BLACK WOMEN AND EMOTIONAL BURDEN IN THE WRITING CENTER

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ABSTRACT

Misogynoir, a term coined by Moya Bailey (2017) to refer to the deep-rooted societal hatred of Black women, is extremely pervasive in higher education. Despite stated movements toward the opposites, Black women in higher education are continually systemically oppressed by a system that refuses to change. However, when they speak about their experiences, they are disbelieved, discredited, and even punished. Writing centers are deeply implicated within this system of higher education and even create their own unique systems of oppression for Black women administrators, consultants, and staff. While writing center scholarship has acknowledged these systems and even made stated moves towards equity and anti-racism, the structures inherent in the writing center and an unwillingness to change keep writing centers exactly the way they are. In this study, I interview three Black women that work in a writing center inside of a primarily white midwestern university: Lana, Sasha, and Victoria. I interrogate how these co-researchers narrate and experience this emotional burden caused by the institutional structures of the writing center. This paper concludes that writing centers in theory claim to be anti-racist, equitable institutions, but in praxis, enforce a culture of misogynoir, resulting in a reality where Black women enter writing centers with the understanding that they will be welcomed and accepted in the space, but once in the space, they begin to disproportionately feel the emotional burden of working in a writing center that privileges whiteness. I end with the recommendation that in order to resist this reality, writing centers must (a) center an ethic of care in policy and practice, (b) hire Black women in clusters and leadership positions, and (c) implement ideological filtering for everyone hired. While these actions alone won't end the culture of misogynoir perpetuated by writing centers, they will be major strides in lifting some of the emotional burden felt by Black women in writing centers.

This thesis is dedicated to Black women.

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Introduction

Counterstory

It's 2019, and I'm a junior in undergrad, headed to Columbus, Ohio to present at the International Writing Center Associations' (IWCA) 2019 convention. The theme is the "Art of It All," and I'm shaking in my boots, excited but so nervous to be presenting my research.

This isn't my first time going to a writing center conference or even presenting, but it all feels so new. My research feels so important, and I'm ready to share it with writing center people, who I *know* will be receptive. I'll be presenting Emotional Labor for People of Color in the Writing Center and recounting my own experiences and labor in the writing center.

I practice up to ten minutes before the presentation, and I can feel the way my whole body shakes with me. I'm sick to my stomach, and I feel faint. My heart is pounding in my chest. I'm the second person on my panel to speak, so I sit and wait in my chair, barely present enough to hear what my co-presenters are saying. I'm sweating a lot now, and I wonder if my friends, who are sitting next to me, can tell.

Finally, it's my turn to stand up and go. When I start talking, there may be ten people in the room, and many of them were consultants from my own writing center. My nerves make it nearly impossible to make consistent eye contact with my audience, but every time I look up, I notice someone new has entered the room. By the time I'm done, the room is packed, most chairs full, and a few people even standing in the back to make space.

As my presentation comes to its end, the room is silent and *heavy* with the weight of what I've said. So nervous I forgot to introduce my next presenter. I sit, and he reminds me gently, so I stand back up, one more time, before sitting down and trying to calm myself again. It's over. I can breathe.

But then question time comes. At first, many of the questions are directed at my co-presenters. Enough even, that I'm sure that not are going to be for me. But then, finally, one woman in the back of the audience raises her hand and points at me.

"Where are you getting this from?"

Unsure of what she means, I quickly flip back to my Work Cited slides, showcasing a proud bibliography and almost a year of research. At first, I am still happy to engage with her, so excited to finally have a questioner. But then she keeps going, beginning to question my research and ask me to share my personal experiences with racism in the center in order to prove to her that what I'm saying is true. My happiness quickly dissipates. I'm answering all of her questions calmly and reasonably. I explain that I'm not just talking about individual racism, but instead the problem of systemic racism that exists at an institutional level, but we just keep going back and forth until …

"Is it maybe in your head? Why can't you just choose to be positive? In my writing center, we all love each other, and we don't really see color."

I immediately shut down. Unsure of what to say, I'm just silent, and my co-presenter steps in to tell the audience member how problematic the idea of color-evasiveness is. But it doesn't matter, I've already fully shut down. I've checked out of the discussion, and I can't muster the words to refute her. Off the top of my head, I feel that I can cite a million articles that specifically dispute her argument. I think of Villanueva's (2006) article about color-evasiveness[1], which only masquerades as modern racism. I have research on how Black women and

[1] Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2013) coined the term "color-blind racism" to refer to phrase to refer to a liberalist ideology "that results in 'raceless' explanations for all sort of race-related affairs" (p. 1364). Villanueva (2006) later described the concept as a series of rhetorical devices that we use to avoid talking about racism.

marginalized communities aren't believed when they talked about their experiences with research.

However, in my frustration, I can't think of a way to bring all of that information to the table. Instead, I just feel a lump in my chest, and tears welling up, and a tugging need to escape the room immediately. I'm upset by the idea that I am somehow not credible when talking about my own experiences with racism and even more upset that this idea has been transplanted into the minds of my audience.

Later the same year, I listen as two of the consultants in my writing center describe a girl as the "least cool" member of our writing center because she always makes everything about race. My friend and I beg our director to let us lead or create a professional development session on anti-racism. Our director obfuscates and works around it until it's too late for us to do it. In a staff meeting, someone poses a question about how to deal with racism in the writing center. Everyone talks about how prepared and ready they are to step in if a paper ever ends up being racist. I remind them that racism doesn't just happen to other people and that they have to think about their own role in racism too. The conversation quickly ends.

In 2020, I take an independent study with my writing center director, where we talk about anti-racism in the writing center. I develop a project meant to help start implementing anti-racism into all staff PD events, but when I present the work to my director, she scolds me for using the word *start.*

"We're already anti-racist," she tells me.

The independent study ends, and despite my constant asking, my director never follows up with me about the work that I am doing. She's too busy expanding the writing center to other areas of the campus.

In 2022, I get to IWCA again, this time in Vancouver. I'm blown away that in every corner I turn, I'm encountering more racism. I sit in on a special interest group on anti-racism and queer justice, where I'm the only Black girl in the room and one of only two people of color. At another time, I step onto the elevator with a friend, and I hear two girls looking over the conference programming.

"Making room for HBCUs," they laugh, "But only HBCUs, no one else."

The way I enter this work is a result of the collective of all my experiences in writing centers, good and bad. I've often thought about the isolating nature of the work I was doing and what it means that for 7 out of 9 years of working in the writing center, I was the only Black woman. But I don't just think about what it means for me. I also think about what it means for other Black women and marginalized communities entering the space as administrators, consultants, and clients. And I think about what the implications of this are for writing centers as a space.

As Grutsch McKinney (2013) posits, writing centers often adhere to a grand narrative that "writing centers are comfortable, iconoclastic places where all students go to get one-to-one tutoring on their writing" (p. 3). This narrative goes on to perpetuate the racism and discrimination experienced in writing centers by marginalized consultants and clients because it allows writing centers to continue functioning exactly the same while continuing to claim that they are safe spaces for all. However, in reality, as described by Martinez (2014), this grand narrative functions as a stock story that "feign[s] neutrality and at all costs avoid[s] any blame or responsibility for societal inequity" (p. 70).

Counterstories, like the ones I share about my own experiences in writing centers, serve "to expose, analyze, and challenge stock stories of racial privilege and can help strengthen

traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance" (Martinez, 2014, p. 70). The stories that I tell about my time in the writing center function as counterstories, by challenging the grand narrative/stock story of writing centers as safe and inclusive spaces for all. My own experiences in writing centers are not singular instances of racism that can be explained away by identifying any single bad actor. Instead, my experiences reflect a culture of genderism and white supremacy that writing centers adhere to, even when virtual signaling the opposite.

Literature Review

In my literature review, pulling from previous writing center scholarship, I will discuss (a) how a culture of white supremacy is enforced in the writing center, (b) how this culture leads Black women to feel as though they don't belong in the writing center because they are presumed incompetent (c) how the silencing of Black women allows the culture of white supremacy to continue and (d) what radical practices Black women have called for writing center practitioners to implement.

White Supremacy Culture

Writing centers are not only implicated in white supremacy culture/Western epistemology but they are often responsible for (re)creating it. For example, when critiquing the grand narrative (Grutsch McKinney, 2013) that writing centers perpetuate, Grutsch McKinney critiques the idea of writing centers as home but does not consider as fully the ways that those myths should also be critiqued for white supremacy. As García (2017) writes, "let me remind you, [the writing center] has been historically, culturally, and rhetorically marked by whiteness and white culture" (p. 48). Scholars are already able to see clearly and chronicle how writing centers are implicated in white supremacy culture. Because writing centers are historically and

culturally marked by whiteness, they reinforce a culture of white supremacy because of the regulatory nature of whiteness in these spaces.

Due to this culture, writing centers perpetuate a legacy of racism and white supremacy. In one of the most telling critiques, Faison & Condon (2022) write that, even within critiques of institutional inequities, writing centers participate,

> in the institutionalized practice of cannibalizing the cultures and languages of Othered bodies; enforcing the assimilation of student writers and tutors of color into whitely discourses and the epistemological spaces in which those discourses are legitimated and reproduced. Whitely writing centres, we think, participate in the academy's racial project of defining and containing racial Otherness within acceptable, normative limits, thus preserving white advantage and privilege" (p. 9).

Writing centers, in their design, perpetuate an institutional legacy of colonialism where bodies of color are forced to conform to acceptable and normative practices. As true in most institutional structures, policies, procedures, and practices work together to maintain a culture of white supremacy that forces marginalized communities to conform in order to preserve white privilege.

In "'Our Little Secret': A History of Writing Centers, Pre- to Post-Open Admissions," Boquet (1999) chronicles how writing centers are entangled in the complex and racist history of first-year writing programs and their emergence during the "literacy crisis." In particular, she writes that "as writing centers were created largely to fix problems that university officials had difficulty even naming, things like increasing enrollment, larger minority populations, and declining (according to the public) literacy" (p. 473). In this history, Boquet argues that writing centers were created largely to "fix problems" which demonstrates that modern iterations of writing centers rely on deficit narratives, which paint students to be a victim of societal issues

without agency and as a result, treat students as a problem that needs to be solved. These narratives position marginalized communities as a problem, which is a legacy that is still ideologically maintained inside writing centers. However, in her history, Boquet fails to highlight the racism inherent in literacy crisis narratives pre- and post-open admission. Because of her failure to address racism, her chronology creates its own deficit narrative, where she refers to "minority populations" as a problem that writing centers were created to fix. In this way, Boquet contributes to a racist institutional history that constructs marginalized communities as problems and writing centers as the solution.

Belonging

This legacy of white supremacy in writing centers also links directly to why marginalized communities and, in particular, Black women are not seen in writing centers, both because there is a small number of Black women inside of the field and also because the Black women in the field are invisibilized. Inside writing centers, deficit narratives and stereotypes of Black women as undereducated and underqualified collide to create an environment where Black women are functionally unable to survive. For example, one key theme Black women identify when talking about their experiences in the writing center is belonging. The idea of belonging, or (dis)belonging, encompasses how Black women begin to feel displaced or othered in the writing center because of systems of white supremacy. However, because the writing center replicates ideas of white middle-class ideas of comfort, marginalized communities, instead of feeling a sense of belonging feel misplaced and othered. For example, Treviño & Faison (2017) critique the motif of home when they write, "I want to stress that feelings of familiarity, of knowing, and being used to things are a part of what makes spaces feel comfortable and homelike, but I did not grow up in a home surrounded by white middle-class comforts" (para. 42). Following up on how

the writing center is socially and historically marked by whiteness, García (2017) also writes, "For me, the writing center is neither my safe space nor my home" (48). In these cases, the culture of white supremacy in the writing center creates a feeling of (dis)belonging for marginalized populations. Green (2018) also writes about feeling a sense of not belonging based on the loneliness she endures in the writing center as one of the few Black women. She writes, "How the hell can this space be home, if I am always alone" (p. 25). The metaphor of home or belonging often doesn't extend to people of color writing centers. Instead, people of color are often dealing with the institutional harm related to being in the writing center, and often, they're doing it alone.

The examples above approach belonging from an interpersonal frame, in which the white and isolating nature of the writing center creates a sense of being othered. However, (dis)belonging also happens when Black women are presumed incompetent or not seen as qualified to belong in the writing center as consultants and administrators in the first place. Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. (2012) write about how presumed incompetence is reinforced through white Supremacy in academia when they write, "the culture of academia is distinctly white, heterosexual, and middle- and upper-middle-class. Those who differ from this norm find themselves, to a greater or lesser degree, "presumed incompetent" by students, colleagues, and administrators" (p. 3). The demographic make-up of universities, coupled with the regulatory nature of whiteness in these spaces, leads to anyone who doesn't fit the norm being presumed incompetent.

The same systems are also present in the writing center. Black women who don't fit the white-normative expectations in the center are assumed to be incompetent. For example, in *Facing the Center,* Denny (2010) writes about how one of the Black workers in his center was

challenged on her qualifications because she was a Black woman. He specifically writes, “When she pushes the student to think about her argumentation, the student says she thought her tutor was going to be one of the white tutors and questions her tutor’s qualifications” (p. 32). Because the consultant did not fit into the white normative expectations of the writing center, the client challenged her qualifications. In this situation, the implication was clearly that whiteness was a major qualifier for who is seen as fit to give feedback and that this Black woman did not belong in the center, at least not as a consultant.

There are many other accounted instances in which Black women have been questioned as not belonging in writing centers. For example, Faison & Treviño (2017) discuss their experiences where clients assume that they are not in the center as a consultant. They write, “I have also had many tutees assume (1) I am the receptionist or (2) that whatever coffee I just made must have been for them” (para. 34). Green (2018) also writes about multiple times where she had her qualifications questioned, and even her place on campus questioned. From a client perspective, Lockett (2019) also discusses how she avoided going to her graduate writing center in resistance to narratives of Black women being undereducated and undeserving.

Tied together, these counterstories show a trend. If writing centers are made up of primarily English first language, white consultants, and marginalized clients, this reinforces the stereotype that marginalized consultants are undereducated, and in the few cases in which a marginalized person does become a consultant, they are assumed to be an outlier. Faison & Treviño (2017) write about an experience in which their dean said, “they deserve nice things too,” referring to the people who visit the writing center. They write, “Therefore, following this logic, one can draw several assumptions from the provost’s statement: (1) that whoever is served

in the WC is somehow an othered body. After all, who is the "they" of which the provost speaks?" (Treviño & Faison, 2017, para. 35).

Additionally, Alexandria Lockett writes,

> Composition Studies and Writing Center scholarship tends to almost always exclusively position marginalized students as students not instructors, clients rather than tutors or directors (Denny; Lederman; Lamos; Malenczyk; Wallace and Bell). Typical narratives about access and equity often describe "people of color," "queers," and "first generation" populations as patrons-only. (p. 27)

As a result, bodies of color are marked as "needing help" and not as "giving help." That might mean that marginalized clients might overwhelmingly feel like they belong in the writing center, while marginalized consultants overwhelmingly feel like they do not. That same message is reinforced to clients who end up presuming consultants of color are incompetent.

Silencing

Given that so many marginalized scholars have identified how racism and white supremacy others inside of writing centers, it might seem surprising that there has not been an ideological shift taking place within writing centers. However, I would argue that ideological change has not taken place in writing centers because white writing center scholars, administrators, and staff don't want to see ideological change that would implicate them in the racism they claim to resist. As a result, systems of white supremacy in the writing center are maintained through silencing tactics, like refusal to engage in race, co-opting of the stories of Black women, and disbelief of the stories of Black women when they are shared.

One silencing tactic that takes place in writing centers is a refusal to engage with race. As Greenfield (2019) argues "the current paradigm of writing centers [...] is at best ambivalent and

at worst indifferent to systems of oppression, relying on the premise that the work of writing centers is separate from or powerless in the face of these systems" (p. 28). Within the institutional critiques of the systems, writing center practitioners are often able to excuse themselves from making any radical changes under the guise that they are either not implicated in institutional and societal racism. This self-exclusion from systems of race is able to be maintained by writing centers that just don't talk about race.

One way that race is averted is through the absence of Black women and marginalized people inside of the writing center. Most administrators will take this up as a staffing mystery. Many directors lament that people of color just don't apply to or stay in writing centers, but they don't make changes to recruitment or writing center policy nationally or locally. For example, IWCA (International Writing Center Association) was founded in 1983, it took until 2018 (35 years) for them to invite a Black woman as the keynote speaker. Additionally, IWCA never made a statement affirming Black Lives Matter. Even with the acknowledgment that statements without actions are usually signposting values that aren't implemented, the lack of a statement showed a lack of ideological commitment. Other organizations within the same affiliation, like the National Council of Teachers in English and College Composition and Communication, did make statements ("This Ain't Another Statement" & "NCTE's Statement Affirming #BlackLivesMatter" respectively). The failure of IWCA to make a statement shows an institutional refusal to engage with issues of race.

In addition to being reflected through local and national decisions, race is also evaded in texts that discuss inclusion and diversity but fail to talk critically about race. For example, Dixon (2017) writes, "to adhere to, perpetuate, and publicize such a one-dimensional and tidy portrayal of the center without also presenting its messiness keeps us from engaging with the possibilities

of such unsettling moments in the center" (p. 2) but fails to ever mention race in her complex conversation about queerness in the writing center. Texts like this allow writing centers to make claims to inclusion, specifically queer and disability inclusion, without ever having to critically engage in race.

Silencing is also maintained through the co-opting of Black women's stories by white practitioners. For example, Morrison (2022) argues that most of the justice work inside of writing center scholarship is written by white women. She critiques books like *Writing Centers and the New Racism*, which focus on race and discrimination but feature mostly white authors. This is the equivalent of a co-opting of the experiences of Black women and marginalized communities in which they are talked about, but they are not listened to or included in those very conversations.

In this scenario, Morrison claims that edited collections such as this are "well-meaning," but "'well-meaning' does not mean 'not racist'" (p. 35). For example, in Travis Webster's (2021) *Queerly Centered: LGBTQA Writing Center Directors Navigate the Workplace*, which won IWCA's 2022 "Book of the Year" award, writes about emotional labor without critically engaging the work that Black women in the writing center have done on emotional labor, while also claiming that he can understand the experiences of Black women, when he says, "This work [queering WCs] is not the same as that for administrators of color, but it rhymes [...]" (p. 80). In Webster's case, he is invoking the image of people of color without giving people of color the opportunity to speak.

Denny's (2010) work in *Facing the Center* also co-opts the stories of Black women in the center, citing their experiences with racism failing to critically engage race. For example, he writes,

> I wondered about their impact on people of color in our immediate company or those who are colleagues, staff, and clients back on campus, those who hear and experience their identities as vantage points inevitably suspect while their white interlocutors' perspectives are beyond reproach. Our impulse around race was to doubt rather than believe what my former tutor had told me. (p. 33)

Throughout the chapter, Denny privileges his own experiences as a white person, accounting for why his own experience led him to "doubt rather than believe" the stories of his colleagues. He mentions that he often is hesitant to believe the stories of Black women, without ever taking the time to actually listen to what Black women in the center have to say. For example, the claim that he often "wondered about the impact on people of color" fails to account for the fact that multiple Black women in the writing center *have* talked about the impact of this racism. However, rather than listening to these critiques, Denny focuses on his own engagement with racism.

Again, in books like *Writing Centers and the New Racism*, *Facing the Center,* and *Queerly Centered* silencing is maintained because even when discussing race in the center, Black women's stories are not being listened to, and instead they are co-opted by white authors. In the rare cases where Black women are not silenced through refusal to engage in race or through the co-opting of their stories, they are silenced because when they do have opportunities to share their experiences, they are often questioned, discredited, and not believed. For example, Morrison (2022) writes about an experience in which a white audience member at a conference tried to explain racism to her, which is an experience that harkens back to my own experience at IWCA in which an audience member doubted my experiences with racism. Morrison further claims, "when women of color do attend and share our perspectives at conferences, we may have

experiences like the one I shared" (p. 41). Between citation politics and narrative experiences, writing centers constantly send and reinforce the message that "Black women are not welcome here."

The silencing allows practitioners, especially "well-meaning" white woman practitioners to continue to distance themselves from accusations of racism through spiritual bypassing. According to Ceballos, Faison, & Olivas (2022) spiritual bypassing is what "happens when white women confronted with racial trauma fall back on unity, peace, kindness and love to force People of Color to recant their claim to trauma at the risk of being painted as mean or divisive" (p. 102). For example, in the narrative that Faison shares about Spiritual Bypassing, she recounts how she did a consultation on a racist dissertation which claimed that "a woman, no matter her racial background, would have inferior children should she become impregnated by and consequently bear the offspring of a Black man" (p. 98). More than just recounting the racism of the consultation, Faison recounts the subsequent racism she experienced by her colleagues who, "dismissed [her] concern as an underappreciation for and a misunderstanding of science" (p. 99). Here, not only is Faison silenced, but she's villainized as misunderstanding science for even bringing up the issue of racism in the first place. Spiritual Bypassing relies on this villainization because by using it, white practitioners can both ignore the stories of marginalized communities, but also punish marginalized communities for discussing them in the first place.

Faison's narrative mirrors Morrison's (2019) claim that Black women are not believed when they describe their experiences with racism. Additionally, the narrative shows how silencing pairs with Spiritual Bypassing to allow white practitioners to not be implicated in the racism that they claim to resist. Ceballos, Faison, & Olivas (2022) write that "Spiritual Bypassing is a "spiritualized strategy not only for avoiding pain but also for *legitimizing* such

avoidance." (p. 104, as cited in Masters). Silencing Black women allows white practitioners in writing centers to not have to hear the voices of Black women or be implicated in the racism they claim to resist. Rather than hearing counterstories by Black women, the white-centered publications in writing centers create a grand narrative of inclusivity (specifically for queer practitioners) without ever having to engage in issues of race that implicate them in broader systems of white supremacy, which then excuses practitioners from making any ideological changes.

It's unfair to say that there has been no movement towards radical change in the writing center, especially when the legacy of so many Black women and other marginalized individuals inside of the writing center has been one of resistance and empowerment even in the face of silencing. Faison & Condon (2022) have critiqued the inclination of writing centers to rely on narratives of home and safety while continuing to be exclusionary spaces. Jordan (2020) has storied the emotional burden of being a Black women administrator and offered a womanist framework for reimagining writing centers. Green (2018; 2022) has demonstrated the emotional toll of trying to survive and exist in writing centers during a public cry for #BlackLivesMatter and reminded Black women that while,

> this writing center space, wasn't built for us and is still trying to figure out how to evolve to include us,
>
> We exist in it.
>
> We fight in it.
>
> We get hurt in it.
>
> We Belong in it.
>
> We matter in it.

We excel in it. Shit, we can give keynotes in it. (p. 24).

However, until writing centers and writing center practitioners are willing and able to make ideological changes as a whole, the burden of liberation and thus, the emotional burden of resistance will always fall on the shoulders of Black women.

Research Question

The primary intention of the research study is to recognize and account for the experiences of Black women in the center by recording narrative accounts of Black women performing emotional labor in the writing center. My guiding research question is:

- How do Black women who work in writing centers experience and narrate emotional and institutional pressures at a Primarily White University (PWU)?

The purpose of this research is not to generalize the specific but instead to point to the specific as a site of cultural knowledge. In other words, the institutional identity of the primarily white midwestern university that my study took place in and the individual identities of the consultants inside of the space may not be replicable outside of it, nor are they meant to be. Instead, my thesis will act as an intervention into the grand narrative (Grutsch-McKinney, 2013) or stock story (Martinez, 2014) of writing centers through critical interrogations into the counterstories of my co-researchers. Looking into the specifics through the lens of counterstories will help us understand broader truths about the nature of the work that Black women are doing in the writing center.

Theoretical Frame

To examine how Black women narrate their lived experiences, my theoretical framework for this research is Black feminist thought and praxis broadly, and more specifically, misogynoir

as a Black feminist concept that attends specifically to the gendered and racialized violence and oppression that Black women face. I am guided by Black feminist thought, in particular, critiques of misogynoir to emphasize the way that Western epistemology objectifies Black women. Through this framework, I will do the following:

1. Offer a brief description of Black feminist thought as a theoretical and a praxis, grounding my frame in the work of Sylvia Wynther (2003), Patricia Hill Collins (2021), Audre Lorde (1984), and the Combahee River Collective (1977)
2. Show how Black women are objectified in Western epistemology,
3. Explicate how this objectification is an example of "misogynoir," a term coined by Moya Bailey (2021)
4. Demonstrate how misogynoir functions in institutions and,
5. Explain how Black feminism's focus on the epistemological importance of lived experiences intervenes in misogynoir.

When taken together, this frame offers a lens for understanding the systems of oppression that Black women must resist inside of the writing center and a critical methodology to intervene in these systems of oppression.

Black Feminism as Theoretical and as Praxis

Black Feminism cannot truly be encompassed by any one ideology because, in reality, there are multiple pathways Black feminist scholars take to engage in liberatory work. As Guy-Sheftall (1995) writes, "Black feminism is not a monolithic, static ideology, and there is considerable diversity among African American feminists" (p. 2). However, key to understanding Black Feminism is the "shared belief that Black women are inherently valuable, that our liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else's may because of our need as

human persons for autonomy" (Combahee River Collective, 1977, para. 9). In claiming that the liberation of Black women is "not adjunct," the Combahee River Collective calls attention to a core problem that was inherent in the Black Liberation and white feminism movements of the 1960s, 70s and beyond. The unique marginalization of Black women, based on interlocking systems of gendered and racial identities, was ignored. Lorde (1984), for example, writes that "By and large within the women's movement today, white women focus upon their oppression as women and ignore differences of race, sexual preference, class, and age. There is a pretense to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word sisterhood that does not in fact exist" (p. 116). Black Feminism argues that in order to even have collective liberation in the first place, there has to be an acknowledgement of the unique systems of disadvantages that multiply marginalized women face.

Given the ignorance towards the unique systems of oppression that Black women face, Black feminism evolved to challenge these systems of oppression. However, as Lorde (1984) writes, "Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface" (p. 60). Instead, Black feminism is beholden onto itself and focuses on addressing the unique and multiple marginalizations and violence that Black women face. Black feminists do not use only one framework to address these marginalizations, however. One key tenet of Black feminism is that it also explicitly acknowledges the integration of heterogeneous experiences into its framework; as Collins (2021) writes, "all African-American women face similar challenges that result from living in a society that historically and routinely derogates women of African descent. [...] this neither means that individual African American women have all had the same experiences nor that we agree on the significance of our varying experiences" (p. 33). Black feminism, rather than shying away from the multiplicity of experiences and frameworks, recognizes and welcomes them. Black Feminism

is defined by its multiplicities, yet core commitment to the liberation of Black women through critique of and intervention in of systems of power. Key themes that are essential to my research into emotions are (a) the objectification of Black women through white-centered ways of knowing and learning that are grounded in white supremacist ideas about superiority (white supremacy culture) and (b) the interjection of lived experiences as a means to disrupt that objectification.

Objectification of Black Women in White Supremacy Culture

One tenet of Black feminist thought is understanding the role that white supremacy Culture plays in the othering and objectification of Black women. According to Okun (2022) "White supremacy culture is the widespread ideology baked into the beliefs, values, norms, and standards of our groups (many if not most of them), our communities, our towns, our states, our nation, **teaching us both overtly and covertly that whiteness holds value, whiteness is value**" (para. 14).

One way that white supremacy culture is maintained is through insurance on objectivity or "the belief that emotions are inherently destructive, irrational, and should not play a role in decision-making or group process" (Jones and Okun, 2001, p. 7). The idea of rationality, as discussed by Sylvia Wynter (2003) emerged with the Renaissance and enlightenment era thought through the construction of the "rational self." Wynter argues that during the intellectual pursuits of the Enlightenment, scholars, specifically white male scholars, created a new way of "being human." She writes,

> it was to be the discourses of this knowledge, including centrally those of anthropology, that would function to construct all the non-Europeans that encountered [...] as the physical referent of, in the first phase, its irrational or subrational Human Other to its new

> "descriptive statement" of Man as a political subject. While the "Indians" were portrayed as the very acme of the savage, irrational Other, the "Negroes" were assimilated to the former's category, represented as its most extreme form and as the ostensible missing link between rational humans and irrational animals" (266).

The insistence on "rationality" as human functionally excluded those who were not Western European white men from being considered rational or *human*. Much like described by Jones and Okun (2001) rationality relies on the ideas that emotions are "destructive" and "irrational." In this case, binaries of rationality/irrationality and emotion/objectivity are co-constructed in a way that marks emotions as "other." Collins (2021) names binaries such as these "oppositional difference," wherein constructed binaries (like rational/irrational, black/white, male/female, reason/emotion) "[gain] meaning only in relation to its counterpart" (p. 91). Key to Collins' theory is that, in any case, a constructed binary serves the purpose of not just distinguishing the "Rational Self" from "the Other," but also of *inventing* the idea of "the Other" in the first place.

In all of these constructed binaries, there is one side that is superior and another that is inferior. As Lorde (1984) writes,

> Western European history conditions us to see human differences in implicit opposition to each other: [...]. In a society where the good is defined in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, there must always be some group of people who, through systematized oppression can be made to feel surplus, to occupy the place of dehumanized inferior. (p. 114)

As Collins prefaces, the "other" is almost always relegated to the inferior side of the binary. So, it's not just the existence of these binaries that is problematic, but also that the role of "other" in

any case only exists oppositionally as a means to reinforce the idea of man as rational and human, whereas the "other" is dehumanized and inferior and allows the "other" to be objectified.

Black Feminists also write about the role that controlling images play in the objectification of Black women. Bailey (2021) discusses how controlling images like Jezebel, mammy, Sapphire, Welfare Queen, and Strong Black Woman are portrayals that "have had material consequences on [Black women's] lives and bodies since Africans' nonconsensual arrival in the West" (p. 2). While racist portrayals, like those cited above, are symptomatic of a culture of misogynoir, they are also central to maintaining control over the bodies of Black women. For instance, when exploring the mammy minstrel – which constructs Black women as "faithful, obedient, domestic servant[s]" (Collins, 2021, p. 94) and punishes them when they do not conform to the role – Bailey (2021) writes, "Fat Black women's bodies reinforce that they are in service to others [...] Black women's bodies are never their own, resulting in a subtle pressure not only to be useful but to explain oneself to others. The utility of the mammy archetype endures" (p. 5). Through the enforcement of controlling images, then, Black women lose bodily autonomy and are thus objectified.

This objectification has many consequences, one of which is that Black women are forced to suppress their emotions. Because controlling stereotypes, like the mammy, the angry Black woman, and Jezebel, rely on affective stereotypes about Black women, Black women are frequently forced to suppress emotions in order to avoid playing into these stereotypes. Collins (2021) highlights this cycle when she writes,

> The allegedly emotional, passionate nature of Black women has long been used to justify Black women's sexual exploitation. Similarly, restricting Black women's literacy, then claiming we lack facts or sound judgment, relegates African-American women to the

> inferior side of the fact opinion binary. Denying Black women status as fully human subjects by treating us as the objectified Other within multiple binaries demonstrates the power that binary thinking, oppositional difference, and objectification wield within intersecting oppressions. (p. 93)

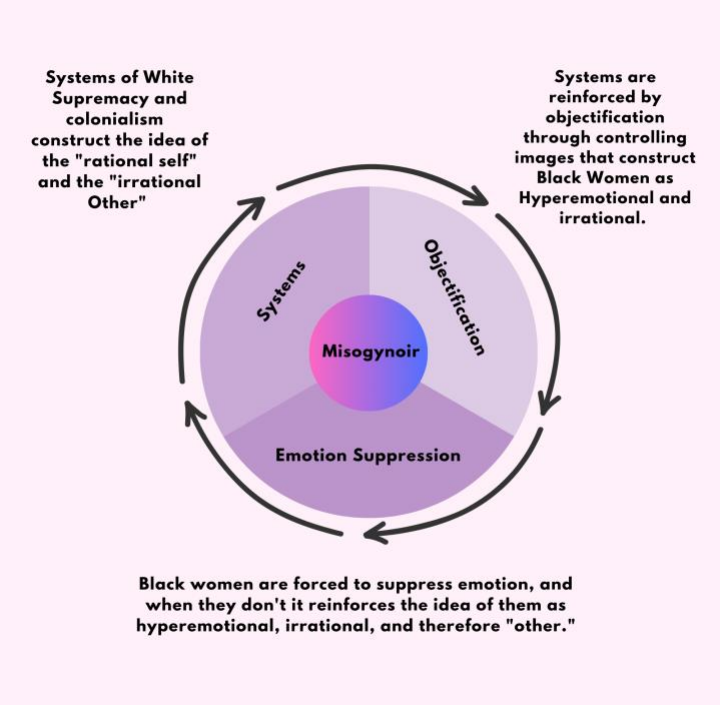
As Collins describes, through constructed binaries, Black women are constructed to be over-passionate, emotional, angry, and irrational. As such, they are forced to suppress their emotions or are punished for asserting those emotions. Primarily, because Black women are objectified through these binaries and then constructed as irrational when they disrupt these binaries, they are placed in a bind in which there is no way for them to be seen as or included in the definition of human.

Misogynoir

As demonstrated in Figure 1, the objectification of Black women in Western epistemology functions as a cycle. Systems of white supremacy and colonialism construct the idea of the "rational self" and the "irrational other" as Wynter (2003), Collins (2021), and Lorde (1984) posit. Those systems are then reinforced through controlling images that construct Black women as hyper-emotional and irrational, which then forces Black women to suppress their emotions, and when they do not, it reinforces the idea of them as hyper-emotional, irrational, and therefore "other." Misogynoir – which is a coin termed by Moya Bailey (2021) to refer to "the uniquely co-constitutive racialized and sexist violence that befalls Black women as a result of their simultaneous and interlocking oppression at the intersection of racial and gender marginalization" (p. 1) – is at the heart of this system.

Figure 1

Cycle of Misogynoir



In her framework, Bailey (2021) focuses primarily on how misogynoir is perpetuated and resisted throughout digital media. The critique primarily focuses on the way that controlling images of Black women are circulated through media like TV, yearbooks, social media, and telephone, and crucially, how these portrayals have an impact on the lives of Black women. For example, Bailey describes how the image of the "welfare queen" was used to "justify federal policy decisions that cut social services for millions of US Americans" (p. 7). The constructed image of Black women as irresponsible, lazy, and as getting "handouts" was then used to change government policy by "creating time limits for the use of assistance as well as work and marriage requirements" (p. 7), which would then go on to impact the work and livelihood of Black women. This is only one example of many in which the objectification of Black women through controlling images and stereotypes has material impacts on the lives of Black women.

Also entangled in the framework is the way in which Misogynoir renders Black women both hyper-visible and invisible; as Lorde (1984) writes, "Black women have on one hand always been highly visible, and so, on the other hand, have been rendered invisible through the depersonalization of racism" (p. 42). As "othered" Black women are always marked, highly visible, and objectified in society, but it's also this very objectification that renders us invisible. Bailey (2021) gives numerous examples of this phenomenon, including her critique of Nelly, who refused to address the sexualizing and objectifying impact that his lyrics had on the lives of Black women but still "felt entitled to [Black women's] assistance with saving his sister's life" (p. xii). She also writes about when it comes to health care, Black women are hyper-visible in the media, due to controlling images like that of "Sapphire" and the "magical Negro" but "invisible when in the need of live-saving attention" (p. 6). The culmination of misogynoir is that Black women's bodies are objectified through controlling stories and representations, and thus, never their own.

Misogynoir in Institutions

Institutions that rely on Western epistemology reinforce misogynoir through a racialized division of tasks and through forced conformity. Ahmed (2007) argues that in organizational structure, whiteness is what is always "behind" and marks "non-white" bodies as different and as needing to conform. The causality of this is that in racialized organizations, Black and brown bodies are marked as different and also asked to conform and perform disproportionate labor. For example, Wingfield & Alston (2014) define racial tasks "as the work minorities do that is associated with their position in organizational hierarchy and reinforces Whites' position of power within the workplace" (p. 276). Wingfield and Alston divide racialized tasks into three levels, ideological, interactional, and physical. At each level, marginalized workers are forced to

"maintain an organizational culture that privileges Whiteness" (p. 277), thus conforming to, and even being forced to contribute to a culture of whiteness. This is not to say that these actions happen without resistance, but more that to succeed in organizational structures, marginalized communities are most rewarded when they conform to and maintain organizational structures that are oppressive to them.

As Ray (2019) posits, one specific way organizations restrict the agency of people of color in the space is by restricting their emotions inside of that space. He writes, "the racialized organizations perspective, in contrast, sees Whites' emotional expectations – as the primary beneficiaries of the racial system – as equally if not more important in reinforcing that system (Ioanide 2015)" (p. 37). Appropriate affective states and emotional regulations in the workplace are mediated through what white bodies deem appropriate.

These systems that privilege whiteness are replicated in academia. In addition to conformity, marginalized workers are often asked to do more tasks associated with race. For example, Baker-Bell (2017) writes that "Black women faculty pay a higher *race tax* because they perform a disproportionate share of service and are expected to mentor Black students and other students of color because of their race and gender" (p. 430). Because of their marginalized positions within organizations, Black women's labor is disproportionately affected.

Kynard (2019) similarly details how Black bodies are controlled in racialized organizations, explaining how racialized structures in academia are constructed to mirror plantations (i.e., the academic plantation). In particular, she details how the "mammification" of the tasks that she and her Black colleagues were expected to do was "more than just a stereotype, media representation, or dominant image, but a fundamental material organization of race, labor, and power" (p. 34). The image of the "mammy" is one of the controlling images implicated in

misogynoir. This controlling image has an effect on the labor Black women are expected to perform and on the disposition under which they perform those tasks. As Kynard further explains, the labor that her Black colleagues and herself were expected to do was not only "menial" but also came with expectations that she would maintain "an appropriate disposition for such a public holiday venue" (p. 31).

In addition to Kynard, other Black faculty, staff, and administrators inside of academia have pointed to the way that controlling images have influenced their labor inside of academia. For example, Baker-Bell (2017) contends that Black women mothers are penalized even more, as they navigate challenges related to motherhood (p. 530). The already masculine normative expectations of academia along with the racialized expectations of labor create barriers to productivity and performance in academia. She further narrates how the affective stereotype of the "*Strongblackwoman"* and the "mammy" characterization of Black women as "nurturing, caring, deferent, mothering" (p. 537) pushed her into doing even more service work at the detriment of herself. These examples exemplify that the success of that emotional labor will be filtered through evaluations of how well that emotional labor aligns with white, heteronormative ideals of comfort and politeness. But additionally, that identity markers will complicate the way that labor is performed and the way that Black women are expected to perform that labor.

For example, as Perryman-Clark and Craig (2020) argue, Black administrators may be asked to perform emotional labor with the intention of making a student or co-worker feel comfortable (access Kynard) and the success of that emotional labor will be filtered through evaluations of how well that emotional labor aligns with white, heteronormative ideals of comfort and politeness. But additional identity markers will complicate the way that labor is performed and the way that Black women are allowed to perform that labor. For example, as

Caswell (2022) identifies, a white woman may be permitted to perform anger within the bounds of her job expectations, but a Black woman performing the same anger may be labeled as an angry Black woman. The role these controlling images play in institutions also implicates institutions as contributing to and benefiting from misogynoir culture.

Interjection of Lived Experiences

Given that in white supremacist epistemology, rationality is constructed as good whereas bias and emotion, lived experiences function to disrupt this system. The River Combahee Collective (1977) engages lived identity when they write, "We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression" (p. 234). The integration of identity and lived experiences is essential to a radical Black feminist politic that will work to transform systems of oppression.

Lorde (1984), too, recognized the importance of honoring the personal and emotional in liberatory work. For example, while the Sapphire image of Black women disrupts their ability to display anger without being devalued, Lorde reasserted the liberatory potential of anger when she wrote, "We use whatever strengths we have fought for, including anger, to help define and fashion a world where all our sisters can grow, where our children can love" (p. 133). Lorde's writing highlights not only that the villainization of anger is used to objectify Black women, but that the reassertion and use of anger is a tool in Black liberation.

In Bailey's (2021) frame, lived experience is also essential to intervening in misogynoir. She writes that in order to transform the system of misogynoir, "we need complex images that disrupt the good/bad, white/Black dichotomy" (p. 2). These complex images, contrary to controlling images, paint Black women as human through the acknowledgement of their

complex experiences, their emotions, and their lives. Part of building these complex images is acknowledging the emotion and experiences of Black women, including emotions such as anger that white supremacy culture uses to paint Black women as villains. Lived experience resists the objectification of Black women through the instance of their humanity as humans who feel.

Black feminism and the critique of and divestment from misogynoir are essential to my research; the critique of misogynoir helps to understand the complex systems of objectification that Black women face inside of institutions like the writing center. Black feminism has liberatory and radical potential because it intervenes in systems of white supremacy and acknowledges the importance of complex, humanizing images and lived experiences.

Methods/Methodology

Given the theoretical framework offered above, I approach my methodology from Black feminist perspectives in order to (a) resist white supremacist methodology and (b) interrogate what the lived experiences of Black women reveal about the institutional and emotional pressures that they are facing in the writing center. In the following methodology section, I will explain how positivist research methods reinforce misogynoir and describe how the interjection of lived experiences can act as an intervention. Then, in the methods section, I will overview the specific methods I used to answer my research question:

- How do Black women who work in writing centers experience and narrate emotional and institutional pressures at a PWI?

This will include an overview of data collection, co-researcher selection, focus group design, and my use of thematic analysis through coding.

Methodology

In addition to being reinforced in Primarily White Institutions (PWIs), Misogynoir is reinforced through white supremacist research methodology. Collins (2021), for example, writes about the role that objectification plays in a positivist research ethic. Positivism operates under the belief that it is "possible to achieve direct knowledge of the world through direct observation or measurement of a phenomena being investigated" (Coe et al., 2017, p. 16). Collins writes that positivist methodological approaches have the following requirements:

1. A distancing between the researcher from their "object" of study,
2. an absence of emotion from the research process,
3. a disregard for ethics and values as inappropriate, and
4. the reliance on "adversarial debates" to learn the truth (p. 324).

Collins argues that these requirements "asks African-American women to objectify ourselves, devalue our emotional life, displace our motivations for furthering knowledge about Black women, and confront in an adversarial relationship those with more social, economic, and professional power" (p. 325). Given that misogynoir relies on the objectification of Black women and the disregard of their emotions and lived experiences, a research methodology that relies on requirements that require Black women to objectify themselves also reinforces misogynoir.

In particular, Black feminists critique quantitative research methods as objectifying Black women because they can "silence African American girls by forcing themselves and their lived experiences on scales that are culturally incongruent" (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015, p. 514). In addition, quantitative research has the potential to reinforce controlling images. For example, Collins (2021) writes Black women are "rendered invisible in quantitative research

methodologies that erase individuality in favor of providing patterns of welfare abuse" (p. 324). Congruent to misogynoir, racist research that relies on controlling images has a material impact on the lives of Black women. Qualitative research has been offered as an alternative and supplementary method because it "can enrich data" (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015, p. 515). Qualitative research is defined as "a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 250). However, qualitative research does not inherently resist white supremacy or misogynoir. In particular, qualitative research that places participants in an "object" position, disregards research ethics by putting participants in unethical or unsafe situations or relies on an assumption of neutrality also enforces misogynoir through the objectification of those involved, especially when doing research about Black women.

With these acknowledgments about the role of qualitative research in reinforcing white supremacy culture, I use critical qualitative research in this study. However, rather than relying on positivist and white supremacist research methodology, I use Black feminism to frame my research, specifically through the interjection of lived experiences. In Black feminist praxis, rather than requiring objectivity, distance, and emotionlessness to validate knowledge, lived experiences become "a criterion for credibility" (Collins, 2021, p. 327). Through interrogating the lived experiences of Black women in the writing center, my research positions Black women as experts on their own experiences and as credible to make knowledge claims about the racism they experience inside of writing centers.

Methods

The specific qualitative design I use for this study is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is, "a method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found

within a data set" (Nowell et. al., 2017, p. 2). As Nowell et al. identify, thematic analysis is advantageous because it allows researchers to code and categorize data, and it accounts for the differing perspectives of research participants, as well as any unanticipated contributions, while maintaining the integrity (positionalities/words) of co-researcher's knowledge.

My data collection method for this project was focus groups. My primary reasons for using focus groups are because (a) they allow for the opportunity for collective storytelling and community care, and (b) given that this research is meant to be generative, focus groups allow for a larger number of co-researchers with a smaller breadth of answers, which can help determine what the next research steps will be.

When searching for co-researchers, I wanted to talk to Black women who have worked in the writing center at the site of this study recently, between 2020-2022. I chose these co-researchers via a combination of convenience and judgment sampling. In order to gauge interest, I reached out individually to each co-researcher with a brief description of the study. Given the small number of Black women in the writing center, it was essential to make sure that staff and administrators could not easily identify who my co-researchers were. As a result, I asked each co-researcher privately if they wanted to participate in the study, so that onlookers could not easily triangulate who was in my study. Once a co-researcher expressed interest, I reached out to them again individually via a scheduling poll. Through this selection process, I was able to host one focus group with three co-researchers.

I have assigned each co-researcher a pseudonym to maintain anonymity. These pseudonyms, as well as a brief description of each participant, are cataloged in Table 1 below. Again, due to the small number of Black women in the writing center, I have kept these profiles vague in order to maintain the anonymity of these individuals. As a result, I have only included

the identifying information that the co-researchers agreed to, and I left out specific information such as job titles, roles, or anything else that I felt may compromise their identities.

Table 1

Co-Researcher Profiles

Name	**Years in Writing Center (#)**	**Roles in WC**	**Identity**
Sasha	5	Graduate Coordinator	Identifies as a Black, Queer, Woman.
Victoria	3	Undergraduate Consultant → Graduate Coordinator	Identifies as a Black, Queer, Woman.
Lana	1	Graduate Coordinator	Identifies as a Black Woman

I used semi-structured interview questions to catalog the emotional experiences of each co-researcher and additionally how each co-researcher performed emotional labor in the situation. Additional questions asked the co-researchers how they conceive of their lived identities and how those identities affected how they experienced the writing center and their emotions inside of it. Using semi-structured interview questions gave a guiding framework for what type of narratives I would collect from co-researchers, while allowing flexibility for co-researchers to co-create stories by changing or guiding the focus group in the direction that they wanted. While I initially had a list of six planned questions (access Appendix), I was only able to ask four of them in order to account for time. Of the questions on the list, I asked the following:

1. Tell me about your general experiences in the writing center? What does a day look like for you?
2. In your day-to-day interactions in the writing center, where does emotion come into play? Do you have some examples?

3. Tell me a story about a time where you thought about or were made aware of your identities within the space?
4. Do you think your identities affect the emotions you feel/display in the writing center?

Given the time constraint, I asked the questions that would be most effective for generating stories that responded to my initial research question "How do Black women who work in writing centers experience and narrate emotional and institutional pressures at a PWI?"

In all of their answers, co-researchers accounted for their lived identities and how those lived identities interrelated with the emotions they were experiencing in the writing center. This inclusion of lived experiences is essential to a Black feminist praxis that "centers on African Americans girls' experiences and empowers them with the right to interpret their reality and define their experience" (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015, p. 509). In these focus groups, the attendance of co-researchers to their identities and their experiences through the lens of those identities was an essential component of co-constructing knowledge about the experiences of these Black women in the writing center.

I recorded the data through Zoom sessions, by using a live transcript and converting that transcript to text. Once I had the text, I manually cross-referenced the data with the audio file to verify that the transcript was correct. In this transcription, I kept the transcript as close to the original interview as possible in order to maintain the integrity of my co-researchers' words. However, in the excerpts of the transcripts I have shared in the findings section, I have made small edits to punctuation and sentence structure to ensure readability.

Once I had transcribed the data, I began to organize and code it. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018) coding is "the process of organizing data by bracketing chunks and (or text or

image segments) and writing words representing a category in the margins" (p. 193). The coding process I used was adapted from Meadow's (2016), which included a combination of in-vivo and latent coding. In-vivo is a code that "is taken directly from what the participant [themself] says" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 4). Once I completed the in-vivo pass, I then completed a pass of latent coding which refers to making "inferences and judgments about the text" (Meadows, 2020, p. 21). In coding, the in-vivo pass helped me to honor the exact words that my co-researchers were using about what emotions they felt and how those emotions were linked to their identities. The latent coding allowed me to contextually understand what environmental factors were causing the participants to feel the emotions they were feeling. After completing both passes, I condensed the codes and then returned to the data until I had reached a manageable number of codes. From the initial codes, I organized the data into four themes, which are explicated in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Coding Scheme 1: Types of Interaction in the Writing Center

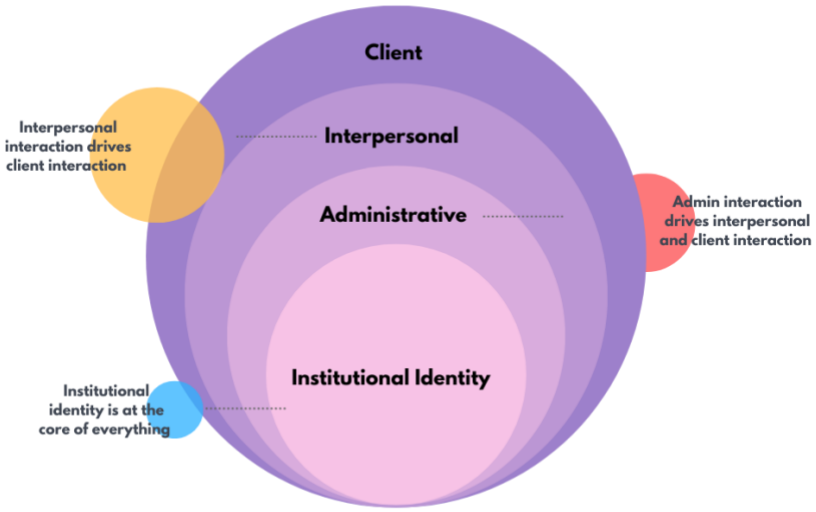
Theme	**Description**	**Example**
Client Interaction	Client interaction encompassed any emotional burden or labor that co-researchers described as an effect of working with clients, mostly in the context of consultations.	"At the end I got really burnt out with consultations. I honestly hated it. I really dreaded it. It was honestly, it's kind of bad, and so that kind of clouds that. But yeah, just a lot of you know, back-to-back consultations talking to students, you know" - Victoria
Interpersonal Interaction	Interpersonal interaction encompassed any emotional burden or labor that co-researchers described as an effect of working interpersonally with other consultants. A subtheme of this type of interaction was campus engagement, which focused on how co-researchers described the labor associated with working with campus partners interpersonally, but those campus partners were not directly involved in the writing center.	"Especially because most of the [campus] partnerships are with underrepresented populations and the writing center hasn't always been kind to those populations, so it's been a tricky situation in those ways of trying to navigate that" - Sasha
Administrative Interaction	Administrative interaction encompassed any emotional burden or labor that co-researchers described as an effect of working with admin. This happened in the context of mentorship, professional development, and support.	"Sometimes it feels like a emotionally. You're like the administrators and I feel like, in my opinion, from my supervisor, like directly, is kind of emotionally distant, and kind of doesn't ask like, how I'm doing. And stuff. Like that so I feel like that makes it a lot more tough" - Sasha
Institutional Identity	Institutional identity encompassed any reference towards the effect that the writing center or university had on the emotional burden or labor that co-researchers described. This included any description of the institution being primarily white, adhering to white values, or storying itself as an inclusive space.	"Yeah, I feel like it goes back to like we had talked a lot about this in our PD, about how with, when you have these practices, these critical race, you know, you know, theory, queer justice, all these things. And it's one thing to see it and say it, and it's one thing to embody it, and I think the writing center is still not truly embodying it" - Victoria

As demonstrated by Table 2, I separated my data into four themes: Client Interaction, Interpersonal Interaction, Administrative Interaction, and Institutional Identity. These themes were primarily helpful in identifying the situations under which co-researchers were experiencing institutional and emotional pressure. They also helped to identify the driving forces

behind these pressures. It's important to note that while each of these themes are separate, they are not discreet. Each theme in multiple instances had an impact on the other themes. For example, while interpersonal interaction referenced interactions that took place between co-workers, those interactions were consistently shown to also be impacted also by administrative decisions and the institutional entity we resided in. Figure 2 shows how these themes are entangled and nested.

Figure 2

Institutional Identity, Administrative, Interpersonal, and Client Interaction Nested



Institutional identity encompassed any reference towards the effect that the writing center or university had on the emotional burden or labor that co-researchers described, including any description of the institution being primarily white, adhering to white values, or advertising itself as an inclusive space. It resides in the core because all of the institutional and emotional

pressures that Black women navigate happen inside of the institution of a writing center. As such, the institutional identity as a primarily white writing center drove the rest of the interactions. Similarly, administrative decisions, like hiring practices and professional development decisions, drove the interpersonal interactions that co-researchers discussed.

However, these themes do not only work linearly, but instead are all entangled with each other. While the diagram shows that institutional identity drives administrative decisions, it does not show how administrative decision-making drives institutional identity. For example, while the writing center is partly primarily white because the university is primarily white, the demographics of the writing center are also influenced by hiring decisions, recruiting decisions, the broader histories of writing centers and literacy work, and how the writing center stories itself. Similarly, in the theme of institutional identity, I will discuss the discrepancy between the way the writing center stories itself, as an inclusive radical space, versus the infrastructure that the writing center actually has to support radical praxis. Again, this institutional identity will drive administrative decisions, but the administrative decisions will also impact the infrastructure of the system. The diagram still works to show how each of these themes are nested, but it is still important to remember that these themes, particularly administrative and institutional, are entangled and dynamic.

After sorting the data into these four themes, I created additional subsections to understand how each co-researcher described what emotions they were experiencing and also what dispositions they reported having in each type of reaction. Table 3 below describes these codes.

Table 3

Coding Scheme 2: Feeling vs Disposition

Code	**Description**	Example
Feeling	Feeling is meant to describe how the co-research were feeling in any given interaction. A good indicator that something belongs in this theme is if the co-research prefaced their statement by saying, "I felt." This is meant to refer mostly to the internal. While it's possible that co-researchers' dispositions matched their feelings, the feelings were only meant to refer to the internal state of the participants.	"At the end I got really burnt out with consultations. I honestly hated it. It it was like it was I. I really dreaded it. It was honestly, it's kind of bad, but and so that kind of clouds that." - Victoria
Disposition	Disposition has to do with what each co-researcher displayed, regardless of what they were feeling. This referred to any moment where co-researchers described constraining emotions, displaying a specific emotion, or doing something physical like smiling, to show a specific affective state.	"So, you rarely ever see like frustration or anything out of me, and that's just not in writing it's in all like PWI spaces. So that's one reason why I kind of just go into the writing center. Emotionless and with smile on my face, and also when talking to certain administrators or individuals, I have to watch my tone, because even when I'm not feeling, like remotely angry or remotely trying to come with a attitude for some reason" - Lana

Findings

In this findings section, I detail each individual theme described in Table 2, specifically accounting for how co-researchers narrated their experiences with each theme: Client Interaction, Interpersonal Interaction, Administrative Interaction, and Institutional Identity. Throughout the section, I will use the narrative experiences that co-researchers shared with me in focus groups to demonstrate the institutional and emotional pressures that Black women are experiencing inside of writing centers.

Client Interaction

Client interaction refers to consultations with clients that happen in the writing center. This is the day-to-day work of writing centers that each co-researcher is responsible for completing. Co-researchers often reported feeling "used" and "tired", especially when discussing relationships with clients. Victoria discussed feeling "used" "tired" and even "hatred" towards consultations in relation to her ability to set boundaries with clients. She often felt as though the strong relationship that she built with clients made her more inclined to do work for clients like writing their papers. Sasha also mentioned feeling a toll based on how frequent and heavy the burden of consultations was, especially in relation to her other responsibilities. She says:

> I've always mostly had in-person shifts, and I just remember I was scheduled to work 12 to 3 and then I had class 4 to 7, and I was like what am I supposed to eat? Like what am I supposed to eat? When am I supposed to have a break? When I was supposed to do that? And it was like every day I was scheduled with the same shift, because a lot of other people like didn't want to, especially right, we're still a lot of people, pandemic restrictions. It's still very unsafe, so very understandable. But it was just like those constraints of like, but also like, what about like what about like caring for everyone in that respect and thinking about that?

Here, Sasha's responsibilities of being a coordinator, a student, a consultant, and a person all conflict. As she states, the result of this was that she felt the extra emotional burden of not being cared for.

Co-researchers also talked specifically about the role that identity plays in the pressure and emotions of consultations. Sasha, for example, mentioned that consultations could be a "wild

ride" of different emotions, especially when handling work that was either attacking her identities or antithetical to her values. In this case, she specifically mentions feeling pressure to act almost as an administrator in these situations. She says:

> and absolutely to consultations, can be a wild ride of different emotions, especially when you get papers that are like not beyond, just like like ones that are like like where you're like, not sure like what your role is or you feel like you are like stepping into this like expert role, or something like that, but also like situations where that you find something offensive in the paper, or there's something that really is attacking, like some of your values, or things like that. And it's like, how do you navigate that when, especially on the back end. Sometimes it feels like an emotionally, you're like the administrators and I feel like, in my opinion, from my supervisor, like directly, is kind of emotionally distant, and kind of doesn't ask like, how I'm doing. And stuff. Like that so I feel like that makes it a lot more tough.

In this case, Sasha is identifying the emotional toll that happens as a result of client interaction, especially when having to manage emotions while not necessarily having the full support of her supervisor.

Lana also mentioned feeling as though she was being pressured to do race-based labor in the context of consultations. In the quote below, Lana narrates her experiences with feeling used due to the way that she has been treated by clients:

> I think like a more specific time where I was made aware of my identity is when clients come into the center, and the reason they book the appointment with me was because they wanted the perspective of a Black woman, which is fine. I totally understand that, but sometimes it's like, well, should I just take my picture down because am I just an

> advertisement for a black woman just to like, book with me because I am a Black woman. But do you care for my background, or do you just need just this perspective to just better yourself? And then again that word used just comes to mind again, because I feel used just as a minority like you're just coming to me to seek my perspective. Do I matter outside of my identity, so those are, like, the only specific times that I've been like aware of my identity, like, do other people who are in non-minorities get those type of experiences? Do I get more clients because I am a black woman? So those are just like the type of things that I can say specifically that relates to that question.

While Lana initially says, "this is fine" she continues to explicate how she feels used and objectified. In particular, she mentions that the writing center has her picture up, and because that picture is up, she feels like she is an "advertisement" and that clients are using her as a means of bettering themselves.

In these interactions, there is also a discrepancy between how co-researchers felt and how they acted dispositionally. For example, while they often reported feeling "tired" "used" "weird" "burn out," dispositionally, they talked about being "excited" "energetic" or "engaged." These labels aren't very helpful out of context because there were some cases in which co-researchers reported acting a certain way because they felt that way. For example, Lana mentioned feeling and acting more engaged during the day than during the nighttime when she said:

> for my one day shift I can say this is more in the the bright of the day it's more interactions, a lot more energetic. So, I get a lot of face-to-face appointments and those kind of there for a little bit from the online, because a lot of them are usually more engaged.

In this case, it's clear that Lana and clients are acting energetic and engaged because they also feel more energetic and engaged as opposed to a night shift where she reports that: "this is kind of in the evening. We're kind of all, like, you know, worn out chill out. So, a lot of our social batteries are a little low." Again, this is an example of disposition to some extent matching feelings. People are a little bit less energetic and chill because they are tired.

However, these discrepancies between disposition and feeling were helpful when discussing the pressure that co-researchers felt, especially from administrators, to behave in a different way than what they felt. For instance, like Sasha mentioned, she often felt tired and like there wasn't enough time to take care of herself, but she was more likely to get a positive reaction if she didn't express these emotions. Specifically, she says:

> especially when you're talking about the ways that you have to like perform your emotions. I feel like with, especially for different, like one-on-one with depending on who the administrator is, there's different things I have to say and different ways. Yeah. I have to be like – I can't just say like "oh, this is really stressful" or "all this is happening" because they like aren't gonna react very positively, or they're gonna be like, "well, have you tried like doing this thing?" And I already told them 2 times I already did this. But yeah, so stuff like that. So that's a that's very emotionally taxing and a lot of emotions. There, it's like that you have to constrain, and then you have to just perform something else.

In the context of this quote, Sasha is mostly talking about her experiences with campus engagement, but it also applies similarly to how she talks about interactions with clients. Regardless of the actual emotions Sasha is feeling in relation to some of the consultations, there

is pressure to suppress those emotions in favor of showing something more positive, especially to her "emotionally distant" administrator.

Overall, in relation to client interaction, the themes that came up as most important was feeling used by clients and feeling pressure to act energetic or excited despite the emotional toll of the interactions.

Interpersonal Interaction

Interpersonal interactions in this case refers to interactions that take place horizontally, meaning essentially interactions between people of the same "status" within an organization. For example, graduate coordinators in the writing center have interpersonal interactions with other graduate coordinators. When referencing this, co-researchers were often referring to interactions between co-workers. While they don't fit perfectly into this theme, I also put interactions across campus organizations into this theme. For example, if a co-researcher referenced their interactions with contacts inside of other campus organizations, I accounted for them inside of this theme.

Again, interpersonal interactions tended to frequently interact with the other themes. Often, co-researchers would tell stories about how these interactions were impacted both by the institutional entity and what actions administrators take. Sasha, in particular, is in a role in the writing center that requires working across campus organizations, and the quote below details some of the particular challenges she faced in this role. As Sasha says,

> But I can see like how much time they like really don't have, or how much time like it takes to really build those partnerships, and I feel like a lot of that sort of labor. And a lot of that is emotional, right? Like, can we trust you? Where is the writing center coming from? Like, what are your intentions? And really trying to figure out like do you actually

> like care and can be reciprocal. Especially because most of the [campus] partnerships are with underrepresented populations and the writing center hasn't always been kind to those populations, so it's been a tricky situation in those ways of trying to navigate that.

While Sasha doesn't point specifically to the emotions that she was feeling in these situations, she points to the fact that as a Black queer woman, she has to do identity-based[2] emotional labor during these interactions. In particular, in the quote above, she mentions that the writing center, "hasn't always been kind to [marginalized] populations." So, then, as a Black queer woman, Sasha has to do labor that requires her to rebuild those relationships while also dealing with pressure from administrators to act in ways that do not truly feel like reciprocity to her. She says:

> And there's always the constant pressure and something I always wonder about like if we're if we're really like listening to our partners because there is that constant struggle of like me being pressured to always reach out to them and always like keep asking like "do you have time to do this?" "Can we do this?" "Can we do that?" And then also a lot of them like being like, not frustrated necessarily towards me, but I can see like how much time they like, really don't have, or how much time like it takes to really build those partnerships, and I feel like a lot of that sort of labor. And a lot of that is emotional, right? "Like, can we trust you?" "Where is the writing center coming from?" "Like, what are your intentions?"

As evidenced through her discussion, Sasha is doing labor to build trust with marginalized populations, and while she values reciprocal care, she's also experiencing pressure from administrators to also apply pressure to other campus organizations. In this quote, Sasha is

[2] Identity-based labor in this case, refers to any labor that co-researchers have to do in order to either in relationship to their identity or because of their identity. This encompasses Baker-Bell's (2017) theory about race-tax, in which women of color are expected to do disproportionate labor, like mentoring and serving on DEI committees, because of their identities.

already expressing the burden of this labor, but she further explicates how this labor is identity-based when she says:

> I realized that in many ways it was kind of like different parts, like, it became more clear to me, probably, why I was put into that role because they have, like one of the few people of color in the writing center, working with a bunch of the different underrepresented communities as kind of the direct face.

Here, Sasha's role extends beyond the "normal" expectations of campus engagement and instead becomes about maintaining sensitive relationships within the institutional context of a writing center that has done frequent harm to marginalized communities. This is a clear instance in which identity-based labor impacts the pressure and emotion that Sasha is feeling inside the writing center.

Similarly, Victoria recognizes that, in her role, she also felt used because of the identity-based labor she was asked to do. Specifically, she says:

> Ascribed to that just feeling tired and like used especially with [her role]. Because we talked a lot about critical race theory and just being black and being queer and being you know, all of these different you know things. So, it's just like the burden of that and making sure you know you're not gonna say the wrong thing, especially with such sensitive topics. Right, and then one of the few only black girls in the center, you know, at the time, you know, having to take on that labor was like, yeah, emotion. And then having to go consult. It was a lot.

Again, Victoria identifies the effects of being forced to do identity-based labor, particularly causing her to feel tired and used. In this moment, the dialogue points towards multiple areas of interaction, administrative and interpersonal.

In these narratives, co-researchers again report feeling an emotional toll related to being pressured to do identity-based labor. In both cases, they have to navigate the emotions and pressures related to their own identities inside of the writing center while also managing the emotions of others who may already feel mistrustful or taken advantage of by the writing center in the past.

Administrative Interaction

As shown in Figure 2, administrative interaction is already implicated in consultations and interpersonal interaction. When co-researchers discuss feeling used in client and interpersonal interaction, it often points back toward administrative decisions about where to place specific coordinators. For example, in Sasha's narrative about working with communities across campus, she states that it "became more clear to me, probably why, why I was put into that role because they have, like one of the few people of color in the writing center, working with a bunch of the different underrepresented communities as kind of the direct face," and in Victoria's narrative she stories how being one of the few Black girls in the center doing very heavy identity based work when she says, "Right, and then one the few black girls in the center, you know, at the time, you know, having to take on that labor was like, yeah, emotion." In both of these cases, co-researchers were assigned roles that required them to do identity-based labor, and that was the result of an administrative decision.

When talking about interaction with administrators, co-researchers often mentioned feeling pressure to perform or behave in a certain way. For example, Lana identifies needing to feel adaptable. She says:

> I feel that some of our administrators there is like different relationships, and I have to be able to be adaptable what you should have to kind of like. Change up my style of my

> behavior and sometimes that can be emotionally strange, and not always just come into the center as just my oneself. I have to be this person in this place for this person, and usually I I'm kind of like I don't wanna say like emotionless. But I don't show a lot of emotions. So, you always like smiling in the writing center because I wanna portray like happiness. And then that's it. You probably won't catch me like angry or sad because I've been so very like mellow person. So, nothing was another emotion that I feel I kind of like separate most of my emotions from work, so I don't have that emotional toll when I come back home.

In addition to noting the pressure to be adaptable, Lana also explains the specific strategies she uses to maintain a particular disposition, like smiling to portray the image of happiness while maintaining a sort of "nothingness" inside. In this quote, Lana claims that "you won't catch me angry or sad" because she's a mellow person, but later in the same interview, Lana wrapped back around to this same story. She revealed that she often maintains a specific disposition because of her identity. In one really telling quote, she says:

> You'll rarely ever see like frustration, sadness, or anger in public, and I think it's because I grew up in [redacted]. I've experienced a lot of situations where they kind of like exaggerate that that black, angry woman stereotype, and I refuse to ever contribute to it by any means, even though I know that the stereotype is not true.

Here, Lana points specifically to the impact controlling images have on how she acts in public spaces, especially as she's trying not to play into any race-based stereotypes. And this influences all of her interactions in the writing center, client, interpersonal, and administrative, but it specifically impacts her interactions with administrators when she says she comes into the writing center,

> emotionless and with smile on my face, and also when talking to certain administrators or individuals, I have to watch my tone, because even when I'm not feeling, like remotely angry or remotely trying to come with an attitude for some reason, whenever I'm talking about something I'm passionate with people portray it as I'm talking down on them or I'm talking to them with an attitude so I have to come in and make sure I'm very like mellow tone, and talking very like sweetly and trying to like high pitch my voice

Lana describes her feelings and affective state as always being racialized to the extent that it has caused her to change her disposition and watch herself more. All four themes, client, interpersonal, administrative, and institutional are implicated in this narrative because Lana was forced to make changes to her disposition to conform to an institutional place; however, administrators are specifically implicated in this narrative because of the punitive approach they have the ability to take.

For instance, Sasha describes feeling pressured by certain administrators to care more about capitalistic things, like deliverables, when she says:

> like capitalism really matters in the writing center, even though they try to pretend like it doesn't like they really are looking for like, “What can you produce?” “What are your deliverables?” “What did you make?”, “How many workshops did you make sure that the partners did?” “What type of specific things or materials did you provide them?”

Sasha also describes feeling pressure to be obedient in these situations and not talk about negative emotions related to the capitalism-centered approach that is privilege by administrators. She describes feeling pressured by certain administrators to act or behave a specific way and to not talk about her negative emotions. She specifically describes the writing center as not being human-centered:

> It's just not as human-centered and checking in about people's emotions and how they're feeling or really recognizing, like, how much that all matters and I think that's really exacerbated when you are someone who has like several different identities, and especially someone who is like Black in the writing center. I think it really, really, yeah, I think it just really matters. And I think for like for me in the, in the the different ways like I've had those conversations like Lana is talking about like with certain administrators, where I just kind of like had like like obedient is not an emotion, but like emotions that are typed to obedience that is what I have felt, and very like suppressed in those ways. And like, that's just how you have to operate to make sure.

What Sasha points towards is an ethic of care or lack thereof. Even when administrators are not directly responsible for a situation, like a client bringing in a racist essay, how they respond to those situations is going to have an effect on the experiences that Black women have in the center. So, when administrators privilege Western, white-centered ways of knowing – like emotional suppression (under the guise of professionalism) – that are grounded in white supremacist ideas about superiority, Black women are disproportionately impacted, such as Sasha describes in her narrative.

Again, under this theme, identity-based labor enforced through administrative decisions plays a big role in the institutional and emotional pressures that Black women are facing. However, in addition to this, we start to see how administrative decisions replicate white-centered ways of thinking, and as a result, push Black women in the center to act and behave in a specific way.

Institutional Identity

Institutional Identity is the most implicated in all of the narratives that co-researchers discussed because inside the writing center, both as a result of the values of the writing center and as a result of the writing center being inside a primarily white institution, white supremacist ideals are centered which impacts Black women in the center.

Frequently, co-researchers brought up a discrepancy between how the center portrayed itself and the actuality of the center. For example, Victoria pointed out that while Black Lives Matter was on the front page of the website, in actuality, it didn't feel as though the center had brought any of that into actual practice. She says:

> But I think for me personally why I have this intersecting view is because I'm like, I see it right. It's there, right, Sasha. It's on the website. It's, we see it. It's around us. We talk about it. But do the people who talk about it and put it on their websites, do they embody that? It's very much so, I always say this, you know. When I see those Black Lives Matter signs in people's yards, like, okay, you have a Black Lives Matter sign outside of your house, but have you ever had a Black life inside of your house? You know what I mean, and it's very much can feel like that. Do you embody what you are, this signage? Do you embody what you're saying? And I don't know. Maybe they're not. Maybe they are. I don't know, but on, my end doesn't seem to be fully there.

Here, Victoria identifies that the writing center is not embodying what they are advertising. The Black Lives Matter sign functions as a really good metaphor for the writing center because often the writing center does not have Black lives inside of it, and when they do, they don't have the infrastructure to honor those Black lives.

As a result of the writing center not embodying the practices that they claimed to value, Victoria narrated how she came to feel isolated inside of a primarily white center. In particular, she discussed how her onboarding was values based in a way that excited her. She was able to take a class where she was able to engage with the River Combahee Statement and how they used the statement to ground the entire class. She even details "shedding a little tear" at the feeling of being seen as a Black, Queer person inside of the writing center. She says:

> I remember coming into the space and being like, wow, this is such a queer space. And in that way, I was excited because I'm queer, I'm Black, and I was like, Okay, I have this diverse space which I had thought all right. I thought, like, okay, a queer space is diverse, like, you know, we're all we're all struggling together out here. And so, I get into the writing center. I'm so excited I'm like in this writing center world. I'm in this queer space we're talking about dude, I remember it was 395 and [name-redacted] had basically framed the theme of the class around the River Combahee Collective? What was it? The Black River Combahee Collective of like this 5, or 6, 7 Black feminists, Lesbian women, who came together and wrote this collective and wrote this this Combahee Collective, and it was just about, you know, Black feminism and intersectionality, and, like all of these things, and I literally, I was in class, and I literally like I shed a little tear, and I was like, so excited. I was like, wow, I'm like, in a space where, like more, this is our principles, like what you know. And then that was like I had joined, too. That was right, right after they had came out with the language statement, too. So, I was like we got the language statement. We got the Combahee River Club.

This narrative is complex because, in this case, there was an instance of the writing center showing anti-racist values by spending time truly focusing on identity, power, privilege, and

Black Feminism. After this experience, Victoria felt that she would be safe in the center, and that her identities would be accepted and seen. However, as she continued narrating, she tells of how she started to feel isolated inside of the center. At the same time as feeling accepted based on her queerness, Victoria began to feel what she described as being "segregated." Specifically, she says:

> I mean, this is incredible, you know. I'm excited, and so I'm in the space, and not to say that it went completely left, or anything. But so, you know, I was excited. I was in the space I was doing the work. But then you start realizing, even in this queer diverse space, you're still, you're Black, you know. Still, it still felt – I still felt this other right. I still felt like I don't know like, I just, I wasn't in, you know, like I don't know cause you – I think that it's a natural human feeling to want to be accepted. I think you know anyone who wants to deny that I mean go for but it's a – it's a natural feeling to want to be, you know, involved in, and accepted. And so, in that way I thought I was coming into a place where I was about to be accepted. For all that I was, and although I did feel a sense of, I did feel that I did feel that comfort in a way, or that want me, you know. But it just, it felt like it came with something I don't know. It felt like it – it. I don't know. It just wasn't natural. It didn't –I don't know, I don't know how to explain it, but I think you really start to see like this notion of how segregated in a way the Black and white queer community are and that was something I had never really realized until I had went to that space.

Based on Victoria's queerness, she felt really accepted in the writing center, but during her continued time in the writing center, she realized that the space was actually very white, and as a result, she felt othered and not accepted. In this case, the writing center administrators were able

to recruit Victoria because of their claims to anti-racism and their virtue signaling, but infrastructurally, they were in no way able to support Victoria as a Black woman.

In conversation with this, Sasha also discussed her experiences in the writing center, describing when claims to progressive and anti-racist values were not reflected in practice. She says:

> We had this question, and it was about like if a really offensive like racist thing was said in a consultation what would you do? And we had to all do a practice brainstorming. And then share out our answers like what was happening. And then I remember this white consultant just said "oh, I'm not sure what to do, because I'm white, but what do the people of color think?" Literally at the table. And I was so frustrated it was - it was just I was so frustrated by it. But it was like that. I mean, that is commonplace, like in the writing center. And it just shows like, even though we get these theories and things like that goes unchecked. And that is just something that just happens. And that's what people say, like in the writing center especially from a lot of like white consultants.

In this case, Sasha points to the institution of the writing center being responsible for this interaction. Interactions like this are "commonplace" in the writing center because of the way writing centers privilege whiteness. In the case of Sasha's narrative here, anti-Blackness goes completely unchecked, and those that are complicit in that anti-Blackness are able to excuse themselves from any discussion of race or racism based on their identities.

Sasha's narrative clearly has interpersonal and administrative components. The consultant who claimed that she didn't know how to deal with racism because she was white had an interpersonal relationship with Sasha. Administration failed to step in or implement ideological checks that could have stopped this interaction before it happened. It is impossible to

look at the institutional identity of a primarily white writing center without also understanding that interpersonal and administrative components play a role in the identity of the space. The institution is only a PWI because of the people in the space, which are determined by administrative decisions about who and where to recruit students to work in the writing center. However, in this scenario, what really comes out is the claims the writing center makes about radicalism and ideology that are not followed through in practice.

In response to Lana's early narrative about not wanting to play into any stereotypes, like the Angry Black woman, Victoria also talks about how this privilege of whiteness inside of the institution results in more pressure to conform. She says:

> So, yeah, I think definitely, just like what Lana said. You know not you know, portraying any kind of stereotypes, not trying to be, you know the person picking and prodding, and and you know, coming off as aggressive. So, yeah, definitely, I've over time, though, when thinking about my experience over time, just throughout all PWI, spaces, I've there's just been so much about like my identities. And like the way I should act, I think, for a while, for most of my life, when I would go into these white spaces I grew up in white spaces. I would try to like you know, Lana said, up my voice, you know. Yeah, smiling, "everything's cool", you know. You know, "how how's the kids, Shannon[3]? You had you had a good weekend," you know, like classic right?

Much like Lana's narrative, Victoria describes making dispositional changes, like upping her voice or talking in a certain way, in order to resist stereotypes and conform to the space. However, unlike Lana, she ascribes this less to personal conversations with administrators and more to the fact that the institution is a PWI and the pressure to conform to that to be taken

[3] Shannon does not refer to a real person in this case. The co-researcher is just using the name as an example.

seriously. As the narrative progressed, Victoria also mentions that she started to resist the pressure to do this. She says “and then it got to the point where I was like. Listen, I'm gonna either be myself or they're not gonna like it, you know, and that's when I really started to talk in my voice, you know.” However, she mentions again that more recently, she’s been feeling that pressure to conform again when she says:

> Most more recently, because I am currently like going out for a position in this department that I am, that's a very kind of like higher level [...]. And so now I'm going back into this mode of I literally thought 2 days ago I was like, maybe I should get a straight wig. I'm like I need to get a new wig. I literally was like I should get it straight hair wig for my interview it, which is crazy. And and I thought that because because I remember being in the office one time and someone being like someone looking at me and being like “Oh, my God [Victoria]! I don't know what's up with you today. But you look great! You look like you are so ready for today” and that was like the only day I had straightened my hair. And so so ever since then, I'm like, “well, I got an interview I'm gonna go – I'm gonna straighten my hair.” When I met the Governor, when I met Whitmer I had my little straight wig on, and so, and I guess that doesn't have to do with my emotions, but it's all tied it's all in there.

While Victoria is not specifically talking about the writing center here, she’s talking about the impact PWIs and white-centered, white-dominated spaces have in general, and writing centers are implicated in that.

Ultimately, because of the privileging of whiteness in the center, co-researchers report feeling as though they have to conform and like they have to field the racism of clients,

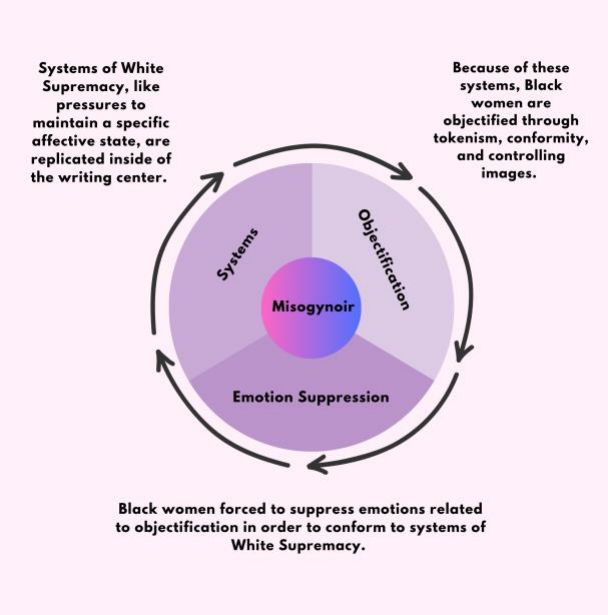
colleagues, and administrators, while also doing the ideological work of anti-racism, because of the privileging of white supremacist ideals by the writing center.

Discussion

In this section, I will discuss how misogynoir in the writing center is implicated throughout my findings. In particular, I will describe how my findings demonstrate (a) that the writing center enforces a culture of white supremacy that co-researchers feel the effects of, (b) how this culture of white hegemony objectifies co-researchers by tokenizing them and forcing them to conform, and (c) how co-researchers feel as though they have to suppress the emotions they feel in relationship to their objectification in order to conform to the white, hegemonic, structure of the writing center. Much like in Figure 1 in my theoretical frame, these systems work as a cycle with misogynoir at the center of it. I show a visual representation of this in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Misogynoir Cycle in Writing Centers



As Figure 3 shows, in the writing center, white-centered values that construct Black women as "other" are centered, which causes specific pressures that Black women have to navigate to conform to those structures. These pressures cause Black women to feel frustrated, tired, and used. However, these emotions need to be suppressed in order to conform to the institutional structure.

Institution / Hegemony

The writing center, both as an institution itself and as part of a broader institutional structure, is designed to replicate and enforce white supremacy. This design causes the emotional pressures that Black women experience and was frequently mentioned throughout the findings. In particular, the fact that the writing center claims to be inclusive while not actually implementing inclusive pedagogy harms and is an act of violence towards Black women in the space. Victoria and Sasha specifically pointed to this when they discussed how the writing center advertising itself as an inclusive space drew them to the writing center, but during their time in the actual writing center, they didn't feel supported.

The institutional ethic of the writing center, in which writing centers claim to support equity but fail to apply it, is implicated here. As argued in the literature review, writing centers adhere to a grand narrative (Grutsch-McKinney, 2013) of safety and inclusion for everyone, but this grand narrative often excuses them from doing deep ideological work. As a result, a lot of the theory and scholarship that comes out of the writing center engages the idea of equity and even queer theory without ever engaging race (like Webster, 2017; Denny, 2010; Dixon, 2017; & Grutsch-McKinney, 2013). Victoria and Sasha's stories are narrative accounts of this same phenomenon, in which they can very easily see the way that queerness is honored in the writing center and feel accepted in that way but feel othered on account of their Blackness. Because the

system and the organization has been designed to work as a white supremacist organization, writing centers do not actually know how to apply critical praxis. The primarily white makeup of the writing center reinforces this because white practitioners do not have the necessary orientations (nor necessarily the want) to apply radical praxis. As hooks (1989) argues those at the margins developed an ability to see society at the margins and at the center, and that ability to see the world creates a space of radical transformation. As long as the writing center is made up of primarily white people, there will always be a failure to see the world in a transformative way. As of right now, writing centers are made up of white people trying to approximate radicality without a full understanding of what it means to be at the margins, and as long as that is true, the writing center will fall into a white saviorist mentality instead of enacting radical and transformative praxis.

Objectification

The white supremacist mentality of writing centers cause objectification through forced conformity and identity-based labor. For example, because the writing center is a colonial space (Faison & Condon, 2022), implicated in a history that relies on deficit narratives (Boquet, 1999), Sasha had to do identity-based labor that required rebuilding trust with marginalized communities and organizations that had previously been abused by the writing center itself. Sasha's narrative aligns with Baker-Bell's (2017) argument about race tax, because, as a Black woman in the writing center, Sasha is being asked to do race-based labor that requires working specifically with marginalized populations. Her narrative also aligns with Wingfield & Alston's (2014) theory of racialized tasks, wherein marginalized workers are more likely to work with marginalized populations, and in doing this work, they are most rewarded when they conform to and maintain organizational structures. In Sasha's narrative, the writing center itself and its

institutional legacy caused Sasha to be used through the identity-based labor that she had to complete, and she was more likely to be punished if she did not conform to and maintain the institutional legacy of colonialism.

As a result of the whiteness of the space that Sasha identifies, she is more likely to be objectified, primarily through forced conformity and identity-based labor. In Sasha's narrative, she expresses her own values that rely on reciprocity and trust. However, when actualizing those values, she faces more pressure from administrators who take a different view on how to approach community work. The approach that administrators take in Sasha's narrative, which involves pressuring other organizations into partnership with the writing center, is a colonial, white centered, approach that Sasha hesitates to replicate, especially because she can "see like how much time they like, really don't have" However, when she doesn't conform to this approach, she is likely to deal with harm and racism from administrators, thus leading to emotional harm and labor for Sasha. In Sasha's case, the burden of race-based labor not only falls on her, but she's also pressured to do it in a way that conforms to white hegemony.

Lana and Victoria also both experienced forced conformity and tokenization in the writing center. When terms of identity-based labor, Lana in her interactions with clients felt as though she was used or taken advantage of by clients who chose to work with her just to get her perspective as a Black woman, and Victoria felt used as one of the only Black girls in the writing center being asked to do ideological work in relationship to race and identity, aligning with Wingfield & Alston's (2014) theory of racialized tasks. In terms of conformity, Lana and Victoria specifically talked about changing their disposition to fit into a white writing center. For example, they both detailed changing the pitch of their voice so that they wouldn't play into stereotypes about Black women being aggressive or angry. In this case, the "Angry Black

Woman" stereotype that Lana is referencing and the idea of being aggressive that Victoria references are controlling images – like the images that Wynther (2003), Collins (2021), and Bailey (2021) critique – that are affecting the ways in which Lana and Victoria must act in the writing center. Congruent to the cycle shown in Figure 3, systems of white supremacy in the writing center dictate the way that people need to act in order to fit into the idea of the "self", and these systems are then reinforced through controlling images, like that of the Angry Black woman that forces Black women in the writing center, like Lana and Sasha, to conform or be "other."

Suppression of Emotion

In the narratives above, Victoria, Lana, and Sasha clearly feel the emotional toll of the whiteness of the institution, their tokenization, and their pressure to conform. As Victoria claims, even if it doesn't seem like it, "emotion is all tied in there." As discussed as a tenet of Black feminism, the personal is always deeply political. In the case of this writing center, in which the writing center advertises care about Black Lives Matter but does not have an anti-racist stance or a willingness to support Black women inside of the center, this experience becomes even more personal and emotional because we are talking about the lives of Black women and the trauma associated with that. However, that message is being co-opted by writing centers but not honored. This experience is deeply emotional and personal, and it follows that Victoria, Lana, and Sasha also describe feeling frustrated, and used, and tired, frequently as a result of all of these interactions that are taking place inside of the writing center.

However, despite feeling these emotions, the co-researchers still felt administrative and institutional pressures to mask these emotions. For Sasha because administrators are emotionally distant and don't implement check-ins and react less than "positively" when she expresses stress.

For Lana and Victoria because when they don't mask these emotions, they risk playing into stereotypes of Black women as aggressive. It's also important to acknowledge that this is a double standard in writing center work. Because these same controlling images don't apply to white women in the center, their feelings are not inherently racialized. So, as Caswell (2022) critiques, white women are not going to be punished for performing anger the way that Black women will.

As a result, we can see that Lana, Victoria, and Lana are all doing race-based labor that takes a big emotional toll, but they are not able to express those emotions. This aligns with Kynard's (2019) writing where she discusses how as a Black woman, she's not only expected to do race-based labor, but she's also expected to do so while maintaining "an appropriate disposition" (p. 33). As Kynard (2020) and Baker-Bell (2017) point to, not only are co-researchers doing emotional labor, but they're expected to do so while conforming to white ideals about emotion.

After considering how the institution replicates whiteness, how Black women are objectified inside of the institution, and then forced to suppress their emotions, the findings of my study replicate the culture of misogynoir that is explained in Figure 1. In that cycle, I describe how in a culture of misogynoir, systems of white supremacy construct the idea of the "rational self" and the "irrational other" and those systems are then reinforced through controlling images that construct Black women as hyper-emotional and irrational, which forces Black women to suppress their emotions.

Conclusion

One of the biggest takeaways of what I've written so far is that writing centers in theory claim to be anti-racist, equitable institutions, but in praxis, enforce a culture of misogynoir. As a

result of this scenario, Black women are entering writing centers with the understanding that they will be welcomed and accepted in the space, but then once in the space, rather than receiving the support that they are promised, they begin to disproportionately feel the toll of working in a writing center that privileges whiteness. This toll is felt both emotionally, in terms of feeling used, tired, frustrated, and forced to conform, but also in terms of the day-to-day identity-based labor they are doing.

This is in part because writing center practitioners often do not have the necessary criticality to actually apply radical praxis. In order to transform this structure, I have three suggestions for writing centers moving forward: (a) center an ethic of care, (b) hire more Black women, (c) implement ideological filtering. In the following sections, I give recommendations for how to implement these strategies and describe why they are essential.

An Ethic of Care

Once in writing centers, as Morrison (2022) argues, Black women are extremely likely to be subjected to racism. Getting Black women into the writing center isn't the only barrier. This means that in addition to hiring Black women in the first place, there needs to be structures in place to support Black women. This means not just focusing on individual consultant education but rather means de-centering a culture of white supremacy in the writing center. Throughout this section, I call for a decentering of white supremacy through an ethic of care. An ethic of care is essential to Black feminist liberation, and according to Collins (2021) it "suggests that personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy are central to the knowledge validation process" (p. 335).

One way to implement an ethic of care is through listening, with empathy, to Black women when they recount their experiences. Like my experience shared in the counterstory at

the start of this essay and like Morrison's experience where she had to argue with audience members at IWCA about what racism even is, there are multiple accounts from the writing center in which Black women just aren't listened to or believed when they account for their experiences with racism. In the narratives shared by my co-workers, a lot of the traumas that they discussed could have been mitigated through human-centered and trauma-informed praxis. For example, in Sasha's narrative, she points to the importance of being listened to as Black women when she says that the writing center is "just not as human centered and checking in about people's emotions and how they're feeling or really recognizing, like, how much that all matters." She also points to the fact that especially with marginalized communities, being human-centered is especially crucial when she says, "and I think that's really exacerbated when you are someone who has several different identities, and especially someone who is like Black in the writing center. I think it really, really, yeah, I think it just really matters."

In this case, there is a significant portion of the emotional burden that could be lifted with flexible policies that allowed consultants to care for themselves. It could also be lifted if she had an administrator that listened to her and also checked in on the personal as well as the deliverables. An ethic of care and listening goes back to the Black feminist practice of caring about the lived experience that Black women bring with them into every situation.

Hire Black Women

As hooks argues, folks on the margin develop a worldview that can act as a space of transformative change. As expressed through claims to radicality and anti-racism in scholarship, writing centers do see themselves as a place of potential for radical change. However, in practice, writing centers instead promote an "us versus them" mentality (Lockett, 2019) in which Black women are often seen as patrons only. This means that when Black women come into the writing

center, both as clients and as consultants, they are more likely to have racist experiences, both because of the idea of belonging based on presumed incompetence and because they are isolated without support. In this case, as long as writing centers are made up of mostly white people, radical change will always fall short in favor of a white saviorist mentality, and harm the Black women inside of that writing center.

The easiest intervention into this system is to hire Black women and other marginalized communities in leadership positions and in clusters. This means changing recruitment strategies. In most writing centers, hiring happens through first-year writing and teacher recommendations. Hiring practices like these privileged students who enter first year writing with knowledge of how to succeed in white-centered universities.

In addition, there needs to be multiple pathways of entrance into the writing center. In the writing center where this study takes place, for undergraduates, the only pathway of entrance into the writing center is through taking a 300-level class and interning in the writing center. This creates barriers to access for students who maybe don't have time to fit that class into their schedule, are in a major that will not reward them for taking that class, and are not able to pay to work, as this model requires students to pay to take the class in order to later work in the center and get paid to do so. In any case where there are barriers to access like this, marginalized bodies are always going to be the most impacted.

Ideological Filtering

Also, crucial to transforming the white supremacist nature of the writing center is doing ideological work. This can happen in two steps, (a) through creating a better vetting process for those who want to enter the writing center, and (b) through doing continued ideological work for everyone who is in the writing center.

At my undergraduate institution, whenever I would bring up racism and ideological work in the writing center, my director would sit me down so we could have a conversation about why it's so hard to do continued ideological work. She would say that the writing center is a temporal space, where people come and leave rapidly. As a result, it was hard to maintain a system that taught every consultant the same thing or transformed the worldview of every consultant.

The writing center is a temporal space where people come and go rapidly; however, rather than using this fact as a scapegoat, practitioners should use it to inform their practices. One essential way of doing this is through a better process for hiring that asks applicants ideological questions. Questions like, "what do you think a writing center should do?" can reveal white saviorist mentalities when applicants give answers that demonstrate a white supremacist mentality. Answers that rely on a deficit framing, where an applicant discusses wanting to "help" or "save" vulnerable populations or use their writing skills to "help" others, can reveal that an applicant might not be on the place they need to be on their journey.

Another important question is, "How do you consider identity, power, and privilege as a person? How do you see that working in a writing center?" As demonstrated in the literature review and findings, many writing center practitioners maintain silence on issues of race, refusing to critically engage with it or when they do engage with it, they co-opt the stories of marginalized populations while still silencing them. An ideological question that already asks applicants how they conceive of their identity can reveal what they think about power and privilege and if they even consider race. In doing this, we would already be taking strides to prevent stories like the one Sasha shared, in which a consultant told her that she did not know how to deal with racism because she was white. With questions like this, from the beginning, we

would be looking for people who already understand that their whiteness does not excuse them from engaging with racism.

It's also important that everyone who enters the writing center is ideologically filtered. In this writing center, most graduate students within the same department as the writing center will either teach first-year writing or work in the writing center. Once graduate students have been admitted into the program, there is not a time in which they are ideologically filtered. For example, during my first year of assistantship in the writing center, I was admitted without a formal interview or any ideological questions. The only ideological filtering I experienced took place through admittance to the graduate program in the first place, which is not necessarily a program that is looking for anti-racist or transformative worldviews from the people that they admit. In the case of graduate students who do enter the writing center with harmful ideologies, using this as the primary process for admittance means that they will likely come into the writing center and do more harm.

Final Words

In order to build a writing center that does not harm all Black women who enter it, there is a lot of radical transformation that needs to take place. One of my favorite questions to ask people at conferences, in professional development, and in class is "in a perfect world, what would a writing center look like?" The worst answers position writing centers the way they already are, with a model that centers tutoring in order to "help" marginalized communities. The best position writing center practitioners as allies, comrades, and co-conspirators who strive for transformation. My answer tends to be more controversial than this because in my perfect world, writing centers, at least as they are right now, would not exist. Writing centers, given the colonial, white supremacist, and deficit approach that writing centers were designed to have,

should never have existed in the first place. Transformation relies not only on righting wrongs or doing individual ideological work but instead on making radically transforming the systems that never should have existed in the first place, and sometimes that starts with dismantling.

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APPENDIX

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about general experiences in the Writing Center. What does a day on shift look like?
2. In your day-to-day interactions in the writing center, where does emotion come into play? Do you have some examples?
3. What are some less common and more specific emotional experiences you have in the writing center? Think about times where big things go wrong or even where things go well. When have you experienced big emotions in the writing center?
    a. What do you do when you feel these emotions?
4. Tell me a story about a time where you thought about or were made aware of your identities within the space?
5. Do you think your identities affect the emotions you feel/display in the writing center?
6. Tell me a story where you felt one way in a writing center during your work, but you hid it or shielded it, but your actions didn't quite match up with what you're feeling?
7. What support structures did/do you have to help you navigate the WC?
8. What support structures do you wish you had to help you navigate the WC?