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## Affinity Seeking in the Writing Center: An Analysis of One-on-One Tutoring Sessions

Item Type	undergraduate thesis
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Affinity Seeking the Writing Center:  
An Analysis of One-on-One Peer Tutoring Sessions

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This research was supported in part by the Undergraduate Research Opportunity (UROP) grant from the University of Vermont Honor's College. . Special thanks to my mentor and advisor, Sarah Heiss, to Sue Dinitz at the Writing Center, and Morgan Dewey for their constant support and encouragement.

### Abstract

This study utilized an instructional communication foundation to study affinity seeking in one-on-one peer tutoring sessions. Writing center theory encourages productive, collaborative tutor-tutee relationships. This study used content analysis of video recorded tutoring sessions to study the praxis of this theory. *Self Concept Confirmation, Nonverbal Immediacy, Assume Control, Personal Autonomy, and Listening* were identified as the most used strategies, which differs from traditional instructional contexts. Differences in tutor affinity-seeking strategies were identified based on gender, especially in sessions with male tutees. Addressing these contextual and gender differences will provide opportunity for improved tutor training and practice in the future.

Keywords: Instructional communication, affinity seeking, peer tutoring, instructional development, writing centers, gender

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**Introduction**

Writing centers are unique places that foster collaborative, one-on-one, and peer based instructional environments. With origins in the 1970s, writing centers have since become “ubiquitous feature[s] of American universities, colleges, and high schools” (Jones, 2001, p. 3). It is often noted that no two writing centers operate the same way, and there is an active debate regarding how exactly tutors within the writing center should tutor (for review see publications such as the Writing Lab Newsletter and the Writing Center Journal).

The relationship between tutor and tutee is a central theme in the debate of tutor method and praxis. It has been established that “both tutor and tutee benefit from the non-hierarchical, complementary relationship that enables both partners to refine and expand their writing and communication skills” (Jones, 2001, p. 17). This mutually beneficial relationship has been considered the first step towards a “successful” peer tutoring interaction (Harada, 1979). With the widespread popularity of writing centers and peer-to-peer learning in general, the tutoring relationship is an important and understudied area of writing center scholarship. Little research exists on how tutors actually go about initiating and developing relationships with tutees.

The field of instructional communication can provide insight on the development of relationships in instructional settings. Traditionally, instructional communication scholars have examined communication between teachers and students in classroom contexts. Specifically, affinity seeking is defined as the “active social communicative

process by which individuals attempt to get others to like and feel positive toward them” (Bell 1984, p. 91). Instructional communication scholars have associated affinity seeking with increased affective learning, cognitive learning, and motivation (Richmond, 1990), as well as increased student perceptions of teacher character and credibility (Frymier & Thompson, 1992).

This research seeks to bridge the literature on writing center theory with instructional communication research, by exploring the ways in which writing center tutors utilize affinity-seeking behaviors. Specifically, the following research questions will be addressed:

RQ1. Which affinity-seeking strategies do tutors use most often in peer-to-peer tutoring sessions?

RQ2. To what degree do affinity-seeking strategies differ between tutors based on demographic variables, such as gender, race, and primary language?

To answer these research questions, this study will examine tutor’s affinity-seeking behaviors during real tutoring exchanges. Content analysis of video recorded tutoring sessions will be used to determine the frequency and demographic variability of tutor affinity-seeking strategies at a mid-sized New England University. The results of this research will provide opportunities for both tutors and tutor trainers to improve and reflect on affinity-seeking in the writing center.

## Literature Review

### Tutoring in the Writing Center

Writing centers are a popular and valuable aspect of colleges today. After assessing the collective available literature Jones (2001) concluded that students who utilize writing centers have higher grade point averages, perform better than those who take customary freshman composition, show a “marked reduction” in failure rate, advance their grammar skills, and produce improved mean scores after being exposed to one-on-one tutorials. Jones concluded “the dynamic peer interaction that is a keynote of most writing center models has been shown to be an effective teaching strategy across a variety of grade levels and disciplines” (p. 17). His research served to “validate the importance of the writing center” (p. 18) and ended with a call to action to continue the expansion of these important aspects of colleges and universities.

Despite their popularity, there are abundant misconceptions about what services writing centers offer. Stephen North (1984), in his well-known article “The Idea of a Writing Center,” expressed his frustration with these misconceptions, which come from staff and students alike. Writing centers are often mistakenly thought to be places where only “bad” writers go, to fix “bad” papers. They are places where you can have your essay edited, revised, and improved. North detests this idea that “a writing center can only be some sort of skills center, a fix-it shop” (p. 435). He argued that writing centers are about *much* more than this. They are about more than simply fixing the physical writing that a student brings in. North championed the idea that writing centers are instead focused on learning about and from individual writers.

Bruffee (1984) further developed this idea with the concept of collaborative conversation. Bruffee claimed that tutoring sessions should make learning “a two-way street” (p. 87). He said that tutors have the opportunity to converse with their tutees as peers in a knowledgeable context. He explained that it is a tutor’s job to:

Engage students in conversation at as many points in the writing process as possible... [They] should contrive to ensure that that conversation is similar in as many ways as possible to the way we would like them to eventually write. (p. 91)

From Bruffee’s perspective, tutors are responsible for providing an opportunity for conversation and for shaping the content of the discussion in a manner that helps the tutor and tutee have an effective interaction. As the tutee is enveloped in a conversation about their writing they should develop a better understanding about the given topic. The goal is that tutees can then independently replicate this discussion when writing or revising their papers. Bruffee argued that the tutor-tutee discussion is a valuable part of the writing process. If a positive collaborative relationship is developed, collaborative conversation will be possible.

The ultimate goal of a writing center is to create better *writers*, not better papers. Developing individual writers shifts the focus of a session from the paper on the table to the person sitting across from you, and this is where relationships come in to play. Tutors “rely on the writer, who is, in turn, a willing collaborator in – and, usually, beneficiary of – the entire process” (North, 1984, p. 439). Better writers can be crafted through these crucial collaborative relationships. Tutoring sessions are nuanced and challenging in unpredictable and highly individualized ways, and as such there are a variety of different opinions in writing center theory on how to facilitate these relationships.

Creating moments of purposeful, creative play is one such writing center strategy for creating relationships. Welch (1999) introduced the idea of “play” in writing center sessions as an important aspect of the social interaction between tutor and tutee. There are key moments in any given session where there is an opportunity for creativity, a moment where the writer’s personality can be examined and incorporated into their paper. These moments might be a gap in the narrative or an unexplored idea expressed fleetingly in a passing sentence. In such instances of play, it is critical that a tutor goes beyond the writing on the page to question and push the tutee about their feelings and experiences about the narrative. Identifying and utilizing these moments of play takes time and practice. To effectively utilize this strategy, tutors must develop a relationship in which they can be questioning, inquisitive and highly attentive as they search for these moments of play.

Creating an open and honest space by listening is another strategy for creating relationships developed within writing center scholarship. DiPardo (1992) examined tutoring relationships using a case study approach to tell the story of Fannie, a Native American student attending a predominately white university. DiPardo highlighted the importance of an open relationship where both the tutor and tutee are honest with each other. Tutors and tutees need to be open and honest about not only their writing, but also about their cultural and ideological backgrounds. To demonstrate her point, DiPardo described how Fannie worked with a tutor named Morgan for a semester. As an African American tutor, Morgan was enthusiastic about cultural differences and teaching, yet she ended the semester with no idea about Fannie’s cultural background or complex individual story. Morgan tried to follow a set of collaborative strategies when she worked

with Fannie, yet she missed crucial information when she failed to listen to Fannie's stories. Morgan is advised to not only "talk less," but to "*listen more*" (p. 365). As DiPardo stated, "authentically collaborative learning is predicated upon fine-grained insight into individual students" (p. 365). This insight may not always come easily, but DiPardo insists that a close, open relationship is extremely important.

Tutor passivity is another strategy for creating relationships developed within writing center scholarship. Brooks (2001) developed the well-known minimalist approach to tutoring, where "the student, not the tutor, should 'own' the paper and take full responsibility for it" (p. 2). Several strategies for minimalist tutoring include sitting beside the student rather than across the desk, making the student read their own paper out loud, and letting the student wield the red pen. Like Bruffee (1984), Brooks (2001) warns against falling in to the "trap" of being an editor rather than a tutor. An editor creates better papers, but a tutor is a true educator. In this minimalist relationship, the tutor would concede control to the tutee, allowing the tutee to direct conversation and the development of the session and relationship.

In sum, while tutor-tutee relationships are valued in writing center literature there is not consensus on the correct type of relationship or best practice associated with developing relationships. The field of Instructional Communication may help shed some light on *how* exactly tutors develop positive, productive relationships within the instructional context of the writing center

### **Instructional Communication**

Instructional Communication is a field of scholarship that focuses "on the role of communication processes in teaching and training contexts in K-12, college, and other

organizational environments” (Mottet, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2005, p. 33). Grounded in communication studies, Instructional Communication scholarship focuses on the exchange of meaning through verbal and non-verbal messages for instructional purposes (Mottet et al., 2005). Essentially, it examines the differences between *what* is said versus *how* it is said. In doing so, it differentiates between the simple transference of knowledge to the co-creation of meaning between students and teachers. Researchers examine how teachers communicate, both verbally and non-verbally, with their students to create opportunities for learning and the effect of different communication styles on learning outcomes.

Affinity seeking is a well-researched communication variable that scholars have identified as impacting the development and maintenance of teacher-student relationships. Affinity seeking is an “active social communicative process by which individuals attempt to get others to like and feel positive toward them” (Bell 1984, p. 91). Bell and Daly (1984) developed a typology of 25 behaviors people use when seeking affinity (see Appendix A). These strategies ranged from active listening and nonverbal body language, to personal grooming and presenting your most interesting self.

Positive feelings established through affinity are especially important in developing productive relationships in instructional contexts. In 1985, McCroskey and McCroskey determined that Bell and Daly’s 25 affinity-seeking strategies were applicable in the classroom context. They identified eight strategies that were reportedly used the most often by teachers: *Physical Attractiveness*, *Sensitivity*, *Elicit Other’s Disclosure*, *Trustworthiness*, *Nonverbal Immediacy*, *Conversational Rule Keeping*, *Dynamism*, and *Listening* (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1985). Roach (1991) found that

Bell and Daly's typology also applied to higher levels of education. Together these studies demonstrate the pervasiveness of affinity-seeking behaviors in instructional settings.

Prior research has found that affinity-seeking behaviors vary based on relational interactants' status, gender and cultural backgrounds. For instance, Roach's (1991) study found that graduate teaching assistants (GTA) use affinity-seeking strategies of equality and openness, whereas faculty tend to use strategies of self-confidence and control. Variations in affinity-seeking behaviors may be a product of differences in age gap and power status.

Previous research examining affinity seeking and gender has found that women tend to be more open to self-disclosure (Dindia, Fitzpatrick, & Kenny, 1997) and tend to score higher than men on "nurturant/expressive traits." For example, a study that examined affinity-seeking differences between roommate dyads found that female roommate pairs were more likely than male roommate pairs to use strategies reflecting other-involvement, such as *Sensitivity*, *Listening*, *Assume Equality*, *Elicit Other's Disclosure*, and *Non-Verbal Immediacy*. In addition to gender differences, research has found cultural differences in affinity-seeking practices.

Affinity-seeking behaviors vary based on the cultural context of instruction (K. D. Roach, Cornett-Devito, & Devito, 2005). Roach and colleagues (2005) identified cross-cultural differences in students' perceptions of their instructor's affinity-seeking behaviors. Specifically, U.S. students reported their U.S. instructors using nonverbal immediacy, and reward, referent, and expert power significantly more often than French students perceived of their French instructors. On the other hand, French students

perceived their instructors using legitimate power significantly more than U.S. students did of their instructors. Goodboy, Bolkan, Beebe, & Shultz (2010) found cross-cultural differences in U.S. and Chinese student affinity-seeking behaviors. Specifically, U.S. students reported using seven affinity-seeking strategies (*Assume Control, Comfortable Self, Conversational Rule Keeping, Dynamism, Presenting Interesting Self, Trustworthiness, and Achievement*) more frequently than Chinese students. Chinese students reported using six affinity-seeking strategies (*Altruism, Comfortable Self, Inclusion of Other, Influence Perceptions of Closeness, Flirting, and Gifts*) more frequently than U.S. students (Goodboy et al., 2010). As classrooms and universities are becoming increasingly diverse, there has been a call for instructors to critically reflect on these cultural differences and how it changes instruction. Teachers are advised to deeply evaluate their situations, their privilege, and the influence culture and race can have on a classroom (Gay & Kipchoge, 2003; Howard, 2003). Cross-cultural differences in students' perceptions and behaviors demonstrate that affinity seeking is a function of the cultural context that affects instructors and students alike.

Examining affinity seeking in instructional contexts is valuable because affinity between teachers and students has been shown to have a positive impact on learning outcomes (Frymier & Thompson, 1992; Jones, 2001; Richmond, 1990). A better understanding of how tutors go about gaining affinity will provide opportunities to increase these learning outcomes.

### **Affinity Seeking in the Writing Center**

While peer tutoring sessions are an instructional context in which affinity-seeking strategies can be used to develop collaborative relationships that foster learning, there is a

gap in the literature concerning affinity seeking in contexts outside the traditional classroom. Few to no researchers have examined this concept within the peer-tutoring context. Defining which strategies tutors use can be insightful to the phenomenon that is a tutoring session, and it can also highlight differences between traditional teacher-student relationships, and the relationships formed between collaborative peers.

Specifically, this study asks:

**RQ1. Which affinity-seeking strategies do tutors use most often in peer-to-peer tutoring sessions?**

Affinity-seeking behaviors have been found to vary based on the age, gender, and cultural-backgrounds of interactants. To determine if these variations happen in the tutoring context, this study asks,

**RQ 2. To what degree do affinity-seeking strategies differ between tutors based on demographic variables such as gender, race, and primary language?**

Due to the extensive popularity of writing centers, the proven effect affinity has on learning and motivation, and the concept of collaboration as a cornerstone to writing center scholarship, this research on affinity seeking between tutors and tutees will be a valuable contribution to instructional development.

### **Methods**

The purpose of this study was to examine the affinity-seeking strategies that tutors use in a peer-to-peer tutoring context. The goal was to determine which strategies tutors use most often and how those strategies differ depending on demographic variables. In order to better understand tutor affinity seeking, this study utilized content analysis of

video recorded peer-to-peer tutoring sessions (see Figure 1), a process approved by the home institution's institutional review board.

### **Context**

The research took place at a mid-sized New England university. Sessions were located in two rooms that were designed for tutee inclusion and comfort. Sessions take place here every Monday through Friday from 10am to 9pm, and Sunday evenings from 6pm to 9pm.

### **Participants**

Forty-five tutors worked at the writing center when the study took place. These individuals had been selected by the writing center through a professor recommendation, application, and interviewing process. Advanced tutors had completed one full year of training and tutoring, working with over 1,000 students in the 2013-2014 school year. First year tutors were enrolled in the training course at the time of the study, and had completed one semester of tutoring. Twenty-two advanced tutors and twenty-three first year tutors were invited to participate, with the permission of the writing center director.

Fifteen tutors between the ages of 19 and 24 consented to participate in the project. Twelve were female and three were male. One tutor identified as Asian and a non-native English speaker, while all other tutors identified as white, with English as their native language. Only three first year tutors participated, while twelve advanced tutors participated. Participating tutors were trained on research procedures during bi-weekly staff meetings. Specifically, tutors learned how to get permission from tutees, operate the video camera, and submit survey data about their session.

All students enrolled in the university were invited to utilize the services of the writing center, including students with disabilities, English language learners (ELL), and Graduate or Continuing Education students. Thirty-one tutees were filmed for this study. The tutees filmed in this study were not considered subjects of this study, rather incidental components of the tutoring session. This study examined only tutor behaviors; therefore, the tutors alone were considered the subjects. However, tutors were asked to report their personal perceptions of their tutee.

Tutors perceived that eleven tutees were male while twenty tutees were female. Tutors reported eleven ELL students, with the primary native language perceived as Mandarin, and others included Polish, Portuguese, and Nepalese. Eleven tutees were identified as a race other than white. Tutees ranged in age between 18 and 35. The majority of tutees were thought to be undergraduate students.

### **Data Collection**

Analysis of video recorded tutoring sessions is a commonly used research practice in the literature on writing centers (Dinitz & Harrington, 2013; Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2013; Sperling, 1991). For this study, filming took place over a two-week period in private tutoring rooms. Together, participating tutors worked up to 96 tutoring sessions during these two weeks. During each session, the tutor read and explained the Tutee Research Information Sheet, which informed the tutee of the details of the study. Tutees were informed that they were *not* the subjects of the research, and that the video was only used to analyze tutor behaviors and strategies. Confidentiality of both parties was assured, as videos were kept in a secure location and only viewed by the research team.

If the tutee agreed to begin filming, the tutor turned on the camera located in the tutoring space. The camera was aimed toward the tutor's face and positioned so only the back of the tutee's head was visible. The tutoring session then continued as normal. At the end of the session the camera was turned off and the tutor then took a short demographic survey concerning their own demographic information, and what they perceived of their tutee, examining gender, race, year in school, and whether or not English was their first language.

### **Data Coding**

The recorded tutoring sessions were coded using Bell and Daly's 25 categories of affinity seeking (see Appendix A). The definitions and examples of the 25 categories were adapted for the tutoring context and used in a codebook to train one coder. Training consisted of a thorough review of the 25 strategies, including examples. The coder and the Principal Investigator then coded the same hour of video, and discussed their results to resolve any differences.

After the initial training, the coders worked separately to code 10% of the sample, or three separate tutoring sessions. The coders were tested for inter-coder agreement. Two of the three sessions achieved a Cohen's Kappa of .841, while the third achieved a Kappa of .920. This averaged to a Kappa of .867, a sufficient level of agreement. The coders then finished coding the remaining 27 sessions.

### **Data Analysis**

From this point on data was detached from participants' identities. The resulting data set was statistically analyzed to answer the research questions and to draw conclusions about tutor affinity-seeking strategies.

Although some tutors had multiple sessions, each was treated as independent since each one involved a new tutee and a unique interaction. Descriptive statistics were used to answer the first research question. Chi-square crosstabs and the Fisher's Exact test were used to answer the second research question. Results of this statistical analysis are discussed in the following section.

### **Analysis**

The first research question sought to identify the affinity-seeking strategies that tutors use most often in peer-to-peer tutoring sessions. Descriptive statistics revealed five affinity-seeking strategies that occurred with greater frequency. As can be seen in Table 1, *Self Concept Confirmation* (n=27), *Nonverbal Immediacy* (n=26), *Assume Control* (n=24), *Personal Autonomy* (n=24), and *Listening* (n=18) were the most frequently used strategies. The strategies that occurred the least were *Self Inclusion* (n=0), *Reward Association* (n=0), *Present Interesting Self* (n=2), *Inclusion of Others* (n=2), and *Influence Perceptions of Closeness* (n=3).

The second research question focused on the degree to which a tutor's affinity-seeking strategies differed based on their perception of a tutee's gender, age, class standing, and primary language. Chi-square tests were employed to explore potential differences. Tutee age and class standing showed no significant variance. Tutee race and English language proficiency showed no significant impact on affinity-seeking strategies employed by tutors. However, gender differences of both tutors and tutees showed significant results (for a summary of significant behavior changes, see Tables 2 and 3).

When examining the dynamics of different gender pairs – a male tutor with a male tutee versus a male tutor with a female tutee, for example – significant differences

occurred in several of the gender combinations. *Assume Equality* occurred significantly less ( $\chi^2 = 8.424$ , d.f. 3,  $p = 0.038$ ) in sessions where the gender of the tutor and tutee were different, with either a male tutor and female tutee, or female tutor and male tutee.

*Assume Equality* occurred in half the sessions where the tutor and tutee were of the same gender (see Table 4). *Nonverbal Immediacy* ( $\chi^2 = 9.069$ , d.f. 3,  $p = 0.028$ ) was observed in the majority of sessions, except for those where the gender pair involved two males (see Table 5). Finally, *Elicit Other's Disclosure* occurred significantly less ( $\chi^2 = 11.113$ , d.f. 3,  $p = 0.011$ ) if the tutee was male, no matter the gender of the tutor (see Table 6).

No significant differences were found between the strategies that male and female tutors use. However, significant differences were found in several strategies when the tutee gender was examined, regardless of whether the tutor was male or female. *Assume Control* ( $\chi^2 = 4.973$ , d.f. 1,  $p = 0.033$ ) was observed in 100% of sessions with male tutees, and only 65% of sessions with female tutees (see Table 7). Sessions with male tutees also lacked *Openness* ( $\chi^2 = 5.188$ , d.f. 1,  $p = 0.047$ ), *Optimism* ( $\chi^2 = 4.025$ , d.f. 1,  $p = 0.028$ ), and *Elicit Other's Disclosure* ( $\chi^2 = 4.973$ , d.f. 1,  $p = 0.002$ ), with these strategies being expressed less than 10% of the time, if at all (see Tables 8, 9, and 10). With female tutees, *Openness* occurred 50% of the time, *Optimism* occurred 60% of the time, and *Elicit Other's Disclosure* occurred 70% of the time. *Nonverbal Immediacy* ( $\chi^2 = 5.161$ , d.f. 1,  $p = 0.042$ ) occurred in 95% of sessions with female tutees, and only 63.6% of sessions with male tutees (see Table 11). The implications, limitations, and future opportunities of this study will be discussed in the following section.

### **Discussion**

Writing center literature consistently emphasizes collaborative relationships and looking beyond the paper to really work with individual writers. Understanding the affinity-seeking strategies that tutors employ helps us better understand the praxis of writing center theory. This study identified which affinity-seeking strategies tutors use the most, and contributed to previous research by incorporating gender dynamics. While there were limitations to this study, it also presents opportunity for more extensive and in-depth future research.

### **Theoretical Implications**

This study aimed to answer two questions. The first examined which affinity-seeking strategies tutors use the most in peer-to-peer tutoring sessions. The five most observed affinity-seeking strategies were *Self Concept Confirmation*, *Nonverbal Immediacy*, *Assume Control*, *Personal Autonomy*, and *Listening*. This study found that tutors use both encouraging (*Listening* and *Self Concept Confirmation*) and authoritative (*Assume Control* and *Personal Autonomy*) affinity-seeking behaviors. As peer instructors with limited power status, tutors may be attempting to boost their credibility and maintain control of the interaction. As fellow students, it is important that tutors demonstrate some amount of authority by asserting their opinions and assuming control of the relationship. Once this authority is established tutors can also actively listen to the tutee and be encouraging and supportive.

These strategies differed significantly from previous research that examined teacher and GTA affinity seeking. In summary, teachers have been known to utilize strategies that emphasize professionalism (*Physical Attractiveness* and *Trustworthiness*)

and control (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1985; Roach, 1991). As professionals in charge of a classroom full of students, it is important to look presentable and trustworthy, but also be approachable and understanding. GTAs, meanwhile, express themes of equality and openness, perhaps in an attempt to relate to their students and break down their established authority as a teacher's assistant (Roach, 1991).

These differences in affinity-seeking behaviors contribute to scholarship by demonstrating the importance of the instructional context in instructor-student relationships, from the writing center to the traditional classroom and beyond.

The second research question explored how affinity-seeking strategies differ based on demographic variables such as gender, race, and primary language. This study found that tutee race and primary language, as well as *tutor* gender made no significant difference in affinity-seeking strategies. This suggests that male and female tutors utilized similar strategies in all sessions, regardless of tutee race or language. Students of all races and students with various primary languages were treated equally in regards to affinity. The practical implications of these results will be discussed in the following section.

The gender of the *tutee* was linked to variance in tutors' affinity-seeking behaviors. In sessions where the gender of tutor and tutee were opposite, tutors did not *Assume Equality* nearly as much as sessions where the gender of the tutor and tutee were the same. Tutors did not try to relate to or compare themselves and their experiences to a tutee of the opposite gender, but rather allowed differences to exist.

Both male and female tutors took control of their relationships more often in sessions with male tutees. Tutors did not ask male tutees about their opinions and emotions, and the tutors themselves were not as open with their own experiences,

emotions, and ideas, nor were they as optimistic. Finally, in sessions with male tutees, especially with male tutors, there were not as many nonverbal cues from the tutor such as eye contact and friendly body language. Gender, especially tutee gender, had a significant impact on tutor affinity-seeking strategies.

Introducing gender dynamics contributes to existing literature on affinity seeking. Tutors responded in a more open and expressive way to female tutees. Tutors used less body language, less openness, less optimism, and less questioning with males. Although the tutees' behaviors were not examined, sessions with female tutees elicited more affinity seeking from tutors, specifically affinity-seeking strategies that were open and expressive. This is consistent with the findings of Dindia et al. (1997). The practical implications of this differential treatment will be discussed below.

### **Practical Implications**

The results of this study have multiple practical implications for instructional communication. First, affinity appears to differ based on instructional contexts. Tutors, GTAs, and traditional teachers all use different affinity-seeking strategies. Therefore, instructional training for tutors, instructors, and GTAs concerning affinity-seeking behaviors should focus on different strategies. A teacher may find it more advantageous to learn about how to emphasize their professional appearance. GTAs, who have established authority in the classroom, might benefit if they relate to their students. Tutors may find it necessary to establish their authority and assume control of the relationship because of their limited power status as a fellow student. Peer tutors operate in a different setting than the traditional classroom, and it is important to address differences in instructional context during training.

Additionally, it was found that male and female tutors utilized similar affinity-seeking strategies. Tutors also utilized similar affinity-seeking strategies with tutees of various races and primary languages. This suggests that students of all cultural backgrounds were receiving similar treatment. This could be a positive result, but it is also a possibility that students of different cultures and languages could benefit from different treatment. It is crucial for tutors to listen to and learn about students of various cultural backgrounds and consider how identity can affect students and their writing (DiPardo, 1992).

Finally, tutors utilize different affinity-seeking strategies when working with the opposite gender, and with male tutees in general. Operating under the assumption that tutor affinity-seeking leads to actual affinity, and that affinity leads to positive learning outcomes, then differential treatment towards male tutees could be detrimental. Using fewer strategies with male tutees may be detrimental to not only their relationships, but also to the productivity of their sessions. When training tutors, it is therefore important to address gender dynamics. Instructors should critically reflect not only on cultural differences (Howard, 2003; Gay & Kipchoge, 2003), but also on potential gender bias.

Though this research specifically focused on tutors in the writing center, it is possible that other instructors such as teachers, professors, and teaching assistants can take these results into account and strategically adapt their behavior in regards to gender.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that affinity-seeking behaviors differ across instructional setting and recipient of instruction. Instructor training should consider the context and setting of instruction. Instructors themselves should reflect on the praxis of writing instruction. It is important for them to critically examine their

situation and behaviors with students (Gay & Kipchoge, 2003; Howard, 2003) and to address whether or not different tendencies exist depending on gender. This research did not prove causation, but it did show an important association between affinity seeking strategy use and sessions with male tutees, and opened opportunities for future research.

### **Limitations**

This study was limited in the diversity and size of the sample, and it did not examine tutoring sessions as a dynamic communicative event. However, these limitations present opportunities for future research. First, this study did not contain a substantially diverse pool of tutors or tutees. All tutors, except for one, were white with English as their primary language. Less than half of the tutees were identified as non-white or English language learners. Only three male tutors participated. This may explain why tutor gender showed no significant differences in affinity-seeking strategies. However the number of participating male tutors was roughly proportional to the actual proportion of male and female tutors employed at the writing center (32% male). There were significant affinity seeking differences between male tutees and female tutees, and this may be due to the fact that the proportion of male tutees to female tutees was greater. Although there was not substantial variability in the sample, it remains roughly proportional to the actual population of tutors, and the findings that were significant create many avenues for potential future research.

In addition to a more diverse pool, a bigger sample size would have strengthened analysis. This study took place at the beginning of the semester, during very cold weather, which significantly reduced the number of sessions at the writing center. A bigger sample size would lead to greater statistical power and reinforce the findings.

Finally, tutoring sessions are dyadic, a “two-way street” (Bruffee, 1984, p. 87). This study analyzed tutor behaviors and did not analyze tutees. As such, it did not consider the tutee’s contribution to, or their perception of the relationship. This is problematic because tutoring takes place within a collaborative relationship. Future research should situate tutoring as a dynamic communicative event and explore the exchange of affinity-seeking strategies between *both* the tutor and the tutee.

### **Future research**

There are several avenues for potential future research extending from this study. Prior research has explored affinity-seeking differences in college settings (Goodboy et al., 2010; D.K. Roach et al., 2005). This study identified a difference between not only professors and GTAs (D. K. Roach, 1991) but also instructional peers in writing centers. Future research can identify additional instructional contexts and the impact of context on affinity seeking. Various instructional contexts include instructor advising, career counseling, and peer tutoring in disciplines such as STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), business, and other liberal arts beyond the writing center.

Previous research has found that teacher affinity leads to increased student learning and motivation, and has positive learning outcomes (Frymier & Thompson, 1992; Jones, 2001; Richmond, 1990). When tutors use affinity-seeking strategies, it can be assumed that they are encouraging positive outcomes for their tutees. However, tutor affinity has not been proven to impact peer-to-peer situations. It would be valuable to know if and how tutor-tutee affinity impacts student tutoring and tutee outcomes, such as grades and development as a writer over time.

This study found that male tutees were treated differently than other tutee demographics. It would be valuable to confirm whether this disparate treatment is detrimental to learning. Perhaps male tutees benefit from different affinity-seeking strategies than female tutees, and it would be valuable to determine which treatment is best for various student demographics. Race and primary language was found to have no significant impact on affinity-seeking strategies. It could be that students with different primary languages from different cultures could benefit from different affinity-seeking strategies, rather than receiving the same treatment as all other students. Determining which affinity-seeking strategies are the most effective in various instructional contexts would be a valuable contribution to the field.

### **Conclusion**

This study demonstrated two things. First, that affinity-seeking strategies differ based on instructional context. Second, that affinity-seeking strategies differ based on the gender of the tutee. Male tutees were the only demographic that experienced disparate treatment, regardless of whether the tutor was male or female. Teacher affinity has been shown to have positive impacts on learning and motivation. This study did not verify that tutors actually gained affinity by implementing these strategies, nor did it verify that tutor affinity has the same positive educational impacts as it does with teachers. However, it did reveal a difference in the treatment of tutees. The lack of affinity seeking experienced by male tutees may have detrimental impacts on their learning experience. Male tutees were treated differently than female tutees, and if this is in fact detrimental to not only the tutor-tutee relationship, but also learning outcomes, then this is a disparity that must be addressed. With these results, tutors and tutor trainers should critically reflect on their

tutoring practices to ensure that their instruction in no way inhibits the educational outcomes of their students.

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### Tables and Figures

Table 1  
*Frequencies of Affinity-Seeking Strategies*

<u>Behaviors</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Self Concept Confirmation	27	4
Nonverbal Immediacy	26	5
Assume Control	24	7
Personal Autonomy	24	7
Listening	18	13
Elicit Other's Disclosure	15	16
Dynamism	14	17
Conversational Rule Keeping	14	17
Concede Control	14	17
Supportiveness	14	17
Facilitate Enjoyment	12	19
Physical Attractiveness	11	20
Openness	11	20
Altruism	10	21
Assume Equality	10	21
Comfortable Self	10	21
Similarity	9	22
Optimism	8	23
Sensitivity	6	25
Trustworthiness	4	27
Influence Perceptions of Closeness	3	28
Inclusion of Others	2	29
Present Interesting Self	2	29
Reward Association	0	31
Self Inclusion	0	31

Table 2

*Significant Affinity-Seeking Differences based on Tutee Gender*

<u>Utilized Affinity-Seeking Strategies</u>	<u>Sessions with Male Tutees</u>	<u>Sessions with Female Tutees</u>	<u>p-value</u>
Openness	9.1%	50.0%	0.047
Optimism	0.0%	60.0%	0.028
Elicit Other's Disclosure	9.1%	70.0%	0.002
Nonverbal Immediacy	63.6%	95.0%	0.042
Assume Control	100%	65.0%	0.033

Table 3

<i>Significant Affinity-Seeking Differences based on Tutor/Tutee Gender Pairs</i>					
<u>Utilized Affinity-Seeking Strategies</u>	<u>F/F</u>	<u>F/M</u>	<u>M/F</u>	<u>M/M</u>	<u>p-value</u>
Assume Equality	53.3%	0.0%	0.0%	40.0%	0.038
Nonverbal Immediacy	93.3%	83.3%	100.0%	40.0%	0.028
Elicit Other's Disclosure	66.7%	16.7%	80.0%	0.0%	0.011

Table 4

<i>Assume Equality * Gender Pair (Tutor/Tutee)</i>						
<u>Assume Equality</u>		<u>Gender Pair</u>				
		<u>F/F</u>	<u>F/M</u>	<u>M/F</u>	<u>M/M</u>	<u>Total</u>
No	Count	7	6	5	3	21
	% within <i>Elicit Other's</i>	33.3%	28.6%	23.8%	14.3%	100.0%
	% within Gender Pair	46.7%	100.0%	100.0%	60.0%	67.7%
Yes	Count	8	0	0	2	10
	% within <i>Elicit Other's</i>	80.0%	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	100.0%
	% within Gender Pair	53.3%	0.0%	0.0%	40.0%	32.3%
Total	Count	15	6	5	5	31
	% within <i>Elicit Other's</i>	48.4%	19.4%	16.1%	16.1%	100.0%
	% within Gender Pair	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 5

<i>Nonverbal Immediacy * Gender Pair (Tutor/Tutee)</i>						
<u>Nonverbal Immediacy</u>		<u>Gender Pair</u>				
		<u>F/F</u>	<u>F/M</u>	<u>M/F</u>	<u>M/M</u>	<u>Total</u>
No	Count	1	1	0	3	5
	% within <i>Elicit Other's</i>	20.0%	20.0%	0.0%	60.0%	100.0%
	% within Gender Pair	6.7%	16.7%	0.0%	60.0%	16.1%
Yes	Count	14	5	5	2	26
	% within <i>Elicit Other's</i>	53.8%	19.2%	19.2%	7.7%	100.0%
	% within Gender Pair	93.3%	83.3%	100.0%	40.0%	83.9%
Total	Count	15	6	5	5	31
	% within <i>Elicit Other's</i>	48.4%	19.4%	16.1%	16.1%	100.0%
	% within Gender Pair	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 6

<u>Elicit Other's Disclosure</u>		<u>Gender Pair</u>				<u>Total</u>
		<u>F/F</u>	<u>F/M</u>	<u>M/F</u>	<u>M/M</u>	
No	Count	5	5	1	5	16
	% within <i>Elicit Other's</i>	31.3%	31.3%	6.3%	31.3%	100.0%
	% within Gender Pair	33.3%	83.3%	20.0%	100.0%	51.6%
Yes	Count	10	1	4	0	15
	% within <i>Elicit Other's</i>	66.7%	6.7%	26.7%	0.0%	100.0%
	% within Gender Pair	66.7%	16.7%	80.0%	0.0%	48.4%
Total	Count	15	6	5	5	31
	% within <i>Elicit Other's</i>	48.4%	19.4%	16.1%	16.1%	100.0%
	% within Gender Pair	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 7

<u>Assume Control</u>		<u>Tutee Gender</u>		<u>Total</u>
		<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	
No	Count	0	7	7
	% within <i>Elicit Other's</i>	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% within Gender Pair	0.0%	35.0%	22.6%
Yes	Count	11	13	24
	% within <i>Elicit Other's</i>	45.8%	54.2%	100.0%
	% within Gender Pair	100.0%	65.0%	77.4%
Total	Count	11	20	31
	% within <i>Elicit Other's</i>	35.5%	64.5%	100.0%
	% within Gender Pair	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 8

		<i>Openness * Tutee Gender</i>		
<u>Openness</u>		<u>Tutee Gender</u>		
		<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>
No	Count	10	10	20
	% within <i>Elicit Other's</i>	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
	% within Gender Pair	90.9%	50.0%	64.5%
Yes	Count	1	10	11
	% within <i>Elicit Other's</i>	9.1%	90.9%	100.0%
	% within Gender Pair	9.1%	50.0%	35.5%
Total	Count	11	20	31
	% within <i>Elicit Other's</i>	35.5%	64.5%	100.0%
	% within Gender Pair	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 9

		<i>Optimism * Tutee Gender</i>		
<u>Optimism</u>		<u>Tutee Gender</u>		
		<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>
No	Count	11	12	23
	% within <i>Elicit Other's</i>	47.8%	52.2%	100.0%
	% within Gender Pair	100.0%	60.0%	74.2%
Yes	Count	0	8	8
	% within <i>Elicit Other's</i>	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% within Gender Pair	0.0%	40.0%	25.8%
Total	Count	11	20	31
	% within <i>Elicit Other's</i>	35.5%	64.5%	100.0%
	% within Gender Pair	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 10

*Elicit Other's Disclosure \* Tutee Gender*

<u>Elicit Other's Disclosure</u>		<u>Tutee Gender</u>		
		<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>
No	Count	10	6	16
	% within <i>Elicit Other's</i>	62.5%	37.5%	100.0%
	% within Gender Pair	90.9%	30.0%	51.6%
Yes	Count	1	14	15
	% within <i>Elicit Other's</i>	6.7%	93.3%	100.0%
	% within Gender Pair	9.1%	70.0%	48.4%
Total	Count	11	20	31
	% within <i>Elicit Other's</i>	35.5%	64.5%	100.0%
	% within Gender Pair	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 11

*Nonverbal Immediacy \* Tutee Gender*

<u>Elicit Other's Disclosure</u>		<u>Tutee Gender</u>		
		<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>
No	Count	4	1	5
	% within <i>Elicit Other's</i>	80.0%	20.0%	100.0%
	% within Gender Pair	36.4%	5.0%	16.1%
Yes	Count	7	19	26
	% within <i>Elicit Other's</i>	26.9%	73.1%	100.0%
	% within Gender Pair	63.6%	95.0%	83.9%
Total	Count	11	20	31
	% within <i>Elicit Other's</i>	35.5%	64.5%	100.0%
	% within Gender Pair	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

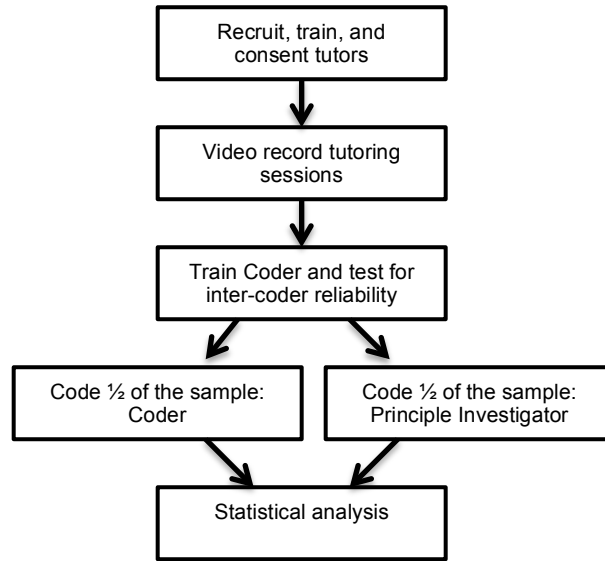


Figure 1. Flowchart: Data Collection and Analysis.

## Appendix A

## Affinity-seeking behaviors

The tutor attempting to get a tutee to like him/her...

1. *Altruism*: Tries to be of help and assistance to the tutee.
2. *Assume Control*: Presents self as a leader, person who has control.
3. *Assume Equality*: Presents self as an equal of the other person.
4. *Comfortable Self*: Acts comfortable in the setting, comfortable with him/herself and comfortable with the tutee.
5. *Concede Control*: Allows the tutee to control the relationship and situations surrounding the two.
6. *Conversational Rule Keeping*: Follows cultures' rules of how people socialize with others by demonstrating cooperation, friendliness, and politeness.
7. *Dynamism*: Presents him/herself as dynamic, active, and enthusiastic.
8. *Elicit Other's Disclosure*: Encourages tutee to talk by asking questions and reinforcing talking.
9. *Facilitate enjoyment*: Seeks to make the situations in which the two are involved a very enjoyable experience.
10. *Inclusion of others*: Includes the tutee in his/her social activities and group of friends.
11. *Influence Perceptions of Closeness*: Engages in behaviors that lead the tutee to perceive the relationship as being closer and more established than it has actually been.
12. *Listening*: Pays attention to what the student says, listening very actively.
13. *Nonverbal Immediacy*: Signals interest and liking through various nonverbal cues.
14. *Openness*: Tutor is open. Discloses info about his background, interests, and views.
15. *Optimism*: Presents self as positive, pleasant, and optimistic.
16. *Personal autonomy*: Presents self as an independent, free thinking person.
17. *Physical attractiveness*: Tries to look as attractive as possible in appearance and attire.
18. *Present interesting self*: Presents self to be a person who would be interesting to know.
19. *Reward association*: Presents self as an important figure who can reward the tutee for associating with him/her.
20. *Self concept confirmation*: Demonstrates respect for the tutee, helps the tutee feel good about how he/she views her/himself.
21. *Self inclusion*: Attempts to befriend/be close to the tutee.
22. *Sensitivity*: Acts in a warm, empathetic manner toward the student to communicate caring and concern.
23. *Similarity*: Tries to make the student feel that the two of them are similar in attitudes, values, interests, preferences, personality, etc.
24. *Supportiveness*: Is supportive of the student and their positions by being encouraging, agreeable, and reinforcing.
25. *Trustworthiness*: Presents self as trustworthy and reliable. Emphasizes her responsibility, reliability, fairness, dedication, honesty, and sincerity.