2018

Paper Chase: Perceptions Of The Pursuit Of Academic Scholarly Productivity Among Faculty Writing Group Participants

Deidra Jackson
University of Mississippi

Follow this and additional works at: https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd

Part of the Higher Education Commons

Recommended Citation
Jackson, Deidra, "Paper Chase: Perceptions Of The Pursuit Of Academic Scholarly Productivity Among Faculty Writing Group Participants" (2018). Electronic Theses and Dissertations. 623.
https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd/623

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact egrove@olemiss.edu.
PAPER CHASE: PERCEPTIONS OF THE PURSUIT OF ACADEMIC SCHOLARLY
PRODUCTIVITY AMONG FACULTY WRITING GROUP PARTICIPANTS

A Dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of Leadership and Counselor Education
The University of Mississippi

by
DEIDRA FAYE JACKSON

May 2018
ABSTRACT

This autoethnography uses the researcher’s personal journey from professional writer to emergent academic scholar to examine the perceptions of the frequent pursuit of academic scholarly productivity among faculty writing group (FWG) participants. The case study, based at a Southeastern U.S. research-intensive university, adds to extensive analyses of FWGs as a means of faculty development that positively influences the frequency of scholarly work; it is significant because unlike most studies on FWGs, this study focuses on understanding more deeply the sway that “publish or perish” directives hold on FWG participants, delving into faculty reactions to academe’s explicit pressures that professors regularly produce publishable scholarly work for the promise of tenure, promotion and advancement, and job security. Empirical studies suggest that what often stymies junior and senior academic faculty researchers and hinders them from engaging more frequently in scholarly productivity are the ongoing challenges in meeting the expectations of their expanding roles amid teaching, service, and other academic obligations (Dwyer, Lewis, McDonald, & Burns, 2012; MacLeod, Steckley, & Murray, 2012). Eight FWG participants completed surveys and five contributed to two focus groups to uncover faculty views on the persistent need to pursue published scholarship. Data analyses revealed 10 major themes that emerged as a result of this exploration. They suggest that faculty are skeptical that their research has practical value, faculty are less inclined to express positive sentiments about their overall research experience, and faculty make significant lifestyle changes when pursuing research publishing. Using a novel approach that employs the researcher’s narratives of personal experience with writing under pressure and working in academia, this
study informs practice and research, presents faculty perspectives on the persistent need to
“publish or perish,” and suggests that research institutions engage faculty-researchers in
considering how increased resources and initiatives aimed at addressing scholarly productivity
may help faculty to better thrive in such environments.

Keywords: faculty writing groups, scholarly productivity, autoethnography, publish or
perish, faculty development, higher education, faculty scholarship
DEDICATION

For Mom, Dad, and Son.

Dad, your unexpected passing shook my world, but you will always be with me. Throughout my life, without fail, you *always* supported my academic goals—all my goals, really—and told me that with your blessing, I could and should do whatever I set my mind to.

This is for you.

And to the selfless faculty researchers with whom I share a war of art, this is for us.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FWG</td>
<td>Faculty Writing Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWGs</td>
<td>Faculty Writing Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTE</td>
<td>Research Training Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTS</td>
<td>Research, Teaching, and Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBL</td>
<td>Work-based Learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe many warm thanks to a number of dedicated higher education professionals for the completion of this project; it was only through their diligent instruction, expert advice, and selfless sacrifice of time, motivation, and valuable counsel that this study was made possible. I thank the following faculty, all members of my committee: Dr. Amy Wells-Dolan (chair), Dr. Phillis George, Dr. Alice Myatt, and Dr. John Holleman. I cannot thank them enough for their valuable time, service, and support. And it is because of Dr. Stacey Britton that I fell in love with qualitative research.

I am grateful.

To Dr. Tonya Thames Taylor, this study’s peer debriefer, your wise words, warm friendship, and expertise over all these years have been immeasurable to me.

I owe much appreciation to my university benefactors whose several years’ worth of financial support for research and study allowed me to travel and concentrate on my academic work full time.

And the genuine collegiality among my fellow doctoral students meant the world. You know who you are.

Unending deep appreciation goes to my parents and son – Emily and James Jackson Jr. and Jackson Brown Reid – for their boundless and sincere love, support, patience, and encouragement. Their steady assurances, from near or far, usually are all I ever need.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .......................................................................................................................... ii
DEDICATION ....................................................................................................................... iv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS ............................................................................................ v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................................... vi
LIST OF TABLES .......................................................................................................... xi
LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................ xii
PREFACE: AN EXPLANATION .................................................................................. xiii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ................................................................................... 1
  Background of the Study .............................................................................................. 1
  Autoethnography—The Blurred Genre ....................................................................... 6
  Autoethnography and Scholarly Productivity ............................................................. 8
  Statement of the Problem ........................................................................................... 9
  Purpose and Significance of the Study ...................................................................... 15
  Reasoning ..................................................................................................................... 21
  Researchers’ Perspective: Truth-telling the Academic Life ....................................... 23
    Managing the Pressure ............................................................................................. 26
    Isolated, Naked and Alone ...................................................................................... 28
    Being(s) in Compliance .......................................................................................... 29
  Research Questions .................................................................................................. 30
## LIST OF TABLES

1. Current Faculty Rank................................................................. 172
2. Years Employed as a Faculty Member........................................ 172
3. Tenure Status.............................................................................. 172
4. Primary Faculty Writing Group Motivation................................... 173
5. Scholarship in Progress.............................................................. 173
6. Faculty Writing Group Impact on Scholarly Productivity.............. 173
7. Plans to Continue Faculty Writing Group Participation.................. 174
LIST OF FIGURES

1. Developing Conceptual Categories ........................................23

2. Visualization for Qualitative Procedure ..................................84
PREFACE

An Explanation

This doctoral text uses autoethnography—which combines autobiography and personal experience with culture analysis and evaluation—as a novel approach to presenting original research. I was not usually accustomed to expounding on details of my life in print, but felt called to do so here, because writing, and all its struggles, joys, quests, promises, and blockages played such consequential roles in my professional and personal lives. I knew well the pursuit of frequent writing productivity; the perpetual cycle of writing for publication enveloped my careers as an undergraduate college journalist and then as a professional newspaper editor and reporter, public relations specialist, and print columnist. However, later as a non-tenure-track university administrator and journalism instructor, I was obligated to chiefly focus on teaching and service, two of the “Big Three” traditional pillars of academe in which tenured and tenure-track faculty are judged and are expected to demonstrate excellence. I was not compelled to regularly conduct publishable research—the third main criterion that a number of research universities use to determine faculty productivity and conduct tenure review (Sampson, Driscoll, Foulk, & Carroll, 2010; DeFrance, Ferrira, & Rappele, 1994; Price & Cotten, 2006; & Reysen & Krueger, 2013). With my university and personal responsibilities already stretched thin at the time, I appreciated being exempt from having to frequently produce publishable scholarly work as an extension of much-needed breathing space. I often wondered, how and when would I find the time to conduct research worthy to be shared and disseminated among intellectual publics?
Unbeknownst to me, this familiar query later would become a significant theme in my research. Now, as a (re)emerging scholar in higher education, I became acquainted with the pursuit of scholarly research productivity, which though a different animal, still is located within the same genus. A few years later, at least two events have propelled me into the quest for frequent academic scholarship: (a) I was named facilitator of four FWGs, which sought to assist junior and senior faculty researchers employed at a Southeastern U.S. research-intensive university by introducing initiatives to help boost their scholarly productivity and (b) I, as a doctoral candidate and prospective faculty-researcher, planned to enter academia intending to pursue faculty positions that all insisted upon an essential requirement: my own developed or (developing) record of published scholarly work. As has been made clear to me and other potential junior faculty candidates, who seek tenured teaching positions, one must demonstrate potential as a promising scholar who would make profitable and noteworthy contributions to an institution of higher learning. New Ph.D.’s applying for faculty positions usually must produce examples of recently published scholarly work or show exceptional promise to engage in scholarship.

Initially, I had planned to obscure my personal thoughts on writing and the pursuit of frequent scholarly productivity, as detached third-person judgments and observations; however, the fresh promise of autoethnography, which has its countless supporters and detractors within research ranks, intrigued me for the potential I saw to enhance and further engage in-depth studies concerning FWGs, and other writing groups, as well as the fields of faculty socialization, work-based learning (WBL), and peer formativity. There is ample qualitative and quantitative
empirical research that proves FWGs’ positive influences on the scholarly productivity among participants. Though the FWGs in which I was a participant-observer revealed similar impacts, data compelled a more avant-garde and causal research focus that did not merely add to extensive studies that measured participants’ scholarly work output but explored participants’ perceptions of the pursuit of frequent scholarly productivity.

Scholars have both lauded and rejected autoethnographies—also referred to as self-reflective research writing—which often merges into the research data, rich details and emotional narratives, as well as authors’ subjectivity, self-awareness, and sense of the prevailing researcher social, field, and intellectualist biases (Patton, 2002; Prasad, 2005). Ellis (2004), an interdisciplinary scholar and qualitative researcher, who is regarded as one of the creators of autoethnography, asserted that unlike other research forms, autoethnographies have the “ability to connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social. . .” (p. xix); similarly, Jones (2005) praised the capacity of autoethnographies’ “evocation and explanation” (p. 765). Other noted scholars, such as Delamont (2007) and French sociologist, anthropologist, and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (1986) (as cited by Everett; 2002), reject autoethnographies for lacking rigor and failing to resemble traditional models of empirical research, and for being “pretentious and . . . unduly narcissistic” (p. 197), respectively.

Delamont’s, Bourdieu’s, and other researchers’ scholarly criticism of autoethnographies as lacking intellectual heft and stringency as a genre, is perhaps why I feel it necessary to share this preface, to heartily defend my choice of research method. Professional nostalgia begs me to draw journalistic comparisons and debates between hard news and soft news advocates: many
among the former either loathe or distrust the type of informal storytelling favored by the latter, who adore the more detailed and nuanced news formats. Similarly, entering into academic research, I am cognizant of a longstanding implicit bias among some scholars that deems qualitative research to be inferior to quantitative research, beliefs discussed among such scholars as Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012; Forber-Pratt, 2015, and others. So, familiar to me are the divergent and conflicting issues within different reporting methodologies, be they grounded in academics or journalism.

The sense of solidarity I felt with the FWG participants I helped guide was indisputable. I linked the FWG participants’ quests for frequent scholarly productivity with my own, allowing our experiences (and my hidden angst) to intersect. It is at these points of intersection that I invite readers to consider FWG participants’ perceptions of the pursuit of scholarly productivity and their relevance to my worldview—which is central, rather than marginal (Cobern, 1994)—to our mutual station within higher education.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In addition to whatever work there may be to do on campus, a teacher is usually engaged upon some kind of research or publication. Aside from any practical values—such as faster promotion—to be gained from this additional work, he usually wants to do it because it offers him an escape from adolescent personalities and minds into the world of ideas (Cole, 1940, p. 300).

Background of the Study

This revealing disclosure appeared in the dog-eared pages of a mid-20th century faded tome aimed at enlightening prospective professors about the shifting rigors and presenting an “overview of the problems” (p. v) within higher education of the era. The commentary emerged eight years after some scholars believe Harold Jefferson Coolidge, a scientist and conservationist, in 1932 first coined the phrase “publish or perish” (Rawat & Meena, 2014; Plume & van Weijen, 2014) to illustrate the perceived pressures aimed at research faculty to frequently produce publishable scholarly work to sustain and advance their careers. Cole’s (1940) exasperation at the changing landscape of higher education is palpable as she criticized large universities for making career advancement conditional with frequent scholarly work output, while failing to grant similar inducements for effective teachers, who do not “rise in rank as fast as the research worker” (p. 506).

Indeed, the academic profession at this time had been undergoing upheaval in many sectors, familiar to modern-day institutional disruptions, including fluctuating student populations, educational operation, evolving instructional methods, and shifting policies related
to curriculum and governance (Tierney & Rhoads, 1993; Altbach, 2011; Thelin, 2011; Lattuca & Stark, 2011; Birnbaum, 2011; Eble & McKeachie, 1985; Cole, 1940). During the same year Cole’s book was published in 1940, faculty professors would finally see their expertise rewarded through tenure, a long-sought guaranteed right to due process for educators. In a historic decision reached after 14 years of talks, the 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure by the American Association of University Professors publicized its concept of permanent faculty tenure (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2011), giving junior and senior professors a roadmap to advancement and clearer provisions for promotions and job security.

Tenured professors, who were now rewarded with their universities’ highest confidence and expressly compensated for their perceived competence, still were beholden to research obligations to maintain their highly regarded university stature. A list of the attributes deemed important to faculty competence, and by extension, to the measure of a respected institution of higher learning, featured prominently in Wilson’s (1942) sociological analysis of prestige and competition in academia. The study was based on an inventory of 57 American colleges and universities at the time. Of the 10 elements listed in a table titled “Regression Weighting of Items of Importance in Staff Competence” (p. 159), the categories “articles,” has the highest weight, with “books and monographs” following; the categories “experience,” “graduate study,” “master’s degrees” and “doctor’s degrees,” rounding out the top 5. There were no references to teaching competence or effectiveness.

Scholars of bygone eras, as well as modern-day academics, have as a matter of course, issued opinions about teaching expertise and scholarly work output. Wilson (1942) posited that “selection and promotion are based upon criteria that assume competition” (p. 157). Though not nearly as blunt about “publish or perish” as was Cole, Rowson (1988), a contemporary,
suggested that scholarly publishing requirements “keep researchers honest by exposing their processes and findings to the criticism of other scholars” (p. 227). White (1996) regarded “publish or perish” as merely part of higher education’s competing professional expectations (e.g., number of publications and citations in refereed journals, submitted and accepted grant proposals, number of classes and students taught, number of active professional organizations) and external competition among public and private universities.

Other higher education scholars believed the notion of “publish or perish” to be a myth; O’Neill (1990) asserted that faculty publication requirements are “grossly overstated” and may not be necessary to gain tenure and promotions in most universities when other factors, such as academic service or administrative activities, instead, likely influenced advancement decisions. Borruso (2007) assailed modern graduate university research programs as “examples of academic malaise” (p. 225) that failed to teach students how to engage in original inquiry. Hexter (1971), another scholar in agreement with that assertion, insisted that relaxing publishing pressures did not improve classroom teaching nor did engaged research professors abandon their classroom lectures.

Despite longstanding criticisms in academia regarding the “publish or perish” reward system by a number of other scholars (Brookes & German, 1983; Budd, 1988; Caplow & McGee, 1958; Oransky, 2015; Felder, 1994; Jaschik, 2007; Betsey, 2007; Paglia, 1991), universities obligating (mostly) junior and senior faculty to frequently pursue research publishing opportunities for the promise of tenure, promotions, and career advancement, remain unyielding (Guraya, Norman, Khoshhal, Guraya, & Forgione, 2016; Plume & van Weijen, 2014; Murray & Cunningham, 2011; Geller, 2013). With ostensible scholarship credentials, institutions are emboldened to satisfy a growing complex of multiple concerns at higher education’s forefront,
stemming from skeptical public stakeholders, increasing student expectations, and perceived internal and external benefits of extensive research activities (Grappa, Austin, & Trice, 2007).

FWGs, whose activities largely are intended to support faculty researchers, who are pressured to continually publish research, are viewed as an inexpensive and effective institutional intervention for professors desiring to improve their rates of scholarly work output (Geller & Eodice, 2013). Today, FWGs in colleges and universities often serve as agencies of faculty socialization and, specifically, faculty development, which is widely regarded as “an expectation for professional growth” (Drummond-Young et al., 2010, p. 153).

This study was focused on my experiences with participants in FWGs, who met regularly in small teams to write, critique each other’s work, discuss research, and share publication goals, anxieties, and achievements, and how they perceived and experienced the challenges presented by “publish or perish” directives. As a pedagogical neophyte, at least in the discipline of higher education, my own rising experiential angst regarding new and compulsory forays into scholarly writing, combined with initial uncertainty at being charged with the responsibility to effectively guide faculty-researchers toward their new scholarship objectives, ran parallel to FWG participants’ aspirations to increase their publication productivity. In this position, I continued to evolve as a (re)emerging scholar with a particular set of experiences that Sparkes (2000) would agree aim to extend the “sociological understanding” (p. 21) of this distinct culture of academia.

This reflective praxis required that I understand myself as a participant-researcher, and correspondingly, offer a narrative analysis by using stories as data (Savin-Baden & Niekerka, 2007); I hoped to present a transparent window into FWG participants’ insights of an environment that continuously demands that they “publish or perish” and accept the implicit requirements to achieve success or status quo in academe. In this study, the frequency of FWG
participants’ published scholarship is secondary to examining faculty’s profound insights, and our shared lived culture together, as I, a FWG facilitator and rising academic researcher, also pursued scholarly productivity goals. Such inquiry allowed the opportunity to explore the following:

- FWG participants’ perceptions of “publish or perish”
- Insight into the workings of FWGs
- The researcher’s perceived sense of solidarity with FWG participants and desire for them to grant acceptance into the ranks of university faculty

Autoethnographies use autobiography, written life history, and ethnography—the study of culture—to “allow another person’s world of experience to inspire critical reflection on your own,” and to “recontextualize what you knew already in light of your encounter with someone else’s life or culture” (Ellis & Bochner, 1996, p. 23). An autoethnography permits “researchers the opportunity to use their experiences to inform about the behaviors and social relations of a culture” (Guzik, 2013, p. 268). Key to this study and other autoethnographies were the interactions between me and the culture being studied, as well as the relationships I drew between my experiences and efforts to understand and interpret the culture’s beliefs. Boyle and Parry (2007), whose qualitative research study centered on organizations, consider autoethnography effective because it illuminated such relationships. Historically, autoethnographies have been used as “a discourse from the margins”—as illustrated first by anthropologists to enlighten the world about the lives of the indigenous people they studied—and a means for a culture to claim a voice, “fill a silent void,” and assert an identity (Brandes, 1982; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Marcus & Cushman, 1982, p. 191). Marcus and Cushman (1982) also
described autoethnography as “a desire to find one’s self in a world . . . transformed by . . . another’s modernist vision” (p. 192).

As I have purposefully meandered through academia and progress as a researcher and writer, while pursuing a goal of becoming a “born-again” academic, I divulged my journey in a way that is reminiscent of what Prasad (p. 84) calls “confessional tales;” here, my personal narratives clarified revelations to enduring questions related to my sense of self and FWG participants’ own perceptions, as we all sought to claim our own voices and acknowledge our “publish or perish” obligations, which Murray and Thow (2014) bluntly referred to as “the imperative to produce writing that counts in someone else’s terms” (p. 2).

**Autoethnography—The Blurred Genre**

As a research and writing methodology, autoethnography aims “to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) to understand cultural experience (ethno)” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010, p. 273), where the narrator’s lived experience is the study’s fundamental focal point (Raab, 2013). Creswell (2007) and Ellis et al. (2010) observed the lack of convention in autoethnographies, a feature of qualitative research that employs a blurred genre or a narrative style with numerous interpretive techniques; the focus on reflexive autoethnographies, which involve the participant researcher producing engaging and evocative “thick descriptions [detailed data] of personal and interpersonal experience” (Ellis et al, 2010, p. 5) was the basis for this study of FWG participants’ perceptions of the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity. According to Méndez (2013) the writing of an autoethnographic account is without formal structure “since it is the meaning that is important, not the production of a highly academic text” (p. 281). Using this type of research design that employed a “humanistic, interpretive approach” (Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007, p. 21), enabled researchers to
immerse readers into the lives of a culture and, by extension, conveyed to them a vicarious understanding of the experiences. More specifically, reflexive autoethnographies forge intellectual and emotional connections with readers during the ambitious process of “representing lived experiences” and document ways a researcher—who unlike naturalistic and positivist methods of traditional ethnographic work, embraces herself as narrator and as part of the story—is transformed after conducting fieldwork (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 739; Reeves, Peller, Goldman, & Kitto, 2013).

I suggested that deeply engaging readers into the academic lives of FWG participants allowed for a more lucid understanding of their perceptions of the pursuit of frequent scholarly productivity, more than a one-dimensional study could convey. Participants’ reasons for participating in FWGs stemmed from their desire to improve their publishable scholarly work output and to enjoy the academic benefits of comradery among peers with similar goals.

Autoethnographic researchers extract meaning from the instinctive contributions of their participants’ experiences, personal narratives, and opinions by filtering them through a pedagogical process for study. The resulting scholarship, whose research has experienced impressive growth over the last three decades (Anderson, 2006), has been buoyed mostly by “interdisciplinary symbolic interactionists,” (p. 373) such as Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner, noted autoethnography advocates, whose renowned experimentation with the avant-garde qualitative research method, favored the use of postmodern influences in the social sciences and humanities. According to Cooper and White (2006) the objective of autobiography in qualitative research is transformative, where truth is defined by the culture, and emotion is held in high regard, they asserted, “We see the role of autobiography . . . as at once postmodern, intertextual
and operating across disciplines, serving to displace traditional notions of what the author’s role means to the creation of the text” (p. 373).

Autoethnography and Scholarly Productivity

Historical and contemporary research on faculty scholarly productivity run parallel when it comes to at least one academic attribute: publication. Cole (1940), Caplow & McGee (1958), Deneef, Goodwin, & McCrate (1988), Tuckman (1979), and others, who called attention to the institution of higher education’s academic reward system for perpetuating a seemingly dismissive view of teaching prowess as an attribute, likely, were similarly displeased with academics’ educational background (the perceived reputation of the university that granted prospective candidates’ doctorates) being regarded with more prestige than pedagogical proficiency (Crane, 1970). “Publish or perish,” the colloquial phrase that refers to the requirement that faculty frequently publish their research or kill their prospects of tenure, promotion or advancement, has been examined in research, primarily, through quantitative means by assessing faculty members’ numerical publication page counts in books, journals, anthologies, and other publications. Among more modern-day research on scholarly output and FWG participation, ample empirical qualitative and quantitative studies have suggested FWGs’ positive influences on participants’ rate of scholarly productivity (e.g., Houfek, Kaiser, Visovsky, Barry, Nelson, Kaiser, & Miller, 2010; MacLeod et al., 2012; Lee & Boud, 2003; Penney, Young, Badenhorst et al., 2016; McGrail et al., 2006).

There have been other studies that have described qualitatively what goes on within FWGs, where participants aimed to increase their research publishing frequency and acceptance rates (Schick, Hunter, Gray, Poe, & Santos, 2011; Linder, Cooper, McKenzie, Raesch, & Reeve, 2013; Kent, Berry, Budds, Skipper, & Williams, 2017). As a facilitator to several FWGs, a
doctoral candidate engaged in correlated higher education research, and a former professional writer, who hopes to join the ranks of faculty-researchers, I had at least two unique perspectives: (a) insight into faculty members’ views on their frequent quests to publish research, as well as their efforts to reach their goals and (b) an understanding of current and historical research on “publish or perish.” Therefore, I sought to employ a distinctive and neoteric methodology—autoethnography—to use my personal journey from professional writer to emergent academic researcher to examine FWG participant perceptions of the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity.

Statement of the Problem

This autoethnographic study used my personal journey from professional writer to emergent academic researcher to examine FWG participants’ perceptions of the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity. Sufficient studies have assessed institutions’ use of publication count and quality as key factors in academic recruitment and promotion (Toutkoushian, Porter, Danielson, & Hollis, 2003; Linton, Tierney, & Walsh, 2011; Alves-Silva, E., 2016; Link, 2015; Walters, 2015). Additionally, there is ample evidence that active involvement in FWGs acts as an intervention and positively impacts participants’ frequency of published scholarly output; but for all the studies regarding “publish or perish,” less is known about participants’ reflective perspectives on persistent research and publication pressures. Such in-depth insider awareness and based on the point of view and relevant autobiographical experiences of the researcher, especially, from the standpoint of a FWG facilitator, has not been undertaken or is infrequently or casually examined in higher educational research.

In this study, I expanded the literature base on the topic of FWGs and their participants, “publish or perish,” and the use of autoethnography as a research method, while broadening my
own awareness of these topics. As I advanced through academia and continued a professional career in which writing has been a ubiquitous theme, I felt solidarity with the FWG participants that I helped guide during meetings aimed at influencing their scholarly productivity; what is more, as Wolcott (1981) described, I sought to interpret their social behavior and from their actions, make meanings. As a doctoral candidate and (re)emerging scholar, I empathized and better related to the perceived challenges of having to regularly produce publishable research to achieve acceptance within the ranks of faculty and, ultimately, to attain academic job security.

During my studies as a graduate student researcher, I was tasked with helping lead four FWGs composed of two discipline-focused groups and two multidisciplinary groups. In considering my decision to employ a narrative qualitative research methodology that would force my subjectivities to be a focal point of the study, I recall Peshkin’s (1982, 1988), belief that social scientists, in general, have discounted that their own biases consciously presented themselves in their qualitative or quantitative research. Peshkin (1982) further argued that researchers should acknowledge the subjectivities that invariably become manifest throughout “the entire research process,” and at least disclose to their readers where self and subject became joined” (p. 17). By confessing this, social scientists and qualitative researchers illustrated a mutual analytical posture that permits another person’s experience to encourage important reflection of one’s own (Ellis & Bochner, 1996). By exploiting the expressive elements of autoethnography, namely the roots that are grounded in autobiography and ethnography, this study forced relevant aspects of the researcher’s personal experiences front and center, transforming the researcher into an additional instrument that reflected on the process and outcomes throughout the analysis. Boyle and Parry (2007), who used autoethnography to bring a deeper focus into organizational culture, underscored the methodology’s use of a “broad lens
focus on individual situatedness within the cultural and social context, to a focus on the inner, vulnerable and often resistant self” and then back again (p. 186). This approach was well-suited to offer an atypical narrative centered on the perceptions of the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity among FWG participants.

It was along this course that I saw the potential for my dissertation to inform practice and enhance in-depth research concerning FWGs’ participants’ pursuit of published academic scholarly work, which may lead other FWGs and their institutions to examine and better engage faculty in initiatives aimed at boosting their scholarly productivity. In my study, I drew from extensive literature centered on qualitative research, autoethnography, field and participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and my impressions and reactions, as well as personal narratives on my transitional journey from professional journalist and writer to (re)emerging academic researcher. The notion of conducting insider research, which I encountered during my literature exploration, prompted me to reflect upon my relationships within the FWGs that I helped guide; as facilitator and graduate student researcher, I had maintained a cordial working friendship with one of the members, and wondered how that might affect my study. Taylor (2011) asserted that with care, restraint, and proper management, when needed, one can successfully have friends as subjects, informants or “intimate insiders” while conducting field research (p. 2). The parallels between my professional writing and academic writing career often are congruent, and this instance was no exception in a cursory review of journalism and research where investigations and publishing of the output were concerned. As a journalist, the appearance of bias when reporting or writing a news story is considered an egregious ethical lapse; similarly, as a qualitative researcher, showing a predisposition to a certain point of view to influence the outcome or results is just as disreputable. I was cognizant of this.
Junior and senior professors, including those for whom “publish or perish” is a persistent academic reality and scholarly productivity is imperative, often have appeared as faceless characters, who have been narrowly portrayed in research studies and commentaries, in one of several camps: (a) academics either are tireless and overextended laborers, who must plug away and complete their many obligations, despite a lack of adequate institutional support; or (b) they are professors, who despite liberal supportive opportunities to increase their scholarly output, fail to follow through in seeking out assistance. Still other analyses have suggested that either “publish or perish” is exaggerated or, in reality, most institutions do not hold faculty to such stringent scholarly productivity requirements. After perusing these research studies, it was clear that among relevant literature, additional authentic and candid faculty voices were absent and would help fill a gap concerning in-depth faculty perspectives on the pursuit of scholarly productivity. This study, which offered new points of view from FWG participants, merged with perspectives of the researcher/FWG facilitators’ own professional and higher educational writing experiences, will allow for deeper understanding of how faculty confront the impacts of “publish or perish.”

When I applied for and accepted a graduate research assistantship, I was grateful, but also initially nervous at the outset to learn that a significant part of my duties would be to lead four department-sponsored FWGs. That I had been published extensively for years as a journalist and had advised and taught writing and news reporting to journalism students for more than a decade, seemed irrelevant at the time, for I had not yet attained that sought-after researcher-faculty achievement: a byline in a scholarly journal as an academic researcher. Though I had been a faculty and staff member at the same university for some 15 years and had the requisite skills to help spur faculty researchers’ scholarly output, I began to doubt that the FWG participants would
respect me as their writing advocate. How could I lead them if I had not yet been published in an academic publication? What could I tell these faculty researchers about improving their scholarly output if I not yet begun to increase my own? How had I sufficiently proved my mettle to earn this responsibility? While I did not recognize it at the time, these questions, which more than occasionally permeated my thoughts as I engaged in discussions with FWG participants, were classic manifestations of imposter syndrome, as evidenced in several research analyses (Clance & Imes, 1978; Foot, Crowe, Tollafield, & Allan, 2014; Gardner & Holley, 2011; Parkman, 2016; Kasper, 2013) or, historically, reflected feelings of academic insecurity, inadequacy or failure (Caplow & McGee, 1958; Anderson & Murray, 1971); conflicted doctoral students and faculty, alike, are the focus of imposter syndrome research studies that often find study subjects who feel incompetent, unworthy, and fearful of being discovered as a charlatan and a pretender, despite the contrary actually being true. An assistant humanities professor at a Southeastern regional public university, through a pseudonym, wrote candidly about his struggles with academic anxieties and his habit of attributing accomplishments to outside circumstances and making intensely personal his obstacles and defeats: “Did I just get an article placed in a top journal? I am amazed, even shocked. How did this happen? Why did they select my article?” (Kasper, 2013). Reflecting on my own apparent feelings of inferiority during my personal academic journey, and as a member of at least two underrepresented groups of graduate students in higher education, where “despite academic credentials and praise from peers, I do not always experience an internal sense of self” (Gardner & Holley, 2011, p. 80), these questions sounded familiar.

However, as the semester approached, I could either except my new roles as FWG facilitator, doctoral student, and (re)emerging researcher or not. I masked any anxiety I felt after
intense self-analyses and self-introspections and rarely expressed my angst verbally, but textually, by writing notes within the margins of notebooks, journal article copies, and on any other pieces of paper within my reach, which, admittedly, is a holdover from my adolescence. Months into writing this dissertation, I wrote the following words in red ink next to an initial handwritten outline of my study: “I always write these notes. Please help me! I’m in a fog right now – need time to recover – but I will!”

My research haze would intermittently come and go after meetings with mentors and peers, a process which paralleled FWGs’ documented effectiveness on faculty struggling with writer’s blocks; sessions that encouraged such behaviors as accountability and peer-review, and diminished isolation, which can bolster a crippling cycle of self-deprecation, (DeFeo, Kilic, & Maseda, 2016) positively influenced scholarly productivity and the motivation to engage it more regularly. My thoughts cleared considerably with the emerging realization that autoethnography would be the most appropriate qualitative research method for giving voice to FWG participants’ perceptions of the pursuit of persistent scholarly productivity.

The following is an outline of the purpose and significance of this research analysis, and then a study of my perspective as a researcher. Subsequently, I clarify my research questions and define the study’s key terms.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to provide an autoethnographic account of my personal exploration as professional writer, university instructor, emergent academic scholar, and FWG facilitator to examine the perceptions of the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity among FWG participants. By way of my experiences from journalist and campus communications specialist to non-tenure-track journalism faculty member to higher education
doctoral candidate, this dissertation examined FWG participants’ candid perceptions of “publish or perish” through my own introspective lens, as well as from my (re)evolution through academe. This study engaged selective key autobiographical processes that Bochner and Ellis (1992), Couser (1997), Denzin (1989), and Geertz (1973) hailed as effective in autoethnographies: epiphanies, critical moments of self-examination, transformational experiences, “thick description,” (Geertz, 1973, p. 6) and their significant impacts were employed in this exploration “to illustrate facets of cultural experience. . .and make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 3). This research was based in narrative and reflexive ethnographies of my experiences writing professionally, teaching writing in academia, and helping to facilitate scholarly writing among junior and senior faculty members and FWG participants.

This analysis used an autobiographical narrative approach of qualitative storytelling and introspection to study a culture. It intended to contribute to an ample body of research on FWGs and fill a gap on such studies that use lived experiences, reflection, and examined perspectives, among other devices of autoethnography, as a research methodology. Forber-Pratt (2015) echoed the apprehension that I initially had at the prospect of laying bare in a published study my recorded thoughts, feelings, and retrospections before, during, and after interacting with FWG participants. Mirroring Forber-Pratt’s (2015) analysis, this study called for the researcher to accept an awareness of facing the challenge of “coming to terms with exposing myself and embracing [autoethnography] to its fullest and finding my voice” and “exposing one’s strengths, weaknesses, innermost thoughts, and opening it up for others to criticize” (p. 1). According to Neumann (1996), autoethnography, as a methodological approach, is an effort to understand both the known and more concealed aspects of cultural understanding, while maintaining an analytical
detachment and perception of each. Quinney (1996) also described ethnographical writing of a close subject as a revealing and intimate endeavor, when he observed, “This will take you beyond questions of participant-observation, unstructured data, case size, and interpretation. It will encompass your emotional and spiritual life, your very being” (p. 357). Such an all-embracing approach, as is customary with most qualitative methodologies that rely on description and inquiry data analysis culled from observations, interviews, impressions, and other field notes, are imperative (Patton, 2002). In choosing to examine FWG participants’ perceptions of the persistent pursuit of scholarly productivity, rather than the quantifiable impacts of consistent group involvement on their research output—an expansively analyzed inquiry—this study filled a gap in the literature by more frankly understanding FWG participants’ sense of “publish or perish” through the FWG facilitator/participant-researcher’s own experiences. By means of qualitative data gathering—interviews, observations, artifacts—and autobiography, I showed not only what happens in naturally occurring settings, but also analyzed FWG participants through a personal lens, offering a new perspective and a practical relevance for these points of view, research-wise (Silverman, 2006).

“Publish or perish,” three words that purportedly strike fear in the hearts of many researcher academics—namely, new tenure-track and untenured Ph.D.’s—has historically created palpable tensions among higher education faculty, whose institutions often require that their scholarly output be recurrently productive and prolific so as to secure job offers, job security, and advancement, as well as for universities to remain relevant and competitive and to garner positive attention (Plume & van Weijen, 2014, Rawat & Meena, 2014; Murray & Cunningham, 2011; Holmes, Tewksbury, & Holmes, 2000; Smith, 1990; Rowson, 1988; Budd, 1988; Guraya, Norman, Khoshhal, Guraya, & Forgione, 2016). My research on the popular academic
euphemism, which studies show may have fundamentally different meanings in different fields (Linton, Tierney, & Walsh, 2011), and whose denotation is predisposed to quality over quantity (Deneef, Goodwin, & McCrate, 1988), revealed at least four generally acknowledged findings when used in relation to university faculty, worldwide:

- When institutions require research publishing demands, faculty generally choose to either “sink or swim.”
- When institutions do not require stringent publishable research demands, it is assumed that faculty will be expected to perform admirably in teaching and/or service, the remaining two faculty obligations among the academic triad.
- When institutions require research publishing demands and provide faculty with support systems to assist with their publishing requirements, faculty often fail to take advantage of them out of disinterest or because they lack the necessary skills to engage in publishable research.
- Rising institutional research publishing requirements, overall, have not driven substantial individual increases in scholarly productivity, largely because researchers are becoming more collaborative, often appearing to author manuscripts with as many as six or more other authors (Plume & van Weijen, 2014; Pintér, 2013).

Despite the wide variances among institutional perceptions and directives regarding “publish or perish,” faculty based at a Southeastern U.S. research-intensive university, who were the focus of this study and who understood their scholarly output obligations to include frequent published research, sought support through FWG participation. Many faculty, especially those at other research-oriented institutions, are expected to not only teach and serve the institution, but also to effectively publish research in reputable publications to avoid “becoming frozen in place as the
tenure-and-promotion milestones bear down with terrifying rapidity” (Johnson & Mullen, 2007, p. xiii). We know that at research-intensive institutions, where research, teaching, and service, are the stalwart pillars of academe, research is the stronger column that largely provides the substantial underpinnings for the other two supports. Institutions may help improve the frequency of their professors’ scholarly output through concerted and deliberate efforts to better understand how faculty deal with the constant pursuit of frequent publishing productivity and by fully engaging them in initiatives aimed at improving their research efficiency.

I showed that (a) FWG participation provided faculty with intermittent edifying respites amid their numerous university obligations; (b) FWG participants were hyperaware of and dedicated to producing publishable scholarly output; and (c) a FWG environment that was nurturing, collaborative, and encouraging fostered additional desirable modes of motivation and support to participants in pursuit of publishable research.

This research is significant and consequential because it concentrates mainly on the deeper and lesser known insights of how faculty deal with the persistent need to produce publishable scholarship to secure tenure and maintain job security. This study also explores how faculty perceptions shape professional practice. Moreover, this analysis avoids an exclusive focus on participants’ FWG encounters and resulting scholarly outcomes, unlike many other related studies; instead, it addresses associated issues of faculty socialization, work-based learning, and peer formativity, whose relevance extends our understanding of how FWG participants perceive their pursuit of frequent academic scholarly productivity.

The socialization experience of faculty to university cultures and norms, ultimately, to gain full membership into the teaching body, is regarded broadly as integral for positive acclimation to the academy, and includes faculty development programs, such as FWGs, as well
as more formal promotion and tenure processes (Eddy & Gaston-Gayles, 2008; Bogler & Kremer-Hayon, 2006; Tierney & Rhoads, 1993). According to Eddy & Gaston-Gayles (2008), faculty “participants who were in programs with specific outlines of expectations and integrated programs to support new faculty felt less stress than those participants in programs without intentional programs to support new faculty” (p. 105). Tierney and Rhoads’ faculty socialization and culture theory (1994), which is infused with organization theory, is aimed at better understanding institutions as cultures by indicating the importance of “the mission, the particular environment, and socialization procedures” (Anfara & Mertz, 2006, p. xiv).

Participation in FWGs allows further opportunities for faculty to learn about their publishing expectations as researcher-scholars, to study how to act within a collaborative group, and to model accepted conduct as a contributor to the peer review process. FWG participation may be considered either a method of formal or informal socialization, because involvement may originate from a prescribed official program or through more unceremonious, but meaningful contacts through observations or conversations (Tierney & Rhoads, 1993). Such interactions are consequential; junior faculty “learn how to act in meetings from the behavior of older colleagues or may always hear their peers talk about the importance of publishing while never mentioning service, which would contribute to the notion that service is not as valued” (Tierney & Rhoads, 1993).

The lead sponsor of the FWGs at the focus of this study was the institution’s writing center, which provided traditional and online consultations for all students and community members, essentially readying a prospective workforce, in addition to offering broad academic writing support. Work-based learning (WBL), the concept of schools and institutions providing structured programming focused on continuing student and professional development through
career/technical training, hands-on learning and real-life work experiences, has long been viewed as an effective and pertinent influence in higher education (Roodhouse, 2007), making the work in writing centers that much more influential in academia, which is enhanced by its own disciplinary foundations and approaches to higher education, and beyond.

The mission of FWGs in post-secondary settings has a cogent association with WBL as participants work on refining technical skills and strengthening their employability through mentorships, job shadowing, and similar undertakings (Rogers-Chapman, & Darling-Hammond (2013). A precursor to what Dewey (1916) in the late 19th and early 20th century envisioned vocational and technical education to be–an integration of the working professions with education curriculum (Swail & Kampits, 2004)–WBL illustrates “the inclination to learn from life itself and to make the conditions of life such that all will learn in the process of living is the finest product of schooling” (p. 51). In a more recent analysis, Lester and Costley (2010) found more refined procedures in the way WBL intentionally had been administered in higher education, with applicable instructional methods and purposeful programming. Other scholars, in adopting a pedagogy reflective of FWGs’ focused agency, endorse teaching students collaborative learning and writing, which often has been described in business, for its beneficial instruction in work-based writing (Howard, 2001).

“Peer-formativity,” which Murray and Thow (2014) defined as what happens when higher education writing meetings generate “writing-oriented peer relationships,” (p. 1166) allows academics to reclaim more intuitive ownership of their writing. Murray, Thow, Moore and Murphy (2008), in a previous study, examined academic writing consultations as a means of improving scholarly writing output through increased self-focus. With its intense spotlight on self-analysis and the subjective use of readily available personal data, autoethnography, as a
valid research methodology, has not only gained more acceptance, but may appear enticing to more professors under “publish or perish” pressures (Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang, 2010). This autoethnographic study, which focused on FWG participants’ perceptions of such scholarly tensions, regarded the type of qualitative methodology as a persuasive and meaningful tool with which to illuminate and advance vivid autobiographical and ethnographic data.

Reasoning

This study addressed a gap in the literature concerning FWG participants’ perceptions of scholarly productivity requirements by using a novel approach to inform practice and research and suggests a need to challenge other FWGs and their institutions to examine and better engage faculty in initiatives aimed at boosting scholarly work outputs. FWG participants’ insights, opinions, and reflective understandings are discussed through an autoethnographic research design. I understood that my denoting this methodology as “novel” may be considered a bit irreverent, as I have assessed its uniqueness based on my own academic work during three years spent in higher education research, primarily citing scholars and theorists, as opposed to offering more of my own analytical thoughts and perspectives; it follows that Edelman (1996) downplayed the notion that reflexivity—a circumspect consideration of research and the researchers’ place within it—is an unusual idea and a singular creation by postmodernist writers. Many pre-postmodernists absorbed in tensions concerning “values,” “objectivity,” and “engaged research” within a “social construction of reality” regarded such complications as inevitable and essential (Edelman, 1996, p. 294).

Autoethnographic practices recalled my familiarity with depth feature writing as a print journalist, where I employed multi-layered or lateral reporting, or reporting from different perspectives to add complexity to a story; when I reported on the state of the declining dairy
industry in Alamance County, N.C., I not only talked to farmers, shadowed them on their predawn slogs on their homesteads, and immersed myself in their work lives, I also examined local and national economic trends, and assessed the roles that innovation and global disruptions played in the industry’s regression.

So, too, on the scholarly academic side, Warren (n.d.) asserted the notion of *structural layering* in relation to autoethnography, as a way for researchers to vacillate between lived experiences and immersing oneself in the culture and interacting on academic levels related to theory and conceptual meanings; it is a view that qualitative researcher Arthur P. Bochner lauded but regarded with unease when researchers split their “personal and academic selves” (Warren (n.d.)). Social science researchers Ellis and Bochner (2000) asserted that the growing acceptance of autoethnography as a sound methodology source stemmed partly from scholars’ need to produce consequential, significant, and straightforward studies “grounded in personal experience.” In Manovski’s (2014) analysis, autoethnography relayed “forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathize with people who are different from us” (p. 234). Figure 1 is a graphic illustration of the developing conceptual categories that will be explored in this study.

Figure 1. Developing Conceptual Categories
Figure 1. Developing Conceptual Categories (Vadeboncoeur, 1998).

In relation to revealing how some FWG participants cognitively deal with constant pressures to produce publishable scholarly work, autoethnography and its self-focus open an avenue to better illuminate the researcher-participant relationship, and to enable a fuller understanding of the researcher’s connection to what Chang (2008) referred to as “others of similarity.”

Researcher’s Perspective: Truth-telling the Academic Life

Like many university students who chose to study journalism, I was an avid reader and budding fiction and non-fiction writer during my formative years. Serving as editor of my college newspaper during my undergraduate senior year, accepting several news reporting internships, enduring persistent writing assignments, and delving into communications theory and depth storytelling during my graduate studies, inured me to the pressures of constant writing and research deadlines that would typify my professional journalism career. Add to that the
persistent rumination over the copy I had just written, and several decades prior, my destiny as a (re)emerging research scholar in the academy already was ordained.

I pursued journalism as a career because I believed it to be the vocation most closely related to novel writing, which I longed to do, and at least in the short-term, to be more profitable. After 10 years’ worth of stints as a newspaper editor and reporter, and following life events that compelled me to relocate closer to my family, I decided to embrace a momentous bit of serendipity and chase another professional opportunity for its similarity to journalism; hired as a communications specialist in university public relations, I still engaged as a journalist, in a sense, but with a particular higher education institution, and not the public, as my primary stakeholder. I spent five years in campus PR writing, sharing, and promoting institutional stories with the media, serving the communication needs of campus departments and centers, and forging relationships with other news professionals. Several years into my tenure, I leapt at the opportunity to teach as an adjunct and to instruct up-and-coming journalism students on the side. This part-time, non-tenured teaching position would begin my foray into the facultyhood. I began to learn new lingo and customs, as well as the formality and informalities of faculty life. A few years later, I would leave university PR to join journalism faculty across campus as a full-time non-tenured instructor teaching at least four—sometimes five—writing and reporting classes each semester. Although, in my role, I was not expected to produce scholarly research, effective journalism instruction demanded routine fresh course prep to ensure currency in lessons and assignments, as well as to regularly demonstrate media savvy. In addition to grading writing assignments, preparing lectures, advising and meeting with current and prospective students, and often, their families, and attending committee meetings, other obligations though not spelled out officially, were expected; it was anticipated that I stayed current on the news, new media
innovations, industry advancements and developments, and kept a foot in the door as a professional journalist. It was during this time that I also wrote a weekly newspaper column to further validate my relevance in the industry while a university instructor. As I wrote this, I was unexpectedly struck by the self-imposed obligations that I, and perhaps other, new non-tenured faculty placed on ourselves when fear of “publish or perish” was not yet made manifest in our professional lives. Were our overachievements borne out of professional insecurity? Does working within university environs teeming with scholars, discoverers, theoreticians, and innovators instinctively force self-introspection and other confidence checks?

Smith (1990), who asserted in an excoriating tome that the unremitting dominant trend toward research and away from teaching has led to a decline in higher education, asked:

Is not the atmosphere hopelessly polluted when professors are forced to do research in order to validate themselves, in order to make a living, in order to avoid being humiliated (and terminated)? What kind of research can possibly come out of such a system? (p. 197).

As university faculty, at all levels, we are indoctrinated into the customs, traditions, and sundry rituals of the academy. When faculty advance from the non-tenure track to the tenure track, the relentless pursuit of idiosyncratic validation is replaced by the persistent pursuit of scholarly productivity, and professional insecurities, for some, ramp up to a faster clip. It was within this academic ecosystem that the FWG participants constantly must prove themselves, and in which, I, as an emerging graduate researcher, aspired to gain entrance.

Though I was not fully aware of it at the time, when I was a journalism instructor, I was employing autoethnographic pedagogy during my lectures. I would always describe my experiences as a professional journalist and PR professional to my students and other university
and community audiences, while drawing connections with my personal background to the academic text, current events or selected topic, and practiced what Ellis and Bochner (2000) described as “an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (p. 739) and back and forth again.

Managing the Pressure

The confessional-like notes I scrawled during the writing of this study ran the gamut of depicting various emotional highs and lows on a broad-spectrum scale. A pattern of intermittent writers’ block, followed by periods of bursting manuscript productivity, followed again by bouts of stagnation, repeated itself; my struggles during the writing of this study often manifest themselves in the notes I scribbled on the pages of journal articles and other cited works. I illustrated a particularly difficult writing phase when I wrote the following:

Have not felt as much despair as I do right now – broke, ashamed, alone. . . (Notes, 2017).

Permissible through autoethnography, such despondent expressions allowed me to relive fragments of my past (out loud) to explore these scholarly research questions as they related to FWG participants; by recalling a multitude of anxieties that I felt based on my personal experiences with resistance to those and other writing struggles, my notes revealed raw emotion at that time, as Pensoneau-Conway, Adams, and Bolen (2017) helped reveal. It reflected the same authentic perspective to best explore FWG participants’ perceptions of “publish or perish.”

As I attempted to work toward (re)entering faculty academic life, my imperfect journey found some alignment to the paths of academics seeking to boost their scholarly work production. Johnson and Mullen (2007), whose research advised academics on how to assume a scholarly identity, urged them to first “undergo a major cognitive and emotional shift in the way you
define yourself” (p. 5) and make scholarly writing an instinctive day-to-day habit. For the academics, who are the focus of this study, their voluntary involvement as FWG participants was another step toward them more fully integrating scholarly writing into their lives. Still, the onus was on emerging academic researchers and tenure-track junior professors alike to prepare for facultyhood by immediately engaging in intellectual growth and prolific scholarship as Wilbur (1988) described.

During my tenure as FWG facilitator, I spent time observing the participants and listening to their progress with the paper chase, their constant pursuit of publishable scholarly productivity. Holmes et al. (2000) discussed the social issue that arose among new Ph.D.’s and others entering academia when they feared failure and rejection because they lacked research skills or scholarly publications. The ability to document what it is like, cognitively, for junior and senior faculty to manage such pressures, when combined with the push-and-pulls of many other academic and personal obligations, was another influence that led to my qualitative research, and more specifically, autoethnography, as a chosen method of inquiry. The use of autoethnography bests other research methods for the ability of the researcher to view her “interpretations, responses and interaction as personal and involved rather than impersonal and detached” (Arnold, 2011, p. 70). The FWG participants I studied were in the throes of academic life and I sought to follow in their footsteps. I had to examine familiarity with my own struggle with constantly producing copy to understand their experience with frequent productivity as they saw it.

Isolated, Naked and Alone

According to Coser (1965), “A certain measure of alienation seems to be the perennial lot
of the intellectual; he can never be ‘like other men’ . . . he will always be in society without fully being of it” (p. 360). New academics, who gain admittance into the exclusive faculty ranks of the University, are expected to have certain expertise and erudite commands of specific subjects. They also should anticipate long hours, solitary activities, and professional isolation that often comes with teaching; historically, academia had not viewed writing as a communal activity (Brookes & German, 1983; Tierney & Rhoads, 1993; Boice, 1992; Mueller, 2014). College and university teaching, Barzun (1971) asserted, is the sole profession in which no instruction is given or mandatory but expected to be acquired along the way. Baldi, Sorcinelli, & Yun (2013), however, who touted the benefits of writing centers and other campus faculty writing opportunities, argued that although writing may require solitude, “writers do not need to isolate themselves to get things done” (p. 44). When new faculty researchers accept teaching positions they can assume deans and/or hiring committees regarded their credentials to be proficient and were assured of their potential to engage students and publish studies within their fields.

When I was hired to join the ranks of adjunct faculty journalism instructors, I was given no instruction on how to teach nor what to teach; I obtained past course syllabuses and contacted current and past instructors for insights. Though there were no formal scholarly research demands placed on me at the time, I imagined that the challenge of acclimating oneself to the strains of new teaching and research academic environments would impact the frequency of scholarly productivity for some. Absent deliberate synergistic faculty collaborations, it is an intimate endeavor, to which I can attest, the bare isolation of conducting one’s own personal research, whether alone or sequestered from the main population. The earliest FWGs sought to provide research faculty with supportive and nurturing environments in which they could assuage any feelings of intellectual isolation and enjoy the periodic social benefits of
collaboration during their intensive research (i.e., discussing research, testing ideas and proposals, exchanging information). Gannon-Leary, Fountainha, and Bent (2011), in their research of an online community of writers to promote academic writing, asserted that institutional writing initiatives often ignored emotional issues linked with faculty isolation, such as lack of self-confidence, fear, anxiety, motivation, and self-doubt.

My experience facilitating the FWGs at focus in this study provided me the opportunity to witness how, in the absence of formal research training, participants found both academic and communal support through the closeness, understanding, and dialogues that occurred.

Being(s) in Compliance

Tierney and Rhoades (1993), whose research examined “how faculty learn to become faculty” (p. 5), suggested that academics became acclimated to the academy in two stages: (a) the watchful phase during undergraduate and graduate school, where professional norms were exposed and (b) the organizational stage during the first two years (Tierney & Rhoades, 1993, p. 5), where new faculty had to learn to overcome the distinctive challenges that academic life posed, related to socialization, loneliness, increased workloads and other demands on time, as well as promotion and tenure processes. Faculty, who learned to manage their new roles, tended to make adjustments, recalibrated any scholarly mismatches, and modeled the behaviors set by their new peers.

The validation of new faculty members into the academy occurred after professors satisfactorily advanced through their institution-imposed phases, thus demonstrating that they could conform to the university. According to Mendoza (2008), the process of sensemaking, which is defined in organizational culture, involves a process of making sense of situations by establishing a sense of order and reflecting on certain circumstances after they happen. Namely,
the meaning behind sensemaking is “embedded in cues, frames, and connections between the
two. . . an effort to tie beliefs gained from previous socialization processes with cues in the
present” (p. 106).

Among the FWG participants with whom I worked, a number functioned within a sphere
of sensemaking, and created a familial, yet edifying, setting for those familiar to the institution,
but not as well-versed to the nuances.

Research Questions

Qualitative research techniques explore and search for the central phenomenon or key
concept from the detailed accounts of participants experiencing it over time (Creswell & Plano
Clark, 2004). Starks and Trinidad (2007) asserted that “by the end of the [analysis], the reader
should feel that she has vicariously experienced the phenomenon under study and should be able
to envision herself (or someone else who has been through the experience) coming to similar
conclusions about what it means” (p. 1376). The central phenomenon to be explored in this
study were the perceptions of the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity among FWG
participants. A guiding qualitative approach, an analysis that illustrated a reflective process, was
applied to answer the central question: Through a narrative lens of my experiences as a
professional writer, doctoral candidate, and FWG facilitator, how is the pursuit of academic
scholarly productivity perceived and experienced by FWG participants? In order to answer the
central question, what are the perceptions of the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity
among faculty writing group (FWG) participants, the following sub-questions were answered:

1. How does the perception of the pursuit of scholarly productivity shape and inform my
   professional practice?
2. How does the perception of the pursuit of scholarly productivity shape and inform FWG participants’ professional practice?

3. How do FWG participants’ perceptions of the pursuit of scholarly productivity vary by discipline?

4. What themes appear during the examination of FWG participants’ perceptions of the pursuit of scholarly productivity?

Advancing this narrative and these reflective questions were a central factor in leading me toward information pertinent to my analysis. Silverman (2006) insisted that qualitative research questions have form, be dynamic, and demonstrate some perspective. Social scientists, who routinely defined such research questions early and who streamlined and prioritized the amount of data they gathered, likely will generate more effective analyses. I intended to provide a broad yet focused examination and perspective.

Significance of the Study

This study’s outcome considered how the frequent and intense pursuit of scholarly productivity to earn tenure, advancement, job security, and departmental and institutional prestige impacted FWG participants’ professional practices. Reichert, Daniels-Race, and Dowell (2002), advocated that junior science and engineering faculty could exert a substantial modicum of control over productive scholarship standards and strategically “plot a course to tenure in a ‘publish or perish’ environment” (p. 133) through deliberate planning that began with choosing a supportive research institution whose RTS and publishing expectations complement their own and by taking advantage of opportunities to improve their writing in all scholarly contexts. Reichert et al. (2002) endeavor to assure new professors that they can attempt to have some sway over one of academe’s longstanding essential precepts, the mandate of frequent research output.
Furthermore, other studies, such as Ito’s and Brotheridge’s (2007) showed that teaching, committee work, and other academic duties may not always bog down, but energize productive faculty researchers, specifically, those who were intentionally focused and skilled at working within the limitations of their other responsibilities. Undoubtedly, they and other researchers attested that the paper chase is but another series of feats to surmount in this academic survival of the fittest tourney, whose highest honor was tenure, conquered.

As I began graduate school with the intention of earning a doctorate and returning to full-time teaching—but as a credentialed faculty member, aiming for tenure—it became clear to me in my second year that publishing my own research was possible and necessary. I presented a research analysis that I had written for a history of higher education class and presented it one year later at a journalism and mass communication association symposium. In another class, one of my professors suggested that I and two peers submit our quantitative data analysis project to a conference sponsored by a national educational research society. It, too, was accepted later that year, and we presented our paper as one of dozens of concurrent roundtable discussions with other educational researchers from around the country. As my anxiety as an emerging researcher reached maximum levels, especially during presentation and the critiquing sessions, I felt more entrenched as a (re)emerging academic than I ever did when I was an instructor, who commanded a classroom, but without the published research imperative that suffices for one’s merit as a scholar and intellectual leader, as Cole (1940) reminded me. Effective teaching and advising were among the highest benchmarks that I had to reach as a journalism instructor and I exceeded them in response to the implicit frequent academic pressures as I experienced them. The different foci undertaken and the assumed aspirational differences between many untenured and tenure-track faculty—another higher educational issue that could be viewed historically—was
not lost on Cole (1940), who was a college teacher when she wrote the comprehensive, frank, and wry *The Background for College Teaching*, and covered such topics as curriculum, mental health, college freshmen preparedness, teaching loads, and publications and research: “There is more pressure for publication than there would be if expert teaching brought results commensurate with research, and promotions are much too dependent upon publication records” (pp. 512-513).

Pursuing publishable scholarly output has been demonstrating our advanced and independent academic mettle. By this extended definition, the academic paper chase is an ongoing praxis in authenticating ourselves and building enough credentials to be afforded the permanence of tenure. As I emerged in academia, I presumed to engage in research nonstop, in concert with my particular research subject, my students, or ongoing related higher educational issues. Such continuous engagement, within the university for the promise of tenure, could be problematic and challenging for many reasons, bearing out the alternate definitions of “engagement”: “battle,” “conflict” or “confrontation” (“Engagement,” Thesaurus.com, 2017).

This study aimed to present faculty experiences and perspectives on academe’s persistent need for academics to “publish or perish,” and suggested a need to challenge other FWGs and their institutions to examine and better engage faculty in initiatives aimed at boosting scholarly productivity. How could institutions inattentive to the challenges of the pursuit of scholarly output among their faculty best examine this issue? And how could FWGs help establish or strengthen research and writing support systems? Narratives, participant-observations, and cultural feedback from questionnaires provided channels through which impacts and deficiencies could be evaluated; “continually providing insight into the lives of ourselves and our colleagues as writers,” allowed for adjustments to institutional programming and FWG improvements, as
needed (Schendel, Callaway, Dutcher, & Griggs, 2013, p. 161). Brookes and German (1983) asserted such faculty career development as crucial for higher education institutions’ survival as they benefit from a symbiotic relationship between the progress of individual faculty and their careers, as well as the overall prosperity of academia.

Summary

The research academy largely demands that faculty researchers frequently produce publishable scholarly output, as well as uphold other vital commitments such as implementing instruction that encourages student learning and advances student progress. For some faculty, who felt their additional teaching, service, and academic commitments impeded greater progress in ongoing research and scholarship efforts, participation in FWGs, as a form of faculty development, unlocked constructive strategies that helped enable them to reclaim time to more effectively continue to produce output. Additionally, new faculty, who grappled with preparing articles for publishing or who “lack a clear understanding of the concepts and cognitive structures” effective for developing perceptions (Eble & McKeachie, 1985, p. 17) may have found reassurance within FWGs’ supportive non-isolating writing spaces. Though numerous quantitative and qualitative studies showed that participation in FWGs had a positive impact on academics’ ongoing scholarship, other studies were more modest in reacting to similar research, and offered that the writers’ group approach may not be for everyone (Murray & Moore, 2006); in addition, power dynamics within a FWG may prove detrimental, if, for example, a new tenure-track junior faculty member is paired with tenured senior professors or department chairs (Gillespie et al., 2005). Junior and senior faculty researchers’ perceptions of “publish or perish” were largely anecdotal; in the literature, there exists a clear need to consider the candid
perspectives and experiences of FWG participants, who are deep in the throes of responding to academe’s requirement that they “publish or perish.”

FWGs and other faculty-centered academic collective writing initiatives aimed to help faculty reclaim the time, attention, improved writing confidence, encouragement, and motivation they needed to complete research manuscripts (Isenburg, Lee, & Oermann, 2017; Dwyer, Lewis, McDonald, & Burns, 2011). Institutions in the 1970s that were responsive to faculty impacted by a growing demand for faculty research, fluctuating enrollment trends, increased accountability metrics, dwindling financial resources, and other circumstances, looked to faculty development initiatives as an important intermediation (Eble & McKeachie, 1985). Fast-forward more than 40 years later, some of the same issues have remained; FWGs—a faculty development initiative—have major roles to play in enabling faculty scholarship and better engaging academics, who were candid in their experiences and perceptions of the frequent pursuit of academic scholarship, in initiatives aimed at boosting scholarly productivity.

The purpose of this study was to reveal more than just anecdotes concerning faculty researchers’ notions of “publish or perish,” and to advance discussions beyond “shared myths,” allowing faculty “to more rationally debate its consequences and their implications for academic life” (Miller, Taylor, & Bedeian, 2011, p. 422). Telling my past and current personal stories treated my lived-through experiences as primary data and revealed myself to myself and to the reader, “seeking a perspective on their experience that neither they nor [the reader] had before” commenced in this study (Ellis & Bochner, 1996, p. vii). My background as a professional writer, a non-tenure track faculty member, an FWG facilitator, and as a doctoral candidate and (re)emerging researcher informed this autoethnographic inquiry. Gut-checks during my journey had me periodically second-guessing my recent foray in academia: “Do I really want to do this,
the constant paper chase, the continuous pursuit of publishable scholarship?” What of similar self-interrogations by FWG participants whose job security, career advancement, and promise of tenure largely hinged on the frequency of their scholarly output? In my autoethnographic role in this study, I revealed my truths and those of faculty researchers concerning the frequent pursuit of writing and scholarly productivity in an analysis that melded together both my familiarity and new curiosity for academia in an attempt to make sense of both my and FWG participants’ lived experiences in these areas.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Geertz (1973) asserted the following:

The claim to attention of an ethnographic account does not rest on its author’s ability to capture primitive facts in faraway places and carry them home like a mask or a carving, but on the degree to which he is able to clarify what goes on in such places, to reduce the puzzlement – what manner of men are these? – to which unfamiliar acts emerging out of unknown backgrounds naturally give rise.

(p. 16)

The purpose of this chapter was to evaluate the research on higher education faculty’s recognition of the academy’s persistent publishing pressures and their effect on faculty’s professional growth, connectedness to faculty peers and the higher institutional environment, and the frequent production of scholarly work demands’ indirect and direct roles in influencing academia. This chapter examined prior research on the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity among faculty and the roles that FWGs have played in supporting participants and their research and writing obligations. I placed supplementary emphasis on how reflective or reflexive writing and research (which I use interchangeably to incorporate all their relevant definitions) allowed me to look inward in pursuit of this study, and to lay bare my transparency (Etherington, 2004); autoethnography, the primary qualitative research method that would generate useful and credible findings in this analysis (Patton, 2002), was explored, as well. Geertz (1973) believed it to be crucial for ethnographers, as participant observers, to take field
notes for insiders and outsiders to better understand a culture (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010); embracing, (auto)ethnography, specifically, enhanced such studies by linking the researcher’s identity with the culture being explored.

Researchers, who examined the effects of “publish or perish” on faculty academic life, largely focused on the impacts that publishing pressures had on their disciplines, the quality of research work, citation rates, and family life repercussions (Miller et al., 2011; Di Bitetti, & Ferreras, 2017; Chavalarias, 2017; Callaghan, 2016); largely overlooked are substantial in-depth findings on how faculty perceive and experience the frequent pursuit of academic scholarly productivity and their resulting impressions on their professional practice. Miller et al.’s (2011) quantitative study, which explored the effects of “publish or perish” on the field of management, bypassed the usual sketchy anecdotes in favor of quantifiable empirical evidence that got to the heart of how management faculty perceived frequent publishing pressures. Their inquiry revealed that publishing imperatives triggered heightened stress levels, sidelined teaching as a key priority, and snubbed innovative and meaningful research (p. 422) among faculty. Such inquiries that explore first-hand faculty insights of “publish or perish” are essential to better understanding and engaging faculty and institutions in initiatives aimed at boosting scholarly productivity.

Research findings showed that faculty, who voluntarily engaged in FWGs to increase their scholarly output and to seek other positive outcomes, found supportive and collaborative environments in which to network, share and discuss their research and writing objectives, and uninterrupted time and functional space in which to work. FWG participants, including those who were the subject of this study, were in a unique position to willingly engage in truth-telling, especially, as it related to one’s identity as a scholar; group members’ practice of reacting to each
other’s scholarship in progress–important, because gratis feedback was delivered while research was ongoing, as opposed to after it had concluded–came when faculty writers needed the most encouraging responses, and largely, reactions less likely to have been delivered by departmental colleagues because of hierarchal dynamics (Werder, 2013) and, perhaps, other politics.

The FWGs that were at focus in this study, much like similar groups based at other colleges and universities, have shouldered therapeutic, restorative, and nearly holistic roles for faculty, in addition to their signature participant advocacy of goal-setting writing and research targets. “Publish and perish” environments, which demand productivity and superior writing quality, have generally been the main impetus for the establishment of FWGs. One faculty writer, who helped develop a faculty writing support group with other professors, largely in response to publishing pressures from administrators and concerns from fellow faculty struggling to manage various professional demands for time, put it this way:

As Wendy Belcher (2009) wrote, ‘some [of us] write consistently and well without having to talk about it; most of us need to admit our struggles if we are to move beyond them’ (p. 190, as cited in Geller & Eodice, 2013) . . . From my perspective as a developer, program design has to take into account both individual and institutional needs, but my primary focus is on the individual (Fraser & Little, 2013, p. 76).

Belcher also stressed that amid academic publishing pressures and decreasing publishing and grant opportunities, it was important that the writing program adopt a “mental shift” (p. 76) away from regarding one’s scholarship as a type of administratively enforced or compulsory academic output that solely epitomized the “publish or perish” mindset. The faculty writer asserted that writing groups aimed at faculty researchers and writers also should nurture peers’ emotional
aspects relating to such qualities as growth and transformation, motivation, autonomy, and relevance (Fraser & Little, 2013).

FWG participants, who work within universities and research institutions whose implicit and explicit directives greatly influenced their frequency of scholarly productivity, are influenced by the following five dynamics that inform their experiences and perceptions of their persistent need to produce and publish scholarly work: (a) faculty socialization; (b) work-based learning; (c) “peer-formativity” or the development of writing-oriented peer relationships (Murray & Thow, 2014); (d) FWGs as a social salve; and (e) “publish or perish” as a driver of faculty scholarly productivity. Consequently, this literature review examined the five pivotal dynamics that shaped the academic landscape in advance of faculty’s and FWG participants’ adjustment to tenure-track positions and informed their perceptions and experiences of the frequent pursuit of scholarly productivity. Traditionally, the collaborative, nurturing, and visible nature of the ongoing work that was shared and in progress within FWGs ran counter to the accepted private isolation and solitary process that characterized most academic writing (DeFeo et al, 2016). Entering a tenure-track environment can be especially jarring for new junior faculty, acclimated to “the expectations and scholarly habits established during doctoral work” (Schick, Hunter, Gray, Poe, & Santos, 2011, p. 45); the academic ecosystem can seem hostile when professors, who had regular teaching, advising, and service duties and were adjusting to their new obligations, perhaps discouraged by unfulfilled writing goals, were still expected to produce scholarship regularly. Recent studies have reported that participants of FWGs and similar writing workshops or writing circles with similar aims of responding to intense publishing pressures, helped participating faculty acclimatize to their academic writing obligations by increasing research professors’ confidence and motivation to become fully immersed in their
writing goals, by enhancing writing development and communication, and by reducing their levels of anxiety linked to academic writing (Dankoski et al, 2012), as their hunt for publication in quality peer-reviewed research journals is ongoing throughout their academic career.

To advance this analysis, the literature addressed the aforementioned dynamics as they related to FWG participants and their adaptation to an environment that demands frequent scholarly productivity to achieve tenure, advancement, and job security. Additional sections addressed the theoretical framework, autoethnography and narrative inquiry, including the participant-observer concept that served as an insightful personal vehicle for this specific study.

Faculty Socialization

Some 40 years ago, Massachusetts Institute of Technology faculty researchers Van Maanen’s & Schein’s (1979) analysis on the impacts of the ways organizations process employees into new roles, posited that managers and others should be more cognizant of how their socialization procedures ultimately affected a company’s bottom line—namely, how their methods of assimilation inspired or discouraged employees to conduct their work. Maanen’s and Schein’s (1979) opinion drew a distinct line connecting socialization to productivity, as they candidly expressed in their work: “Organizational results are not simply the consequences of the work accomplished by people brought into the organization, rather, they are the consequences of the work these people accomplish after the organization itself has completed its work on them” (p. 71). Maanen and Schein’s (1979) theory of organizational socialization suggested several extents to which socialization is framed within an organization that reflected its diversity of approaches to socialization within that organization. Hornak and OzaSchein (1979) and Tierney & Rhoads (1993, p. 3) defined faculty socialization as a continuous process by which faculty are introduced to a clearly defined way of life and are exposed to the norms, habits, and customs of
the professoriate and of the organization, by which they are taught necessary social knowledge and skills, and learn “the ropes,” a particular concept which will be discussed in the next section.

Socialization is a significant factor in the professional lives of faculty researchers, with studies showing both favorable conditions and barriers throughout the process. To illustrate, Cawyer & Friedrich (1998) found that faculty approval of orientation activities and other induction events best predicted satisfaction upon acceptance into the institutional workforce. However, at least one professed obstacle in the socialization process, Johnson (2001) found, involved perceptions that senior faculty were not helping junior and new faculty become familiarized with nuanced organizational customs and norms, which recent hires haphazardly had to learn on their own. The opinion that less experienced peers felt that more seasoned faculty did not adequately help them learn the unofficial aspects of organizational culture regarding faculty socialization was a common sentiment in the literature (Kilbourne, Mazerolle, & Bowman, 2017; Murray, 2008; Boice, 1992). With respect to the persistent need for faculty to produce publishable scholarly work for increase hopes of tenure, advancement, and job security, it meant that junior faculty often were unclear as to local beliefs regarding their scholarly output expectations (Murray, 2008) and unsure where to seek clarification, if the institution was not accommodating in this area.

Modern research examined how effectively higher education institutions acclimated new tenure-track and tenured faculty to their campuses, by gauging the impacts of in-processing procedures, and evaluating how related orientation methods accustomed faculty to scholarship demands and other output obligations. Faculty socialization into the academic profession, which was uniquely tied to the promise and realities of scholarly output, could be altered and improved upon to transform and influence positive workplace ideology, creativity, and innovation.
Increased attention to faculty’s perceived immersion into the institution was viewed as a multi-staged rite of passage that began with coaching in graduate school and probation as a new professor hire, and ended with tenure, if successful (Tierney & Bensimon, 1996; Johnson, 2001). As some institutions considered how best to acclimate new faculty to their expectations as scholars, appreciating more fully how faculty understood themselves within their roles in professional practice was key to successful socialization. Kuntz (2012) took a similarly intuitive approach in a qualitative study that considered how socialization among tenured social science faculty at a large research university affected their approach to scholarship; he examined the academic workplace and its “dynamic relationship between what faculty do (practices), where they work (material place and social space), and who they are (professional identity)” (p. 769). When it came to scholarly productivity, related key findings emerged as faculty customarily relied on socialization to shape their professional identities as productive and engaged scholars. According to Kuntz (2012), the workplace that these faculty internalized and believed they recognized was exemplified by: (a) isolation as a requirement to perform their scholarly work, which was a means of assimilating into the predominate culture and paying homage to their mentors and (b) organizational duties and “institutional policies that promoted single-authored publication over collegial collaboration contributed to their sense that the workplace was divided and constrained” (p. 773-774). Kuntz (2012), citing Lattuca (2002), asserted that the material context that examined other meaningful workplace factors often was disregarded in research on faculty productivity: “…although few studies of faculty productivity completely extract faculty from their work contexts, they often reduce the complex variable of context into simple measures of workload, reward and incentive systems, and institutional types” (p. 735).
Faculty usually entered the profession prepped by formal and informal training and programming provided by their doctoral environments, which may have included both valid and flawed assumptions regarding their expectations as productive scholars in higher education. It was vital that leaders considered at the outset how they may have communicated their messages to new hires and used faculty socialization processes to reinforce well-defined institutional realities or debunked false narratives, actions that likely affirmed faculty members’ places within their academic institutions and their commitment to be productive scholars. Commitment to the institution and to one’s discipline were two points of intersection by which faculty socialization could be understood (Tierney & Rhoades, 1993).

Learning the Ropes

Glossaries that offered context to the term “learning the ropes,” cited its nautical roots, which referred to an expression that emerged originally from sailing ships, where sailors had to be well acquainted with intricate systems of ropes that composed the rigging (TheFreeDictionary.com, 2017). The phrase is apt for new junior and senior faculty who attempted to disentangle the official and unspoken murky nuances and customs of fitting in and being accepted within academe. Opportunities for new faculty to benefit from implicit socialization may have occurred during informal and spontaneous office visits and luncheons, campus walks, faculty gatherings, and at brief moments at the copy machine. More explicit chances arose during faculty development meetings and other official programming.

Gardner and Blackstone (2013) added to research that supported the idea that new professors first gained access by entering the university and familiarizing themselves with the customs of the department and the institution. The first entry is part of a two-phase process, which ended with the role continuance period, after which faculty have been positioned in the
institution (Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). It was a progression from what could be deemed a hopeful stage for prospective academics—an anticipatory socialization during graduate school, where students began internalizing the beliefs, attitudes, and values of the profession and of the discipline in which they worked (Tierney & Rhoads, 1993).

The intricate maze of institutional beliefs and principles that faculty experienced spontaneously with their peers and others within their departments and fields of specialty, wielded a great influence on their behavior; for this reason, Tierney and Rhoads (1993) suggested that leaders avoided assuming what faculty believed about an institution and considered more deliberately how to socialize new faculty to an institution’s culture.

Several older and newer studies considered “learning the ropes,” within the solitary career and activity that is academia and teaching (Brookes & German, 1983), to be a challenging endeavor for the new faculty member hoping to establish alliances with at least two dominant groups promising to show them the way: their new institutional peers and institutional leaders. As with other complexities of higher education, such as tenure and promotion and university culture, gaining sound footing within academia could be more challenging for faculty of color and women than for White males, largely because of deficient anticipatory socialization during graduate school (Véliz Calderón, 2013; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996; Tierney & Rhoads, 1994). While White women and women of color share similar challenges in this area, there are particular issues that minority faculty face (Sulé, 2014; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996; Thomas, Bystydzienski, & Desai, 2015; Kelly & McCann, 2014). Research showed that new faculty, whose early mentoring was considered weak and lackluster, relied on trial and error or observation to gain understanding about institutional culture and norms (Johnson, 2001).
Faculty Development

Extensive studies on faculty socialization revealed that many new faculty, who took on roles as academicians, and perhaps, as new researchers at research-intensive universities, may be ill-equipped to carry out the exceptional challenges demanded of higher education careers that include RTS as a mainstay (Puri, Graves, Lowenstein, & Hsu, 2012). To reiterate, new faculty benefitted from both implicit and explicit modes of organizational socialization that assisted in communicating values and expectations; however, such interactions can break down in at least two environments: (a) those devoid of responsive peer or senior mentors to informally acquaint new faculty with “the way it is done here” and (b) those where institutional programming is arbitrary or ineffective in conveying official policies and standards. An example of such programming—faculty development—has undergone major changes since its foundations in academe, which based on its own fluctuations and reactions to reform, reflected a mutual synergy within higher education (Brookes & German, 1983).

Following empirical evidence that the state of faculty development is in flux, due to societal and educational shifts, Camblin Jr.’s & Steger’s (2000), study of one institution’s faculty training programming, which was structured around competing grant proposals for individual faculty, groups, and university centers, was effective in improving interdisciplinary faculty collaboration and in targeting specific faculty academic-related needs. By comparison, a limited number of other researchers similarly explained faculty development as among concerted institutional non-research-centered, faculty-driven programs intended to enhance faculty well-being, teaching and teaching reflection, curriculum design and instructional techniques (Brookes & German, 1983; Calkins & Harris, 2017; Eaton, Osgood, Cigrand, & Dunbar, 2015). However, there was a noticeable gap in the literature that failed to sufficiently address the evolving
delineations of faculty development as an institutional resource and intervention for university professor-researchers. In citing Nelson (1983), Camblin Jr. & Steger (2000) defined “faculty development” as any effort “… designed to improve faculty performance in all aspects of their professional lives—as scholars, advisers, academic leaders, and contributors to institutional decisions” (p. 70). Kucsera & Svinicki (2010) emphasized a similar disparity in the research since at least 1991 to help advise faculty researchers in faculty development programming decisions. They described “faculty development,” as programs that “encourage faculty to look at the effects of their teaching practices on student learning as part of the consultation process, workshops, and learning communities” (p. 5).

Higher education in the years following the passage of the federal G.I. Bill in 1944 embraced a massive influx of new student veterans–excluding comparable numbers of Black men and women due to disparities in secondary education and social and cultural barriers–who were eager to spend their financial aid and living expense benefits for the promise of a more prosperous way of life through a degree and/or job training (G.I. Bill, n.d.). The period following World War II also saw an infusion of newly graduated young academics, whom Baldwin and Blackburn (1981) say “stimulated the educational system with novel perspectives and up-to-date knowledge” (p. 598).

As with the founding of many counteractive structures and organizations, faculty development grew out of a need to improve and resolved a variety of issues and pressures that were pervasive in academia at the time. Continuing through the next 30 years, current and anticipated faculty shortages would engender a host of problems related to recruitment, foundational preparation, and faculty retention; however, those woes would overshadow a relevant and equally important dilemma that confounded leaders: What were the best ways to
stimulate the ongoing professional development of current faculty employees? (Miller & Wilson, 1963; Eble & McKeachie, 1985). Challenges that would vex higher education administrators some three decades later in the 1970s, when faculty development became a fixture on college and university campuses, remain a source of concern for many leaders in academia today; officials still grapple with issues associated with enrollment patterns, increased accountability, diminishing financial resources, rising professional insecurities, weak course conceptualization and teaching techniques, ineffective student-teacher interactions, inadequate teaching evaluations, and ambiguity with tenure-review processes (Tierney & Rhoades, 1993; Eble & McKeachie, 1985; Camblin Jr. & Steger, 2000).

Though visible in many institutions of higher education today, Rossing and Lavitt (2016) argued that stagnation in faculty development and related academic practices have led to engaged faculty learning being overlooked as a cornerstone to efforts aimed at addressing scholarship and other demands. Researchers also found that faculty who could benefit from programs aimed at improving new and senior academics’ teaching, performance, socialization, and confronting the increasing challenges of tenure and promotion, faced the same obstacles as did some junior and senior professors seeking to boost their frequency of scholarly productivity: the lack of adequate space and time. When it came to evaluating their own teaching, especially how it related to student learning, many faculty found that current time and space constraints, complicated by their tenure/promotion research demands and different development needs, made it difficult to engage in critical reflection (Calkins & Harris, 2017; Baldi et al., 2013). Additionally, increased service requirements added to the challenge; Cochran (1992), who questioned the suitability of RTP as an appropriate measure of faculty performance, called for
institutions to reassess the role of faculty service, urging institutional leaders to reduce service activities to address the increased emphasis placed on research and teaching.

Work-Based Learning

While practitioners and researchers, generally, have extolled and documented the substantial growth and relevant pedagogical value of WBL to engage workforce development in higher education and focus employability as a goal for students in academe (Lester & Costley, 2010; Talbot, Costley, Dremina, & Kopnov, 2017; Atkins, 1990; Brodie & Irving, 2007), its significance to faculty socialization had not been the source of comprehensive research; however, judging by the literature, there had long been agreement among several scholars that WBL—in the form of graduate school or earlier, as opposed to course offerings in the curriculum—was where many faculty members cut their teeth in academia, were exposed to the work that academics do, and first began to understand what it meant to be college professors, along with the subsequent consequences of such commitments (Austin, 2002; Tierney & Rhoades, 1993; Fleming, Goldman, Correll, & Taylor, 2016). Studies focused on WBL emphasized the importance of such job training as being constructive and increasingly essential for higher education students in rapidly changing environments to learn how to engage in effective and proficient written communication, though challenges regarding staffing, institutional commitments, and other concerns, persisted (Brodie & Irving, 2007; Johnson, 2001).

After the Civil War, early American scholars, who traveled to Germany seeking graduate work at the revered German universities of the time, popularized the modern university in the United States (Jones & Shaw, 1990). Post-baccalaureate studies at prestigious institutions further validated academics’ place in esteemed higher education circles. “Before long it became a virtual requirement for prospective academics” (Jones & Shaw, 1990, p. 49). However, the
literature on socialization implied that understanding of the faculty career began with the graduate school experience or even earlier, not the first faculty position. WBL and its promise of meaningful professional preparation for faculty, mirrored that of faculty development initiatives that extended beyond educational praxes and offered more holistic services for faculty.

Several WBL researchers, such as Brodie and Irving (2007), whose study examined WBL as a pedagogical approach to enhancing higher education student learning, asserted that at least two views on learning theory were significant to academic pedagogy. The notion that these interpretations also closely related to FWGs was not lost on this researcher. As Brodie and Irving (2007) posited, both concepts focused “on how [learners are] learning” (p. 13), as opposed to how the facilitator might assist them in learning. With relevance to both WBL and FWGs, the two theories the researchers cited were: (a) the “constructivist” view, which proposed that learners constructed their meaning of experiences depending on the context in which they were; therefore, learning was “situated” in a particular context (Wertsch, 1991) and (b) the recognition of “communities of practice,” which focused on how people learn as members of a socially constructed group (Wenger, 1998).

While higher education professors usually entered the profession with theoretical knowledge of RTS and other aspects of academia, this familiarity may not coalesce cleanly with the actual reality of their learned expectations. From WBL and other skills programming and faculty development resources, such as FWGs, professors could benefit from experiential learning. It was imperative that time and space for critical reflection of RTS and other academic endeavors was a supported part of institutional faculty development efforts (Calkins & Harris, 2017). While acknowledging that traditional theory-based pedagogy was attained in graduate
school, opportunities for routine and productive reflection of research and teaching obligations allowed academics to advance their professional practice.

Faculty Writing Groups

Seminal research on FWGs in colleges and universities in the United States and internationally is expanding and shedding light on the impacts that focused voluntary small-group collaborations have on faculty participants’ scholarly outputs. The literature depicted FWGs as a form of faculty development; the active groups, which may be composed of peers from the same fields or of departmentally diverse academics, were among proven strategies aimed at not only motivating faculty to boost their scholarly productivity, but also helping new professors and those new to publishing and to their departments, flourish in practice (Boice, 1992; Pennamon, Moss, & Springer, 2016; Murray & Cunningham, 2011), relieving their “tenure-track stress” (Tysick & Babb, 2006, p. 94). Much of the literature on the influence and effectiveness of FWGs and similar interventions focused on studies involving higher education medical- and health-related fields, such as those by Bland & Schmitz, 1986; Guraya, Norman, Khoshhal, Guraya, & Forgione, 2016; Isenburg, Lee, & Oermann, 2017; Kilbourne, Mazerolle, & Bowman, 2017; Schrager & Sadowski, 2016; and Rawat & Meena, 2014. These studies, as well as others, indicated that the socialization experiences gained from FWGs, peer-mentoring, and similar intentional support strategies positively shape faculty attitudes and academic values.

Although ample research lauded FWGs for their positive influences on tenure-track and tenured faculty’s obligation to publish their research, I was privy to the skepticism that existed among some faculty researchers, regarding the groups’ “true” academic worth; that FWGs were a “waste of time,” was a sentiment expressed indirectly by a senior faculty member based at the university at focus in this study. One would be hard-pressed to find this reaction validated
widely in the literature; I did not. Save for studies challenging the established belief that many faculty are unable to find enough time to write and conduct research, and analyses disputing the perceived realities of “publish or perish” that largely discredited the perception that all institutions and departments demanded that faculty engaged in frequent research productivity at the same rates (Murray & Cunningham, 2011; Plume & van Weijen, 2014; Holmes, Tewksbury, & Holmes, 2000; ONeill, 1990), quantitative and qualitative researchers generally relied on their persuasive study results to provide evidence as to the efficacy of FWGs. As to the faculty member, who was critical of FWGs’ value to academics and scholarly productivity, I am reminded of studies that alluded to the perceptions that FWGs and other forms of related institutional support may be seen as weaknesses or crutches; others perceived such development as highlighting skills deficiencies that “academics should already have when they enter the academy.” Muller (2014) discovered an existing “macho spirit in the traditional scholarly enterprise” (p. 34) when it came to the “celebration of solitude” (p. 34) centered around academic writing. While he was considering creating a writing group to support scholarly productivity on his campus at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, he gauged faculty support by asking colleagues representing diverse disciplines whether such groups were common in their fields at their schools. Murray (2014) recalled that a senior faculty colleague at a research-intensive university responded with the following:

I suspect that most of my colleagues would say this: If a faculty member at a research university needs a group of colleagues to push him/her to be productive, perhaps that faculty member might best be advised to think about finding different work or at least to seek out a teaching position somewhere other than at a research university. (p. 34)
From their earliest beginnings, FWGs formed primarily to help new and active faculty boost their publishable scholarly output. Furthermore, the literature documented in this study illustrated some of the significant benefits that academics seemed to be reaping from participating in FWGs; positive impacts on teaching, intensified productivity, heightened academic self-confidence, and doctoral student retention have been observed. Franke (2001), who was in his first year as a new faculty member at State University of New York at Cortland, a teaching institution, offered a unique perspective into what led him to launch a faculty writing group there. His treatise, conveyed through a first-person narrative based on his involvement as a young academic, provided a novel glimpse into how he began the group, challenges notwithstanding. As with many qualitative studies, the author’s personal narrative here was key; it helped clarify to the audience the unsure and haphazard launch of a group that used websites, word-of-mouth, and meetings to not only help nurture faculty writers, but also to “contribute to the cultural conversation” (p. 3) about academic writing at the university. Franke’s (2001) anecdotes regarding participants, whom he referred to by their first names, gave readers a cinematic thrill; the scene-setting was no doubt familiar to academics who would undeniably recognize these characters within their classes and committees. Those looking to launch their own FWGs might assume to expect similar personalities within their ranks.

Fassinger, Gilliland, and Johnson (1992) offered insider perspectives based on their decades of study on FWGs or “circles,” as they and others often referred to them. The trio first presented their research as part of a professional development series, which centered on the results of their mixed methods study that first appeared in the journal College Teaching. The authors, sociologists who formed an early FWG in 1987 at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minn., found that participants at the end of their 10-week sessions felt greater empathy for
student writers, learned to approach different learners individually, and were more likely to embrace new teaching methods, all sentiments echoed in subsequent research.

In other works, such as Geller’s and Eodice’s (2013) edited book of real-life accounts from faculty writing instructors, the authors challenged cream-of-the-crop scholars who believed that individuals struggling from writer’s block, cannot unblock their writing through group intervention, creative encouragement or other inventive strategies. Sixteen chapters detailed the experiences between faculty writing coaches and academics trained in professional development. The book, in a revealing manner, featured the collected experiences and snapshots of different types of FWGs and the interactions between facilitators and participants. Creative practices, tailored to each of the different types of writing groups, were featured, as were representations of diverse types of institutions and perceptions of similar interventions.

A common theme that ran through many FWG studies is that publishing was critical for academic survival. Though a fairly recent source, Brandon et al.’s (2015) influential work, a mixed methods study, explored this widespread belief and faculty’s responses to it. They examined a peer-support writing group’s previously rejected articles and accepted scholarly works over a six-month period to see how the collaborators fostered self-confidence and increased academic production among fellow faculty. The study also echoed faculty members’ reasons for not writing more—lack of time, confidence, motivation, and ideal writing environments—similar sentiments expressed in other formative research. By working with “previously rejected manuscripts” (p. 534), the authors gathered data on the articles by analyzing anonymous participant surveys and rates of acceptance. Participants resubmitted 10 articles at the behest of the group and within six months, according to the study, four manuscripts were accepted for publication, five were being revised, and one was withdrawn (Brandon et al., 2015).
Such reported activity supported extensive research that validated arguments favoring FWGs—that the academics who participated in them, indeed, produced more scholarly work.

Researchers such as Page, Edwards, and Wilson (2012) detailed the impacts that their FWG had on teacher education faculty at a mid-size university campus and provided detailed unparalleled snapshots of the demands and workloads placed on faculty at a university, where faculty workloads were expected to reflect the following guidelines: teaching (45%-70%); service (10%-40%); and professional development and achievement (10%-40%). The study group was composed of at least five tenure-track junior faculty members, who expressed an interest in increasing their academic writing. The authors cited five group benefits at the end of each semester: accountability, structure, collaboration, motivation, and an increase in scholarly production.

Hampton-Farmer et al. (2013) in reviewing the founding of a FWG at a university faculty development center, cited an essay by Marley (2008) that appeared in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that identified difficulty at starting or completing writing projects as one of the major hindrances to new and senior faculty achieving tenure. Faculty development in this area, according to the authors, was devoted to helping faculty find time to write amid “publish or perish” environments. In Hampton-Farmer et al.’s (2013) qualitative study, where narratives from participants of a university faculty writing group were coded and categorized, the following intended and unintended foundational themes emerged, including: Perception Prior to and After the Establishment of the Faculty Writing Group, Facilitator’s Role in Building Cohesion within Faculty Writing Group, Perceived Benefits of the Faculty Writing Group, and Why Some Groups Work and Others Don’t.
Research on FWGs also included several with participating doctoral students. Jalongo, Boyer, and Ebbeck’s (2014) qualitative study focused on the scholarly writing process through the perspectives of 30 doctoral students of diverse levels enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States, Canada, and Australia. When the authors compared data from interviews, the resulting responses provided a relevant discourse on how best to promote doctoral student retention. While other studies have suggested that FWGs that include doctoral students helped graduate students more effectively reach their academic goals, this trio’s research presented clear data that suggested specific student-centered proposals, such as offering at least one doctoral level writing course on academic publishing and designing class assignments aligned with academic publication, may better enable early doctoral students to advance in the field.

The focus on early career academics’ threat of burnout due to the increased pressure to publish is undoubtedly mentioned in most studies centered on the impacts of faculty writing groups. Dwyer, Lewis, McDonald, and Burns’s (2012) research, through a participant-observer approach, breaks new ground within this unique focus. Their analysis used qualitative accounts to provide insider reports of a functioning FWG. While concentrated on boosting scholarly productivity, the author-participants, who all were within their first five years of faculty appointments, were as concerned about (re)producing pleasure, which they said should be the primary impetus for scholarly writing, as opposed to the “contemporary imperative of writing as a product of academia” (p. 129). By adopting and replicating the undertakings of a writing collective, adopting a sense of collegiality, and immersing participants in a shared experience—the desire to publish—the authors pushed a different narrative, one that, instead, focused on pleasure, an intangible gratification.
In another unique perspective Linder, Cooper, McKenzie, Raesch, and Reeve (2014) employed a new scheme – backward design – that compelled teachers to reflect on their student-centered roles as educators and to outline their goals for student objectives before they embarked on instruction. The researchers examined a FWG that began as an outgrowth of a faculty development program at the Center for Teaching Excellence at Suffolk University in Boston, Mass. In addition to having examined qualitative data from weekly journal entries from participants, Linder et al. (2014) also studied the commonalities shared between them and their group of 10 faculty members, who were part of another faculty development program that received training in the backward design approach. Though the study largely underscored backward design as its major theoretical framework, the origin of the writing group—considered the voluntary coming-together of faculty united in a common cause—helped buttress awareness that such groups were effective in encouraging scholarly writing production by forcing participants to articulate goals and objectives, effectively holding faculty accountable to each other and themselves, and turning amplified attention to their audiences. In addition, researchers found that the informal social component of the FWG, in the form of support networks and peer alliances, increased self-development, which brought more confidence and internal assurance to participants embarking on personal academic writing challenges.

In other FWG research that included doctoral students, Horta and Santos (2016) disclosed noteworthy findings in their inquiry on the impact of publishing scholarship during doctoral study in scientific fields. An emergent outcome among studies examining doctoral student participation in FWGs, was that the impact of being published in research publications while enrolled in Ph.D. programs, positively influenced visibility and increased the likelihood of faculty collaborations, especially, with those internationally. Horta and Santos (2016) proposed
that universities enact policies and programs or create incentives that encouraged doctoral students to publish more research while they were still pursuing their degrees. It had been stated frequently in the literature that doctoral students, too, who participate in FWGs are more likely to enjoy more prolific careers “in terms of research production and productivity” (Horta & Santos, 2016, p. 45). Maher, Fallucca, and Halasz (2013), in their related analysis, which examined the impact of a university-based writing group on higher education administration doctoral students, suggested that FWGs, which may also include graduate student participants, have a much shorter history when compared to those aimed at faculty only. This study appeared to break new ground through qualitative approaches that employed semi-structured interviews; it theorized that participation in writing groups may provide a significant impetus in motivating doctoral students to complete their dissertations and, ultimately, their degrees sooner. Among the writing groups I profiled for this study, I concluded that doctoral student members could benefit from scholarly productivity, emotional boosts, and the academic structure that the writing groups supported.

As demonstrated in the preceding literature review of FWGs, Franke (2001), Fassinger, Gilliland, and Johnson (1992), and many others’ research laid the groundwork for numerous subsequent studies concerning FWGs that were conducted over the last 25 years in academia. Research has come to denote the “normal” work expected of most academic staff, as opposed to an elite activity assumed by special factions in a small number of higher learning institutions funded specifically for the purpose (Lee & Boud, 2003, p.189). These analyses were beneficial to recognizing how FWGs have evolved over time. The preceding assessment has offered a comprehensive review of the literature that has led to the evolution and development of FWGs, a strategy that the literature largely shows to be proven to increase the frequency of published faculty scholarship, among other impacts.
Faculty Writing Groups as Social Salve

Empirical studies have shown that FWGs, mirroring the evolutions in higher education, have undergone fascinating changes over the years after adjusting to cultural shifts both inside and outside academia. Many FWGs, seemingly organically, have expanded their focus to become safe havens, spaces where faculty–especially new junior tenure-track professors–can anticipate comforting and supportive environments; professors of different stripes, who work often in isolation, are learning to navigate new academic landscapes or are pursuing scholarly output obligations, in addition to managing their other academic demands, and research portrays the groups as founts of moral and collegial support and constructive feedback (Johnson & Mullen, 2007). Lee and Boud (2003), whose research responded to what they consider to be cultural changes in the workplace (i.e., staff research development of staff research and writing, workplace peer learning), saw benefits in advocating that such writing groups be more inclusive and responsive to professional development as a whole for more diverse participants, as opposed to exclusive academic development for faculty only. The authors also cited a critical need for staff writing development “in light of growth of higher education and changes to the organization of the sector in many countries” (Lee & Boud, 2003, p. 187).

In a rather esoteric study using writing as inquiry, Badenhorst et al. (2016) employed research-participant qualitative methods to draw conclusions from written journal narratives. The authors formed their own FWG in 2009. Though their research explored the framing of the narratives of self, using the metaphor “from there to here” (p. 3), the early beginnings of their group provided a unique glimpse into the formation of a distinctive coalition of working academics from diverse disciplines, who met weekly to commit to a writing project for three months. The study joined others in providing further evidence of the tenuous nature of FWGs,
where schedules, time constraints, and work demands largely determined either sporadic or consistent attendance.

In much of the qualitative research on FWGs, written reflective participant narratives elucidated the data. A researcher-participant qualitative study by Penney et al. (2015) examined the experiences of 11 women who balanced family or parenthood demands while pursuing academic careers as education FWG members. Researchers then studied written reflective narratives that were aimed at capturing an understanding of the female faculty experiences. A concept mapping approach, which was used to quantify the qualitative data into at least five common themes among the researcher-participants, ranged from gender-specific experiences surrounding parenting and commitment to work and family. Though their study is largely centered on a framework of work/family border theory, which explored the contradictions that made “work and family balance challenging” (Penney et al., 2015, p. 459), of immediate interest was the formation of the featured FWG at Memorial University, a teaching college in Newfoundland, Canada. The group formed there in 2008 to support faculty writing and research goals and initially opened only to untenured faculty and faculty under contracts; eventually, however, only female faculty continued to attend.

A Theoretical Prelude

Prior to beginning this study, I and my graduate school peers met informally to discuss the progress of our doctoral studies in coffee shops and lingered outside our dismissed night classes, staying behind after-hours on campus. We welcomed the moments of levity to discuss our daily frustrations, successes, and bewilderment with our research and writing, professors, students, family, and home lives. Invariably, talk of local, national and global politics, our reflections on various facets of life, and other weighty concerns, crept into our conversations.
We had forged our own unofficial cohort and were comfortable with each other being part of it. This reminded me of the good-natured discourses I had with colleagues when I was a faculty member, and this is how I anticipated the level of collegiality to be among FWG participants.

When small cohesive groups, who belonged to the same “tribe” and who shared similar stressors and goals, unite, comradery sometimes is revealed. It was relevant for me to mention this now, not only to illustrate FWGs’ auxiliary role as social salve, but also to set the stage and provide an early “theoretical orientation” (Casanave & Li (2015) in citing Merriam (2009)) for this study’s theoretical framework. In their conceptual research, Casanave and Li (2015) asserted that novice scholars in the social sciences have difficulty composing such frameworks in their dissertations and other published research (especially, qualitative research), a struggle they contended vexed the authors and other scholars “over the lifetimes of a scholarly career” (p. 104). After much reading, educational research review, discussions with professors and advisers, and deliberate thought, I purposefully considered the theoretical framework that I believed would help me interpret this study’s data and forge essential connections to other works, two aims that Casanave and Li (2015) believed to be crucial to qualitative research.

Theoretical Framework

Echoing Casanave and Li (2015), Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (1997) found that qualitative researchers should postulate their theoretical positions early in their studies, citing the research and specifying the origins of their own personal positions, as well as their opposing beliefs. They asserted that writing theoretical autobiographies, for example, helped illustrate “how past events speak to present concerns and bring a level of consciousness to one’s current work” (p. 257). This study, an autoethnography that explored the perceptions of the pursuit of scholarly productivity among FWG participants, demanded that I also step into the (my) past and
reflect on my own growth as a theorist (Ely et al., 1997). Almost immediately, this recollection evoked gloomy memories of me sitting in my high school senior English class, which I generally enjoyed and for which I earned good grades but felt protracted anguish over the sessions devoted to studying and discussing Beowulf. At the time, I could not wrap my head around the epic poem nor grasp its meaning for the universe or for me. Only many years later could I conclude that it may not have been just my mental or academic blocks preventing me from understanding all the verses and their many themes; perhaps, it was the way the teacher delivered the lessons, inspired or stifled our discussion, or ensured that we students were engaged or merely at attention after she dispassionately delivered the material. What of the methods and materials behind the teaching? I considered other meaningful flashpoints during my tenures in journalism, public relations, and academia that have led to my understanding of what is meant by a theoretical framework in qualitative research (this, amid a debate in the literature as to whether theory even has a role to play in qualitative inquiry; see Kovach, 2016; Tavallaei & Abu Talib, 2010; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Schwandt, 2007); my experiences wrought the beginnings of assumptions that would later form the concepts, values, and practices that would become my theoretical standpoints (Schwandt, 2007). As a requirement of this study, and through my numerous lenses, I considered the concepts of peer-formativity, phenomenography, and narrative inquiry to construct this analysis, to extend its theoretical perspective, and later, to interpret and analyze resultant data.

My goal in writing this autoethnography was to promote a more cogent understanding of the experiences of faculty in constant pursuit of publishable scholarship and how their perceptions shaped their academic practice; in addition, optimistically, to provide insight that would help inspire or improve initiatives aimed at motivating academic scholarly productivity is
among a larger aim. In its basic form, the FWGs profiled in this investigation involved writing meetings between a participant(s) and a facilitator. Thereby, the goal, ultimately, was to counter the deleterious outcomes of “performative” academic environments (anxiety, apathy, fear, depression, etc.) where, above all else, faculty were expected to frequently pursue opportunities to publish or present their scholarship in certain renowned publications or symposia (Murray & Thow, 2014, p. 2). Murray’s & Thow’s (2014) research explored the actual practice, the meaningful but little-known dynamics that happened in such writing meetings that extended beyond research and writing mentoring, goal-setting, and expressions of accountability objectives, all of which take place in FWGs – “negotiations surrounding the imperative to produce writing that counts in someone else’s terms are relatively unexamined, and the demands can seem non-negotiable” (p. 2). In a novel approach, Murray and Thow (2014) assessed writing as a behavior and, as such, this inventive framework’s potential to encourage academic writing in performative settings. The specific concepts the researchers explored compose the following theoretical foundations that also were factors in the FWGs under examination in this study: (a) motivational interviewing (b) autonomy (c) self-determination (d) environmental factors and (e) social support (Murray & Thow, 2014). By using this writing meeting framework, I peered into the FWG meetings, of which I was a participant-observer, and examined accurately what motivated productive academics to write, especially when they were buoyed by the psychological process of positive support of peer relationships; i.e., “peer-formativity” (p. 1, 10).

Also guiding this qualitative study was phenomenography, a theoretical framework that fostered a more cogent understanding of the diverse ways in which people encountered and understood the phenomena around them; more precisely, in this research, it helped make sense of how FWG participants perceived and experienced their frequent pursuit of scholarly productivity
and assisted in deriving meaning from inferences culled from the data (Unleur, 2012; Reeves, Peller, Goldman, & Kitto, 2013). In drawing distinctions between qualitative and quantitative researchers, Padgett (2004) asserted that the former had “the market cornered” when it came to willingly embracing different perspectives from the periphery that allowed us to “see both the overarching contours and the hidden crevices” (p. 4) for meanings; for this inquiry, phenomenography was used to explain, feasibly, the meaning behind sentiments left unsaid, or the perceptions to which observed attitudes and behavior implicitly allude.

Tight (2016) regarded phenomenography, in its role as a research design, as the only research scheme, up to now, to have been established largely within higher education research by higher education researchers and Ashworth and Lucas (2000) cited phenomenography’s original extensive impact that led to the opinion that teaching and learning could be modified to improve the quality of learning outcomes. Knowing this made phenomenography an apt conceptual tool to gauge how FWG meetings may have been altered to more positively impact participant outcomes related to scholarly output and other related measures. The literature reached no consensus regarding phenomenography as a fixed theory, design or methodology; there was overlap as each embodied features from all three (Tight, 2016; Giorgi, 1999).

This research study includes a narrative inquiry framework to portray my story as a former journalist, PR professional, university instructor, and now, (re)emerging academic scholar, guiding FWG participants in their pursuit of frequent scholarly productivity. Connelly and Clandinin (2013) asserted that “narrative inquiry” or “inquiry into narrative” denoted both phenomenon and method and convey the view that “humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives” (p. 2). This study centered narrative inquiry as a theoretical orientation, giving prominence to “the potential of stories to give meaning to people’s
lives, and the treatment of data as stories” (Emden, 1998, p. 30). Consider, for instance, Pennamon et al. (2016), who examined FWGs’ dynamics and therapeutic factors:

. . . when inevitable writing blocks occur, in a trusting environment, members can experience catharsis while sharing their experiences and instillation of hope with support, idea sharing, and consultation. Furthermore, scholarly writing groups have the potential to support goal setting and skill acquisition through feedback and modeling. . . Through openness to feedback exchanges, individual writing group members and the group collectively generate positive receptivity and subsequently build upon the relationships created to provide an appropriate balance of challenge and support for each other. (p. 3)

This rereading and retelling of FWG observations and positions was rife with prospects for narrative inquiry theory; Trahar (2009) advised examining how these interpretations and reflections were composed, for whom and why, and the academic, cultural, and social discourses that they drew upon; in addition, the construct favored adding distinctive and authentic voices, who could disrupt the canons of discourse and conventional framing around the scholarly productivity of faculty researchers at research-intensive institutions, “capturing the complex and psychological components of individuals’ experiences” (Arnold, Crawford, & Khalifa, 2016, p. 896). The literature depicted narrative inquiry as a support that helped researchers connect the lives and stories of individuals to greater human social phenomena and, as a tool, to interpret experiences through the lens of the participant (the basis of phenomenology) in a form of self-interrogation (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995; Biggio, 2010; Moore, Scarduzio, Plump, & Geist-Martin, 2013).

This research was guided by narrative inquiry and a perspective of self—and through self, society—derived from autoethnography. Hones (1998) suggested that reflective researchers allow
their protagonists’ words to convey significance to the audience and to focus any “interpretations of [their] words on the needs of ongoing dialogue” (p. 229). Researchers also must be cognizant of possible risks and abuses of narrative inquiry that mirror some of the intellectual denunciations of qualitative research, in general. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) warned that because narrative researchers assumed first-person roles and shoulder multiple functions (in this study, such as researcher, commentator, research participant, and theory builder), in the narrative inquiry process, “we are one person,” as well as “one in writing” (p. 9). As I write my narratives, I will need to make clear who has the dominant voice when referring to “I.” Some of the pitfalls of introspection research that Louie, Drevdahl, Purdy, and Stackman (2003) cited in their examination of the collaborative self-study drew compelling links to those of narrative inquiries, and believed the criticisms (i.e., lack of generalizability and hubris) originated partly from inconsistencies in the literature in addressing validity issues:

Challenges to the validity of self-study reflect an underlying epistemological question about whether researchers can create useful knowledge when they are their own research subjects. From our perspective, validation, rather than validity, is a more important standard in self-study research. Clearly, self-study does not reduce or eliminate one's obligation to conduct a systematic inquiry that meets the standards of the researcher's chosen methodology. (p. 10).

Accordingly, appropriate inductive tools of inquiry sanctioned by the literature were used.

Qualitative Approaches that Promote Insider Perspectives

Like any other organization with its own customs, FWGs, too, enjoy different cultures. Sangasubana’s (2011) study, which illustrated the practice of ethnographic research—the direct detailed study of a group or culture—offered a sturdy foundation with which to consider such
inquiry. The author, a sociologist, described the process by suggesting that researchers considered the following: (a) how data should be handled (b) how such a study should be conducted and (c) how limitations should be cautioned on approach. The research study answered these and other queries with succinct checklists that clearly stated what conditions should first be met.

Seidman’s (1998) classic compendium, *Interviewing As Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*, which is hailed as a classic study on the subject of interviewing, enhanced its qualitative focus through phenomenology, which aimed to describe a lived experience. While the goal of phenomenological studies was to acquire pure detailed occurrences, the author still based his focus on a driving qualitative research foundation – interviewing. Seidman (1998), an educational researcher, saw interviewing as a way for researchers to “put behavior in context and provide access to understanding . . . action” (p. 4).

For fledging interviewers, the author provided common-sense but authoritative directives to follow, which were related to comprehension, subjectivity, crafting meaning, and beliefs. While other researchers may have quibbled with different interviewing approaches, the author addressed skills that researchers would need to produce an effective qualitative study.

In another definitive observational study, Wolcott (1981) laid bare his raw and enlightening experiences of teaching graduate students about ethnographic fieldwork within a 15-paged exposition. His illuminating narrative insight served as a how-to manual on effectively (and ineffectively) performing such qualitative research. Although the author periodically gave play-by-play accounts of his interactions among his students, the lessons he recounted also substituted as training for researchers about to embark on similar ethnographic fieldwork. Wolcott pulled no punches on what he regarded as qualitative method contradictions, such as
placing higher accountability on what observers believed, rather than what they actually saw. This unique intimate narrative provided an instructive and informative account of a veteran researcher and his interactions with his fledgling research students, who were subsequently sent out into the field with mixed results.

Literature Review Summary

A review of literature has shown a burgeoning need for faculty voices in higher education, especially when it came to assess institutional faculty development initiatives and resources intended to support and encourage the publishable scholarly work that academia demanded of faculty. New junior faculty, specifically, may have felt apprehensive or overwhelmed by hazy or demanding publishing pressures, although their early years’ work would portend their academic success as they were supported aggressively as graduate student researchers (Girardeau, Rud, & Trevisan, 2014; Bartkowski, Deem, & Ellison, 2015). Other professors, especially newly minted Ph.D.’s, will be surprised by the strange new publishing pressures they will face after they have been hired into the academic world; as Brookes & German (1983) stated, “the preparation graduate students receive bears little resemblance to what they do when they become faculty members” (p. 17), and typically, the training included little to no emphasis on teaching, with most of the focus on the chosen discipline. Meeting scholarly research goals was the direct pathway to achieving tenure and job advancement. With such a mindset ingrained as gospel by higher education institutions and the leadership that governs them, the expectations of new junior and senior academics may have been in conflict with what their graduate programs trained them to do and what they were expected to do, especially where research and scholarship are concerned (Brookes & German, 1983; Schick et al., 2011; Caffarella & Barnett, 2000; Kemp, 2013). This begged the question for FWGs and their
research-intensive institutions: How can faculty perspectives on the persistent need to produce scholarly work better engage higher education leadership in supporting initiatives aimed at helping faculty increase their scholarly productivity?

Within the literature, early faculty development in higher education began with institutions granting professors sabbatical leaves, awarding access to programs focused on advancing their research acumen, and encouraging their visibility in their respective fields (Sima, 2000; Boice, 1992). For several decades, universities have compelled academics to be exceptional researchers first. Research and publishing pressures are challenges for junior tenure-track faculty, especially; if they hope to be granted tenure, promotion, advancement, and job security, they are expected to research, write, and publish their studies and results in scholarly books, peer- and editorially reviewed journals, and various other periodicals, in addition to juggling teaching, service, and other academic obligations.

Based on the literature, some faculty development initiatives, including FWGs, increased faculty scholarly productivity and academic self-confidence. However, I agree with DeFeo, Kılıç, and Maseda (2016), whose research showed that FWGs, as they are studied in academia, are largely relegated to the scientific fields of nursing, engineering, and psychology; additionally, in my review, I was surprised by the dearth of published scholarship on FWGs published in high-impact higher education journals, such as The Review in Research in Higher Education, Research in Higher Education, The Review of Higher Education, and the Journal of Higher Education. Early mentions of FWGs, writing circles or research circles in the literature, generally were positive, with Gaillet (1994) citing Gere (1987), who dismissed the impression that group-writing is a contemporary occurrence by pointing out “self-help writing groups and college literary societies in colonial America” (p. 93), that sought social identification and
economic influence. Furthermore, while the review of early higher education research was fascinating for its historical influences on present-day advances in academia, it was curious, if not dismaying, to see faculty and institutions today still grappling with the same challenges, including the following three: (a) the perceived academic value of research over teaching; (b) the sentiment that professors must “sink or swim” in a “publish or perish” environment; and (c) the belief that institutions are not responsible for assisting faculty in meeting their need to research and publish often.

This review has identified a need for further research into the perceptions and experiences of FWG participants in pursuit of academic scholarly productivity. The narrative autoethnography method provided a novel approach that best revealed an enlightening analysis of FWG participants that was not commonly found in the literature. Some scholars rejected autoethnography for lacking rigor, for failing to duplicate conventional methods of empirical research, and for purposely indulging the whims of self-absorbed researchers (Delamont, 2007; Bourdieu, 1986). However, narrative autoethnography’s dual influences and unconventionality served as both “a method of inquiry and a way of knowing–discovery and analysis” (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997, p. 64). An autoethnographic methodology also enabled researchers to examine their own first-hand experiences in relation to those of the participants they study—in this case, I, a former faculty member and professional writer, and (re)emerging academic, also was in pursuit of frequent scholarly productivity. This autoethnography provided perspectives and a narrative to broaden understanding and to inspire an examination or consideration of institutional and faculty development initiatives aimed at increasing scholarly productivity that would engage faculty, especially tenure-track junior professors.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Schön (1987), a research philosopher, advanced an enlightened validation of qualitative research methods:

In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high hard ground overlooking a swamp. On the high ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the application of research-based theory and technique. In the swampy lowland, messy, confusing problems defy technical solution. The irony of this situation is that the problems of the high ground tend to be relatively unimportant to individuals or society at large, however great their technical interest may be, while in the swamp lie the problems of greatest human concern. (p. 3).

Why Autoethnography?

Much of my life has centered around writing—professional, academic, and personal. As a former journalist, I spent years reporting, meeting deadlines, and reporting enterprise (in-depth news features), daily, and breaking stories. As a reflective thinker, I regularly scribbled random thoughts within the margins of assignments, scraps of paper, and on the lines of small hand-held notebooks. As a doctoral candidate, I was immersed into the academic rigors of research writing, encountering diverse ideas and concepts, both strange and new. However, when I committed myself to researching how FWG participants perceived and experienced the pursuit of
academic scholarly productivity, I was overcome by a strong sense of familiarity, not of complete fluency but that I had already visited similar places. After I assumed the role as facilitator, and by extension, FWG participant-observer, I discovered how a former newspaper reporter could feel unanimity with a group of faculty researchers who sought to engage with and be supportive of scholarly writing group members. After reviewing the literature, I also determined that the experiences and perceptions of faculty engaged in the pursuit of persistent scholarly productivity within “publish or perish” environments should be allowed more prominence and depth, so that their voices could extend beyond mere anecdotes commonly published in the literature. As a research tool, autoethnography allowed me to use my experiences and awareness of consistent writing and persistent deadlines as a lens to examine my research subjects, and to convey my own sense of relatedness, which resulted in a more complex and multilayered analysis.

Early in my graduate studies, many of the messages within academia at the time seemed to espouse the view that quantitative research was deemed more “superior” and a “more verifiable and legitimate” method than qualitative research; from course lectures and classes comprising the program curriculum to research paper calls and comments from professors, the implications were not overt, but implicit—an analysis with an abundance of statistics was deemed more credible than an inquiry that “merely” expressed feelings. After launching my own investigation of the verity of qualitative research, I believed I had read enough qualitative studies and reviewed enough qualitative researchers to conclude that my preferred research method, autoethnography, was a sound choice, as long as I was thorough. During my readings, I was struck by the ideas of the late philosopher and American professor Donald Schön, who made significant contributions to the study of educational thinking and reflective learning. It is his
dramatic account of the problematic issues of professional education–institutions’ favoring of technical, systematic and scientific processes over all others—that appeared at the beginning of this section. He also fully embraced the notion that practitioners should reflect on their work as they were working and continually make evaluations throughout the process. Boud (1990), whose research called for an overhaul of traditional student assessment practices, supported Schön’s reflection-in-action approach and applauded his analogy, when he said: “It is this which they assess in their own way and lead students to false conceptions about the nature of the practices in which they will engage” (p. 108). By using a non-traditional research method, this study aimed to include the “swampy lowland, messy, confusing problems” (Schön, 1987, p. 3) that FWG faculty-researchers may have chosen to convey in expressing their experience with the pursuit of scholarly productivity. Autoethnography also was an appropriate research method because it allowed me to welcome the “messiness” and ruminate over my background and personal experiences, which were steeped in specialized, deadline news and academic writing, and all the accompanying anxiety and contentment, in ways useful in connecting to this study.

Autoethnography and Qualitative Research

As I explained in previous chapters, there was a dearth of more nuanced, in-depth, explanatory, and clarifying literature regarding tenured and tenure-track FWG participants’ experiences with the pursuit of scholarly productivity amid “publish or perish” environments in mostly research-intensive universities. Popular qualitative and quantitative methodological studies on scholarly productivity among higher education faculty largely have focused on the scientific fields of medicine, nursing, engineering, and psychology, and have highlighted anecdotal annotations on the writing activities of the group or inventories of work completed, as opposed to the deep-seated experiences among faculty researchers; while others’ research was as
valuable, FWG participants’ complex perceptions and experiences with the persistent pursuit of academic scholarship was not fully explored in the literature (Page, Edwards, & Wilson, 2012; Brandon et al., 2015; Pololi, Knight, & Dunn, 2004). While broader FWG participants’ viewpoints are only minimally represented in much of the scholarly productivity literature, which tended to use more quantitative methodologies, some studies offered a more extensive analysis, such as that by Miller, Taylor, and Bedeian (2011), who surveyed management faculty in some 104 faculty departments about their perceptions of the imperative pressure to publish and provided detailed empirical and qualitative evidence. Additional examinations of the experiences and perceptions of FWG participants, particularly using more qualitative research methods, would magnify the collected research works in this area. As a research method, autoethnography sheds light into an area of interest within higher education from an insider’s vantage point to instill confidence in the audience that deeper contexts and connections would be presented on this relevant academic issue and, by proxy, would serve as extensions of the researcher’s life (Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Change, 2010).

Reflexive Autoethnography: Perception of Solidarity

This is a section that I initially felt compelled to partly title “A Confession,” after some contemplation, but thought better of it. Schön (1987) defined “reflective practice” as “a dialogue of thinking and doing through which I become more skilled” (p. 31). Luttrell (2000) described “reflexivity” as “sustaining multiple and sometimes opposing emotions, keeping alive contradictory ways of theorizing the world, and seeking compatibility, not necessarily consensus” (p. 13). In this study, I engaged in both. In employing autoethnography inquiry as this study’s methodology, I strived to find and sustain an authentic voice that would be both
vulnerable and formidable as I reflected on my life experiences to garner insights into the FWGs of which I am a part (Patton, 2002).

When I first began leading FWGs as a facilitator, as I mentioned previously, the academic insecurity I initially felt when I considered the role that I would need to play. I felt pangs of uncertainty at the prospect that I, who had not been published widely in academic books or journals, would be overseeing a group of tenured and pre-tenure FWG participants, who were engaged in publishing work from their dissertations or whose research had a following. Despite having been published extensively as a news reporter and having taught as a non-tenure-track university instructor for 12 years, I believed that I lacked the academic credentials to help prod these faculty toward their scholarship goals. It had been two years since I left teaching to pursue full-time graduate studies, and what I may have felt was connected to the perceived loss of adoration and attention I felt as a faculty member holding court during lectures and impromptu counseling sessions; Mayhew (1969) in his research on faculty members and their motivations during campus tensions, put it this way: “…professors generally want to be loved, like the feeling of superiority which comes from having disciples (advisees) and like to appear before a class. There is, after all, an affinity between teaching and acting (p. 344-345).

In previous chapters I cited educational and other scholars, whose studies cited anecdotes about how some academics suffered research and writing blocks from anxiety triggered by having to frequently perform in “publish or perish” environments. After the anxiety over my brief crisis of self-confidence had eased, I dove into my responsibilities as FWG facilitator and eagerly anticipated my dual role as participant-observer, where I, the spectator, openly participated in the discussions and activities of the FWGs under study, “observing things that happen, listening to what [was] said, and questioning people, over some length of time” (Becker
& Geer, 1957, p. 28, citing Kluckhohn, 1940). The faculty researchers with whom I worked generally regarded me as an observer, rather than as another participant, who also wished to further her scholarly writing goals. It became clear that the majority of FWG participants, but not all, whether intentionally or subconsciously, seemed to limit my engagement with them as a fellow researcher, when I offered to share my own dissertation and post-dissertation research and writing goals. I considered resisting the participant-observer label during my brief internal struggle to reflect on my place in the FWGs. As facilitator, I eventually concluded that I was indeed a study participant—as this study’s participant-observer—whether or not the professors had chosen to accept me as their fellow academic.

Sample

After being approved by my dissertation committee, this study used a purposeful sample of voluntary FWG participants, all tenured or tenure-track faculty researchers, who were employed at a large public Southeastern U.S. research-intensive university. All participants had the choice to opt out of the FWGs at any time. I intentionally selected the participants and sample site, not merely for convenience, but also because I believed both components to be “information rich” and would coalesce to convey an understanding of this study’s central phenomenon in depth (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 1990, p. 169). Patton (2002) noted that purposeful sampling was intended to “reveal insight about the phenomenon, not empirical generalization from a sample to a population” (p. 40). This study aimed to reveal a thick, deep, and detailed focus on these specific FWG participants’ experiences and perceptions of the frequent pursuit of scholarly productivity. Some participants were recruited to join FWGs informally by their department heads or their peers, while others responded to interest announcements that appeared on the university’s website or on flyers posted on campus. For

76
interested faculty, I made my contact information available and corresponded via email, phone or online survey to confirm participation and group meeting times.

Study Setting

By integrating Rossman’s and Rallis’s (2003) sampling strategy in this analysis, the study setting aspired to satisfy each of the following parameters as an “ideal site, where: (a) entry was possible (b) there was a rich mix of the processes, people, programs, interactions, structures of interest, or all of these (c) I was likely to be able to build strong relations with the participants and (d) ethical and political considerations were not overwhelming, at least intentionally” (p. 136). I easily gained entry because of my “native” status and university affiliation as a graduate assistant researcher and my involvement as the FWGs’ participant-observer. The study site also offered opportunities in which to engage and interact with diverse participants through FWG activities and discussions. I developed positive and collegial relationships with fellow FWG participants during my tenure as facilitator and was engaging in what Creswell (2012) called “assuming a comfortable role as observer in the setting” (p. 214). I was familiar with several of the faculty researchers who were interviewed, having worked with them in previous writing groups. My familiarity with the participants, gained firsthand, Patton (2002) asserted, helped establish a common ground from which our bonds could strengthen and from which we could benefit from direct, personal contact, leading to better understanding of the context within which we–I and the subjects–interacted. In addition, I never asserted any power over the groups of participants nor gave them the impression that they were being tested (Unluer, 2012). Due to my knowledge with the setting, I was responsive to any ethical or political issues that could surface and immediately made adjustments to avoid such obstacles. This research, an autoethnography, also employed participant-observation, for its two-way exchange between researcher and
participant and the potential to examine the characteristics of subjects’ lives and understand their interconnections (Shah, 2017). FWG meetings and their efforts to ameliorate academics’ writing struggles, offered faculty support for advancing their scholarship in an open and public manner, which ran parallel to Jensen’s (2017) view that “there’s no reason to treat that struggle like a shameful secret or to mystify the writing process” (para. 7).

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of tenured, tenure-track, and non-tenured junior and senior professors, all faculty-researchers, employed at a Southeastern U.S. research-intensive university. Participation was voluntary and participants, who represented diverse disciplines, could opt out at any time. Participants had varying levels of experiences with FWGs, which was similarly reflected in their disparate histories of published scholarship. Counting participants’ instances of scholarly output, however, was not an integral part of my study, as I instead sought to go beyond statistical data to focus on qualitative findings of how FWG participants perceived the experience of the frequent pursuit of scholarly productivity.

Data Collection

I proposed to study three FWGs that met every two weeks over two semesters or a full calendar university school year. Due to attrition caused by the loss of two participants, the three groups were downsized into two. After approval from my dissertation committee and before I proceeded further with my study, I submitted a research protocol application to the university’s Institutional Review Board and acquired permission to collect and analyze qualitative data. My application included an informed consent form that I presented to participants, which briefly described the nature of my research study and the nature of their requested participation (see Appendix A). I contacted by email all FWG participants, who gave their consent, and requested
that they complete a brief survey to provide background demographic and related information (see Appendix B). In another level of data collection, after my study was approved and after participants had completed background surveys, I engaged FWG participants in focus group interviews; the focus group questions are documented in Appendix C. With all participants in agreement, I scheduled two focus group interviews, one lasting 52 minutes and the other lasting 33 minutes. I spoke to all participants within their same group settings as their FWG meetings. Strategically, I asked primarily subjective queries related to FWG participants’ perceptions of scholarly productivity in the focus groups interviews and a few within the background surveys to ensure that I would generate enough useful subjective data. Overall, I queried eight participants and led face-to-face focus group interviews with five of them, for a total that deemed to be a “good” online and face-to-face response rate of between 30% and 40% (Fryrear, 2015). I asked focus group questions based on semi-structured, open-ended interview questions that I designed and were adapted from studies conducted by Murray (2013) and White (1996).

Interviews

According to Creswell (2012), focus groups often yielded collective understanding from several people gathered together and recorded views from targeted groups of people. I created the focus group questions in the hopes of enabling the semi-structured interview sessions to maintain a feel of some procedure. As I did when I was a journalist pursuing an in-depth feature story, I allowed participants opportunities to veer off the script to enter related conversations, whose themes spontaneously developed. I allowed participants to speak for as long they wished. Interviewing a group of people at the same time can be challenging if the researcher-interviewer fails to devise an appropriate strategy for collecting and capturing conversations. I digitally recorded the focus group sessions and initially alerted participants of my plans to do so on the
consent forms (see Appendix A). Patton (2002) regarded interview guides to be critical for conducting focus groups since they “keep interactions focused while allowing individual perspectives and experiences to emerge” (pp. 343-344). Since the FWGs were kept small, with each having between two to three participants, I maintained familiarity and informality and preserved the similarity of backgrounds among group members by holding focus groups within the same environments as FWG sessions. My projected focus group sizes were of some concern; at between two to three participants, they were, on average, smaller than the minimum four to six participants that researchers typically recommend as being most effective; however, Toner (2009), whose research on Very Small Focus Groups (VSFGs) examined marginalized women of color within two small groups of two participants each, said such group sizes withstood the rigors of standard measures of validity, and asserted that even small-sized clusters of participants can record significant group development stages and reflect active group dynamics. Toner (2009) observed the following:

The data that emerged from both groups were incredibly rich, thick, and broad. . . My field notes reminded me of an observation that, in spite of small size, the focus group context of purposeful, subject-directed discussion seemed to shape the behavior and interactions of the women involved. (p. 181)

However, if only one person showed up for a focus group session, I planned to proceed with the interview, especially, if I was unable to merge two separate FWGs together to conduct the interviews. To cancel a group because of small sample size, according to Toner (2009), “would be an incredible loss of situated knowledge and an affront to the people who sought to participate” (p. 190). O’Gorman (2001) suggested that changes occurring in the micro-environment could be handled through sampling strategies in which access may unexpectedly be
altered. Lack of participation was not an issue; all the participants who had indicated a willingness and consent to participate, contributed data.

Like any other organization with its own customs, FWGs, too, enjoyed different cultures. Sangasubana’s (2011) study, which illustrated the practice of ethnographic research, the direct detailed study of a group or culture, offered a sturdy foundation with which to consider such inquiry. The author, a sociologist, suggested that researchers considered the following: (a) how data should be handled (b) how such a study should be conducted and (c) how limitations should be cautioned on approach. Sangasubana’s research study answered these and other queries with concise checklists that clearly stated what conditions should first be met. So, too, does this study.

I offered insight into FWG participants’ perceptions of frequent scholarly productivity through a process of narrative inquiry, focus group interviews, field notes based on observations, and reflection. I used autoethnography, described as cultural analysis through personal narrative (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014), as a valid research methodology. When researchers engaged autoethnography in their studies, they accessed their own life stories in hindsight and, strategically and deliberately, wrote about discoveries that stemmed from being part of the culture they were studying or with whom they possessed a specific cultural identity (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). Lichtman (2006) suggested autoethnographic researchers “concentrate on the gathered stories and narratives and look for epiphanies” (p. 163). I hoped to use my personal experience as a lens through which to understand how FWG participants experienced the frequent pursuit of scholarly productivity—the cultural phenomenon being studied—and my collection of qualitative data aimed to assist with my recollections. I reached data saturation, when there was enough information to duplicate the study, fewer opportunities to
obtain new information, and any new data would not provide any new insights (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Creswell, 2012).

I conducted focus group interviews with five of the eight FWG participants, sought their perceptions and experiences, and held member-checking interviews to follow up and ensure validity. Participants viewed their words and thoughts as I had transcribed them, as well as the resulting themes, and had the opportunity to challenge my recordings. I asked broad general probing questions during the focus group sessions (see Appendix C). Interviews were semi-structured to allow for the natural flow of conversation, and I allowed for and asked unscripted follow-up questions to participants, as warranted. I noted queries and responses from the first FWG so as to attempt to solicit rich data from among all the groups, but the same questions were be asked of all FWGs for consistency. Rabionet (2011) asserted that effective qualitative interviewing is an influential way to elicit people’s stories when they attempt to make sense of their experiences; semi-structured questions allowed the researcher to ask subjects about specific topics associated with the research questions. I asked open-ended questions to prompt detailed responses about FWG participants’ experiences with the frequent pursuit of scholarly productivity that this study promised. Later, during data analysis, although I searched for themes, the aim was not necessarily consistency, but sincerity, among the FWG participants, as Schmidt (2004) made clear:

...the interviews should not be considered comparatively. It is, however, useful for the following stages in the analysis to note any marked similarities and differences between the interviews... to take account of the openness of the interviews, it is important not simply to take over the formulations from the questions that were asked, but to consider whether the interviewees actually take up these terms, what the terms
mean to them, which aspects they supplement, which they omit and what new topics, which were not foreseen in the guide, actually turn up in the collected data. (p. 254)

Researcher as Instrument

In semi-structured or unstructured qualitative interview studies, the researcher is the primary instrument (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Pezalla, Pettigrew, & Miller-Day, 2012). Prior to embarking on this study, I questioned FWG participants, but not to overtly solicit the quality of depth and detail as research subjects. Patton (2002) affirmed that the researcher does not try to manipulate the phenomenon under study but allows it to reveal itself naturally. As a former journalist and emerging academic researcher, I am well-acquainted with knowing how to conduct interviews and interact with FWG participants in a professional and non-manipulative manner for this study. In addition, as was mentioned in previous sections, I believed I shared a commonality with the faculty-researchers, as a university instructor, and as a professional, for whom writing had prominence in her career. I mention this, again, in acknowledgement of researcher reflexivity, where I had previously declared my biases and beliefs in this autoethnography. This study used interviews to explore developing themes in greater depth and detail and to “triangulate” findings by comparing several data sources to foster understanding on the same topic (Creswell, Plano Clark, Guttmann, & Hanson, 2003).

Procedure

I sought and obtained approval to conduct research from the study institution, the researcher’s home institution, dissertation committee members, and Institutional Review. I also provided each FWG study participant, who aimed to be interviewed, access to an Informed Consent Form (see Appendix A) and sought their approvals prior to the start of all interviews. Confidentiality was maintained at all times. Each participant was provided copies of transcripts
to check for accuracy and content. As they were reminded throughout the study, participants had the option to omit any or all parts of their interview narratives. In addition, participants could opt out of the study and remove their personal narratives at any time. The Qualitative Research – Phase 1 flowchart illustrated the data collection procedure (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Qualitative Research-Phase 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative Data Collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interviews, 8 participants, observations at the site, document review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Data Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Analysis: Use descriptive coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of codes and themes for each group site</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Visualization for Qualitative Procedure (Creswell, Plano Clark, Guttmann, & Hanson, 2003).

Organizing, Storing, and Transcribing Data

Information obtained in connection with this study and that could be linked to participants or their identities was kept confidential. To maintain confidentiality, the name of the university was not disclosed, generic and non-gender-specific pseudonyms were used, and specific titles, departments, fields of study, and other identifying information of participants were not revealed. Only with participants’ permission were interviews digitally recorded. All data were kept secure on the researcher’s computer, which was password protected, and printed data was kept secure in the researcher’s locked personal files.
Ensuring Trustworthiness and Credibility

The researcher used triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing of this study’s results to enhance trustworthiness of the data and data analysis (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Triangulation is a validity procedure “where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126). Member checking, employed in this study, shifted the validity onus from researchers to participants; it allowed participants to review study data and interpretations so that they could confirm the information’s credibility and narrative accounts, deemed appropriate for focus groups (Creswell & Miller, 2000). An additional step to guarantee trustworthiness, peer debriefing, is when the researcher assigns a reviewer, “who is familiar with the research or the phenomenon being explored,” (p. 129) to analyze the data and research process. As this study’s peer debriefer, Dr. Tonya Thames Taylor, Associate Professor of History at West Chester University in Pennsylvania, provided additional support in this area by objectively challenging assumptions and methods, and ensuring accurate interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Delimitations

Through FWG participants’ perceptions, this study hoped to explore the experiences of the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity among FWG participants. Therefore, this research did not examine, judge or elaborate on quantifying scholarly output, which is prevalent in the literature. Additionally, study participants were composed only of those who voluntarily agreed to join FWGs and later engage in interviews for this analysis.

Limitations

There were some limitations due to methodology. This study did not include entire verbatim transcripts without context. In addition, although I am trained as a journalist and can
claim expertise in taking notes, I could mishear or transcribe some notes incorrectly. However, this study’s methods of validity aimed to eliminate such errors. In addition, I asked readers to trust the study’s chosen methods of inquiry as the best format in which to present the qualitative data, as opposed to merely featuring pages and pages of transcribed text without context. Where participant voices are featured at length, I was compelled to do so deliberately for readers to gain complete perspectives. Study participants, whose FWG involvement was as a group, may not disclose negative experiences in an open forum; I, reiterated, however, that confidentiality was guaranteed. Conversely, I included an additional opportunity for study subjects to be candid privately during the survey data collection.

Data Analysis

After gaining institutional approval to proceed with this research study, and prior to analyzing observations, impressions, and other data, I, the researcher, transcribed all the interviews, viewing it as worth the effort to ensure greater accuracy, a practice that Lichtman (2012) recommended. After having been a reporter for several years, I was confident in my abilities to transcribe precisely, as I mentioned in the previous section. After collecting the qualitative data, I conducted data analysis by reading the information, reviewing and categorizing themes, and then compiling the findings (see Figure 1) to consider my own knowledge construction (see Figure 2). Regarding the themes that emerged from FWG participants, I wrote summaries of the narratives of each subject after listening to and transcribing the interviews and reading the transcribed data to provide a greater understanding of each FWG participants’ experiences of the phenomenon under study. Themes emerging from this study’s subjects were neither predetermined nor influenced by my own insights or expectations of results (Jackman, 2009); my analysis sought to make sense of the data, delineate
significance from the unremarkable, categorize meaningful patterns, and compose developing contexts for communicating general pictures of what the data reveal. Data analysis for this qualitative study, which relied on thick descriptions, centered on my separating and categorizing themes and presenting the recurring and outlying ideas that emerged. Sense was made of the data after themes were separated and categorized and significance was extracted from each study participant. The process reflected what anthropologists referred to as “sensitively representing in written texts what local people consider meaningful and them making their concerns accessible to readers who are unfamiliar with their social world” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 108). Observations, dialogue, and my own reflections assisted in engaging the audience in FWG participants’ world and concerns. I was comfortable with this study’s proposed data analysis techniques, despite its seemingly rudimentary procedures; when it comes to qualitative research, as Patton (2002) asserted, “There are no formulas for determining significance. No ways exist of perfectly replicating the researcher’s analytical thought processes . . . [Researchers should] do [their] very best with [their] full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveal given the purpose of the study” (p. 433).

Coding

According to Saldaña (2015), descriptive coding—which identifies topics of qualitative data—“is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies. . .and studies with a wide variety of data forms (e.g., interview transcripts, field notes, journals)” (p. 102). Such coding summarizes in one word or short phrase, the subject of a segment of data (Saldaña, 2015). I gathered descriptive codes from all data and compiled them into “meta-summaries” to compare and contrast with findings among other collected descriptions. With a smaller number of study participant interviews to analyze, descriptive coding, which “categorizes data at a basic level to
provide the researcher with an organizational grasp of the study” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 105), was deemed to be adequate for this analysis. I organized the survey data and interviews into major themes and re-examined them against the transcripts and follow-up interviews. Then, I compiled this information in specific files, each classified and differentiated by distinctive codes. Afterward, I added supplementary information to the files, and enhanced the info with depth and/or detail from field notes and other observations. Ultimately, coding often leads to “big piles of data [being] transformed into succinct statements that describe, explain, or predict something about what the researcher has studied” (Lecompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 145), which was a primary goal of this exploration, to understand FWG participants’ experiences with the pursuit of frequent scholarly productivity. Results were situated within the theoretical frameworks–peer-formativity, phenomenography, and narrative inquiry–which were discussed in the previous chapter.

Summary

Numerous research studies over the last several decades have confirmed the positive impacts that involvement in FWGs had on increasing the frequency of scholarly output among participants. But fewer studies have provided thick descriptions, details, and depth when it came to understanding more deeply how “publish or perish” directives impacted FWG participants as they pursued research and publishing obligations at research-intensive institutions. This significant study addressed faculty-researchers’ reactions to academe’s persistent pressures that they regularly produce publishable scholarly work for job security, promotion, and advancement. Study results also will be useful in challenging other FWGs and their institutions to examine and better engage faculty in initiatives aimed at boosting and supporting scholarly productivity.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

The purpose of this case study was to lend an autoethnographic account of my personal exploration as a professional writer, university instructor, emergent academic scholar, and FWG facilitator to examine the perceptions of the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity among FWG participants. A guiding qualitative approach, a method of inquiry that illustrated a reflective process, was applied to answer the central question: Through a narrative lens of my experiences as a professional writer, doctoral candidate, and FWG facilitator, how is the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity perceived and experienced by FWG participants? The following questions guiding my inquiry were:

1. How does perception shape and inform my professional practice?
2. How does perception shape and inform professional practice for FWG participants?
3. How do the perceptions vary between participants of discipline-focused and multidisciplinary FWGs?
4. What themes appear during the examination of FWG participants’ perceptions of the pursuit of scholarly productivity?

I used observations, surveys, focus group interviews, and documents related to FWG conversations, discussions, and activities to collect data (see Appendix D for survey data in Tables 1-7).

This chapter details the findings of the research study, including a description of the purposeful sample and data analysis. To answer each research question, I collected notable
statements from observations, survey responses, and semi-structured focus group interviews and conveyed the meanings of participants’ beliefs through themes. Through data analysis, I identified overlapping themes and patterns (a practice that Patton (2002) asserted allowed researchers to see repetitions in seemingly arbitrary information), classified them into structures, and assembled them into recurring main categories. Accordingly, Chapter Four features in narrative form the main categories of beliefs that emerged through data analysis. The purpose of this chapter is to detail meaningful and original faculty perspectives through their authentic narratives, so as to reveal FWG participants’ true perceptions of the pursuit of scholarly productivity. Because participants were told their opinions, expressions, and information would be confidential, and that neither they nor their host school nor departments would be identified, they should have felt free to reveal candid impressions of their experiences. Likewise, strict confidentiality was maintained throughout the study.

Participants

The participants in this analysis were briefly described in Chapter Three. This chapter examined FWG participants in much greater detail. A total of eight faculty participants, who consistently attended meetings over one calendar school year, comprised three FWGs; participants represented junior and senior tenured, tenure-track, and non-tenured faculty from the Southeastern U.S. research-intensive university at focus in this study. Research study participants were voluntary FWG members, who completed online demographic surveys with open-ended questions; five of the participants completed focus group interviews. FWG participants of varying levels and disciplines were required either to be engaged or interested in pursuing academic scholarly productivity. FWG participants representing both discipline-focused and multidisciplinary groups were included in the study.
Purposive sampling was used in the selection of participants. Data were collected from FWG participants through observations, online surveys, and face-to-face focus group interviews; to further gather data, I employed a structured Online Background Survey Guide (see Appendix B) and a semi-structured Focus Group Questions Guide (see Appendix C), two tools that I developed. I became acquainted with participants through my role as facilitator of all the FWGs at focus in this study. After participants had established a history of consistent engagement in the FWGs, which was based on their attendance of a majority of the 14 bi-weekly meetings that were scheduled over the course of one calendar school year, they were deemed as potential study participants and were asked to participate in the research inquiry during a regular FWG meeting and by email. Interested FWG participants, who agreed to participate in the research study, responded to the request to complete an Online Background Demographic Survey (see Appendix B) by clicking on a Web link that I provided via email. Participants were again provided with an explanation of the survey process, as well as the subsequent focus group interview procedure, question type, study range, and benefits of the research.

Setting

This study’s focus group interviews were conducted in conveniently located enclosed settings on the campus at one Southeastern U.S. research-intensive university, the same locations where participants’ FWG meetings usually took place. Participation was voluntary and FWG members were told they could end their participation at any time. During the first phase of data collection, participants completed online surveys on their own time and in a place of their choosing by a deadline I designated.

All eight junior and senior faculty members of varying levels completed online surveys and five of the participants contributed to two focus group discussions (over the course of the
year, three FWGs were scaled down to two to better distribute participants and to promote more effective engagement after at least two members became inactive; they are not included in this study). The five FWG participants, who were queried, represented an across-the-board sampling of faculty indicative of varied ranks, years served, and tenure status, which also is largely reflected among the sample overall. Focus group participants included the following: a tenured associate professor, with 10 years’ or more spent as a faculty member; a tenured associate professor, with one to five years spent as a faculty member; a tenure-track assistant professor, with one to five years spent as a faculty member; a non-tenured assistant professor/visiting professor, with less than one year spent as a faculty member; and a non-tenured lecturer/instructor, with 10 years or more spent as a faculty member.

Survey Findings

Overall, six females and two males participated in the online background survey. The sample population included associate professors (n=3, 37.5%), assistant professors/visiting assistant professors (n=4, 50%), and one lecturer/instructor (n=1, 12.5%; lecturers/instructors at this R1 institution are not required to engage in scholarship, and their primary responsibility is to carry a teaching load of three to four courses per semester, depending on their department and/or discipline). None of the participants indicated that they held the position of full professor.

The duration of teaching experience that individual faculty held at this and other higher education institutions ranged from less than one year (n=1, 12.5%) to 10 years or more (n=3, 37.5%); half the participants held between one to five years’ teaching experience at this and other institutions (n=4, 50%). Three faculty members indicated they were tenured; three indicated they were on the tenure-track; and two indicated they were neither tenured nor on the tenure track. When asked how much their recent FWG participation contributed to their
scholarly writing productivity, a majority (n=5, 62.5%) indicated “a moderate amount,” the second-highest indicator; the remaining participants (n=3, 37.5%) responded “a great deal,” the highest indicator. Tables 1-7 in Appendix D, illustrate this and additional background survey information in response to the research questions and relates to FWG participants’ interests, motivations, and experiences with the pursuit of scholarly productivity and their decision to join a writing group to assist with their research and writing goals. This descriptive data was culled from all eight FWG participants who completed the online background surveys.

I carefully read and re-read all the survey data and separated major recurring statements, phrases, and comments that addressed the main research question focused on how FWG participants perceived and experienced the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity. I reviewed all the responses and clustered them into the common general themes that emerged and reoccurred. I revisited FWG participants to validate my findings from the preliminary analysis of the descriptions that represented their perceptions.

To increase the accuracy of this data analysis, I sought input from this research study’s peer-debriefer to objectively challenge any assumptions, and to ensure precise interpretations of themes. The research question asked, “Through a narrative lens of my experiences as a professional writer, doctoral candidate, and FWG facilitator, how is the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity perceived and experienced by FWG participants?” and related sub-questions inquired as to whether such general perceptions shaped professional practice and, if so, if faculty members’ specific discipline, years of service, and tenure status played a part. A summary of participants’ qualitative survey responses was categorized into five major themes: Lack of Time and Emotional Toll, Impactful Research Experience, Uncertainty of Research Practical Value, Enjoyment of the Writing Process, and Perception as A Writer.
Lack of Time and Emotional Toll

For a majority of the participants, six out of eight, experience with the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity evoked stress and frustration, which at times, caused them to experience overwhelming negative emotions. The theme of lack of time and emotional toll, centered on the protracted length of time it often takes faculty to finish and to publish their scholarship while juggling other academic commitments, and the tense feelings such repeated activities often provoked. Participants commented on the laborious aspect of the process, and ultimately, the uncertainty that the experience often brought. They noted the challenges with having to experience a “time-consuming” practice and the “length of time the process takes, writing, rewriting, submitting, revising. . .” as one participant noted. A tenured associate professor with 10 years’ or more faculty research experience shared that the frequent pursuit of scholarship often sapped their mental strength (generic gender pronouns will be used to protect identities), and said, “Publishing a peer-reviewed journal article is emotionally draining, particularly when reviewers require extensive edits that seem to change the essence of the article.” Similarly, the emotional toll brought on by the frequent pursuit of scholarship was expressed by an assistant professor on the tenure track, who had been employed as a faculty member for one to five years, and said: “Research can be daunting, and easily slips onto the back burner. I feel it’s hard to get motivation and focus to write.” Another tenured associate professor with 10 years’ or more experience as a faculty member described her frustration with the publishing process when they said, “It’s difficult to make university presses happy with a topic that is not fashionable.” However, one FWG participant, an assistant professor on the tenure track with one to five years’ faculty experience, mentioned finding an unexpected pleasure in efforts to get scholarship published:
The thing that stands out to me the most was my surprise at finding myself feeling grateful for the comments from my reviewers, rather than anxious or defensive. I have a lot of anxiety related to writing, tied into a perfectionistic streak that is often unhelpful, so to discover the first time I went through it that peer review could be pleasurable and rewarding, was, frankly, a surprise.

**Impactful Research Experience**

Respondents’ relayed their experiences with working to get their scholarship published and how such academic and professional encounters informed their professional practice. For faculty researchers pursuing published scholarship in hopes of earning academic tenure, familiarity with the rigorous academic research publishing process becomes a well-known rite of passage. One-third of the participants expressed positive sentiments, and another one-third, expressed negative sentiments relating to the experience; others, instead, reacted to the impact of being an FWG participant. Some faculty conveyed optimism with how publishing their scholarship would later benefit them in their careers, and others voiced dismay with the persistent anxiety such activities caused. The theme of impactful research experience is described by participants in terms of their understanding of their overall experience with the pursuit of research and their persistent need to publish their scholarship. An assistant professor on the tenure track with between one and five years’ faculty experience, described as worthwhile, the work involved in completing scholarship and trying to get it published, when they said, “The experience of publishing? It has helped establish my name and get me a tenure track job.” Having to pursue published scholarship heightened one participant’s desire to make their work more accessible to the public; the tenured associate professor, who had 10 years or more faculty experience remarked, “It’s made me want to find ways to write in a way that’s more
immediately meaningful to others.” A one- to five-year faculty veteran and tenured associate professor noted that the requirement to publish scholarship was an impetus to them accomplishing their academic work; they said, “I have been able to push through and complete some of my writing that would otherwise still be just an idea.” Other faculty, including a tenured associate professor who had been a faculty member for 10 years or more, had an alternative view, and said, “I dislike writing articles for peer review, even though I have been a natural and willing writer all my life. But I don’t think that dislike has slowed me down in publishing.” Another participant, a tenure-track assistant professor with between one and five years as a faculty member, said, “... It has made me more stressed.” On the issue of the perceived impact of having to frequently publish scholarship to ensure academic advancement, other faculty took the opportunity to describe the effects of their FWG participation, including the benefits of sharing their work with others. A non-tenure-track assistant professor, with less than one year of faculty experience, said, “[The experience] has helped me to appreciate the peer-review process. It really does work, and you get great suggestions.” A tenure-track assistant professor with between one and five years’ faculty experience described their FWG participation as being instrumental in allowing them to be more receptive to sharing academic work with others:

Partly through peer review, partly through participation in various writing groups, I have learned slowly to think of writing more as a community/group activity, something I do in dialogue with lots of people in different ways. I still am not great at sharing my writing in progress, mostly because I tend to get sort of stuck in my rabbit hole and forget to share, but I’m getting better.
Uncertainty of Research Practical Value

Closely associated with the impact of being a faculty researcher in frequent pursuit of published scholarship and how such ambitions informed professional practice, was whether faculty believed their research had or will have had practical value. With the exception of the focus group’s lone lecturer/instructor, who said, they “hoped to have this be the case,” all participants were guarded in their responses, and voiced an unwillingness to express definitively, without qualifiers, that their research had or will have had practical value. Most participants responded that they were either unsure of the practical value of their research or that any perceived usefulness was narrow in focus and limited to within a certain discipline. The theme of uncertain research value described participants’ beliefs in the public importance of their scholarly studies. A tenured associate professor explained the practical value of their research as being determined from the outset:

Some will have practical value, others will not. The publications with practical value were written for that purpose. Those without much practical value were written because they had to be—the research project was concluded even though it did not yield the anticipated useful results.

An assistant professor on the tenure track said they tried to ensure that practicality was part of their research purpose outset from inception and explained that “I try to write on policy issues with practical value.” A tenured associate professor added that their studies could have some value for others, when they said, “They could be useful for people who formulate public policy.” But another assistant professor on the tenure track also expressed their impression of their work’s practical value as having limited importance, and said, “The nature of my field and specialty is such that practical value isn’t really applicable, but I do think that my scholarship has important
insights about urgent current issues!” A non-tenured assistant professor explained that awareness of their research publications, though written to appeal to certain audiences, probably would not appeal to the audiences they were writing about, when they said, “I hope they will help encourage greater understanding between [_____] groups. Although, realistically, I know many will not read them.”

Enjoyment of the Writing Process

In exploring FWG participants’ perceptions of the frequent pursuit of scholarly productivity, some level of enjoyment of writing was a factor in faculty remaining in the academic hunt. For tenured and tenure-track research faculty, the process of research writing can be an all-consuming endeavor throughout their academic terms. The theme enjoyment of the writing process is closely aligned with participants’ reasons for either deriving pleasure or discontent from writing, a significant part of the frequent pursuit of scholarly productivity. While most participants professed to enjoy the research writing process, their affirmations were immediately followed by qualifiers, as illustrated by the following five participants, who said, “Occasionally. If I can get past the anxiety surrounding it and establish a rhythm, I find myself liking it, but getting over that hump is hard. That’s what I like about writing groups.” Another participant remarked, “I enjoy writing, but it can be very daunting.” An additional participant said, “I truly enjoy the process of writing when I can see that there is a useful purpose for it and when I have freedom to use my personal style.” One participant was more circumspect about whether they enjoyed the academic writing process, when they explained:

Sometimes, yes, sometimes, definitely not! I enjoy it a lot more now than I did as a graduate student, mostly, I think, because I have a lot more patience with myself and with
the process. Usually when I don’t enjoy it, it’s because I’m feeling impatient, or else because I’m writing something I’m anxious or worried about.

Another faculty-researcher responded:

I do. It takes me awhile to get warmed up, but I think it’s one of the things I’m good at, and once I’m clipping along, I don’t like to stop. I enjoy trying to make my writing clear and interesting.

One participant echoed the challenges they encountered when preparing to write, when they said, “I enjoy it when I can have peace and quiet to concentrate.” Another participant explicitly remarked that they disliked the writing process that has been central to the obligations of a faculty researcher; they said, “No, I would rather present and verbally share ideas and research. I find it difficult to put words on paper.”

Perception as a Writer

In addition to participants’ perceptions of the enjoyment of the writing process, their perceptions of themselves as writers while engaged in the pursuit of published scholarship was a substantial factor. Their identification as either emergent or established research writers, and their beliefs as to what distinguished the two designations, revealed writer insecurities among them. Regardless of their tenure status or academic employment duration, all participants described themselves as emergent writers, with the exception of one, a veteran tenured associate professor, who despite having had numerous articles published, considered themselves to be a “somewhat established writer,” and said, “. . . I’ve published about 15 peer-reviewed journal articles. But I think my best writing is non-technical writing about technical subjects, which I hardly ever have the opportunity to do.” The theme of perception as a writer illustrated how most participants regarded themselves largely as developing writers, who are inching toward the
pinnacle, the status of established writer. Six participants described their writing proficiency in the following responses, and one said, “[My proficiency is] . . . somewhere in the middle. I write every day but publish less.” Another participant termed their writing proficiency as “developing,” and said, “[It’s] emerging, just because I haven’t published that much yet.”

Among the reasons participants gave for not having written as much as they would have liked, had to do with lack of complete focus; one responded, “I don’t have problems writing, but sometimes, it’s hard to concentrate.” Some participants said their writing stalled because of their resolve or lack thereof; one responded, “I write because I have to, not because I want to. I am an emerging writer. I still find it difficult, but the more that I do it, it seems to be getting easier.”

Another participant said, “I feel confident as a […] writer, and nascent as an academic writer.” Still, one faculty-researcher was uncertain as to whether they could improve their writing, and explained: “Perhaps, in time [I would be an established writer], if I get better.”

FWG participants, when asked to perceive themselves as writers, cited reasons why they did not consider themselves to be established writers, such as this tenure-track assistant professor with one to five years’ faculty experience:

I am definitely an emerging writer. I have published a little, but not a ton, and I’m only just finishing my first book. Mostly, it’s been a struggle for me to think of myself as a writer or a scholar. I have struggled a lot with imposter syndrome, so I never felt like I really ‘counted’ as a writer or a scholar, because I hadn’t done enough, or I didn’t know enough, or whatever. I realized a couple of years ago that that self-image was a major barrier to my productivity and my happiness, so I have been trying to actively notice and challenge those thoughts/feelings when they crop up. In that process, I also came to realize that part of my struggle was that I resisted seeing myself as a ‘real’ writer or
scholar as a sort of ego defense–if I wasn’t REALLY a writer/scholar, if I failed at it, then it would be less devastating, or something like that. So, I’m still trying to work through all that, and to think of myself as a writer and a scholar because that’s what I do, and what I do is good and valuable, even without outside validation.

Summary of Survey Findings

Survey content analysis from the qualitative study revealed the following themes related to perceptions of the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity among FWG participants: Lack of Time and the Resulting Emotional Toll, Impactful Research Experience, Uncertainty of Research Practical Value, Enjoyment of The Writing Process, and Perception as a Writer. Qualitative survey findings were presented at length and represented the perspectives of the principal participants in this research study. The longer pieces of dialogue data were not meant to exhaust readers interested in this study, but to authentically reveal participants’ thoughts from which the appropriate themes were drawn. The FWG participants presented similar information in sharing their perceptions of having to frequently pursue published academic scholarship.

Emerging themes from data collected through online surveys were reflected in participants’ personal responses. Exploration of the perceptions of the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity among FWG participants was assessed by extracting noteworthy responses and statements. Data suggested that the FWG participants, who also are faculty researchers, understand and can articulate their perceptions of the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity to be related to five themes. These themes include lack of time and emotional toll, impactful research experience, uncertainty of research practical value, enjoyment of the writing process, and perception as a writer. The theme lack of time and emotional toll centered on the protracted length of time it often takes to finish and to successfully publish scholarship within
the strict confines of higher education and publication, while juggling other professional academic commitments, and the disquieting feelings such repeated activities often provoke. The theme impactful research experience encompassed experiences with working to publish scholarship and how such academic and professional knowledge informed professional practice. The theme uncertainty of research practical value included beliefs in the public usefulness of personal academic research. The theme enjoyment of the writing process closely aligned with reasons for either deriving pleasure or discontent from writing, a significant part of the frequent pursuit of scholarly productivity. The theme perception as a writer included the recognition and awareness of being an academic research writer and acceptance of career challenges.

I have presented the five themes that emerged in my research and discussed their associated meanings. To further establish the truthfulness of my findings, I presented the results of the focus groups that I conducted. These surveys, which elicited qualitative data, gave voice to participants and allowed them to comment on my interpretations of their experiences with the pursuit of frequent academic scholarly productivity.

**Focus Group Findings**

In seeking to enhance the trustworthiness of my findings, I conducted two focus groups with three participants in one, and two participants in the other, whose sizes are reflective of Toner’s (2009) Very Small Focus Groups (VSFGs), deemed to not only withstand the rigors of standard measures of validity, but also to reveal significant group development stages and reflect active group dynamics. In addition, the data gleaned from the background surveys I first administered participants, allowed me to draft an appropriate group survey instrument that would elicit the most relevant responses to the research questions. According to Fowler (2002), data culled from the most effective focus group questions enabled researchers to compare the reality
about which participants would be answering questions with the theoretical ideas embedded in
the study’s purpose. Participants varied in tenure status, years served in academia, and
experience with scholarly output, as well as the type of FWG in which they were engaged.

I conducted the focus group interviews in the same settings as participants’ FWG
meetings, so as to mimic the groups’ familiar surroundings and the synergy that was sustained
throughout the year. Once seated, participants were presented with a copy of the research
protocol as well as the focus group questions, which I read aloud as we advanced through
discussion topics during the group interviews, lasting 52 minutes and 33 minutes, respectively.
Participants’ identities were kept anonymous and were acknowledged numerically to maintain
confidentiality. Participants #1, #7, and #8 were from a discipline-focused FWG and
Participants #2 and #3 were from a multidisciplinary FWG. In addition, all identifying
information, such as gender, fields of study, departments, and academic fields was omitted or
redacted by indicating the following: [____]. Participant comments were edited for clarity and
length, as well as for relevance to main topic. In most cases, the order of their responses was
maintained to reflect an authentic conversation flow. As with this study’s survey data findings,
some focus group responses were preserved for context and to uphold the tenor in which they
were voiced. The following significant themes emerged: Inconsistent Publishing Mandate,
Uneven Training in Scholarly Writing, Institutional Supports Sought for Publishing Rigors,
Lifestyle Choices Help Foster Productivity, ‘Publish or Perish’ Creates Range of Tensions.

Inconsistent Publishing Mandate

Traditionally, throughout contemporary higher education history, research-intensive
institutions have required faculty to regularly produce certain publishable scholarly work for the
promise of tenure, promotion and advancement, and job security; however, individual
departments within those same institutes, based on participants’ responses, either have been vague or have differed on their scholarly output demands. The following focus group extracts, indicated by anonymous participants, illustrated some of the perceived disparities. On this issue, participants engaged in spirited back-and-forth discussions. A tenure-track assistant professor/visiting professor from the discipline-focused FWG, recalled being told explicitly what types of output their scholarly productivity should produce:

When I was hired, I was given a set of publication requirements, basically, that I would need to fulfill for tenure. . . But it’s just kind of known, like, this is what you’re fed in graduate school. . . I know I have to do a set of meta things, and I have no control over that, but what they look like is completely up to me, so a great deal, I guess is within those parameters.

Another discipline-focused FWG participant and tenured associate professor echoed their peer’s sentiments and remarked on differences regarding scholarly output between research-intensive institutions and other schools:

In many departments where you have graduate programs, for sure, you have to publish and there are some smaller colleges where you may not need the publications to get tenure, but more and more of those schools don’t have tenure. So, in the four-year R1 institutions, that’s what you need to do. . . Yes, they establish the requirements and then you fashion your own book, whichever way you want.

One participant, a non-tenured assistant professor/visiting professor and discipline-focused FWG member, based a response to their peers on this issue and recalled their thoughts on the impact that social media had on faculty productivity requirements:
I guess I would say, this is not coming from administration, but I do think, you guys can correct me if I’m wrong, but I think in the sort of ether, more and more voices are sort of encouraging young academics to engage in public commentary and become whatever it’s called—a Twitter-academic or write in *The Washington Post* or something, but again, those don’t have any worth in your promotion, but there still are more and more academics who are trying to break out that way.

The distinction between the perceptions of participants who belonged to discipline-focused and multidisciplinary FWGs was evident in the discussion of publishing mandates. A multidisciplinary FWG participant, a tenured associate professor, described having learned about their publication requirements through ambiguous messages:

For me, I would say the only formal message I received is what is, sort of, in our tenure and promotion documents that is still fairly vague about the requirements for publication. Otherwise, it’s a lot of informal messages from my peers about what worked for them or what they think the tenure/promotion committees are going to be looking for; so, anything about the type of publication or the number of publications or anything like that is really informal and depends on who you talk to [participant laughs].

Another multidisciplinary FWG participant, a non-tenured lecturer/instructor and faculty member for 10 years or more, explained that they received no such messages during their 10 years or more faculty tenure; the participant’s decision to join an FWG last year was based on their own intentional desire to take up research and academic writing as a faculty member. They said: “I didn’t know there was a possibility to receive any messages at that time. I wasn’t writing academically for the sake of the job. . . .So, I’m getting things in preparation for that receipt of messages or feedback on the writing that I’m attempting to do.”
Uneven Training in Scholarly Writing

“Learning the ropes,” mentioned in this study’s previous Faculty Socialization chapter, symbolized how many new academics first gained access to faculty customs (typically through graduate school) and later acquired scholarly publishing expectations through an indoctrination of institutional and departmental traditions. For some faculty, however, assuming the role of a productive academic and learning how to manage time, produce, and write scholarship effectively, is still an ongoing process. The following focus group extracts, indicated by anonymous participants, illustrated this. One participant responded:

I think it would be extremely rare to hire someone who does not have a Ph.D. in [____] . . . That’s the training you have to have, basically, and there’s no way to pick up that training. I would imagine if you came, and let’s say you have published two or three books in [____] that are well-received and important, but for some reason, you don’t have a PhD in [____] because you came to this as a hobby. I don’t know, then that could happen, I suppose, but that would be extremely rare.”

Another participant agreed and said how well an academic acclimated to institutional customs often depended on several different factors:

I mean, it’s just really a variable because it depends on who your adviser is, right? That’s the school [and it relates to] institutional supports. It could be any number of grad students who went through a Ph.D. program and didn’t get a lot of training.

Both participants agreed and said, “Yea” simultaneously. Another participant, who responded to their peers’ comments, described the challenges faced by new faculty who had to acclimate themselves, without some of the institutional supports enjoyed by their peers:

Exactly how a manuscript is shepherded through peer-review, maybe no one’s explained
that to you, unless you really have a hands-on adviser talking to that person and, as we all know, there’s lots of people who get through Ph.D. programs, who are not good writers.

So, sometimes, there isn’t that help either; there’s a lot of bad writing in academia, right?

So, it’s a good question, and I don’t know about the answer, but the answer just varies.”

Another participant responded:

Yea, I had an adviser who, very clearly, stuck through all these things and then also there were institutional supports for graduate students, a specific graduate writing center, and the department would bring in people, [demonstrating] this is what it looks like to publish an article, this is what the peer-review process is like, and I work with X press, and they did the same thing with books. They had faculty, who were in the process of revising or who had published their first book, come in and talk about the dissertation.

Having heard this, one participated interrupted and said, “Wow.” The other participant continued their response, and said, “. . . to book so that was hugely supportive. . .” Another participant said, “Yea, I think they’re trying to do more of that stuff now, but I think the experience is more rare than common.” Having been a faculty member for one to five years or more, one participant explained that they forged her own way—through help from peers and self-determination—into a more informal indoctrination into academia and its customs:

I don’t think [most of my faculty peers] have a lot of training in academic writing, so any writing experience they have, primarily, is based on their coursework experience, which is different than submitting for publication and going through that review and rejection and revise process. Writing for an audience is different than your professor, so I think there’s a shift that needs to happen, how you move from, at least for me, from summary research to unique research, and finding your own path through the literature in a way
that nobody trained you for. So, for me it was just finding peers who had done it before and could say, ‘it’s OK to be rejected, you know, everybody gets rejected’ or ‘revise and resubmit is still a big step’ and then you’ve got that support to not fall down anyway. It’s horrible I’m never going to get anything published, but just even understanding that.

. .what’s ‘peer-reviewed’ even mean? You talk about what a ‘peer-reviewed’ article is, as a student, but you don’t understand what that means, as a writer who’s submitting that.”

The conversation recalled one participant’s belief that their informal indoctrination into academe’s mores began beyond their post-secondary years:

As a graduate student, I didn’t feel as though I had the training that would have enhanced my perception of research and understanding of it until I began teaching and carrying my classes up to the library and seeing what a peer-reviewed, peer article actually looked like, you know, how to go about that in databases, so I guess I picked up those skills, listening to librarians, researchers. . .that was my training.”

_Institutional Supports Needed for Publishing Rigors_

Higher education institutions’ embrace of FWGs, which are depicted in the literature as forms of faculty development, have been empirically proven to enable faculty to increase their scholarly productivity, to empower those new to publishing to be successful, and to help emerging faculty feel more confident about engaging in academic scholarship, among other benefits. However, FWGs, which often begin and end as informal independently formed small-group collaborations launched with the blessings of administrative heads as institutional support (Baldi, Sorcinelli, & Yun, 2013), are not always enough to fully support faculty in achieving their publishing goals. Participants discussed other institutional supports that would boost their scholarly productivity in the following focus group extracts, illustrated here:
Almost immediately, one participant said, “Money!” All participants laugh in unison. The participant continued:

“Money in the case of … traveling to [_____] and that kind of stuff, in particular. . . and then maybe the kind of stuff that we just mentioned, you know if they helped you out with just knowing the steps of publication, in case you’re not familiar. The other thing that comes to mind is, it didn’t used to be that way in the past, but nowadays it’s not unusual for departments or universities to dish out some of the money to cover the cost of publication. . .”

In response to the question about whether institutional resources and initiatives might support faculty-researchers’ pursuit of scholarship, another participant cited the writing groups as being a positive intervention, and said, “Well, I guess what we’re doing now with the writing group. . . I know that I benefitted tremendously from it.” Another participant agreed and cited ways the institution could be more responsive to faculty’s frequent scholarship pursuits:

I agree that it’s sort of creating structure for peer support. I think another thing that I would have liked is time and understanding by the institution that publication is important, that my workload is manageable in a way that I can do everything that the institution’s requiring, and still have time to publish and have a life. You know, I’m figuring out how to fit it all in to what the institution’s asking of me.

*Lifestyle Choices Help Foster Productivity*

This study’s rare in-depth look into the perceptions of the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity among FWG participants also revealed the habits, behaviors, and routines that participants believed characterized their own productive research and writing process. Participants shed light on the usual conventions that helped them work toward advancing their
research scholarship, such as being active in FWGs and designating consistent and specific times to write, but also reflected on the extent that success and failure in their pursuit of scholarly productivity had influenced their lifestyle choices and affected power dynamics within their organizations. Participants, who were married with children, who represented three of the eight, explained how having families that understood their occasional need to be left alone to research and write or to skip activities and other events, was not only important to them but was necessary to help them pursue scholarship goals. One participant explained:

I think for me as a married person with a child in the summer, being able to write means having a family that understands that when I’m home at night, sometimes they can’t bother me, and that sometimes, I’m not going to be able to take them to the park or the grass isn’t going to get cut tonight, because I need to get this chapter done. So, having a family that understands that is important. I also had an experience where that understanding wasn’t there, and the marriage didn’t work because it just. . .our priorities were in two different places.

Another participant raised the issue of salary as being determined by whether faculty published their work or not, and that such a reality “has an influence on your lifestyle choices for sure.” Collegial relationships, based on tenure status and rank, this participant continued, also were impacted by levels of faculty scholarly productivity and were dependent on what groups of people “you were dealing with. Some individuals will be OK, and some others will pooh, pooh, you know something about their attitude, power dynamics. . . I think that will depend on how the department. . .is structured, because this happens in academia.” One participant, an assistant professor/visiting professor, related how their research plans, both ongoing and future often overwhelmed his teaching duties:
So, the choices I make now, even though, I’m supposed to be concentrating on teaching, I’m making as much time for writing, as possible, because I think for me it’s ‘publish or perish,’ so that I can get into a situation, where it will be ‘publish or perish.’

[Participants laugh]

Another participant, an assistant professor/visiting assistant professor, responded directly to their colleague about how academic publishing obligations had taken center stage over all else:

Yea, right. This is actually the first time in a long time that I’ve been able to think about things that I’m writing because I think it’s an important thing to think about. As much as this is important for my CV, this is important for showing that I can do this set of things and that was an interesting shift that happened in my brain because I realized that I had been thinking really instrumentally for a very long time.

A tenured associate professor described the lifestyle choice of deciding not to change their name after they got married, so as not to lose their professional identity after years of publishing under a different name. They said, “I didn’t want to lose that, that reputation that came with those articles and that knowledge by changing my name when I got married.” Participants also remarked on the extent that faculty have avoided taking on too many responsibilities that could interfere with research, such as service, committee work, and voluntary activities. One participant said that it was only after being granted tenure that they felt they had the luxury to refuse such opportunities, if they needed to. They recalled:

Early on in the faculty career, it was ‘yes, ma’am, yes, sir; Where do I need to be?’ because I knew that I needed to fill that vita in a way that got me through all the requirements. But as I’ve moved through my career, I’ve been like, now this doesn’t quite line up to where my priorities are, and I’m a little more willing to back off and say
For me, it depends on what it is, too. If I’m committed to teaching in the profession that I’m in, that means that I have to spare my research time to do the things that I think are important to my students, and the department. . .? Oh, well. So, I think it depends on what it is that I’m trying to avoid or not avoid and how much time to devote to it.

Several participants, both assistant professors/visiting professors, said they had not had to try to avoid such obligations at their institutions. Another participant, a tenured associate professor, told them, “Yea, I think for young faculty, we try not to give you too much committee work.” But after earning tenure, the participant said they believed that faculty still had a duty to take on additional service work within the institution, including committee work. They said some faculty deliberately avoid such commitments, while others cannot say no, with “a lot of people in between.” They explained:

. . . After you get publications you get to serve on committees around the university and in the department, and of course that needs to be done. . . Personally, I feel like there’s a responsibility to contributing and doing stuff for the department because it’s your job and I try to do my best with that. I mean, if the aim is to see how much it hinders your productivity and research, it can, depending on how much time you want to put into this.

The art of juggling numerous responsibilities while pursuing research publications still vexed participants, who employed their own strategies to maintain or boost productivity, including having participated in FWGs. The following focus group extracts illustrated this, as demonstrated by a participant, who said, “Consistency, I know to be true, although, also in practice, like short, intense bursts over time also work.” Another participant responded, “Yes, I’ve been productive in so many different ways.” One faculty-researcher recounted how their
scholarly habits changed once they had to learn to juggle family responsibilities with their research scholarship:

I used to be just like a classic grad student just, like, terrible. I just would not start writing until the afternoon, I would just, like, settle into it and write. I would stay up all night. I would procrastinate. I’d stay up late and do it that way. And then, after we had kids, that became less of an option because I used to count on the evenings, you know. So, I started working in the mornings, even though I’m not a morning person and that’s been nice, I’ve been productive with fewer hours if I start right away. I think this (FWG meeting) has been helpful because even if in 25 minutes or in a couple of sessions, all I do is fix five sentences. I find that sort of getting my head into the project again, into a massive project, which you think about for a while before you decide to make any changes, that motivates me, so the work starts to begat more work and then you’re able to work in the evening because you worked in the morning.”

At that, another participant concurred and said, “Yes, I totally agree with that.” The previous participant responded, “So, it’s one way to do it and I don’t think I’m good at it (laughs).”

Another participant shared their scholarly habits with the group:

Yea, I think, if I’m most successful, it’s when I say, OK, you need to write two pages today or you need to write for two hours today and then I do that, and I don’t do it anymore. It’s like, even if you feel like you can go on, I just stop. . .

A fellow faculty researcher had a retort: “Oh really?” The other participant continued, “. . . Preserve energy. . . I could do more, but I’m not going to because I don’t want to burn out.”

Another participant expressed frustration at the challenges of negotiating time to write up research amid other institutional obligations:
I agree with all that, mostly. There’s always something else that happens and interrupts that routine, but I think that’s ideal, and whenever I’m able to do that, to say, OK, now no matter what happens in the world—short of World War III—I’m going to sit here for this one hour and do that, and that works very well because you sort of make yourself do it and you take the whole rest of the world outside. But for me, personally, it’s been very difficult to do that and part of it is my fault and part of it is the world’s fault.”

(All participants laugh)

Other faculty participants cited timing, prioritizing writing as routine, scheduling, accountability, and spontaneity as ways to stay on course with their productivity goals.

‘Publish or Perish’ Creates a Range of Tensions

Higher education faculty in research-intensive institutions know well the phrase, “publish or perish,” which studies show has different meanings in diverse fields (Linton, Tierney, & Walsh, 2011); focus group participants, who understood the phrase to refer to their institution’s frequent scholarly output obligations which must be met for the promise of tenure, advancement, and job security, expressed having varying levels of tensions when considering their obligations as faculty-researchers. Participants considered the idiom in relation to their institution and their place in it, as illustrated by the following focus group extract:

I don’t know about the tenure process, but I was just speaking to the fact that the way the job market is now, it’s almost like you have to ensure that you have a book contract just to get that first job, in some instances, so it’s not a comment on what the tenure process expectations are like, but more a comment on how glutted the job market is. And I think this gets back to doing support at universities. I think grad programs are only starting to realize that. Like, how if you want your Ph.D. students to have jobs, that you should be
talking about how to publish articles. It needs to be at where I used to be, writing your dissipation and maybe have one article coming out when you graduate. The new expectation is that either you post-doc right after a couple of years and get a [book] contract and then get a job or you should already get a bunch of stuff published when you’re finishing your dissertation.”

Participants unanimously agreed that “publish or perish” was real; one faculty-researcher said, “I think it’s more real now as [my colleagues] said, even in the sense that it used to be you finish your dissertation and then you start publishing at your first job, but as they said, it’s no longer like that.” Another participant, who explained that expectations for new and tenure-track faculty have ramped up, said, “I mean you should have, basically, written enough stuff to get tenure before you even get a job kind of expectation is new.” At least one participant expressed frustration with academe’s “publish or perish” mandates:

So, we’ve hired in the last few years, all of these people who have demonstrated already their ability to publish or almost always have something that people noticed in hiring, and certainly, it’s noticed in terms of ‘The Book’. So, you will perish and not get tenure, if you don’t publish that ‘Book.’ It is as simple as that. And then after that, it’s for getting promotions, you have to publish, and then you have to demonstrate engagement in the profession. . .I think the question that you’re not asking is does that affect everything else? I’m one of those who thinks that it doesn’t affect everything in the right way and that we can have ‘publish or perish,’ but you know, I think it affects some people ‘s teaching to the extent that you know some [who feel] undervalued should write letters to the administration and say, this teacher really didn’t teach me anything, because he spent too much time in his lab or something like that. That happens, too. I think that’s not a
good thing. I think for some people it makes their teaching suffer and I mean I hear stories and anecdotes over the years about how some faculty members . . . really don’t do a very good job for their undergraduates at all. I don’t think that’s right, honestly. I just think it’s crazy that you come to a four-year university and you don’t get a good education as you could because the university has to be R1. OK, fine, that’s good, but you’ve got to teach your undergraduates well in the first place, right?”

Another participant agreed, and responded, “Yea, it’s like teaching is not a surprise part of this profession.” The previous participant rejoined, explained that teaching should be faculty members’ first mission, and said, “You know these people pay tuition. And you have to get them out of here knowing some stuff, so they can get a job.” An additional opinion came from a participant, who recalled instances in which faculty colleagues were not retained, because while they were effective teachers, they did not fulfill their research publishing obligations:

They’re great at what they’re doing, but they just didn’t make it in that environment, which increases pressure in the rest of us. When you see someone who’s a great colleague and then they’re let go because of not producing, and suddenly, [you think], I’m not good enough, am I producing enough, and am I doing what I need to do as much as the next person? . . . One of the things that I’ve found beneficial besides the peer contact and accountability was the interdisciplinary [nature] of it and hearing how others in different subjects and disciplines are doing their writings and learning from them in terms of learning what their departments’ requirements are, how they’ve moved through the process in figuring it out. Sharing the process across disciplines has been beneficial, as well; it’s just having a place to write and someone holding you accountable.”
Another participant, for whom research productivity was not a requirement, voluntarily began pursuing publishable research when they joined the FWG. They expressed their reaction to institutions’ research publishing demands, and said:

I think I’m in a different stage. It seems like it’s demanded of you to publish. . . as much as possible. . .is that what you think? So, at the same time, I feel like I can always fall back on the teaching as an excuse not to research. . .academically. . .So, I feel that [_____] is where my sentiment and the passion resides most in the academic side of things, you know, but I’m trying to get there.

**What was gained through the focus groups**

These focus groups were constructive to me as a researcher in corroborating my findings. In further defense of applying the veracity of the qualitative research method of autoethnography to this study, I felt more certain in my research procedures and in the context for which I presented the interviews and the themes that emerged. The focus group elucidated my findings and gave voice to the FWG participants, whose perceptions of the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity, were the subject of analysis. I presented my themes to the participants as my interpretations of their descriptions. To further ensure trustworthiness and credibility, I offered participants the opportunity to agree or disagree with my presentation of the experiences they vocalized. Urging faculty participants to articulate their opinions of my findings was crucial for helping to secure the credibility of my findings and allowing for essential comprehension and understanding of these unique experiences. After meeting with each focus group, I felt self-assured in my findings and confident that the research methods were appropriate for presenting FWG participant perspectives on the mandate that they “publish or perish.”
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this case study was to examine the perceptions of the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity among FWG participants. Through autoethnography, a qualitative research method, this inquiry used my personal exploration from professional writer to emergent academic scholar to further explore insights into this phenomenon. A guiding qualitative approach, a method of inquiry that illustrated a reflective process, was applied to answer the central question: Through a narrative lens of my experiences as a professional writer, doctoral candidate, and FWG facilitator, how is the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity perceived and experienced by FWG participants? The following questions guiding my inquiry were:

1. How does perception shape and inform my professional practice?
2. How does perception shape and inform professional practice for FWG participants?
3. How do the perceptions vary between participants of discipline-focused and multidisciplinary FWGs?
4. What themes appear during the examination of FWG participants’ perceptions of the pursuit of scholarly productivity?

Next, I summarize my findings. Then, I discuss my discoveries as they relate to each research question. I then examine the implications of this analysis for faculty researchers and the research institutions that employ them. I discuss my reflections on what I have come to know and how my perceptions have shaped my professional practice. I conclude with an observation of issues and ideas on advancing further research.
I submit these findings as the authentic experiences of the eight participants whom I interviewed. Their academic encounters, unique and personal, also were recounted among each other. That distinctiveness and acceptance of similar perceptions within this study makes these findings transferable to similar situations. The faculty-researchers reflected diversity in rank, tenure status, and number of years employed as professors, which implies that these experiences are familiar across a range of people and settings. Several of the sentiments commonly expressed by this study’s participants were broached in previous research findings, but not many earlier analyses offered as much depth of opinions as does this inquiry. Unlike other studies on scholarly productivity, this study focused on understanding more deeply the sway that “publish or perish” directives held on FWG participants, delving into faculty reactions to academe’s explicit pressures that they regularly produce publishable scholarly work for the promise of tenure, promotion and advancement, and job security. This research produced findings that both provided a novel way to understand in-depth FWG participants’ and faculty-researchers’ perceptions of the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity and contributed an unusual complexity of understanding of faculty perceptions of “publish or perish.”

Ten themes emerged from the data, with the first five having emerged from survey data and the remaining five having developed from focus group data: Lack of Time and Emotional Toll, Impactful Research Experience, Uncertainty of Research Practical Value, Enjoyment of the Writing Process, and Perception as a Writer; in addition to Inconsistent Publishing Mandate, Uneven Training in Scholarly Writing, Institutional Supports Needed for Publishing Rigors, Lifestyle Choices Help Foster Productivity, and ‘Publish or Perish’ Creates a Range of Tensions. Because each of the themes have been revealed in this study, and I believed them all to be significant and greatly responsive to the research questions posed in this analysis, I focused on
emphasizing only the best single overarching themes that addressed each so as to stress the significance and to avoid muddying the themes’ importance in exploring this study’s phenomenon. Therefore, through analysis and coding, I determined the single best themes that corresponded to this study’s research questions. Uncertainty of Research Practical Value, which best corresponded to the central question: Through a narrative lens of my experiences as a professional writer, doctoral candidate, and FWG facilitator, how is the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity perceived and experienced by FWG participants? Impactful Research Experience best corresponded to research question 1: How does perception shape and inform my professional practice? “Publish or Perish” Creates Ranges of Tensions best corresponded to research question 2: How does perception shape and inform professional practice for FWG participants? Uneven Training in Scholarly Writing best corresponded to research question 3: How do the perceptions vary between participants of discipline-focused and multidisciplinary FWGs?

**Discoveries**

As a result of this study, I, as FWG facilitator, have discovered that the accountability, comradery, nurturing, and motivation—all unique features that were fostered within the writing groups and that were strategic in helping faculty-researchers find encouragement in supportive spaces, as well as uninterrupted time in which to write and critique each other’s work—may help fill some of the gaps resulting from any inadequate or uneven research/writing training received in doctoral training. Participants’ early history with instruction in scholarly writing plays a role in their current scholarly writing efforts as faculty-researchers; collaboratively working with and being among peers in FWGs—absent environmental pressures and constraints, disruptions, commitments, and other ongoing activities—is key to their motivation to produce scholarship,
although this may manifest in different degrees for all faculty. Some FWG participants, who had expressed near the end of the semester that they had not made as much writing progress as they would have liked, consistently attended group meetings and benefitted from the culture of solidarity with other faculty-researchers engaged in writing.

**Uncertainty of research practical value.** This discovery best relates to the central question that centers on how the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity is perceived and experienced by FWG participants through a narrative lens of my experiences as a professional writer, doctoral candidate, and FWG facilitator. Consistent with the research literature (Gelso, 1993; Berman, 1990; Galassi, Brooks, Stoltz, & Trexler, 1986), the findings from this study corroborated a claim that faculty-researchers still maintained a familiar “ambivalence toward the role of research in their future careers” (Gelso, 1993, p. 4) that began in graduate school, with only modest increases in research interest as graduate training became more advanced.

Participants, regardless of rank, tenure status, and years employed as a faculty member, admitted to having a healthy dose of uncertainty as to whether their research publications had or will have practical value. Such sentiments clearly play a role in participants’ motivations for scholarly productivity, as this study’s findings showed participants to be driven to publish, mostly, by institutional mandates, rather than by any deep-seated intrinsic research values. Gelso (1993), in his study of professional psychology doctoral training programs, noted that few programs robustly pursued, or openly affirmed, development of doctoral students’ research attitudes to be an instructional objective. In addition, empirical research shows a relationship between former students’ published research productivity and the prestige of their Ph.D.-granting departments (Long, Bowers, Barnett, & White, 2017; Seibert, Kacmar, Krainer, Downes, & Noble, 2017). When I reviewed the eight participants’ graduate degree institutions, all but one was ranked
among the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education and designated as R1, which are among the doctoral universities with the “highest research activity” rating (The Carnegie Classification, n.d.), based on their performance-based rankings on national benchmark data from 2013-14. Hailing from top-tier universities suggests that participants already were inoculated with the spirit of scholarly research productivity. During FWG meetings, there seemed to be no question as to whether participants felt invested in their own research; in discussing their work progress or proudly announcing productivity, publication or presentation successes, they eagerly held court, and either were animated—or exasperated—as they discussed their ongoing scholarship with peers in safe spaces. They gave and received feedback that was not judgmental, but often critical-complimentary. Ultimately, however, most participants, expressed being under no preconceived notions that their academic life-work up to now had lasting practical value. This finding shaped my own view of professional practice and made me question whether my intended research path is meaningful enough: Is it enough that I, alone, am passionate about my research focus, absent others? Yes, I concede, but I also believe that potential audiences who might be interested in our research, simply may not have access to our work. Should I change my research path to another for which larger audiences would have a heightened interest? It depends; if abruptly shifting my focus for the sake of gaining a wider appeal forces me to sacrifice my enthusiasm for the research, my interest will not hold for the long term. Should I ensure that my ultimate research focus has maximum practical value for the masses? Altruistic goals, such as those rooted in medicine and education are commendable; however, I intend to be just as driven in pursuing research that fascinates me and adds upon what has already been studied. For most faculty at research-intensive institutions, the successful pursuit of frequent publication and scholarly research promises tenure, promotion, advancement,
and job security; this study’s participants, whose faculty careers span from less than one year to 10 years or more, have worked on research that satisfies those requirements, because as one participant, a tenured associate professor, said, “The publications. . .without much practical value were written because they had to be.”

**Impactful research experience.** This discovery best relates to the first research question that centered on how perception shapes and informs my professional practice. In this autoethnography, I sought to offer a unique perspective through my vantage point as a professional writer, former faculty member, and doctoral candidate, who sought to (re)join the ranks of the faculty with whom I was engaging during FWG meetings. Through my role as FWG facilitator, I had at least two unique perspectives: (a) insight into faculty members’ views on and experiences with the persistent need to pursue scholarship, as well as their efforts to reach related productivity goals and (b) an understanding of current and historical research on “publish or perish.” Some historians attribute the idiom’s origins, which they believe have both non-academic and academic roots, to state bluntly the fate that befalls academics, graduate students, researchers, and others who fail to produce publishable scholarly work; its meaning has permeated throughout higher education to also impact graduate students (Doe & Burnett, n.d.) and some staff, for whom scholarly publishing promises benefits. The negative consequences associated with “publish or perish” environments and the stressors caused by scholarly publishing pressures also are prevalent in academia as illustrated in Miller et al.’s (2011) revealing study of management faculty. However, based on the participants I studied, I found such publishing pressures to be inconsistent throughout their home university, an emergent research-intensive institution; it was an observation, that they, too, noted. Autoethnography, the distinctive research methodology, used my personal journey to examine FWG participant
perceptions of the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity. When participants were asked about how their research experience has impacted them as faculty-scholars, one-third expressed positive sentiments and another third expressed negative sentiments related to the experience. For most faculty, publishing their research served as a means to an end—promises of tenure or tenure-track, job security or advancement, and increased name recognition. But on this issue, at least one participant’s opinion resonated with me; it came from a tenured associate professor and faculty member for 10 years or more, who said, “It’s made me want to find ways to write in a way that’s more immediately meaningful to others.” This sentiment recalls my days as a news reporter, when I always strived and continually was advised to write news stories that could be understood by broad audiences of various abilities of comprehension. So, on an emotional level, I immediately responded positively to this reaction of one faculty-researcher’s impression of the research process. I also was heartened by this sentiment and saw it as a remedy to feeling that my own burgeoning research would fail to make a connection with audiences and not demonstrate a practical interest that satisfied my own mind. Consider the belief that faculty pursue research that is meaningful to others; within doctoral research training, is this altruistic viewpoint passed on to students as a fundamental goal to encourage one’s work to be sustainable throughout their graduate student career and beyond, or it is self-actualized? A majority of participants did not identify an inherent need to serve the masses when they considered how their research experience impacted them as faculty-scholars. The findings seemed consistent with Gelso’s (1997) assertion that although the research training environment (RTE) influences students’ research beliefs and subsequent scholarly productivity, the environment seldom has a long-lasting altering effect on them (Mallinckrodt and Gelso, 2002). One way to make this a more sustainable outcome is for more colleges and universities to model successful
organizational enterprises whose effective leadership sets the vision and consistently cultivates high morale and productivity among their employees. At emergent institutions, such as the one that is the focus of this study, critical supports to engage and enliven faculty may close the gaps in the university infrastructure that may be inhibiting further scholarly productivity and more impactful research experiences. One participant, an assistant professor on the tenure track, indicated that while practical value wasn’t applicable to their scholarship, they desired that their work have relevance, based on events occurring at the time: “. . . I do think that my scholarship has important insights about urgent current issues!” During regular FWG meetings, participants demonstrated that scholarly successes are short-lived—once one juggled project was completed, it was onto the next one, and then the ones following. To early career academics in the group, it was clear that pursuing faculty research and the efforts to have scholarship published would be ongoing until the ultimate goal—tenure—was granted. In considering how perception shapes and informs my professional practice, participants showed me that the frequent pursuit of scholarly productivity can commingle with an intrinsic desire to conduct research.

‘Publish or perish’ creates ranges of tensions. This discovery best relates to the second research question that examined how perception shapes and informs professional practice for FWG participants. Participants had no shortage of opinions on the popular adage and brought into focus their tensions and impassioned discussions on research related to tenure, book publishing, teaching, social media, and interdisciplinary relationships. Although publishing research and maintaining scholarly productivity are essential to being awarded tenure and retaining job security, faculty development researchers, such as Nottis (2005) asserted that continuing to engage mid-career faculty, who composed one-third of participants in this study, based on rank and years employed, in research productivity when the pressing need for
publication has diminished, was an important issue that should be taken up to support, sustain, and enhance continued superior scholarship from within an institution. In addition, some participants discussed having to juggle family and work responsibilities with their ongoing research, which created other tensions; over recent years, in response, many administrators have addressed faculty demands to implement “family-friendly” programs on their campuses (Raabe, 1997; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004), which also has been a source of controversy among those who brand such policies as unfair and biased against faculty who choose not to have children. One participant, a tenured associate professor relayed other ways in which the pursuit of scholarship clearly had become a lifestyle choice and one that academic research and writing had influenced:

In terms of the collegial relationships with faculty, I’ve also seen competition within my departments where somebody’s just gotten two publications, and I don’t have any, and you know we could be the best of friends, except that, no, I can’t go out to Happy Hour with them because I should be home writing, instead of being a part of their conversation and being a good colleague and a good friend. . .but at the back of my mind, I’m still thinking, but they’re not that much better than me, they’re that much further in the process of tenure, and so it becomes competitive in a way that can be detrimental to the relationship at work.

I found it disheartening that within this participant’s words, I heard the reality of faculty willingly transforming their lifestyles and home lives to conform to the research productivity rigors placed on them, rather than the institutions, in some way, recognizing a clear boundary in faculty’s academic lives between work and family. This statement sounded absurd as I typed it, because I could recount the numerous times that I, without a second thought, altered my own
home life to accommodate my roles as a news reporter, university instructor and administrator.

Participants, such as the tenured associate professor, cited previously, reported that the choice to abide by requirements to frequently produce and publish scholarship within a “publish or perish” environment to reap promised rewards, came down to survival as a successful faculty researcher; another participant remarked, “I think it makes a big difference at the end of the day because, first of all, salary doesn’t go up unless you publish, so that has an influence on your lifestyle choices, for sure.”

**Uneven training in scholarly writing.** This discovery best relates to the third research question that asked how perceptions vary between participants of discipline-focused and multidisciplinary FWGs. In this study, Participants #1, #7, and #8 were from a discipline-focused FWG and Participants #2 and #3 were from a multidisciplinary FWG. After reviewing focus group data from participants on this question, it was clear that those representing the discipline-focused FWG, which was composed of three faculty members from within the same department or focus area, were instructed explicitly and early in their graduate training as to the type of scholarship and customs of professors that were expected of them as early career academics. “Shepherding manuscripts,” “university presses,” and the “peer-review process” were among the phrases in the academic lexicon that participants expressed within focus group sessions. Among their peers in the multidisciplinary FWG, who each hailed from more than one department or focus area, there were no such discussions on how doctoral training socialized participants to effective habits of scholarly productivity. Considered the different deliberations among the two FWGs might lead some within higher education to question the legitimacy of the multidisciplinary writing group’s positive impact on individual scholarly productivity; on the contrary, researchers, such as Cuthbert, Spark, & Burke (2009), have noted strengths and
weaknesses with both types of writing groups, but recommended that multidisciplinary writing
groups be incorporated into enhanced doctoral training that prepares postgraduate research
students for frequent publication writing as academics. They reported that multidisciplinary
writing groups exposed postgraduates to “a range of generic and professional skills by providing
breadth to doctoral education” (p. 15) and did not threaten or compromise the spirit of discipline-
focused education. Conversely, multidisciplinary groups were susceptible to dissolving into
discussions on topics for which various individuals are diametrically opposed–without ever
having mentioned writing quality, depth, relevance and other skills–related issues (Cuthbert,
Spark, & Burke (2009). As FWG facilitator to both types of groups, I saw first-hand nuanced
differences between the two. That participants in the discipline-focused FWG group displayed
more outward comradery, a willingness to share and critique another’s research, and depth of
knowledge of each other’s multifaceted research topics was not surprising; they were,
essentially, borne from the same academic “family” and had been “raised” within similar
academic cultures. Though the multidisciplinary FWGs I led had not exhibited these same
attributes to the same extent as the discipline-focused FWGs, other qualities among
multidisciplinary groups were dynamic, such as allowing participants exposure to research
conducted by peers across campus and providing opportunities to get scholarly feedback from
diverse faculty, who offered new and different perspectives. In addition, in all groups, veteran
academics freely advised “greener” participants on best practices and shared academic wisdom
on moving forward under the strains of the persistent need to produce scholarship, regardless of
their department or specialized affiliation.
Summary

This qualitative study, an autoethnography, used my personal journey from professional writer to emergent academic scholar and examined the perceptions of the frequent pursuit of academic scholarly productivity among FWG participants. Unlike most studies on academic writing groups, this analysis focused on understanding more deeply the sway that “publish or perish” directives hold on FWG participants and delved into faculty reactions to academe’s explicit pressures that professors regularly produce publishable scholarly work for the promise of tenure, promotion and advancement, and job security. Scholarly research productivity in academia has been cited as the “primary criterion for decisions” related to promotion and tenure (White, 1996, p. xi). Martinez, Floyd, & Erichsen (2011) urged that more research on productivity examine the impact of faculty-researchers’ work, versus simply quantifying the published research, which my study addressed. This study revealed in depth how faculty perceive and meet the frequent need to pursue published scholarship within a “publish or perish” environment. I conducted a qualitative inquiry that provided revealing first-hand dialogue and sentiments from FWG participants and challenged researchers to reevaluate their assumptions about faculty sentiments on the pursuit of scholarly production (Linder, Cooper, McKenzie, Raesch, Reeve, 2013), areas unexplored according to researchers such as Dwyer, Lewis, McDonald, & Burns (2012).

Limitations

This study had some limitations. The sample size was restricted to eight FWG participants. More participants may have revealed additional answers to the research questions, but Toner (2009), whose research on Very Small Focus Groups (VSFGs) examined marginalized women of color within two small groups of two participants each, noted that they withstood the
rigors of validity standards, and emphasized that even small participants groups can record significant group development stages and reflect active group dynamics. Study participants, whose FWG involvement has been as a group, may not disclose negative experiences in an open forum; I, reiterated, however, that faculty’s confidentiality was guaranteed during my observations and collection of survey and focus group data. In addition, I included several opportunities for study subjects to be candid privately during the study. I conducted this analysis with junior and senior FWG participants working in a specific region of the Southeastern U.S., and the results may not be transferrable to other regions of the country or world.

Conclusion

The following conclusions, applied within the limitations of this study and based on the results, were that among FWG participants at a large Southeastern U.S. research-intensive university, perceptions of the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity matter. That promises of tenure, promotion and advancement, and job security, largely, will continue to depend on the type and frequency of published scholarship as mandated by research institutions, a better understanding of faculty perceptions of “publish and perish” may inform practice and research and encourage increased engagement in institutional initiatives and resources aimed at boosting scholarly productivity. Unlike most related studies on academic writing groups, this analysis adds to knowledge in the area of FWGs as a form of faculty development and focuses on understanding more deeply the sway that “publish or perish” directives hold on participants. In addition, I felt it suitable to use autoethnography as a research method so that I could include my experiences and lend insight as someone who soon hoped to gain entry and acceptance into the same ranks as the participants I was studying. Autoethnography allowed me to peer into the
participants’ world from the perspective of an emerging researcher who is looking in the rear-
view mirror and gazing at the future directly ahead of me.

Implications

The conclusions of the study have the following implications for faculty engaged in the
pursuit of scholarly productivity and the institutions that employ them.

1. Developing writing and research development initiatives that speak to scholarly
   writing and research instruction to all faculty who seek them.

2. The theme impactful research experience suggests faculty participants actively seek
   ways to increase affinity for their research and would respond to institutional supports
   that aid efforts to unite relevant audiences with their published scholarship.

3. The theme institutional supports needed for publishing rigors suggests faculty would
   positively respond to institutions that offer a broad array of resources, initiatives, and
   incentives to help them better respond to persistent scholarly publishing pressures.

4. The theme “publish or perish” creates a range of tensions that suggests that
   institutions and academic writing groups can play effective roles in ameliorating
   stressful environments in which frequent scholarly output is a mandate.

5. The importance of examining candid faculty perceptions of the pursuit of scholarly
   productivity to aid in fostering productive environments in which faculty members
   can draw on resources and initiatives to address their need to publish scholarship.

6. The need for more research-intensive institutions to adopt organizational enterprise
   styles of leadership that may enliven faculty, speak to morale, and provide critical
   institutional supports to fill gaps in the infrastructure that may impede productivity.
Recommendations for Further Study

This study has provided insight into the perceptions of the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity among FWG participants. Based on the perceptions of these faculty, who are engaged in scholarly productivity and other academic responsibilities at a research-intensive university amid “publish or perish” environments should be a vital concern to institutions that require faculty to frequently produce scholarship. More research should center on understanding more deeply faculty members’ candid views of having to fulfill such obligations that promise tenure and advancement. Higher education institutions would benefit from knowing how to better assist junior faculty and other early career researchers in meeting their scholarly publishing goals. In addition, the most effective FWGs, a form of faculty development, could help promote and improve research productivity and enhance peer research collaborations.
REFERENCES
REFERENCES


http://doi.org/10.12669/pjms.326.10490


doi:10.1080/03075079.2010.541556


doi:10.1080/0307507032000058109


doi:10.1080/03075070903216635


Mueller, E. L. (2014). Developing the faculty as a writing community. *Academe, 100*(6), 34.


doi:10.1080/09518398.2013.780315


Toner, J. (2009). Small is not too small: Reflections concerning the validity of very small focus groups (VSFGs). *Qualitative Social Work, 8*(2), 179-192.


LIST OF APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Appendix A

INFORMED CONSENT SHEET

Title: Paper Chase: Perceptions of the Pursuit of Academic Scholarly Productivity Among Faculty Writing Group Participants

Investigator
Deidra Faye Jackson, M.A.
Leadership and Counselor Education
117 Guyton Hall
The University of Mississippi
(662) 915-7069

Advisor
Amy Wells Dolan, Ph.D.
Leadership and Counselor Education
117 Guyton Hall
The University of Mississippi
(662) 915-5710

By checking this box, I certify that I am 18 years of age or older.

Description
The purpose of this research is to learn about faculty writing group participants’ perceptions of the frequent pursuit of academic scholarly productivity. I would like to ask you a few questions about the pursuit of scholarly productivity. You will not be asked for your name or any other identifying information. In a subsequent focus group discussion session to be scheduled later, you will be asked related questions on the topic.

Cost and Payments
It will take you approximately 10 minutes to complete this survey. You will receive a $10 coffee shop gift card for completing this questionnaire and participating in the focus group.

**Confidentiality**

No identifiable information will be recorded; therefore, you will not be identified from this study.

**Right to Withdraw**

You do not have to take part in this study and you may stop participation at any time.

**IRB Approval**

This study has been approved by The University of Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) (18x-156). If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482 or irb@olemiss.edu.

**Statement of Consent**

I have read and understand the above information. By completing the survey/interview I consent to participate in the study.
APPENDIX B: ONLINE BACKGROUND SURVEY QUESTIONS
Appendix B

Online Background Survey Questions

(Sent via Google forms one week before each focus group meeting)

I appreciate your willingness to participate in my dissertation research. The Institutional Review Board has approved this study. As a voluntary study participant, neither you, your department nor the institution will be identified. As you know, I am exploring experiences and perceptions of the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity among faculty writing group participants. As your FWG facilitator, my goal has been to assist you in increasing your scholarly output, among other objectives. To help me establish some basic information about your academic level, scholarly writing experience, and goals, please respond to these questions by March 14. Thank you.

1. What is your current faculty rank? Choose one.
   - Professors
   - Associate Professor
   - Assistant Professor/Visiting Assistant Professor
   - Instructor/Lecturer

2. How many years have you been employed as a faculty member at this and other institutions overall? Choose one.
   - 10 years or more
   - 6-9 years
   - 1-5 years
   - less than 1 year

3. Do you currently have a tenure-track appointment? Choose one.
   - Yes
   - No

4. What was your tenure status at the time of your most recent participation in a faculty writing or other writing group? Choose one.
   - Tenured
   - Tenure track
   - Neither tenured, nor tenure track

5. What was your primary motivation for joining a faculty writing group? Please choose all that apply:
   - Departmental directive
   - Personal interest and enjoyment
   - Tenure or promotion requirement
   - Colleague collaboration, collegiality
   - Financial rewards
   - Personal accountability
6. What type of scholarship were you working on when you last participated in a faculty writing or other group? Choose all that apply.
   - Conference presentation
   - Book manuscript
   - Book chapter
   - Article for peer-reviewed journal or publication
   - Article for non-peer-reviewed journal or publication
   - Grant proposal
   - Other (please specify)

7. How much has your participation in a faculty writing or other group contributed to your scholarly writing productivity? Choose one.
   - A great deal
   - A moderate amount
   - A little
   - None at all

8. Do you plan to continue participating in this faculty writing group or another faculty writing group? Choose one.
   - Definitely yes
   - Probably yes
   - It depends (explain)
   - Probably not
   - Definitely not

9. What is your experience with having your scholarly work published or soon to be published? What aspects of the experience stand out for you?

10. How has the experience affected you?

11. Do you believe your own research publications have or will have practical value? Why or why not?

12. I enjoy/do not enjoy the process of writing. Explain. Why or why not?
13. How do you perceive yourself as a writer? For example, are you an emerging writer or an established writer? How do you think about that distinction?
Appendix C

Focus Group Questions

I appreciate your willingness to participate in my dissertation research. As a participant in this study, neither you, your department nor the institution will be identified. As you know, I will be exploring perceptions of the pursuit of academic scholarly productivity among faculty writing group participants. As your FWG facilitator, my goal has been to assist you in your goals of increasing your scholarly output, among other objectives.

To help me become more familiar with your experiences with the frequent pursuit of scholarly productivity as faculty writing group participants, you’ll be asked most or all of the following questions or related follow-up questions as a focus group.

You do not have to take part in this study and you may stop participation at any time. This study has been reviewed and approved by The University of Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Protocol 18x-156). If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at 915-7482 or irb@olemiss.edu.

1) What kinds of messages do faculty receive about the kinds of publications that are most valuable?
2) To what extent do faculty feel like they have control over their research goals and/or requirements?
3) Prior to a faculty appointment, how much training or preparation in scholarly writing do most faculty have? Explain. What is the nature of this training? When faculty do not receive this training, how do they “pick up” the skills?
4) What institutional supports do faculty need to produce publishable research? Explain.
5) To what extent do faculty avoid taking on too many responsibilities that may interfere with research (e.g., service, committee work). How commonplace is this avoidance?
6) What habits, behaviors, and routines characterize a productive research/writing process?
7) To what extent does success or failure in the pursuit of scholarly productivity influence the lifestyle choices of faculty? The collegial relationships of faculty? The power dynamics in departments?

8) What role, if any, does autonomy and isolation play in enhancing or inhibiting productivity?

9) How do collaborations with others (i.e., other faculty or graduate students) enhance or inhibit scholarly productivity?

10) How do faculty use the strategy of disengagement to pursue or engage in academic writing or be more productive? Explain.

11) What forms of support, if any, would be helpful to faculty so that they may disengage from other tasks and engage with academic writing?

12) “Publish or perish” – does this expression bear truth or is it an exaggeration? Explain.

Thank you for your input today. Are there any additional comments anyone would like to make? My goal is to use the information you provided to help provide valuable insight to institutions seeking to improve faculty experiences with the pursuit of scholarly productivity.

Adapted Source: Murray (2013)
APPENDIX D: SURVEY DATA ANALYSIS RESULTS
Appendix D

Survey Data Analysis Results

Table 1: Current Faculty Rank

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FWG Participants</th>
<th>Professor</th>
<th>Associate Professor/Assistant Professor/Visiting Ass’t Professor</th>
<th>Lecturer/Professor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FWG-1</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-2</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Question posed: What is your current faculty rank? Choose one response.

Table 2: Years Employed as a Faculty Member

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FWG Participants</th>
<th>10 years or more</th>
<th>6-9 years</th>
<th>1-5 years</th>
<th>less than 1 year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FWG-1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Question posed: Overall, how many years have you been employed as a faculty member at this and other institutions? Choose one response.

Table 3: Tenure Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FWG Participants</th>
<th>Tenured</th>
<th>Tenure track</th>
<th>Neither tenured nor tenure track</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FWG-1</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-2</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-4</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-5</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-6</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-7</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-8</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Question posed: What was your tenure status at the time of your most recent participation in a faculty writing group? Choose one response.
Table 4: Primary Faculty Writing Group Motivationa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FWG Participants</th>
<th>Departmental/directive</th>
<th>Personal interest and enjoyment</th>
<th>Tenure/promotion</th>
<th>Collaboration/collegiality</th>
<th>Financial rewards</th>
<th>Personal accountability</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FWG-1</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-3</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-6</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-7</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Question posed: What was your primary motivation for joining a faculty writing group? Choose all that apply.

Table 5: Scholarship in Progressa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FWG Participants</th>
<th>Conference presentation</th>
<th>Book manuscript</th>
<th>Book chapter (peer-reviewed)</th>
<th>Journal Article (non peer-reviewed)</th>
<th>Grant proposal</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FWG-1</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-2</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-3</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-4</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-6</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-7</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Question posed: What type of scholarship were you working on when you last participated in a faculty writing group? Choose all that apply.

Table 6: Faculty Writing Group Impact on Scholarly Productivitya

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FWG Participants</th>
<th>A great deal</th>
<th>A moderate amount</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>None at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FWG-1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-2</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-4</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-6</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-8</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Question posed: How much has your most recent participation in a faculty writing group contributed to your scholarly writing productivity? Choose one response.
Table 7: Plans to Continue Faculty Writing Group Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FWG Participants</th>
<th>Definitely yes</th>
<th>Probably yes, if available</th>
<th>Might or might not</th>
<th>Probably not</th>
<th>Definitely not</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FWG-1</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-2</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-3</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-4</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-5</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-6</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-7</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWG-8</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Question posed: Do you plan to continue participating in a faculty writing group or other writing group? Choose one response and briefly explain why.
VITA

Deidra Faye Jackson, prior to earning her doctorate in Higher Education at the University of Mississippi, has worked at the university level for 18 years. She has a master’s degree in journalism from the University of Mississippi and received her bachelor’s degree from Mississippi University of Women, majoring in print journalism. After receiving her bachelor’s degree, she worked as a broadcaster at her third radio station and later worked as an editor and journalist for seven years at newspapers in Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill, N.C. Afterward, she moved back to Mississippi to become a communications specialist in University Communications at UM. During this time and after two years serving as an adjunct journalism instructor, she accepted a full-time instructor position to teach journalism and integrated marketing communication students, and to also head academic advising for the UM journalism school. Soon after, she decided to pursue full-time doctoral studies with a focus on scholarly productivity, faculty writing groups, faculty development, and autoethnography. A contributing writer for the website of a leading digital media company devoted to higher education, she is a seasoned columnist and freelance writer, having been published in academic and mainstream venues. In addition, she has presented original research at national and regional educational conferences, such as the American Educational Research Association, and the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. She plans to continue teaching in higher education and advancing her research through writing and other scholarly productivity.