Feminist Intersectionality: Two Writing Center Staff Renegotiating Identities in the Early 2020s

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Abstract: Writing Centers (WCs) can establish communities where peer tutors collaborate on projects and initiatives that lead to their professional and academic development. Positioned as both students and professionals, peer tutors are able to foster connections with their students as much as with other tutors and WC administrators. That being said, the perceptions of peer tutors and WC administrators on themselves, their writing, and their positionality merits further exploration in WC scholarship. While current research exists exploring this matter, it is important that WC staff continue to contribute their individual experiences and intersectional identities to this larger conversation so that feminist and antiracist work can produce up-to-date and contextualized impacts on WC policies and practices. One particular niche to advance the aforementioned scholarship is to speak up about the unspoken intersectional identities of minoritized WC staff through a feminist lens.

The authors of the current study - a WC peer tutor and a WC administrator - employ the collaborative autoethnography (CAE) method in their own distinct voices to reflect on and share lived experiences of renegotiating their often vulnerable or contradictory identities, during the turbulent times of the early 2020s. In doing so, the authors concretize WC staff's voices about navigating their intersectional identities, affirm how WC staff's pluriversal identities impact WCs, and deepen the professional connections of WCs as feminized spaces, their services, and their synergies ultimately for student success.

Keywords: intersectional identity, writing center, feminism, collaborative autoethnography

Introduction

As extensions of the classroom, Writing Centers (WCs) are critical to student success, advocacy, and sense of belonging, as WCs combat norms within academic discourse while fostering opportunities for academic growth for all students. These students include women, people of color, and non-native English speakers who are often underrepresented in and excluded from academic scholarship. WC spaces provide students with a dependable community of peer tutors who recognize the students' identities and work in their best interests. Furthermore, the peer tutors are often positioned "at once part of the student body and part of academic structure," allowing them to forge emotional, motivational, and synergic bonds across disciplines with their students (Namakula and Prozesky 40). That being said, their viewpoints on themselves,

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attitudes towards writing, and approaches to position themselves warrant further exploration to expand this continuously evolving conversation within WC scholarship.

Hence, the current study: the authors, who are a female WC tutor, Naya, and a female WC administrator, Xuan, at a large urban Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), will employ the collaborative autoethnography (CAE) method to reflect on and share their own lived experiences of renegotiating intersectional identities, when the COVID-19 pandemic and other humanitarian crises further complicated the early 2020s. Both authors come from very distinct backgrounds, experiences, and levels of expertise, imbuing their narratives with the value of being able to draw connections with others and build dialogues around how WCs can be diverse and equitable spaces. As such, they have chosen the CAE method, given its merit in conversations surrounding intersectionality, feminism, and community-building during this unprecedented time (e.g. Roy and Uekusa 384). Following Roy and Uekusa's two central components of CAE, self-reflection and collaboration, the authors start with their respective self-narratives and self-reflexivity. Then, based on these reflective texts, they develop dialogues of inquiry where they further retrieve and analyze their experiences and reflections as collaboration (384-385). By taking this approach, the authors contribute to the larger conversation regarding intersectionality, feminism, and inclusivity in WCs and broader academia. It should be noted that the authors do not claim that their experiences are more valuable than anyone else's, but rather that their perspectives can contribute to this larger conversation, help nurture feminist pracademic communities and provide helpful insights for more inclusive WCs.

Additionally, it is important to note that the two authors' voices come across distinctly in both story and style. This detail also contributes to the overarching methodology of this study, particularly in relation to the utilization of the authors' narratives as counterstories. Prominent scholars within feminist rhetoric and writing studies at large have justified this mode of writing, arguing that, "by writing in their two voices they can begin 'interfering with modernist expectations of coherence' in order to expose how personal and professional lives are interconnected" (Barron and Grimm 55). Thus, we actively choose to write in our distinct voices, featuring translingualism and transnationalism, so that we can disrupt the rigidity of writing expectations and other "rules of racial standing under white supremacy" (Condon and Faison 6), while also illustrating how our individualized experiences intersect.

This article adds to the ongoing feminist call to advocate for staffs' pluriversal identities and their positionalities within university curriculum, research, as well as praxis in WCs. The significance of this study is tri-fold: to further advance WC research by introducing collaborative autoethnography, to legitimize WCs' story sharing of identity pluriversity and renegotiation - in particular that of minoritized and excluded individuals - and to contribute to the ongoing feminist scholarship with its connection to WC staff and their intersectionalities.

Theoretical Framework

The authors in the current study use the WC scholar - Bitzel's Multi-Dimensional Identity (MDI) - as its conceptual underpinning; MDI frames personal, sociocultural, and professional identities that are interrelated and mutually informing (2). The figure below visualizes the intersections of identities (Bitzel 3), revealing the complexities of interacting and overlapping categories in identities.
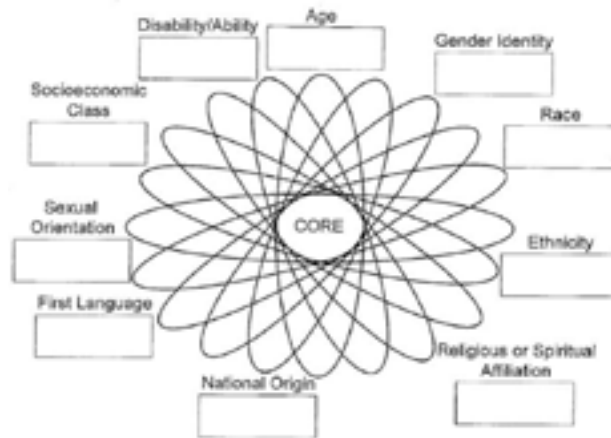

Figure 1

Multi-Dimensional Identity (MDI) Diagram

The authors also adopt a feminist approach in highlighting the sharing process of their stories, "as a site of knowledge" (Stenberg 47). The feminist MDI aligns with WC culture as the space encourages individuals to share and counter stories, overlap and overwrite narratives, explore and reflect languages (Green 257), disturb and disrupt the dominant structure (Blair and Nickosen 3), as well as include underrepresented dimensions to challenge "the (problematic and gendered) historical narrative" (Heinert and Phillips 256). Combining MDI and a feminist approach into an intersectional framework, the authors agree with Ribero and Arellano on such a framework "that attends to asymmetrical power relations and challenges hegemonic forces" (341).

Regarding details of challenging hegemonic powers, WCs have been an ever-growing site to practice linguistic justice and embrace cultural differences. Scholarly, WC literature has progressed its scope in advocating to decolonize WCs (e.g. the Writing Center Journal's special issue edited by Hutchinson and Perdigón), in order to interrogate intricate entanglements in WCs in writing and beyond (e.g. Praxis 2024 issue about emotions and other aspects of needs from diverse student writers). Professionally, many WCs have diversity statements on their websites that are accessible to the public, conducting and inviting professional development focusing on transculturalism and transnationalism, and reminding people of their positionality as welcoming sites of expanded academic interactions. Practically, many WCs contextually practice code-meshing and translanguaging in their daily tutoring sessions and host tutor-led engagement activities for students, such as conversation circles in multiple languages, creative workshops, and others blending educational purposes with recreational contents (e.g. Peña et al.). All of them join forces to challenge the standard language and academic norms and reconstruct the complexity and pluriversality of WCs as a horizontal

ecosystem of faculty, students, and peer tutors.

In addition, counterstories are also at the crux of this paper's theoretical underpinnings. Academia has historically been a place of structure and rigidity, with many policies, curricula, and "best practices" being rooted in the experiences and teachings of white, English-speaking men (Greenfield 35). These rules and restrictions often limit the expression and recognition of other identities that lie outside of those in power, including those coming from different racial, ethnic, gendered, and linguistic backgrounds. WCs are spaces that can be considered a haven for story- telling, intersecting personal experiences, and language practices that disrupt exclusionary norms, ultimately promoting the advancement of antiracist policies and practices (257). This can be attributed to the unique positionality of WC tutors, often having their own individual identities, linguistic placements, cultural characteristics, and counterstories that deviate from white, male, English-speaking Standards. As a result, counterstories can thrive in this setting, "help[ing] members of outgroups form communities" while "also shin[ing] a very bright light on the power and privi-lege that comes with the dominant story" within the larger academic space (Green 259). It is in this way that the promotion of counterstories in WC spaces can promote intersectional connections between personal narratives, promote the open expression of individual identity, and challenge traditional notions of race and identity through writing practices (Green 260).

This paper further emphasizes that intersectional identities are not fixed or constant, but instead fluid and dynamic. Echeverri and her colleagues shared their experiences as academics and how they rene-gotiated their intersectional identities across borders. This intersectionality is referred to as "the overlapping effects of race, class, gender, national origin, dis/ability status, and so on" (Green 260). Such an emphasis would help explain the geopolitical shift between individuals' belonging "to majority and minority groups in different contexts" (Echeverri et al. 1796). Besides individuals' renegotiation of their multiple identities as acts of transnationalism (Echeverri et al. 1796), the authors in the current article would like to contextualize such renegotiation at WCs, including the practice of translingualism (Canagarajah 40).

WCs, being relatively microscopic spaces, are regarded as feminized mainly because of their staff "who perform feminized labor and service" (Heinert and Phillips 255) and the nature of the work "asso-ciated with feminine qualities" (Payne 284). But WCs can also be spaces of legible tensions when "the tidy operation of tutoringgenre, argument, development, sentence clarity, and grammar gets upended by percep-tions, preconceived notions, and power dynamics - by compelled disclosure of identity formations such as those that accents or belief systems represent" (Denny et al. 5). For instance, there may be an initial assump-tion that peer tutors would position themselves with authority and power, subjecting a student's writing to the rigidity that comes with Standard English. However, we propose modeling the dynamic between WC tutors and students after Canagarajah's study of translingualism, so that WCs can become communities that welcome negotiated language varieties and practices like code-switching and code-meshing (65). In doing so, WCs can foster intersectional collaborations and provide a place where multifaceted identities can be shared and counterstories engaged.

We would like to foreground aforementioned changes across time, especially in the early 2020s. The temporal context is meaningful for the authors' lived experiences, as the COVID-19 pandemic and other humanitarian crises have increased and intensified the authors' practices of identity renegotiation and critical reflections on feminist intersectionalities.

Collaborative Autoethnography as the Chosen Method

Autoethnography as a research approach, focuses on narration (graphy), culture (ethno), and self (auto) (Ellis et al. 273) or Self+ Culture+ Writing (Jackson and McKinney). Through narratives, researchers explain how they respond to their own circumstances in certain ways and how their sociocultural contexts have shaped their perspectives, behaviors, and decisions. Researchers' lived experiences become data as it "expands and opens up a wider lens on the world, eschewing rigid definitions of what constitutes meaningful and useful research", while also helping "us understand how the kinds of people we claim, or are perceived, to be influence interpretations of what we study, how we study it" (Ellis et al. 275). Thus, autoethnography is especially useful when it comes to identifying and understanding "personal experiences with(in) the discipline or practices related to language and representation, literacy, writing, teaching writing, studying writing/writers, being a writer" that are rooted in a wide array of factors such as gender identity, age, race, ethnicity, and economic standing (Ellis et al. 275; Jackson and McKinney 11). The various factors mentioned above can help researchers identify different patterns across time, spaces, and geopolitical contexts, while also fostering a greater understanding of how these patterns can impact how research is perceived and conducted within writing and writing studies (Jackson and McKinney 11), challenging "the (problematic and gendered) historical narrative" (Heinert and Phillips 256).

Building upon autoethnography, Collaborative Autoethnography (CAE) allows researchers to critically analyze and reflectively interpret their data. CAE enables us to be participants; the research process of CAE is interactive so that each voice is closely examined in a similar way that counterstories are. Our study was strengthened by employing CAE, as it combined collaborative and critical views with individual perspectives through self-reflexivity and feministic collaboration (Roy and Uekusa 388).

Using researcher reflections and analyses, this study harnesses personal experiences as data. Thus, our data collection started with individual stories provoked with initial key words such as our upbringing, cultures, linguistic journeys, educational backgrounds, working experiences, and interpersonal communication, and continued with written reflections of our intersectional identities. This initial stage was inspired by MDI as the theoretical framework, existing literature in writing studies and WC studies, and our own instinctive curiosity, and led to fruition of individual trajectory and self-reflectivity via a feminist lens. When meeting virtually, we shared our notes and gradually peeled back the layers of our intersectional identities from the surface to approach the core via - feministic, dialogic, relationship focused, and inquiry-based conversations (Cox and Riedner 15). Our approach through these consecutive meetings aligned with Cooper's way of crediting intersectionality as a noun - an account of personal identity and power (385) - and a verb, metaphori-

cally peeling the onion or "lifting the veil" (393). By sharing and snowballing our individual experiences, we were not only able to identify how our experiences intersect with one another, but also how these intersections are reflected in and shape who we are within the WC and academia as a whole. The whole process of cross-inquiry and self-reflectivity has definitely articulated the connections of our identity and positionality in the WC, tracing the origin and impact on the WC as a pracademic ecosystem.

The analysis stage, which simultaneously overlapped with the data collection of our own stories, involved more critiquing and "peeling" through cross-inquiries and self-reflectivity. We critiqued the necessity and meaning of those personal accounts in order to not only keep our different experiences and distinct voices more salient, but also to make sure to feature the themes of translingualism and transnationalism in the context of our WC. This stage involved trimming or deleting some accounts and highlighting and fleshing out others in the manuscript. These prioritized and finalized intersections directly relate back to the implementation of the authors' counterstories throughout this study, promoting feminist rhetorical practices in the WC and larger academic writing practices.

Physical and Temporal Contexts

The WC where we work is located down the hallway shared by two other centers. On a busy first floor of the university library, the WC serves over 10,000 tutoring sessions in person and online per year, free for the 56,000 students in this Hispanic Serving Institute (HSI). It has also used student-favored social media to promote their free services and events to students. As an expanded academic space, the WC has operated on the same budget for over 10 years, notably in the early 2020s when the inflation rate was historically high. This WC, like other WCs and university offices, has experienced staff loss and has raised its hourly pay from $10 to $15 for undergraduate peer tutors. Even among expanded academic spaces, WCs are perceived to belong to non-STEM fields and, thus, are not considered to be top priorities compared to STEM oriented academic spaces. This WC is not alone in terms of its financial concerns; some WCs were closed before COVID-19 due to budget cuts or other structural arrangements (e.g. Zhang). During COVID-19, more financial burdens overwhelmed universities and their expanded academic spaces, including WCs.

The WC tutors are contingent part-time university employees and many of them are commuting students who regard their tutoring jobs as their primary source of income. In the early 2020s, many of the WC tutors who lived with their families faced hardship, including the unemployment of their family members, extra child or adult care for their families, and a higher cost of living. Their pressures also included the higher taxing of their emotional labor when student writers were also impacted by the aforementioned factors.

Findings

Through the conceptual lens of feminist MDI (e.g. Bitzel; Blair and Nickosen; Green; Heinert and Phillips), the two authors connect with the current literature and share their intersectional identities and exigent positionalities below, weaved in with self-narratives and self- reflections. They both agree with Roy and Uekusa in that "self-narratives of their experiences during the pandemic as a rich source of qualitative data for further delving into the socioeconomic, political and cultural impacts of the pandemic" (383). They also affirm that the WC community allows students to contribute their different funds of knowledge, whether it be from their homes, personal relationships, or beyond. These knowledge bases ultimately shape how student writers convey and interpret meaning in their work.

Authors' Exigencies as First Layer of Findings

Naya, a Cuban-American woman, experiences fluid, sometimes conflicting aspects of her own identity. These struggles manifest in clashes between English and Spanish or in adopting Cuban traditions in an American setting. Often times, Naya resists the rigid "professional" American English standards that are so central to many literature courses, using code-switching and slang throughout her work as her way to retrace, rewrite, and reshape the history of immigration, cultural and linguistic negotiation, or historical and existing conquest (Canagarajah 40; Gilyard 285). This local liminal cultural space in which she dwells has heavily influenced her current academic study as a Master's student at the HSI, as well as how she views the rigidity of academia in her job as a WC tutor. Her position as a student and tutor - a learner and expert - allows her to occupy the WC as an extended academic space in which she understands students' struggles while also trying to help them achieve their academic ambitions (Namakula and Prozesky 40).

Xuan graduated from the university's PhD program as an international student and was excited to return to work at the university WC as an international employee. Fully aware of her identities at the HSI and subconsciously trying to 'remodel' the space, she brought greeting posters in multiple languages - one saying "Hello" and one saying "thank you" - placing them on her door and in her office. The posters recently got a response from an anonymous visitor who added a sticky note with a new or corrected version of "Hello" to the original part of Korean expression. Noticing many of the WC staff in a parallel position to her underprivileged intersectionalities, she has continuously contributed to the WC to be more inclusive, collaborative, and progressive. She has introduced scholarship including translingualism and international scholars as part of her class readings. Besides this, she has also created a WC Curriculum Vitae to record and celebrate every achievement of their creative and academic writings, in all the languages they used in drafting. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she helped invite university units - some also considered as extended spaces - to the WC's staff meetings, which coached WC staff on coping, being mindful about genders and pronouns, and working with students with disabilities.

We claim that our exigencies can help shape the WC into a more feminine, reciprocal, and brave

space. We also want to acknowledge in the following sections that our lived stories of shaping this space involve vulnerability and emotional labor at "the heart of the study" (Jackson and McKinney 11).

Cross Inquiry for Self-narratives and Self-reflexivity as the Second Layer of Findings

We shared our voices but also learned about each other's experiences with critical examinations in our virtual meetings. While having a comfortable space between us and "peeling" the layers of data, we still felt vulnerabilities and emotions, both of which can potentially be overlooked within the literature. The shared feelings and follow-up narratives challenged "the (problematic and gendered) historical narrative" (Heinert and Phillips 256) and referenced Cox and Riedner's article about "two women-identified labor conscious institutional workers" (17). The following scenes, enriched with conflicts, contradictions, and emotional labor, are outcomes of our cross-inquiries. They are inspired by Payne's suggestion to "take emotions seriously" (295), as a way to protest the biased narrative which has devalued the emotional labor of intersectionally minoritized populations for decades (Heinert and Phillips 256).

Cultural Conflicts in Naya's Experiences

One of the distinct aspects of both authors' positionalities within the WC stems from their culturally diverse backgrounds. In Naya's experience, her cultural background is a medley that has been a source of confusion for her as a second-generation Cuban-American born in Hialeah (Miami), in a community of working class Cuban immigrants. Having spent the majority of her youth with her religious Cuban immigrant grandmother, she grew up speaking Spanish as they went door-to-door preaching in the streets of East Hialeah. This little Cuban enclave is what Naya considers to be her home: the Spanish, the neighbors' chatter filled with Cuban slang, the salsa music at night. This was as close to Cuba as she had ever been - and maybe ever will be. That being said, it comes as no surprise that the minute Naya had to step out of that little Cuban bubble and into a Pembroke Pines elementary school located in Broward County, with a predominantly white population, she was faced with a completely different world from what she was used to.

Naya remembers her first day of kindergarten in vivid detail; her little pink and white Sketchers, the starchiness of her pleated uniform skirt, and the weight of her school supplies stretching the fabric of her My Little Pony backpack. She remembers the excitement and fear of the prospect of meeting other children her age, making new friends, learning new things. The fantastical image that she painted in her mind, however, was quickly tainted once she stepped into those intimidating school doors. It was not long before Naya had to write her first English sentences introducing herself to her teacher and classmates. Although Naya knew some words in English, much of her thinking took place in Spanish - and so, she struggled with the task. Called to the front of the class to finally read what she had written, she fumbled with the words and all that she could produce was "broken English."

As a consequence, her teacher gave her poor marks on Naya's efforts and had a discussion with her parents about her "lack" of "proper" English. It was obvious after that moment that Naya's Spanish was not welcome here; this was English territory now. Although she was too young to understand much beyond this, what was taking place in that moment was an exercise of dominant, exclusionary language practices - all disguised under the term "Standard English." Laura Greenfield explores this idea of "Standard English" as:

> The belief that 'Standard English' is an inherently superior language has been used to justify pedagogies that insist upon the teaching of only 'Standard English' in writing classrooms and writing centers (and indeed across the curriculum). Such pedagogies, when built upon this faulty assumption, implicitly privilege a racist view of history rather than an intellectually sound understanding of linguistic phenomena (38).

This usage of "Standard English" is one that showed itself from Naya's very first day of school and would inevitably continue to permeate itself in all levels of her education until her very last. Looking back on Naya's youth, while her parents had indeed taught her English in tandem with her grandmother's Spanish lessons, she felt more comfortable speaking in her mother tongue. It was not long before her Spanish suffered from the process of learning English. Naya remembers her grandmother's desperate attempts at salvaging her Spanish, administering make-shift Spanish lessons in her elegant cursive script. She remembers fighting to wrap her tongue around the tilde in mañana and struggling to roll her r's in carro. However, her grandmother's efforts faded away as Naya was singled out by both her teachers and fellow peers for her accent and grammatical slip-ups. In going through this challenging and confusing time, Naya quickly understood that she was different - culturally and linguistically. She was expected to split herself into two and engage in bilingualism, speaking Spanish only at home and English only at school, a practice that Greenfield argues has been a part of a historically exclusive system of inequality that paints "Standard English" as the language of "success" (Greenfield 43) and the others as the opposites. The "American way" reigned supreme in the classroom when it came to both teacher-student and peer-to-peer dynamics; a system that ultimately excluded cultures, languages, and perspectives that deviated from the dominant, white, male, upper-class standards, akin to the "rules of racial standing under white supremacy" (Condon and Faison 6). Feeling pressured to embrace the "American" way, while also being encouraged by her grandmother to hold on to her roots, Naya found herself in an ongoing internal and external battle between her Cuban and American heritage.

Naya's introduction to higher education opened a door to a world where the expression of her linguistic and cultural perspective was not only welcomed but encouraged. Studying at the HSI, Naya has been able to participate in writing projects that not only engage in translingual practices, but also tap into her own personal and renegotiated cultural narrative. These wonderful experiences have inspired Naya to further explore Cuban-American identity in her Master's thesis, as well as carry what she's learned into how she tutors students at the WC. Given the diverse student body at the HSI where both authors work, many students come into the WC with a native language that is not English. Much of their writing is critiqued by their professors because of their "poor English," which Naya has approached with a conflicted attitude. Why

are these students viewed as intellectually and linguistically inferior because they do not write in the English Standard? In Naya's eyes, their languages and perspectives are just as valid, an attitude that has permeated through how she engages with these students. Maintaining a balance with meeting a professor's linguistic expectations and encouraging the students to continue negotiating how they use language in their own way, Naya has molded her tutoring style in such a way that it actively critiques the dominant systems at play in the American education system, which resonates with the power of counterstories (Green 257- 260).

Naya's Creation of Connections with Student Writers

The ways in which Naya has negotiated her personal attitudes towards translingual practices and cultural differences through her tutoring have ultimately allowed her to foster deeper connections with her students (Canagarajah 40). One facet of her duties that is an exemplar of this is her role within the WC's Graduate Writing Mentorship Program (GWMP). The GWMP is a joint program sponsored by the HSI's graduate school and hosted by the WC, in which a single graduate writing tutor facilitates weekly three-hour-long meetings with a group of roughly ten students each semester. These graduate students typically work on high-stake, long-term writing projects: theses, dissertations, project proposals, journal publications, and so on. The purpose of this program is to provide a designated period of time and community for these students to work on their critical writing projects, that they would not otherwise have in the midst of the obligations posed by their everyday lives. During this three-hour block, students have the opportunity to have 15-minute one-on-one sessions with their program facilitator to discuss their current progress and establish attainable goals for subsequent meetings. This is all done in order to encourage and engage with productive writing habits that bring these students to their ultimate goal - whether that be graduation, publication, or presentation.

Naya has personally facilitated seven separate cohorts across the 2021-2024 Spring and Fall semesters. During her time as a GWMP facilitator, she has managed to foster a sense of camaraderie with her students. Many of her students, like Naya, are first-generation college students and come from a diverse background of cultures and languages that differ from the white, American, middle-class, English standard (Jiang et al. 34). Much like the majority of her GWMP students, Naya's positionality as a woman has also played a major role in the connections she has been able to foster with her students through shared experiences as women navigating academia. Since Naya is a commuter to her university, she faces added familial pressures and issues that also demand her immediate attention. This makes it difficult for Naya as she tries to balance her home- life with her work as a graduate assistant. As such, she has been able to directly relate to the plight of her students, given that she was also a student herself, working towards her Master's degree in English Literature while also trying to balance all of the other factors outlined above.

As a graduate assistant, Naya can relate to the financial issues experienced by her students, as many of them are also teaching assistants struggling to get by. This comes as no surprise, considering that 58% of college students across the country work on-campus jobs, with 55% being financially independent and 42%

living in poverty (Lederer et al. 15). All of these everyday struggles have become even more complicated as a result of the recent Covid-19 pandemic (Lederer et al. 15). Samuel Shelton, a fellow teaching assistant, touches on similar shared experiences during the pandemic, stating that "we are exposed to worsened/ing forms of neoliberal, capitalist exploitation, isolation from support systems, emergent obstacles to degree completion, and unexpected responsibilities in our lives" (36). Much like Shelton, Naya and her GWMP students share the same experiences. Despite being fortunate enough to hold positions as teaching assistants, there were obstacles and issues that ultimately affected the experiences of them as both laborers and students.

Additionally, Naya's academic program required her to write a thesis. Furthermore, she was also encouraged to actively engage in other writing projects like publishing and conferences in order to gain experience by the time she entered the job market. These requirements offered Naya a deeper understanding and sympathy for her GWMP cohort, as they were all working on projects of similar difficulty and significance to her own. In this way, Naya has established a feminist dynamic with her GWMP cohort in which she "do[es] not hold [herself] as superior to [her] students in a hierarchy of academic proficiency," and thus "resist[s] the positionings inherent in deficit discourses," instead emphasizing "a more horizontal power dynamic" (Namakula and Prozesky 46). In establishing a balanced relationship with her cohorts, Naya viewed herself as equal to her GWMP students, many of them being multilingual female writers with similar struggles and experiences.

Coming from a place of linguistic diversity can create challenges in many academic spaces, especially where Standard English is the norm. Because any sign of linguistic diversity is labeled as "imperfect English" in academia, many professors will equate these deviations from the Standard with a lack of intelligence, thus delivering poor marks for the use of multifaceted languages or non-Standard Englishes (Greenfield 35). Naya resonates with her GWMP students in their shared struggles with navigating their individual linguistic identities and the rigidity of language posed by white-dominated academic Standards.

Overcoming this similar thread of hurdles, Naya and her GWMP students have been able to foster an open dialogue rooted in empathy, respect, and even friendship (Jiang et al. 36). This can be seen in the weekly observation logs that Naya updates after each GWMP session (see fig. 2), with personal identifiable information removed:

Figure 2: Snapshot of Excel Sheet Containing Student Graduate Writing Mentorship Program Log[1]

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1   The first column outlines the date, the second column describes the student's current progress, and the third column de-

In just these few sessions, both the progress the student had shown throughout the program and the relationship formed between Naya and the student, are clearly outlined. What is particularly worth noting is where Naya and the student were able to bond with and relate to each other when it came to overcoming certain hurdles in regards to both of their writing processes. Naya specifically remembers the long two-hour sessions beyond GWMP during her tutoring hours that she would spend with this student revising her dissertation each week; at the time, Naya was also in the nascent stages of drafting up her own Master's thesis, as well as a potential journal publication. She often found herself saying "I get how you feel" and "me, too!" whenever her student laid out her stresses about new critiques from her major committee member or editorial revisions on her publication manuscript. Despite their different fields and levels of education, Naya was able to utilize her own personal experiences and tutoring style in order to better guide the student towards their writing goals. This, once again, is reflective of the unique positionality that Naya has within this diverse academic space.

In light of Naya's stories, it is important that we take note of peer tutors' professional disposition towards student writers, not only linguistically or cognitively, but also emotionally. Hence, their emotional labor correlates with student writers' emotions. Tutors are likely to vary in their emotional engagement and labors; some tutors, particularly tutors of color, may experience more emotional labor than others (Hynes 215). This observation aligns with "critical consideration of intersectional identities" as key to building mentorship (Ribero and Arellano 340), which is apparent in Naya's experiences outlined above and will be further confirmed by Xuan's experiences that follow, as a WC administrator of color.

Xuan's Self-healing by Making Connections

What Xuan has done is a self-healing process to get rid of her own negative thoughts about the various losses and challenges in her life, intersecting with gender, race/ethnicity, nationality, and other factors affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical crises between, but not limited to, the U.S. and China (Echeverri et al. 1796). Coming from a working-class town in China, she has developed perseverance and resilience over the years of fighting hardship with her parents. Such growth has enabled her to see positivity within negative contexts. However, she still values a space where she feels comfortable sharing her vulnerability and absorbing others' bravery.

The year of 2020 marked Xuan's most vulnerable year. Before she went to sleep on Monday in April 2020, she received a WeChat (similar to Facetime) call from her younger brother about a truck accident her parents had in China. Xuan's mom passed away on the spot and her dad was sent to ICU in a hospital. Devastatingly hopeless and sleepless overnight, Xuan shared the message with her WC supervisor Tuesday morning. Receiving condolences and support, Xuan was excused from teaching or working that day. But she still did, and even met a student 10 minutes before the class as they had scheduled. Xuan recognized that this was all unfolding in the last few weeks of the Spring semester and her mom would have hoped that

scribes the student's goals for the following week.

Xuan pulled through for her students during this critical point in the semester. That pre-class meeting with the student created a moment and space for Xuan to share the news with her student and compose herself for most of the class, though she had swollen eyes and a damaged voice. It was later found out that Xuan could not go back to China because of the dissonance of the COVID-related policies, the geopolitical tension between the two countries, and the skyrocketing price of the U.S.- China flight tickets. Holding a working visa as an international employee, Xuan failed to attend the funeral to say good-bye to her mom, and was only able to visit her family three years later.

This particular email (see fig. 3) was sent to Xuan from the student in the meeting who went on to become a WC tutor a year later, on the same date of losing her mother. This email itself shows that the WC space, physically, virtually and spiritually, has been built and maintained with safety, feminism, and humanities. The content encompasses feminist love and a community rooted in sisterhood for Xuan who is not just a professional, but a mother and daughter. And as the last paragraph in figure 3 shows, the WC staff took action in supporting a cause to help certain individuals with minoritized intersectional identities. This was an action-oriented response to Xuan's call for support in an op-ed after the Atlanta shooting occurred in March 2021. Xuan called for high education support to demystify the ongoing objectification imposed on and potential threat to individuals who look like Asian women (Jiang). This outcry was Xuan's message of sympathizing with the victims and worrying about her own situation, as well those of her daughter and others like them.

Dear Xuan,

Last year, you chose to include us in one of the most vulnerable moments one could have: loss. You shared the news of your mother's passing with us. In response, we wrote you "A Piece for Xuan", sharing our thoughts of *If I hadn't* met you to try to show you how much you'd changed us as students, writers, researchers, and people.

A year later, we'd now like to recognize and honor you again with the help of even more supporters. I've been working with Glenn and everyone from the writing center to create a piece that holds remeberance for you on this day, since everyone at the Writing Center has felt your warm and encouraging presence, from staff meetings to the whole Center for Excellence community. You see us, and we only hope that this small token of our appreciation could give something similar to you.

Additionally, to help build a safer future for you and your daughter, the Writing Center will be placing a charitable donation to the AAPI Women Lead Organization and #ImReady Movement **in your name** to ensure the success and visibility of the Asian American community and STOP ASIAN HATE. This charity focuses on women who are victims or survivors of gender-based violence on their journey to healing, which after the stories your her op-ed, we hoped would be a very strong message of solidarity. Your writing has encouraged a wave of positive change that won't yet break upon the shore. We Love you.
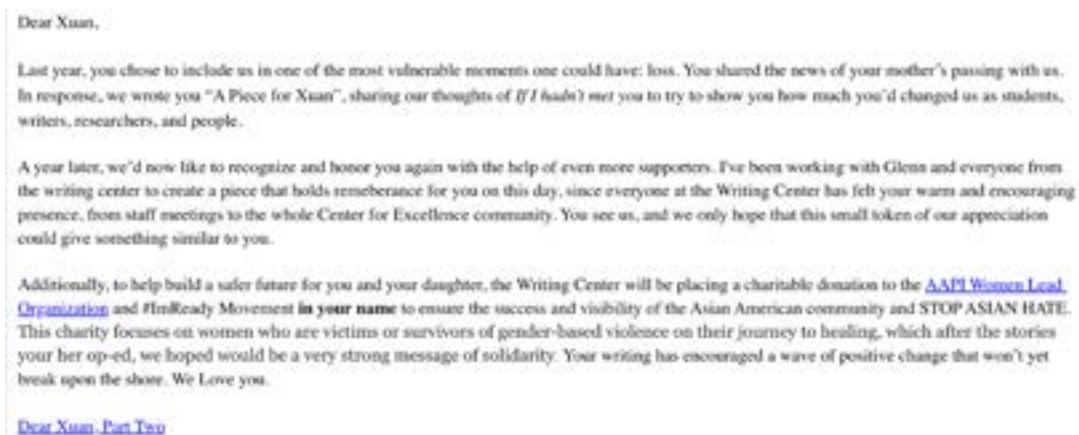
Dear Xuan, Part Two

Figure 3: Excerpt from an email received in April 2021

The whole email showed the WC's great understanding and strong support for Xuan by acknowledging and affirming her intersectional identities (see fig. 3). Xuan could see the WC as her family in the U.S., as none of her extended family members reside in the U.S. Seeing and feeling other WC individuals like her family members who are having similar or parallel difficulties, Xuan could further relate with them and provide a "feminist ethic of care" (Wenger 121). Such care refers to "a moral and egalitarian means of leadership, one that spreads out rather than reaches up" as "a means of flattening hierarchies and redefining professional relationships" (Wenger 120-122), disturbing the dominant structure (Blair and Nickosen 3). Accordingly, power under such leadership "is shared and facilitative, built through relationships and governed by support [,] not control" (Wenger 122-123).

One example of the support alluded to above was when everyone, including the WC contingent staff, had to deal with the high inflation rate in the early 2020s. Seeing and experiencing the importance of financial aid support systems to the success of first-generation students (see Rehr et al.), Xuan persuaded other WC administrators to agree on raising the hourly rate while simultaneously helping create a connection with the graduate school, securing two graduate assistantships (GAships) since Spring 2020 and one more GAship since Spring 2024. Those GAships have helped undergraduate tutors, many of whom are first-generation college students, apply for graduate schools without too many financial concerns. Though their department might give them their GAships, the GAships from the writing center, as a great option or backup, have supported six individuals, including Naya.

Xuan's Feministic Co-authoring as Empowerment

Xuan sees herself in the other WC individuals' strength and resilience navigating their intersectional identities. More collaborative scholarship emphasizing emotions, rapport, humanities, and mindfulness in writing and writing tutoring processes were crafted, submitted, and published. This made their voices loud in academic and creative writings, as well as in op-eds. The WC staff shared and reviewed each other's manuscripts as peer review exercises but also peer therapy. When such collaborative opportunities to participate in research and writing were available, the WC staff, many of them minoritized students, worked to "enhance work-related skills that can better prepare them for their future careers and interpersonal relationships" (Castillo and Estudillo 2). Such co-authorship has been communally documented and celebrated in the center's collaborative Curriculum Vitae (see the figure 4 below).

Figure 4: Excerpt of WC Curriculum Vitae

It is worth noting that many of the names outlined in the snapshot above belong to peer tutors who identify as women coming from ethnically and racially diverse backgrounds. One individual co-author, Ms. Casabone (see figure 4) was one of the three students in Xuan's tutor- training class who came to her office for a research study about free access to menstrual products after Xuan's class announcement, along with

other announcements about conferences and calls for proposals and publications. The three students were invited to chat and learn more about what they needed to do, and how long they needed to commit to this project. Even though the invitation was responded to by three individuals in class, Ms. Casabone was the one who followed up after the semester ended and contributed most to the literature review section. Her interest and dedication in this study showcased not only "how personal and professional lives are interconnected" (Green 257), but also how her marginalized identities (e.g. Hispanic, female, working class) drove her along the way in earning their co-authorship in mainstream scholarship (Bitzel 3). As Xuan, Ms. Casabone was aware of the monthly cost of menstrual products and passionate about the free access to menstrual products at the workplace and beyond. It should be noted that this publication was referred to by the HSI's Center for Women and Gender Studies and shortly followed by the decision of the HSI's Student Government Association that free pads are provided on campus. Ms. Casabone is currently a receptionist in a law firm in New York City, and she has been moving toward her dream as an editor in a publishing company, updating Xuan with her milestones.

Another collaborator, Ms. Peña (see figure 4), joined the authorship journey through the same process as an undergraduate student. She moved on to her master's degree at the HSI and is now a second-year doctoral student at the University of Miami, thriving with the research foundation she accumulated as an undergraduate student. Ms. Peña highlighted her gain in a fourth collaborative piece with Xuan, including metacognitive explorations and identity shifts. As a student collaborator, Ms. Peña changed her self-perception from a knowledge consumer to a contributor (Palmer et al. 5). This series of collaborations has not only benefited Ms. Peña, but also empowered Xuan. As a mentor and co-author of Ms. Peña for several years, Xuan was invited to Ms. Peña's master's thesis defense and introduced as her "research mentor" to her thesis committee and audience. As a contingent faculty member and unofficial mentor of a graduate student, Xuan, having heard Ms. Peña's introduction, felt more legitimate and motivated to continue her mentorship and co-authorship with students.

By encouraging these peer tutors to pursue publication opportunities on the same platforms as faculty, Xuan not only fostered these tutors to embrace and position their own publicly peripheral identities in the larger academic and professional space, but she also established greater diversity within the WC in scholarship and praxis (Blair and Nickosen 3). This has helped to combat the dominant academic standard within academia (including who gets to share knowledge, in what languages, and using whose voices), while also making the WC a more feminine, diverse, and inclusive space. These efforts have also yielded the new generation of minority staff who "will ruffle some feathers" and not be "the tokenized minority who will bring unthreatening diversity to higher education" (Ribero and Arellano 348). Xuan has started to see her emotional support and "feminist ethic of care" as leadership (Payne 285; Wenger 121). This realization comes from a dedication to "transgressing boundaries" which exclude and silence undergraduate student writers, particularly those from marginalized communities (Shanahan n.p.). In doing so, Xuan empowers many individuals in her co-authoring and mutual learning experiences.

Dialogues of Inquiry as Inner Layer of Findings

Xuan could see Naya's quest for linguistic and academic justice, when the latter mentioned her question, as follows:

> *Much of their writing is critiqued by their professors because of their "poor English," which Naya has approached with a conflicted attitude.*

Many times, it is a battle for tutors to position themselves and renegotiate their identities while also being pragmatic and unfaltering in their sessions (see Shapiro). In the context of one-on-one peer tutoring, being pragmatic means adhering to the existing standard and authorities, and being progressive refers to representing student writers' agency. Even though student writers' previous knowledge are rich assets, they may not be seen as legitimate in their instructors' curriculum and instruction. Hence, the battle of peer tutors as an "in-between" does not have a "standard" solution. Xuan argues that in peer tutoring sessions, within such a context of individual proximity and horizontality, tutors' eagerness to be progressive would be even stronger for student writers. Accordingly, the frequency and intensity of peer tutors' identity renegotiation is very salient.

In a similar vein, Naya was able to relate to and reflect upon Xuan's statements, particularly when she stated:

> *Xuan could see herself within the other WC individuals' strength and resilience… they made their voices loud in academic and creative writings, as well as op-eds.*

Having once been a tutor-in-training under Xuan's guidance, Naya remembers the plethora of creative and academic publishing opportunities that Xuan's training class provided her. As a young bachelor's student back then, Naya had never stopped to ask whether or not she should send her writing out into the world for publishing; she simply did not think her work was publishable material. It was not until Xuan introduced her to her first ever call-for-submissions - a flier for O, Miami's upcoming Waterproof anthology - that Naya considered submitting her work for publication. She had her doubts, of course, but her WC administrator continuously reassured and supported Naya throughout the entirety of the publication process. In the end, Naya accomplished a dream that she had never considered possible before - she got to see her translingual poem published in print. If it was not for Xuan's implementation of creative writing activities in class, as well as the promotion of publication and conference opportunities, Naya would not have fully tapped into her professional writing potential. Naya's lived story further confirms Larracey et al.'s statement that "Part of UR's work is to demonstrate to students that they can and do make important contributions to our collective disciplinary knowledge despite histories of exclusion" (11) and Palmer et al.'s identity shift from knowledge consumers to knowledge contributors (5).

Through persistence, Naya has been able to build her expertise in both English conventions and creative writing techniques, allowing her to "negotiate between and among intersecting and clashing cultures, languages, literacies, discourses, and disciplines" (Severino, as cited in Bitzel 2). Naya has published several poems which code-mesh English and Spanish languages and cultures. This allows Naya to translate her writing experiences into her tutoring so that she can help students "decide when to follow organizational and stylistic conventions . . . and when to take risks and violate them" (Severino, as cited in Bitzel 2).

Both authors are aware that underprivileged students are not a homogenous group and that intersections of their MDI would have differences in weights and foci compared to the diagram (Bitzel 3). Such awareness contributes to revealing the ever-changing complexities of interacting and overlapping categories in identities within different spaces and contexts (Bitzel 3). Multilingual students, as Naya discussed above, need to develop their writing and language skills, whereas many first-generation college, immigrant, and international students may need more time to register themselves in academic rhetoric. The complexity, in reality, is that many of our student writers, as well as peer tutors, carry several of the aforementioned identities, intersecting to form and renegotiate their own identities when entering the academic space physically and metaphorically. Noticing such genuine complexities, Xuan argues against monolithic or dichotomic tutoring approaches which put themselves at the risk of artificially simplifying the tutoring process. The writing center administration has advocated and cultivated tutors' mindset of a continuum embracing mirror and window (Kurzer 202), for both pre-service and in-service tutors. Peer tutors and student writers exercise their own agency as they decide contextual positionality and identity renegotiation along this continuum. Peer tutors can encourage student writers to use writing to amplify their strengths and richness as a mirror (Kurzer 202), for instance, in their experiences out of the classroom, with their work and family life. They can also make connections with the new class about how to write better as a window (Kurzer 204). Through peer tutoring, writing tutors can connect with student writers and motivate them to be better writers by seeing the content and purpose of their writing as self-expression and knowledge-sharing. Through these sessions, student writers would be engaged as active thinkers and rewriters, and left their undeniable right to decide how they renegotiate their intersectional identities, including their professional identity (Godbee et al. 5).

Conclusion

WC practitioners, many times, are WC tutors and administrators from different linguistic, cultural, and gendered backgrounds, carrying out their own perspectives through their practices. The lived experiences shared by both Xuan and Naya reflect these findings, emphasizing the importance of the WC as a space that promotes cultural awareness, linguistic diversity, and creative collaboration,despite being systematically unprioritized within the larger academic space in the trying era of the early 2020s. One of the inside-out approaches is to value and share WCs' own intersectional stories to enrich WC scholarship and to amplify their identity-renegotiating voices to a broader audience.

By sharing their perspectives as female, multilingual, and culturally diverse WC staff members, the

two authors advocate their renegotiated intersectional identities as resources and assets by illustrating how their individual experiences have positioned themselves in the WC and for the WC, internally and externally. In doing so, they combat the standard pushed by the white, masculine academic space in general, and connect and empower student writers, many of whom have been minoritized and even excluded by the aforementioned space and standard. Future studies would benefit from looking at the lived and fluid experiences of other WC tutors and administrators, as well as student writers with different perspectives from the ones detailed here.

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