at another institution (after a facilitator suggested it to a friend), and, most commonly, for the graduate students they advise. For example, one facilitator who described a writing group she started for her

doctoral students emphasized the way the group helps them to develop their scholarly identities.

Others reflected on how facilitating the writing group enhanced their work with graduate students regardless of whether they adopted the structure of a writing group. One noted that the leadership and mentoring aspects of the facilitator role had "transferred … into the way that I approach writing processes and working with my graduate students. There are some things that I was doing, but others that … just through facilitating the group, that I incorporated into the writing processes with them, not just as they're working for degree completion but also in collaborative projects." She went on to describe how she shared insight from her own writing practices as well as those of other writing group members when a graduate student was having trouble with a collaborative writing project.

The writing group also translated into making facilitators more effective in other administrative roles. For example, one facilitator of a grant writing group who later became an interim department chair explained, "Being a facilitator has helped me figure out some of the things that I now, as a department chair, need to impart on my junior faculty that are in my department and just starting out with grant writing." In this way, the writing groups functioned as informal training that facilitators carried into other professional contexts.

WRITERLY IDENTITY

Participants indicated that being a facilitator and a participant in the writing groups enhanced their scholarly identities. For example, one participant reflected on how her understanding of herself as a scholar and writer changed through her participation in the writing groups:

> When I first got a tenure-track job … I viewed [publications] at first as that many disconnected hoops I had to jump through. So, I would jump through this hoop, and then I would jump through the next hoop, and this hoop, and this hoop, and they were unconnected to each other. But being part of the group has helped me coalesce all those hoops into an important part of my job and an important part of my identity, and had I not been in the group I wouldn't think of myself in the same way that I do now that I have a body of work that is united and cohesive and I have developed an expertise on a specific subject. I think, without the support of other women doing the same thing and creating an identity, I

> … would just be a person with a basket of skills and a bunch
> of publications, but I wouldn't understand them all as one
> important part of my job.

Within the groups, interacting with group members and engaging in regular conversations about research and writing enabled facilitators to develop and express scholarly and writerly identities.

Scholarly Identity vs. Writerly Identity

Although many facilitators identified ways the writing program enhanced their scholarly identities, several of their responses indicated tensions between their identities as scholars and their identities as writers. For example, one participant questioned, "Do I think of myself [as writer]? I think of myself as an academic, and part of that is writing." Another said, "I don't see myself as a writer, I see myself as a scholar, and I want to claim that as my identity as a scholar … I communicate through the writing." One facilitator of a writing group focused on grant writing noted that facilitating "reaffirmed my … identity, I think, as a grant writer. I've never thought of myself that way but, you know … I have to live and die by it. If I don't have it, I'm not successful according to the world that we live in."

Disciplinary background played a strong role in determining whether facilitators felt that the writing program enhanced their writerly identity. Prior to joining the writing groups, facilitators who were not English faculty tended to identify as scholars with writing as one task that contributes to their scholarly identity rather than constituting a central part of their identity. After leading the groups and being part of them, several were more comfortable with viewing themselves as writers.

Both English faculty members who were part of the focus groups indicated that they had previously thought of themselves as writers and understood writing as a significant aspect of their identities. One shared:

> English is about writing … [a writerly identity] was some-
> thing that I already had. … This is part of … who you are as
> a professional in English … you think of yourself as someone
> who writes … but the thing that has changed a little bit for
> me … I look back at the things that I've accomplished, the
> work I've done in my career, and I think, "you know what—
> I'm actually okay at this."

This experience of gaining confidence in one's scholarly work and writing abilities was a common theme among facilitators. However, many felt it was

difficult to tease out the identity shifts resulting from progressing in their careers from those caused by participating in and facilitating the writing groups. One said that around the time she became a facilitator, she was getting publications into stronger journals, "and that was really empowering, and so I felt like … dedicating more time into writing … and it wasn't this thing I was trying to squeeze in between putting kids down for naps or grading or whatever else." This theme of increasing the quantity and quality of publications emerged from several facilitators' responses, though most could not attribute it specifically to the facilitator role. For example, another facilitator noted, "The positive support within the group has helped my confidence, but I think some of that would have happened anyways, it's just to a greater degree. It's like the group is a multiplier."

Understanding Other Writers' Experiences

In the context of gaining confidence as a scholar/writer and enhancing writing skills and productivity, many facilitators identified hearing about others' challenges with research and writing as pivotal to their own professional growth. Many facilitators similarly reflected on how group conversations about writing challenges normalized their own struggles with writing, resulting in changes in how they experienced writing and understood themselves as scholars and writers. As one explained, "Because I have watched so many other people struggling the same way that I am struggling [it] has turned my struggle into something that is perfectly normal and part of a process." This understanding resulted in a shift in writerly identity for at least one facilitator. The facilitator who had self-identified as a writer since graduate school went on to explain that gaining an understanding of the experiences of other writers, specifically their struggles, caused this shift in her writerly identity: "That's been kind of empowering to realize … yeah, it is a struggle, it's not that it's not hard, it's not that it's not frustrating and, you know, you want to pull your hair out, but I've actually done well." Another believes that this experience is common among participants in the groups beyond facilitators. She described how, before the writing group formed, "we were all on our little islands, and … you kind of have this idea that there's [sic] these people who are out there who are just, like, tearing through everything, and it's easy for them, and to find out that … maybe those people exist, but most of us are just—it's hard, it's hard, writing is hard." One facilitator reflected on how the writing group disrupted the academic culture of perfectionism, explaining,

> Academia is kind of like social media in a way, where we see
> everybody's successes and we don't necessarily see the shadow
> CV with all the failures, but to meet with people on a week-

> ly basis, and they're like, "I just had nothing in my tank this
> week, I got nothing done," or "I got two rejections on the same
> day, and I'm just … really down," that has kind of helped me
> distance myself emotionally from some of the things I put out,
> and I think I'm more willing to put out things now because,
> if it comes back to me, so what? It's going to come back with
> suggestions, and I can make it better, and I can try again.

Group conversations functioned to demystify individuals' writing processes and experiences, including the challenges members face, thereby altering facilitator understanding of their own writing processes and scholarly or writerly identities. It is important to note there that some of the facilitators mentioned that the women-centered aspect of the writing program offers a safer space to share vulnerabilities. Additionally, one facilitator said that the program "has really been super instrumental in professionalizing women across campus and empowering them … we were in silos before and now we can address the issues that everybody's having … and have a united front" for issues affecting women. In other research projects from the writing program, we share in detail about the value of the women-centered space (Sharp & Messuri, 2023).

Others reflected on how they came to understand that different writers have different needs and processes, realizing that there is not a single way to be productive. One facilitator began to "see certain things that work for me don't work for other people," coming to a stronger understanding of the diversity of writing practices. Another explained, "It's interesting to see everybody struggling with the same stuff and to see in what ways we are struggling all the same way and in what ways we're struggling in unique ways." She went on to discuss how she believes that, for her,

> the best practices have floated to the top, and they are the
> obvious ones that I know I need to follow to be successful:
> carving out the time, touching the project frequently and in
> smaller groups rather than waiting for some magical window
> in two weeks when I will have nothing else going on in my
> life and I'll be wildly productive.

Facilitators found that developing practices that work for them as well as "forgiving" themselves when they did not meet writing goals were important shifts in how they experienced writing and understood themselves as writers. At the same time, they recognized and respected that other writers have different practices and needs.

Facilitators also reported stronger positive emotions associated with writing due to normalizing struggles, developing consistent and effective writing

practices, and writing as part of a community. One facilitator shared,

> There were moments before joining this group that when
> I would put my hands on the keyboard I'd literally almost
> be shaking, like there would be that much anxiety. And so,
> when I say it was transformative, [it] really shifted in a deeply
> psychological level. … It's hard for me now not to be writing
> and enjoy writing.

Others expressed that they also enjoyed writing more than they had prior to joining the group, as they had reframed the way they understood writing.

DISCUSSION

Although most universities are concerned with faculty development and growth, there are few initiatives that are effective for women faculty (Cardel et al., 2020). The present study focused on leaders within a women faculty writing program. The findings indicated that the faculty writing groups had important implications for women faculty success and encouraged women faculty to think deeply about multiple types of identities: group identity, professional identity (especially as related to identities as mentors, leaders, and administrators), and writerly identity. The study follows Aitchison and Lee (2006) in understanding the "notion of community" as an "intrinsic element" of research writing groups that allows "identification" among group members (pp. 271–272). The strong sense of group identity found in the writing groups in the present study is aligned with other accounts of faculty writing groups, such as that described by Fajt et al. (2013), who reflected on how "collaboration helps us resist becoming needlessly isolated in our specialized academic disciplines" and how the women-centered space created by that group provided "common ground," much like the group discussed in this study (p. 173). Moreover, facilitators indicated that participating in the writing groups and taking on leadership roles enhanced their sense of themselves as mentors, leaders, current/future administrators, and scholars, thereby demonstrating growth in multiple, interrelated aspects of professional identity. The emphasis facilitators outside of the English department placed on professional or scholarly identities rather than writerly identities is in keeping with previous research indicating that faculty typically do not identify as writers (Banks & Flinchbaugh, 2013; Elbow & Sorcinelli, 2006). However, upon further inquiry, the data indicated that facilitators did develop writerly identities, some self-identifying as writers for the first time, reflecting both new understandings of themselves and enhanced understandings of writing as an evolving, recursive, individualized, contextual, contingent process.

Facilitators' experiences with the writing program enabled them to support others in forming, re-thinking, and cultivating writerly identities. The data indicates that facilitators transferred their knowledge and experiences to help their group members, students, junior faculty, and others find resources, experiment with new strategies, develop and join writing groups, and enhance their writerly identity development. It is worth noting that facilitators came to understand that different writers have different practices, though they also identified some common strategies that they and others have adapted to their own needs and circumstances. While their reflections on writing practices often noted the day-to-day behavioral advice of the sort featured in writing advice manuals, they understood these practices as part of long-term, individualized, evolving processes rather than discreet, one-size-fits-all tips and tricks devoid of context. This emphasis on adapting writing practices, as well as the specific practices facilitators found effective, is in keeping with Tulley's (2018) finding that prominent writing studies faculty "adapt similar practices in widely diverse ways to local employment contexts, career stages, family circumstances, and individual preferences" (p. 146). That the current study included faculty from multiple disciplines suggests that, while writerly identity may be influenced by disciplinary background, sustained discussions about writing among a diverse community of writers may enhance faculty's understanding of writing practices and processes.

The communal setting, which facilitators consistently associated with supportive, candid discussions about writing, added an important dimension (and, often, challenge) to straightforward productive writing advice favored by writing advice manuals and articles. In this way, the writing groups under study may, to some degree, use the communal forum to circumvent focusing too heavily on behavioral strategies at the expense of understanding writing as a complex emotional, intellectual, rhetorical process, concerns about typical writing advice manuals articulated by scholars such as Johnson (2017), Tarabochia (2020), and Werder (2013). Future writing group discussions could engage more fully in discussions and events that "combine behavioral goals with a focus on inquiry and intellectual complexity," as Johnson (2017, p. 67) suggests.

Pleasure in writing was also identified by Lee and Boud (2003) as central to the experiences of writing group participants, especially those who participated over the course of multiple years, as they gained facility with writing and publication: "Pleasure … has to be substantially located within the processes of 'doing' the writing groups. The fact that the writing groups have been deeply satisfying to all participants is clearly a major factor in their success" (p. 198). Moreover, the pleasure in writing facilitators felt aligns with the experiences in the women-only writing group described by Bosanquet et al. (2014), who state, "Writing circles for women offer a pleasurable and productive social space that

can ameliorate" the structural academic and social challenges women face in the academy (p. 375). In the present study, the sense of joy surrounding writing as well as the satisfaction in contributing to a community of writers were revelations to many facilitators and important factors in enhancing their writing productivity and professional activities and identities.

In summary, the communities created by the writing program encouraged intellectual engagement, candid interactions, and emotional connections that helped facilitators develop more robust professional practices and writerly identities as well as experience pleasure in writing. These outcomes allowed facilitators to cultivate more complex, holistic mentoring practices that surpassed the simplistic behavioral advice common in many faculty writing advice books.

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS
FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Although our study offers several important insights, we could have improved the design of the study by composing more homogeneous focus groups on some important dimensions such as length of time as a facilitator and whether the groups were face-to-face or virtual. For example, one of the focus groups included a facilitator who had only been a facilitator one time and the other facilitators who had been leaders in the program for 10 times or more. Another focus group had two facilitators who had only conducted face-to-face groups, while the other member had conducted in both face-to-face and virtual modalities. In the future, we think it would be instructive to have a focus group limited to facilitators who are also administrators, because they contend with high service loads that place significant constraints on their time—conditions the groups are designed to mitigate. Future work could also analyze facilitators' experiences in the context of other identities, particularly race, as the need for mentorship as well as the disproportionate service and mentoring loads experienced by faculty of color are well documented. Additionally, future research should consider conducting a study examining members' reflections and experiences with facilitators. For example, which facilitator practices and personalities tend to be especially helpful for members?

CONCLUSION

The present study adds to the small but growing scholarship on the importance of faculty writing programs, especially at large universities, and the crucial contributions they can make to faculty success (Sharp & Messuri, 2023). These findings have implications for writing program administrators who are developing faculty writing support and others who are implementing faculty success

programs, especially as they consider the value of involving faculty in leadership roles within those programs. Our findings underscored the value of the writing program for the development of faculty facilitators' identities, especially as the facilitators are encouraged to think of themselves as writers, mentors, and leaders. Overall, there was a strong sense of generativity from most of the facilitators as they expressed their desires and joys of supporting other women's writing and career growth. The writing program helped the facilitators engage more deeply with their identities as writers and accomplish their own writing goals, and served as an outlet to "give back" to the program and to other women.

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