

## Theme 4. Identity and Labor

The stories in this section show us all the ways in which identity and intersectionality impact our labor and our workplace politics. Although we have reviewed much of the literature around intersectionality and the hostility to non-white, cis-het voices in writing centers, we also want to emphasize that we do not wish to cordon off these voices from the others in the collection. Here we also include white working class consciousness as well, and each of us (Genie, Dan) would likely have placed our introductory narratives in this section. In particular, we wanted a space in which to de-naturalize the ways in which whiteness and heteronormativity dominate writing center spaces. For instance, in “Writing Center Exile: Third Gender as Third Class in a Third Space,” the pseudonymous Silk Jade, an international writing center worker, identifies the ways in which she occupies a third class both in her current university and in her home country. Occupying a specific (and very limited) staff category—neither faculty nor staff—she struggles with institutional stigma because of her position in the university and with prior experiences with stigma because of their gender and education level in her home country. Here, we see the real pain that is caused by fuzzy job descriptions that withhold rewards and promotions to workers. These inequities are inextricably enmeshed in gender and racial categorization.

Queerness and class are other identity markers that impact how writing center workers approach their labor and how they are treated in the workplace. In this section, Anand identifies the importance of mentorship in his career trajectory, as a queer Indian man in “Thank You for Carrying Me Through,” and Ryan creates the queer mentorship and learning spaces she was denied in her own education (“Coaching Queerly,” this collection). Witt (“Fucking Up’ and Listening,” this collection) shares a story of how one’s class background can be harmful in white-collar workspaces. Unable to connect with his boss over a misunderstanding, Witt describes feeling chastened for doing the overt labor of writing tutoring instead of the implicit labor of research. As such, he struggles to find a place in his graduate writing center. Class is an important marker of how writing center workers situate themselves vis-à-vis their labor. Giaimo (“Boundless,” this collection) details the ways in which their precarious upbringing caused them to internalize all kinds of harmful values about work, including overwork and “workism.” We carry so much of ourselves into our professional lives and, in many cases, we are guided by our identities as Witt so eloquently describes. But sometimes, as he also notes, we are punished for them in workspaces.

Though we write about the lack of racially diverse voices in Act I, we continue to wonder about the barriers to sharing stories around labor for people of color in writing center spaces. We hope this section will serve as an exigence for still more voices around this subject.

## Discussion Questions

- “Writing Center Exile: Third Gender as Third Class in a Third Space,” details how liminality—in gender identity, nationality, academic titling, and reportage—leads to different kinds of “third space” experiences: part of the university, but also apart from it. What kinds of third spaces do you occupy at work? Would you consider the writing center a third space (as distinct from work or home but still communal) or not? How do you define the writing center in your workplace ecology?
- How might specific identity markers like race, class, sexuality, disability, or nationality, contribute to your relationship to work? How does your workplace imagine your identity or who (or how) you are “supposed” to be?
- Do you feel like your identity impacts your socialization at work? For example, Witt notes not really understanding the expectations or “rules” around work and prioritization because those rules were never taught or are different for working class folks.
- As Anand notes, mentorship is—for many of us—a critical part of our academic and professional development. Who are your work models and/or mentors? How have they shaped your attitudes toward work?
- In what ways do you bring your identity into your work? For example, Ryan details bringing queerness into the writing center to increase queer visibility and to create welcoming space for student writers. Do you think identity is important to the work we do in the writing center and, if so, in what ways? What kinds of metalabor do you do to make workspaces more inclusive?
- Think about your earliest experiences with work, perhaps watching family members work, and think about what values were instilled in you around work even before you started working.
- What are your current attitudes towards work? How have those developed throughout your career?
- In what ways might “workism”—overwork that borders on a kind of religious or otherwise powerful relationship—be a cultural construct? Have you felt this? If so, in what ways does work control your life? If not, how do you find work-life balance?
- Explore your institution’s workplace culture (i.e., is email limited to working hours, or not; vacation and sick time packages; professional development opportunities; staffing levels, etc.) and identify policies or strategies that are working and those that are not. What changes might you make to your workplace culture, if you could?