

Tony Scott and Lil Brannon

## Democracy, Struggle, and the *Praxis* of Assessment

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This article draws on qualitative research conducted as a part of a writing program assessment to examine the relationship between assessment, valuation, and the economics of first-year writing. It argues that the terms of labor in first-year writing complicate practices of valuation and the processes of consensus building that have become common in assessment models. It explains that if assessment is to be situated at a site and represent the work that happens there faithfully, it needs to account for how power, the economics of staffing, and differing ways of thinking about writing education necessitate struggle and the acknowledgment and representation of dissonance.

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**O**ur essay begins with an assessment story, a familiar tale that could be told about many writing programs throughout the United States. It begins this way:

*In 2009 this first-year writing program had to undertake a writing assessment in answer to the mandate of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Writing assessments are standard fare in first-year writing, but for Tony, who was the writing program administrator and the only tenure-line faculty member working in the writing program, the assessment presented a*

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challenge. The year before, Tony had begun working collectively with the faculty (full-time contract lecturers and part-timers) to revise the curriculum from a largely formalist understanding of literacy and language to a “social” view that emphasized the situatedness of writers and writing, diverse literacies, and the socially constructed values of diverse contexts. An assessment had been administered three times over the prior nine years, but the rubric that was applied to student writing would not work for the new curriculum, and the logic on which his university based SACS programmatic assessments did not fit well with the new curriculum’s constructivist orientation. Moreover, the assessment process the program had used in the past, a process of having a small group of faculty paid to read and assess the student writing, seemed oddly “outside” the current conversations in the program. This is not to say that the assessment was not done properly. The former writing program administrators (WPAs) generated reports always on time and circulated them to the faculty and the administration. There was a “feedback loop,” which brought news back to the program. Yet the news seemed to focus on minor issues of improving student adherence to formalist conventions, basically “proving” that everything in the program was functioning well (Rice). Absent in any of the program reports was the increasing dependency on part-time faculty. Also absent was any reason to change the program’s curriculum.

Tony wanted to develop an assessment plan that would not only provide valuable programmatic information, but could be used to engage the faculty in curricular conversations and professional development. He enlisted Lil to help him redesign the assessment. They gravitated toward Bob Broad’s Dynamic Criteria Mapping (DCM) (see What), which seemed to align more with their philosophies of literacy and program administration than the required campus model. They thought that the qualitative inquiry that is a part of the DCM process would be a good way to bring program faculty together to talk about student writing and the faculty’s teaching practices. Through this talk the faculty could actively “map” together what they valued, and Tony and Lil could design an assessment that captured their differing ways of evaluating students’ work. In other words, they strove to create an assessment carrying the hallmarks of much of the contemporary assessment scholarship (see, for instance, Broad; Gallagher; Huot; Moore, O’Neil and Huot; Lynne). Rather than starting from the claim of value enshrined in the program’s rubric, they opened up the question of what to value among faculty within the program. They designed an assessment plan that would actively value multiple perspectives and preserve this complicated portrait. And when Tony and Lil submitted the report to the program, depart-

*ment, and college, they planned to continue the dialogue about the assessment—a dialogue that would be taking place within the larger conversation concerning curricular change.*

It would not be surprising to those familiar with writing program scholarship if at this point we proceeded with the narrative, describing challenges faced, negotiated, and met or transcended. We might also tell a story of resistance, persistence, understanding, and, eventually, consensus and buy-in. Or we might offer a more soul-searching, revelatory story of our own initial arrogance or sunny naïveté followed by surprises and humbling realizations, and then eventually by the development of a new, more modest, pragmatic and measured way forward. This is not an essay that follows any of those narratives, nor does our story. Our essay describes our attempts to remake the assessment scene, responding to Chris Gallagher's call in *CCC* to take assessment out of the exclusive hands of administrators and the testing industry and to assert the agency of teachers and students who are "there"—that is, at the actual scene of teaching and learning.<sup>1</sup> Gallagher joins others, like Brian Huot and Bob Broad, in casting assessment as a site of struggle for the democratization of education.

Our essay explores the complexity at the scene of an assessment, conducted from "there" in a democratic spirit, but recognizing that "there" is a vexed place. It describes the dissonances, the power struggles, the tensions and contradictions that arose within a process of assessment and curricular change that was enacted with egalitarian intentions. The description leads to two primary arguments. First, while it has been well argued in writing assessment scholarship that assessment should take into account different value judgments about what constitutes "good writing," how assessment relates to labor structures and practices in first-year writing programs has not been extensively explored. The terms of labor in first-year writing programs complicate practices of valuation and processes of consensus building. We argue that programmatic writing assessments that lack qualitative elements remain pervasive in no small part because these assessments align well with exploitive labor practices, shifting the focus toward measurable characteristics of texts and away from the terms of labor that produced them. Second, we argue that in spite of the intentions with which they are enacted, more constructivist and qualitative assessments can also easily align with, and even legitimate, exploitive labor practices through portraying consensus and resolutions in sites in which dissonance and struggle are everyday realities. Using Bakhtin's concept

of the chronotope, we examine how assessment relates to the broader, troubled economics and position of first-year writing at our institution.<sup>2</sup> We argue that if assessment is to be truly situated at a site and represent the work that happens there faithfully, it needs to account for how power, the harsh economics of staffing, and sometimes irreconcilable ways of thinking about writing education necessitate struggle and the acknowledgment and representation of dissonance.

### **Shifting Chronotopes and the Problem of Writing Assessment**

In “Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel,” Bakhtin uses the term *chronotope* (or *time-space*) as a means of describing how cultural and material factors serve to frame utterances, creating the common terrains upon which at least a degree of mutual understanding can be achieved through words. Utterances cannot stand alone and have meaning. In order to have meaning, even seemingly simple utterances are reliant upon a “scene” constituted by shared worldviews and shared understandings of social conventions, values, and assumptions among speakers, writers, and their audiences. So *chronotope* is a way of identifying the narrative elements selected to form the foundations on which meaning can be cooperatively made in a given place and time. Authors negotiate culturally established viewpoints through their use of narrative elements that help to reproduce familiar assumptions about life, truth, social roles, values, and what it means to be human. Seeing contexts for writing and speaking in terms of chronotopes is a means of accounting for the elements that animate utterances with meaning through creating time-spaces that can be shared among authors and audiences. Importantly, though, as we locate the narrative elements that create chronotopes, we also point out their cultural contingency, their ideological exclusivity. As we imagine how meaning is made through a particular chronotope, we also open up the possibility of alternative frames that create alternative meanings. So to describe an utterance as a part of a chronotope is also to denaturalize it, to make it more subject to critical scrutiny.

George Kamberelis and Greg Dimitriadis, in *On Qualitative Inquiry: Approaches to Language and Literacy Research*, use Bakhtin’s notion of chronotopes to organize and explain the dynamic shifts that characterize the history of qualitative research in literacy studies over the past four decades. Framing literacy research in terms of time-space enables Kamberelis and Dimitriades to explore how assumptions about literacy research methods coalesce to form

integrated points of view and create philosophical stability. This stability allows researchers to communicate with their audiences, with whom they share foundational assumptions, and forward research agendas that coalesce around particular methodologies and sets of questions. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis show how established ideas about literacy have their own reinforcing research methods, their own vocabularies, their own perpetuating mechanisms—like textbooks and assessments. Likewise, alternative ways of conceiving of literacy require new ways of researching, naming, and enacting—new chronotopes.

Just as our conceptions of literacy and our research methods are “normalizing frame[s] that render the world as ‘just the way things are’” (Morson and Emerson 87, qtd. in Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 25; see also Hanson, Gould),<sup>3</sup> writing assessments are normalizing frames that create a status quo. While we might think of regular, mandated assessments as merely measuring the products written in first-year writing, assessments actually help to produce the chronotopes in which the work of first-year writing is performed and managed, naturalizing common assumptions and investing common practices with authority.<sup>4</sup> Assessments codify particular value systems. Conceptions fundamental to writing pedagogy, such as the relationship between language, sociality, and knowledge, the centrality and importance of “basic skills,” and the role of rhetoric in the making of meaning and knowledge, are also fundamental to writing assessments. Assessments, like research methods, can produce the larger scene of a writing program with consequences for student placement, course goals, institutional perceptions of writing and the function of writing programs, and the terms of labor of teachers. In our assessment, we were concerned with finding ways to acknowledge the terms of labor for teachers of writing in the program, which we felt were highly exploitive and constantly undermined any effort to maintain a writing program of consistently high quality for our students.

*To initiate the mapping process, Tony asked the first-year writing faculty at a professional development workshop to write about how they understood the meaning of the catalog description of the first-year writing courses. He also asked them what they valued in student work (what they were teaching writing “for”). The conversations that ensued from this writing made the mapping process complicated. Various terms that the faculty used to talk about writing (i.e., voice, authenticity, author’s purpose, persuasive argument) mapped onto differing discourses, different ways of valuing writing. Tony and Lil wanted to*

*disentangle some of the confusion, so they attempted to denaturalize the terms that some faculty took for granted, working with them to name the competing positions they represented among alternatives. Initially, the plan was to document the values that circulated within the program. Yet as the first-year writing faculty reflected on their differing values, they wondered about the values underpinning the general education requirement for first-year writing and the values of faculty who taught writing outside of the first-year program. So Tony and Lil invited faculty who were teaching writing in the disciplines and vocal about their practice in general education conversations as well as rhetoric and composition faculty, who were not teaching first-year writing but who were invested in writing on campus, to contribute to the map. In order to situate “outsiders” values in the work of the first-year writing program, Tony and Lil collected twelve essays that were written in the program in response to typical writing assignments, and they invited these “outside faculty” along with first-year writing faculty, both contract lecturers and part-time faculty, to respond to these essays. The faculty came in small groups to hour-and-a-half-long meetings to discuss how they ranked the student work and what criteria they used for sorting and ranking. The meetings were structured so that part-time faculty in first-year writing were talking to other part-time faculty; full-time contract lecturers were speaking to each other; and tenure-line faculty outside the writing program were speaking together. They set up the group discussions in this way because they knew that contingent and contract faculty may not talk as openly about their values in the company of those with more secure positions (tenured and tenure-line) or who might be considered to have more expertise. They also wondered whether there would be noticeable differences between how the groups discussed and valued the samples.*

After inviting various faculty members to discuss essays written in the program’s classes, none of which was composed under timed testing conditions, we began to analyze transcriptions of the group meetings. What follows is a sample of our analysis taken from two groups of faculty. They both discuss an essay in which a student author describes a soccer field, what it is like to play soccer, and why she has so much passion for the game.<sup>5</sup> All of the twelve pieces discussed by the faculty groups revealed different values; however, this draft, like some of the work in the larger programmatic assessment, raised polarizing responses. We begin with the tenure-line faculty group who self-identity in rhetoric and composition. All have published in the field, but they have different research foci and were born, and received their degrees, in different decades. While

these faculty had taught first-year composition at some point in their careers, they were not teaching in the program, nor, other than Tony, did they have an administrative role.

Jack, one tenure-line participant, responded to the soccer draft positively and in a way usually associated with expressivism, given his emphasis on voice and the writer's ability to express her feelings:

1. When her voice began on the third page, that became excellent to me.
2. When she got to the part about hearing, she really got into what was going on in the field and what she had to interact with.
3. And I thought I heard her voice.
4. And I was very happy with that.
5. That is an excellent, excellent piece of writing.
6. It came out nicely.
7. I was very pleased with this essay, actually.

In these statements, Jack values the investment that the writer shows in her subject (2). He values the way she describes her subject and how the writer's voice emerges within the piece (3). Overall, he puts high value on the writer's passionate relationship to her subject, and how that relationship is conveyed through the text. The focus is more on the writer than on what the text delivers to readers.

A second member of the tenure-line group, William, had a very different response to the piece.

1. I do think that there are a couple of moments there, where, when she talks about soccer that are, that will be the gem, or the germ, of a paper for her.
2. But anybody who approaches a writing task so, with such a lack of rhetorical awareness—[this person] spends paragraphs telling us stuff that that she knows no one would need to know.
3. [quotes from the essay] "Almost everyone who doesn't live under a rock": now that cliché right there begins to show me, the kind of thinking that she's in.

4. She goes on and spends a paragraph just with cliché after cliché telling us stuff that we already know.

William values how a writer relates to her audience. His emphasis is less expressive than Jack's and more formalistic and rhetorical. He faults the essay for its lack of rhetorical awareness (2), particularly the author's lack of understanding of what her audience knows (4). He also critiques the essay for its reliance on cliché (3). He ventures a characterization about the student-author's thinking (3), which implies that he can ascertain her level of rhetorical understanding based on this piece. Both Jack and William show little apprehension about expressing differing viewpoints, and this willingness to disagree manifests throughout their conversation.

A third tenure-line composition faculty member, Rubin, responds quite differently from his two colleagues. After he expresses his overall dislike, he says:

1. I wondered why. Why would you write this? I couldn't see a meaningful assignment behind this.
2. I just could not imagine . . .
3. I don't see the student learning anything.
4. I don't see the student engaging with new or complicated ideas or texts.

Rubin switches the focus from the student to the assignment that initiated the essay. The implication is that this essay was not a worthwhile endeavor for the student, and that the perceived poor quality of the writing is not the fault of the student, but rather of the teacher, or perhaps the writing program more generally. Rather than valuing the student author's relationship to the subject, or how she relates to her audience, Rubin is more concerned with what the student is learning. Rubin values writing that "engag[es] with new or complicated ideas or texts" (4), which perhaps indicates less regard for "personal" writing. In contrast with Jack's appreciation of the author's passion for the subject matter and "voice," Rubin does not appear to value either. In contrast with William's focus on what the essay delivers to an audience, Rubin finds audience less important than what the writer learns through composing. Like Jack, Rubin is more concerned with the text as a vehicle for the writer. Like William, he values how the writer expresses and negotiates ideas more than how she expresses her emotional attachment. Rubin wants to see writers engaging the challenges of essayistic, "academic" writing.

Throughout their conversation, these readers disagreed with each other. They also noticeably positioned their conversation outside of this program, making no reference to the classes, program goals, or typical assignments that characterize the institutional, programmatic context from which students' drafts originated. This was a conversation about writing and writing education generally, so the conversation often veers away from the student drafts and toward metadiscursive questions and explanations of positions. At one point, for instance, the conversation turns toward the question of whether and how to value student writing as in process, rather than as polished product. William uses the metaphor of a developing musician to explain his view that assessment of in-process work should be seen as very distinct from assessment of polished work:

1. I'm not looking at it as exercise.
2. I'm not saying flow me some finger scales on the piano and let me see how you're doing.
3. Oh, my gosh, you've learned that A-flat key very well.
4. Thank you, thank you.
5. Not so well with the D-flat. I'm not so sure what the D-flat is doing there with the A-flat, but, but man, you're doing great with the A-flat.
6. Way to go.
7. If that's the way I'm looking at this. I'm there. I'm with you.
8. But if I'm saying, sit down and play me something that shows me your ability as a pianist . . .
9. Then I'm not going to be happy just because we do pretty well with a particular chord.

As this metaconversation thread continues through the transcript, Jack becomes interested in how his colleagues' view of "academic writing" is shaping their valuation—particularly how it intersects with process vs. product considerations. He repeatedly attempts to push his colleagues toward a clearer definition of what they consider academic writing, for instance:

1. I think that's what's interesting is when you said that, interpreting the text, doing something new.

2. I mean so that's—is that academic writing?
3. Is that academic writing to you?
4. I mean, is that your version of what academic writing should be or . . .

Throughout the longer conversation with their colleagues, Jack, William, and Rubin make assertive value claims concerning the quality of writing, and as they speak about each piece, each builds an argument for a particular set of values, defining elements of his pedagogical stances. In terms of chronotopes, these participants can certainly be seen in different ways depending on how one draws the circumference. Yet what becomes obvious is that these readers do not feel compelled to come to consensus and make little effort to do so. Indeed, it is possible that their professional inclination is to be dialectical: to define, and sometimes argue, differences.

In contrast to the tenure-line faculty, the transcribed passage quoted below is from full-time contract lecturers who teach in the writing program. This group holds the MA as their highest degree, all of which were awarded at the institution at which they teach. While the three graduated in different years, all took the same TA training course with the same instructor, a former WPA. These teachers are on renewable contracts and teach almost exclusively within the writing program.

Below is an extended conversation of the soccer draft:

1. PATTI: I . . . this one also suffered with that thing we all do value, which is clear transitions . . .
2. [and] there was point of view shifts throughout, which is something I always hate. That's one of my little nitpicky things.
3. MARGARET: I thought so, too.
4. PATTI: Because, it's not just a small thing, if it affects the entire conveyance of the paper.
5. BOB: Um-hm.
6. PATTI: And point of view shifts, and that goes along hand in hand with the way it's, too, I, you know, the set of the paper. Of course, so, once again, it's kind of the same thing as the first. There was a lack of coherence . . .
7. MARGARET: Hm-hm.

8. PATTI: And it wasn't quite there. This was just the ideas coming out, especially with the huge digressions toward the end.
9. BOB: It seems like I keep trying to categorize these of where this would be in my class. If it was 1101, 1102, 1103.
10. MARGARET: You have to remember . . .
11. BOB: So I put this was probably an informative essay about soccer and the five senses. Probably suitable for an early 1101 piece of writing.
12. MARGARET: Um-hm.
13. BOB: Prior to introducing research methods.
14. PATTI: Yeah.
15. BOB: It's like, you know, your exploratory essay, the one or two that you do early on.
16. PATTI: Yeah.
17. BOB: And so, you know, in that particular case, it probably would be like a second draft of that kind of essay. . . . I can't find a lot of fault with it, other than what's already been said. I gave this one a three.
18. MARGARET: Well, I felt the structure was decent for this one. It didn't bug me as much as that first one. And as Patti said there were some transitional things. This one to me had more cleanup work to do.
19. PATTI: Um-hm.
20. MARGARET: And so, I got kind of hung up on the cleanup as you can see. I started going crazy. I mean, I had, I was reading it, I had to put commas . . .
21. BOB: Yeah.
22. MARGARET: Because it was driving me nuts.
23. BOB: Yeah, yeah.

Different from the tenure-line faculty, who often use the students' drafts as a pretext for expressing their views about writing in general, this group constructs their identity in relation to writing pedagogy rooted in the teaching that they have done for years in this program. In this cited portion and throughout the transcript, Margaret, Bob, and Patti exhibit a consistent concern with formalist

characteristics as they value students' writing. They tend to locate writing in a particular school genre—such as informative or exploratory essay—and then base their evaluations on adherence to their conceptions of that form. They also exhibit more concern with surface textual features than with the intentions, investments, or contexts of the student writers, repeatedly referencing issues like clear theses, comma placement, effective transitions, correct citation conventions, point of view shifts, and concision and clarity at the sentence level. When they do mention growth, they describe it in terms of students' progression through this particular program.

Also in contrast with the tenure-line faculty, this group exhibits a desire to reach agreement among themselves throughout the transcript. They are more given to co-constructing a collective stance than distinguishing and arguing their own stances, and the transcript is more characterized by short, overtly conversational statements than lengthy exposition. Differing perceptions certainly emerge and point to differing ways of assessing students' papers, but these differences are largely overlooked in their discussions, as the participants look for and emphasize their points of agreement, which tend to center on finding problems with surface issues.

The perspectives exhibited here and elsewhere in this transcript are far more locatable in a time and place of this first-year writing program: the chronotope they evoke and occupy is largely circumscribed by their training and experiences as teachers at this location. In line 10 above, Bob not only attempts to categorize the writing according to a recognizable school genre, he also tries to place the writer in a particular class (9–17). In this program, most students take 1101 and then 1102, and that is the terrain on which Bob places the students' literate trajectory. The assumption of the group is that writers progress in abilities rather uniformly in the program, from 1101 to 1102, regardless of the approach and orientation of their teachers, the background and propensities of the student writers, or the particular readings and assignments in the classes. The assumption is also that incoming students are similar enough, and the rate of progression is regular enough, that students can be identified with reasonable accuracy as being in 1101 or 1102 based on the reading of one of their essays and the type of writing that is being solicited.

The tenure-line faculty establishes their expertise with their peers through staking out different positions in writing education; in contrast, this group establishes expertise by applying what they learned together in a specific era of the program as the most important aspects of writing. Disagreements surface

but then are largely unacknowledged as they seek a sense of certainty through talking toward consensus on a common standard and locating students on a predictable trajectory of learning in this program with each draft.

*As Tony and Lil mapped teachers' values toward the goal of developing a common standard for a large-scale assessment, they wondered about the relationship between faculty education, professional status, and the ways that people value within institutional contexts. As they listened to and analyzed the transcripts of the tenure-line faculty in rhetoric and composition, they noticed how the rhet/comp faculty approached valuation as an extension of their individual theoretical orientations toward pedagogy and as an occasion for open-ended dialectic. As the rhet/comp faculty discussed what they valued, they approached moments of dissensus as opportunities for clarifying positions and differences, rather than as problems that needed to be overcome. In contrast, the full-time lecturers seemed to talk toward consensus, and they didn't develop a metadiscursive conversation about writing; they relied on the institution for the framing of arguments for how they valued. Tony and Lil began to wonder how one's training and employment status might condition his or her perceptions of, and stakes in, valuation. Tenure-line faculty have more power to disagree and are rewarded in their scholarly work for developing intellectually creative and novel theoretical rationales for their pedagogical values. Contingent faculty, typically, have little incentive for public disagreement, and they have little stake in broad institutional or disciplinary debates over what writing is or how it should be valued. In fact, because adjuncts often teach at two, three, or even more institutions simultaneously, flexibility may be a more durable and successful quality than firmly held pedagogical positions.*

Consensus building as an aspect of writing assessment certainly has a long history. It developed, in part, out of a struggle with interrater reliability in holistic writing assessment. Reliable scoring requires a singular, consistently applied standard. In much of the assessment literature, differences among scorers concerning how and what to value is often posed as a problem, an error that must be overcome. Edward W. Wolfe, Chi-Wen Kao, and Michael Ranney describe the problem of scorer dissonances this way:

When essays are evaluated in large-scale assessment settings, scorers make judgments about how well specific pieces of work demonstrate writing competence. Such judgments often result in differences of opinion between two scorers. In a psychometric system (i.e., one that emphasizes maintaining high levels of quan-

titative indicators of consistency among scorers), differences of opinion are seen as potential sources of measurement error and indicate a need for further training or refinement of the scoring rubric and training materials (Moss, 1994). (qtd. in Wolfe, Kao, and Ranney 465–66)

The emphasis in scorer disagreement in large-scale writing assessment (see, for instance, Engelhard) is on identifying the possible reasons for disagreement and remedying it in various ways, such as through changes in the selection process of scorers or ways that scorers are trained. Reliability has as a premium scorers valuing the same essays in the same ways. Dissensus is explored only to the degree that it creates reliability problems for the assessment (Elbow and Yancey). The focus is not on recognizing and contrasting different values, though these different values are consequential for writers everywhere other than in the controlled environments and contained moments of large-scale assessments.

In other assessment scholarship, discussing disagreements over standards is an important benefit of programmatically engaged portfolio assessment. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Pat Belanoff and Peter Elbow developed a program initiative at SUNY at Stony Brook that used portfolio assessment as an impetus for program-wide discussions of standards. Advocating group grading of portfolios, they stressed the importance of teachers critically examining their standards and working toward agreement, even as they asserted that complete agreement over standards was neither possible nor desirable. This melding of professional development and portfolio assessment became a common practice in writing programs that used programmatic discussions of assessment either to norm grading across sections or to develop standards for large-scale assessments (see, for instance, Broad, “Portfolio Scoring”; Durst, Roemer, and Shultz; Smit).

The ongoing challenge is to generate assessments that acknowledge differences yet apply a common standard in order to produce results in large-scale assessments that are satisfactory to administrators and accrediting bodies. In their recent overview of college writing assessment, Peggy O’Neill, Cindy Moore and Brian Huot acknowledge that WPAs seeking to create informed assessments can find themselves in conflict with institutional administrators who may be coming from very different philosophical perspectives. The common answer in the assessment scholarship, as they suggest, is to reach a local consensus on standards through discussion that starts at dissensus but ends at agreement: “Positions of individual evaluators can change as the rational debate ensues, with the final decision coming out of consensus or compromise”

(51). This is certainly the basic framework for DCM and the favored process in the assessments listed at the WPA Assessment Gallery (<http://wpacouncil.org/assessment-models>), which offers eight positive models for research-informed assessments. Among the eight models, disagreement among instructors concerning the standards that are applied to student writers is not mentioned, or there is no detailed description of precisely how consensus was achieved. In none of the descriptions is the faculty status (part-time, full-time, tenure-line) described as a complicating factor in the development of the assessments.

*The details of “rational” compromise toward common values for a large-scale assessment became of concern and inquiry for Tony and Lil. As they analyzed the transcripts and considered the situatedness and complexity of what they found, they wondered about the qualitative processes and practices that surround a consensus driven standards model. How, for instance, do local social dynamics, politics, and histories shape, or undermine, the consensus building process? How do differences in instructor status and educational backgrounds play a part in what they are willing to state publicly and how much they are willing to risk? What of the tense, ongoing institutional struggles for power that involve assessment and are so much a part of contemporary life in higher education—particularly in the shadow of the accountability movement and the market-driven higher education “reform” schemes that are being passed in state legislatures?<sup>6</sup> As qualitative researchers, Tony and Lil could see the gaps between the representations of the program they were being required to offer through their institution’s narrowly conceived assessment mandate and the messy material enactments of teaching/learning and writing “there.”*

*Tony and Lil were concerned about the order that is created by assessment, and about the tensions between clean, ordered representations and messy materiality, between static, circulating representations and dynamic, ongoing praxis. Most of all, they were concerned about what ideological interests various means of ordering serve through inclusion and exclusion. When they mapped the values that emerged on the transcripts, they found richly diverse, conflicting, often contradictory, statements that were difficult to locate categorically. They could also see how easily dissenting views become cordoned off, even absent on their maps. They questioned assessment practices documented in the professional literature that forged a singular moment of consensus, calibrating scorers and achieving reliable numbers according to a singular set of values when so many different values were always in operation at any site. Looking at the transcripts,*

*they saw that what and how people valued was connected to an array of factors, including their disciplinary orientations, their ideologies, the institutional power with which they were vested, the orientations and curricula at other schools at which contingent faculty taught, and even to past WPAs and moments in the history of the program. They were compelled to be reflexive about the tensions between narrative ordering and the messiness of experience. They seriously doubted whether any singular moment of consensus achieved for the purpose of conducting an assessment could fundamentally change how these faculty were working as teachers in classes—what they were valuing in practice.*

Kamberelis and Dimitriadis's descriptions of differing chronotopes of literacy research point out that politics and emancipatory struggles came more strongly to the fore in much of the literacy research in the 1980s. In this research, truth is seen as constructed, produced through social processes—rather than being discovered, as in objectivist research. Rational consensus is possible, but it is arrived at through reasoned argument in forums that provide the opportunity for what Habermas calls “practical” or “emancipatory” rationality. However, Kamberelis and Demitriadis point out that this view of consensus began to change in the literacy research (44–59). Some recent research is shaped by those like Baudrillard, Foucault, and Lyotard, who warned that consensus not only is often achieved through coercion but actually elicits at least surface complicity with hegemonic belief systems. These theorists reject the notion that power and competing ideological perspectives can ever be turned off in real social situations, and they argue that what is suppressed also operates as a force in any social scene. Kamberelis and Demitriadis describe research that recognizes resistances, alternative points of view, and alternative ways of seeing and that strives to incorporate those resistances and alternatives into their methods and conclusions.

*Tony and Lil believed that those involved in large-scale assessment needed to recognize how valuing is stratified within the institution, and no matter how much WPAs seek to be participatory and democratic, power would be manifested through their work. All assessment practices are inevitably positioned within hegemonic struggles, and those who administer and use the results of assessments must work to identify and accept the consequences of assertive action within those struggles.*

*Tony and Lil grew wary of claims of rational consensus within complex*

social dynamics. They could see how the maps they created distributed large parcels of terrain to particular values, creating gated communities that privileged certain narratives about success in writing and walled out the less desirable values held by others. They felt compelled to make visible both the varieties of values that were present in the program and the unequal power relations among those involved with first-year writing. They could see in the maps how differing ideas of literacy, different chronotopes of literacy, animated various values. The idea of differing chronotopes helped them to recognize how the assessment's design and performance related to and could create ruptures with the program's curricular history and with institutional expectations and processes.

Embracing struggle in the assessment provided an opening for relating assessment to the troubled terms of labor in the program. The cadre of thirty-five to forty part-time faculty teaching in the program were turning over at a rate of a third each year, so there was no real way to compare the teaching work being done in the program in one year with the work being done in another. Sixty percent of the courses were being taught by part-time instructors who were paid \$2000 per course, had no benefits, and worked on only one-semester contracts. Full-time, non-tenure-line instructors taught 30 percent of the courses, and while they did receive three- or five-year contracts and a benefits package, they taught four-four loads and made about 10 percent less than the national average. The remaining courses were taught by second-year MA students who made an annual stipend of \$9000 and received no benefits. The reporting mechanisms for the assessment afforded no explicit opportunities to mention these terms; instead the reports placed emphasis on aggregate performance numbers, comparisons with past numbers, and plans to raise the numbers by the next assessment. The chronotope of the assessment mandate not only carried an objectivist ideology concerning measurement and literacy, but it also enacted a corresponding efficiency-driven, neoliberal ideology of labor and management. It shifted the focus from the terms of work that transparently undermine learning to the efficient achievement of circumscribed, measurable outcomes in texts. It carried the view that a writing program is a uniform curriculum and a set of policies and procedures, rather than the laboring bodies, expertise, and creative activity of human agents. The assessment mandate was not concerned about whether or not Tony and Lil were applying the "measure" to classes taught by the same faculty members as the prior assessment three years earlier. In terms of the institution, objectivist logics and the underlying economic and power relations they sustain were supposed to remain safely intact. If Tony and Lil generated numbers within a prescribed

*range (and how often are numbers generated by writing programs about their own performance ever not in the prescribed range?) administration would be justified in proceeding without providing much-needed support for the writing program.*

*Tony and Lil had to comply with the mandate, but they decided to do so while making visible the problematic nature of what they were being asked to do. To accomplish this, they collected a random sample of first-year writing papers and prepared a rubric using generalized categories. They then wrote descriptors for each of the categories from two different vantage points based on the qualitative research that they had done, asking faculty to describe what they valued in student work and to read the same twelve student essays. One stance valued formalist characteristics located in the writing, the stance of faculty most associated with the prior writing curriculum. The second, a more expressivist stance, focused on developing writers (not writing). From these stances they constructed two rubrics—both with the same categories but different descriptors for each category. They then “calibrated” two sets of readers, one with each rubric, to read the same set of papers from these vantage points. Their assessment met the basic requirements of the mandated assessment but allowed them to show how differing values (or at least the two dominant value systems manifest in the program) sort students in different ways. The results of their assessment, therefore, made visible the constructivist way that they see both literacy and learning and the limitations of objectivist assessment to measure students’ writing development. Their assessment consciously came out of a differing chronotope, a different way of seeing pedagogy, language, and assessment. Their report delivered two sets of numbers, without favoring one stance over the other. They also forwarded a detailed account of their qualitative research on what faculty value to show the wide varieties of values that faculty inside the program and across the disciplines bring to bear on students’ drafts. This account also described the terms of labor of teachers. The overall strategy was to provide numbers in satisfaction of the assessment mandate, even as they emphasized that any standard, any set of values and criteria, is constructed, materially situated, and in contention. They wanted to show that students’ work sorts out differently, depending on which value system dominates. They also wanted a report that offered numbers alongside other factors—such as the terms of work for teachers—that need to be considered when responsibly assessing a program.*

### **The Troubled Terms of Democracy and Valuation**

Assessment philosophy, pedagogical philosophy, and terms of labor for teachers are interdependent, mutually reinforcing elements of a chronotope. The heavy

reliance on contingent labor and corresponding hierarchical administrative structures that characterize so much of the scene of postsecondary writing education fit with more objectivist views of assessment, which can be used to fix writing education in a stable, predictable mold that carries a formalist view of language and presents itself as a-situational, a-ideological. Within this chronotope, all of the pieces work well together. Contingent teachers with minimum qualifications to teach writing are plugged into “commonsense” pedagogical models. These models are maintained through such programmatic mechanisms as standard textbooks and syllabi and “one shot” workshops that aim to train rather than to educate and sustain intellectually dynamic, open-ended, research-informed conversations about writing education. Assessments can be conducted as unilateral processes that purport to verify programmatic adequacy to administrators through applying a standard rubric to students’ work. The practice of using exclusively quantitative measures that derive singular, aggregate scores keeps the sometimes vast differences in pedagogical stances and quality that operate in actual writing classrooms safely hidden. Contingent faculty do not have the professional status to demand meaningful consultation, and a lack of professionalization and identification in the field of rhetoric and composition contributes to a lack of interest in making such demands. So as its results circulate, the assessment’s validity is assumed as “a given” rather than as a constructed set of values that are rightly subject to scrutiny and debate. Consumers of assessment reports do not have to know that what is valued in writing is subjective, actively contended, and contextual; that the writing faculty in the program are turning over at such a high rate that after a given three-year period, over half of the faculty have left; and that teacher evaluators not only did not necessarily agree with the values applied in the assessment, but also were able to achieve agreement on scoring only through calibration and ongoing negotiation during the scoring process.

Through emphasizing outcomes measurement, such assessment can support the continuance of “business as usual” in a writing program, providing evidence that all is well enough in the current structure and undermining arguments for more resources and a full-time, professionally vested teaching faculty. Tony argues elsewhere that in spite of “the now widespread consciousness of the overuse and exploitation of contingent labor in composition,” there is little research that investigates the ramifications for programmatic cultures and day-to-day writing pedagogy (19). Rather than seeking to understand these ramifications, “the field’s normal science continually sutures the split between disciplinary ambitions and projections and the material realities of

writing education” (19). Positioned as lower management who are responsible for managing situations they have little real role in creating, WPAs find ways to make contingent teachers who have, at best, para-professional status in their institutions feel as though they are institutionally empowered—giving a “voice” to contingent teachers in institutionally mandated assessments is an example. So the WPAs’ roles are ameliorative rather than transformative, and programs that are functioning under unacceptable terms are made to appear as though they are functioning well. From the vantage point of higher administration, if students are performing to statistical expectations, why not continue to do writing education as cheaply as possible?

### **Dissensus as a Value: Democracy as Struggle**

Kamberelis and Dimitriadis argue that emerging literacy research necessitates a new chronotopal frame that takes a stronger turn toward understanding literacy and research in terms of power and struggle. We argue that assessment research needs this chronotopal frame as well. This understanding of power is substantially shaped by Foucault, for whom truth is always related to power, and the creation of truth is an ongoing, even obsessive, function of power. The connection between truth, power, and everyday life is essential to Foucault. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis point out that Foucault coined the combined term *power/knowledge* because they are co-dependent and largely inseparable (47). While commonplace assumptions create warrants and justifications for power, power is constantly concerned with ensuring that foundational knowledges are reproduced in everyday social life. Research and assessment provide validity for status quo assumptions and power relations, creating what Foucault calls “regimes of truth.” Researchers and those involved with writing assessment should thus be concerned not only with the overt manifestations of power—for instance, how it becomes codified in policies and regulatory processes—but also with how it manifests and reproduces itself in the “micropractices of everyday life” (Foucault 138). Power manifests in the questions we ask about literacy, the methods we deploy to answer the questions, and the vocabularies and narratives we use to articulate what we find. Typically a prerogative that remains unquestioned, assessments are enacted in ways that leave important questions off the table, such as: Who mandates assessments? Who is in a position to determine what is valued? What views of literacy do various values reflect and enact? How do scores (valuations) circulate beyond the program and what are the consequences?

*Consensus* has a mantle of neutrality and can mask the agenda of those whose values are dominant. The assessor is imagined to be following the will of the local culture through enacting open-ended democratic processes that recognize the equality of all relevant agents. When those who solicit and conduct assessments move beyond the scores and focus on the qualitative details of what happens in large-scale writing assessment, they see that many valuable outcomes are not measurable as discrete elements and perhaps don't even manifest in texts. Outcomes, even when explicitly stated, are subject to interpretation, negotiation, and contestation in actual practice. Readers see outcomes manifesting differently in texts (which is why objective assessors must continually calibrate scorers—so they don't interpret individually) because literacy is complicated and situated, and therefore not subject to distanced evaluation or "one-size-fits-all" rubrics.

There is this cliché that "literacy is power," which describes the power that is alleged to come to those who become "literate" in a society, but it is perhaps more true that "literacy is involvement in broad struggles for power" that are economic, racial, gendered. We should be wary of consensus-building processes, like democratically achieved common standards for mandated assessments, that neither address nor represent in their circulated results inequality and struggle and that define a "rational" process of consensus, relegating the suppressed and dissonant to the irrational. Democratic processes can be used as a means of achieving complicity with unjust structures when consensus is valorized over struggle and the important questions—like who is teaching what under what terms—are left off the table. In situations that require change, those of us who are involved in writing assessment carry the burden of acknowledging, engaging in, and representing struggle. No matter how much we seek to be participatory and democratic, power will be manifested *through* our work. Democratic processes don't happen in "natural" spheres outside of power. Our work is inescapably positioned within hegemonic struggles—ideological, political, bureaucratic, philosophical—and we must find ways to identify and acknowledge the consequences of assertive action within those struggles.

*The "new" curriculum that Tony and Lil advocated created disruption by repositioning the work of teaching writing, arguing for writing as a complex sociocognitive interaction with the world that entails, in part, establishing and maintaining social positions, adapting to variable discursive conventions, constructing ideas and relationships for oneself and others, and understanding how technologies,*

*diasporas, and further global integration of the economy are transforming how we conceive and perform writing. Their position was intriguing to many of the writing faculty who were either working within this vein or wanting to explore this new direction for their work. Others were puzzled and unsure about moving toward a curriculum that didn't give them the formulas to teach ("Toulmin" or "Rogerian" argument, for example). Tony and Lil saw that any widespread consensus concerning values that could be built over differences of opinion of what we were teaching writing for risked being either philosophically contradictory or an exercise in procedural compliance, rather than being indicative of deeper shifts in perception that would lead to substantive changes in pedagogical practices. Moreover, regardless of how they conducted the assessment, its results would circulate within an organizational hierarchy that mandates numbers that show that students are progressing in the acquisition of universal, measurable language skills. Regardless of how they wished to redesign the curriculum, the assessment would become part of the ongoing struggle to maintain the status quo. In student learning outcomes assessments the goal is to use student work to reflect on a program and improve instruction so that students' writing "improves." In the old curricular and testing model, nothing structural needed fixing. The terms of labor created an adaptive culture, which placed a premium on convergence of opinion, postures of consensus, and can-do narratives of success under difficult circumstances. Student writing produced for the writing assessment was the effect of these institutional arrangements, and assessment naturalized the program's inadequate resources and formalist teaching practices, investing them with a veneer of authority and expertise.*

As we entered into discussions about values we found dissensus: issues that could not be resolved and remain unresolved. We found that dissensus enables an ongoing, continuous interrogation of, from our vantage point, the mystification that there are "universal" standards for, and values that can be applied to, student writing. In a programmatic assessment, the most pressing questions are "Who is the 'we' that values? And whose values impose a consensus?" More important were the consequences for students and teachers when their work appeared as outliers: work, like the soccer draft, that highlights frictions between values and causes us to clarify our differences. Dissensus enables and constrains disciplinary power and expertise just as it disrupts the illusion of programmatic coherence. Dissensus foregrounds the unequal relations and the continual struggle for power, where issues erupt and differing

strategic alliances are formed. Conversations we have had both with program faculty and with other WPAs at a meeting of the Council of Writing Program Administrators showed how student work becomes a litmus test for those who agree or disagree with one's values. Faculty tell of being coerced into grading student work in ways they did not value or of being humiliated in front of other faculty when their values didn't conform to those imposed by their programs. We started asking faculty and colleagues to think with us about where certain "values" come from—the histories of differing values and the social work that values perform. We keep asking "who is the 'we' that values in this way" in order to press what we see as the objectivist logic that creates the common sense that "good writing is good writing."

In contemporary educational life, we cannot imagine that agency for teachers and students exists outside of the organizational architectures, the technologies of management and valuation, the institutionally determined terms of work that shape what we do. As an increasingly pervasive and political mechanism of "reform" in the organizational architectures of education, assessments are often used to obfuscate differences, create centers and margins, and align the work of teachers and students within a neoliberal, consumerist framework that emphasizes economic efficiency, procedural closures of debate, and static predictability. In contrast, some scholars have recently proposed approaches to research that account for the complex ecologies, the hybridity, and the sheer messiness and unpredictability of composing in real situations. For instance, Kristie S. Fleckenstein et al. argue for research methods that are as reflexive, untidy, and aware of the intricacy and fluidity of their ecologies as the composition processes and rhetorical acts they seek to understand and represent. They describe knowing itself as necessarily in motion, overtly conscious of its involvedness with the "known," and open to continual evolution as new phenomena undermine stable representations:

If the phenomenon we wish to understand is 'complex, diffuse, and messy' (2), then we need to "find ways of knowing the indistinct and the slippery without trying to grasp and hold them tight" (3). Counterintuitive though it may be, complex, diffuse, and messy phenomena require—must harmonize with—complex, diffuse, and messy research methods. (Law, qtd. in Fleckenstein et al. 389)

The methods that we use should seek alignment with what we seek to understand and represent: without such alignment, they argue, "the knowledge we create and the applications derived from that knowledge are flawed: limited, reductive, and subject to misleading clarity" (389). Assessments should be no

less responsive to situations, no less resistant to reductive representations, and just as aware of variety, dissonances, and macro and micro struggles for power as the research methods these scholars describe. Rather than appearing as clear and objective representations that result from natural-seeming measurement procedures, assessments should be represented as *praxis*, as reflexive involvement in the vexed, complicated workings of programs and institutions. Assessments should strive to create three-dimensional portraits and resist representations of the work of students and teachers that are “limited, reductive and subject to misleading clarity.”

Our work on this assessment opened up conversations both in the program and within the institution remaking the assessment scene. “Being there,” as Chris W. Gallagher calls for, means making visible the laboring bodies of those who write and teach writing. Being there means being in messy struggles, particularly when the struggle is over better terms for writing education and educators. Consensus surrounding values closes off the complexity and diffuseness of the scenes of first-year writing and jeopardizes open, democratic, intellectual life. Rather than consensus in assessment, we need conceptual oppositions that make available differing values, their histories, and their critiques. The reification of assessment categories makes student writing a commodity that contains “things” independent of human interaction; so doing, it aligns with the belief that texts can be measured, that the growth of student writers can be tracked in fifteen or thirty weeks, and that simple causal connections can be made between what student writers learn and what teachers of writing teach. Assessment as a global programmatic mandate masks the local, specific, and situated practices of student writers and their teachers. Being there and remaking the assessment scene are messy and difficult. At stake with assessments and their representations of work are the autonomy, professional status, creative latitude, and educational and literate possibilities of teachers, students, and programs.

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## Notes

1. This research was conducted under IRB Protocol 08-09-39 UNC-Charlotte.
2. At the time of this project, Tony Scott and Lil Brannon worked at the same institution. In 2012, Scott moved to Syracuse University.
3. Allan Hanson argues that assessment is ubiquitous because it serves as a means of ordering and disciplining. He describes practices as varied as medieval witch tests, drug tests, polygraph tests, and standardized achievement tests that help to maintain order through culturally or politically sanctioned categories. In *The Mismeasure of Man*, Stephen Jay Gould examines how nineteenth-century studies of skull sizes and shapes operated to reinforce racial stereotypes concerning intelligence and character. The deeply flawed research provided a scientific rationale for systematic racism.
4. For a description and historical examples of the cultural, productive function of assessment, see Allen F. Hanson.
5. For a full version of the essay under discussion, see the online version of this article.
6. For elaboration on the relationship between market fundamentalism and assessment, see Gallagher, 453–55.

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### Tony Scott

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### Lil Brannon

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## Appendix: Student Essay

### In Between the White Lines

In recent years soccer has grown to be the number one sport participated in by females in the United States. Soccer is truly emerging in the lives of millions upon millions of girls. All over the country little girls come out to learn how to play in intramural or recreational leagues. Throughout their teen ages, young ladies are devoting their lives to club soccer, travel soccer or youth leagues. In this day and age, there are even adult leagues for older women who choose to continue to play. From ages ranging anywhere between four and forty, girls and women alike are playing the beautiful game. In the United States alone, there are 321 female Division 1 college soccer teams competing in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). With thirty to thirty-five girls on each team and 321 teams out there, that's about eleven thousand, two hundred and thirty-five girls in Division 1 colleges alone who compete. I am one of those girls. I am a female soccer player and for me life has always been and always will be on the soccer field.

Once you step across that white line, all outside thoughts fade away. You are solely to be focused on soccer. You train the way you think, and you play the way you train. The field is a sacred place, and it should be treated as such. - Coach Smith. Soccer is an intense sport. In order to be able to grasp exactly how much of a person's mind, body, and soul it requires, you'd have to play it yourself. Not only would you have to play it, but you'd have to play it at an elite level. An outsider talking about soccer does not even touch the surface when describing what goes on, in the actual field of battle. All your senses are alive and throbbing when you play. Whether you're at early morning training, or playing in a late night game, your senses soak up all the field has to offer.

I have grown up as a soccer player, and when I define myself as a person, I use soccer. When first learning how to play I used my eyes. When taking kicks and throw-ins, my Dad, a competitive man by nature would always tell me simple tactics that as a child I thought would go a long way. "Look one way and kick it the other way" my Dad would say, and that's exactly what I would do. As I got older and began learning how to defend fancy players who had mind boggling moves, new advice was given to me by coaches. "Watch the ball not the player's feet. The ball is what matters." I was constantly reminded to watch Men's professional soccer on television because I would learn from these older, experienced, extremely talented players.

When playing, a key tactic is to never ball watch. Ball watching, unlike when you're defending a player with fancy footwork, is never a good thing, and it usually kills you in a game. While playing you are always looking for the next cue, or next position you are required to be in. If you are ball watching you are focused on just the ball and where it's going. You are not doing your job, and therefore you are letting down your team.

Once you've been playing soccer at a high level, for a decent amount of time, plays seem to just click in your head. You can visualize a run, or a ball being played into a space that you already know will be open because you've seen it happen before. You imagine tactics, and footwork put into use and choreography flowing along allowing you to score a goal that you've already pictured in your head forty seconds ago. On the field you read the game with your eyes, you anticipate what's happening next because you've seen it, and witnessed it previously. Watching soccer creates muscle memory, and therefore you know what to do when you have the ball, you know where to play it to. Seeing soccer is only the beginning of playing the game.

Hearing things on and off the field can either be beneficial or harmful. On the field, it's the opposing team, your teammate and yourself. The only person a player should have to listen to who is located off the field is the coach. Otherwise, everyone else shouldn't matter. Tormenting

crowds, obnoxious parents, or even head enlarging encouraging comments should all be blocked out. These outside noises hinder your play at times, and only distract your mind from the game. The only thing a player should focus on is the communication between her teammates and her coach. On the field, communication is a key component. Talking to each other and giving direction is extremely important however, hearing and listening to each other is vital. Without communication and hearing, players would most likely get confused, overwhelmed and uninformed. In pre-game talks, as well as half-time speeches coaches are constantly giving out crucial information. If you don't hear this information and you don't take it all in, you risk being lost out there on the field. You risk being subbed out of the game, and replaced. Most of all you risk putting your team in a bad position. Hearing is a key to success when playing.

When I walk on a field, early in the a.m. the smell of the morning dew always puts a smile on my face. The moisture that flows through my nose fills me with oxygen and energy for the game or training session ahead. The fragrance of the freshly cut grass is a familiar scent to me. I find that it awakens me to play. Although I don't like it when the grass gets all over your cleats and legs when rolling and stretching in it, the smell of it sure tickles me in a good way. The scent of rubber on brand new balls makes me eager to test them out. The same goes with new equipment. Some people like when their shoes are new, but when I have new crisp, cleats or boots, the first thing I want to do is run around and get them dirty. The worst smell in soccer for me personally, has got to be either my shin guards or my plain self after I play. Shin guards over time develop a nasty stench, which usually rubs off on my shins leaving them smelling foul until I shower. After playing, I reek. I drag around a funky odor from sweating all game or practice, but usually my teammates cannot smell me, because they emit some weird smells themselves. Scent is another sense that allows you to be aware of your environment. I can smell a freshly cut field the second I step on it.

Touch. Touch is the strongest sense I believe that you use when playing on a soccer field. As you mature as a soccer player, and continue to play with a ball at your feet, you develop a "touch" on the ball. Some people have some of the most amazing touches on the ball you will ever see. They are either naturally gifted players, or very hard working players. A player with a bad touch is a very difficult player to play with, or trust. If you don't have a good touch on the ball, then you let the ball dictate where it wants to go, and that will absolutely make you look like a terrible player in a game. On the field different surfaces can cause your touch to be off, or enable the ball to be hard to handle. Such surfaces can include bumps, divots, and dirt piles or recently just in, hidden sprinkler systems! Either way, when on the field, you must be able to control the ball at your feet and all this comes from touching a ball every day, and creating a relationship with it. Some of the best soccer players in the world can kick a ball and hit the same exact spot from thirty yards out about fifty times in a row. Some can even keep the ball in the air with their feet with their eyes closed. These are remarkable players who fell in love with touching the ball.

Another form of the touch sense that is necessary, especially when you are an older player is the act of being physical. The clichés of female soccer players in recent history have been that we are pansies, and too gentle. Oscar Wilde a Irish play Wright, poet and author of several short stories once said "Futbol is all very well as a game for rough girls, but is hardly suitable for delicate boys." Rough girls are exactly what we are. On the field, you have to be prepared to sacrifice your bodies for all different things. On corner kicks you must stick your head in seams and places that one's skull should never be in. On blocking shots you must sacrifice your legs, stomachs, faces. If hit hard enough the ball mark will only last a couple of days, and the stinging about ten minutes tops. When tackling you must be willing to throw elbows, and receive them back. The most exhilarating experiences are when you are matched up against a player who doesn't like to be touched. That's when you get in their head all game and you make contact with them. You shove them, not with your hands but with your upper body. You impose yourself on them and you let them know that you have the upper hand. Being physical is the only way to

survive on a field. Sure you might have good footwork, a rocket of a shot, and the ability to pass perfect balls, but if you're not willing to battle and fight for your teammates and your own pride, than you shouldn't play soccer. Going to war on the field is eighty percent of the game. The other twenty percent of actually playing comes from winning the battles. Being physical and having the sense of touch has always been something I enjoy when playing. When I step onto the field I know that my body will have to endure a lot of pain. It's just part of the game and its part of being on a soccer field.

The last sense that you use on a soccer field is taste. Some people think it's weird, but at times I enjoy tasting my own sweat. Alex Rodriguez, a professional baseball player, says this about sweat, "Enjoy your sweat because hard work doesn't guarantee success, but without it you don't have a chance." Tasting my own sweat is an indicator that I'm working hard and pushing myself as well as the players around me. Another vibrant product that I've had the joy of tasting would surprisingly be my own blood. As disgusting as it sounds, when you're playing, there comes a time when you get hit, and you get hit hard. The best part about these circumstances is that sometimes you are so mentally involved in the game, you don't even notice it. In a game you can get smacked, elbowed, even slammed in the mouth and you bleed... and then you continue to play.

A similar instance where you are required to be tough and continue to play would be when your team runs fitness. Fitness is a sensitive, touchy subject for most athletes, let alone female soccer players. Running, sprinting and testing your limits on a level of that sort can cause people to throw up and get sick. While playing at an elite level for numerous years of my life, I was always taught that if you get sick, you go to the side, get sick and when you're done you jog back onto the field to play. It's a crude atmosphere, which supports the statement, only the strong survive.

Another taste that I enjoy feeling on the tip of my tongue would be any type of non-carbonated liquid. Water is a highly recommended drink, as well as Gatorade. The best feeling in my opinion, is when you're done working out and you chug a bottle or cup of cold Gatorade. Recently in college there have been two drinks offered to me for when I finish playing. Chocolate milk for after training sessions, which helps your body to recover, and also a new mixture called Endorox. Endorox works the same way as the chocolate milk; however it is a lot stronger and more effective. I despise the Endorox because I hate the after taste and I have strong gag reflexives. The chocolate milk, on the other hand, I'm very fond of.

The soccer field for me has always been a place that I can call my own. I've traveled to many different countries, and played on countless different surfaces, however, once I cross the line to play I feel at home. There is a different type of energy that I receive when being on the field. It's the imagery of my shot sinking the ball deep into the goal, and the hard fought physical tackles I feel myself making. It's the roar of the crowd that I can hear after the exuberant taste of victory. It's the smell of the moist air when I get up in the early morning to train on my own, in order to better myself as a player. The field as a whole puts all your senses to work. For me and millions of female soccer players throughout the country, the green grass and the white lines are cherished. The field is a place that we all hold close to our hearts.