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Bethany Mannon

Centering the Emotional Labor of Writing Tutors

Abstract

Writing consultants regularly perform emotional labor. They suppress or express emotions to welcome clients and invoke enthusiasm to cultivate writers' confidence. Because emotional labor performs these crucial functions, it merits focused attention in writing center studies. However, while research has considered the emotional needs that writers bring, scholars have not yet sufficiently examined the affective engagements that consultations require of writing consultants. The first section of this article presents a case for treating affective dimensions of tutoring as labor. The second section analyzes five tutor-training manuals using the Specific Affect Coding System (SPAFF) to identify references to emotion and affect in the texts. This analysis shows that these tutor training manuals offer limited or indirect discussions of emotional labor and neglect the fact that relational work is just as much a practiced skill as cognitive work. The final section offers implications and proposes ways these manuals could start more robust discussions of emotional labor to further writing center goals of creating supportive, collaborative environments. By teaching and valuing the emotional labor of tutors, writing centers can become more inclusive places and mitigate factors that lead to burnout.

Emotional labor lies at the heart of writing center tutoring. During appointments, tutors draw from reserves of kindness and enthusiasm to help writers build confidence, even excitement. At times this means defusing writers' frustrations over challenging assignments or writers' disappointment in low grades, but even when no negative emotions arise during a conference, tutors try to spark writers' investment in their projects and empathize with the challenges of navigating higher education. Possibly because such affective engagements are central to writing center practice, the field tends to normalize this work rather than recognizing it as labor or exploring its relationship to the cognitive work of tutoring writing.

The phrase *emotional labor* may be unfamiliar to tutors. However, sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild's (1983) definition—inducing or suppressing feeling “in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others” (p. 7)—likely resonates with their experiences. Tutors project empathy and interest to manage students' frustrations and boredom, and suppress tutors' own anxiety in order to “feel the appropriate feeling” (Hochschild, 2009/2013, p. 25) for a one-on-one conversation about writing. Behaviors like these produce positive interpersonal relations, foster community, and resolve conflict and tension; research shows that these behaviors are as vital as cognitive work. Despite this importance, emotional labor is rarely as celebrated as intellectual sharpness (Hochschild, 1983; Guy & Newman, 2004). Yet research confirms what many tutors (and teachers) can attest from experience: One consequence of poorly managed emotional labor is burnout (Wharton, 2009).

Emotional labor took on greater relevance for writing centers during spring and summer of 2020. As writing courses and tutoring moved online to prevent the spread of COVID-19, writing center practitioners asked how video conferences or asynchronous feedback sessions could adapt to this “uncharted territory” (Widen & Prebel, 2020, para. 1) and create a “sense of connection” (para. 4) in appointments. Tutors and writers alike carried the negative emotions of a disrupted semester, a global pandemic, and their uncertainty about personal academic and professional plans. Effective tutoring meant managing these emotions and doing so in online spaces that often lack the “face-to-face orality and body language” (Hewett, 2015, p. 2) to communicate that care. Tutors had to reexamine their abilities to do emotional labor in asynchronous conferences where a written text, such as a comment box or email, “becomes the instructional voice” (Hewett, 2015, pp. 4–5). In synchronous conferences, tutors grappled with the fact that video only partially dispels the “silences of cyberspace and the frequently solitary nature of online learning” (Chick & Hassel, 2009, p. 198). Online tutoring requires a range of adjustments, including adjustments in a tutor's manner of affective engagement.

Mannon: Centering the Emotional Labor of Writing Tutors

Studying the concept of emotional labor clarifies the challenges of peer tutoring and highlights the difficult work done by tutors even when discussing familiar assignments and concerns. Examining these behaviors as work requires acknowledging that emotional labor is both demanding and essential for writing tutors. My survey of scholarship and tutor-training manuals revealed that, while writing center studies does address the emotions writers and tutors experience, those texts rarely distinguish the *presence* of emotion from the work of *managing* emotion. Moreover, I find our field's texts refer to emotional labor only occasionally, indirectly, and without presenting it as a skill to practice and learn. In *The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors*, Lauren Fitzgerald & Melissa Ianetta (2015) offered advice that reflects this widespread attitude:

You probably already know how to interact with others, to help put people at ease if they seem to be feeling unsure (which can happen when people share their writing with strangers and even people they know), to give them space or time if they need it, to listen. All the qualities that go into making you a friendly, helpful person will be an important skill set for this job. (p. 53)

Some tutors may indeed have those qualities when beginning the job. However, treating emotional labor as natural, easy, or “not quite real work” (Hochschild, 2009/2013, p. 30) leads to a writing center where the work of managing writers' emotions is invisible, devalued, and disheartening. If scholars and practitioners are to appreciate the full range of peer tutors' work and support students developing as effective consultants, we need to recognize tutors' emotional labor and assess discussions of this concept in our discipline. This article makes a case that building explicit dialogue about emotional labor into tutor training, with opportunities to practice those behaviors and the mindfulness that facilitates these behaviors, repositions emotional labor as a toolkit or series of techniques tutors can employ critically and intentionally.

I provide a conceptual framework for studying writing tutors' emotional labor, and I then apply that theory to examine the ways widely used training manuals present the emotional labor dimension of the consultant role. I first survey writing studies scholarship on related concepts, such as emotional intelligence, and summarize the useful research on emotional labor that comes from other disciplines. I then explain my approach to analyzing these tutor training manuals, a set of shared texts that ground the work of many writing centers, and I present my analysis of five recent and popular manuals to understand treatments of emotional labor. To conclude, I discuss implications of those treatments and the benefits to be gained from more detailed and intentional conversations. By teaching and valuing the emotional labor of tutors, writing center practitioners can create more inclusive places, address factors that lead to burnout, and reexamine the expectations and ideals that inform practice.

Managing Feelings in the Writing Center

Emotional labor is ubiquitous in writing centers but obscured in much of our discourse. Melissa R. Weintraub (2005) listed many of the practices that require tutors to manage clients' feelings (and sometimes tutors' own): "providing support by listening and normalizing" (p. 10), finding "something positive in every paper" (p. 10), and being careful not to impose tutors' own feelings of fatigue and stress on the client. However, Weintraub never named these acts as labor or asked how tutors learn to do them. David Taylor (1989), similarly, appreciated that tutors "are constantly meeting new people and being forced to form a positive, helping relationship with them" (p. 3) but also never referred to these activities as emotional labor. Writers who use the writing center also sense the emotional labor tutors perform, or fail to perform. Jaclyn Wells (2016) found that students who complete required tutoring repeatedly cite positive or negative feelings in follow-up surveys and interviews. Wells determined that writers' emotional experiences, especially the ways tutors make writers feel, drive those writers' decisions about scheduling future appointments. However, Wells never explicitly mentioned the concept of emotional labor in her discussion.

Writing center scholars and practitioners have long noted the emotional needs clients bring to consultations along with their academic writing, even if remaining largely silent on the labor involved for tutors (Barnett, 1995; Fiethumel, 2012; Nicklay, 2012). This scholarship has engaged with writers' emotional needs from various angles: Some scholars have described ways tutors can engage students who write about trauma and the negative emotions that create difficult conferences (Weintraub, 2005; Lape, 2008; Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2013; Perry, 2016), while a recent special issue of *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship* focused on treating negative affect as opportunities for critical thinking (Haen, 2018), mindfulness (Kervin & Barrett, 2018), and relationship (Yoon & Stutelberg, 2018). In "Metaphors and Ambivalence," Daniel Lawson (2015) concluded that writing center research largely regards clients' emotion as disruptive and called for attention to the ways emotions lead to knowledge and agency. These examples show how emotional labor has been obscured by language about providing support and forging interpersonal connections.

A notable exception is Nicole I. Caswell, Jackie Grutsch McKinney, & Rebecca Jackson's (2016) *The Working Lives of New Writing Center Directors*, which engaged with emotional labor at length, defining it as "the complicated work of managing relationships," "emotion management," and directors' decisions to "display particular emotions for the sake of those around them" (p. 26). Their study built on Laura R. Micciche's (2007) call for teachers and scholars to "take seriously the work that emotions do in the context of

Mannon: Centering the Emotional Labor of Writing Tutors

disciplinary formation, teaching, and administering writing” (p. 7). Noreen Lape (2008), too, raised emotional intelligence as a quality that enables tutors to reframe “even the most emotionally fraught tutor-writer relationship” and open the potential for learning (p. 2), ideas later echoed by Lawson (2015). These and other studies show that rhetoric, composition, and writing center research have begun to theorize the role of emotion; but, as Caswell, Grutsch McKinney, & Jackson noted, the existing research in writing center studies leaves most emotional labor invisible (p. 10), and additional work remains.

Research on the emotional labor of administrators and writers sets the stage for a close look at tutors in particular. Many writing tutors have dispositions that prepare them to welcome, encourage, and support clients, but Hochschild’s (1983) research reminds us that “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” (p. 7) requires effort, sometimes to a considerable degree. To be clear, I do not think tutors want to avoid emotional labor. Many find that these interactions make writing centers transformative and productive spaces. Hochschild’s (1983) research for *The Managed Heart* led her to conclude, “one can enjoy emotional labor immensely, I think, provided one has an affinity for it and a workplace that supports that affinity” (p. 25). However, affinity or emotional intelligence only partially accounts for a tutor’s capacity to do this work. Mary E. Guy & Hyun Jung Lee (2015) distinguished emotional intelligence—“the ability to accurately sense one’s own emotional state, to control one’s state in a manner that is constructive, and to accurately sense the emotional state of another person, responding in a way that elicits desirable behavior” (p. 262)—from emotional labor, the *application* of that emotional intelligence. They explained that employees perform emotional labor in response to job requirements, “analogous to manual labor that relies on muscle and cognitive labor that relies on knowledge” (Guy & Lee, 2015, p. 264). Significantly, the scholarship elaborating Hochschild’s (1983) theory has explained that emotional labor is a demand of a position, not necessarily a trait of a worker (Guy & Newman, 2004; Wharton, 2009; Hochschild, 2013). For example, Guy & Lee decoupled emotional intelligence and labor in the same way that “high IQ scores do not guarantee that the student will become valedictorian” (p. 272) and observed that additional factors contribute to effective emotional labor.

In writing centers, where we emphasize craft and practice over innate skill, it seems important to focus on emotional labor as a learned practice and consider the possibility that tutors can perform emotional labor apart from their emotional intelligence. Because this labor remains undertheorized in scholarship and under the radar in practice, many scholars and practitioners attribute emotional labor to consultants’ instincts or personalities. Scholars might overlook the degree to which caring and communicating are considered “natural” abilities of some tutors (particularly female tutors). Even when tutors

do have an affinity for emotional labor, that may not be enough; online tutoring provides a striking example of a context that frustrates any “ingrained abilities” (Sklar, 2020, para. 8) to interpret and respond to emotional cues from another speaker. Current scholarship has called for research that illuminates the ways that training prepares tutors for—or neglects—this everyday facet of the position.

To study emotional labor, we must recognize that crisis situations and writing about trauma are by no means the only scenarios in which tutors manage writers’ emotions. Sometimes tutors are just dealing with students who are tense and tired but not with students who are tearful or “students who [had] written some version of hate speech” (Lape, 2008, p. 5). Emotional labor suffuses every stage of consultations: Tutors make writers feel comfortable; engage their attention; find effective ways to discuss strengths and weaknesses; project interest, empathy, and validation; and spark confidence that tutors hope the writers will transfer to future work.

Method and Methodology

I begin this research with two core sets of questions about scholarship and training: 1. How has writing center scholarship addressed the emotional labor done by tutors, and how does scholarship in sociology, gender studies, and public administration further illuminate the affective dimensions of tutoring? and 2. How does training equip tutors for the emotional labor involved in their role, and what additional topics or practices might tutor training address? To answer, I use theoretical inquiry and critical inquiry (Liggett, Jordan, & Price, 2011), the latter of which I use to investigate tutoring manuals. Like the session notes and other writing center texts that R. Mark Hall (2017) studied, tutoring manuals “reflect and generate underlying assumptions about writing, teaching, and learning” (p. 4). Future research might use interviews, observations, and surveys to study tutors’ emotional labor during appointments, but first we need to understand the ideals that emerge from influential texts. Doing so fills a gap in the existing theory and identifies the discourses that—intentionally or not—shape tutors’ perceptions of the writing center. I study these manuals for a second reason: If we are to train and support tutors differently in the future, these widely read texts will provide the starting points for those conversations.

I selected five tutor training manuals to analyze: *A Tutor’s Guide: Helping Writers One to One*, 2nd edition (Rafoth, 2005); *The Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring*, 2nd edition (Gillespie & Lerner, 2008); *The St. Martin’s Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*, 4th edition (Murphy & Sherwood, 2011); *The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors* (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2015); and *The Bedford Guide for Writing*

Mannon: Centering the Emotional Labor of Writing Tutors

Tutors, 6th edition (Ryan & Zimmerelli, 2016).¹ Three research questions guided my reading: 1. How do these texts frame, instruct, or describe the behaviors and skills that require emotional labor? 2. What do these texts reveal about the ways tutors learn to do the emotional labor of peer writing tutoring? and 3. What sections of these texts might facilitate discussions of the emotional labor in peer tutoring? To identify emotions and affective responses in the texts, I used the Specific Affect Coding System (SPAFF). The SPAFF was developed in 1989 to study spousal interactions in therapeutic contexts and has since been used to study family and romantic relationships (Coan & Gottman, 2007).² As James A. Coan & John M. Gottman (2007) explained, the SPAFF connects behavior and emotion, and this tool codes verbal content, facial behaviors, voice tones, and body language that indicate eighteen emotions or affective behaviors: affection, anger, belligerence, contempt, criticism, defensiveness, disgust, domineering, enthusiasm (joy), fear/tension, humor, interest, neutral, sadness, stonewalling, threats, validation, and whining. As Coan & Gottman explain, “we cannot ‘see’ Validation without the presence of one or more of its indicators, but without the construct of Validation, those indicators are by themselves of little theoretical value” (p. 268), and the same holds true for the other emotions and affective behaviors as well.

I used the SPAFF to guide my close reading of the manuals, a process also informed by the existing research on emotional labor in the social sciences and writing center studies (scholarship I review in the next section). While reading the manuals, I recorded direct references to these emotions or indicators (i.e., back channels, direct expressions of understanding, paraphrasing, apologies, and sentence finishing as indicators of validation, for example). When electronic versions of texts were available, I checked my work with keyword searches. After using the SPAFF to code emotions and behaviors, I re-read the manuals to confirm these references. In this second reading, I also

1 I selected tutor-centered texts that are popular and recent, beginning with the three manuals most frequently named in a WCenter listserv thread about favorite tutor training resources ([WCenter listserv archive, 2015]). On February 23, 2015, Muriel Harris asked, “I’m curious to know which tutor training manuals are most widely used and why. So, if you use a tutor training manual, which one?” The conversation concluded on March 2, 2015. Eight responses named *The St. Martin’s Sourcebook for Writing Tutors (4th edition)*, seven responses named *A Tutor’s Guide*, and four responses named *The Bedford Guide*. To expand my discussion of relatively recent manuals, I also include *The Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring* (2007) and *The Oxford Guide* (2015).

2 I discovered the SPAFF in Lawson’s (2015) article “Metaphors and Ambivalence: Affective Dimensions in Writing Center Studies,” in which he uses the system to define affect and emotion and then determine whether articles in *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship* and *The Writing Center Journal* address emotion. I use the SPAFF to analyze foundational texts here, but the SPAFF would also be useful for analyzing interpersonal interactions such as tutoring sessions.

identified trends in the ways the texts presented emotion, such as the emotions manuals discussed most often. To determine whether these texts described emotional labor (rather than simply naming or describing emotions), I re-read the context around each mention of an emotion or behavior using the lens of emotional labor scholarship. When context suggested that emotion on the part of a tutor or writer was a phenomenon the tutor could or should suppress, resolve, cultivate, or project, I placed (EL) next to the page number in my coding chart. I also recorded the complete quote in my own notes. The findings section presents my summary of these references.

I selected the SPAFF to consider the range of emotions tutors and writers display, including emotions that appear even during amiable consultations, in order to provide a methodology for moving beyond the previous focus on crisis. Like Lawson (2015), I find this tool useful because it includes both affects I readily associate with tutoring (such as enthusiasm) and affects I do not immediately connect with writing center work (such as disgust). Helpfully, the SPAFF also drew my attention to behaviors such as humor, validation, and interest, which have clear applications to writing center work but did not initially strike me as emotional. As my findings and discussion aim to demonstrate, this tool makes possible a more precise discussion of emotion and emotional labor than previous writing center scholarship has achieved.

Findings: Emotional Labor in Tutor Training Manuals

Disciplinary discussions of emotions and emotional labor are one factor that contributes to tutors' abilities to perform this part of the tutoring role. Tutors are most likely to encounter that conversation in tutoring manuals. My goal in analyzing these texts is not to evaluate them, but rather to assess how the discipline of writing center studies currently views this aspect of tutoring and how our widely circulated texts might prompt conversations among scholars and practitioners. Table 1 enumerates references to each emotion and indicator and notes how often the text positioned that emotion as a phenomenon for tutors to manage (rather than simply a phenomenon experienced or displayed by tutors and students).

Mannon: Centering the Emotional Labor of Writing Tutors

Table 1

Frequency of References to Emotions, Indicators, and Emotional Labor in Common Writing Center Training Manuals

Emotion	Indicators	Total references	Presented as emotional labor?
Affection	Reminiscing	St. Martin's: 1	
	Caring statements	Oxford: 4 Bedford: 1	Oxford: 4
	Compliments	A Tutor's Guide: 6 Longman: 5 Oxford: 12 Bedford: 10 St. Martin's: 9	A Tutor's Guide: 1 Longman: 2 Bedford: 5 St. Martin's: 3
	Empathy	A Tutor's Guide: 7 Longman: 1 Oxford: 6 Bedford: 1 St. Martin's: 2	A Tutor's Guide: 3 Longman: 1 St. Martin's: 1
	The common cause	A Tutor's Guide: 1 Oxford: 2	Oxford: 2
	Flirting	Bedford: 1	
Anger	Direct references	A Tutor's Guide: 2 Longman: 1 Bedford: 4	Bedford: 1
	Frustration	A Tutor's Guide: 1 Longman: 6 Oxford: 8 Bedford: 22 St. Martin's: 3	Longman: 1 Bedford: 7
	Angry I-statements	A Tutor's Guide: 1 St. Martin's: 1	St. Martin's: 1
	Angry questions	Bedford: 1	
	Commands	Bedford: 2	
Belligerence	Taunting questions		
	Unreciprocated humor	A Tutor's Guide: 1 Bedford: 1 St. Martin's: 1	
	Interpersonal terrorism		

Emotion	Indicators	Total references	Presented as emotional labor?
Contempt	Sarcasm	Oxford: 2 Bedford: 2	Bedford: 1
	Mockery	Oxford: 2	Oxford: 2
	Insults	A Tutor's Guide: 1 Longman: 2 Bedford: 1 St. Martin's: 1	Longman: 1
	Hostile humor	A Tutor's Guide: 1	
Criticism	Direct references	St. Martin's: 3	
	Blaming	Oxford: 1 Bedford: 2	Oxford: 1
	Character attacks	Oxford: 8 Bedford: 1	Oxford: 8
	Kitchen sinking		
	Betrayal statements		
	Negative mind reading	A Tutor's Guide: 1 Oxford: 1	A Tutor's Guide: 1 Oxford: 1
Defensiveness	Direct references	Oxford: 14 Bedford: 2 St. Martin's: 1	Bedford: 1
	"yes-but"	A Tutor's Guide: 1	
	Cross-complaining	Oxford: 6	
	Minimization		
	Excuses	Oxford: 2	Oxford: 2
	Aggressive defenses	A Tutor's Guide: 2	
Disgust	Involuntary revulsion	A Tutor's Guide: 1	
	Moral objection		
Domineering	Direct references	St. Martin's: 1	
	Invalidation	A Tutor's Guide: 1	
	Lecturing/ patronizing	A Tutor's Guide: 4 Longman: 2 Oxford: 2 Bedford: 5 St. Martin's: 1	Longman: 1 Oxford: 1
	Low balling		
	Incessant speech	Longman: 2	
	Glowering	A Tutor's Guide: 1	

Mannon: Centering the Emotional Labor of Writing Tutors

Emotion	Indicators	Total references	Presented as emotional labor?
Enthusiasm	Direct references	St. Martin's: 2	
	Anticipation	Oxford: 9	Oxford: 9
	Positive surprise	Oxford: 19	Oxford: 19
	Positive excitement	A Tutor's Guide: 3 Longman: 1 Oxford: 13 Bedford: 3 St. Martin's: 2	Oxford: 13 Bedford: 1
	Joy	A Tutor's Guide: 2 Longman: 1 Oxford: 1 Bedford: 1	
	Expansiveness	A Tutor's Guide: 6 Longman: 1 Oxford: 24 (17 motivation, 7 inspired) Bedford: 1 St. Martin's: 2	Oxford: 6
Fear/tension (including worry, dread, anxiety, nervous anticipation)	Direct references to fear	Longman: 9 Oxford: 2 Bedford: 10 St. Martin's: 3	Longman: 4 Bedford: 4 St. Martin's: 1
	Speech disturbances	A Tutor's Guide: 2 Bedford: 1 St. Martin's: 2	
	Fidgeting		
	Nervous laughter and gestures	A Tutor's Guide: 1	
Humor (only code that requires shared emotion)	Direct references	Longman: 1 Oxford: 8 St. Martin's: 7	Longman: 1 Oxford: 8
	Good-natured teasing	A Tutor's Guide: 1 Oxford: 1 St. Martin's: 1	
	Wit and silliness	A Tutor's Guide: 1 Bedford: 1 St. Martin's: 1	
	Private jokes	Oxford: 11 Bedford: 1	Oxford: 7
	Fun and exaggeration	A Tutor's Guide: 1 Oxford: 2 St. Martin's: 1	Oxford: 1
	Nervous giggling		

Emotion	Indicators	Total references	Presented as emotional labor?
Interest (gathering information about your partner)	Direct references	Longman: 3 Bedford: 9	Bedford: 3
	Nonverbal attention (i.e., leaning forward, eye contact)	A Tutor's Guide: 5 Longman: 2 Oxford: 3 Bedford: 4 St. Martin's: 3	Bedford: 3
	Elaboration and clarification-seeking	A Tutor's Guide: 8 Oxford: 17 Bedford: 2 St. Martin's: 2	Oxford: 14
	Open-ended questions ^a	A Tutor's Guide: 18 Longman: 8 Oxford: 7 Bedford: 9 St. Martin's: 9	Longman: 1 Bedford: 1 St. Martin's: 1
Neutral	Informal exchanges	Bedford: 2	
	Non-codable moments		
Sadness	Direct references	Longman: 2 Oxford: 2 St. Martin's: 1	St. Martin's: 1
	Sighing	Bedford: 2	
	Pouting/sulking		
	Resignation	A Tutor's Guide: 1	
	Crying	A Tutor's Guide: 1 Oxford: 2 Bedford: 1 St. Martin's: 1	Oxford: 1
	Hurt feelings	A Tutor's Guide: 5 Oxford: 7 Bedford: 1 St. Martin's: 2	A Tutor's Guide: 1 Oxford: 4
Stonewalling (communicating unwillingness to listen or respond)	Active away behavior focuses on some trivial object (i.e., fingernails)	A Tutor's Guide: 2 Longman: 1 Bedford: 4 St. Martin's: 1	Bedford: 1 St. Martin's: 1
	No back channels (head nods, vocal assents)	A Tutor's Guide: 4	A Tutor's Guide: 1
	Monitoring gaze	A Tutor's Guide: 2	
Threats	Bans		
	Ultimatums		

Mannon: Centering the Emotional Labor of Writing Tutors

Emotion	Indicators	Total references	Presented as emotional labor?
Validation	Direct references	Bedford: 2	Bedford: 2
	Back channels	A Tutor's Guide: 2 St. Martin's: 3	
	Direct expressions of understanding	A Tutor's Guide: 4 Oxford: 2 Bedford: 10	A Tutor's Guide: 2 Bedford: 2
	Paraphrasing	A Tutor's Guide: 4 Longman: 3 Oxford: 17 Bedford: 8 St. Martin's: 4	A Tutor's Guide: 1 Longman: 1 Oxford: 12
	Apologies	A Tutor's Guide: 2 Oxford: 1	Oxford: 1
	Sentence finishing	Oxford: 1 St. Martin's: 2	Oxford: 1
Whining	Whiny protest	Bedford: 1	

Note. The SPAFF includes counterindicators, but I find few of these. In most cases, the counter-indicator can be coded as another emotion or behavior (i.e., when lack of interest manifests as stonewalling). St. Martin's refers to *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*, 4th Edition, by Christina Murphy & Steve Sherwood. Copyright 2011 by Bedford/St. Martin's. Oxford refers to *The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors: Practice and Research*, by Fitzgerald & Ianetta. Copyright 2015 by Oxford University Press. Bedford refers to *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*, 6th edition, by Leigh Ryan & Lisa Zimmerelli. Copyright 2016 by Bedford/St. Martin. A Tutor's Guide refers to *A Tutor's Guide: Helping Writers One to One*, 2nd edition, edited by Ben Rafoth. Copyright 2005 by Heinemann. Longman refers to *The Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring*, 2nd edition, by Paula Gillespie & Neal Lerner. Copyright 2008 by Pearson.

*Open-ended questions are such a widely used technique in writing centers that I found many more references than I count here. My count includes instances when the manuals discuss the practice of asking open-ended questions rather than providing examples (as in sample scenarios).

My coding and checking processes revealed three broad trends that raise questions about the value we attribute to emotional labor and that prompt areas for future study.

Indirect References in Manuals to Emotional Labor

The first trend I noticed was that I never found the term “emotional labor” in these manuals. Instead, in all five manuals, including in the anthologized writing contained within them, emotional labor was folded into broad terms, such as Murphy & Sherwood’s (2011) language about “interpersonal skills” (p. 1) or “interpersonal conflicts” (p. 12), or abstractions, such as one Harris (2005) used about “establish[ing] an atmosphere of trust” (p. 28). This is the trend I find most significant when thinking about how we can support

tutors. Ryan & Zimmerelli (2016), in *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*, suggested that tutoring is valuable preparation for future jobs because the tutor develops “people skills—the ability to empathize, and to adapt and respond appropriately to each individual writer’s situation” (p. 4), and they later directed students to “build rapport” and “[assess] the needs of writers,” two tasks that require tutors to suppress their own negative emotions and project positive ones (p. 138). While I did find substantial discussion of emotions in the manuals, they were only occasionally presented as something to manage or project, study, and analyze.

Tutors are often thinking on at least two levels: 1. What feedback would help this writer improve? and 2. How or when should I give that feedback to stay positive and to keep this writer engaged in the session? While these manuals focused on cognitive skills, my analyses did not show that these texts neglected emotion. In fact, these manuals were more attuned to emotional labor than scholarship would suggest, but they tended towards indirect discussion that may not help tutors grasp this part of the tutoring role. On some level, writing center practitioners know that intellectual and emotional forms of work are intertwined. But I found the central textbooks in our field demonstrated that we do not make a habit of recognizing tutors’ abilities and efforts in this area nor of helping them develop these skills. This article advocates for more nuanced and concrete discussions and for a sustainable level of emotional labor in our practice. Tutoring manuals provide starting points, though not clear roadmaps, for developing such a discourse in writing center studies.

Timing

The second trend I found was that these indirect references to emotional labor tended to locate it at certain points in a tutoring session, usually the arrival and welcome, which Murphy & Sherwood (2011), in the *St. Martin’s Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*, called “pretextual” (p. 11). In her piece included in *A Tutor’s Guide*, Muriel Harris (2005) explained that many students are “apprehensive” and under “emotional strains” (p. 25) when they come to the writing center. Ryan & Zimmerelli (2016) advised in *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*, “greet each writer cheerfully and indicate that you are ready to begin work, even if you are tired or under stress from school or job responsibilities” (p. 2). Reading this passage with the lens of emotional labor, I recognized the work of managing client emotions and suppressing one’s own. Indeed, managing the writer’s emotions, as well as the tutor’s own, are crucial parts of creating the desired environment when a client arrives and the consultation begins. Tutors assess students’ moods; they might mirror a student’s enthusiasm and dive right into a paper, or they might help the writer relax and set aside the other responsibilities that might be on students’ minds. Tutors set a tone that hopefully will encourage the student’s deep thought about their writing.

Emphasis and Attention

The final trend that emerged was that these manuals paid far more attention to certain emotions than to others. *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors* (Ryan & Zemerelli, 2016), *A Tutor's Guide* (Rafoth, 2005), and *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors* (Murphy & Sherwood, 2011) discussed affection, interest, and validation most frequently. In *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*, Ryan & Zemerelli (2016) advised tutors to recognize the vulnerability writers experience and to give praise—an indicator of affection—alongside feedback for improvement (p. 53). Likewise, they recommended that when a tutor encounters “a writer who is confident that he has written the perfect paper,” an effective strategy is to “praise aspects that appear to be well done, then ease into pointing out places where there is room for improvement” (p. 108). In one of the pieces anthologized in *A Tutor's Guide*, Nicole Kraemer Munday (2005) noted, “most writers want to hear their work praised, as well as criticized” (p. 22). Manuals frequently directed tutors to express empathy, another indicator of affection. A section of Fitzgerald & Ianetta's (2015) *The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors* (2015) titled Tutoring is Conversation (pp. 54–79) linked emotional labor (especially motivation and empathy) to the cognitive work of writing. With specific advice for listening, asking open questions that motivate writers, and offering praise, this section showed tutors how to think through the nuances of emotional labor—but without using that term. In her chapter in *A Tutor's Guide*, Harris (2005) advised tutors to “empathize” with anxious writers (p. 28), while in their chapter, Corinne Agostinelli, Helena Poch, & Elizabeth Santoro (2005) advised tutors that in emotionally charged sessions, they should “[show] empathy to writers while not allowing them to lose sight of the reason that they came for help in the first place: to express ideas effectively” (p. 35). Empathy and validation are both routine and desirable parts of the tutor's job, but tutoring manuals perhaps overemphasized these behaviors, a question I return to later in the Implications for Inclusivity section of this article.

The manuals I analyzed referred to emotions such as validation and indicators such as empathy in passing and in positive ways, but reading these manuals for their treatments of emotion highlighted other statements casting emotion as negative. In *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*, Murphy & Sherwood (2011) cautioned tutors that tutorials can involve “difficult interpersonal conflicts” because writers can express “opinions on social, political, and moral issues that run counter to the tutor's own views” (p. 12). And in their chapter of *A Tutor's Guide*, Agostinelli, Poch, & Santoro (2005) explained, “the problem with emotions, obviously, is that they cloud judgment and rationality on both sides, making for a potentially conflict-filled session” (p. 35). For many tutors and researchers, this problem is not so obvious; scholars such as Micciche (2007) have asked us to regard emotion as a source of knowledge.

Furthermore, emotions around interpersonal conflicts warrant critical self-reflection during training and tutoring rather than wariness about any emotional engagement. Most important for my discussion, interpersonal conflicts are neither the everyday work of the writing center nor the core emotional labor of tutoring.

Exceptions

Numbering textual references to emotions showed three exceptions or nuances to the three trends above. First, *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors* (Ryan & Zemerelli, 2016), far more often than the other manuals, contained acknowledgments of fear and anger (specifically, frustration). Second, I found markedly infrequent references to any emotion or affective engagement in *The Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring* (Gillespie & Lerner, 2008). Similarly, with a few exceptions as noted in Table 1—including references to frustration, domineering, and open-ended questions as well as direct mentions of fear and sadness—this text contained references to emotions and emotional behaviors less often than the other texts and omitted many emotions altogether. Finally, in *The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors* (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2015) emotions were emphasized that in contrast were neglected in other manuals. This text referred to validation and interest as the other manuals did, but it had a distinct (and, to my mind, welcome) emphasis on enthusiasm and humor that was missing from the other four. As I discuss in the Implications for Inclusivity section, noting these patterns could help writing centers think critically about which emotional behaviors our practices emphasize (or overemphasize) and why.

I found that criticism and affection were among the emotional behaviors frequently mentioned in tutor manuals, which gave me pause. True, tutors offer criticism in every appointment, but without realizing that, researchers studying interpersonal dynamics tend to associate criticism with blaming, character attacks, betrayal statements, or negative mind reading (associations writers might also make). Tutors work to direct their criticism toward writing, not writers, but viewing this criticism toward writing as part of a more specific discussion of emotion underscores the importance of threading that needle successfully. Conversely, empathy, caring statements, and compliments indicate affection, but not all tutors who decide to use empathy or compliments in an appointment would describe the relationship with that writer as affectionate. In a similar vein, tutors might not connect their emotional labor to the common techniques of paraphrasing or asking questions, but these techniques can be found linked to interest and validation in the SPAFF. When tutors try to describe positive qualities or weaknesses in ways that maintain writers' enthusiasm and confidence, tutors engage emotion—consciously or not. The tendency of the manuals I analyzed towards indirect discussion of emotional labor might exacerbate the disparity between the affective dimensions of

Mannon: Centering the Emotional Labor of Writing Tutors

writing center practice and everyday experiences of emotion—resulting in misunderstandings over, say, criticism or compliments. A sharper awareness of the emotional overtones in common writing center interactions could prevent miscommunication. With a sharper awareness of the emotional overtones, we could more fully recognize that giving feedback in the form of praise or criticism on a project involves both cognitive and emotional labor.

Starting Points for Future Discussions

In their chapter of *A Tutor's Guide*, Agostinelli, Poch, & Santoro (2005) noted, “For the most part, a tutor is expected to figure out the ‘heart’ aspects of tutoring on her own” (p. 34). In the first section of this article, I presented a case for treating “the ‘heart’ aspects of tutoring” as labor that a writing center community can hone rigorously and reflectively. Even practitioners who are alert to emotion in the writing center often use unhelpfully conflict-laden or abstract terms to discuss it. As tutors train for a layered and fluid role, they would benefit from “a pedagogy that attends to emotion as a crucial, epistemological component of rhetorical education” (Stenberg, 2011, p. 351).

The tutoring manuals I reviewed offered several starting points for discussing emotional labor. For example, in *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*, Ryan & Zimmerelli (2016) did note that these emotion-based behaviors are intentional: “It is not by accident that many writing centers appear welcoming and friendly” (p. 11). While they did not acknowledge the effort involved in achieving that appearance as challenging work, a tutoring practicum might. *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors* also includes a section called The Many Hats Tutors Wear, in which tutors are encouraged to be flexible and aware of the different roles they might inhabit. When wearing the hat of an “ally,” for example, a tutor “offers support to a writer coping with a difficult task”—the tutor is “sympathetic, empathetic, and encouraging” and takes seriously “questions that may seem silly or stupid” (Ryan & Zimmerelli, 2016, p. 5). As “the coach,” a tutor might instead “stand on the sidelines” and ask questions or make comments that “encourage writers to think through problems and find their own answers” (Ryan & Zimmerelli, 2016, p. 5). This section introduces a wide range of ways tutors and writers might interact. Discussing these roles might also include paying closer attention to the behaviors that are associated with the “ally” or “coach” personas and how those personas serve to project or suppress emotion.

Tutoring scenarios and role-playing prompts might likewise facilitate discussions that analyze the work of affective engagement. In one role-playing section in *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*, Ryan & Zimmerelli (2016) instructed tutors to consider the following as they read each scenario:

- How is the tutor probably feeling? How do you know? What verbal and nonverbal clues indicate his or her feelings?
- How is the writer probably feeling? How do you know? What verbal and nonverbal clues can you find? (p. 145)

A discussion about this scenario might be most effective for tutors by moving from identifying and understanding feelings—the emotional literacy that Lape (2008) described—to discussing the possible, appropriate, and effective responses a tutor might choose in order to begin (or sustain) a productive session.

While the passages I cited in my findings introduced emotional labor indirectly, Hochschild (1983), Micciche (2007), Hall (2017), and others have explained the value of speaking specifically and consistently about this component of a tutor’s job. Micciche (2007) argued, “Passing on content knowledge and practical know-how should be complemented by frank discussions about working conditions and the affective landscape of professional life” (p. 98). This recommendation for training teachers and administrators holds true for writing centers, too. Hall (2017) made this point explicit when he argued for “tutor education focused not merely on instrumental strategies, but on developing conceptual frameworks—habits of mind and critical lenses to inform writing center work” (p. 13). Not only does sustained attention to emotional labor support tutors’ work, but also investigating the links between theory and practice supports their learning. I agree with Hall (2017) that “administrators and tutors must engage together to examine unspoken assumptions, mental models, conceptual frameworks, to make them explicit in order to develop new, shared models” (p. 149) of writing center training and work. Research and reflections on online tutoring suggest one meaningful application of such examinations. When directors ask tutors moving online to “mimic approaches they use in person” (Widen & Prebel, 2020, para. 4), the language of emotional labor might help students name the specific affective behaviors used to connect with writers and then deploy these behaviors intentionally.

These mental models and conceptual frameworks should acknowledge that emotional labor can cause burnout (Wharton, 2009). For teachers and tutors who offer video conferences, discussing the weariness that comes from interacting with writers in that virtual space could be particularly useful. In the spring of 2020, a cluster of articles in popular online media explained that “Zoom fatigue” stems from increased emotion management (Mikel, 2020; Sander & Baumann, 2020; Sklar, 2020). According to Julia Sklar (2020), a video call “requires sustained and intense attention to words” and stifles any “ingrained abilities” (para. 8) to engage another speaker affectively. Without non-verbal cues, Libby Sander & Oliver Baumann (2020) explained, “people feel like they have to make more emotional effort to appear interested” (para. 3). In “Do You Understand? A Practical Guide to Synchronous Online

Tutoring,” Joseph M. Rein (2009) modeled the intentional (if a bit mechanical) approach to building rapport and engaging writers that an online space requires. Rein encouraged tutors to develop “a friendly cyber-voice” and “take the time to insert brief but necessary personal touches like ‘I just finished writing my own personal statement’” (p. 14). My review of emotional labor research suggests that self-awareness and facility with the concept of emotional labor could equip tutors to make these adjustments when asked to work in new contexts or media. Furthermore, as I explain in the following section, a strategic “minimalist emotional labor” might help tutors adjust to the intensity of video appointments.

Tutors and teachers might be encouraged by Hochschild’s (2009/2013) argument that burnout comes from dissonance, not the amount of emotional labor or frequency of interaction a job requires (p. 160). Displaying “emotions that conflict with their own feelings” leads to exhaustion for people, even when the emotions themselves are positive, and doing so reduces workers’ “sense of personal accomplishment at work” (p. 159). Hochschild identified the source of this problem in systems that impede emotion workers, noting, “though they may come to work hoping to take pride in a job well done, low pay, understaffing, rigid rules, and devaluation can set up circumstances which prevent that” (p. 30). In these conditions, workers’ “main job becomes protecting patients [or other people in their care] from the harm of life in a broken, globalized, over-bureaucratized, or profit-hungry system” (p. 30). Emotional labor might therefore take less of a toll on tutors in environments that define it, value it, and establish conditions where it resonates positively.

Viewing Emotional Labor with a Critical Eye

Do tutors need to perform emotional labor at all? In the classroom, I see value in letting students sit with their discomfort. In my personal life, I appreciate service providers who are direct and skilled even if they are not particularly empathetic or complimentary. Perhaps counterintuitively, writers do not always benefit from the empathy and validation that writing center practitioners often use. In a tutor’s column in *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship*, Sacha-Rose Phillips (2018) recounted an appointment with a writer named Kalie who shared Phillips’s own “foreign-born and multilingual status” (p. 27). She assumed that these similarities in their identities meant they also both lacked confidence as writers (p. 28). Afterwards, she realized that providing affirmation inadvertently dismissed Kalie’s actual concerns. Phillips reflected, “Instead of addressing her writing challenges, I had attempted to address her feelings by trying to ensure she didn’t feel the way I had felt when I first began writing in college” (p. 28). In telling this story, Phillips described one of the pitfalls I see in overvaluing emotional labor, and she also affirmed that we can address this by centering students’ “expressed needs,” which, in some

cases, means prioritizing “clear advice about what could be improved” over “an encouraging spiel” (p. 28).

Furthermore, reading the tutoring manuals I analyzed and Hochschild’s (1983; 2009/2013) work made me wonder whether tutors who make their own emotions obvious and choose not to respond to clients’ emotions could still be effective. Wells (2016) showed that tutors who do not suppress their annoyance or frustration can leave students “with a bad feeling about the writing center overall” (p. 104). And yet, is the demanding work of suppressing emotions the only way to create that good feeling? While studying this subject, I have repeatedly thought of Wells’s (2016) suggestion for managing client expectations:

We can say to students, “We know you’re busy. We know you’re stressed and limited for time. We know that being required to use the writing center adds one more thing to your to-do list. But, these required sessions will likely be worth the time they will take, many times over. We can help you meet specific needs that will ultimately help you find more time in your day.” Such a move would require us to get past the ideal of the writing center as a community of unhurried students working to improve their writing at whatever pace is needed. Ultimately, though, framing required tutoring in this way would show students that we understand their realities and want to meet them where they are. (p. 103)

Although Wells did not speak directly about emotional labor, she offered a pragmatic—but not negative—approach that I find appealing. Adopting such a tone for discussing a tutor’s negative or neutral emotions, rather than always or immediately suppressing those feelings, could mitigate the burnout that dissonance brings and help tutors step away from emotionality when it becomes draining. Tutors might adapt the above script to acknowledge their own stress or frustration. In these cases, they could tell writers, “regardless of my own stress, I am here because helping you meet specific needs in your writing is important to me.” Such a move would dispense with the ideal of the writing center as a community of writers with similar emotional needs and tutors with natural affinities and endless capacities for emotional labor. Conversely, we might examine how often we ask tutors to project positive emotions that they do not genuinely feel.

Direct and routine discussions of emotional labor provide vocabulary for more specific conversations with writers and tutors and a reassessment of the emotion work built into assumptions about the writing center. Wells (2016) called for us to recognize “that some of our sanctioned methods may not appeal to everyone” (p. 104). As she explained, “honest conversations with students about finding a good fit and responding to a disappointing session” (p. 105) might convince dissatisfied clients to return. These honest conversations that explain our processes and policies to students depend on awareness of

Mannon: Centering the Emotional Labor of Writing Tutors

tutors' cognitive and emotional work. As we discuss emotional labor with more precision, we can name the approaches tutors use (i.e., "It sounds like you benefit from working with Matt because he focuses on validating your strengths," or "Bethany doesn't tend to compliment clients' writing very often, but she'll ask questions to help you dig into your ideas and feel inspired to develop the draft."). These differences in style are one of the advantages of having a staff with multiple tutors.

Implications for Inclusivity

I propose two additional implications for writing centers' approaches to emotional labor, both of which could make writing centers more inclusive. First, intentional study and discussion would bring the gender dynamics of writing centers to the surface. As Micciche (2007) wrote, there is a "tendency within intellectual as well as popular thought to collapse emotion with all things feminine" (p. 3). Those working in emotional labor scholarship have explained more specifically that caregiving is "an expectation or norm with which female and male workers are differentially expected to comply, as well as an informal aspect of workers' interpersonal relationships at work" (Wharton, 2009, p. 154). The close association between tutoring and emotional labor might be one factor that feminizes the tutoring position. In a chapter on gender and sex in *Facing the Center: Toward an Identity Politics of One-to-One Mentoring*, one of the few focused studies of gender in the writing center, Harry C. Denny (2010) observed that writing centers "have disproportionate representation of women, as tutors or clients," which stems from the greater "perceived social stigma that goes along with men seeking help" (p. 100). If we overemphasize helping, caring, and empathizing behaviors when we recruit new tutors, that job description might invoke gender norms and (erroneously and inadvertently) convey that female students are better suited for peer tutoring than male students, more welcome to apply, and more likely to enjoy the work.

Second, regarding affective engagement as labor rather than as a function of personality means that tutors can deploy it purposefully—or choose not to. For example, an emotionally intelligent tutor might elect not to empathize or offer validation. I recognize that this choice goes against the grain of writing center practice, and I am certainly not advocating that tutors make a habit of acting in a detached manner. Rather, we might view this decision by a tutor as a minimalist form of emotional labor (analogous to Jeff Brooks's, 1991, minimalist tutoring), where tutors do not always or immediately move to resolve writers' negative feelings. A tutor might instead let a writer sit with discomfort for several moments or focus on the writer's request for clear advice. This flexibility aligns with Denny's (2010) observation that tutors decide to assimilate, oppose, or subvert norms of gendered behavior, meaning that a sustainable response to gender politics "might involve strategic decisions about when to do

one rather than another” (p. 112). Tutors might respond to clients’ emotions in varied, personalized ways besides empathy and validation. For example, a tutor who is mindful of the full range of emotional labor could decide to project expansiveness (“feel[ing] creative, motivated, and inspired”; Coan & Gottman, 2007, p. 276) more often, such as when responding to a frustrated or disengaged writer (i.e., shown by the tutor saying, “This topic has so many different starting points you could choose from!”) in addition to or in place of the empathy we expect (i.e., shown by the tutor saying “I have a hard time starting my papers, too”). Facility with minimalist or strategic forms of emotional labor might be particularly useful for a tutor deciding how to approach a regular client who relies on that tutor’s emotional resources to a degree that is perhaps gendered and probably counterproductive for both parties.

Using the role-playing and persona sections of the tutoring manuals I analyzed as springboards for discussing emotional labor could facilitate tutors’ increasing deftness in moving among a range of emotional possibilities. Incorporating mindfulness could also help to develop these skills. Claire E. Kervin & Heather E. Barrett (2018) proposed that mindfulness, “paying attention to the present moment without judgment” (p. 11), can help procrastinators notice the impulses that delay their work. Addressing mindfulness in tutor training, possibly through the reflective reading and writing exercises Kervin & Barrett described, could similarly prepare tutors to notice the impulses that guide emotional labor. Learning “to simply pay attention to our emotions and thoughts—rather than jumping straight to judging those thoughts and feelings” (Kervin & Barrett, 2018, p. 11) has clear implications for the emotional regulation and projection that are parts of tutoring. Such mindfulness also offers benefits beyond discerning the productive type of affective engagement for an appointment. For tutors experiencing or nearing burnout, mindfulness could calibrate their affective engagement to a sustainable level. Finally, non-judgmental attention to frustration or empathy fatigue could enable tutors to speak honestly about their emotional limits or seek out the resources they need.

Conclusion

I find that two attitudes to emotional labor inform writing center practice. First, researchers and practitioners anticipate that tutoring will require difficult engagement with writers’ emotions. The tutoring manuals I analyzed addressed complicated, fraught sessions directly, but these texts dealt indirectly with the more mundane work of interacting with students who are “stressed and limited for time” and adapting the strategies tutors need in order to “meet them where they are” (Wells, 2016, p. 103). Second, writing center researchers and practitioners anticipate that tutors will bring with them a high

Mannon: Centering the Emotional Labor of Writing Tutors

level of emotional intelligence and an affinity for emotional labor without any training. With the exception of the research articles in the *Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors* (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2015), our primary resources for training tutors have very little direct advice for performing this part of the job, perhaps because we perceive engaging writers' emotions to be an aspect of tutoring "that we can learn but that no one can simply teach us" (Sherwood, 2011, p. 98). These attitudes reflect notions of both ideal writers and ideal tutors. Ideal writers are "unhurried by deadlines, unconcerned with grades" and put few emotional demands on the tutor (Wells, 2016, p. 98). Ideal tutors have natural or instinctive inclinations to emotional labor and can react quickly to meet students' needs. I hope that, by highlighting these ideals, I can encourage directors and tutors to reflect on their existing practices and consider where centers could benefit from new conceptual frameworks.

Writing center conversations about emotional labor need not revolve around whether this work is good or bad, productive or unproductive. As Hochschild (2013) wrote in a follow up to her seminal 1983 study, emotional labor can be both meaningful and fun when working conditions value and protect the laborers. Hochschild explained in her 2013 work, "That starts with recognizing the extraordinary emotional labor it takes to maintain a thriving childcare center, nursing home, hospital, or family" (p. 31) and includes improving working conditions in these spaces—or, I contend, in writing centers. By cultivating this knowledge and recognition through the texts we reference, practitioners can become more aware of the emotional labor we take for granted and better equipped to deploy it purposefully when writers enter the room.

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Mannon: Centering the Emotional Labor of Writing Tutors

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