

CHAPTER 14.

INTEGRATING THE  
MARGINALIZED AND THE  
MAINSTREAM: WOMEN OF COLOR  
GRADUATE INSTRUCTORS'  
EXPERIENCE WITH IDENTITY,  
DIFFERENCE, AND BELONGING

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Despite decades of research and theory on teacher preparation in writing programs, issues of difference along axes of race, sexuality, nationality, language, and disability have largely been ignored, and all too often graduate instructors are figured or assumed by default to be White, straight, U.S.-born, proficient in U.S. Standard English, and able-bodied. The few narratives in the field that do share marginalized graduate instructors' experiences show how racism is endemic to writing programs and the field more broadly, how students treat teachers of color as spectacles, and how teachers of color experience microaggressions from students and faculty (Carey; Craig and Perryman-Clark; Walker et al.; see also Madden et al.; Phillips and DeLeon). Kelsie Walker and her coauthors suggest that the field perhaps has so few perspectives from marginalized graduate instructors because of the time and emotional energy it can take to write about one's own experiences and because of the risks involved (such as calling out a program for White supremacy) (98). And Jasmine Car Tang and Nora Andriamanalina observe, "Studies of graduate students of color paint a bleak picture, citing racial isolation and racial microaggressions as part of everyday experiences of this student community" (11). The lack of attention to graduate instructors' experiences in the field's literature is symptomatic of a larger problem of normativity in writing programs. Genevieve García de Müller and Iris Ruiz observe that "Discourse about race in writing programs have been very scarce" (20). Further, Christina V. Cedillo argues that the field

of rhetoric and composition is structured along “standards of white eurowestern ablebodiedness.”

This chapter addresses this gap by sharing narratives from three graduate instructors in Texas Tech University’s first-year writing (FYW) program. While TTU is officially a Hispanic Serving Institution, it is still predominantly White: roughly 53% of students are non-Hispanic White, and Hispanic students constitute roughly 27% of the student body; further, faculty are overwhelmingly White (72%) (Texas Tech University Fact Book). When the editors of this collection contacted Michael about contributing, he knew that the field didn’t necessarily need another White writing program administrator’s (WPA) perspective on difference within writing programs (though this too is important, as we need White WPAs who actively take up antiracism and other anti-oppression approaches; see, for example, Wible). Michael invited three graduate instructors in the English department—Michelle, Meghalee, and Jiaxin—to collaborate on this chapter. This collaboration is driven by the field’s need to hear the experiences of non-White or otherwise-marginalized graduate instructors and that collaboration can be a site of feminist and antiracist interventions in scholarship. As Alexandra L. Lockett et al. suggest in the conclusion of *Race, Rhetoric, and Research Methods*, collaborative authorship can serve antiracist and coalitional goals because it can promote “difficult conversations about race and improve one’s understanding about how to talk about it” (229). Indeed, as we collaborated on this chapter, we learned from each other about the challenges and opportunities of marginalized graduate instructors and worked through how to talk about our own understandings of identity, power, oppression, and privilege.

Drawing on methodological practices theorized by feminists of color and critical race theorists, we center Michelle’s, Meghalee’s, and Jiaxin’s narratives in this chapter. bell hooks argues for the importance of women’s narratives, especially those that are nondominant, because such stories can place “identity in relation to culture, history, politics” (110). Further, if these stories are not told, we risk reinforcing normative narratives in ways “that all experience that does not fit the model is deemed illegitimate or unworthy of investigation” (110). Victor Villanueva too has spoken of the importance of narratives from people of color, which can validate others’ experiences, awaken consciousness, build solidarity, and build (on) collective memory (“*Memoria*” 15-16). Aja Y. Martinez points to the historical, social, and political systems of oppression that shape knowledge and theory in the field and suggests that to counter these systems, we need methodologies grounded in critical race theory because they challenge notions of neutrality and objectivity in dominant epistemologies that tacitly legitimize white privilege and silence and distort BIPOC epistemologies: “methods that empower the minoritized through the formation of stories that disrupt

the erasures embedded in standardized majoritarian methodologies” (3). As Ruiz notes, “The personal essay brings us into visibility” (29; see also Powell; Villanueva, “Rhetoric”).

As we recognize the ways that telling our own stories bring us into visibility, we also want to take time to acknowledge the race, culture, land, language, sex, gender, and ability privileges that we benefit from in a society that values whiteness as capital. As WPA, Michael acknowledges his privileges that come with being White, cisgender male, visibly able-bodied, tenured, and U.S.-born. Michelle recognizes her privileges as a cisgender woman who is racially White and ethnically Mexican; she grew up in a Spanish/English bilingual household and in U.S. English-speaking public schools. Meghalee is a cisgender female international student from India. She grew up speaking Bengali and Assamese socially and was enculturated into English in primary and secondary school. Jiaxin is a cisgender Han Chinese female, international student from China. She speaks Mandarin Chinese as her primary and native language and learned English from the nine-year compulsory education and senior high school.

As non-Black and non-Indigenous scholars, we acknowledge how the land TTU is built upon was stolen, through violent colonial and imperialist practices, from the *Numunuu* (the Comanche). In the nineteenth century, the *Numunuu* lived on this land before Spanish, Mexican, Texan, and U.S. American colonialism. The land on which TTU is built, like all land in the United States, was cared for and occupied by Indigenous people before settlers arrived. We recognize the settler colonial practices that contributed to Indigenous genocide, and we acknowledge that we benefit from the settler colonial practices that perpetuate a history of violence against Black and Indigenous people in the United States.

We take time to reflect on the ways that excluding Black and Indigenous voices in our classrooms and excluding anti-racist theory from our assessment practices sustain the systems of oppressions that we seek to challenge. We also commit to continuing to reflect on how our teaching and research practices perpetuate oppressive systems of whiteness, ableism, and heteronormativity, and, more importantly, to actively work against these systems in our praxis. An acknowledgement is not enough to combat the historical colonial and racist logics of higher education, but we believe, following Andrea Riley-Mukavetz, that it “is an important gesture of acknowledging Indigenous visibility” (549). Moreover, Vershawn Ashanti Young calls on us to move beyond acknowledgements that merely recognize the systemic oppression of Black people in daily life by personally committing to using our individual platforms to counter injustice and then personally calling upon others to join in the active effort to root out anti-Black sentiment.

By writing this chapter, we hope to open a conversation in the field that centers the experiences of marginalized graduate instructors so that (1) WPAs

begin to seriously consider how to transform their programs to support graduate instructors marginalized along axes of difference; and (2) graduate instructors can engage in dialogue that promotes a collective subjectivity amongst themselves—one in which graduate instructors commit to learning, and putting into practice, strategies for leveraging their own privileges to counter the injustices that each individual subject within their collective faces.

### **MICHELLE'S NARRATIVE: BRIDGING IN NEPANTLA: REFLECTING ON RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING PRACTICES AS A GRADUATE INSTRUCTOR**

Gloria Anzaldúa tells us that within liminal (threshold) spaces—spaces she theorizes as *nepantla*—transformation happens: “Nes tierra desconocida, and living in this liminal zone means being in a constant state of displacement—an uncomfortable, even alarming feeling. Most of us dwell in *nepantla* so much of the time it’s become a sort of ‘home’” (Anzaldúa and Keating 1). In Anzaldúa’s seven stages of *conocimiento*—the shift from fragmented, conflicting identities toward one that embraces the perspectives of one’s own, and the identities of others, as means for transforming reality—*nepantla* is the second stage.

However, Anzaldúa reminds us that it is not enough to dwell in *nepantla*; we must attempt to bridge: “attempt community, and for that we must risk being open to personal, political, and spiritual intimacy, to risk being wounded” (Anzaldúa and Keating 3). This requires rethinking the borders of our race, gender, and identity and developing a multicultural perspective “that takes into account the whole planet” (3). We must connect through our differences to dialogically and collaboratively imagine a new reality, and “act consciously on our ideas” (5).

In this narrative, I examine the processes of relationship building in graduate school that have shaped my teaching and research practices. I begin by considering how I am positioned within my institution: as a Ph.D. student and graduate instructor in a predominantly White English department at a PWI. As a first-generation college student and Chicana, I value a multicultural view of language. I recognize the ways that ideologies that privilege Standard Academic English promote assimilationist pedagogies in the writing classroom and how those approaches to teaching language erase and stigmatize the home languages of minority students (Flores and Rosa), thus perpetuating the raciolinguistic discrimination that ensures that minority perspectives remain minority perspectives instead of allowing those perspectives to shape a shared reality. To promote the development of language identity, a curriculum must connect to, value, and leverage students’ own experiences with language and literacy. When I was a first-year Ph.D. student in technical communication and in rhetoric, I

took courses on entire subject matters in language and communication that did not critically address culture or race. If race or culture was addressed in my early coursework, it was in passing: a week of readings dedicated to issues of culture, race, and gender or a nod to “diversity” in the field. What’s more, discussions about race did not seem welcome, nor were they comfortable in class discussion. In my foundational courses, we discussed feminism and critical theories of culture without discussing experiences of BIPOC; we discussed new materialism without even a nod to Indigenous ontologies of knowing and being that presume non-human agency. Bringing up race or culture in these contexts felt like a faux pas, like discussing politics at a dinner table with the family of a friend. I often spent quite a bit of time after each class regretting that I had spoken and wondering if I had overstepped. When conversations around culture and race came up in many of these classes, they were often brought up by BIPOC students—not by professors and not through course readings. I learned early in my graduate studies that it felt much more comfortable to stay silent; I was not even sure I had a choice. After all, I chose to come here, I chose to come to a PWI to study and teach in a predominantly White field. Perhaps I was a guest at a dinner table who should be grateful for the invite.

As a graduate instructor, I found the curriculum I taught equally passive on issues of race, language, and culture. For example, the course textbook and readings only superficially acknowledged how race, culture, and gender affect rhetoric and meaning. A discussion of cultural language practices by these means can be simply explained by audience and audience awareness—where the audience that students are writing to is often imagined as White at a PWI. That is, in a context that is predominantly White, audiences like the instructor, students in the class, or experts in a field can be presumed White. And if we were to consider the presence of the few instructors or FYW students who are not White to trouble this argument, I would still counter that bodies that uphold values of whiteness in their actions are indeed conduits of whiteness. How can I value my students’ cultural language practices without knowing what they are? Without making space for even discussing them in my classroom? And, if I do have those discussions with my students, how can I honor their linguistic practices in classroom discussion and then assess their work based on Standard Academic English practices? These are questions that troubled me in my first year of teaching.

I struggled with how to integrate multicultural theories of teaching into my classroom and into my research that came from my instinct to survive by clinging to my privileges. As a light-skinned Latina, naturally born U.S. citizen, and native English speaker, I did not feel that I bore any markers that would necessarily separate me as an outsider or other in my program. Taking up a Chicana Feminist epistemology of teaching and research required me to openly position

myself in my work. However, I eventually found that I felt more uncomfortable passively engaging in a pedagogy of assimilation. I knew the value of multicultural perspectives on language; multicultural theories of being had allowed me to find my voice as a writer. However, as a Woman of Color and a first-generation college student from a working-class background, to bring my perspectives of teaching into the classroom felt like risking my positions in the academy—like outing myself as not belonging in the field at all.

As I began to incorporate readings on language, culture, identity, and oppression from BIPOC writers into my classroom, I worried about facilitating conversations on race with my students: I worried whether I was prepared to navigate these conversations, and I held a much more present fear of backlash from student complaints that these conversations might incite. Although, now as I reflect on inviting these conversations into my classroom, I see that the fear of being underprepared to navigate these discussions should be a more fervent concern than fear of backlash. I have found that my students, even in predominantly White classrooms, relate to and actively engage with multicultural theories of language, that they are able to address race, class, gender, and culture in empathetic ways as they negotiate how their own language experiences and knowledge relate to the conversations in class. What I worry about now is how I can reflect on and improve my teaching praxis in a program that does not provide antiracist teacher training nor prepare teachers for navigating discussions around language, race, and culture.

The problem I see, both as a graduate student and as a graduate instructor, is that critical conversations about race and culture are sometimes acceptable, sometimes welcome, but seldom initiated by White colleagues. Indeed, White faculty are often resistant to implementing antiracist strategies in the classroom, either because of discomfort or fear of consequences to their long-term career success (Akamine Phillips et al.). Even White faculty who have noted their personal benefit from multicultural pedagogy feel they lack guidance for approaching antiracist conversations in their classroom (Smith et al. 654). However, without explicitly antiracist programs in place, our curriculum remains racialized as White—inherently racist because it is built in the racist academy and purposed for white domination (Inoue; Peters). As WPAs struggle to address issues of race at all levels of their programs, it is WPAs and compositionists of color who are largely doing the work to account for race (García de Müeller and Ruiz). However, these WPAs—as do I—often feel reluctant to discuss these goals with their colleagues because of the discomfort with discussing race in the field. Without colleagues to discuss and reflect on practices with, I rely on the antiracist, decolonial, and multicultural literature to self-evaluate as I move through each class period, unit, semester.

As I consider my experiences negotiating my positionality as a graduate instructor and assistant WPA with the experiences of my Women of Color colleagues, I imagine the writing program itself as a liminal space, where multiple perspectives and ideologies shape the reality of the classroom spaces that FYW students occupy—a place where those who, regardless of identity, can connect through shared motives of empowerment.

### **MEGHALEE'S NARRATIVE: IDENTITY AND IDENTIFICATION: BUILDING COMMON GROUND WITH FYW STUDENTS AT PWIS**

I am an international graduate instructor working towards my Ph.D. in technical communication and rhetoric, and as I develop my professional identity, I am aware of how much it is a product of the intersections of my nationality, language, culture, gender, and race. Thus, my writing, and by extension how I teach and evaluate writing, is rooted in my lived experiences, which I adapt to the needs of my audience, comprised largely of White students. In my attempt to establish identification with an audience that is so different from me, I make purposeful decisions about which identities to express and suppress. But this can sometimes lead to the loss of those very cultural characteristics that are meant to add value to a PWI through diversity in perspectives and practices. In this narrative, I reflect upon my positionality as a person of color, FYW instructor, and non-native English speaker, and I explore what role my identity and efforts of creating common ground with students at a PWI play in influencing my pedagogical practices. Is adapting to the dominant group's cultural norms and their standards of English and composition an effective teaching approach, or does this marginalize my own identity?

Not all international graduate instructors have the same experiences because we are not a homogenous group. But considering that 70% of international students in the United States are from countries in the Global South, the demography of American higher education is evolving (Duffin). I hope these reflections give a glimpse into the experiences of international graduate instructors; help WPAs consider these factors during orientation, mentorship, and teaching evaluations; and create a space of solidarity with other transcultural and translingual graduate instructors.

Previous scholarship in this area emphasizes the complex identities of transcultural and translingual educators (Canagarajah; Varghese et al.) and that these identities are a resource, not a deficit (Morgan). However, academic and professional writing continue to follow Eurocentric standards, often disregarding other Englishes. In such a context, I see my transcultural and translinguistic identity

as fluid, yet intentional; I strategically express, integrate, reflect, and suppress myriad sociocultural and linguistic characteristics as an instructor, so that I can effectively create common ground and identification with my students. This works particularly well when I ask ice breaker questions and in assignments where students write about a piece of media that shaped their values. During these interactions, a lot of pop culture or sociopolitical references come up, symbols which students might not associate with their “foreign” instructor but are surprised when they realize I do know them. These discussions allow them to perceive me as not so alien anymore, and I feel more comfortable knowing that I am not being solely judged on my ethnicity.

Once a student wrote about my shoes in minute detail in a free-writing class activity, and I was relieved that I was dressed in Western business formal attire while teaching because I didn’t want to be under scrutiny for my sartorial choices. I also used examples, readings, activity scenarios, and so forth that were U.S.-centric because my students would identify with these issues more, and I thought it would improve my credibility and reduce any ethnicity-based micro-aggressions. And even within these U.S.-centric issues, I tried to avoid topics which could potentially lead to heated discussions, such as racial inequities, police brutality, White supremacy, and cultural appropriation. In one class, I had a White student who wanted to analyze White privilege from “both sides,” even justifying how being White can be a disadvantage. His response to my feedback made me uncomfortable, and I wasn’t sure how to handle this project. In another class, I assigned readings on how social media affects behavior because I thought if I assigned texts seen as too political, I would be seen as an outsider by my students if I commented on a sociopolitical theme affecting U.S. society.

Perhaps it was a lack of experience in teaching, uneasiness of interacting with undergraduates in a foreign country, or a cultural hangover of maintaining hierarchies and not questioning the dominant groups, my first semester of teaching was mostly about maintaining the status quo and erasing any differences in my goal of creating common ground. I would watch the sci-fi show *The Expanse*, in which one of the main characters is United Nations Secretary General Avasarala, who exudes power wearing the most vibrant saris on screen regularly, and that would make me miss wearing my traditional Indian clothes or jewelry to work. All the videos, songs, or readings I used for rhetorical analyses in my FYW classes were strictly from the United States, while I educated myself about the civic and historical issues of this country, disregarding my own.

As an instructor, I would ignore things in class which would be considered highly disrespectful and offensive in my culture. One time, a student had his feet on my desk, where I kept my books and stationery. All learning materials in my culture are associated with the goddess of learning, Saraswati, and although



I am not particularly religious, I cannot dream of touching my desk or books with my feet, especially in front of my teacher! But I justified it by thinking U.S. society does not have formal hierarchies between student and teacher like in South Asian societies, and U.S. students don't know the connection between the "impurity" of the feet and the sacredness of learning tools.

I also hesitated to ask for advice from teaching mentors as I come from a high-power distance culture. Sometimes I didn't even know what to ask, and many terms, like "course reserve" and "interlibrary loan," were new to me. Teacher observations and reading student evaluations were anxiety-filled events, and although I have received fairly positive comments, I have been part of numerous conversations with instructors who were mocked by students in class and course evaluations due to their accent or ethnicity. While I was spending so much energy in adapting to the dominant culture's norms, I felt frustrated and confused about how to make inclusive pedagogical choices that did not diminish my identity.

With time, positive feedback from mentors, progress in my own research and understanding of intercultural communication, and an exhaustion from anti-immigrant rhetoric and political gimmicks, I developed a new-found *migritude*, a term coined by Shailja Patel to represent an attitude where migrants "speak unapologetically, fiercely, and lyrically for themselves" (143). I was ready to "break silences—personal, familial, global, historical" (100)—in spite of the risks involved when migrants ask questions, such as losing jobs, visas, even lives. When U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) threatened to deport international students for attending online classes during a pandemic in July 2020, I was in the middle of finalizing my syllabus and answering students' questions for a writing course I was teaching in summer. I was in tears thinking I might not even be in the country the next week but had to keep myself composed for my students even though I was stressed out to the point that I felt sick. But I, along with many international students who were used to keeping a low profile, was done keeping quiet, and I received a lot of support from my school.

During this time, I was researching an interpretive constructivist approach to intercultural interaction, which weaves the individual and social into a dialogue with each other. Out of this process, there emerges an immersive experience of differences, as well as the recognition of their impact on one's identity (Bennett and Castiglioni). My research has influenced not only my attitude but also informed my pedagogical practices. I realized that I didn't need to erase my identity markers to establish common ground with students, and I was forming a state of Aimee Carillo Rowe's "differential belonging," where I embraced my various identities and their influence on my growth as a person and an instructor. In my FYW and technical writing classes, I started including more readings and examples from

non-Western contexts and collaborated with the school's Raider Education program to explore ideas on supporting an inclusive class curriculum and increasing students' cultural intelligence through speaker presentations. I tackled controversial topics in class and was honest with students about what I didn't know. The same student in my writing class who had initially written about the disadvantages of being White started researching and thinking critically, and his final essay took a completely different turn where he highlighted racial inequities and White privilege. This might not have been possible if I hadn't even given him a chance to explore these issues because they made me uncomfortable.

As a graduate instructor, I am in a liminal space, where I gather new perspectives, skills, and knowledge, and also discover and assert my identity in an environment that is culturally, socially, and linguistically different from where I grew up. A school's diversity or mission statements help acknowledge differences and inequities, but they must also be translated into action so that no one feels like their needs don't matter because they are part of a minority group. Instead of expecting only international graduate instructors to assimilate with the dominant group's norms, there should be initiative from both sides to integrate and expand their identity, thereby creating a mutually supportive and productive space.

### **JIA XIN'S NARRATIVE: CALLING OUT MICROAGGRESSIONS: PREPARING GRADUATE INSTRUCTORS TO SHARE STRATEGIES AND FACE CHALLENGES IN A FYW PROGRAM**

Before coming to TTU, I only had experience teaching during my master's degree as a part-time teaching assistant teaching Mandarin Chinese. As an international graduate instructor and Asian Woman of Color who teaches FYW in her non-native language to (mostly) English native speakers at a PWI, I felt both excited and worried at the same time. Through my teaching experience, I realized that my teaching philosophy and pedagogical approaches are shaped by my complex positionality and adjusted dynamically within the social structure and "across ideological positionings" (Carillo Rowe 33). Identity markers always related to each other. If the professional identity marker "professor" is associated with the racial identity marker "White" and the gender identity marker "male," then if one cannot fit the normative myth of a particular identity, the fit can cause strain (Walton et al. 68). Therefore, marginalized women graduate instructors may face stereotype threats in the classroom because their gender and race could influence how students view the instructor. Unconscious stereotypes and biases can even exist before the semester begins (Lazos). For example, when students register for classes, they can see an instructor's non-European name in the registration portal, and after registration they may be able to see an instructor's

profile picture in other online portals. No matter how hard I try, I can't change my appearance, race, or cultural background.

I was uncertain about sharing the following narrative since it may be considered by some to be overthinking or overreaction. However, I decided to share this story because it's necessary to understand what microaggressions are and how they affect graduate instructors.

One day during a small group discussion in class, a White male student came up to me to ask when I was going to take the attendance that day. While he was asking the question, his middle finger was staying on the bridge of his nose, probably for a second or two. He then scratched his nose with his middle finger and put his hand down. I looked at him and was shocked. At the moment, I asked myself: Is that real? What just happened? Did he just insult me or was he just scratching his nose? Should I say something? Did he do that because I'm Asian? Did he do it on purpose? Or was his nose just itchy? Am I overthinking it? I didn't say anything about his behavior. I answered his question calmly, but I could feel that my facial expression was stiff with a strong feeling. Thankfully, this was my last class on that day.

I went back to my office; luckily, my two officemates were not there. At first, I'd have liked to have company, but later I was glad that no one saw I was crying. I sat at my desk and tried to figure out how to interpret what just happened. I couldn't find the exact answer, and I cried. I felt I needed a hug. I struggled about whether to talk with the program director since I didn't say or do anything in class. What's the point of talking with him now? I texted my friends who also teach FYW classes in other U.S. institutions, to see if they have met similar situations. They tried to comfort me through texts, but it didn't work. I locked myself in my office for an hour. I tried to believe that this student had not flipped me off on purpose.

When I was leaving, I ran into Michelle, the assistant director of the FYW program. I told her what happened in the class. She hugged me and said, "You know, if you're really feeling uncomfortable about it, you can talk with Dr. Faris. He'll provide support." I hesitated again because that might be implicitly telling my supervisor that I cannot handle or respond to an immediate performance in the class and that I am not strong enough psychologically.

After thinking for a while, I emailed Dr. Faris the next day to talk about the situation. I'm glad I did because I received advice on how to respond. He suggested describing the behaviors instead of evaluating them to the student. If I told the student that I believed his behavior was racist or sexist, he could argue that he was simply scratching his nose. It's better to describe behaviors: "I saw you're using your middle finger to scratch your nose. Are you trying to insult me? Please stop doing that."

Microaggression is defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults that potentially have harmful or unpleasant psychological impact on the target person or group” (Sue et al. 273). Racial microaggressions are common in everyday life. It’s hard to recognize microaggressions because they may be conscious or unconscious behaviors. Therefore, Sue et al. further categorized microaggressions as microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations. The behavior of showing one’s middle finger to someone is a microinsult, which “convey[s] rudeness and insensitivity and demean[s] a person’s racial heritage or identity” (274).

The second story also happened with the same student. In this class meeting, my throat was dry and hoarse because I had just explained a new unit and assignment in my previous class. As I was introducing the new unit to this student’s class, I said, “Today we’re going to start a new unit. Let’s look at the project rationale and assignment prompt [prɑ:mp] first.” My throat was too tired to loudly pronounce the [t] of “prompt,” and the sentence was gradually quieter. Two students sitting in the back together started to chuckle. I didn’t understand why at first. Everyone else was paying attention to what I was about to explain. I wanted to move on and explain the assignment. Then, I saw the student imitating my pronunciation [prɑ:mp] and the other one laughing in response. I stopped and looked at them; they became quiet. After I introduced the new unit, we started a small group activity. When I checked on the group progress in the back of the classroom, the student pointed to the assignment prompt on the screen and asked me, “How do you pronounce it (prompt)?” The other student (who had laughed before) looked at me expectantly. I said, “[prɑ:mpt]. What’s wrong?” “Nothing,” the student responded and returned to the group discussion.

Although I was a little upset, I didn’t realize that I was offended at first because I know that I’m not a native speaker like most of my students. Therefore, I’m willing to repeat or elaborate on classroom requirements to ensure everyone understands what we’ll do next. Because of that, I ignored the purpose or intention of his question about pronunciation. However, imitating how people speak and asking them how to pronounce something (especially when they know the correct pronunciation) is offensive and rude. If I mispronounce something, I’d rather someone correct me than make fun of it.

After that, I thought about why that difference was noticed. Would that [t] be noticed if I were a native speaker without an Asian face? As a “foreign” instructor, I speak English to my students, and yet I’m not a native speaker. Microinvalidations are “verbal comments or behaviors that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color” (Sue et al. 274). To address microaggressions, it’s necessary to understand

what microaggressions are, identify them, and identify how to respond to them. Having anti-racist training in the program is a step towards preparing graduate instructors to share strategies and face challenges. I'm lucky that I talked to people who support me and share a similar experience with me, and I ended with confidence and positive thinking again.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: DIFFERENTIAL BELONGING FOR WRITING PROGRAMS**

As we drafted this chapter, we considered providing key takeaways in our conclusion: what are some actionable things writing programs can do to make their programs more inclusive? But such a list seemed overly reductive. Combatting White supremacy, for instance, isn't so easy as "take these steps" or a checklist. And to be honest, we're working through these questions at our institution and in our own practices. Michael, for instance, is reevaluating his graduate-level syllabi after reading Michelle's observation that she didn't read Chicana theories in her graduate coursework at TTU. And the FYW program is re-evaluating assignment prompts for how they reinforce and reproduce Whiteness through the norms of standard academic English (see Inoue) and making plans to incorporate teacher preparation for antiracist pedagogy and how to discuss difference, power, and oppression in classes. Instead of "how-to" takeaways, we offer two theoretical takeaways we believe should be useful for writing programs and for graduate instructors.

We've just shared three individual narratives of Women of Color graduate instructors' experiences teaching at a PWI. While these narratives are individualized, we want to stress, following Carrillo Rowe, that "The meaning of the self is never individual, but a shifting set of relations that we move in and out of" (16). Put differently, one's identity and positionality are never created and performed in isolation but are rather products of and productive of relations. So our first implication is that writing programs need to find ways to discuss identities, differences, power, and oppression in terms of relations rather than solely isolated identities.

The concept of privilege helps to make this point. It is not enough, we argue, to acknowledge one's own privilege (along lines of race, class, gender, ability, nationality, and so forth) in writing programs—for graduate instructors or for WPAs. As Carmen Kynard explains, paraphrasing Zeus Leonardo, focusing on privilege "only offers a passive description of white racial domination as if racial domination happens without active agents, making whiteness a state of being dominant rather than a calculated and calculating series of racist processes" (2). Put differently, discourses that attend solely to privilege frame the problem of domination as static rather than as a problematic that can be analyzed and

changed through social action. As Kynard encourages, we need to “understand ourselves as social actors and not lone individuals” (2) and name and address issues like White supremacy in writing programs.

Second, we find a differential discourse of belonging to be a useful concept for writing programs and for graduate instructors. Feminists of color like Carillo Rowe and Karma Chávez build on Chela Sandoval’s concept of differential consciousness to theorize differential belonging as “differential modes function[ing] by coalescing differently-situated groups and demanding that policy address the deep causes of interlocking systems” (Chávez 137). Differential belonging is in opposition to normative belonging, and practitioners use “differential belonging as a strategy to confront the exclusions” of normative belonging (138).

We point to differential discourses of belonging in writing programs as a way to make space to normalize discussions of graduate instructor positionality and privilege as they relate to teacher-student relationships in teacher preparation and mentorship. For instance, in both Meghalee’s and Jiaxin’s cases, their positionings as “foreign” instructors added to the anxieties they felt about reaching out for help managing relationship building in their classrooms. When considering her narrative in conversation with Jiaxin’s and Meghalee’s, Michelle recognized how her own racial, class, citizenship, and language privileges positioned her to initially choose whether or not to bring issues of culture, race, and language into her classroom. She considered how, by not engaging in these discussions in her work, she is, as Kynard suggests, sustaining the standards of Whiteness that incite the acts of violence that Jiaxin and Meghalee recounted in their narratives. We have found that differential belonging offers a way for WPAs and graduate instructors to understand how the positionalities and privileges of individuals in their writing program are connected and how those positionalities and privileges shape relationships in their institutional contexts.

We also recognize the potential that differential discourses of belonging have to leverage the value that teachers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds bring to writing programs. All three narratives discuss strategies that Jiaxin, Meghalee, and Michelle used as graduate instructors to engage in normative discourses of belonging in their classrooms. In these narratives, normative discourses of belonging served as defense mechanisms and strategies for survival. The narratives also show how each woman assumed that Eurocentric values would put them at a power disadvantage in relation to their students in their classrooms. Aligning with Whiteness by ignoring differences was a means for survival—to be a successful Ph.D. student, they each had to be able to be successful as an instructor, and to be a successful instructor, they had to be able to manage their classrooms. Racial and language privileges affected how each woman experienced challenges related to identity in their context. A writing

program that integrates differential belonging can promote discussions about the challenges teachers face discussing difference, identity, race, culture, gender, and ability in the classroom, and the strategies that they use to overcome these challenges—thereby supporting teachers with marginalized identities as they navigate the challenges of discussing differences in identities. Further, such a dialogue could engage graduate instructors from non-marginalized backgrounds in conversations that make salient the value of addressing difference, identity, and oppression in their own classrooms, as they learn multilingual teaching strategies from their peers.

Perhaps the biggest implication from our discussions is that writing programs should engage in a teacher education pedagogy of differential belonging. Meghalee summed up this point well as we discussed our individual narratives during a meeting; she pointed out that each time we begin a class with new students, we may teach the same curriculum but we adjust our classroom practices based on our students' needs and learning styles. Even when we teach multiple sections of the same course in a semester, each class is different because students have different needs. This same method of differential instruction should be applied to graduate instructor preparation and mentorship. That is, with each new cohort of graduate instructors, WPAs should re-assess the effectiveness of their methods of teacher preparation and assessment based on the positionalities and identities of their teachers. Embedding and normalizing conversations about positionality, privilege, power, and oppression through a pedagogy of differential belonging makes space to share the challenges graduate instructors face and to discover and share strategies for overcoming those challenges.

By reflecting on our experiences as graduate instructors and WPAs, we recognize the relational bonds we share with each other due to our common state of professional liminality, as well as our relation to the land where we live in terms of our respective positionalities. Like Carillo Rowe's concept of differential belonging, we "move among different modes of belonging without feeling trapped or bound by any one in particular" (33). Our experiences with establishing common ground with students, navigating academic conventions, and making marginalized identities visible conveyed the myriad challenges we face and the contributions we make to the FYW program in our university. But although we share some experiences as members of marginalized groups, we have unique identities that we strongly believe in preserving and expressing. Our identities, thus, present identity-in-practice, which Manka Varghese et al. describe as "constituted by the practices in relation to a group and the process of individual identification or nonidentification with the group" (39).

These narratives were an attempt to display the richness of graduate instructors' positionalities and the relational identities forged through coalition

building as we worked with different groups in a PWI. While we refrained from presenting a checklist of things to do, we do hope to have provided ways for readers to begin conversations about how positionality and privilege shape the shared realities of their own programs.

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