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"Starting from Square One": Results from the Racial Climate Survey of Writing Center Professional Gatherings

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Abstract Though the conversation about race and racism in individual writing centers has developed in the last 30 years (Coenen et al., 2019; Condon, 2007; Dees et al., 2007; Denny, 2010; Faison, 2018; García, 2017; Greenfield, 2019; Greenfield & Rowan, 2011; Grimm, 1999; Kern, 2019; Lockett, 2019), scholars rarely discuss the racial climate of writing center professional spaces. This article reports on the findings from the Racial Climate Survey of Writing Center Professional Gatherings. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected in spring 2019, when participants were asked about their experiences and perceptions of the racial climate of international, national, regional, and local writing center professional gatherings during the 2017–2018 academic year. Results show a statistically significant difference between White participants and BIPOC participants in relation to experiences of racial microaggressions, tensions/comfort in professional gatherings, and experiences in sessions about race/racism. Across multiple survey questions, the lack of diversity noted by participants was one of the most significant factors shaping their experiences of the racial climate of writing center professional gatherings. Based on the results, suggestions for how to improve the racial climate of writing center professional gatherings are provided.

Keywords racial climate, writing center professional gatherings, antiracism, conferences, microaggressions, racial tension, diversity

In recent years, race, racism, and racial justice have increasingly figured as central topics at IWCA conferences, regional affiliate conferences, and other professional writing center gatherings, as well as in our field's journals. Many researchers have called for attention to the doubled margins that writing center workers of color must navigate (Esters, 2011; Green,

2018), to methods of incorporating antiracism¹ into everyday writing center work (Geller et al., 2007), and to how to act on our commitments to racial justice (Diab et al., 2013). In particular, scholars of color have written about the difficulty of feeling a sense of "home" in writing centers as women of color (Faison & Treviño, 2017) as well as the ways "surface-level

Azima

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Hixson-Bowles—
Simpkins

diversity” does not always equate to an inclusive or equitable environment for Black consultants (Haltiwanger Morrison & Nanton, 2019). Typically, however, these conversations about race and racism are situated in the context of the specific centers we lead and work in (Coenen et al., 2019; Condon, 2007; Dees et al., 2007; Denny, 2010; Faison, 2018; García, 2017; Greenfield, 2019; Greenfield & Rowan, 2011; Grimm, 1999; Kern, 2019; Lockett, 2019). Far less is known about how race and racism shape individuals’ experiences of writing center professional organizations and gatherings. Writing center conferences are, in part, intended to serve as places where those who occupy lonely or siloed jobs on their campuses can find community and support. But does this opportunity for connection exist for people of color in our majority-White field?

We (the coauthors) began discussing this gap in the fall of 2015, during a conversation within the Anti-Racism Special Interest Group (SIG) at the IWCA conference in Pittsburgh. Some of us had been involved with the SIG for several years; all of us had heard stories about microaggressions and other racist incidents happening at writing center conferences either at prior SIG meetings or during conference presentations by participants of color. While the SIG brought us together and launched the conversation around pursuing empirical research on this topic, our collaboration took shape outside the SIG itself. Our goal in pursuing this project was to move beyond scattered anecdotes and provide a systematic look at the racial climate of writing center professional gatherings.

To this end, we designed the Racial Climate Survey on Writing Center Professional Gatherings, which we distributed in spring 2019, to gather detailed data about participants’ experiences at these gatherings with an eye to learning how our professional organizations might create more equitable and inclusive professional spaces. Three interrelated research questions guided our project:

- What is the racial climate of writing center professional gatherings?
- How do race and racism affect individuals’ experiences with writing

center professional organizations and gatherings?

- What are areas of strength and areas for improvement for writing center professional organizations seeking to create more equitable and inclusive professional spaces?

Our project offers a snapshot of participants’ perspectives at one moment in time. We sought to provide a baseline against which future attitudes around race and racism at our gatherings might be measured, as well as to provide an opportunity for participants to share information that could lead to greater understanding of the racial climate of our field as a whole. Below, after describing the demographics of survey respondents, we focus specifically on analyzing responses to questions about sessions on race/racism, microaggressions, and tensions/comfort around race/racism among attendees. We discuss the need for participants to consider their own feelings of relative comfort and discomfort around race at our gatherings and offer suggestions for ways our professional organizations might begin the work of improving the racial climate of our field and especially our professional gatherings. Overall, our findings show attendees of writing center gatherings in general are concerned about race and racism in professional gathering spaces, but the lack of racial diversity in the field along with how conversations about antiracism tend always to be starting at “square one” have had a deleterious effect upon our ability to move the field forward.

Methods

We modeled our climate survey on existing climate surveys, including the 2016 University of Wisconsin–Madison Campus Climate Survey and the 2002 University of Nebraska–Lincoln Campus Climate and Needs Assessment Study for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) Students, with one major exception: most other climate surveys we referenced did not include questions about microaggressions. We chose to ask about microaggressions to gather empirical evidence on how common

they are in writing center professional spaces. Once we had developed the survey, we sought and obtained IRB approval for the project.

The survey was distributed on April 9, 2019, on the WCenter listserv to the emails of professionals listed in the St. Cloud directory and in the Writing Center Director Facebook Group. Participants had until the end of May 2019 to answer questions about the 2017–2018 academic year. We asked participants to narrow their responses to a single academic year because we wanted answers to reflect the current climate without bias toward any particular professional gathering that participants may have recently attended.

Analyzing results was an iterative process. The survey collected both quantitative and qualitative data, which allowed one coauthor to focus on analyzing the quantitative data while the other two analyzed the qualitative data. Early in the process, the coauthors decided to separate responses of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) participants and White participants.² Descriptive statistics were used to make sense of the demographic data, while tests of difference were used to determine if BIPOC and White participants reported different experiences of writing center professional gatherings. Because the number of BIPOC respondents was so small (22), we used Mann-Whitney *U* tests to analyze the differences between answers from BIPOC vs. White participants.

We chose to divide the qualitative as well as quantitative data into BIPOC vs. White responses for two main reasons. First, the small number of responses from BIPOC participants meant that combined data would be more meaningful when trying to determine if measurable differences existed between BIPOC and White experiences. Some identity categories included just 2 or 3 respondents, limiting our ability to make claims about the experiences of individuals from those groups. Second, combining responses from BIPOC participants allowed us to protect their anonymity, since attaching too much demographic information to a particular response may well have revealed the respondent's identity. While we fully acknowledge that it is problematic to collapse BIPOC participants from varying backgrounds into a single category

when experiences can and do vary significantly across racial/ethnic groups, the overwhelming Whiteness of our field rendered it necessary both for analytical purposes and to ensure that responses could remain anonymous.

It is important to note that a portion of survey participants did not describe their race/ethnicity. Because we were interested in learning about differences in experiences depending on participant identity, we often left this group out of our analysis.

Qualitative data analysis involved multiple rounds of coding. We used Dedoose to collaboratively code the qualitative answers (Saldaña, 2009). Two of the coauthors used a mix of in-vivo, process, and thematic coding to individually code a sample of the qualitative data. After this first round, the team met to discuss their preliminary codes and defined the codebook. Then, the same two coauthors separately coded all the data. After this step, they met again to consolidate codes for different questions based on the content of the responses, their stance toward the topic, and the rhetorical purposes of the responses. Coding in this way allowed us to see both the overall patterns of the data as a whole as well as the most salient data within each specific question. For example, a major category that arose was "ongoing lack of diversity." Once we understood how this code was salient across many questions, we were then able to see how it informed responses to individual survey questions.

The qualitative survey responses also required another level of interpretation based on the respondent's positionality. For example, a White participant describing presentations about race and racism as "awful" can mean something completely different from a BIPOC participant's negative description of these sessions. Again, this indicates the necessity of separating data based on the participant's self-reported race. Though we did not do so for every question or respondent, we frequently tracked participants' responses across questions, particularly when they fell outside the range of typical responses for a given question. This tactic helped us understand how individual responses that departed from the norm did or did not reflect the landscape of the racial climate at our professional gatherings.³

Azima

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As in many studies, there are elements we would change if we were to conduct this study again. Though we validated our survey with a diverse group of writing center professionals at the IWCA CCCC Collaborative in 2016, we found that some of our word choices affected the data and data analysis. For instance, in the frequency scales, we used the terms “sometimes” and “occasionally” to describe 2 and 3, respectively, on the 4-point scale. Upon reflection, these descriptors are too similar, and the distinction between the two is less clear than we would prefer. Additionally, the first day the survey was distributed, we became aware that the survey did not allow participants to go back. We added that function.

Results

In what follows, we report the demographics of survey respondents, followed by responses to questions about sessions on race/racism, microaggressions, and tensions/comfort around issues of race/racism. In order to put the qualitative results in conversation with the quantitative results, we briefly discuss each of these categories of responses throughout the Results section. We then analyze patterns that emerged across questions and categories in the Discussion section.

One hundred ninety-five participants completed the survey. Since we used display logic to ask certain participants questions based on their previous answers, however, not all participants answered every question. Therefore, as we present the quantitative results, we will indicate the total number of participants who answered each question with “n =.”

We asked participants to write in how they identify in terms of race/ethnicity as well as gender. As noted above, 46 participants, or 21%, did not describe their race/ethnicity (either leaving the text box blank or leaving

a nonrelevant descriptor, usually indicating some kind of color-blind stance⁴), and we combined all BIPOC participants (n = 22 or 10% of total participants) into one group for analysis. Responses in this category included answers such as “Black,” “Asian American,” “biracial,” and “Latina,” to name a few. Participants gave a variety of responses indicating Whiteness, which we categorized into the “White” group (n = 151 or 69% of total participants). While many of these responses simply stated “white” or “Caucasian,” we coded quite a few as “White with qualifications.” In this category, participants described their race/ethnicity in terms of their heritage, for example “white, Scottish, German, and Scandinavian heritage.”

We also asked participants to describe their genders in their own words and coded answers into four categories: cis woman, cis man, trans/genderqueer/nonbinary, and other. Responses such as “female” or “man” were categorized into the “cis” categories. As with the race demographic, we collapsed trans, genderqueer, and nonbinary responses into one category to protect participants’ identities. Finally, we had a small number of responses that did not actually answer the question or were difficult to categorize (e.g., offering an opinion on gender equality, or describing their sexuality rather than gender). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the majority of participants identified as cis women (see Table 1).

Participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 74, with the majority of participants, both BIPOC and White, falling in the 25–54 range (see Table 2). Additionally, the majority of participants did not identify as multilingual (BIPOC, n = 7; White, n = 114). That being said, it is interesting to note that within the two groups, only 9% of White participants reported identifying as multilingual, while 68% of BIPOC participants reported identifying as multilingual.

We also wanted to know a bit about our participants’ current institutions and positions.

Table 1. Gender of BIPOC and White Participants

| | Cis Woman | Cis Man | Trans, Genderqueer, Nonbinary | Other |
|-------|-----------|---------|-------------------------------|-------|
| BIPOC | 16 | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| White | 91 | 33 | 5 | 3 |

Table 2. Age of BIPOC and White Participants

| | 18–24 | 25–34 | 35–44 | 45–54 | 55–64 | 65–74 |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| BIPOC | 4 | 8 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 0 |
| White | 2 | 34 | 36 | 36 | 16 | 8 |

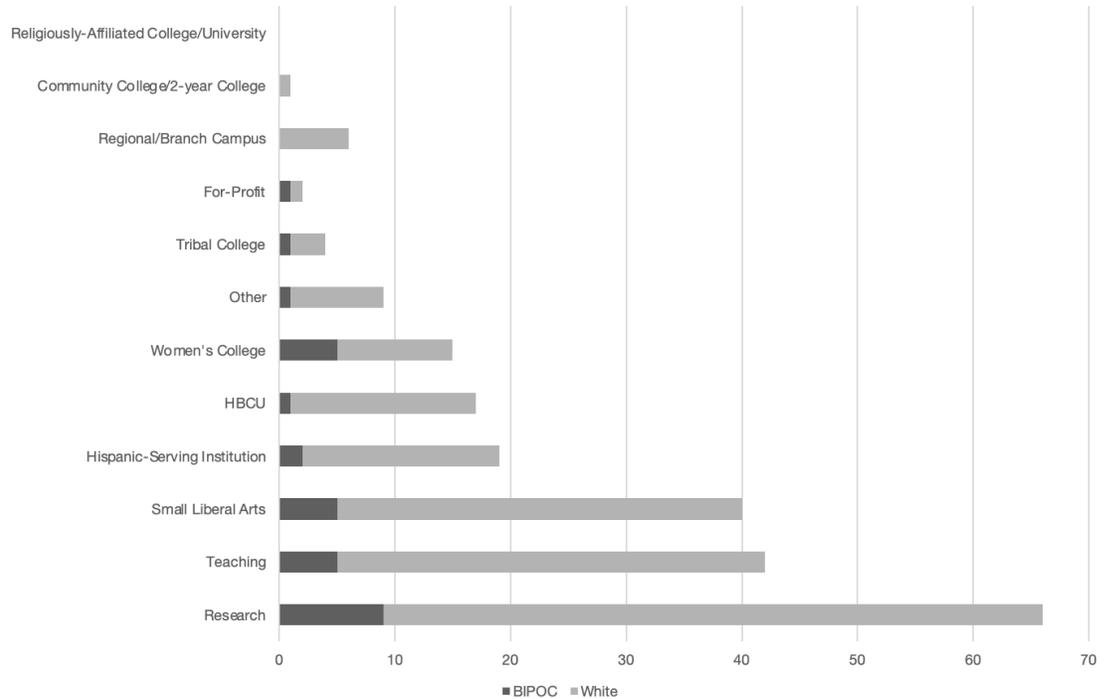


Figure 1. Type of Institution Based on Race

As you can see in Figure 1, research, teaching, and small liberal arts institutions were the most common institution types represented in our participant pool.

Figures 2 and 3⁵ illustrate our participants' campus and writing center roles by their race. Breaking down participants' institutional and writing center positions by their race demonstrates the overwhelming Whiteness of our participants. Most of our participants were either in staff positions ($n = 108$) or full-time (tenure or nontenure track) faculty positions ($n = 100$). While the staff/faculty divide was roughly 50/50 among our White participants (staff, $n = 85$; faculty, $n = 83$), BIPOC participants were more likely to be in a staff position ($n = 13$) than a faculty position ($n = 6$).

All 154 participants (BIPOC, $n = 22$; White, $n = 132$) who reported their race/ethnicity also confirmed having attended a writing center professional gathering between spring 2015 and spring 2019. The survey specifically asked

participants to recall writing center professional gatherings in the 2017–2018 academic year. Nineteen BIPOC and 118 White participants attended a writing center professional gathering that year.

When asked how satisfied they were with the racial climate at writing center professional gatherings, both BIPOC and White participants gave a wide range of responses (see Table 3). Examining the qualitative alongside the quantitative data from specific questions below illuminates the divergent experiences and perceptions that contribute to this broad range of assessments.

Sessions about Race/Racism

We asked a series of questions about participants' experiences in formal conference spaces (e.g., conference presentations, the Anti-Racism SIG, etc.). Eighty-six percent of BIPOC ($n = 19$) and 85% of White ($n = 112$) participants

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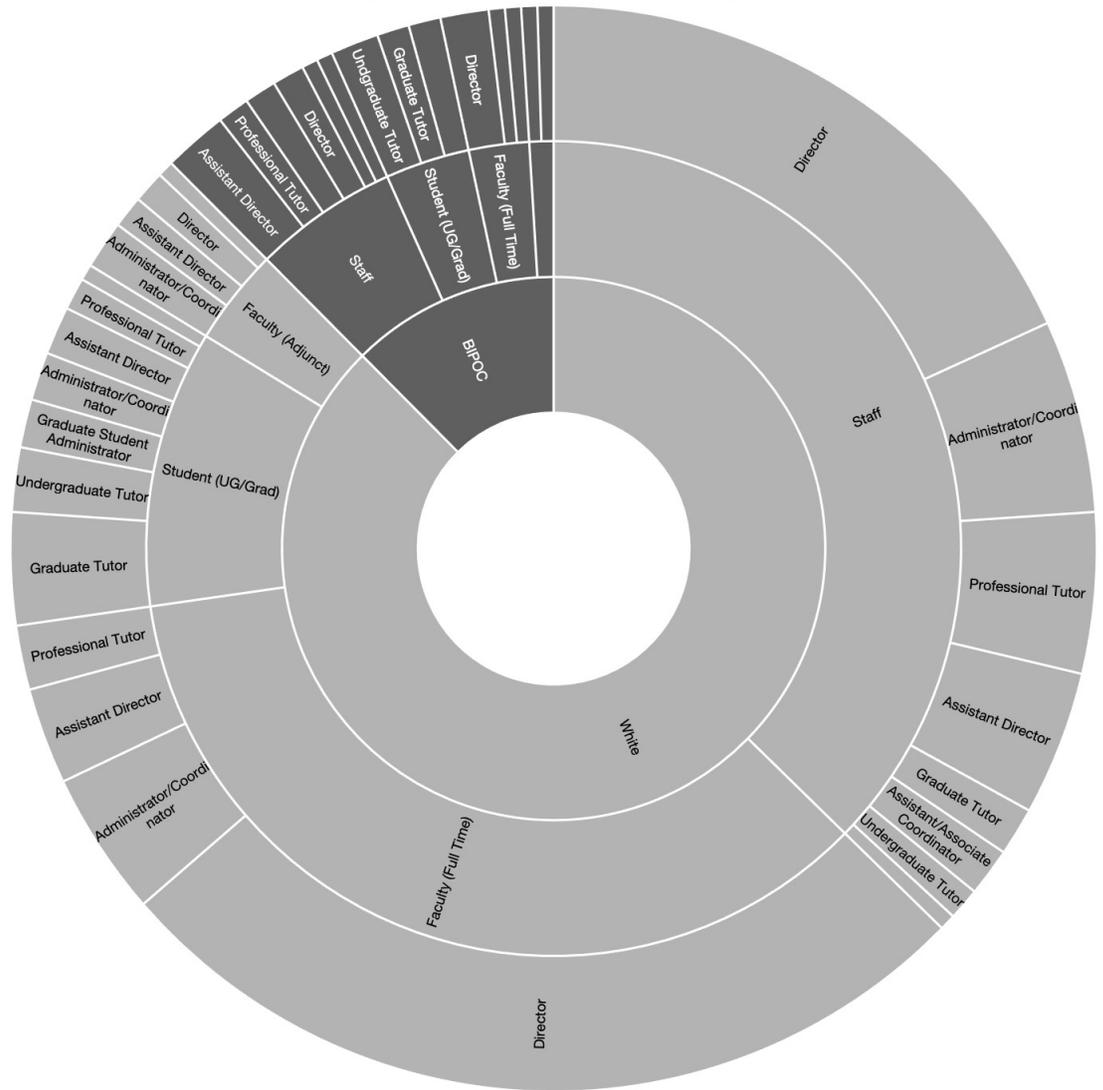


Figure 2. Writing Center and Institutional Positions by Race

reported attending sessions about race/racism. When asked, “How often have you participated in conversations about race and racism in conference presentations?” 62% of BIPOC ($n = 13$) and 35% of White ($n = 46$) respondents reported “frequently” or “very frequently” (see Figure 4). Participants who had attended conference presentations about race and racism were asked to characterize the sessions in a text box. These qualitative responses reveal a broad range of experiences and perspectives. Many call attention to the varying quality of presentations and of the reception to these presentations, even within a single participant’s experiences at a given conference. Curiously, many survey participants responded with a list of adjectives, though we did not specifically frame the question in this way.

Qualitative coding of these responses revealed that participants used positive descriptors for sessions about race and/or racism more frequently than negative descriptors, with “informative” (11 responses, all White), “helpful” (8, all White), “enlightening” (4 White, 1 BIPOC), “interesting” (4 White, 1 BIPOC), and “useful” (4 White, 1 BIPOC) appearing most often. While participants described attending such sessions positively, the positive characterizations from White respondents may reflect the unfamiliarity of the subject matter for these participants. Descriptors such as “cutting edge” (2 White responses) and “eye-opening” (3 White responses), along with “informative” and “helpful” as noted above, suggest the content of these presentations was new to these audience members,

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Figure 3. BIPOC Participants' Writing Center and Institutional Positions

Table 3. Satisfaction with Writing Center Professional Gatherings' Racial Climate

| | Very Satisfied | Somewhat Satisfied | Neither | Somewhat Dissatisfied | Very Dissatisfied |
|-------|----------------|--------------------|---------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| BIPOC | 2 | 3 | 13 | 14 | 2 |
| White | 48 | 53 | 78 | 81 | 17 |

as we will discuss further in the Discussion section.

We also saw a range of negative responses to sessions about race and racism. Critiques of sessions by White participants sometimes included racist rhetoric. Some respondents questioned the value of having any discussions of race and racism at writing center professional gatherings at all; one of these respondents went so far as to say that

sessions about race and racism were “[p]oorly argued and almost wholly unrelated to what I’m interested in as a writing center scholar.” Some negative responses from White participants engaged in tone policing when criticizing presenters of color or sessions about race and racism, describing them as “heated discussions” or “unnecessarily inflammatory or venting.” It is important that we emphasize that this category of responses was small.

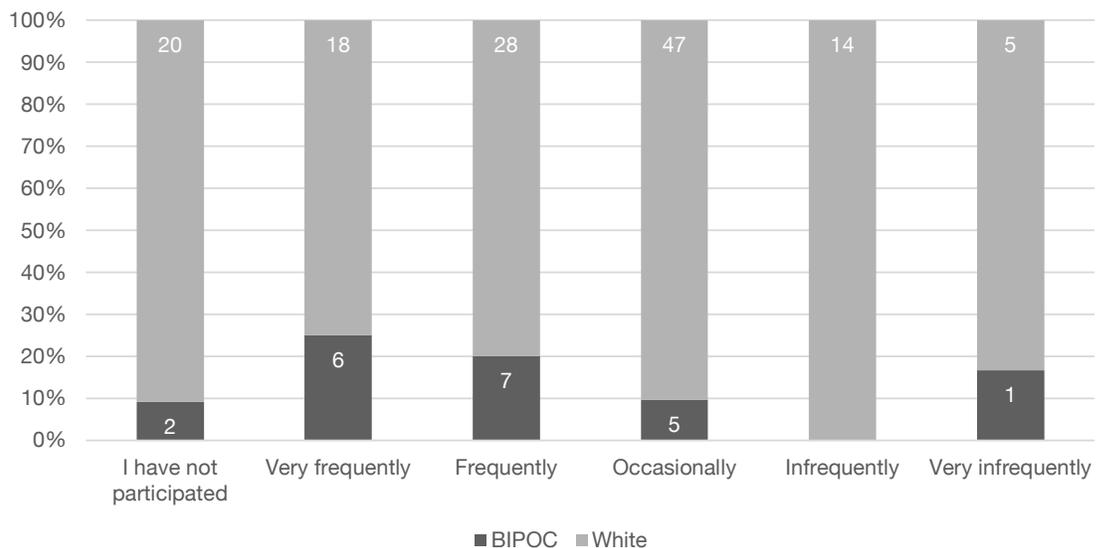


Figure 4. Participation in Conversations about Race/Racism at Conference Presentations

That said, we are troubled by its presence at writing center professional gatherings and believe it is important to track, as it points out lingering attitudes that inevitably help shape the climate of these gatherings.

A more common pattern in the data was critiques of presentations about race/racism not going far enough. Some participants felt these sessions should be more focused on activism. For example, one White participant said conference presentations about race/racism were “largely non-confrontational, more academic and less activist-oriented, informative and often avoiding naming racism outright.” Echoing these sentiments, another White participant reported such sessions being “mostly calls for improvement or informational. Typically not action-oriented—and so I’m skeptical that much comes out of them.” Along the same lines, other participants noted that presentations about race and racism tended to “start at square one” and were focused on interventions within individual writing centers rather than the field as a whole.

Notably, the most frequent code in this category was “ongoing lack of diversity.” Negative assessments by participants in this area took several forms, including critiques of who ends up leading conversations on race/racism at professional gatherings and critiques of the audience for these sessions. Regarding the former, both BIPOC and White participants noted repeatedly that conversations tend to

be dominated by White presenters and attendees. One White participant offered a pointed critique, saying that sessions are “Occasionally [sic] tokenistic and self-congratulatory for white presenters.” Both BIPOC and White respondents noted the importance of presenter identity: as one BIPOC participant put it, “Many are quite powerful and led by POC members, but I’d still like to see more diversity of experience represented among racial groups.”

Likewise, respondents commented on how having a predominantly White audience shapes the kinds and quality of our professional conversations about race and racism. As one White participant wrote about a session, “the last one I went to it was all white people, so it didn’t really feel like we had the best conversation we could have had.” Participants noted that often audience members were new to the conversation, or that the people who needed to be there weren’t there. Furthermore, these critiques appeared not only in the context of the audience for individual sessions, but also in reference to the Whiteness of the field as a whole. As one BIPOC respondent put it:

There’s much discussion about racism and anti-racist practice among certain circles, but the conferences are still very white. Also, there’s little attention to mixed-race experiences, which complicates any discussion of race. Also, given the overwhelming majority of white attendees, there’s little

Azima
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Simpkins

discussion about privilege and how to be a good ally.

According to a number of participants, the lack of diversity not only flattens distinctions among BIPOC experiences, but it acts as a barrier to the conversations that could help move the field from constantly raising awareness to taking concrete action. Another response encapsulated many of the issues at stake around this question of the field's lack of diversity: "Conversations continue to center White writing center professionals; very few writing center professionals of color attending regional conferences (other than undergraduate/graduate tutors)." As we will talk about more in the Discussion section, the lack of diversity has a direct effect on the continuing centering of White perspectives in the field.

Tensions/Comfort

Like participants' responses to sessions about race/racism at conferences, their responses to questions about feelings of tension and comfort also varied, both within the context of making professional connections and in the tensions they did or did not perceive around race/racism at professional gatherings.

Participants were asked to identify how comfortable they felt making professional connections at various writing center professional gatherings on a 2–6 scale (1 = did not attend [not included in this analysis], 2 = extremely comfortable, 3 = somewhat comfortable, 4 = neither comfortable nor uncomfortable, 5 = somewhat uncomfortable, 6 = extremely uncomfortable). There was a significant difference between BIPOC and White participants for 2 of the 6 professional gatherings: regional and local/municipal gatherings. A Mann-Whitney *U* test revealed a significant difference in participants' comfort making professional connections at regional conferences between BIPOC ($Md = 3.5, n = 18$) and White participants ($Md = 2, n = 123$), $U = 1606, z = 3.394, p = .001, r = .286$. Similarly, for local/municipal gatherings, a Mann-Whitney *U* test revealed a significant difference between BIPOC ($Md = 3.5, n = 6$) and White ($Md = 2, n = 93$) participants' comfort in

making professional connections, $U = 440, z = 2.758, p = .006, r = .277$. In both cases, White participants reported feeling extremely comfortable making professional connections, while BIPOC participants reported feeling less comfortable.

This was consistent with our qualitative findings. White participants largely expressed feeling unconditionally comfortable making professional connections at conferences, while BIPOC participants' comfort was always conditional in some way. For example, one BIPOC participant said, "I think I'm comfortable because they [sic] connections being made are often with other people of color." Similarly, another participant noted that their mixed-race identity affected how they connect with others in writing center professional gatherings:

It's difficult for me being a mixed-race person and not always feeling connected to a single race or cultural experience. People like me experience in-betweeness [sic] where we don't always fit in. Also, there's the assumption that we're white, when we don't identify that way. It's complicated, and being an introvert doesn't help, either.

While White participants sometimes echoed similar interpersonal concerns (such as introversion) that shaped their comfort levels, race/ethnicity simply was not a determining factor in their responses, as it was for BIPOC respondents.

We also asked participants to report more broadly on how much tension they perceive around race at writing center professional gatherings (1 = a lot, 2 = a moderate amount, 3 = a little, 4 = none at all, 5 = I didn't notice). A Mann-Whitney *U* test revealed a significant difference in the perception of tension around race at writing center professional gatherings between BIPOC ($Md = 2, n = 22$) and White participants ($Md = 3, n = 151$), $U = 1083, z = -2.75, p = .006, r = 0.21$). Such responses may be related to participants' relative awareness of microaggressions at professional gatherings, which we report on in the next section.

White participants gave a wide range of qualitative responses regarding tensions

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around race at writing center professional gatherings. Several indicated that tension was simply not present, often pointing to the idea that writing centers (and their staff) are inherently inclusive: “Writing centers may be one of the most inclusive spaces in campus by virtue of the writers we work with. I see no problems with race at our conferences.” Few White respondents identified specific instances of tension around race, though some called attention to the need to push through feelings of discomfort around discussions of race: “As a Caucasian at an HBCU I care a great deal about issues of race and racism, and it is very important to me to learn and grow in this area, but it is also still an uncomfortable issue for me to talk about because it is so loaded, but because I believe it is important, I am trying to push through that discomfort.” Several called out their fellow White participants for being unwilling to engage productively in discussions involving race and racism: one participant noted, “As is often the case, I think white people are too focused on making sure they aren’t called racist to see how writing centers might be a part of systemic racism.” Many qualitative responses occupied a sort of middle ground, in which participants noted that their Whiteness might prevent them from observing tensions: one wrote, “I suspect there may be more than I am aware of as someone with white privilege”; another replied, “As a straight, white male, I know I don’t have to wrestle with many of these issues, and probably do not notice the same things that others do.” As we will see, participants’ recognition of microaggressions (or lack thereof) makes concrete some of the variance around the tensions they do or do not perceive.

Microaggressions

Microaggressions, as we defined them in the survey, are “instances of subtle and often indirect or unintentional oppression.” Importantly, they differ from what Huber and Solorzano (2015) call “macroaggressions,” or institutional, political, or structural forms of racism that disenfranchise groups of people. Drawing from the work of psychology scholar Derald Wing Sue,⁶ we asked participants about six

categories of microaggressions that many people of color face on a regular basis. Using a 4-point scale (1 = often, 2 = sometimes, 3 = occasionally, and 4 = never), we asked participants to identify how often they have experienced or witnessed the following race-based microaggressions at writing center professional gatherings. A Mann-Whitney *U* test revealed a significant difference between BIPOC and White participants’ experiences in four of the six categories (see Table 4): assumptions of intellectual inferiority (BIPOC: *Md* = 3, *n* = 22; White: *Md* = 4, *n* = 149; *p* = .014), physical avoidance of people of color (BIPOC: *Md* = 3, *n* = 22; White: *Md* = 4, *n* = 149; *p* = .020), assumptions of inferior status (BIPOC: *Md* = 2, *n* = 22; White: *Md* = 4, *n* = 149; *p* = .002), and assumptions about superiority of white cultural values or communication styles (BIPOC: *Md* = 2, *n* = 22; White: *Md* = 3, *n* = 149; *p* = .042).

These results demonstrate that White participants are rarely aware of the race-based microaggressions colleagues of color are experiencing at professional gatherings, a finding supported by BIPOC responses about microaggressions. White participants’ assessments of their own awareness of racial microaggressions at professional gatherings varied widely. Some White respondents noted their Whiteness prevented them from seeing microaggressions, such as one participant who stated, “I am white, and so I might not notice.” Other White participants reported they didn’t see microaggressions because of the perceived positive environment of writing center professional gatherings: “I’m not sure I would necessarily notice any of these, but I don’t think the writing center crowd engages in this behavior as much.” On the other hand, some White participants sought to clarify that while they did not *experience* racial microaggressions and often did not witness them, they believed they did occur to people of color at our professional gatherings. One participant offered this response:

As a white person, I am very likely unaware of microaggressions. I want to emphasize that even if all the answers in this survey add up to “occasionally” or “never,” all that tells us is that white people don’t

Table 4. Statistically Significant Perception of Microaggressions between BIPOC and White Participants

| Microaggression | Mann-Whitney U | z | Significance | r (Effect size) | Median | |
|--|----------------|--------|--------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| | | | | | BIPOC (n = 22) | White (n = 149) |
| Assumptions of intellectual inferiority | 1170.000 | -2.451 | .014 | -0.19 | 3 | 4 |
| Physical avoidance of people of color | 1205.000 | -2.333 | .020 | -0.18 | 3 | 4 |
| Assumptions of criminality | 1698.500 | .598 | .550 | | | |
| Assumptions of inferior status (e.g., assumed to be an undergraduate tutor) | 1007.500 | -3.165 | .002 | -0.24 | 2 | 4 |
| Assumptions about universality of experience | 1255.000 | -1.830 | .067 | | | |
| Assumptions about superiority of white cultural values or communication styles | 1213.000 | -2.033 | .042 | -0.16 | 2 | 3 |
| Other | 18.500 | -.979 | .493 | | | |

Significance level is .050.

notice these things, not that they are not happening.

These responses from White participants reveal a spectrum of understanding about their role as observers of microaggressions. On one end, some White participants claimed they don't notice racial microaggressions *because* of their Whiteness; at the other, some recognized they might not see or experience racial microaggressions, but that should not be seen as evidence of a lack of racial microaggressions. Many White participants thus appear to be at different places in the process of developing an antiracist framework, particularly around noticing moments of racism.

The largest gap in awareness between BIPOC and White participants appeared within the category "assumptions of inferior status." The statistical results show that BIPOC participants experience and/or witness this microaggression more frequently than assumptions of intellectual inferiority and physical avoidance of people of color, and that White participants

almost never recognize assumptions of inferior status. Not many participants commented on this particular microaggression when given the opportunity to elaborate. Still, two responses stood out. The first is from a BIPOC undergraduate, who noted that they have attended, presented, and received awards for their work at writing center professional gatherings:

While I often do not start with disclosing my UG status it comes up at times, this paired with the moments when I have not disclosed, there are many moments where people have stated they they [sic] are surprised or they comment about how smart I must be . . . in these moments it has felt as though my labour and the barriers I face as an academic of color were silenced/ ignored.

The surprise that this person faces when fellow attendees realize they are an undergraduate is probably well meaning and intended to flatter. That some are surprised

Azima

Hixson-Bowles

Simpkins

and delighted about this participant's contributions, however, implies their low expectations of undergraduates; in this case, a BIPOC undergraduate. While we only have one side of this exchange, it's telling that this student experienced these compliments as microaggressions. This comment is notable when read alongside another participant's remark: "I am an older caucasian [sic] male and generally when I have attended conferences there was an assumption that I was a director." One way we understand responses like these is that together, they demonstrate how pervasive subconscious frameworks are about who inhabits different statuses in our field and what people in different roles look like.

The most frequently recognized microaggression across the board was assumptions about the superiority of White cultural values or communication style, with BIPOC participants' median response as 2, or "sometimes," and White participants' median response as 3, or "occasionally." While the median responses seem to suggest that this type of microaggression does not happen frequently, the qualitative data tell another story. Several White respondents highlighted the continued emphasis on "Standard Written English": as one respondent put it, "I think the reproduction and reification of white academic English is one of my greatest concerns at professional gatherings and in our WC work, generally." The most strongly worded response we received called out not only the tendency to focus on problematic notions of Standard Written English at writing center professional gatherings, but the failure of some in writing centers to explicitly counter White supremacist ideology in their practices:

I heard many presenters and attendees at the IWCA in Atlanta aruge [sic] about the use of what many refer to as "Black Vernacular" in academic settings, stating that we need to prepare our students for the professional realities they'll face in the workplace. What I heard is that we need to prepare our students to work in a "White" workplace. Shouldn't we, instead, be giving students the tools they need to fight against these

deeply ingrained models founded in racial and gender discrimination [sic] rather than teaching them how to assimilate to a toxic culture?

This response connects to a number of recent conversations in the field, such as Asao Inoue's 2019 CCCC keynote, in which he argued, "We must stop saying that we have to teach this dominant English because it's what students need to succeed tomorrow. They only need it because we keep teaching it!" (pp. 18–19). While we agree such critiques are necessary, and we believe it is a net positive for individuals to be watchful for examples of White language supremacy, we also find it striking that participants were far more likely to be alert to this type of microaggression than ones involving interpersonal interactions.

Along these lines, participants were also asked if they have ever felt reluctant to attend a writing center professional gathering because of race-based microaggressions (1 = yes and didn't attend, 2 = yes and attended anyway, 3 = no). A Mann-Whitney *U* test revealed a significant difference in feeling reluctant to attend writing center professional gatherings between BIPOC ($Md = 2.5, n = 22$) and White participants ($Md = 3, n = 150$), $U = 928, z = -5.83, p = .000, r = -0.44$. Given the median, 2.5 for BIPOC participants, it appears that while some BIPOC participants have been hesitant to attend a writing center professional gathering because of the threat of microaggressions, many have not. This may be because racist microaggressions are an "everyday hassle" that BIPOC individuals experience on a regular basis, and are thus expected (Sue & Spanierman, 2020, p. 121).

While 22 BIPOC participants responded to this question, only three elaborated on their experiences. It is also important to note that some participants described differences in their experiences at IWCA conferences and at local conferences held in countries outside of the United States. The experiences of writing center professionals outside of the United States coming to the United States for professional gatherings is underresearched and needs further exploration.

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Discussion

Overall, we found the lack of diversity at our professional gatherings had a strong negative impact on every aspect of climate measured by our survey. Across multiple questions, "ongoing lack of diversity" was one of the most frequently used codes in all of our qualitative data. The Whiteness of writing center studies shapes all aspects of every climate-related topic we asked about: who presents at sessions and what role they are expected to fill; who is in the audience (and who, perhaps, should be there but is not); how alone or tokenized BIPOC attendees feel both at these professional gatherings and as members of this field; and the quality of individuals' experiences at these gatherings. In the space of writing center professional gatherings, Whiteness operates through both of its commonly ascribed functions: the predominance of individuals who identify as White as well as Whiteness's role as a force of cultural and political oppression.⁷ Despite increasing attention to questions of diversity in writing center studies, Whiteness continues to act as the center of gravity for discussions at these gatherings.

We do not highlight this call from our participants for more diversity uncritically. As Sara Ahmed (2012) has illuminated, diversity work often functions to paper over attempts to change the culture of institutions. Diversity without institutional change can not only distract from rooting out racist practices, but also serve as a rhetorical tool for avoiding deeper work to change institutional cultures (see Ahmed's "Commitment as a Non-Performative"). The work of being "more diverse" is often framed as a wicked problem by institutions—the "if you build it, they will come" approach to diversity centers Whiteness and avoids needed structural change, and it allows for a return to the status quo when it ultimately fails.

The continuing predominance of White attendees in our professional gathering spaces, however, remains a real issue that must be solved. The idea of "critical mass," a key concept in social psychology scholarship on stereotype threat, comes into play here—that is, the idea that minoritized individuals need to be able to

look around and see enough others who share their identity in order to feel comfortable in a space (Steele, 2010). BIPOC members of the community should be able to look around writing center professional gathering spaces and see others who share their identities, and this is only likely to happen once the culture of the community has changed enough to attract and retain more BIPOC members in the field. Thus, organizers of writing center professional gatherings must both consider how they can support more people of color participating in professional spaces while at the same time doing the hard structural and conceptual work of decentering Whiteness as a cultural, pedagogical, and political core of our professional gatherings.

Over and over, our data made it clear what a struggle it is to move past the 101 level of antiracist work within writing center studies, due in large part again to the Whiteness of the field. Many White participants are still learning to "see" microaggressions and the like, let alone being ready to move the conversation toward concrete, meaningful action. Some of the difficulty White respondents reported in recognizing existing tensions around race no doubt relates to the "grand narrative" of writing centers as comforting, friendly, and welcoming spaces, to borrow Jackie Grutsch McKinney's (2013) formulation—a narrative that García (2017), Faison and Treviño (2017), and Haltiwanger Morrison & Nanton (2019), among others, have deeply troubled.⁸ These scholars are writing about writing centers rather than conference spaces per se, but our results indicate the idea of writing centers as uniquely welcoming persists in many White participants' assessments of our professional gatherings. If writing centers and, by extension, writing center people are inclusive and welcoming, how could racial tension exist?

The inability to recognize how tension around race and racism flows through writing center professional gatherings creates several real challenges to addressing racism in these gatherings. First, for White attendees, not noticing tension lets them remain comfortable, and it also allows them the choice of either opting in or sidestepping conversations about race and racism in the field. Second, continuing

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not to notice racial tension represents active avoidance of the stories and experiences of writing center professionals of color. As we discuss below, given the intensity of the Whiteness of our field, White writing center professionals must move through a certain amount of tension and discomfort around race as they cede space, time, power, and resources to colleagues of color.

Importantly, responses frequently revealed a tendency among White respondents toward addressing questions of race and racism in the abstract, such as focusing on linguistic diversity versus grappling with the interpersonal dimensions of racism in professional spaces. It is perhaps unsurprising that the “superiority of white cultural values or communication style” category of microaggression was the most frequently commented upon in survey responses, particularly among White respondents. Writing center professionals are primed to think in terms of language use and the values associated with the kinds of language fostered and encouraged within writing centers. While these concerns are absolutely crucial to raise and are, indeed, endemic to this field, it is also notable that participants were far more likely to comment upon language-based microaggressions rather than categories that relate to interpersonal relations at writing center professional gatherings. In fact, many White participants specifically called attention to their inability to notice the latter. Even if White individuals do manage to pick up on interpersonal microaggressions, it can be safer to critique the intellectual foundations of the field than to notice and implicitly or explicitly call out one’s colleagues’ behavior. Both are necessary, but from these data, the former appears to come much more readily to the writing center community than the latter.

It must also be noted that, although they were not plentiful, there were indeed a handful of comments stating that questions of race and racism are not of interest to them and that they can somehow be separated from the work of writing centers. In fact, some White participants went so far as to give responses that projected racial harm onto themselves, to borrow from Bonilla-Silva’s (2018) analysis of

race talk:

By “racial tension,” I probably don’t mean what you think I mean. I am a white male, and the tension I feel more and more is the profound sense that white men are the scourge of society—the bane of all Western existence, responsible for all the evils of society. But to the point of scholarship at these conferences, I note how quickly scholarly presentations that are wholly unrelated to racism can quickly devolve into a tangential conversation of such, derailing the scholarly thread at hand and turning into a contest of virtue signaling. I grow eternally weary of such.

These comments are eerily reminiscent of the language that would later appear in the September 2020 Executive Order 13950 on “Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping,” which offers the following definition:

“Race or sex scapegoating” means assigning fault, blame, or bias to a race or sex, or to members of a race or sex because of their race or sex. It similarly encompasses any claim that, consciously or unconsciously, and by virtue of his or her race or sex, members of any race are inherently racist or are inherently inclined to oppress others, or that members of a sex are inherently sexist or inclined to oppress others.

The survey participant’s comments echo this sense of feeling scapegoated, and they reflect how writing centers are inextricably tied to larger societal conversations (or rejections of conversations) about race.⁹ The problems with the presence of comments like these are two-fold: first, if one person is willing to say it, there are likely more who believe it but do not voice that opinion. If individuals in our community are actively resisting calls to reject White language supremacy and appear to feel victimized as White, male members of the field, this inevitably has a negative impact on the climate of our professional gatherings, and consequently, the experiences of BIPOC members of the writing center community. As Bonilla-Silva (2018) notes, comments like these are an active effort to diminish the experiences of people of color and lessen their access to resources within a

Azima

Hixson-Bowles

Simpkins

social sphere. Second, we urge readers to resist assuming that this comment is just one racist outlier in our dataset. Rather, this comment is indicative of the systemic racism we, our centers, our organizations, and our conference spaces are inherently entrenched within. The parallels to the executive order highlight how we simply cannot view writing centers as immune to these larger forces. While some White participants did indeed call out their White colleagues for attitudes that prevent productive discussions around race, which serves as an important first step, these issues must be addressed at a broader level, not minimized as isolated attitudes or incidents.

That being said, we focus first on individual intervention because the climate survey was oriented around individual experience, and the data revealed a need for individual strategies as well as broader interventions. Despite receiving a wide spectrum of responses regarding perceptions of racial tension, the majority of responses did indicate some level of awareness of the presence or effects of racism in the field, even if respondents weren't always able to point to specific instances of oppression.

Strategies for Individual (White) Professionals

A key skill for White participants in our professional gatherings to continue developing is learning how to notice racism and understand their emotional responses when witnessing racist acts, learning about racism, and redressing their own racist actions. In the field of writing center studies, scholarship on race and racism offers many ways to approach this work. For example, Rasha Diab, Thomas Ferrel, Beth Godbee, and Neil Simpkins (2013) detail how developing a "willingness to be disturbed" is essential for accomplishing antiracist goals, highlighting how the self-work of understanding our emotional relationship to racism is critical to social change. Sarah Dees, Beth Godbee, and Moira Ozias (2007) remind us that reflecting on "meta-narratives and meta-talk" about race and racism are necessary for breaking the habit of evading conversations about the impacts of racism on our work. Further, Romeo García (2017) argues that developing a

"mindfulness of difference and [being] mindful of spatio and temporal attributes" is necessary for antiracist writing center work (p. 48). These skills are needed not only for our interactions between tutors and students or among our staff in our centers. They are also crucial for us to change the racial climate of professional gatherings.

Returning to our complicated qualitative responses about comfort and discomfort at our gatherings, we offer a tool that individuals can use to assess discomfort they might feel when talking and thinking about race and racism in our professional gathering spaces (see Figure 5). This tool is based on the common emotional responses we noticed in our qualitative data. We aligned "comfort" and "discomfort" with the qualities of "constructive" and "destructive." By "constructive," we mean experiencing comfort/discomfort in ways that improve the racial climate of our professional gatherings; similarly, "destructive" relates to forms of comfort/discomfort that potentially worsen the racial climate of our professional gatherings. We suggest participants at our professional gatherings check in with their sense of comfort/discomfort to know where they are spending (or conserving) their time and energy. We also suggest White participants should seek opportunities to feel "constructive discomfort" in our professional gathering spaces.¹⁰ Given that in our qualitative data BIPOC participants only described their comfort in conditional terms, we encourage White

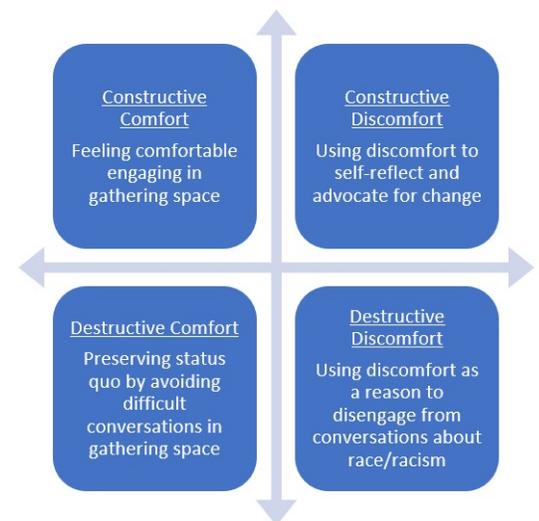


Figure 5. (De)Constructive (Dis)Comfort Matrix

participants to question the comfort they feel at writing center professional gatherings, perhaps by asking some of the following questions when they are taking stock of their emotions:

- Is my comfort at the expense of someone else's?
- Where am I at emotionally, and where could I be?
- What actions might move me from one square to another?

This tool will function differently depending on one's positionality. For individual participants of color, it could be used to validate their experiences, work through intraracial microaggressions, or make visible the labor of responding to racism. The consequences for one's location on the tool are also different depending on one's positionality and the context of the situation. For example, White participants undergoing "destructive discomfort" maintain the status quo by remaining in that space; participants of color may experience "destructive discomfort" as having to engage with harm reduction in an encounter, which likely isn't productive for the participant or the conversation. In other words, this tool interacts with the "double consciousness" (Du Bois, 1897) that BIPOC individuals inevitably bring into professional gathering spaces, and it may make this rhetorical work more visible to White participants.¹¹ The matrix may also be useful beyond the individual level, such as for conference organizers, who might ask, "What will allow participants of color to be in a space of constructive comfort more often?"

Writing center professional gathering participants can also become more skilled at intervening when witnessing microaggressions. Knowing ways to respond can help participants move from a "nonracist" stance to an action-oriented approach (Sue et al., 2019, p. 132). Before describing some strategies, we want to emphasize the potential negative impacts of intervention for participants of color. Sue, Alsaidi, Awad, Glaeser, Calle, and Mendez note that in "the race-related stress-coping literature, the first rule of thumb for a target [person of color experiencing a microaggression] is to *take care of oneself*. In this respect, it is important to distinguish between the internal (survival and

self-care goals of the target) and the external (confronting the source) objectives in dealing with bias and discrimination" (p. 131, emphasis in original). With this in mind, we argue that the burden of resolving microaggressions should not be the responsibility of the person or people experiencing the microaggression.

Sue, Alsaidi, Awad, Glaeser, Calle, and Mendez offer four categories of microresponses to microaggressions, geared both for targets of microaggressions and bystanders, which we here define and pair with one example based on potential writing center professional gathering interactions. First, one approach is to *make the invisible visible* by naming the microaggression in the moment. A second strategy is *disarming the microaggression*, or immediately refuting or redirecting a microaggression. A third strategy is *educating the perpetrator* by briefly correcting a false statement.¹² While brief moments of education cannot solve systemic racism, Sue, Alsaidi, Awad, Glaeser, Calle, and Mendez argue that these microinterventions can "plant seeds" for change. Finally, they offer *seeking external support* as a method of responding to microaggressions. Below, we adapt these terms to model how these options might look when intervening in a scenario that we have witnessed at a writing center professional gathering.

While the approaches here use different tactics, they all draw attention to the microaggression in the moment and facilitate a response. They also potentially resolve unproductive comfort by highlighting the problem instead of hiding it. Additionally, the fourth strategy gestures towards a need for institutional channels for addressing racism in our conference spaces and institutional strategies for addressing racism in our professional gatherings. We share below some of our suggestions for how writing center professional organizations can create a better racial climate at our professional gatherings.

Concepts, Questions, and Strategies for Our Professional Organizations

From our findings, we identified several key concepts that writing center professional organizations should attend to in order to improve

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Scenario: After a panel about race and racism held in a small room with a lively Q&A, the panelists who follow this presentation enter the room. One of the panelists, a White person, interrupts the conversation between a presenter of color and a White audience member; she tells the presenter of color to leave the room immediately.

| Strategy | Example Approach |
|----------------------------|--|
| Make the invisible visible | State, "We are wrapping up an important conversation about racism in the writing center field. Please give us a minute to finish our conversation while you set up." |
| Disarm the microaggression | Say, "Asking us to leave is not a welcoming gesture, especially to our colleagues of color." |
| Educate the perpetrator | Say, "Being asked to leave sounds a lot like you think your work is more important than what was just presented. It came across as racist." |
| Seek external support | Discuss incident at town hall with executive committee or Anti-Racism SIG. |

the racial climate of our field. We write more briefly here to model the language of an executive summary and to offer more direct suggestions with regard to potential structural changes.

Given the nature of our work in writing centers, *mentorship* was a critical benefit our participants described, but that mentorship is distributed unevenly. Our professional organizations should examine their mentorship networks and efforts to build informal mentorship at our professional gatherings; they should also model and encourage mentorship models that rely less on informal socializing and that encourage exchanges of ideas and expertise across difference.

We also found a need for field-wide conversations about *the relationships between regional gatherings and international conferences*. Often because of funding limits from home institutions, regionals are more accessible in terms of time and cost, which leads to more BIPOC individuals attending these gatherings compared to IWCA. However, the racial climate at regional gatherings is often less comfortable for participants of color compared to our larger gatherings. Given that regionals are often meeting the needs of newer writing center professionals and are an entry point into writing center studies and professional development, intentional conversations about the racial climate of these gatherings and their role in bringing new professionals in the field are needed. We also recommend that IWCA consider establishing

intentional spaces for BIPOC attendees to network within the conference space to promote constructive comfort. While the Anti-Racism SIG has typically served as a gathering space for mostly White participants to figure out where they are on their individual journeys, we wonder what would happen if IWCA and its affiliates adopted a caucus model at gatherings, where BIPOC individuals would have designated time and space that would offer opportunities for constructive comfort and facilitate developing personal and professional connections.

We also recommend the work we've taken up here to describe the racial climate become an *ongoing assessment effort* by our professional organizations. Returning to questions such as the ones we examined in this climate survey would help our organizations better understand the culture of our professional gathering spaces. In fall 2020, in response to an open letter written by members of the writing center community urging more timely responses to the Black Lives Matter movement and other pressing concerns, IWCA took the important step of forming the Inclusion and Social Justice Task Force, which has been seeking to move the organization forward in a number of ways, including by conducting surveys and listening sessions. Our results suggest that there is substantial work to be done around antiracism at the organizational level, and it is imperative for these efforts to be ongoing, sustainable, and accessible to all members of the writing center community.

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Finally, many survey participants desired deeper research into race and racism in writing center studies, particularly beyond the focus of individual writing centers and programs. While some writing center professionals are eager to take next steps toward more equitable practices, the high rates of turnover and often contingent status of writing center directors means that we are always welcoming new individuals into the field who may need “Antiracism in Writing Centers 101” education. And as our data indicate, White writing center professionals in particular need consistent opportunities to experience constructive discomfort at our professional gatherings. We suggest, then, that writing center professional organizations invest in ongoing programming that gives basic tools for antiracist practice for all writing center professionals, ensuring that these sessions are offered at all conferences and in different modalities. For example, regularly offered workshops for developing antiracism statements, designing antiracist tutor education curricula, and establishing antiracist recruiting and hiring practices would be useful starting points for many writing center administrators. Additionally, our conferences could adopt a “track” system with multiple tracks centered on race and racism, indicating the purpose and topics of these sessions so that conference goers can better select which sessions they wish to attend. A track model would allow participants who are further along on their antiracism journeys more opportunities to work with peers on how best to engage in direct activism within writing centers, while also ensuring that individuals who are new to the field or these ideas get the basic education they need.

These changes, of course, do not happen without time and effort. We recognize our professional organizations are comprised of volunteers. We would argue, however, that improving the racial climate of our professional gatherings, as well as of the field more broadly, must become part of the fabric of normal operations for writing center organizations. Furthermore, the burden should not fall disproportionately on minoritized members of the community to put these changes

into practice.

Conclusion

Until recently, antiracism work in writing center professional gatherings has largely been a grassroots effort. Members of our community have presented research and guidance through conference presentations and workshops, but without having these offerings built into conference programming in a consistent way, they are inevitably limited to one-off experiences available only to participants who choose to (or are able to) attend. Networks such as the Anti-Racism SIG have offered space for discussions about antiracism in writing center work, but such efforts often revolve around whether individuals have the motivation and energy to take on this labor. Continuing to conduct assessments such as this climate survey for professional gatherings and the IWCA Inclusion and Social Justice Task Force’s survey and listening sessions, then taking concrete actions based on those findings, will be key for understanding and improving the overall racial climate of the field into the future.

Given that our field has historically seen high turnover and substantial precarity in its leadership positions, it is crucial to offer support to individuals who are new to conversations around antiracism in the writing center while also not being content to stop there. We need spaces in which we can explore how to take larger, more boundary-pushing steps toward antiracist advocacy and practice without having to take time to convince audience members that these questions are central and not peripheral to the work that happens in and around writing centers. Individuals’ entry into the work needs to be scaffolded, and this introductory work needs to be offered on an ongoing basis without taking space and energy away from more activism-oriented conversations.

As we reflect on our findings during the COVID-19 pandemic, we invite leaders and participants in the field to think hard about how we can open our field’s conversations to more people. What would it look like to continue exploring alternative models of conferencing that are more inclusive, especially for our members outside the United States or those at institutions that offer little or no funding or other support for conference

Azima

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Hixson-Bowles—
Simpkins

travel/attendance? How might virtual engagement serve as a useful way to make tools, trainings, and conversations both available to more members of our community and tailored to their local needs, even postpandemic? And how do we ensure that any virtual events do not replicate the same problems of in-person gatherings, with their attendant opportunities for microaggressions? Our data show that our White participants in particular are at a wide range of stages in their antiracist awareness, including sometimes actively resisting the idea of race/racism being important to consider within writing center work at all. In order to make progress toward any antiracist vision for writing centers, we will need to employ a wide variety of tools and strategies to both meet individuals where they are and advance the conversation, taking into consideration where people fall on the (De)Constructive (Dis)Comfort Matrix (see Figure 5) and moving them toward the constructive side. Also, given the small but noticeable presence of White participants rejecting research and broader conversations about race and racism in writing center studies, our professional organizations need to emphasize the necessity and centrality of this work repeatedly.

The most pressing barrier to a positive racial climate in our professional gatherings that we see is the stark lack of racial diversity in our field.¹³ We end by asking questions about how this problem might be resolved. While we think of the writing center field as "international," we need to undo the centrality of U.S.-centered perspectives in our professional gathering spaces. The writing center field, more than many academic disciplines, has a unique pipeline for professionalizing undergraduate and graduate consultants into leaders in our field by connecting research to the work of writing center instruction; we need to examine how and why that pipeline has failed to bring more people of color into our discipline. Since we see from our data and other scholarship that writing center professional gatherings are often starting points for new professionals in our field who might be coming from outside of composition and rhetoric or the field of writing center work, we need to have consistent ways of mentoring newcomers that are particularly

sensitive to how race and racism play a role in mentorship. Our professional organizational leadership needs to reiterate the importance of scholarship about race and racism to our field and actively encourage its growth in many directions. Interpersonally and institutionally, we need to develop ways to intervene in microaggressions in professional gatherings to improve retention of professionals of color in our field. In short, our field cannot afford stances of neutrality and silence around racism, neither within our professional gathering spaces nor in the broader historical and cultural circumstances that shape them.

Notes

1. Ibram X. Kendi (2019) discusses the concept of antiracism extensively in *How to Be an Antiracist*. Alastair Bonnett provides this succinct definition: "Anti-racism refers to those forms of thought and/or practice that seek to confront, eradicate and/or ameliorate racism. Anti-racism implies the ability to identify a phenomenon—racism—and to do something about it" (2000, p. 3).

2. We acknowledge that BIPOC is both U.S.-centric and emergent as a term, with its grammatical and social functions still not entirely settled. Despite its limitations, however, we find both BIPOC and the older term "people of color" preferable to "non-White," as the last still centers Whiteness. BIPOC is the more nuanced of the two alternatives, as it foregrounds the experiences of Black and Indigenous individuals (see the BIPOC Project, <https://www.thebipocproject.org/>). Furthermore, nearly one-third of our respondents of color did identify as Black or Indigenous, suggesting that the term BIPOC does serve as a reasonably accurate reflection of our study demographics. We do use the terms "scholars" or "attendees of color" when discussing populations outside our study's participant pool. Additionally, we capitalize "White" here in accordance with APA style.

3. Put another way, we needed to contextualize strongly worded responses, some of which represented deeply racist beliefs and some of which represented deep frustration with patterns of racism the participant had witnessed or experienced. By reading across one participant's responses across the survey, we were better able to understand the experience they narrated in the broader context of all responses. This is not to say that we dismissed these responses as "outliers"—rather, a single racist response in a survey like this indicates problems with racial climate.

4. For instance, one participant said “human being,” while another said, “I prefer to deal with people as individuals not based on race.”

5. Figures 2 and 3 do not represent every participant who took the survey. Participants who marked “other,” “none,” or left questions about their positions blank are not represented in these figures. People who chose not to identify their race were also left out of these figures.

6. The term “microaggression” was developed by Chester Pierce (1970), an African American psychologist and medical doctor, to help describe everyday experiences with racism. Derald Wing Sue, among other psychology and education psychology researchers, has deepened inquiry into the nature of microaggressions, and we used Sue’s (2010) framework from *Microaggressions in Everyday Life* to develop our questions for this portion of the survey.

7. Particularly in education studies, Whiteness is a deeply interrogated and developed concept, signaling cultural and social cues that often form the foundation of institutional cultures. See for some examples Lipsitz (1998) for a discussion of institutional material investment in Whiteness, Frankenberg (1993) for a framework of the culture of an unmarked Whiteness in relationship to gender identity for White women, and Leonardo (2009) for an interweaving (and critique) of the project of Whiteness studies within critical education research.

8. We anticipate the forthcoming collection *CounterStories from the Writing Center*, edited by Wonderful Faison and Frankie Condon, will continue to challenge this dominant narrative.

9. While President Biden rescinded this executive order on the first day of his presidency, similar bans aimed at the teaching of critical race theory have been proliferating at the state level (see *EducationWeek*, “Map: Where Critical Race Theory Is Under Attack,” <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/map-where-critical-race-theory-is-under-attack/2021/06>).

10. As Megan Boler (1999) puts it, “A pedagogy of discomfort begins by inviting educators and students to engage in critical inquiry regarding values and cherished belief, and to examine constructed self-images in relation to how one has learned to perceive others,” and it also “calls not only for inquiry but also, at critical junctures, for action—action hopefully catalyzed as a result of learning to bear witness” (pp. 176–177, 179). We suggest White participants be willing to put themselves in this place of instructive and constructive discomfort to create a more positive racial climate in our field.

11. See, for instance, Neisha-Anne Green’s (2016) discussion of not just W. E. B. Du Bois’s (1897)

double, but the triple consciousness she experiences in relation to writing and writing center work.

12. We want to note that the metaphors used by Sue, Alsaïdi, Awad, Glaeser, Calle, and Mendez here have some issues. Conversations about racism often use sightedness as a metaphor in a way that is both ableist (framing sight as knowledge) and inaccurate (racism is “multimodal”); Annamma, Jackson, and Morrison (2017) examine this connection and offer the alternate term “color-evasiveness.” Additionally, the terms “disarming” and “perpetrator” are likely meant to metaphorically connect microaggressions to acts of violence (which they are). However, they also invoke carcerality and policing in a troubling way.

13. See also Rebecca Day Babcock, Sarah Banschbach Valles, and Karen Keaton Jackson (2017) on the lack of diversity among writing center administrators in particular.

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Azima

Hixson-Bowles

Simpkins

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Hixson-Bowles

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