BIPOC Graduate Students' Coalitional Healing in Writing Programs and Colonial Institutions

Ruby Mendoza, California State University, Sacramento, r.mendoza@csus.edu
Constance M. Haywood, East Carolina University, haywoodc22@ecu.edu
Floyd Pouncil, Michigan State University, pouncil1@msu.edu
Stephie Minjung Kang, Michigan State University, kangmi23@msu.edu

Abstract: In 2020, 31 graduate students in Michigan State University's (MSU) Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures department published their Graduate Student List of Demands in response to violence on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) lives both within and outside the institution. More than three years after the statement was published, we find that the department's response(s) to graduate student intellectual knowledge and lived experiences have been performative at best—revealing an on-going dilemma of the conflicts that arise when anti-racist and pro-Black initiatives (Jones, Gonzales, & Haas, 2021) are presented within white organizations (Ray, 2019). Thus, this article addresses the need to support BIPOC graduate scholars—particularly those who exist within a multitude of intersectional and marginalized identities—in relation to graduate program development, curriculum, and writing program administration. We employ a narrative approach to 1) show folks why we need to be attentive to collegiate sponsored oppression against multi-marginalized graduate students; 2) forefront graduate student knowledges as intellectually viable (Browdy et al., 2021; Prasad, 2022); and 3) understand that even as graduate students ask writing programs to engage in anti-racist practices, those same students must be mindful of the resistance in contemporary academic writing programs and the impacts therein to their well-being (Carter-Tod & Sano-Franchini, 2021; Perryman-Clark & Craig, 2019). We conclude by considering a Black feminist approach to healing (Carey, 2016; Ohito, 2021) given the material and social impacts of institutional violence on graduate students and we forward a need for writing program administrators to contend and reckon with white resistance at white colleges and universities.

Author Bios: Dr. Ruby Mendoza (they/them) is an assistant professor of English at California State University, Sacramento. Ruby's research focuses on critical race theory, queer and transgender studies, cultural rhetorics, and technical and professional communication.

Dr. Constance M. Haywood (she/her) is an assistant professor in the English department at East Carolina University. Her work lives at the intersections of digital writing and rhetoric, Black feminist theory, and technical and professional communication.

Floyd Pouncil (they/he) is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures at Michigan State University and an instructional designer at SAP Concur. Their work focuses on the critical literate practices of Black and other marginalized professionals in the workplace.

Stephie Minjung Kang (she/her) is a doctoral candidate in the Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures Department at Michigan State University. Her research looks into transnational and multilingual writing instructors' identity with the focus on translingual approach to writing pedagogy.

Introduction

On September 3, 2020, graduate students in Michigan State University's (MSU) Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures department published their Graduate Student List of Demands in response to violence on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) lives both within and outside the university. In the statement, graduate scholars called for 1) the immediate attention to anti-Black racism and 2) action for "racial justice in [the] department's cultures, practices, pedagogies, and policies" in several institutional locations, including pedagogy and writing program administration (p. 1). Although the statement was published three years prior to our authoring this piece, we argue that the department's response(s) to graduate student knowledge and lived experiences have been inadequate—revealing an on-going dilemma of the conflicts that arise when anti-racist and pro-Black initiatives (Jones, Gonzales, & Haas, 2021) are presented within white organizations (Ray, 2019). The lack of adequate response provided us the exigency to seek rhetorical healing (Carey, 2016) from Western Settler Colonialism (Ore, Wieser, & Cedillo, 2021) and leverage our narratives to continue the literacy campaign (Miller, 2004) that began with the Graduate Student List of Demands. We use Carey's engagement with Miller's (2004) use of literacy campaigns here, understanding that "literacy campaigns enable us to understand how rhetoric functions as a form of social praxis through education by revealing which urgencies a community, an institution, or a person invested in an institution may try to remediate through instruction." (Carey, 2016, p. 5). Accordingly, the Graduate Student List of Demands is an ongoing part of a literacy campaign continued here via four BIPOC scholars. We wish to add momentum to coalitional thinking (Walton, Moore, & Jones, 2019) in technical communication through expressing our process of healing alongside the explicit retelling of experiences we feel did not translate to the dominant groups in our community.[1]

We begin here with establishing translation as a central component of social justice work in technical communication (Gonzales, 2022). As emergent scholars, we believe that successful translation involves negotiation of meanings constituted by social practices, identities, and ideological structures beyond transmission of words. Historically, BIPOC embodied experiences under settler colonialism have not been understood by those in groups with access to dominant power–it could not be translated. This absence of translation leads to epistemological violence. More specifically, Dotson (2011) categorizes this epistemological violence by defining specific unsuccessful translations due to a lack of dominant group audience uptake. She refers to it as testimonial oppression and further elaborates on the phenomenon through two conceptual frames: testimonial quieting and testimonial smothering. Testimonial quieting happens when ". . .an audience fails to accurately identify the speaker as a knower, thereby failing to

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[1] As Arun Kamar Pokhrel (2011) asserts, eurocentric/ism "is generally defined as a cultural phenomenon that views the histories and cultures of non-Western societies from a European or Western perspective … functions as a universal signifier in that it assumes the superiority of European cultural values over those of non-European societies" (p. 321). We use the term "dominant groups" to refer to larger eurocentric colonial logics that perpetuates whiteness. Our choice to use "dominant groups" is also to acknowledge that Eurocentric logics are also replicated by BIPOC groups.

communicatively reciprocate in a linguistic exchange due to pernicious ignorance in the form of false, negative stereotyping." (Dotson, 2011, p. 243). Similarly, testimonial smothering occurs when a speaker recognizes specific communication as "unsafe and risky" as well as the audience has displayed a "testimonial incompetence" when it comes to receiving what a speaker will communicate (Dotson, 2011, p. 244). Dotson's ideas directly relate to how our embodied experiences have failed to be translated: we as BIPOC people are harmed by an incompetent dominant audience at individual, interpersonal, and institutional levels. The failure and intentional exclusion by the incompetent audience to understand our needs led to a breakdown in the technical communication of our roles as instructors, which we elaborate on below.

Given what we have established about translation, epistemic violence, and the specific onboarding needs of BIPOC graduate instructors in first year writing, we argue that the Graduate Statement of Demands was an unsuccessful translation of our needs to the dominant group of the first year writing program and department. However, translation *can* work if we consider the act of speaking amongst ourselves and to others—the coalitional potential of sharing our stories beyond one specific institutional context—to rhetorically heal from testimonial silencing and smothering. Thus, considering the effort to mobilize coalitions in our workplaces and the translation necessary to decipher BIPOC embodied experiences under western settler colonialism, we forward critical questions to readers as they engage with our stories: what does it mean to work alongside BIPOC graduate instructors who share experiences like ours, and how will you assess the work to heal as additional labor? What will you do to create space and structure to do healing work and how are you preventing the need for healing in the organizations where you work?

To showcase our experiences and how they are intertwined with our own embodied sense of self, each of the authors use narrative to story their experience. Ruby is a Mexican American and Chicanx queer, trans-femme, and non-binary person who was raised in California by an undocumented mother, and someone who experienced rhetorical violence due to imperialist and colonizing desires. Constance is a cisgendered Black woman who was born and raised in eastern North Carolina and is a first-generation PhD holder in a working class family. She has recently returned to her home state working in higher education as an assistant professor. Floyd hails from Flint, Michigan and is a Black queer non-binary man. They worked in post-secondary student affairs administration for the past decade in various student-facing roles focusing primarily on students of color, low income students, and first generation college students before recently making a career shift to corporate learning and development. Stephie is a cisgendered East Asian woman who was born and raised in Seoul, South Korea where Standard white American English is heavily emphasized as an important form of socioeconomic capital. When she moved to the States for higher education, she started to experience and learn problematic raciolinguistic ideologies influencing her teacher identity. Thus, our storied experiences as BIPOC graduate students here represent the nuanced holistic selves we bring to any environment

we occupy and are always intersecting across multiple identities, including our racial identities (Hsu, 2022; Martinez, 2020).

Our experiences build on the demand statement's attempt at translating BIPOC graduate instructor needs for increased coalitional learning (Jones, 2020) and decolonial practices ingrained in Black feminism (Baker-Bell, 2017; Nur Cooley, 2020; McKoy, 2019). We employ a narrative approach that focuses on healing (Carey, 2016) through the embodied experiences we encountered (Dotson, 2011) rather than antagonizing, blaming, and calling out institutional and administrative failures. To exemplify our approach, we 1) show folks why we need to be attentive to collegiate sponsored oppression against multi-marginalized graduate students; 2) forefront graduate instructor knowledges as intellectually viable (Browdy et al., 2021); and 3) understand that even as graduate instructors ask writing programs to engage in anti-racist practices, those same students must be mindful of the resistance in contemporary academic writing programs and the impacts therein to their well-being (Carter-Tod & Sano-Franchini, 2021; Perryman-Clark & Craig, 2019). We conclude our storytelling by considering a Black feminist approach to healing (Carey, 2016; Ohito, 2021) and we forward a need for writing program administrators to reckon with white resistance (Mendoza, forthcoming) at colleges and universities.

Ruby's Narrative: Lost in Translation, White Writing Administration Neglecting to Hear BIPOC Perspectives

Positioning the Self

> A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives–our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings–all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity. Here, we attempt to bridge the contradictions in our experience:
>> We are the colored in a white feminist movement.
>> We are the feminist among the people of our culture.
>> We are often the lesbians among the straight.
> We do this bridging by naming our selves by telling our stories in our own words.
>
> - Cherrie L. Moraga

Chicana scholar and activist Cherrie L. Moraga's theory in the flesh represents a pivotal reminder that intersectional queer (and transgender of course) bodies always "attempt to bridge the contradictions in our [lived] experience[s]" (Anzaldúa & Moraga, 2015, p. 19). As a Mexican American and Chicanx queer, trans-femme, non-binary person of color, I have come to realize that institutions–familial, interpersonal, and organizational–never know how to fully support my embodied perspectives when set against Eurocentric tendencies. Through scholarship and lived experience, I understand that educational institutions continue to run on colonizing and

imperialist desires (la paperson, 2017), and as Ore et al. (2021) write, "we [also] run on 'university time,' which like white time, national time, colonial time, and slave time, is driven by market aims, the rhetorical stand-in for white desires" (p. 601). As a person with many intersecting identities, these imperialist, colonizing, and white desires have come to fruition as I have navigated institutional spaces, particularly in my doctoral program. When attempting to bridge the transparent discrepancies that impact BIPOC lives, the response at our department at Michigan State University–a Predominantly White Institution–has been performative at best. My narrative describes a particular encounter with First Year Writing (FYW) administration and curriculum, and how white embodiment has negatively and violently impacted me when attempting to decenter whiteness. As Ore et al. (2021) further substantiate, that the control of our time by "the Western, settler-colonial academy, an institution that would not exist without slavery and genocide, proves to be a form of rhetorical violence" (p. 602). Through my narrative, I aim to show how "the ivory tower" not only upholds white privilege, but also white epistemologies.

Dear Department, Anti-Racist Pedagogy Where?

In First Year Writing**,** WE DEMAND that:

1. the curriculum revises its values and practices to anchor critical race theory, anti-racist pedagogy, and queer/trans*/Black feminist rhetorics.

- WRAC Graduate Student Statement of Demands

In my second year in the program and one year after the Demands were written, I received a position as a first-year writing instructor for the 2021-2022 academic year. For context, my first year in the program I had no assistantship as I received a University Enrichment Fellowship that allowed me to focus on coursework. Before teaching FYW, graduate students are required to attend a two-week orientation to discuss the curriculum and learning goals a few weeks before their semester of teaching begins. However, as we mentioned in the demands, we had tension with the curriculum, learning goals, and mentoring practices as they excluded any content related to race and signified colonizing desires. As the Graduate Student List of Demands articulated, we demanded that our FYW curriculum needed to change to support and protect both BIPOC students and teachers and argued that we "see the importance of literacy-based writing pedagogy and the current inquiry/discovery/communication approach (though "discovery" is a clear colonial construct)." Simply put, we as graduate students rejected the learning goals as there was a complete absence of intersectional perspectives which "neglects consideration of students' (and instructors') racial identity and intersectionality of these identities with writing." This integral point made by the graduate students exemplified the tensions we had (and still have) as our department had not provided critical culturally appropriate frameworks to support us. We offered solutions to help provide critical approaches to begin starting a conversation and

direction to move towards. When I attended the two-week orientation to learn more about FYW and my teaching role for the upcoming academic year, I made sure to advocate and inform the FYW administration of the need to consider and adopt the principles as they were not only life-affirming, but life saving. However, what I did not realize was that by advocating and addressing institutional whiteness, I would later be penalized and removed from all teaching opportunities in my department.

During that two-week orientation, I did not realize that BIPOC embodied knowledge would be lost in translation by white administrators. Although there are many stories to tell about the orientation, there was one particular moment that escalated and illustrated harmful embodied practice when a graduate student who served as a writing program intern, a woman of color, spoke about how she navigated institutional whiteness to assist the very few graduate students of color prepare as incoming instructors. In her presentation, she discussed establishing community norms and shared her experiences about a white student who perpetuated harmful writing practices by extracting knowledge from BIPOC communities. In response to this real world situation, a white student responded, "well, maybe the student was taking risks (a nod to the discovery/exploring component of the learning goals)?" I immediately exclaimed back, "discovery and exploring are colonizing frameworks, these enactments are harmful and neglect to consider BIPOC who are conditioned to learn how to navigate whiteness to protect themselves from harm." In response to my assertion, a faculty administrator exclaimed, "you should be a part of the FYW committee." My response, "Pay me!" Their response, "How much?" I replied, "90,000." Silence ensued. After the tense situation, the faculty administrator publicly told everyone we could change/adapt language on our syllabi to support BIPOC faculty and students. I took the faculty administrator's statement seriously and changed the language on my syllabus. As our orientation nearly reached its end, we were asked by the FYW administration team to share our syllabi to the committee through email. I obliged and sent my work directly to the administrators. However, the response I received was a complete contradiction to the administration team's previous statement about supporting BIPOC students and faculty.

The email that was sent on a Friday asked me to do two things: change the learning goal language as it did not align with the department and add a reflective assignment as it was absent. I agreed to add the final reflective component, but I refused to change the language. I received a request to meet with the faculty administrator and another administrator the following Monday. I agreed. However, for safety as I anticipated difficulty translating my experiences to white administrators, I asked if I could have my doctoral committee present as I did not feel comfortable being alone with two white administrators. Both administrators said no to my request to have my committee present. In response, I sent a reply and Cc'd my entire committee, addressing the actions by the two administrators as not trauma informed. One committee member, the only Black person on my committee, immediately responded and stated that the department and college needed to adopt the social justice principles that were being discussed by the department as they were concerned. That committee member also privately sent me a

message with their phone number where I sobbed about my experience; I did not feel safe or valued by the department. My committee member did not only hear me shed my tears, but committed to support me. More surprisingly, other members of my committee immediately responded, and we met the same day and talked about my course materials: my entire committee all agreed that there was nothing wrong with my syllabus, and that my work mirrors the work the department needed to do. My committee chair asked me if I would still be willing to work in FYW, and I said yes. We decided to hold the original meeting date of Monday where we would all (my committee and FYW administrators) discuss the next course of action. What I did not see coming was another follow up email made by the faculty administrator.

The faculty administrator emailed us all on Saturday and said they planned to *not* attend as they were not needed, especially as I showed reluctance to engage with them to discuss FYW curriculum and learning goals. This response was wholly inaccurate. The claims I made against the curriculum were directly mentioned and tied to the Graduate Student List of Demands, and I never refused to engage in a conversation with the faculty administrator. I simply asked for my network of support to be present as I felt uncomfortable. Once again, this response by the faculty administrator was not only problematic, but communicated that *I* was a liar. In response, I wrote an 18 page letter to my doctoral committee and department that showed the entire threaded conversation, while also citing anti-racist scholars who addressed the embodiments enacted by the white administrators as engaging in rhetorical violence. Even after sending the document and having a follow-up meeting with the dean and department chair, I was told I would not be able to teach first-year writing. My committee member, the only Black person on my committee, advocated and pressured the department for me to explicitly work with them the following year so my funding and health insurance would remain intact. Without them, I do not think I would have been able to survive my second year in the PhD.

From this embodied experience, I realized that many white administrators live in a different paradigm, and that our realities only intersect when we inhabit institutions that often feel like they were never made for us. Since this traumatic experience, I was never able to teach any courses at my department and I would later hear directly from a senior white faculty member who said the department and its white administrators saw me as a "loose canon." This experience haunts me to this day. I often have anxiety attacks when I am around the administrators both in physical and virtual spaces. I never anticipated that this traumatic event would have severe ramifications after its occurrence, but I am grateful to the faculty member who saved me and believed in me. I thank them every time I see them.

Rhetorical Healing: Taking My Time Back

Writing this article marks one-year after the rhetorically violent encounter. Since then, I have fully removed myself from the institution—literally. I moved back to California to be closer to family, I negotiated to receive my university fellowship earlier than anticipated (time to focus on

dissertation research only), and I am completing my PhD in three years instead of five. This encounter has impacted my life tremendously. I am unable to be located near my institution as I am reminded that I do not belong there. This full removal is unfortunate; many of my white counterparts are still able to attend the institution, something I wish I could do. Although this may seem like unfortunate circumstances, I have actively engaged in rhetorical healing through the writing of this narrative. As Tamika L. Carey (2016) conveys, rhetorical healing "makes clear which ways of reading, knowing, and being—or literacies—writers expect individuals to recognize and demonstrate or acquire as a means for healing" (p. 7). This Black feminist approach to rhetorical healing is profound—my writing, my narrative, my voice, has helped and uplifted me to think critically and analytically towards institutional change through my teaching, scholarship, and community practices. From this act of healing, I feel as if I can move forward towards a place where I can begin finding my voice again and where I can take back my time.

Constance's Narrative: An Examination of Mistranslation and Power in the Healing/Care of Graduate Programs and Students

> "Furthermore, WE DEMAND that WRAC develop and design culturally-sustaining support structures and practices, specifically in regards to codifying graduate student inclusion in committees and by-laws. We want to establish an institutional memory to ensure continued recognition of graduate student involvement and labor."
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> - WRAC Graduate Student Statement of Demands

I start my narrative with a focus on my position, as it – and the power dynamics associated with it – have slightly shifted the purpose of my contribution to this article. When we first began this piece, I was still a graduate student within the WRAC department. Currently, my position as a graduate student has concluded and I maintain the title of assistant professor at another institution. Still, I find it necessary to engage in the reflection of my time as a first-generation Black woman PhD within WRAC because it informs my current and future work alongside graduate students. In moving from a graduate student to an assistant professor, I recognize that the work and responsibility that comes with the production of this piece falls back on myself and my colleagues alike. Though this narrative is a bit difficult for me to write, the matter is and always will be pressing. To keep it short, there is much work to do.

During the time that the Graduate Student Statement of Demands was written, I served as the president of WRAP (Writing, Rhetoric, and Praxis), a graduate student group housed within the WRAC department. Prior to this, I served on WRAP as the PhD representative in RWGAC (Rhetoric and Writing Graduate Advisory Council), a small committee of graduate faculty in the department that engaged in activity, conversation, and work concerned with graduate student recruitment, graduate curriculum/program development, and overall graduate student success. With RWGAC, it is written in the bylaws that two students – an MA representative and a PhD representative from WRAP – must serve on the committee. While at first glance the inclusion of

graduate students seems to forward a sense of inclusivity and transparency in administrative decision-making, I often found that the perspectives and needs of graduate students were either often grossly misinterpreted or silenced. The experience I recall here is an example of both, and has deeply shaped my outlook on the consideration of graduate student labor and the ultimate care of graduate students altogether.

I recall a day where I felt it necessary to bring the concerns of graduate students in WRAP to a RWGAC meeting. In a previous WRAP meeting, a few master's (MA) students within the department felt comfortable and safe enough to share just how exhausted they were in their first year of their studies. With the WRAP collective, the MA students shared that Mondays were particularly tough on them. For context, on Mondays most of the MA students either taught first-year writing or worked in the writing center during the day for their assistantship (note: many did both just as I did during the first year of my PhD to help make financial ends meet). Additionally, these students also found themselves on campus for two three-hour long back-to-back graduate seminars on Monday evenings. In sharing their concerns, they asked if I – along with the MA representative at the time – would mention this to RWGAC committee members to see if it would be possible for them to reconsider having multiple required graduate seminars on the same day. I, along with the MA representative, agreed to bring this matter to RWGAC and hoped that a robust conversation might ensue.

On the day of our RWGAC meeting, before we could even bring the issue to the group of administrators, one graduate faculty member brought up the issue before either of us representatives could. Apparently, the conversation of graduate student exhaustion also took place in the faculty member's class, and they—like us—hoped the committee might spend some time finding an alternative solution to the issue of multiple required seminars on the same day. Before either of us representatives could share our experiences or add to the commentary of the faculty member who had spoken up, another member of the committee interjected and said "Tell them to drink coffee and *get over it*. We all had to do it. They will be all right."

There is a part of me that wishes I could tell of something explosive happening in the room at that moment, but that would be a fabrication of the truth. The truth is that while the faculty member who brought up the concerns was visibly frustrated with the committee member's response, the meeting continued. Us graduate students were not asked for our input. The conversation ended just as quickly as it began. While I cannot speak for the MA representative, I can outrightly say that I felt too angry and too unsafe in the moment and in that space to speak up. I was one of two graduate students in a room of faculty, and I was also the only Black person in the room. As someone who labored very similarly to the students who desired to have their concerns heard, I had just witnessed my own previous experiences as an overworked and overstimulated graduate student translated as irrelevant, as necessary to the "graduate experience," and as of no real concern to those who actually had the power to facilitate change. For the rest of the meeting, I was on the verge of tears. When I returned to WRAP with the news

of what happened, no one was surprised. For some, the response from administrators was even expected. So, for the rest of that semester, graduate students continued to be exhausted and –as shown through this recollection of events—completely unheard.

In Esther Ohito's (2016) article "Some of Us Die," they write that within the academy –aka the 'publish-or-perish' culture – "worth as a scholar is calculated solely based on quantifiable productivity" (p. 518). As a graduate student sitting in that RWGAC meeting, it became violently evident that my worth as well as the worth of my fellow graduate students at that time was directly tied not to our contributions to the program as living, breathing, healthy, functioning human beings but as members of the academy expected to perform and produce, despite the harm that our performance and production might inflict on our physical, mental, and emotional selves. Too often, the obligatory demands of the institutions we belong to ask us to ignore the conditions of our bodies and to "push through" our commitments to teaching, scholarship, and service; it is this very rhetoric that led me – someone who has always had minimal health issues aside from obesity – to develop anxiety and hypertension in the first year of my PhD program. While one part of the issue here is clearly the culture of the academy and the "normalization of disembodiment" that Ohito (2016) warns of, another issue present in this situation is the overall mistranslation and silencing of concerns of graduate students by faculty administrators and those in positions of power.

I fought back tears in the RWGAC meeting that day because it was there that I realized that despite *how* the concerns of my peers at that time came to be raised or even *who* they would be raised by, there was something about our particular positions as graduate students in the department that rendered us unhearable. Dotson coins the term 'testimonial quieting' as the problem of "an audience [failing] to identify the speaker(s) as knowers" (p. 242). An example that she uses to further define this issue lies in Black feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins' analysis of Black women being an example of a social group *so* objectified that they are often "hindered...from being perceived as knowers" (Collins as cited in Dotson, 2011, p. 243). While the predicament and positioning of graduate students within academic contexts cannot be directly compared to that of the sociopolitical positioning of Black women in the United States, the issue of translation on part of graduate students being unhearable by graduate faculty does indeed fit within the realms of testimonial quieting. From experience (and as demonstrated in Ruby's narrative), graduate students who do not immediately welcome the practices, traditions, and values of the neoliberal white academe are often labeled as 'loose canons' -- deemed as overly dramatic, overly entitled, and out of touch with the 'real world'. When graduate students –who already hold less social power within academic institutions—are seen as people who have little idea or knowledge of the inner-workings of the academy versus human beings who already hold a wide range of personal, communal, and world knowledges, they are hindered from being perceived as knowers and essentially become unhearable.

In reflecting on this experience as someone who is no longer a graduate student, I interpret the administrator's mistranslation and silencing of graduate students as both an abuse of power and a lack of care. In the example that my narrative points out, the committee member of the RWGAC meeting at that time mistranslated graduate students' experiences as mere complaints and could/would not hear that the graduates' concerns were genuine cries for help. In turn, this mistranslation resulted in a quieting and silencing of graduate students that is all too familiar – one that continues the narrative of higher education being entrenched with toxicity, cycles of irreversible harm, and politics that are far from socially just, equitable, or radical (Jones, 2021). As I am now in the position of a faculty member, I maintain a desire to do and be different.

I am reminded of Shelton's (2020) work on what it means to 'shift out of neutral'. Though Shelton's piece is purposed with the reexamination of traditional pedagogical approaches in technical communication, I find her Black feminist praxis of "[examining] biases...[to] resist the perverted use of rhetorical tools [that] reproduce and normalize oppression and injustice" (p. 19) exceedingly helpful to the work of addressing translation issues between graduate students and faculty. Clearly, there is a significant amount of work that needs to be done in order for our institutions, departments, and programs to cultivate graduate program cultures that are caring, ethical, inclusive, equitable, accessible, and sustainable, but where exactly do we begin? As a scholar who works out of Black feminism quite regularly, I turn—as always—to the work, values, and efforts of Black women.

Towards Healing

My work as a Black woman who takes up Black feminism becomes especially important in situations such as these because I am reminded that in order to come to healing, we must center the knowledges and the lived, embodied experiences of Black women in our praxis. As scholar Tamika Carey (2016) writes, the "rhetorics of healing have...emerged out of the concerted efforts Black women have made to focus on their own self-preservation and survival" (p. 43). Thus, in order to turn towards *and* stay committed to our collective healing, I find it necessary for us to detach ourselves from practices and ideologies of the academy that 1) are rooted in a multitude of -isms (i.e., racism, sexism, classism, capitalism, imperialism, etc.) and 2) uphold structures that purposefully fail to interrogate issues of the 3Ps: power, privilege, and position (Jones, Moore, & Walton, 2016). For this matter, I turn to the Combahee River Collective, as their commitment in examining bias and power differentials proves to be a step towards collective healing – a step that I choose to enact as a junior faculty member who desires to work with and support graduate students in ways that I was not always granted.

In addressing the collective issues of Black women, the Combahee River Collective (1995) shared that they "believe[d] in collective process and a nonhierarchical distribution of power within the group"; the group also named a commitment to "[the] continual examination of politics...through criticism and self-criticism" (p. 315). If we are to support graduate students –

especially BIPOC graduate students—and be able to fully hear, translate, and act upon their concerns when presented, those of us who maintain positions of power need to get serious about acknowledging our power, assessing it, and redistributing it. We need to spend more time addressing and recognizing graduate students as the knowers they are. We need to understand inclusion as less of who is in the room and more of who actually holds the power to influence and initiate change in the room. We need to continually push back against the demands of institutions that ask us to work from disembodied places and make peace with fragmented lives. We also need to be more intentional about naming, revealing, and healing from our own experiences with institutional abuse so that we can put an end to its insidious cycles. Only if we do these things can we begin to hear each other and heal with each other. Though, it must, too, be understood that healing does not happen overnight. Healing is an intentional practice that takes practice, corrective measures, more practice, and most importantly, time. Even if we do not heal today, we can at the very least begin conversations around it.

As I find it necessary to continue pondering what it means to resist and heal from the practices, structures, and mistranslations that uncritically consider position, power, and positionality and continue to damage graduate student program cultures, I close my narrative with a quote and posed question from bell hooks' (1989) Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness:

> Within complex and ever shifting realms of power relations do we position the side of colonising mentality? Or do we continue to stand in political resistance with the oppressed, ready to offer our ways of seeing and theorizing, of making culture towards that revolutionary effort which seeks to create space where there is unlimited access to the pleasure and power of knowing, where transformation is possible? (p. 15)

Floyd's Narrative: Being and Not Being

> "WE DEMAND more intentional mentorship opportunities that support Black grads and grads of color in the department. These practices should be crafted in ways that are critically reflective of students' cultures and experiences."
>
> - WRAC Graduate Student Statement of Demands

During an exercise teaching first year writing and introducing a new project, I explicitly asked students to list what they knew about me. They got to work listing at least a dozen facts they had learned in our short few weeks together. However, I noticed one conspicuous item they had not broached. So I remarked: "Uh, there is one thing that I thought was obvious that you haven't said." Fortunately one of two Black students in my class spoke out and said "Well, you're Black!"

In everyday conversation I hear numerous accounts of how Black people's bodies are read, or not read, in the workplace. More historically, the below statement has been attributed to

Sojourner Truth in 1851 (Guy-Sheftall, 2011) who spoke on the reality of living in a Black body over a century ago by saying:

> Dat man ober dar say dat womin needs to be helped into carriages and lifted ober ditches, and to hab de best place everywhar. Nobody eber helps me into carriages, or ober mud puddles, or gubs me any best place! And a'n't I a woman?

Unfortunately, my example above is one where the sociohistorical conditions of our world interfered with my students being able to see me as a human and, in turn, understand me and subsequently my lesson, fully. The identity of an instructor connects to the idea that first year writing courses are always about professional and technical communication. The course generally emphasizes the audience as paramount to understanding the needs of a rhetorical moment and the literate actions that should follow. Therefore, I argue first year writing is primarily a process of working with students to understand audience and employ communication methods successfully. Translation becomes critically important as first year writing students experience their knowledges widening to include ways of being different than their own socialization prior to the course, including any that may differ from their instructor's. Thus, the preparation and development of first year writing instructors becomes critical in first year writing.

Backing up from the classroom for a moment, I also understood the university as an ecosystem that I had navigated prior. Having worked at my university for the past seven years in some capacity, I was familiar with the student population on campus. During our two-week training for graduate instructors, I brought up that the student population at MSU often has trouble engaging with the idea of culture or social identity given the homogenized spaces they may have grown up in Michigan. Many folks who come to work at our university do not have the experience of growing up in Michigan, but being from Flint myself, a city that experienced massive white flight during the end of the last century, I was well aware of the dynamic. Michigan is one of the most segregated states in the country and in my experience the university's curriculum did not reflect this reality. This lack of guidance around engaging with the students themselves created a dissonance in me throughout the two-week training and harkened back to the inadequate response to the statement of demands. I mentioned to Ruby on a few occasions throughout, as we both were in the same training session, that I felt like this preparation is not for me given that it would be a specific kind of work for me to communicate to my students what they needed to be successful in first year writing given my own social identities and physical embodiments as a Black person who grew up in the state.

One explicit concern was around the second assignment in the curriculum where we were tasked with asking students to bring in a cultural artifact to write around. During our training, I asked, genuinely, how we were to explain culture to these students. I was told that we do not and that we were welcome to include materials we wanted to include to support the existing curriculum. I

was disheartened that I had less than two weeks to find materials that would allow me not only to communicate what culture was to my students, but also somehow protect myself in the process given my Black identity. Additionally, I knew from my years at the university that first year students would not have concurrent coursework that discussed what culture was. In fact, I recall an experience years prior when a white woman student tasked with responding to a diversity question for graduate school applications explicitly told me she was not diverse and had no culture! These are our students, and my body often communicated to them that I innately held "culture" in ways they did not. This reality–the fact we were not adequately scaffolding in appropriate measures for students to understand concepts such as culture given their own positionalities–meant I was left with figuring out a solution sans the apparatus the university said was supposed to prepare me for my role. Like Sojourner Truth, I couldn't help but ask myself if I was actually a graduate instructor because I was not being considered in the ways I understood a graduate instructor should be mentored.

As Ruby mentions in their part of this article, we were fortunate to have a graduate assistant working in the program who spoke to her experiences as a person of color. I believe they saw that I, and I imagine others like myself, needed their stories in order to begin healing (Carey, 2016) from what was happening around us just moments prior. In line with the healing from the graduate assistant, the point of my telling this story is to illustrate what happens when technical communication is not taken up as a serious practice by faculty administrators, teachers, and the college or university at large given the liminal space graduate instructors inhabit. Audience is paramount in translation, particularly when it comes to instructions on how to do work that can be potentially harmful when done incorrectly (i.e. inappropriately attributing culture exclusively to people of color). The stakes are high and I believe our graduate assistantship colleague modeled the importance of an epistemological stance that mirrors those you are in charge of guiding.

Accordingly, what I've shared here is an explicit example of testimonial quieting erupting from the harm done when communicators cannot speak, and the audience cannot hear, with enough of the same literate understanding for successful translation. In my case, it was the fact I was concerned as a Black graduate instructor teaching mostly white students in a state like Michigan that could not translate to the administration. My circumstances led to me feeling it necessary to write about my experience toward rhetorical healing (Carey, 2016) in coalition with my co-authors in an attempt to translate my experience to a different audience that *could* possibly receive my story successfully. Although I am no longer a graduate instructor, part of my goal in speaking up in our training was to emphasize the impact positionality has on the work of technical communication via training to the administration for better alignment between their epistemological standing and my own. That goal continues through my writing here. I hope I am able to add to the stories, including the others in this article, to cause a positive impact to the discourse on preparation for BIPOC graduate instructors. At the least, I take solace in that I was

able to translate my experience with my co-authors and be heard as a graduate instructor and for that I am thankful.

Stephie's Narrative: "Good Teacher" Identity

> "WE DEMAND all WRAC curriculum be revisited and revised to adopt intersectional anti-racist values, practices, and pedagogies as a cornerstone of praxis."

> - WRAC Graduate Student Statement of Demands

What makes a good writing teacher? I have dwelled on this question through my entire graduate education as I was always eager to become a better writing teacher. By saying that, I should clarify that I wasn't being an overachiever or more enthusiastic about teaching than other graduate students. Rather, I was trying to (over)compensate for myself as a nonnative English speaking teacher from Korea who didn't know what an icebreaker was or often wrote wrong idioms in my emails. For the longest time, I thought I wasn't qualified to teach, not because I lacked teaching experience, but because I was a multilingual transnational person whose first language is not English. Until I encountered Nonnative English-Speaking Teacher (NNEST) literature in the second year of my MA, talked with other multilingual teachers resonating with my experiences, and researched what implications are in a term like "language competence," I was perpetually an incompetent writing teacher. So naturally, this question of "what makes a good writing teacher?" has remained as the backbone of my research and teaching philosophy today, inquiring into the relation of literacy education and *identity*.

Here's the thing. To ask this question about identity translates to the kinds of writing teacher identities we nurture in our respective writing programs, which in turn translates to the kinds of pedagogies that are acknowledged and circulated and the kinds of languaging that is acceptable in writing classrooms. Without questioning them, I will never be "the good teacher" because anywhere I go, whether that is a writing classroom or instructor orientation, white monolingual spaces are always the default . In this monolingual ecology, teachers become custodians of standard English through their writing instruction (Matsuda, 2006), while their proxy teacher identity remains 'monolingual,' 'accentless,' 'white,' and 'American.' Well, I am none of these. So what I noticed myself doing in these white monolingual spaces is that I would clench my lips, keep myself quiet, and avoid bringing up my cultural and language background, all in an attempt to try to 'pass' as one of them.

When I stepped into the FYW instructor orientation in my first year at MSU, I was nervous but excited to learn about their shared curriculum. Especially given that the institution is known for its high enrollment of international students (about 15% of the undergraduate population in 2019 was international, for instance) and having heard about their translingual writing curriculum (Kernan et al., 2016), I was curious about how their shared curriculum invites students with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, like myself, as writing assets. But as the orientation

progressed, I quickly realized that my curiosity wasn't the center or even a part of the schedule or conversations. I blended into the rest of the people in the room who seemed to embody standard English perfectly. I tried to pass again with my lips shut. When three days of orientation ended, I regretted not speaking up about the absence of addressing linguistic diversity in the mainstream FYW courses. Leaving a white space with involuntary silence only left me with resentment towards myself, thousands of words I swallowed, and the trope of another 'quiet Asian girl.' Why didn't I say something? Let me switch up the question. What stopped me from speaking up?

Min-Zhan Lu (1978) describes the composition classroom as a "purified world," where only one discourse is allowed to be used. When writing classrooms are monological and monolingual, encouraging students to ignore "other voices that seem irrelevant to the purified world of the classroom," students lean into standard English as the parameter of being a "good student" (p. 444). I was sitting in the room trying to be a 'good' graduate student-teacher, censoring my languages and identities as they seemed 'irrelevant.'

In one of the conversations between four of us, Constance said: "Do I advocate for myself? Or do I protect myself? That's systemic oppression at its finest." When I trace my experience in graduate schools in the U.S., there are countless moments of shame and pain from being considered inadequate to be a writing teacher. In those moments, the only way I knew how to protect myself was ironically by scrutinizing myself for having 'different communication style' as some had commented in my career. But after years of healing from the shame and pain, what I realized is that I didn't need translation of my 'unclear English;' I needed translation with equal footings in the meaning negotiation. So some days, I am resilient and courageous to speak up for myself and my values against standard language ideologies looming in the room. I'm ready to be in a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation. Other days, I still succumb to the surroundings full of white speaking and listening subjects (Flores & Rosa, 2015) that discourage me, tire me, and even scare me. On those days, I'm not even invited to sit at the negotiation table.

It is important to understand that the continued absence of acknowledging language differences alone could do harm to multilingual communities and all communities whose language only translates as nonstandard and inappropriate. In 'neutral' spaces that don't challenge the range of inequalities with language practices, many are still deciding whether to advocate for themselves or to protect themselves with involuntary silence at every moment.

Concluding Notes: Moving Toward Rhetorical Healing

As we shared these stories with each other in the process of writing together, we often came back to the fact that the state of demands literally exists as a textual artifact for communication *and* our administrators are aware that it exists. Their refusal to act on behalf of our needs as graduate students in ways that felt tangible to us was their refusal to decenter whiteness as the dominant

group. The point of us bringing this up is not to shame, berate, or call out those in our community. Instead, we turn towards how we take care of ourselves, and, in turn, each other, due to the pernicious ignorance we encountered (Dotson, 2011). We can use Dotson's (2011) framework which we discussed in the introduction to understand our experiences together. Testimonial silence is what occurred when Floyd asked for guidance on teaching the concept of culture to largely white students in a Black body, when Ruby sought to update their syllabus according to their expertise and was told it was inappropriate, and when Constance was silenced by administration's invalidation of graduate student experience. Similarly, testimonial smothering occurred when Stephie decided she could not speak to the lack of explicit linguistic diversity in the curriculum. All of these stories together signify that the Graduate Student List of Demands was not a manifesto but a *living outcry* from BIPOC experiences of white institutional violence and silencing that was not successful in translating the needs of BIPOC graduate students.

Carey's (2016) work on rhetorical healing mirrors the approach that we employed as a community as each of us came together after our experiences and decided to write about how we move forward. Carey (2016) explicitly uses literature and the Black women writers within the texts to demonstrate that "Healing can involve verbal warfare and should result in a woman's rhetorical agency. Among Black women writers of this period, acquiring knowledge of cultural memory and developing a command of language are steps to reclaiming and restoring the self" (p. 20). Similarly, we recognize that while most of the writers in this article are not Black women, there are lessons that we can learn from their approach to engage systemic oppression that Carey describes. We understand our healing to have begun as we reached out to one another during moments of insecurity. Healing occurred when we were able to communicate our experience successfully, in a way that allowed us to "acquire knowledge of cultural memory" insofar that we came to understand our experiences were steeped in a history of epistemic violence. Additionally, the process of composing this article together with a new audience has been a way of reclaiming the language we failed to translate and reconfiguring it so it is successful with a new audience who is prepared to receive it. Overall, after coming together we understand translation to be chiefly about understanding ourselves, our experiences, and the conditions which impact our ability to translate that to others. We hope we have accomplished that here.

Lastly, we note that our stories unfolded in different styles and voices informed by our varying positionalities and yet they were in coalition. That is, having different identities and goals, we had to critically engage (Pouncil & Sanders, 2022) with each other's stories together in ways that respected each individual's needs while also attending to our collective goal of translation. Accordingly, as Constance mentioned, we take to heart the Combahee River Collective's 1977 iconic statement to understand the power of working together across differences within BIPOC communities for radical care against oppression. We understand the historical position of the Combahee River Collective and are building on it with our own present-day realities in the

tradition of other contemporary scholars Walton, Moore, and Jones (2019), Nur Cooley (2020), and Ohito (2021). Building diverse and inclusive coalitions in technical communication, and specifically in translation, meant to us that "we accept our own shortcomings, rely openly on others' perspectives and experiences; and remain alert for justice that extends beyond the boundaries" (Walton, Moore, & Jones, 2019, p. 12). And our serious take on coalition building extends beyond our four stories (Ore et al., 2021) and adds to a cacophony of complementary words that will aid in the translation of BIPOC graduate instructors experiences to all charged with the training of graduate instructors. We highlight this stance because in the process of writing this piece, a graduate student of color had to withdraw from collaboration due to their position in the department. We concluded that participating in this would've made them *more* vulnerable. Thus, we dedicate this work to our dear friend and to other BIPOC graduate students at white institutions who find this kind of public storytelling of oppression too risky. We know many of you are out there: we hear you, we see you, we believe you, and we hope this has contributed to your healing.

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