

## **Academics' understandings of the authorial academic writer:**

### **A qualitative analysis of authorial identity**

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#### **Abstract**

Research on authorial identity has focused almost exclusively on the attitudes and beliefs of students. This paper explores how academics understand authorial identity in higher education. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 27 professional academics and analysed using thematic analysis, identifying themes at two levels. At the semantic level was a main theme called 'the authorial writer', with five subthemes: 'authorial confidence', 'valuing writing', 'ownership and attachment', 'authorial thinking', and 'authorial goals'. At the latent level were two integrative themes: 'tacit learning' and 'negotiating identities'. The semantic subthemes represent attributes that could be targets for pedagogic interventions. The integrative themes suggest processes in the development of authorial identity, which can inform more effective teaching. By identifying attributes and processes associated with authorial identity, these findings help towards a psychological understanding of authorial identity, informing development of more effective pedagogy to help students improve their academic writing and avoid plagiarism.

Keywords: plagiarism; authorial identity; academic writing; pedagogy; thematic analysis.

## Introduction

Plagiarism has been defined as acts that: “take and use the thoughts, writings, inventions etc. of another person as one’s own.” (Concise Oxford Dictionary). Other definitions of plagiarism appear similarly straightforward, but analysis of university policies has shown that defining plagiarism is often complex (e.g., Sutherland-Smith 2008; 2011). There is some disagreement about the scope of plagiarism; in particular, some commentators have questioned whether the actions of students who are simply not familiar with referencing should be classed as plagiarism (Howard 1995).

Regardless of how it is defined, student plagiarism is a major concern for universities worldwide. A UK survey of 93 higher education institutions revealed 9,229 cases of formally recorded plagiarism in one academic year. The action taken included 143 students who were expelled, 2,372 assignments that had to be resubmitted for reduced or capped marks, and 2,192 formal warnings (Tennant and Duggan 2008). Even more students are at risk of punitive sanctions against plagiarism, as 46% of undergraduates in one UK study reported that they had plagiarised an entire paragraph at least once (Bennett 2005). In a US study with over 63,000 respondents, 36% of undergraduates reported copying a few phrases or sentences from web sources and 38% reported doing the same from written sources (McCabe 2005). The dominant strategy for dealing with plagiarism has focused on detecting copied text, and the use of punishments where considered suitable. However, traditional ‘deter and detect’ strategies have significant limitations so institutions should complement them with more positive pedagogic strategies to help students avoid plagiarism (Park 2004; Macdonald and Carroll 2006; Sutherland-Smith 2011).

One pedagogic approach to plagiarism focuses on improving students’ authorial identity. This concept, first described by Romy Clark and Roz Ivanič (Clark and Ivanič 1997; Ivanič 1998), was defined as ‘the sense a writer has of themselves as an author and the textual identity they construct in their writing’ (Pittam, et al. 2009, pp. 154). The authorial identity approach helps students to understand the role of the author and see themselves as the authors of their university assignments, with advice and guidance about how to approach academic writing in an authorial way (Elander 2015; Elander et al. 2010).

This approach to plagiarism prevention relies on a theoretical framework of authorial identity that was developed by examining student perspectives (Abasi et al. 2006; Pittam et al. 2009) and developing psychometric models of student attitudes and beliefs (Ballantine et al. 2015). For example, a recent analysis of students’ questionnaire responses identified three factors associated with authorial identity: authorial confidence, valuing writing, and identification with author (Cheung et al. 2015).

The student perspective is important but another group of stakeholders has been overlooked in previous work: the professional academics who assess student work. Researchers have examined staff perspectives on student plagiarism (Flint et al. 2006; Wilkinson 2009) and aspects of academic writing (Harrington et al. 2006), but authorial identity theory also needs to be informed by research on academics’ understandings and beliefs. This is important because academic staff play key roles: acting as role models of authorial academic writers for students; marking and giving feedback on students’ academic writing; and designing and delivering pedagogic initiatives to help students improve their authorial identity.

The present study aimed to gain insights into professional academics' understandings of authorial identity in academic writing, in order to guide the development of initiatives to help students develop stronger authorial identities. There is no shared understanding of authorial identity among academics, just as there is no real consensus about meanings of plagiarism (Sutherland-Smith 2008). Academics' understandings of authorial identity might also be expected to differ between subject disciplines. For example, Ballantine et al. (2015) suggested that similarities and differences between understandings of plagiarism and authorship among students in Psychology and Accounting might be explained by the ways that those disciplines would be classified by Biglan's (1973) typology of academic disciplines.

We conducted interviews with professional academics across a range of disciplines and institutions, asking about their perceptions and understandings of authorship and authorial identity in relation to professional academic practice and student writing. The objectives were to 1) identify attributes of the writer associated with strong authorial identities, which could indicate useful targets for pedagogic interventions, and 2) identify processes in the development of authorial identity, which could inform the pedagogic methods to be used in such interventions. The research strategy was not to ask participants directly to identify those attributes and processes, but to gain insights into their perceptions and understandings that could be interpreted in terms of attributes or processes in order to inform pedagogic initiatives.

## **Methods**

### ***Participants and recruitment***

Recruitment targeted a heterogeneous sample of academics from UK universities with experience of assessing undergraduate academic writing. The heads of 20 academic departments were approached, and 13 gave permission to recruit. Individual academics in those departments were sent invitations to participate, with assurances that neither individuals nor institutions would be identified in study reports. The 27 participants were from five UK universities and a variety of subjects: Psychology (n=5), Philosophy (5), Education (3), Allied Health Subjects (3), Engineering (2), History (2), Business (2), Biological Sciences (1), Mathematics (1), Law (1), Languages (1), and Music (1). To be included in the study, participants had to a) have taught for at least one year in a publicly funded UK higher education institution, b) work in a department corresponding to their own disciplinary area, and c) have experience of assessing undergraduate coursework. Participants were excluded if they a) had not taught in an HE context in the last five years, or b) did not have experience of undergraduate teaching and assessment. There were no inclusion or exclusion criteria related to the types of assessments participants were involved in setting or marking.

There were 16 male and 11 female participants, aged from 29 to 60+, with a range of teaching and academic publishing experience. Five were Professors with an extensive range of publications and decades of teaching experience, six had 20 years of teaching experience and less engagement with research publishing, and three had become lecturers in the previous three years. The remainder had experience of teaching and publishing research that ranged from five to 15 years.

### ***Procedure***

All participants were briefed about ethical considerations and research aims before taking part. The interview schedule was also sent to participants before the interview, allowing participants to consider the topics in advance, as some academics were concerned about discussing the sensitive topic of plagiarism.

The interview schedule covered issues related to authorial identity and higher education. The schedule included questions about participants' own sense of authorship, their understandings of the role of the author in a professional academic context, and their perceptions of student authorship from experiences as university teachers. Follow-up questions were used to explore areas of interest or probe participants' perspectives. Development of the schedule was informed by the literature on authorial identity and student plagiarism (e.g., Abasi et al. 2006; Elander et al. 2010; Hyland 2002; Ivanič, 1998; Pittam et al. 2009), and was refined following two pilot interviews with academics that were not included in the present study.

Participants were given written information and invited to ask questions before the interviews, and audio recording did not start until informed consent was given. Participants were also invited to add comments at the end of interviews. All interviews lasted between 40 and 80 minutes and took place in participants' offices or rooms booked on campus. They were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

### ***Analytic Strategy***

The data were analysed using thematic analysis that included familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for potential themes, reviewing and refining the themes, defining and naming the themes, and producing written accounts of the themes (Braun and Clarke 2006). The transcripts and themes were presented to collaborating researchers who acted as auditors of the analysis, a step suggested by Elliot, Fischer and Rennie (1999), and the team continued to review the analysis regularly throughout the process.

Two sets of themes were identified: a semantic main theme and subthemes, and integrative latent themes. The semantic subthemes represented distinct characteristics of authorial academic writers, as understood by participants. The subthemes were developed inductively, by examining the semantic content of the transcripts, following guidance that semantic themes are 'identified within the explicit or surface meanings of the data, and the analyst is not looking for anything beyond what a participant has said' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 84). The main theme was identified by reviewing the semantic subthemes, which clustered together as attributes of an authorial writer.

The integrative latent themes represented psychological processes associated with authorial identity development. These themes were developed more interpretatively, with the aim of explaining the development of the authorial attributes captured by the semantic subthemes. This was consistent with the recommendation that latent themes 'examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations – and ideologies – that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 84).

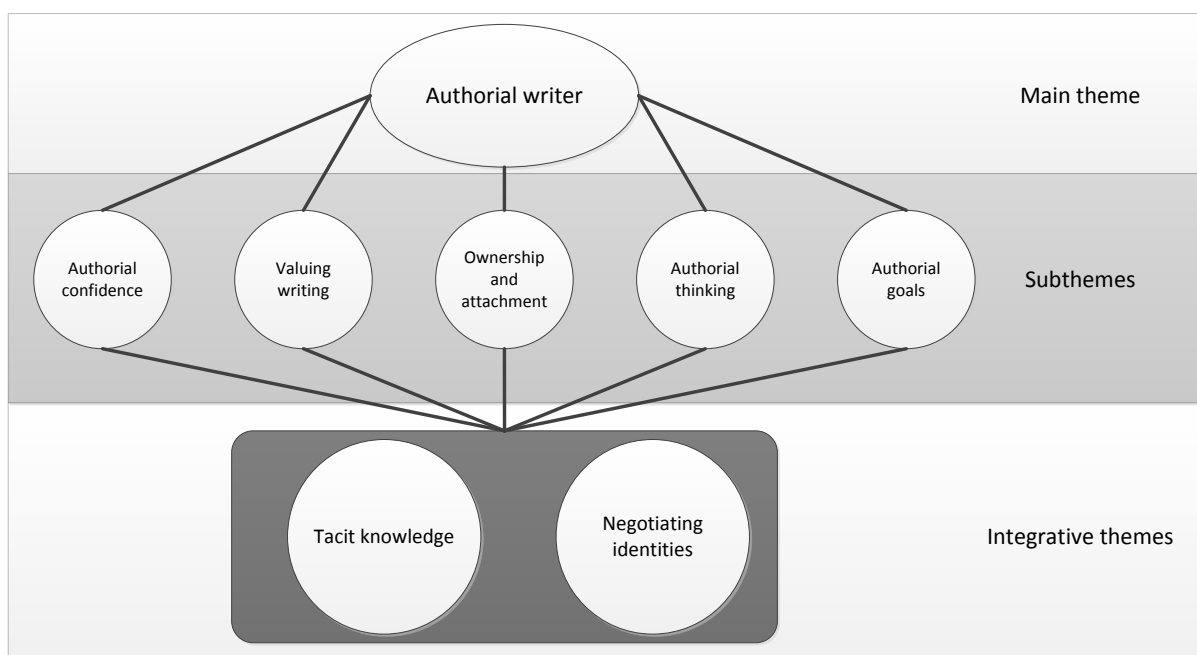
The two types of themes were identified in parallel during the six-stage process described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Therefore, the approach was a hybrid thematic analysis similar to Fereday and Muir-Cochrane's (2006) analyses involving both inductive/descriptive and deductive/interpretative theme development. Quotations are referenced with

pseudonyms and subject areas. They are presented as extracts from verbatim transcripts using (.) to denote short untimed pauses. For brevity, some extracts have also been shortened by removing intervening passages. Care has been taken not to change the meaning of passages and ... denotes where text has been removed.

## Analysis

Initial semantic themes were identified and it became clear that participants understood authorial identity as a cluster of attributes that applied to the writer. The main theme was labelled 'authorial writer', and the constituent themes were organised as subthemes representing typical characteristics of professional or student writers with relatively strong authorial identities. Sub-themes were all derived from interview material where there were responses from multiple participants with thematically similar content, so although there was not always unanimous concurrence among participants, all the subthemes reflected concurrence among a number of participants.

**Figure 1. Thematic map of the analysis**



The subthemes revealed that participants understood an authorial writer as one who: has confidence in their role as author; values writing; has ownership of their writing; thinks authorially; and has rhetorical goals in their writing. The two integrative latent themes, 'tacit knowledge' and 'negotiating identities', represented psychological processes that helped to explain the development of authorial identity. A thematic map of the themes identified is presented in Figure 1. This shows the five sub-themes as constituents of the main theme, so that having authorial confidence, valuing writing, and the other attributes described in

subthemes, were interpreted as part of what makes an authorial writer. The thematic map shows the two integrative themes as underlying all the sub-themes, so that tacit knowledge and negotiating identities were interpreted as processes that lead to the development of the attributes of an authorial writer.

### ***Semantic Subthemes***

#### *Authorial confidence*

Authorship and confidence were perceived by participants to be closely linked; they expressed their own self-beliefs about writing when explaining the importance of authorial identity in their own writing:

‘I do think I write well and I think that’s half the battle. So that authorial element is very important for me personally.’ (Richard, Psychology)

Participants reflected on their own development as academic writers, and suggested that increased authorial identity could be attributed to gaining confidence:

‘I remember my husband reading something and saying, well that just isn’t you in the document ... I thought I had to write academically, whereas now, I probably feel more comfortable, more confident, there’s more of me in it, so maybe there’s confidence in there.’ (Janet, Nursing and Healthcare)

When asked whether students developed authorial identity, participants felt that they improved considerably and attributed this to increasing confidence:

‘If they have developed sort of articulate skills and developed the ability to have a strong sense of confidence and analytical skills then they can give effect to themselves as being authors, rather than scribes.’ (Stanley, Law)

However, many students were perceived as not sufficiently confident to adopt authorial roles. For example, one academic suggested that fear and a lack of confidence were barriers to an authorial role:

‘It’s almost as if they are either afraid or not confident enough to have their own thoughts... most of the time they are just not confident enough.’ (Damian, Psychology)

Confidence was therefore understood by participants as an important feature of an authorial writer, and participants expected established writers to have gone through a developmental process to gain that confidence. Students were perceived by participants as lacking in confidence, which they considered to hamper students’ development as authorial writers. This is consistent with more direct evidence from students about lacking confidence as authors (Pittam et al., 2009). Participants in the present study also believed that confidence in other domains, such as thinking, could affect students’ authorial identity, which is reflected in the subtheme *authorial thinking*.

#### *Valuing writing*

Participants valued their own writing abilities and associated these abilities with their authorial

identity. They suggested that students did not appreciate writing skills and that this was a barrier to students becoming authorial writers. Writing of all forms was conceptualised as holding value to participants, including in contexts other than formal research outputs. For example:

‘I’ve had an ambition to write, to write to be published, so, and it’s, that’s why I’ve done such a variety of work whether academic or popular.’ (Lucas, History)

This was not just a shared view among academics with a keen interest in writing; others were aware that their writing ability needed development:

‘I’m in a developing role at the moment to try and enhance my writing skills.’  
(Ryan, Nursing and Healthcare)

Good writing ability was also valued from the perspective of reading articles; this was interpreted as a feature of the writer’s authorial identity:

‘You do have some sense of that person being there, or if it’s just beautiful academic writing you know, you have a sense of gratitude for that person.’  
(Jamie, Engineering)

Participants felt that writing ability should be valued highly by students and described it as one of the most important skills that students needed to be successful in higher education, even in mathematics:

‘We really like students to pay a lot of attention to their writing skill as well as the mathematics. [...] we see this as very important, particularly in mathematics, because apart from showing the equation, you really need to discuss the concepts.’ (Chun Kit, Mathematics)

Participants suggested that some students were unaware of the need to develop skills related to writing:

‘If they don’t have the ... I would describe it as perspective. Skills themselves don’t make sense. Just one, for instance referencing. Okay you can teach it as a kind of rote activity, but if the students don’t have the perspective of why on earth this is important then it’s not going to happen.’ (Damian, Psychology)

Valuing writing skills was therefore perceived to be an important issue in relation to authorship. Participants associated students’ authorial development with their writing skills, but only if those skills were valued by the students, and felt that many students do not appreciate the value of writing skills. Valuing writing might be related to people’s perceptions of *why* they are writing, so the ways that both professional academics and students value writing may well also be related to the subtheme *authorial goals*.

#### *Ownership and attachment*

Recognising ownership of and attachment to one’s written work was considered to be a defining feature of an authorial writer. This was described in terms of having pride in one’s work and taking care over it. Ownership was understood as closely linked to authorship and the two concepts were considered synonymous:

'I feel that ownership and it's that ownership [which] then blesses me with the authorial identity.' (Charlene, Business and Marketing)

Ownership was described as a feeling linked with attachment, suggesting that a writer's ownership of a piece was a personal and subjective experience. For example:

'For me authorship means having (.). My interpretation of that is in terms of the level of pride you have in the end result.' (Dominic, Music)

Ownership was also associated with authorial identity when discussing students as writers; a desire to take ownership of one's written work was perceived as reducing the likelihood that a student would plagiarise. This attitude was expressed when discussing plagiarism specifically:

'My sense is that the students that plagiarise don't have a sense of ownership.'  
(Geoff, Philosophy)

Many academics in the present study believed that the ways students are taught about academic writing made it more difficult for them to take greater ownership of their writing. For example:

'I don't think we give them much room to be able to take ownership, maybe they don't realise they can, maybe that's one of the problems.' (Natalie, Psychology)

In addition, participants compared their own authorial identity with the way that students felt about written work, and expressed concerns that students were less likely to feel the 'love and care' they associated with ownership and attachment to writing:

'Authorship with me as well is about ... about it being part of you, it's almost like a love and care that you give to this essay that you write and I don't know that students necessarily either have the time to be that precious about the work.'  
(Elaine, Languages)

When academics described students with stronger authorial identities, they suggested it was associated with ownership and feelings of 'pride', similarly to descriptions of their own work, and this language of 'love', 'care' and 'pride' tell us something about the subjective experience of ownership and attachment in relation to writing, which participants expressed in their descriptions of their own writing with their perceptions of students' attitudes to writing:

'I felt like it really was owned by that person and I thought it was above and beyond.' (Sarah, Biological sciences)

'They're proud of what they've done and they want to share that.' (Amy, History)

### *Authorial thinking*

Thinking was understood by academics to influence authorial identity, but which aspects were important was dependent on the level of the writer. Some respondents claimed that writing by professional academics was expected to demonstrate distinctive, creative thought, and some considered their authorial identity was inextricably linked to their thought processes:

'When I'm thinking I'm actually thinking in written form. ... I am formulating a couple of sentences which I would write down about what I'm thinking, so the



ability to think, to give a bit of thought and then to cast a beautifully structured sentence, paragraph, page, chapter, is what one longs to do and I feel a strong identity with that.' (Jamie, Engineering)

There was some evidence that when the thoughts expressed were too similar to others, the writer was considered not to qualify as an authorial writer, suggesting that distinctive thinking is a prerequisite for an authorial writer. This was evident in one participant's description of articles written by peers who lacked authorial identity, where the style of writing and the ways the thoughts were formulated made the authors appear interchangeable rather than distinctive:

'I just don't see many signs of actual people writing those papers. I mean the thoughts are obviously theirs. ... I think they are absolutely interchangeable. I'm talking about the style of writing and perhaps even the way of formulating thoughts.' (Damian, Psychology)

In some disciplines, creative thinking was also understood as important for an authorial writer to demonstrate. For example, when asked to describe the elements of writing that showed authorial identity, one academic in Psychology referred to creativity:

'That expression of self and that expression of creativity is a truly fundamental part of a piece of work, it's not necessarily just a mere summary' (Stuart, Psychology)

Different elements of thinking were important when discussing student writing. For example, as described below, when describing work with a strong authorial identity, participants cited examples where the students' thinking processes were reflected in the writing, whereas assignments by students with weaker or absent authorial identities were perceived as lacking thought:

'They've thought things through; they've got more, more sensitivity to the dialect.' (Geoff, Philosophy)

'It ... just looks like a list of references and a list of studies with no real arguments in there. No real thought from the student about what those studies mean.'  
(Naomi, Psychology)

Participants felt that the demonstration of thinking in students' writing helped to reflect authorial identity. For example, one academic explained how authorial identity could be detected in student writing:

'You can hear them having an internal debate.' (Sarah, Biological sciences)

According to this description, identifying work produced by students with strong authorial identities requires some interpretation of the writer's thoughts and internal debates. This reinforces the importance of the author's thinking when considering the requirements of an authorial writer, and also reinforces the close connections between confidence in writing and confidence in thinking, as noted earlier.

### *Authorial goals*

Participants suggested that authorial identity was linked with how writers communicated intentionally with their intended audience. Setting *rhetorical* goals for communication (that is, goals related to persuading a reader about a message or point of view), as opposed to grade-oriented performance goals (that is, goals related to demonstrating knowledge and understanding), was considered particularly important for students. Having a strong message and communicating it persuasively was understood as a requirement for authorial writing:

‘I actually do myself very very strongly make that author comparison, because it’s about audience, it’s about who’s the audience going to be ... what am I trying to convey, what do I want to say.’ (Richard, Psychology)

Participants described the importance of disseminating articles to facilitate academic debate and felt that students did not appreciate this communicative aspect of writing. This was attributed to epistemological naivety and not appreciating the importance of critical feedback:

‘Part of what we do if we write articles for publication is we put them out there to be criticised. You know, that’s what they’re published for isn’t it, they’re published in order to invite people’s comments and feedback ... I think students perceive them as being published because that’s the truth.’ (Robin, Nursing and Healthcare)

This point goes to the heart of the relationship between writing and knowledge; viewing published writing as established, factual knowledge reflects naive epistemological beliefs, whereas viewing writing as part of the process of constructing knowledge reflects more sophisticated epistemological beliefs.

Some problems were attributed to students imitating the voices of established academic authors, for example by trying to write in the style of textbooks and journal articles; this impacted on students’ authorial identity, participants’ felt, because students attempted to project identities that were not their own, so their rhetorical goals (their intentions to persuade or influence readers, see above) were not clear in their writing:

‘Sometimes I say: explain to me as if you are explaining these things to your Grandmother, don’t adopt all the technical terminology and try to sound like a professor when you’re not a professor.’ (Gordon, Philosophy)

Participants suggested that students were not aware of communicative aspects of writing because they wrote exclusively for their tutors and their goals were often purely instrumental – to achieve higher grades:

‘It has a point, but again I get the impression that as far as students are concerned the point is that they are being assessed.’ (Dominic, Music)

Academics described students’ grade-oriented goals as performance goals related to the demonstration of ability rather than communication. These instrumental goals were framed as barriers to developing authorial identity; their effect was seen as conflicting with the communicative purpose of writing. Academics understood the setting of suitable goals as associated with authorial identity, suggesting that setting rhetorical goals should be part of

writing instruction. In addition, a communicative element that facilitated discussion within a community was emphasised as important for professional academics. This could help to develop students' authorial identities by improving their epistemological beliefs related to writing, for example by helping students understand that writing is part of the process whereby knowledge is constructed, rather than just a way of conveying accepted truth.

### ***Integrative Themes***

The two integrative themes were identified at a latent level of analysis and underlie the surface level semantic themes. Therefore, they are not independent from the main theme and subthemes; instead they help explain how the features of an authorial writer can be developed.

#### *Tacit knowledge*

This theme reflected the nature of authorial identity as tacit knowledge, which has been characterised as the automated components of task performance that are not the focus of conscious attention (Tsoukas 2003). Many participants had not explicitly reflected on their own authorship before participating in the study. For them, authorial identity was a part of writing they were not consciously aware of:

'It's [writing in an authorial way] something that comes with practice because you have to be very good at fluently writing so that you don't think about it.' (Trina, Business and Marketing)

Participants believed that the development of their authorial identity often centred on their academic communities, as part of the socialisation process during the development of professional identity:

'It [writing for publication] has to have an impact on identity because each time you feel that you're establishing yourself a bit more within that community.'  
(Charlene, Business and Marketing)

Participants viewed the perception or detection of authorial identity in student assessments as a form of tacit knowledge, describing it as hidden within other elements of writing, such as argument. They described feelings and intuitions rather than explicit indicators of authorial identity in student texts:

'It's quite hard to explain, you just get a gut feeling when you've read it; it's hard to quantify that.' (Ryan, Nursing and Healthcare)

'There is a definite writing style where you realise it's not a collection of facts, it's somebody putting it to you in such a way that hasn't been put before, there's a certain realisation of that, I can't quite explain it in any other way.' (Sarah, Biological sciences)

Participants described teaching methods for writing in terms of implicit guidance, or practice and exposure rather than explicit instruction, and suggested that instruction should be supplemented with opportunities to practice academic writing and reflect on the task.

Examples of methods of writing instruction suggested by participants included modelling aspects of authorial writers represented in the semantic subthemes, such as valuing writing and recognising the communicative goals of writing:

‘In the way that I teach, you know, there is a kind of implicit guidance given about how to write.’ (Arthur, Philosophy)

‘We should be demonstrating the notion of authorial identity and what does it mean to be a writer as opposed to just a look at writing skills. There’s a huge difference between having writing skills and actually being a writer and I think a lot of that is about beliefs, values and identity as well.’ (Jackson, Education)

In some participants’ descriptions and explanations, the implicit way that authorial values and attributes were modelled for students was contrasted with the rule-based approach to teaching about plagiarism. For example:

‘Not one of us tells them about a concept of authorial identity, we give them a lecture about not plagiarising, that’s not the same thing at all, all we do for our students currently is we give them a session on what plagiarism is and how not to do it.’ (Richard, Psychology)

The importance of socialisation within a community was also emphasised as a way of developing students’ confidence and other values related to authorial identity:

‘If they feel like respected members of the community ... it’ll give them more confidence and that will improve their work. It will also, we sort of suspect, mean that they’d maybe be less inclined to cheat.’ (Kareena, Philosophy)

The values and attributes associated with authorial identity were understood as a form of tacit knowledge in which social experiences played an important role for professional academics and students.

### *Negotiating identities*

Participants understood authorial identity to depend on how a writer manages multiple identities, including self-identity (as an individual) and professional identity (as a member of a professional community) as well as the identity they project in their writing, which was perceived as much harder for students than for professional academics. Self-identity was viewed as an important part of authorship that went deeper than ownership of writing as described in the semantic subtheme:

‘I think that concept of authorship, it goes beyond ownership to self-identity as well, it’s a big part of yourself.’ (Stuart, Psychology)

Some participants associated their authorial identity with their professional identities as members of a discipline. For example:

‘The way that I’d been thinking of authorial presence is really tied up, inextricably tied up with what doing philosophy is.’ (Kareena, Philosophy)

‘Traditionally psychology involves that production of a written piece of work which is published for wider consumption and is peer-reviewed along the way, I would think it’s a fairly safe bet that most psychologists would view that as authorship of a piece.’ (Stuart, Psychology)

Certain elements of more practical disciplines were perceived as contributing to a weaker authorial identity among members of those communities:

‘I see authors, true authors as writing books or being published ... We do what we’re trained to do, therefore, academia and writing about it is a world away, it doesn’t, you’ll hear it all the time, it doesn’t make you a good nurse.’ (Janet, Nursing and Healthcare)

This perspective may be more prevalent in vocational and professional subjects, like Janet’s own, which have developed as academic subjects relatively recently. However, even in disciplines with a relatively strong authorial tradition, like psychology, some experienced and published academic writers described a hesitant reflective process as they negotiated their identity as an author:

‘Am I an author or do I just write papers? Is that an author? You know it’s not really, it’s just, it’s that word, the way that word (.) in my head.’ (Naomi, Psychology)

One participant suggested that continuity between pieces of writing was associated with development of an authorial self-identity:

‘Seeing your work as part of a continuous process is quite important because it would be quite demoralising and alienating if you were just creating sporadic and unconnected pieces of work and I suppose the conception of yourself is in some way a kind of constant thing behind that process as well, it to some extent gives it value.’ (Arthur, Philosophy)

Students were observed to struggle to develop authorial identities, partly because the young adult status of many students made identity development inherently problematic, and partly because of potential conflicts with other aspects of student identity, such as identities as young adults, who may be establishing an independent personal identity for the first time.

Participants commented directly on these issues when discussing student authorial identity:

‘In order to have an authorial identity, you’ve got to have an identity first. I think some people wouldn’t think of themselves as authors because they don’t know who they are or what they are in themselves.’ (Anthony, Education)

‘We have whole sets of people who, who maybe don’t buy into authorship or will struggle to buy into the idea of authorship because that’s not what they see their role as an undergraduate as being.’ (Richard, Psychology)

This integrative theme suggests that interaction between the role of an author and other identities is important in the development of authorial identity, so that a mature, strong authorial identity is unlikely to develop in isolation. There was considerable variation between

participants in the extent to which this developmental process had progressed, and students were perceived as subject to significant challenges in this regard.

## Discussion

The main theme and subthemes reflected participants' understandings of authorial identity as a set of writer attributes. An authorial writer was seen as having confidence in their writing; valuing writing; taking ownership of their writing; thinking in an authorial way; and having rhetorical writing goals. These subthemes help us to understand the attitudes and behaviours that characterise a writer with a strong authorial identity, as understood by professional academics, and can be compared with models of authorial identity based on data from students. For example, a recent model identified 'authorial confidence', 'valuing writing', and 'identification with author' as factors making up student authorial identity (Cheung et al. 2015). Two of those factors, 'authorial confidence' and 'valuing writing', closely resemble subthemes in the present study. This supports Cheung et al.'s (2015) student-based model, and suggests that students and academics may understand authorial identity similarly in terms of authorial confidence and valuing writing.

However, the 'ownership and attachment', 'authorial thinking' and 'authorial goals' subthemes from the present analysis were not included in Cheung et al.'s (2015) student-based model, so those themes might reflect writer attributes that academics but not students regard as part of authorial identity. That would not be surprising considering that participants in the present study believed students lack knowledge and awareness about authorial writing, and considering that previous research has also identified differences between students' and tutors' understandings of other aspects of academic writing, like critical evaluation and developing argument (Harrington et al. 2006).

Writer attributes that are recognised by academics but not students may be aspects of authorial identity that students need more help to understand and appreciate, so the subthemes 'ownership and attachment', 'authorial thinking' and 'authorial goals' may be useful targets for pedagogic interventions. Future interventions to improve students' authorial identity might therefore aim to improve their sense of ownership of written work, guide them toward authorial ways of thinking, and help them adopt more authorial writing goals.

Considering the ownership and attachment subtheme, for example, it is possible that interventions for students could adopt or adapt some of the approaches that have been developed for English as a Second Language (ESOL) students, for whom taking ownership of language has previously been identified as important (Chiang and Schmida 2002). Less attention has been paid to ownership of language and writing among native speakers, but it has been suggested that students learning to write in academic disciplines are learning a discourse that is alien to them, even when they are writing in their native language (Ivanic 1998).

In fact, many of the issues with student understandings of authorial identity, as described by the academics in the present study, resembled the difficulties experienced by international and ESOL students in other studies (Abasi, Akbari, & Graves, 2006; Abasi & Graves, 2008), so efforts to improve authorial identity among students more generally might extend pedagogic approaches developed for international and ESOL students, especially those

developed to help international and ESOL students avoid unintentional plagiarism (Abasi & Akbari, 2008; Hamp-Lyons, 2011; Wette, 2010).

Considering the authorial goals subtheme, future interventions might involve exercises in which students write short pieces for non-academic audiences, like lay summaries or press releases for the general public, and then discuss how the communicative aspects of the task affect the writing. This might help students to understand that writing is fundamentally a communicative activity, and encourage them to adopt rhetorical rather than grade-related performance goals in their writing. Having grade-related performance goals may also reflect lack of confidence in writing, and having authorial, rhetorical goals may reflect other authorial attributes, like confidence in writing or valuing writing, and so may appear later in the process of authorial identity development.

The phenomenon of students adopting the writing identities of others and trying to write like professors, as described by Gordon in the description of the *authorial goals* subtheme, may in fact be an important early stage in writing development, for other research has described how novice writers may model other writers as they develop their own authorial voice (Angélil-Carter 2014). Tutors could be encouraged to recognise this and design exercises, perhaps like the one with designated audiences for short written pieces described above, that aim explicitly to help students shift from performance goals to authorial goals in their writing.

The integrative themes suggested that authorial identity could be developed by treating it as a form of tacit knowledge, and by helping writers to develop stronger disciplinary identities. These themes illustrate that authorial identity has a complex, interconnected nature that develops in a gradual process, as suggested previously (Abasi et al. 2006). These integrative themes can also inform the pedagogic methods of interventions targeting authorial attributes.

Our data showed that participants' understandings of authorial identity were consistent with previous research that identified three salient features of tacit knowledge: it is acquired without explicit instruction from experts; it relates to procedural information for specific contexts; and its applications are mediated by personal goals (Elliott et al. 2011). Previous explanations also suggested that tacit knowledge is transferred through the socialisation of novices (Eraut 2000) and that "we learn to engage in practical activities through our participation in social practices, under the guidance of people who are more experienced than us." (Tsoukas 2003, p. 424). This suggests that doing more to socialise students into the relevant academic community could improve their authorial identity.

Identifying authorial identity as a form of tacit knowledge is important for educators because current plagiarism pedagogy focuses on explicit, codified knowledge, often categorising offences and explaining the categories to students, in attempts to unpack some of the concepts related to plagiarism and make them more explicit. Even 'holistic' plagiarism initiatives focus on improving explicit, codified knowledge about referencing (Kaposi and Dell 2012). Previous authorial identity interventions also used conventional teaching methods, with sessions presenting examples of writing, followed by teaching knowledge about authorship, plagiarism and approaches to writing (Elander et al. 2010; Elander 2015). However, a key insight of identifying authorial identity with tacit knowledge is that there are limits to what can be achieved by making concepts and principles more explicit for students.

Tacit learning interventions take longer to implement than explicit instruction as they involve a wider range of activities in different settings. To our knowledge, tacit learning

approaches have not been employed in initiatives to counter plagiarism, but applied to writing, tacit learning approaches can resemble apprenticeships rather than direct instruction (Collins, Brown and Newman 1986). These would provide opportunities for repetition and habit formation, and less emphasis on conscious, explicit learning, consistent with descriptions of academic writing as tacit knowledge learnt through 'mental osmosis' (Elton 2010, p. 158).

Our findings about aspects of authorial identity that resemble tacit knowledge suggest that authorial identity could be developed and promoted as a set of skills and attitudes rather than as knowledge and understanding, and interventions might resemble the teaching of professional skills (Eraut, 2000). As noted earlier, our data suggested that instruction should be supplemented with opportunities to practice academic writing and reflect on the task, including aspects of writing performance that are difficult to codify explicitly. The *tacit knowledge* theme in our data included elements related to exposure, modelling, practice, reflection, and development of communities, some of which are techniques already recommended for improving students' writing skills (Kellogg and Whiteford 2012), as well as their understanding of learning and assessment (Rust et al. 2003).

The integrative theme *negotiating identities* illustrated how authorial identity involves a developmental process of maturing and gaining experience as a writer. It also illustrated the interaction between individual self-perceptions and shared disciplinary or professional identities. Viewing authorial identity as part of negotiating identities allows us to consider the importance of a writer's relationship with their academic discipline and links authorial identity to perceiving oneself as part of the academic community. This suggests that authorial identity initiatives might benefit from encouraging disciplinary writing identities in students, for example by exercises in which students write for different disciplinary or multidisciplinary audiences, or discuss and explore ways that writing in their own discipline may differ from that in other disciplines.

There is evidence already that disciplinary communities influence authorial identity. Hyland (2010) analysed the text of expert writers to identify techniques used to convey authorial identity, and found that academic communities and conventions were used as rhetorical devices: "The analysis suggests that the performance of an identity is always shaped by our goals and by the demands of the context as we walk a tightrope between projecting an individual persona and taking on social roles and qualities valued by community members." (Hyland 2010, p. 183).

The role of communities in developing authorial identity among more novice writers has not been investigated so far, but students might be helped to develop stronger authorial identities by participating as junior members of their academic communities. This takes place to some extent already, but could be developed and extended, for example by involving students more systematically in activities usually designed for staff and postgraduates, like journal clubs where published papers are discussed, and seminars to discuss specific published research findings. This might mean making routine teaching more similar to the ways that professional academics share and develop knowledge, and developing ways to support and encourage less confident students to take part in what might appear to be more 'advanced' forms of learning.

A social dimension was common to both integrative themes; both tacit knowledge and negotiating identities referred to communities that form the broader context of academic writing. One challenge for promoting student authorial identity will therefore be to ground



student learning about authorship in a wider social context and make that meaningful to students, so that students can more easily understand and appreciate the social and communicative aspects of academic writing. Workshop activities to include students in communities of practice have been effective for developing understanding of assessment, with exercises in which students took on the role of assessors to practice making quality judgements about academic writing (Rust et al. 2003). Interventions to promote authorial identity could adopt the same approach, with exercises that enable students to view academic writing from different perspectives, including those of people in other roles within the communities they belong to.

The emphasis on social and communal aspects of learning in our data, especially the integrative themes, also means that pedagogy for authorial identity may be able to draw on methods used in the honor code system, which has been used with positive results to counter plagiarism in the USA (McCabe and Treviño 2002). The honor code system is related more to honesty and integrity more than the development of writing, but authorial identity initiatives might still benefit from cultivating shared values among students and professional academics. Approaches to other aspects of higher education, like persistence and drop-out, have also benefited from adopting a theoretical framework emphasising academic and social integration, and by promoting a greater sense of educational community among staff and students (Tinto 1998).

The present findings suggest initiatives to improve authorial identity need to consider social integration, and add to the argument for teaching methods that help communities develop. This could involve students delivering interventions to improve students' authorial identity, building on initiatives where students acted as peer mentors in writing programmes (Bakhshi et al. 2009; Elander et al. 2011).

Methodologically, the study employed a relatively large sample of academics, for qualitative research, and covered a range of disciplines at multiple institutions, whereas most previous authorial identity research focused on individual disciplines at fewer institutions (Pittam et al. 2009; Ballantine and Larres 2012; Maguire et al. 2013). However, further research is needed on several aspects of authorial identity. Future studies could include qualitative and quantitative explorations of students' understandings of the attributes described by subthemes in the present study that did not resemble themes in previous studies of student understandings of authorship. Research with students could also focus on how students perceive and understand academic writing in relation to tacit learning and disciplinary or community identity, the integrative themes in the present study.

Future research might also compare student writing and authorial identity between disciplines, or focus on disciplines like mathematics or music, where writing might stereotypically be expected to have a more secondary role, but where participants like Chun Kit and Dominic in the present study suggested that writing skills are in fact highly valued, and students are expected to have pride in their writing (see the *valuing writing* and *ownership and attachment* subthemes). However, the most important areas of need for future research are arguably to understand the process of development of authorial identity, and to evaluate practical interventions designed to help students develop stronger authorial identities.

To conclude, the present study identified five key attributes associated with authorial identity, and two integrative processes associated with the development of authorial identity. Identifying those attributes and processes provides a more psychological understanding of

authorial identity, which is important for the development of interventions to improve students' authorial identity. The five key attributes can be the targets for interventions aiming to improve students' authorial identity, and the integrative processes can guide pedagogic methods for use in future interventions to improve students' authorial identity.

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### **Appendix: Schedule of interview questions**

Please note that this schedule is not a rigid framework and further questions may be asked to encourage clarification and deeper explanations during the interviews.

What is your definition of an author? [This question was not included in schedule sent to academics in advance]

In what ways do you think your sense of yourself as an author is important in your own academic writing and publications?

In what ways do you think the author's presence in the text is important, when you are reading articles written by other academics in publications?

How do you think this sense of yourself as an author relates to your sense of self as a member of your academic discipline and community?

In what ways do you think a student's presence in the text is important, specifically when reading and assessing academic assignments written by students?

How do you think that the student's presence in the text relates to the quality of the grade received when assessing student assignments?

How do you think a student's sense of identity as a member of the academic community effects their academic writing?

How do you think students' approaches to learning and study skills effect the sense of themselves as authors of their assignments?

What difficulties do you think students have when expressing their own identity in their assignments?

Are there any particular groups of students that have more difficulties than others with conveying a sense of authorship in their academic writing?

How do you think that students' sense of themselves as authors could be improved?

What particular features in text do you think impact the way that a writer's presence is conveyed to the reader?

How do you think the conventions about the presence of the author in academic writing may differ in your own academic discipline when compared with others?

How do you think that this sense of self relates to student plagiarism?

Psychological research has suggested that undergraduate students lack understanding of 'authorial identity.' How do your experiences relate to this assertion?