

First Year Composition: The Effects of Race and Gender on Graduate Teaching Assistants

by

Sterling Eugene-Elon James

July, 2017

Director of Thesis: Dr. Nicole Caswell

Major Department: English

Based on current literature there is a lack of discussion surrounding the identity of English Graduate Teaching Assistants and how embodied experiences influence teaching approaches throughout a First Year Composition course. Drawing on six interviews of doctoral GTAs, the results of this study demonstrate that previous experiences, classroom curriculum, and the notion of an ideal instructor all play a significant role in how GTAs value race and gender within spaces of a FYC classroom. Discussions about the experiences for this particular group of instructors can lead to discourse surrounding more topics and issues GTAs endure as a student and instructor. This research presented demonstrates the ways GTAs may embrace or distance themselves from their identity as a writing instructor and illustrates GTAs referring to their pedagogy education within other spaces outside of a writing classroom, and how their personal experience has a significant influence toward certain teaching approaches. Based on the research conducted English departments should consider the demographic of their GTA instructors and the curriculum that is being asked for GTAs to teach and the impact those two aspects have toward teaching approaches. By making the identities of GTAs visible, there is a possibility of providing GTAs with resources about dealing with their identity and how to manage their embodied experience while facilitating a FYC classroom.

First Year Composition:
The Effects of Race and Gender on Graduate Teaching Assistants

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty of the Department of English
East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Masters of Arts in English

By
Sterling Eugene-Elon James
July, 2017

© Sterling Eugene-Elon James, 2017

First Year Composition: The Effects of Race and Gender on Graduate Teaching Assistants

by

Sterling Eugene-Elon James

APPROVED BY:

DIRECTOR OF THESIS:

Nicole Caswell, Ph.D.

COMMITTEE MEMBER:

William Banks, Ph.D.

COMMITTEE MEMBER:

Erin Frost, Ph.D.

CHAIR OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH:

Marianne Montgomery, Ph.D.

DEAN OF THE
GRADUATE SCHOOL:

Paul J. Gemperline, Ph.D.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank everyone who has devoted their time, patience, and energy to help me during the process of my thesis. I also would like to thank my participants for lending their voices and experiences during this process as well.

To Dr. Caswell: Thank you for everything that you have done throughout my master's experience. As my mentor and professor, you have always been there for me every step of the way. From reading drafts, my constant emails, texts, weekly meeting, and checking in from time to time, you've made this thesis something worth achieving. None of this would have been possible without you.

To Dr. Frost: Thank you for your positive feedback throughout my master's experience. Part of this research started in a course you instructed and I can't thank you enough for allowing me to start project while also explaining that what I would gain from your course would be used in chapters of this thesis. You influenced me to take on the topic for my thesis and I'm glad you were a part of this process.

To Dr. Banks: Thank you for the constructive feedback on my work throughout my master's experience. I appreciate all you taught me. You have challenged me in ways that have changed how I think and your curiosity in my decision making in and out of the classroom is something positive that I admire about you and it has helped me grow student.

To my family and friends: Thank you all for being there for me when I thought this process would never end. I thank you all for taking the time out to listen even when you had no clue what I was talking about, but the encouragement and positive support really helped make this possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background.....	2
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Research Questions and Objectives.....	9
The Study.....	9
Methods.....	10
Participants.....	11
Conclusion.....	12
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	13
Introduction.....	13
First Year Composition.....	14
Graduate Student Training.....	16
Race and Gender/Embodiment of Instructors.....	22
Conclusion.....	27
CHAPTER 3: METHODS.....	29
Introduction.....	29
Research Questions and Objectives.....	30
Methodology.....	30
Methods.....	32
Institutional Review Board.....	33
Participants.....	33
Interview Participant Histories.....	35
Interview.....	36
Coding Schemes.....	37
Data Analysis.....	40
Limitations.....	40

Conclusion.....	41
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS.....	42
Introduction.....	42
Interview Population.....	43
Race & Gender as a GTA.....	43
Ideal Instructor.....	49
Experience.....	51
Classroom Curriculum.....	52
Conclusion.....	54
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....	55
Introduction.....	55
Summary of Data.....	55
Ideal Instructor and Implications.....	56
Experience and Implications.....	58
Classroom Curriculum and Implications.....	59
Further Research.....	62
Implications.....	63
Conclusion.....	64
REFERENCES.....	66
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	68
APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL LETTER.....	70
APPENDIX C: IRB STATEMENT.....	71

LIST OF TABLES

1. Common Pattern Codes.....	38
2. Definition of Codes.....	39
3. Participant Demographic/Background Information.....	43

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

First-year composition (FYC) is an integral part of most four-year institutions today. The courses being taught may be done by full-time tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty, part-time faculty, or in some cases tenured faculty. At most universities with graduate programs a significant amount of FYC teaching is done by the English department's graduate teaching assistants (GTAs). According to the WPA Census, in the academic year 2011-2012, GTAs taught anywhere from one percent to 100 percent of first year composition course with the majority of graduate students teaching sixteen to twenty-five percent. Despite the different levels of instructor hierarchies, instructors typically take different approaches to teach first year writing. In composition courses, many instructors have different goals they set forth for their students. The most recent version of the WPA Outcomes establishes nationwide goals for first year composition that instructors might adopt in their classrooms. These goals consist of understanding the process and conventions of writing, thinking, reading, and writing critically, as well as being able to demonstrate rhetorical knowledge (WPA Outcomes). Some departments maintain similar standards allowing instructors to use a most comfortable teaching approach, but also hold these standards as a guide for instructors to use as they teach composition courses. In most cases, examples of these goals would appear in a standard syllabus and the work being performed by instructors should advance these goals, expecting to prepare students for citizenship and encourage the development of students' interests and talents in an academic setting.

Looking specifically at East Carolina University (ECU) and its English department, I have noticed that the department works toward preparing its faculty and instructors to meet goals that have developed at the department level and worked its way through the curriculum development process. ECU has adopted many of the WPA outcomes as they appear in the standard syllabus of FYC. In Fall 2016 at ECU, seventy-four percent (74%) of first year composition courses were taught by GTAs. Preparation for GTAs to teach a FYC course may include new teacher orientation, professional development workshops, GTA meetings, etc., and these experiences can help shape or determine how GTAs facilitate their classroom. In my experience as a GTA at ECU I've come to realize the importance of the GTA position and how GTAs help advance the writing foundations program. An example of this consists of GTAs teaching multiple sections of FYC, becoming more seasoned GTAs and taking on positions that contribute to the English program. As I consider the work of GTAs and how they contribute to English departments, it is important to acknowledge the experiences of GTAs because classroom behaviors and beliefs become more developed as GTAs grow as writing instructors and have a significant influence on department culture, the teaching of FYC, and other classes taught by GTAs.

Background

As an African American male teaching at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) I noticed changes in my own behaviors as I move between my roles as instructor and student; I therefore became curious about the experiences of other GTAs and decided to explore patterns in the relationship between identity and pedagogy among my colleagues. As a GTA I have found that I would attend GTA workshops that the Director of Composition would hold in order to

prepare myself and others of the writing foundations when a new course being taught. This is considered helpful because the information is still fresh in the minds of GTAs right before entering a classroom, but I do question this type of training as it does not always cover situations of cultural, ethnical, and social differences between instructors and students, because some material GTAs teach may deal with issue that put their identity on display for students, which can be an uncomfortable feeling. GTAs are both masters and doctoral degree seeking students. For this study, I did not include students seeking a Master's degree in English because of the experience that doctoral students hold in an English program. Doctoral students offer more experience as a graduate student and although, the experiences of a master seeking student would be beneficial, doctoral students have more semesters teaching at the college level. Because of my experience in this particular role as a GTA, I am interested in the process and the training GTAs experience during their time as graduate students; therefore, this research attempts to explore the pedagogy education of doctoral GTAs as well as their identity as writing instructors teaching first year composition.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to illustrate the experiences and preparation of doctoral GTAs teaching first year composition and how certain aspects influence the work being done on a day-to-day basis. When this research started, I was interested in how GTAs teach first year composition, but I have come to realize that scholars such as Stacia Dunn Neeley, have made claims that the main reason GTAs are considered a marginalized group of instructors is because of the lack of research published on this topic. As my research interest focuses on aspects of identity for all instructors in the university setting, as a GTA I found that I am more interested in

this position because of Neeley's statement and used her belief as the focus for my research. Research on GTAs' experiences in graduate programs and how they handle teaching writing courses as a student and instructor do seem to go unnoticed in much of the literature. While I agree with Neeley that GTAs are a marginalized group of writing instructors, I seek to look deeper into the issue by focusing on embodiment and its impact on teaching first year composition specifically focusing on the race and gender of particular instructors in an attempt to understand how these two aspects of an instructor's body effects or influences the manner in which they teach first year composition.

One must also understand that gender is understood as the socio-cultural aspects of being a man or woman or in other words how society sets rules for masculinity and femininity. This is important to understand because in the classroom there may be situations where a male's masculinity may be able to take on a certain teaching style that may not be acceptable for a woman because of her femininity. For the purposes of this thesis, I'm working with a notion of gender-in-performance which would suggest that there are primarily two genders: male and female. Because this thesis looks at pedagogy and how bodies in classrooms are constructed, it's useful to remember that first-year writing students do not typically have a complex notion of gender construction/identity, and often map outdated beliefs about binary gender onto bodies whether those bodies identify that way or not Therefore, because of my interest of the identity of graduate teaching assistants, this study seeks to fill the gap of how graduate teaching instructors embodies aspects of masculinity and femininity and how the teacher incorporates certain beliefs, tendencies, and behaviors within the space of a classroom.

Understanding how certain bodies teach first year composition as it pertains to race and gender appears to be a gap when working conditions are addressed regarding contingent faculty.

According to Jacobsohn (2001), “there is lack of attention toward adjunct faculty and the conversation discontinues after discussing the problems of adjunct instructors” (p. 159). It seems as if graduate teaching assistants do not receive the same attention – about their bodies, personalities, or the environments they teach in. As English programs continue to help graduate instructors work toward better preparing students for diverse writing contexts in educational, personal, and professional settings, I still question why more attention is not given to the identities of GTAs and how this intersects with the tasks they are asked to perform in writing classrooms? In “Recent Trends in TA Instruction: A Bibliographic Essay,” for example, Wilhoit (2001) states,

Additional longitudinal studies of GTA development would help determine which instructional techniques have lasting value for GTAs. Are some methods of instruction most helpful to TAs early in their teaching and some most helpful near graduation? What is the best way to sequence instruction throughout the years of a TA’s service? Research that examines the relationship between TA instructional techniques and gender, race, age, and teaching style is also needed. (p. 23)

Here, Wilhoit explains that race and gender seem to be aspects that do not get discussed throughout a GTAs experience as an instructor. Race and gender are important aspects that should be addressed if researchers want to discuss the teaching approaches for graduate teaching assistants. This is important because this may possibly have an impact on the demeanor of an instructor in the classroom and how an instructor may facilitate a writing classroom. I emphasize this because categories and subgroups are not just matters of theoretical interest. In *Critical Race Theory*, Delgado and Stefancic (2001), explain that, “How we frame people determines who has power, voice, and representation and who does not” (p. 51). Collins & Bilge (2016) also believe

that, “How people relate to one another determines who is advantage and disadvantaged within social interaction” (p. 7). This is crucial to understand as race plays a factor in the power an instructor holds in the classroom setting because classrooms may contain certain hidden biases, such as when an African-American woman teaches a course compared to when a white male teaches a similar course. In this situation, there can be different outcomes to a composition course depending on the individual teaching the course.

As Wilhoit discusses the role gender plays in a classroom setting, Marting (1987) and Restaino (2012) examine the roles GTAs hold and how English departments view the experiences of instructors with this title. In Marting (1987) “A Retrospective on Training Teaching Assistants,” she addresses that: “Responsible to students, the department, the college, and the university, and in some people’s estimation, to the fostering of a literate society, teaching assistants cannot be overlooked. Nor can their training be taken for granted” (p. 35). More recently, Restaino (2012) expresses that, “Despite graduate students’ crucial role in making writing programs work, there exist proportionally few efforts to study their experiences. Of the work that is extant, much of it is either outdated or highly practical, lacking consideration of the theoretical significance graduate students in the classroom pose to composition as a field” (p. 18). Between 1987 and 2012, many researchers such as E. Shelley Reid, Heidi Estreem, Marcia Belcheir, Anne Beaufort, and Elizabeth Wardle have conducted research in the field that examines the pedagogical approaches to teaching composition for first year writing instructors. Restaino’s argument states that few efforts have been made to study the experience of GTAs and that researchers in the field show a lack of interest about this particular group of writing instructors, which still seems to be an issue in the field today. The scholarship illustrates that research is focused on teaching approaches for FYC courses, but does not address the

experiences of GTAs as first year writing instructors, examined through their identity and embodiment. Scholars should focus on embodiment and the identity of GTAs because this is just as important as the training GTAs may encounter in their graduate programs. GTAs may feel misunderstood as it may be difficult to teach certain material that puts their body on the line in front of their students, which can impact how their ability to exclude their personal feelings from their teaching approaches.

An example of instructors displaying their body toward their students consisted within the Pirate Read all First Year Composition instructors were required to teach in the fall semester of 2016. The Pirate Read, *Just Mercy*, was published by Bryan Stevenson and discussed topics of racism in law enforcement and incarceration of African-American males. Throughout Stevenson's novel he vividly explained situations that occurred in the 1960s, while most situations are still current in modern society. And as these topics were being discussed in the classroom by instructors many issues within the novel placed particular bodies on display more than others, which produces presumed representations students had toward their instructor that many GTAs discussed among themselves. From this example, developing more research about GTAs' experience in composition classrooms can make apparent what helps encourages GTAs to facilitate writing practices they value to their students, but also distinguish the relationship between a GTA's identity and how that is valued in a writing classroom. This is an important aspect to my research as I am curious about the experiences GTAs encounter during their time as graduate students, but how GTAs engage with their identity as both student and instructor.

Throughout my coursework and readings as a graduate student, I noticed that many of the texts published in the field of writing studies examines the work conditions of higher ranking faculty in English Departments. These rankings and labels consist of tenure, tenure-track faculty,

and full-time non tenure-track faculty, which leaves GTAs at the bottom of the hierarchy in higher education. According to Jacobsohn (2001), “The part-time and adjunct faculty and graduate student teaching assistants is the most ignored issue facing higher education today perhaps because it is the most serious” (p. 159). He expresses that the acknowledgment of contingent faculty are not recognized as much as they should be, but seems to be the most important for the field, as most departments experience issues that include low wages, no health care, no job security, no voice in faculty governance, no time to pursue research that would enhance their own and others’ professional practice for contingent faculty (Jacobsohn, 2001, p. 159). The issues in English departments Jacobsohn emphasizes on demonstrates that full-time faculty gain more attention about similar work conditions and preparation to teaching composition than GTAs. This leads back to Marting’s (1987) article addressing the lack of attention GTA experience in writing classroom and Restaino’s (2012) text that advocates similar issues in her study on GTAs experience.

Given these gaps in the current research, this thesis attempts to demonstrate what GTAs value about their teaching approaches as well as their identity as a writing instructor. The central question for this study is how do GTAs value their race and gender as they facilitate a first-year writing course? This research is also driven by two sub questions: *What relationship exists between graduate instructors’ beliefs about their pedagogical education and teaching practices (both content and delivery)?* And, *does race and/or gender mediate any aspect of the preparation to teaching first year composition?*

Research Question

As previously mentioned, the central question for this study is how do GTAs value their race and gender as they facilitate a first-year writing course? The two sub-questions include: (1) what relationship exists between graduate instructors' beliefs about their pedagogical education and teaching practices (both content and delivery)? (2) does race and/or gender modify or adjust any aspect of the preparation to teaching first year composition? Seeking answers to my research questions, this thesis will work achieve the following objectives:

- to connect the history of teaching first year composition to the experiences of GTAs who teach these particular courses at East Carolina University;
- to identify how graduate instructors teach first year composition through pedagogical education or personal experience;
- to explore what influence, if any, race and/or gender has on graduate students' teaching philosophy or preparation when teaching first year composition.

The Study

As a graduate student, I have observed many experienced GTAs teach composition and examined how they incorporate aspects of multiple composition theory throughout their lesson plan as well as having the opportunity to explore my own teaching pedagogy during my first semester instructing a FYC course. While taking a previous graduate level research methods course in Fall 2015, I was able to conduct a small research project that examined how GTAs used their pedagogical experience in a writing classroom and transfer those theories to practice. For that study, I mainly looked at the pedagogical education of graduate instructors, but came to realize that most of the instructors I interviewed relied on their own experience, whether that be

as a student or a writing center consultant, or from previous experience teaching. For this study, I wanted to expand on my own research and come to an understanding of how identity may play a factor in a GTA's teaching style by focusing on the race and gender.

Methods

Because I am interested in understanding and analyzing the experiences of graduate teaching assistants, a qualitative research method with the use of interviews provides a compelling source for data. I specifically selected interviews because they allow me the opportunity to focus on the lived experiences of a small sample size. Therefore, by doing this I will be able to pay greater attention to detail of what interviewees value about teaching styles as well as their bodies in classroom.

The framework of this research models Reid, Estrem, and Belcheir's (2012) study *The Effects of Writing Pedagogy Education on Graduate Teaching Assistants' Approaches to Teaching Composition*. As these scholars use the approach to determine if pedagogy education or experience influences GTAs' belief for teaching writing, I intend to use this same approach and use both aspects to examine how either approach impacts GTAs' preparation to teaching composition at East Carolina University while also focusing on identity examining how GTAs embody their race and gender. For this project, I used a case study approach to conduct six interviews with participants. This is the most beneficial approach for this study because I value the backgrounds and experiences participants bring with them. I held six, IRB-approved interviews that were approximately one hour long during the eighth week of the Spring 2017 semester at ECU. During these interviews, I asked questions that examined the teaching experiences of GTAs, gaining an insight of their teaching philosophies as well as their feelings

toward their identity as a GTA. I questioned participants about how they engage in their own teaching style, while also discussing topics that relate to their race and gender.

Appendix A outlines the interview questions, but in general I asked participants to provide answers centered around their concentration in their previous graduate program, as well as their background in teaching first year composition. I also asked the participants how many years of college level teaching experience they had at the time. Not only do the interview questions ask about the teaching experience GTA instructors hold in the university setting, I also ask questions that solely pertained to how aspects of identity (race/gender) impacted the role of being a writing instructor in this particular position as a GTA.

Participants

The participants chosen for this study consist of six doctoral students in the English department at East Carolina University. My reason for choosing doctoral students as participants for this study relates to the background and teaching experience doctoral students have obtained. Before I began this study, I considered incorporating MA student instructors in this research, but the lack of experience seemed to be a concern. I inferred that doctoral students would have a better understanding of their teaching philosophy and overall more experience teaching composition at the university level. Therefore, by choosing doctoral students, my interview questions can focus on the amount of experience doctoral students have teaching composition and highlight what this group of instructors value about their teaching experience.

Ultimately, I chose to interview only doctoral students who are labeled as GTAs in ECU's English graduate program. I desired a smaller sample size, so as previously stated I did not include masters' students or any other group for that matter that might teach first year

composition. By doing this I will be able to pay greater attention to details of what interviewees value about teaching styles as well as their bodies in classroom. This selection meant that there were only fifteen eligible participants as opposed to 50 in the department. Knowing that I would likely not get to all fifteen doctoral students in the amount of time for this research, analyzing my results thoroughly would seem more feasible, which I explain in further detail in Chapter 3.

Conclusion

This thesis is organized in a traditional fashion. Chapter two, the literature review, is organized into three sections to focus on specific topics related with GTA instructions; I address first year composition, GTA training, and the identity of instructors. Chapter three provides an in-depth discussion of the methods used in this study. I discuss the process of planning the study and the motivation behind the choices made in this study. I support my reasoning behind certain decisions made as to why I chose a certain group of participants, why I asked particular questions, and in what ways certain information will be used in my analysis. Chapter four includes the results of the interviews conducted. I provide the narratives of GTAs to demonstrate their experiences that I analyze and elaborate on in chapter five, which consist of the discussion portion for this research. This section contains an analysis of the data collected in this study as well as a proposed answer to my research question. I also address any issues or limitations that occur throughout the course of the study that may require any particular change in the methods of the study. In this section I also discuss how others in the field of writing studies could build from this research, including myself.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I started to build an argument about the lack of attention GTAs receive in terms of their identities as graduate instructors in the field of writing studies. While there is a lack of scholarship directly focused on GTAs, there is research on how first year composition is taught and how identity might shape instructors' actions in the classroom. This chapter reviews that scholarship and addresses the background of techniques used to teach first year composition and how the identity of composition instructors are perceived. I begin by discussing the history of first year composition and how theory and pedagogy may drive a GTA's teaching approach. Then I move to discuss the training of GTAs, which may be seen through profession development, meetings, or observations of other instructors. And, finally, this chapter explores how identity impacts certain teaching approaches for writing instructor. These three scholarly conversations work to construct a framework to help me answer my research question: how do GTAs value their race and gender as they facilitate a first-year writing course? A brief history of the field includes scholars such as Elizabeth Wardle, Doug Downs, Jessica Restaino, and many others who have published on this area in composition. Overall, this chapter provides the framework to explain the relationships between teaching first year composition, graduate student training, and the issue of race and gender that both past and presently occur in the first-year composition classroom. Furthermore, this chapter provides insight as to how graduate instructors may choose to approach teaching first year composition from descriptive background that highlights the personal experiences GTAs encounter.

This literature review is organized into three sections, First Year Composition, Graduate Student Training, and Race and Gender, that summarizes the work that has been published in the field regarding first year composition. Within each section I review a selection of work that has been published in the field of rhetoric and composition, but specifically focused on how or if graduate teaching assistants are being considered within these conversations. The section *First Year Composition* examines how the field has conceived of the first-year composition classroom including overarching goals and objectives. *GTA Training* explores different perspectives of how GTAs have been trained in English programs and the effects of these methods toward a GTA's experience. This section covers former GTAs' experience and their outtake on their educational experience. The third section, *Race and Gender*, examines the ways embodiment functions for instructors of writing who do not typically occupy position of power in the dominant culture, thus illustrating how their bodies integrate with the work they are asked upon them while teaching writing courses. This literature addresses the experiences of faculty of color and issues of identity that instructors face in the university setting.

First Year Composition

Disciplinary history suggests that the central goal of FYC instruction has been to provide students with the foundational skills that they can deploy in a range of other college courses, including those in their chosen majors; as such, “transferring” those skills from first-year composition takes on critical importance (Anson, 2014, p. 4). According to Albert Kitzhaber (1963), composition can serve two purposes, the first being practical. Kitzhaber states, “A course exists to provide immediate therapy for students whose academic future is clouded by their inability to manage the written form of English with reasonable ease, precision, and correctness”

(p. 4). Kitzhaber further explains that this practical technique should develop each student's writing skill to the level of competence required by college work. Believing that this is the service concept of the course, which assumes that students should benefit from the practical training offered by a composition course.

Kitzhaber also believes that the primary purpose of the course is to focus the student's attention on fundamental principles of clear thinking, and the clear and effective written expression of that thinking, and to give students disciplined practice in applying these principles. In contrast to Kitzhaber's belief, Downs and Wardle (2007) believe that "First-year composition (FYC) prepares students to write across the university; this request assumes the existence of a "universal educated discourse" (Russell, "Activity Theory") that can be transferred from one writing situation to another" (Downs & Wardle, p. 552).

The chapters in *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies* focuses on the theories and pedagogies used in the discipline of writing studies. Tate and others explore the various pedagogies that are commonly used in composition, and which many instructors use to facilitate a first-year writing course, and can be a resource for graduate students and administrators to use to train GTAs before they move into writing classrooms and become instructors. In relation to FYC these pedagogies consist of basic writing, cultural studies, expressive, feminist, genre and process pedagogy. Many of these pedagogies consist of ways to approach writing and writing techniques GTAs can use to enhance their students' abilities as writers. These fundamental aspects address collaborative writing, journal keeping, drafting and revising, reflective writing, and writing in multiple media and context. In a review of *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, Carol Zitzer-Comfort (2013) states that composition pedagogies provides graduate students

with the theoretical framework to teaching composition, but more importantly provides realistic examples of what can and does happen in a composition classroom.

In contrast to these beliefs, other researchers such as E. Shelley Reid, Heidi Estrem, and Marcia Belcheir believe that the training GTAs gain from programs and professional development encourages and shapes how GTAs teach writing at the university level. In the following section, I explore how researchers in the field conduct studies to find the effectiveness of pedagogy education through GTA training.

Graduate Student Training

Reid, Estrem, and Belcheir (2012) closely examine GTAs and what influences their teaching philosophies and design of first year writing course. To get a better insight into how to conduct research for this topic, these researchers provide their own study that explains the methods and methodologies for this topic in the field of composition. The researchers report on results of a multimodal study on the relationship between pedagogy education and teaching practices for graduate teaching assistants in first year writing. Reid et al. (2012) facilitated their research through interviews and surveys on what GTAs experienced and learned in their disciplines and related this information to their pedagogical action. The surveys consisted of both multiple-choice and short answer questions as well as separate thirty-minute interview questions. Throughout this study these scholars have found a disconnect between the relationship of formal pedagogy education and teaching practices for graduate teaching assistants in FYC in their research. They found that GTAs heavily rely on their experience in the classroom and that composition principles weren't fluently integrated in GTAs composition pedagogy education.

This leaves an important question if pedagogy education has any effect on the teaching being done in composition classrooms by GTAs.

Engaging with the preparation of graduate teaching assistants, the collection, *Preparing College Teachers of Writing: Histories, Theories, Programs, Practices* edited by Betty P. Pytlik and Sarah Liggett, Pytlik's "How Graduate Students Were Prepared to Teach Writing—1850-1970," section shows the depth of research that has been published in the field, but also expresses a need to invest more research in the field to help develop graduate student teachers. In the Preface, Liggett and Pytlik express that, "especially for beginning instructors, learning to teach by teaching can be an inefficient and frustrating method of professional development," and that "well-designed teacher preparation programs have much to offer novice teachers by way of theories and practices for teaching writing" (xv). As Liggett and Pytlik voice their opinion on the development of graduate teaching assistants in writing courses there is still a gap in the training of graduate students. The professional development of GTAs is merely about how to teach writing effectively, not necessarily considering the bodies, personalities, or the environment graduate students teach in where they might have to consider their race, gender, age because those may be many aspects that go unnoticed in the preparation of teaching.

Wilhoit (2001) also looks at the training of GTAs and divides it into specific categories. Wilhoit looks at pre-service and in-service practica, as well as GTAs as writing tutors, which is perhaps the most common component of GTA instruction in a graduate program (p. 17). Specifically examining how GTAs are trained, I used Wilhoit's concept of "pre-service." It is extremely common for WPAs to hold recommended meetings with GTAs a few days before classes begin to discuss writing pedagogy, composition theory, and their school's writing program. Another common component of GTA instruction that programs have used over the

years has been in-service course work. Wilhoit explores how new graduate students are required to enroll in teaching composition courses before entering a writing classroom. Wilhoit looked to Wendy Bishop's work as she examined how the efforts to encourage GTA adherence to a particular theory of composition can be complicated by the theories GTAs bring with them consciously or unconsciously to graduate school. Wilhoit believes that GTA in-service programs must balance three related needs: to educate GTAs in composition theory and pedagogy, to maintain a theoretically coherent writing program, and to respect the GTAs' own theories of writing and teaching. In Wilhoit's argument, it shows that this should be applied in the professional development of GTAs. As most GTAs come from different backgrounds, it would be important to understand and accept the different teaching approaches GTAs offer to a program.

In "The Professionalization of TA Development Programs: A Heuristic for Curriculum Design," Kathleen Blake Yancey explains that the field has focused on how to teach students to write, while thinking very little about the kinds of assistance programs might offer graduate students, who teach a considerable number of the FYC courses offered in the university setting (p. 63). Yancey brings up concerns about how programs aren't considering the characteristics of the GTAs who teach first year composition and that English programs should think about who GTAs are. She addresses questions such as: "Demographically, are TAs recent college graduates or older, more experienced graduate students? Are they primarily women or men? What ethnicity are they? What about class identity?" And more generally, "what kind of fit do programs see between TA demographics and those of the undergraduate population" (Yancy, 2002, p. 72).

Yancey goes on to challenge these question by stating, "If the TAs share their students' demographic characteristics, they may be able to think specifically and realistically about the

students they'll be teaching; they will know and understand what motivates the students they'll work with as well as how and why they see the world as they do" (p. 66). She uses a great example to explore the difference in cultures between the instructor-student relationship. Yancey states that if a GTA is from the north and their students have never traveled outside their Southern state, emphasizing on demographics and different cultural aspects would be a key introduction for a writing course to help students understand that their reality may be different than their instructors. This contributes to this research as GTAs may teach students of a different race and cultural background, therefore, illustrating that teaching in different environments affects how an instructor interacts with students and approaches to teaching.

Similarly, in "Teaching-Racially and Culturally Diverse Environments," Jaslin U Salmon (1994) explains the importance of a student/instructor relationship in the classroom. She explains that each student is a product of his or her own culture. Students walk into a classroom, with a rich text of lived experience and they do just as commonly as GTAs do who are new to teaching. Both Salmon and Yancey explain that attention toward a GTA's identity, and the preconceived identity of a GTA is critical. Therefore, how do English departments consider these aspects of their graduate instructors? How does a new GTA understand identity of a teacher? As a junior faculty member of a program? In other words, what experiences and education have shaped the GTA's construct of a teacher, and how does he or she construct his or her relationship to that identity? These are questions that should be addressed when WPAs work to train graduate teaching assistants, looking deeper than into the construct of a new teacher.

As I further explore the training of GTAs, Reid et al. (2013), examines the training GTAs can adopt from more experienced graduate instructors. These scholars go on to explain how GTAs can learn from senior and peer teachers in guided and informal conversations, during

online discussions, face-to-face workshops, from observing class sessions and being observed, also while reading about other's teaching principles, and writing reflectively about their own teaching (p. 203). As a part of the GTA training Reid states that a GTA's pedagogy may not be practiced, reasoning for this is that GTAs do not have the amount of time to rely on this approach as they only have a restricted amount of time in their program. For a graduate instructor to acquire a theory that best assist a teaching style would have to be within the reach of other new teachers, and having the experience of being in a composition classroom, and this would be crucial for GTAs who are trying to adopt a pedagogical repertoire. Reid's explains the importance that other GTA instructors may have an influence on the use of pedagogy education new GTAs acquire as their time as graduate students, but that observing is an element to develop and can also influence what GTAs may value about their approaches to composition.

In *When Teaching Assistants Teach Teaching Assistants to Teach*, like Reid and Wilhoit, Irwin Weiser also examines the training of GTAs. He begins his chapter explaining how GTAs who serve as mentors can apply their disciplinary knowledge and teaching experiences in a way that is quite different from simply teaching their own classes. As mentors to new GTAs, GTAs find themselves having to generalize from their own experiences and to find ways to apply what they have learned, both as students and teachers in order to help new graduate instructors succeed at their position. Weiser believes that GTAs will discover that what works (or doesn't work) for them in the classroom may not (or may) work for another teacher (p. 46). Unlike new teachers of writing, through experience many GTA will realize this comprehension of their teaching style over the course of their time as an instructor. When training GTA who have questions about teaching, Weiser suggests that experienced GTAs recognize that what they have learned about teaching over a number of years through experience can't always be easily

explained to or adopted by another person, that they have to theorize their practice. For many graduate students, mentoring allows them to apply their expertise and in doing so to contribute to a program's diversity of teaching GTAs in ways that might not otherwise occur.

In "Only Connect...": Graduate Instructors Choosing the Margin," Stacia Dunn Neeley (2000) recalls her experience of walking into her first composition classroom. She explains that her "not-so-distant" past as a traditional student complicated her identity as a teacher. As a twenty-three year old, Neeley states that she was "nervous, malleable, and conditioned to conventional classroom reality" (p. 20). Thinking about her age, Neeley embodied a passive student role as graduate student, realizing that five years later she had falsely constructed a teaching authority out of previous scholars' theory or pedagogy. She explained that after thinking about the rhetorical and institutional situations as to why she became an instructor, she believed that she better understood the dynamic of power relations that existed of teaching writing, and felt compelled to ask, "How do material and intellectual working conditions affect the classroom?" (p. 20). Neeley believes that the field of composition could do much more for the future of composition studies if we would take time to address the needs of tomorrow's professors in this postmodern age when the tension between scholarship/theory and teaching/pedagogy is only intensified.

Addressing similar questions to Neeley's issue about GTAs' experience as instructors, it is safe to say that this particular gap in the field is important. I say this because graduate students may struggle with identity and professional agency. GTAs are considered as teachers, but yet an assistant and student. Employed, but part time or less. And departmental conversations in which GTAs are being spoken about are probably not as concerning as faculty employed by the

university, making the case that the graduate teaching assistant is a marginalized position, overlooked by higher positions with similar issues.

Race and Gender/Embodiment of Instructors

To begin thinking about race, gender, and embodiment, I chose to begin in chapters eleven and twelve of Wilson's, *College Professors and Their Impact on Students*. As Wilson explores the role of professors and how they have an impact on their students, I find that the identity of an instructor also has a significant influence on how students perceive their instructor. Wilson indicates the diversity of faculty attitudes toward teaching and educational change and the diversity of faculty teaching styles and practices. He also explores how students may benefit from an instructor's attitudes toward teaching and finds this important to significant because he believes that students feed off the energy of their instructors. Wilson goes into greater detail how the approach to teaching writing is heavily influenced by students' engagement. Wilson created a questionnaire that asked students to indicate how many times they had asked questions, volunteered answers, or made any remarks throughout their semester. Because he was targeting seniors in college, Wilson found that the engagement of students were remarkably high, but it is necessary for instructors to ask themselves what drives their attitude and choices to teach writing to keep students engaged and understand the fundamentals of writing.

Because this particular section examines the identity of instructors and how they embody aspects of their identity, Wilson's text foreshadows how identity affects the attitudes of instructors in the classroom setting. In relation to the impact of teacher attitudes and the embodied experiences professor values Wilson's text illustrates how students perceive their professors, their engagement within the classroom, and how instructors may navigate through

different components that influence their teaching approaches, which may include aspects of their body.

In *First Semester: Graduate Students, Teaching Writing, and the Challenge of Middle Ground*, Jessica Restaino (2012) states that significant work exists on the preparation of writing teachers—on topics ranging from mentoring programs to practicum courses, but argues that much of this work does not theorize the experience of graduate students as writing teachers and its potential shaping of graduate students’ understanding of composition as a discipline” (p. 2). Restaino recruited four participants for a study that examines the experience of GTA instructors. One of Restaino’s participants, Shirley, an African-American woman in her twenties, noted that “her racial minority status was a source of extra pressure to ‘prove’ herself,” and I found this piece of information interesting as similar conversations with GTAs in my current English program. This is a clear example of the experiences or situations that go unnoticed when researchers explore the role of a GTA in a writing classroom, much scholarship will mention the conditions GTAs may have to work in, what to expect as a new teacher or even the brief experience of GTAs, but exploring how GTAs embody their experiences seems less significant to other issues.

Faculty of Color in Academe examines the experiences of faculty of color that are employed in the predominantly white colleges and research universities. Turner and Myles (2000), draw on a comprehensive study of African American, Asian American, American Indian, and Latino faculty of the Midwestern states. One chapter in *Manifestations of Interlocking Race and Gender Bias* analyzes higher education administration and policy, human relations, and social justice, within the context of public affairs. This chapter specifically asks question about: *What factors contribute to this underrepresentation of faculty of color? What do we know about*

possible solutions to the underrepresentation of faculty of color in higher education? In this study, Turner and Myers interviewed fourteen female faculty members and nearly one-half the total described instances of gender as well as racial bias in their academic workplace. They stated that the interlocking of effects of gender and race compound the pressures of the academic workplace for professors (p. 105). Both Turner and Myles look to Evelyn Hu-DeHart, who recognizes that “Men have progressed considerable farther than women, for the simple fact that they are, after all, men in an institution designed for men” (p. 105). Hu-DeHart goes on to state that colleges and universities are more flexible when it comes to the work needs of men and less flexible in providing for the needs of female professors.

The edited collection, *Teacher’s Body: Embodiment, Authority, and Identity in the Academy* addresses the distinctiveness that leaps out of the generalized, invisible and unobtrusive body. Many authors throughout this text situate their analyses in the interactive spaces of the classroom. This body of work recognizes a range of embodied identities usually disguised, muted, or excluded from the role of the classroom teacher. Many of these studies introduce a number of teachers’ bodies that significantly depart from the standard teacher’s body, ultimately meaning a white male body in the teacher’s position. The chapters throughout *The Teacher’s Body* challenges the oppressive representations through narratives many educators have experienced while teaching students of different racial, cultural, and social backgrounds. Many chapters look directly at race and how teachers’ bodies are marked by society as inferior in the academic setting. This text is used to negotiate how embodiment works through spaces of a classroom and gives an insight of the authoritative roles teachers take on within the classroom. Since the focus of this research looks at how race and gender may have an impact on how GTA’s

may operate in the classroom setting, this text illustrates similar narratives that are found in my study that explain certain situations that may occur in particular teaching positions.

Specifically looking at race in the classroom, black women have spoken on their experience and how there may be some discomfort and/or disempowerment while teaching students of the white race. Simone A. James Alexander, an English instructor, speaks on her experience in the classroom. Throughout her experience as an educator, she explained how she focused on texts that were not centered on an “all-white, womanless curriculum” (p. 105). Alexander stated that a particular student (white) raised questions about her selection of text. Asking, “Why are there so many women’s text on this syllabus” (p. 105), Alexander believes that her white male student question of the texts resulted from his literary training and background, that he has been trained to read and accept a white man’s text unconditionally. In contrast, Alexander believed her student viewed this change in the curriculum as an act of pushing her own agenda for the class due to the fact that she is black, Caribbean-born, and also a female professor. As Alexander states, “instructors of students who are predominantly white, instructors of color occupy an ambiguous position, powerful and powerless” (p. 107).

In *Faculty of Color: Teaching in Predominantly White Colleges and Universities*, Jeffrey Guidry’s chapter, “Can a Brotha’ Get a Break?” explores the challenges of being an African-American male faculty member at a predominantly white research university. In a brief discussion, Guidry explains his experiences dealing with disbelief, disrespect, negative non-verbal communication, and questions of authority from majority white students. Guidry addresses how a tenure-track African-American male professor, particularly himself, deals with racism and discrimination as they relate to teaching and the role of gender and race in majority students’ negative perceptions of minority faculty:

Parents have emailed or called me to question my knowledge, teaching skills, and grading scheme. I have actually had a parent tell me, “My husband is an M.D., and he read his daughter’s paper, and she should receive an A. Are you sure you know how to write and teach?” I wonder, if I were a tenured white male faculty member, would I have been approached like this? (p. 170)

Guidry believes that race and gender stereotypes and expectations have played a significant role in the way he has been treated by students, colleagues, and university administration. Guidry notes, “Some of my students have challenged my credentials in and out of the classroom and have had the audacity to question my appointment at a ‘superior’ institution of higher learning” (p. 169). In the classroom, many of his previous students did not consider his experience as a member of the minority faculty to be academically legitimate. Examining Guidry’s experience, it is necessary for African-American male professors to understand that they must contend with the negative portrayals of African-American men on television, social media, and everyday conversations. Racial identity can affect the outlook of a person’s gender and their appearance can give off prejudged qualities of what a student may expect from an instructor, therefore affecting the teaching style or preparation of an instructor.

Conclusion

Overall, the importance of a graduate teaching assistant's experience seems to be deemphasized in the field of composition. Examples from this literature review on GTA training considering the use pedagogy education informs what new teachers of writing can rely on when it involves theory. As a lot of this information is helpful for new instructors, I question how much longer can the field of composition have conversations that address GTA training that does not consist of the embodiment of graduate instructors? I'm concerned as to why the race, gender, social, and cultural backgrounds a graduate instructor are frowned upon to higher ranking faculty that perform the same duties in an English department. These issues are just as important as faculty issues and I believe more research should look more closely at the training and work conditions of GTAs.

The three sections used throughout the literature review situate the different aspects of composition I explore for this research. These sections work together to develop a conversation around the experiences of instructors who teach composition, but demonstrating that there could be more work focused toward GTAs' identity as instructors. With these three sections, I scaffold each in order to narrow the focus of what this research attempts to analyze, which is the identity of GTAs. I start with First Year Composition as the broader topic of this research, because as previously stated in the introduction GTAs may teach from one to 100 percent of first-year writing courses, and I use this particular course as a space where GTAs can explain the impact their identity has toward their teaching approaches. GTA training examines the service and preparation of GTAs as they teach sections of writing course. As this aspect of a GTAs experience is essential, there are also other elements of GTAs experiences that need to be considered as well, such as race, gender, age, or identity overall. I have found that the training of

GTAs focus on teaching writing effectively to students, but the last section labeled as race and gender explores the aspects of an instructor's identity and that is a conversation missing from the training GTAs experience that this research expands on.

Chapter 3: Methods

Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I have suggested that the experiences of GTAs do not gain much attention as it relates to teaching first year writing composition. Current research (Restaino, 2012) demonstrates that the work that does exist is either outdated or lacks the consideration of the theoretical significance graduate students in the classroom pose to composition as a field. This chapter explains the methodological approach taken to analyze GTAs' current teaching approaches to composition in the first-year writing classrooms and how graduate instructors embody their identity in the position of a writing instructor. Furthermore, this chapter reviews the research question and objectives for this study. I also include the interview questions that are used to gain an insight into the experiences that GTAs endure throughout their time as both graduate students and instructors. This chapter also details the IRB process and explains the methodological choices to the interview questions chosen for this study while discussing the limitations and giving an explanation of data analysis that will appear in greater detail in Chapter Four, Results/Analysis. Both the research questions and the objectives of this thesis are important to keep in mind as they helped provide the rationale for the overall design of this study.

Research Question & Objectives

The central question for this study is how do GTAs value their race and gender as they facilitate a first-year writing course? The two sub-questions include: (1) what is relationship exists between graduate instructors' beliefs about their pedagogical education and teaching practices (both content and delivery)? (2) does race and/or gender modify or adjust any aspect of the preparation to teaching first year composition? Seeking answers to my research questions, this thesis works to achieve the following objectives:

- to connect the history of teaching first year composition to the experiences of GTAs who teach these particular courses at East Carolina University;
- to identify how graduate instructors teach first year composition through pedagogical education or personal experience;
- to explore what influence, if any, race and/or gender has on graduate students' teaching philosophy or preparation when teaching first year composition.

Methodology

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) defines critical race theory as a theoretically grounded approach to research that foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process that foregrounds and accounts for the role of race and racism in education and works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of opposing or eliminating other forms of subordination based on gender, class, sexual orientation, language and national origin” (p. 25). Critical Race Theory is a necessary component to this research as I examine the experiences GTAs encounter with race. For example, Matsuda et al. (1993) would describe a Critical Race Theory methodology as, “one that is grounded in the experience of our collective realities” (p.

35). This is a necessary component as I use this literature as a tool to gain an understanding how certain aspects of identity intersect and may shape the reality for a person, which occurs through multiple interviews further explained in chapters four and five. Critical Race Theory identifies power structures based on privilege, which is very common to find in universities and when it relates to the race of an instructor, because their power and authority can either be challenged or accepted. Race is important as it pertains to this study because this aspect of a person's life may shape their reality and as writing instructors may cover issues within a text like Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy*, where situations and discussions of race may put an instructors' identity on display and change the demeanor of an instructor. Taking the approach to use Critical Race Theory benefits my research by exploring the intersectionality of race within spaces of an institution.

As previously stated, the framework of this research models Reid et. Al's (2012) study as well as Jessica Restaino's (2012) theoretical approach in *First Semester: Graduate Students, Teaching Writing, and the Challenge of Middle Ground*. As these scholars examine the educational background and experience of GTAs, I model similar approaches to gain an understanding of the preparation of graduate students have been exposed to in their English program. Reid, Estrem, and Belcheir's (2012) approach looks to find if pedagogy education or experience determined the influence of GTAs' belief for teaching writing. I use this same approach and use both aspects to examine how either approach impacts GTAs' preparation to teaching English 1100 courses at East Carolina University. I model this approach by asking similar interview questions that allowed GTAs to explain whether they rely on their pedagogical education or the experiences as a student, tutor or instructor while teaching composition. I did this in order to see if I would have received the similar responses from their study as they

demonstrated that the GTAs in their study relied on their own experiences. And because the voices of the participants are important aspects for this research I do not view the participants as a subject in this study, but as people with real lived experiences, allowing them to express their feelings and create a reality I can understand from their personal and teaching experience.

Methods

This research uses a qualitative research approach to collect data. For this study, I use a case study approach using interviews to gather data from participants. I believe interviews were the most beneficial approach because for this study I value the backgrounds and experiences of participants. During the study, I held six private interviews in which interviewees and I examined the teaching experience of doctoral GTAs; this process allowed me to gain an insight into their teaching philosophies. I talked in depth with participants about how they engage in their own teaching style, gaining an understanding of what valuable techniques they use to teach first year writing while also discussing topics that relate to their race and gender.

The structure of the interview questions encourages a natural dialogue that asks for clarification and uses semi-structured questions provided to adapt to the experiences of the interviewee. The data collected from the open-ended questions provide concrete instances of GTAs talking about their teaching experience, while the close-ended questions draw toward the embodiment of identity as a graduate instructor. For example, question twelve (12) of the interview questions asks participants: *What is your thought-process as you prepare to teach a FYC class?* as opposed to question twenty-one (21) where I ask participants: *Is your race something you think about as you prepare to teach certain material to your students?* I structure certain questions of this study to allow participants to elaborate on their responses where they

cannot answer with a one word answer, and then there are areas where I wanted to hear the first thing that comes to their mind with a simple yes or no, which occurs in both sections of the interview questions. The data from this analysis allowed me to work toward answering my research questions and in the following sections, I discuss in depth the methods and the coding schemes used to analyze the data.

IRB

This study went through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process, and approval was obtained in February 2017, by the IRB at East Carolina University. Before conducting in person, voice recorded interviews, I provided each participant with an informed consent form that explained the goals of this study and but more importantly that their participation for this study is completely voluntary. The consent form explains that the participants' identity would remain anonymous throughout the entire study. Participants were also informed that they would not be asked to reveal any identifying information, with the exception of stating the institution in which they were currently teaching. Participants gave consent individually in a face-to-face meeting one week before the interview and also signed the consent form while scheduling a comfortable time to conduct an interview. Participants were informed that the interview would be approximately between 20 minutes to an hour to complete.

Participants

The participants chosen for this study consist of six doctoral students in the English graduate program at East Carolina University. My reason for choosing doctoral students as participants for this study is that most or all have experience teaching composition at the college

level. When this study began I inferred that doctoral students would have a better understanding of their teaching philosophy and teaching style they use in first year composition. Before I began this study, I considered incorporating MA student instructors in this research, but the lack of experience seemed to be a concern. Therefore, by choosing doctoral students my interview questions would focus on the amount of experience one has of teaching composition and depict what participants' value about their teaching.

Ultimately, I chose to interview only instructors who are labeled as doctoral graduate teaching assistants. I desired a smaller sample size, so I did not include masters' students or any other group that might teach first year composition. This selection meant that there were only fifteen eligible participants as opposed to closer to fifty (50) instructors who taught FYC in the fall semester of 2016. Knowing that I would not have been able to get to all fifteen doctoral students to participate in the amount of time for this research, choosing ten (10) participants whose interviews I would analyze seemed more feasible. Before the study, I wanted to have a mixed variety of doctoral students and understanding the demographic of the students in the doctoral program I knew it would be difficult as there are only a small number of men, and minority students, and because there are no African-American men in the program at the moment. I wanted to try to make the study as even as possible, so I recruited the participants before creating consent forms for doctoral students to sign. There was a three week gap in between recruiting doctoral students and distributing consent forms. Once I received a verbal consent and approval from IRB, I asked participants if they were still willing to participate. Out of the ten chosen, six participants agreed to be a part of the study and then interviews were conducted a week later in a setting that participants felt most comfortable in.

Interview Participants Histories

Dana. Dana is a 25-year-old African American female. Dana is a second year doctoral student in the English Graduate program at East Carolina University. Dana currently has three semesters of teaching experience at the university level.

Katherine. Katherine is a 24-year-old white female. Katherine is a first year doctoral student in the English Graduate program at East Carolina University. Katherine currently has one previous semester of teaching experience at the university level.

Collin. Collin is a 31-year-old white male. Collin is a second year doctoral student in the English Graduate program at East Carolina University. Collin currently has nine semester of teaching experience at the university level.

Jennifer. Jennifer did not disclose her age, but is a white female. Jennifer is a second year doctoral student in the English Graduate program at East Carolina University. Jennifer has six semester of teaching experience at the university level.

Liz. Liz is a 34-year-old Native American female, but identifies as gender queer. Liz is in her fifth year as a doctoral candidate in the English Graduate program at East Carolina University. Liz currently has ten years of teaching experience at the university level.

Troy. Troy is a 29-year-old white male. Troy is a second year doctoral student in the English Graduate program at East Carolina University. Troy currently has twelve semester of teaching experience at the university level.

Interview

Interviews contributed to my study by allowing GTAs to discuss their experiences in the writing classrooms they teach in as well as any training they may have had previous to being accepted as a graduate in ECU's English graduate programs. Because I was interested in understanding and analyzing the experiences of GTAs, a qualitative research method with the use of interviews provides a compelling source for data. I specifically selected interviews because they allowed me the opportunity to focus on the lived experiences of a small sample size. Therefore, I was able to pay greater attention to detail of what interviewees value about teaching styles while considering their embodied experiences as a student and instructor.

Interviews for this study were recorded for accuracy of participant experiences and transcribed for coding purposes. (Please see Appendix A for interview questions). I asked participants to provide answers centered toward their concentrations at previous institutions, as well as their background in teaching first year composition. I also ask the participants how many years of teaching experience they currently have. Not only do the interview questions ask about the teaching experience doctoral GTAs hold in the university setting, I also ask questions that solely pertained to how aspects of identity (race/gender) impacted the role of being a writing instructor in this particular position as a GTA. Interviews followed a semi-structured list of questions that are categorized as follows:

- Background Information: three (3) questions ask participants to self-identify their race, gender, and age, two (2) questions ask participants to reflect on previous teaching experience, one (1) questions ask participants to reflect on previous coursework
- Teaching Experience: nine (9) questions ask participants to reflect on how their experience as an instructor impacts their approach to teaching composition

- GTA Instructor Identity: five (5) questions ask participants to reflect on how identity influences/effects their teaching in and out of the classroom

The interviews questions for this study gave GTAs the opportunity to explain their teaching experience as a graduate teaching assistant. Within each interview I allowed each participant the chance to lead and direct the conversation as they wished in order to respect their experiences and voices as a graduate teaching assistant. The amount of time spent talking with participants ranged from 20 minutes to an hour for each individual interview. I talked in depth with participants about how they engage in their own teaching style, gaining an understanding of what valuable techniques used to teach first year writing. I believe this approach would allow my research to examine the relationship of what GTAs value as instructors and potential theories that might be used for teaching composition compared to the literature that suggests particular theories or pedagogies. Because this research is driven by the experiences of GTAs' this allowed GTAs a chance to reflect on their past.

Coding Scheme

For the questions pertaining to teaching experience, I first listened through the recorded interviews to notice any response patterns. To transcribe these interview responses, I took notes while the GTAs were talking about their personal and teaching experiences. After gaining responses from all interviews I listened again without the notes to gain a sense of who the participant were as a person. As I previously stated, I value what participants have to say and listening to the tone of the voices without the notes allowed for a clearer understanding of what participants actually valued, whether they were passionate about certain questions or simply could not relate as this differed for each participant. From the responses, I came across three (3)

common patterns that emerged from the data: ideal instructor, past experiences, and classroom curriculum (Table 1). The ways in which each participant talked about their personal experiences, and how my analysis ranged from short phrases (distancing gender) to longer responses (under qualified) I understood that what few participants responded to and what all participants had a worthy opinion about transferred into these three common patterns.

Table 1: Common Pattern Codes

Coding	Definition of Code	Example of Code
Ideal instructor	Participants mention that there is an anticipated image of an instructor their students expect to see.	“Well, I just not your typical teacher.”
Past experiences	Participants mention their lived past experience or teaching experience.	“In the past I would experience my students challenging me...”
Classroom curriculum	Participants mention the curriculum in relation to teaching writing and their teaching approaches.	“The conversations about <i>Just Mercy</i> .”

From the common patterns, I gathered related patterns in a secondary coding scheme (Table 2) which applies to questions ten through eighteen (10-18) and nineteen through twenty-two (19-22) of the interviews: embracing race, distancing race, embracing gender, distancing gender, privilege, under qualified, teacher/student relationship, and institutional context. It was not until later in my analysis that I began to notice how these codes related to the three common patterns shown above. The process of coding responses from participants was recursive at times. Once I found that I had realized there were three common themes, I could break up the interviews in to sections by going through the interview questions separately and noting when certain experiences and stories aligned with particular questions which then led to the eight (8) secondary codes.

Table 2: Definition of Codes

Coding	Definition of Code	Example of Code
Embracing race	Participants mention they consider their race as an instructor.	“I consider race and gender as teach or prepare to teach any course.”
Distancing race	Participants mention that they do not consider their race as an instructor.	“I never think about my race in the classroom or otherwise.”
Embracing gender	Participants mention that they always consider their gender as an instructor.	“Every time I step in a classroom I consider my race and gender.”
Distancing gender	Participants mention they do not consider their gender as an instructor.	“I remove myself from the text, as a white male.”
Privilege	Participants mention that they do not have certain issues that others may face.	“I don’t have to worry about bringing my identity into the classroom.”
Under qualified	Participants mention the challenges they face from their students.	“I allow my students to read my writing to show students that I’m qualified to be in the position of a writing instructor...”
Teacher/student relationship	Participants mention how they react to students a writing instructor.	“When I begin teaching I view my students as people before I assess them as writers.”
Institutional context	Participants mention how teaching at ECU changes.	“I wonder it this would change if I were at another university teaching these courses”

Data Analysis

After coding and transcribing the interviews, I began to notice that almost every experience that the GTAs remembered as it related to their teaching approaches, their pedagogical education did not have a significant impact unlike their personal experiences as a writing instructor. GTAs explained that their past experiences through coursework and previous semesters teaching influence their thoughts and beliefs as an instructor. In relation to the identities of GTAs, data showed that depending on the demographics of GTAs this affected whether GTAs valued gender and race on a regular basis. In some responses, it was clear that race by itself and gender by itself were essential to the data collected. For example, many of the female participants expressed their engagement with their body in the classroom setting (embrace identity) and men leaving the idea about their body in the classroom before stepping into the classroom (distanced identity). At other times, it was visible that the intersection of race and gender affected the teaching approaches for GTAs who labeled themselves as a minority. Therefore, my analysis suggested not all GTAs value their race and gender as an instructor, but some were aware that this could be an issue for other GTAs.

Limitations

In attempting to highlight the individual experiences and voices of GTAs I had a limited number of minority student in the English doctoral program. One of the most apparent limitations of my study is the fact that the study was ethnically uneven. There were four participants who labeled their race as white, which does not negatively affect the research, but it shows the limited amount of responses from participants who aren't white. There was one Native American and one African American interviewed for this study, who were both female. Also,

there were only two men in this study, both white, so I couldn't get a contrast in experiences regarding race and gender. I would have liked to have an African American male participate in this study, but the African-American males in the English graduate program are both M.A. students (one being myself), and do not fit the criteria for this study. Having only one African-American person for this study does not give off a substantial representation of reality African-Americans experience as GTAs. I say this because other scholars may disagree based on their personal experiences and I was not able to incorporate enough information as I hoped for minority GTAs. As I discuss in more detail in chapter 5, I believe future research studies should work to make the experiences of GTAs more visible, especially considering minority instructors.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I restated my research questions and objectives to frame my research methods. I also presented the methods and methodological beliefs on which I based my choices and data collection process including IRB and limitations. In the data analysis section, I highlighted the emergent codes of the interview data, which work to answer my research questions. These codes aim to identify how GTAs engage with race and gender in and out of the classroom. In Chapter four, I will analyze the interview results based on the data analysis section detailed in this chapter. The codes related to ideal instructor, past experiences, and classroom curriculum will be analyzed in relation to the identity (race and gender) of GTAs and how they value this aspect of themselves. Based on that analysis, I will provide further analysis of the results and explain how this analysis attempts to answer my research questions. In chapter five, I will discuss how these answers have can lead to potential applications within the community of the Writing Foundations Program.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

As outlined in the last chapter, my research questions focused on how do GTAs value their race and gender as they facilitate a first-year writing course? This research uses a case study approach using interviews to gather data from participants. The interviews conducted provide in-depth data pertaining to GTAs' teaching experience as well as their identity as they teach First Year Composition. The interviews conducted provide a way to understand how GTA embrace or distance themselves from their identity such as race and gender.

This chapter provides the results from the interviews that were described in chapter 3 whereas chapter 5 will provide an in-depth analysis of the results. This chapter describes the interview population in terms of race, gender, age, position held, and previous teaching experience. In this chapter I use a data set to report the interview data to work toward answering my research question. I begin by offering individual summaries of each participant in terms of how they view their gender and race in the classroom. Then, I move from individual cases to discussing the data in aggregate. The data set is discussed according to the following categories: Ideal Instructor, Experience, and Classroom Curriculum. Finally, this chapter provides an analysis of the codes mentioned in chapter 3 in order to identify GTAs approaches to teaching FYC and their methods for discussing their identity. Furthermore, the analysis in chapter 5 will work toward creating discussion to illustrate the value of identity in a FYC classroom.

Interview Population

Table 3: Participant Demographic/Background Information

Participants	Age	Gender	Race	Teaching Experience
Troy	29 years old	Male	White	12 semesters
Jennifer	Unstated	Female	White	6 semesters
Liz	34 years old	Gender Queer	Native American	10 years
Katherine	24 years old	Female	White	1 semester
Dana	25 years old	Female	African-American	3 semesters
Collin	31 years old	Male	White	9 semesters

Race & Gender as a GTA

In this section, I summarize each participant's interview as it relates to race and gender and how these two aspects may or may not affect their teaching approaches. While readers might not be able to hear the tone of my participants, I hope these summaries provide readers some insight into who participants are individually and how they approach teaching writing at the university level.

Katherine

During our interview, Katherine shared that identity has impact her approach to teaching composition. She states, "Being female has been a bit difficult in some situations, especially with students, certain students. They expect me to be more lenient. For example, taking late work."

Katherine stated that unlike most GTAs she accepts late work, and students still expect to receive full credit for major assignments. In Katherine's experience, she stated that being a female instructor has an impact on the way that she is treated. She has found that this is happening more frequent with her first-year composition students, rather than the second year course of the writing foundation, which consist of upperclassmen, but she is not sure why that is. She believes that FYC students would be more intimidated by the fact that she is a woman as their instructor. When asked how often does Katherine consider her race as a GTA or if she thinks about her race at all, Katherine simply stated that her race never comes up and that race has never been an issue or impacted Katherine's approaches to teaching FYC. Katherine has had multiple conversations with other instructors who are minorities that teach FYC that have brought up the issue of being a particular race and teaching composition and teaching certain material, realizing that she does not have any of those concerns that minority would think about. Katherine says that she doesn't have to worry about bring her identity into the classroom, but those conversations have made her more aware of the fact that issues of race exist for others not labeled as white.

Collin

During the interview, Collin expressed that race is as aspect of his body that he does not consider in his approaches to teaching FYC. When asked why, Collin stated, "I never think about my race in the classroom or otherwise, I don't really know," which is not surprising considering the demographic of the institutions Collin has attended in both present and past; two medium to large public universities in the southeast, both PWIs. In a question where I asked Collin how certain material may affect his teaching approaches or where his identity may be put on the line in front of his student, Collin seemed a bit distanced in his response. When engaging with certain

teaching material, such as ECU's Fall 2016 Pirate Read *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson's, Collin shared that when it comes to text that exploits aspects of a person's identity he focuses on his students' identity and their reaction to the material being taught and how aspects of race and gender may affect their learning abilities while leaving his own identity out of a discussion. When asked why he takes this approach Collin states, "Not only from a teaching standpoint, but personally... I find myself as more of a facilitator for chapters of text that may talk about issues of race and gender." As we moved forward into questions that pertained to both race and gender in the classroom, I noticed Collin's responses were beginning to become shorter than the first section of questions. When asked about the role his gender plays in the classroom, Collin made it clear that he does not intentionally use his body to gain authority. Describing his experience teaching, Collin shared, "I don't think about, I'm a white man in front of the classroom, I try to be a very authentic person with my students. I don't try to use my masculinity to assert dominance over my students." I think that Collin's past history of working in writing centers translates toward his demeanor in the classroom because Collin believes in creating a safe and comfortable environment for students.

Jennifer

During our interview, Jennifer shared a story about her Business Writing course to demonstrate issues of gender she has seen in her teaching experience. Jennifer has realized that identity is an aspect of her body that she considers. In her Business Writing example, she shared that male students at times will push back on the assignments she creates. For example, Jennifer explained, "A lot of times when we are doing case studies, like gender neutral bathrooms, in order to get the male students to think about that properly because they weren't understanding it I

told them they are writing this letter to a CEO for a company, but she is a woman and by doing this I tried to get them to understand how gender can change the tone in which people use to talk to one another.” When asked how the students took the assignment Jennifer quickly stated that the students pushed back. Jennifer said that if she were a male she wouldn’t have done that because the students would have listened and done the prompt, and probably wouldn’t have been challenged by her male students. After explaining this situation Jennifer experienced I asked her how she felt about her role in the classroom as a white female and her response was that she embraces issues within the classroom that deal with race, but does not consider her own race as she teaches FYC. She states, “It’s just not something I generally think about. I have spent enough years in my skin and have been around a variety of people, I don’t have the same problem that people have when I’m around people of a different race. It almost seems normal for me.” Jennifer explained that she attended an HBCU during her undergraduate experience, so being around others who are culturally different from her does not make her feel uncomfortable, but embraces the fact that those situations are normal.

Liz

During our interview, Liz expressed that identity has impacted her approaches to teaching all the time. At the beginning of the interview, Liz wanted to note that she is a lesbian and that she identifies herself as gender queer, which both impacts the way she thinks about writing and her teaching approaches. After she identified herself, Liz shared her history about her teaching experience that has had a significant impact on her life. When she started teaching at a community college, she noticed that in one of her courses, she estimated that ninety-five (95) percent of the students were either from a different country or represented a different race

outside of the dominate race (white). And she explained, “Now I consider race and gender as teach or prepare to teach any course because even as a Native American female I understand the struggles of being that person in an environment that where my background differs from others. Liz also shared her experience with this while at the community college, when she stated that she was almost fired for being a lesbian and a feminist. She was very explicit that this was a traumatic experience in her career, which makes her more cautious around her students. She demonstrates this by sending announcements to her students giving them her credentials proving she is qualified to teach composition. When I asked Liz how engaged she is with topics on race and gender the tone in her voice changed, as she seemed extremely engaged with identity and from her perspective “bodily rhetorics.” She stated, “Because I am in the doctoral program, I have more room to play with things than a master’s student when I teach my courses, so I can create and explore issues considering race and gender more broadly where it helps my students understand these issues.” From Liz’s responses to the interview questions, she values aspects of people’s body and she considers this to be important in the university setting.

Troy

During the interview with Troy, we discussed topics that heavily relied toward his teaching experience. When asked about his identity (race and/or gender) within the classroom setting or as a GTA, Troy expressed that those two aspects of his body have never been a factor or issue for Troy. I was not surprised by his response, but I was eager to find the reason behind this and he believed that only his students would know if that impacts their learning abilities. Troy went on to say nobody has come to him and said, “Oh Troy, your race or your gender did this to me.” So, when I asked how Troy felt about teaching material that explore race and gender

because it seemed that he distances himself from this in the classroom, Troy responded, “I remove myself from the text, as a white male I know I’m not a part of some of these stories we may see in novels, so in class discussions it never about me, I see myself as more of a facilitator in the classroom.” When I asked Troy how he came to this approach he continued by saying that he doesn’t ever take anything personally, which he thinks that is important for a teacher. Troy believes that instructors are a small part of a student’s life, “you’re not that big of a deal to them.” Troy distances himself from topics of race and gender as he believes that an instructor should not take teaching personally. Stating that instructors are only in students’ lives for a short period of time and to help them grow as students and writers. “If you step back for a minute and think that you aren’t the teacher, then really you are just meeting 25 new people for the first time.” This statement demonstrates how Troy distances his personal beliefs and identity while being in a classroom setting.

Dana

During my interview with Dana, her experiences seemed much different from those of other participants. With discussing her race and gender as a GTA teaching composition, Dana started off by stating that her appearance and her language are concerns that arise before she considers race and gender as a GTA. She states, “I feel like I have to put on a front for my students for the first few weeks and sound smart and articulate, and then I have to explain to my students that I actually don’t even talk like that.” Dana believes that being an African American female and speaking with the particular dialect, she finds that this is difficult for students who do not understand her cultural background. When I asked when does she feel comfortable about her body in the classroom she became passionate about telling her students that she is not going to

put up a “front” for the entire semester. She stated, “I want my students to know that I am going to be different from what they used to,” so she allows her students to read her writing to show students that she is qualified to be in her position as an instructor of writing. She has found that this is something that works for her that she will continue to do in the future. When I asked Dana specifically how she feels about her identity (in terms of race and gender), she expressed, “Every time I step in a classroom I consider my race and gender. I always have to think how can I make sure that my students understand my lessons that I am giving them. I use music, which is not traditional in a sense to teach, for example, rhetorical analysis, so I prepare myself to be challenged by students. Overall, Dana feels like her identity impacts her approaches to teaching FYC. Asking her about her teaching approaches to FYC she relates back to her experience at an HBCU, where it was hard for her to understand her professors, so she attempts to make her lesson plans as understandable as possible as she wants her students to know that she is in fact invested as their instructor.

Ideal Instructor

According to the data from the interviews conducted, questions nineteen (19), twenty (20), twenty-one (21) and twenty-two (22), GTAs expressed what an ideal instructor would seem to have a role teaching at the university level. From the participants’ responses, the ideal instructor is usually a white male. For minority instructors, the identity of a professor is almost certainly incompatible with their gender and racial identities, as Rakon (1991) believes that the generic professor is ideally white and male; this population of professors do not face the same issues (p. 10). Dana and Liz reported that they embraced the fact they do not look like the standard teacher and the other for participants, Troy, Jennifer, Katherine, and Collin distanced

themselves from the fact that they do actually hold qualities of the traditional teacher. When GTAs were asked about their approaches to teaching FYC, some participants described their experiences as a challenge, having to prove their credibility as an instructor because of aspects of their identity.

Through the common responses I received from participants, for example, “Well, I just not your typical teacher,” seems to be a topic frequently discussed by GTAs of color and GTAs who label themselves as female, which lead to other codes within the image of the ideal instructor. As previously stated in Chapter 3, these codes that pertain to the ideal instructor include privilege, embracing race, distancing gender, and feeling under qualified. Many participants were direct about being compared to a white male professor with statement such as “I allow my students to read my writing to show students that I’m qualified to be in the position of a writing instructor” and “Every time I step in a classroom I consider my race and gender.” These participants embraced that qualities of their bodies do not necessarily empower them to be writing instructors from their students’ perspective who labeled himself as a white male explained, “I never think about my race in the classroom or otherwise,” which Bennett (2012) would consider as privilege.

White privilege or privilege itself is a concept that has shifted throughout U.S. history (Bennett, 2012). White privilege could be suggested as a historic structural benefit resulting in psychological advantages that create different lived experiences for Whites and minoritized populations. Faculty of color and female faculty are often times self-conscious about their bodies in the classroom as they are aware that their bodies hold markings of difference as opposed to the typical authoritative bodies of white men. Dana called upon her experience as an African-American instructor stating: “Because of how I look, my appearance, and the language I use I

already know that my students are not used to seeing this in the classroom, probably because I am not a white man.”

This emphasizes that a white male holds the representation of what an instructor should be perceived as and demonstrates that white instructors have the privilege of not thinking about or discussing their race on a daily basis, considering that whiteness has become normalized. In an institutional context where most professors and instructors look the same, conversations of white privilege as it pertains to teaching will almost always remain minuscule.

Experience

When the interview participants were asked about their teaching experience in questions eleven (11), twelve (12), fifteen (15), and sixteen (16), GTAs noted that they rely on their past experiences they have encountered throughout their time as graduate students and their own lives. Jennifer stated, “Everything is embodied and based on experience,” and most of the responses were not surprising as the participants stated their teaching experience in the beginning of interviews, therefore this allowed me to take an informed guess about whether or not previous teaching or personal experience influenced their teaching approaches and how they value race and gender. Three (3) of the six (6) GTAs interviewed stated that they relied on their personal experience as it related to their race and gender. Liz stated: “Because my mother was an English teacher I remember sitting in her classroom and watching her teach and I have found myself using her same approaches to teaching writing,” while Dana reported, “not only does my Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) experience influence my understanding of teaching writing, but my personal experience as well,” and Jennifer highlighted, “I have spent enough years in my skin,” as she further explained that during her undergraduate experience she

has become more comfortable around people of different races and gender, therefore she illustrates an explain of distancing

Unlike the previous participants, others did not highlight the relationship between their identity and experience. The other three participants did reference their experience, but that it never occurred to them to actually consider their race and gender as it relates to teaching, and based on personal experiences these participants distanced themselves because they have the privilege not to think about their identity in a classroom setting. From Troy's perspective, he stated, "I guess it came from being in graduate school," as well as Katherine as she stated she references her experience as a GTA. In contrast, Collin related back to his experiences through the Writing Centers and how that has developed his teacher-student relationship within the classroom, which was a regular code that appeared in interviews. Collin stated, "I gained my experience from being a writing tutor or mainly from the writing center. When I begin teaching I view my students as people before I assess them as writers."

Classroom Curriculum

Additionally, experience and the image of an ideal instructor were common themes, but classroom curriculum was also a topic that was discussed during the interviews process of this research. Question eighteen (18) allowed participants to explain their teaching philosophies and its relation to the standard curriculum the department holds for GTAs that instruct FYC courses. At East Carolina University, GTAs are required to use a textbook for each first-year writing course. For the Fall 2016 semester, GTAs were required to use Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy* (2014) for Foundations of College Writing, which all participants expressed their personal experiences using this text to teach first year composition while also voicing their opinion on as

many issues of that text related to a person identity and how discussing those issues impacted their approaches to teaching writing.

Interview participants shared their thoughts about teaching *Just Mercy* that was required of them to teach students. Katherine highlighted her thoughts when asked about certain material used in FYC in question twenty-one (21):

Last semester I had conversations with three other doctoral students about their concerns with the Pirate Read, *Just Mercy* and it kind of made me realize I don't have those concerns. I don't have to worry about bringing my identity into the conversations that are discussed throughout the book. But even though it wasn't a concern for me, it made me a bit more aware.

Jennifer is in agreement with the previous response relating to how this standard text impacts her thought process of her identity in the classroom, she stated "I'm struggling to think about how I would feel if I were think about my identity while teaching the content within *Just Mercy* because it's just situations like that that just never occur to me." As Dana expressed that she constantly thinks about her identity every time she steps in the classroom this was coded as under the institutional context that *Just Mercy* was being taught in. Jennifer also stated, "I wonder if this would change if I were at another university teaching these courses." When asked what institution, the she said an HBCU because she previously graduated from an HBCU institution for her undergraduate education, which examines how conversations of different classroom material would change if the environment of schools would be different than ECU's.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the results of the interview data as they relate to answering my research question. This chapter began to identify how GTAs discussed race and gender throughout their teaching experience as an instructor of FYC. According to the interview data, common themes such as experience, classroom curriculum, and the notion of the ideal instructor all play a role in how the participants value race and gender in their approaches to teaching FYC. There were four (4) participants, who were all female, that stated they embrace their gender as it pertains to teaching, yet two (2) participants consider their race, which both labeled themselves as a race other than white. The two (2) males, who labeled their race as white reported that they distance themselves from race and gender overall as it relates to teaching. In Chapter 5, I will continue discuss the implications that the idea of an ideal instructor, experience, and classroom curriculum have on the value that race and gender hold in a FYC classroom and provide further explanation of the ways aspects of identity can be discussed in GTA training.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

In this concluding chapter, I discuss my analysis and implications of the interview data. I assert that discussions of the ideal instructor, experience, and classroom curriculum are common themes that GTAs think about during their time as writing instructors. I will discuss how conversations surrounding GTA training experience, whether teaching based or personal, may create a much larger discussion around GTAs' identity, thereby making aspects of identity such as race and gender more visible in the Writing Foundations Program. Moreover, awareness of a GTAs' body and identity has the potential to encourage more productive conversations with other GTAs and their students about curriculum materials that address such issues or topics about identity. The interview data suggests that personal experience of a GTA determines whether GTAs value their identity as a writing instructor. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of future research that will further explore the claims made about the identities of GTAs.

Summary of Data

In the interview data, four (4) of the six (6) GTAs interviewed stated they embrace their gender as it pertains to teaching. Only (2) of the six (6) GTAs interviewed consider their race writing instructors. When discussing teaching philosophy, interview participants recalled that many of their principles relate to experiences that have occurred in their past. In regard to referring to pedagogy education or experience four (4) of the six (6) GTAs expressed that they do not rely on pedagogy education as often as they do with personal experience.

Ideal Instructor and Implications

Based on the data presented in Chapter 4, the idea of what an ideal instructor should look like is a key element for a writing instructor. The interview participants shared their feelings toward concerns or possible issues that they may be confronted with in the classroom when it comes to their identity. This data demonstrates that the identity of GTA instructors' impacts how GTAs believe their students view them as instructors and influences their teaching approaches. According to Guidry (2006), race and gender stereotypes and expectations have played a significant role in the way he has been treated by students, colleagues, and university administration. Dana goes on to describe as a GTA her identity is in fact a major component toward her teaching approaches to as it relates to FYC:

I know I look younger to my students so I have to make sure that I look like I know what I'm talking about, and being an African-American female that speaks the way that I do, students probably be like "bruh, she don't know what the hell she's talking about." I think about my identity as a GTA so much because I do not teach in the traditional fashion that is commonly used. I always use music to teach my students rhetorical analysis and I understand that this would be the standard way to learn, like reading out of a textbook.

Dana's response expresses that she sees herself as a much different individual than a traditional instructor of writing, but here she establishes her uniqueness at ECU. Other institutions such as HBCUs where Dana previously attended and schools that are more diverse, find it common to use the concept of music to teach writing, where at ECU it would not be as common depending on the demographic of the institution. In contrast, as a white male Troy stated that he distances himself from his identity as a GTA:

I remove myself from the text, as a white male I know I'm not a part of some of these stories we may see in *Just Mercy*, so in class discussions it never about me, I see myself as more of a facilitator in the classroom. I guess it came from being in graduate school.

And, Troy goes on to state

I think it's important to be very practical. I think as graduate students we are ideologically trying to change our students, on a level of ethics, which has always made me uncomfortable. I'm not here to try to tell you how to think; I'm here to help you think through writing. Students are more than welcome to think and believe whatever they want, but think critically about it.

The implication of these two particular responses demonstrates the privilege that some GTAs have that others do not. From my interpretation, when the second participant reported "I remove myself from the text," he illustrates a level of privilege that white male instructor have the benefit of doing, where others may not have that chance, for example a black woman. As Dana describes, she is constantly thinking about her appearance in the classroom. Troy brought up a key point as he elaborated on the novel *Just Mercy*. Stating that he is a white male and able to remove his identity while covering issues of race; this example proves that GTAs labeled as minorities show value of their identity than White GTAs. As previously mentioned, four of the six GTAs expressed that they do not consider their race as a graduate instructor and all four participants labeled their race as white. However, I question if these same responses would still hold true if the environment changed. At a Predominantly White Institution (PWI), it would seem normal for white instructors to be comfortable with their identity where they wouldn't consider it as often as other races, but if East Carolina University were an HBCU, such as North

Carolina Central University for this study, I wonder how these responses might change depending on the institutional context where GTAs teach. From these responses, I find it necessary to for administrators to host workshops that discuss identity in relation to GTA training to support GTAs that navigate in culturally different spaces. This will help GTAs become more comfortable speaking in spaces that seem difficult to teach in and put GTAs in a position to be more aware of their surroundings, considering their own body in the classroom as well as their students.

Experience and Implications

Although discussions of the ideal instructor come up as GTAs express their opinions toward identity, throughout interview data, participants relied on their experiences as graduate students as well as their previous teaching history. One of the participants noted,

At the community college, I almost got fired for being a lesbian and a feminist. I had a student make an allegation that I was discriminating against him because he was a white, gay conservative, which wasn't the case he just didn't like the grade he received on his annotated bibliography. Even though I proved those allegations wrong, I was still chewed out by my administration and striped of my teaching materials.

Collin recalls his experience in relation to teaching, explaining,

As a writing tutor for many years, as an undergrad and a graduate student I became very aware of the power and the individuality of the writer and help students express their thoughts in their own voice, or to find their own and find confidence in their voice.

I do question how much time is given to talk on these experiences of GTA instructors. In the case of Liz and her experience with students, Liz explained that she believes she has to prove her credential to her students in order for students to understand that she is qualified to be their instructor. Analyzing Collin's experience, which is nothing similar to Liz, it shows that students respond differently to these particular bodies. This is an example of the past experiences both GTAs felt about being a writing instructor, and illustrates the value women instructors have toward their identity and how males might not find their identity impactful at all. Liz went on to state that, "It was the most miserable semester ever." How often are GTAs given time to discuss situations such as Liz's to other GTAs as well as administrators? While this may not be an issue many instructors would like to talk about, how can we create discussions and support GTAs who face mistrust from their students? Given the examples from the ideal instructor, Collin's response to his experience as an instructor illustrates the distance he gives himself from his identity in the classroom. This may not be something that Collin purposely tries to avoid in the classroom, but unconsciously he may not have to worry about issues of his body that instructors of color or females may encounter. As a community, I believe we can work towards bringing more awareness toward GTA identity, creating discussions and strategies during GTA meetings to make sense how identity impacts a writing classroom.

Classroom Curriculum and Implications

As previously stated in chapter 4, *Just Mercy*, was a required text GTAs were assigned for FYC in the fall semester of 2016. The patterns noticed by participants for the classroom curriculum showed that GTAs who labeled their race as white unknowingly distance themselves on topics about race and gender, and one black participant stated that she takes on issue of race

personally. Through discussion of classroom curriculum, I believe this subject matter can be used as a bridge to discuss the material GTAs are asked to teach and the bodies in the classroom are being asked to facilitate conversations on these topics. Collin, Troy, and Katherine each had responses that show how they do not embrace their own race. Collin stated,

Yes, I do think about race, but I don't know how I do think about it. With *Just Mercy* I was more concerned about how the class would react. Their own race may be enacted in the classroom. Not from a teaching standpoint, but personally.

In those kinds of situations I am more of a facilitator of discussions and chapter of a text. More aware of how participant of a discussion become more of a factor than my own race.

Race is a factor in Collin's discussions, but personally, it never seems to impact him as an instructor. Troy explains teaching *Just Mercy*:

I don't ever take anything personally and I think that is super important for a teacher. Cause again, you're a super small part of a student's life, you're not that big of a deal to them. You're just here to help them realize a few things; I'm not here to get involved in these other conversations.

Katherine seemed very aware of issues pertaining to race and *Just Mercy*. In response to question twenty-one that asks participants to explain how race may have an impact on teaching certain material, Katherine stated,

I've had multiple conversations with other instructors who are minorities that teach FYC that have brought up the issue of being a particular race and teaching composition and teaching certain material. I realized that I do not have any of those concerns that minorities would think about. I don't have to worry about

bringing my identity into the classroom, but those conversations I have made me more aware of the fact that issues of race exist for others not labeled as white.

Dana has a different approach to the content in *Just Mercy* than the other three as it relates to her body as well as to her students:

Students are asked to look at ethical issues that they don't understand or are inherently racist and I always take these issues into account and I create days of "how not to piss off your reader" because I realized I was getting upset with my students writing and I couldn't fairly keep taking it personal.

Listening to the GTAs talk about their experience with *Just Mercy*, conversations about the curriculum seemed to bring out different levels of emotions toward their bodies on the line for their students to see, but these would also be a good example to create potential discussion as a gateway to instructor identity for all GTAs. If we can encourage GTAs and administrators to talk about the curriculum as a whole, this can lead to progress toward what GTAs are comfortable talking about with their students and demonstrate how to navigate a writing classroom that provides a safe space for minority instructors to embrace their identity.

For the implications in this section I find myself asking two questions. How often do administrators ask GTAs about their role in the classroom? How can administrators incorporate more time to create these conversations instead of solely focusing on the content that needs to be taught to students? From my experience, GTA meetings are a place where I allow other GTAs to hear my experience as an African-American male instructor to inform them about issues of my identity that may go unheard elsewhere. Regardless whether or not these conversations are valuable for minority instructors or any instructor, conversations how GTAs embody their experiences should be developed in organized meetings where all GTAs and administrators can

be informed, because there are aspects of FYC that require instructors to display their body and identity to their students, which should not go unnoticed.

Further Research

This research presented demonstrates the ways GTAs embrace and distance themselves from their identity as a writing instructor and illustrated that GTAs refer to their pedagogy education within other spaces outside of a writing classroom, and how their personal experience has a significant influence toward certain teaching approaches. This research utilized the framework of graduate teaching experience presented by Reid, Estrem, Belcheir (2012) as well as Restaino (2014) to discuss the identity of graduate students and their responsibilities as writing instructors. While this research begins to illustrate how GTAs engage with their identities and how they discuss their engagement about these features, further research would allow those aspects of identity to become more apparent throughout the experiences GTAs endure with their dual role of being a student and instructor.

Further research would allow me to repeat a similar study with more open-ended questions and a more diverse population of all GTAs, which would include all GTAs, as well as administrators. I would create separate interview questions for each group of participants pertaining to the training and the environment of the institution. This interview would also include questions pertaining to training materials and/or curriculum used in order to do an evaluation of what scholarship is being used and how identity addressed. In a new study, I would model other researchers interview questions to see if my results would be similar or different in order to find a new gap that surrounds the topic of GTA identity. Further research should include

creating discussions around the training of GTAs and incorporating strategies that involve talking about topic surrounding the embodied experience GTAs bring to a graduate program.

Implications

There are several implications of this research that require action by both GTA and administrators of the Writing Foundations Program as well as the University Writing Program:

- GTAs need to be more aware that aspects of their identity may have a significant value as writing instructors. This can be made apparent through GTA training from administrators by integrating discourse surrounding aspects of identity and the materials GTAs are being asked to teach their students. WPAs can provide awareness by allowing experienced faculty members to come speak to GTAs and talk on their own experiences to give advice that pertains to issues of identity.
- Race and gender are concerns for minority and women GTAs. Allowing the GTAs to facilitate these conversations with others while a WPA is in the room taking notes can help to build on future conversations and can limit the belief that issues of gender and race are somehow not part of teaching writing.
- Within the education field scholars study the transitions of students from coursework to their own classrooms. I suggest that Writing Studies scholars should forge connections here to develop effective structures for helping new teachers to connect pedagogical education to their own classroom practices.
- Administrators should be more supportive of GTAs' experience and create more discussions that help GTAs incorporate their past experiences with the standard teaching objectives set forth for composition courses such as FYC. Examples of this can occur

during weekly GTA meetings. One GTA meeting out of a month where the room is open for everyone to speak can create new teaching approaches toward certain material that is required for FYC instructors to teach.

Conclusion

This research suggests that not all GTAs value their race and gender as an instructor, but most are aware that this may be an issue for all GTAs. Discussions of the ideal instructor, experience, and classroom curriculum provide a foundation for how GTAs engage and discuss their identity. GTAs discussed their experience handling aspects of their identity as an instructor and I found that GTAs who consider themselves white tend to “leave their identity out of the classroom,” and those who are consider a minority “embraces identity when stepping into the classroom.” The research demonstrates that departments should consider the demographics of their GTA instructors and the curriculum that is being asked for GTAs to teach and the impact that has toward their teaching approaches. By making GTA identity visible, there is a possibility of providing GTAs with resources about dealing with their identity and how to manage this while facilitating a FYC classroom.

This research aims to fill the gap in the literature surrounding GTA identity in English graduate programs. This research highlights that GTAs do not rely on their pedagogy education as their personal experience has an influence toward their teaching approaches and how they value their identity as a writing instructor. Identity has an important role as it relates to teaching. This aspect of an instructor’s body is most visible by students and this can have a positive or negative affect on an instructor depending on the environment one is teaching in. The goal of this research is to make the identity of GTAs visible for English graduate programs. It may not be

possible to make this topic apparent in all English graduate programs, but by starting conversations about this particular group of instructors can lead to discourse surrounding similar issues. I believe the next step of this research is to find effective techniques that incorporates an awareness in the community of English departments that identity and embodiment is an important aspect in teaching writing. Therefore, if administrators from the Writing Foundations and University Writing Program help guide GTAs to value their identity through professional development training there is the potential to build on this topic and expand on the experiences GTA encounter during their time as a student and instructor.

References

- Alexander S. A. J. (2003). Walking on Thin Ice: The Illegitimacy of Race and Racial Issues in the Classroom. In Freedman, D. P., & Stoddard Holmes, M. (Ed.), *Teacher's Body: Embodiment, Authority, and Identity in the Academy* (pp. 105-119). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Bennett J. (2012). White privilege: A history of the concept (Unpublished master's thesis). Georgia State University, Atlanta.
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical Race Theory: An introduction*. New York: New York University Press.
- Downs, D., & Wardle, E. (2007). Teaching About Writing, Righting Misconceptions: (Re)envisioning "First-Year Composition" as "Introduction to Writing Studies". *College Composition and Communication*, 58(4), 552-584.
- Guidry J. (2006). Can a Brotha Get a Break? Teaching on a Majority White Research University Campus. In Christine A. Stanley (Ed.), *Faculty of Color: Teaching in Predominantly White Colleges and Universities*, (pp. 166-175). Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Company, Inc.
- Jacobsohn, W. (2001). The Real Scandal in Higher Education. In E. E. Schell and P. L. Stock (Ed.), *Moving a Mountain: Transforming the Role of Contingent Faculty in Composition Studies and Higher Education*. (pp. 159-84). Urbana, IL: NCTE.
- Kitzhaber, Albert R. 1915- (Albert Raymond). (1963). *Themes, Theories, and Therapy: Teaching of Writing in College*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Marting, J. (1987). "A Retrospective on Training Teaching Assistants." *WPA 11.1-2*. 35-44.
- Matsuda, M. J., & Mazal Holocaust Collection. (1993). *Words That Wound: Critical Race Theory, Assaultive Speech, and the First Amendment*. Boulder, Colo: Westview Press.
- Neeley, S. D., (2000). Only Connect . . .?: Graduate Instructors Choosing the Margin. In T. L. Good and L. B. Warshauer (Ed.), *In Our Own Voice: Graduate Students Teach Writing*. 19-27. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Pytlik B. P., (2002). How Graduate Students Were Prepared to Teach Writing—1850-1970. In B. P. Pytlik & S. Liggett (Ed.), *Preparing College Teachers of Writing: Histories, Theories, Programs, Practices* (pp. 3-17). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

- Rakow, L. F. (1991). Gender and Race in the Classroom: Teaching Way Out of Line. *Feminist Teacher*, 6(1), 10-13.
- Reid, E. S., Estrem, H., & Belcheir, M. (2012). The Effects of Writing Pedagogy Education on Graduate Teaching Assistants' Approaches to Teaching Composition. *Writing Program Administration*, 36(1), 32.
- Restaino, J. (2012). *First Semester : Graduate Students, Teaching Writing, and the Challenge of Middle Ground*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Salmon J. U. (1994). Teaching-Racially and Culturally Diverse Environments. In B. J. Frye (Ed.), *Teaching in College: A Resource for College Teachers* (3rd ed.) (pp. 55-77). Cleveland, OH: Info-Tec.
- Solorzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Story Telling as an Analytical Framework for Education. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 23-44.
- Tate, G., Rupiper Taggart, A., 1973, & Schick, K., 1964. (2014). *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Turner, C. S. V., & Myers, S. L. (2000). *Faculty of Color in Academe: Bittersweet Success*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Weiser I. (2002). When Teaching Assistants Teach Teaching Assistants to Teach: A Historical View of a Teacher Preparation Program. In B. P. Pytlik & S. Liggett (Ed.), *Preparing College Teachers of Writing: Histories, Theories, Programs, Practices* (pp. 40-50). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Wilhoit S. (2002). Recent Trends in TA Instruction: A Bibliographic Essay. In B. P. Pytlik & S. Liggett (Ed.), *Preparing College Teachers of Writing: Histories, Theories, Programs, Practices* (pp. 17-28). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Wilson, R. C., 1920, & Gaff, J. G. (1975). *College Professors and Their Impact on Students*. New York: Wiley.
- Yancey K. B. (2002). The Professionalization of TA Development Programs: A Heuristic for Curriculum Design. In B. P. Pytlik & S. Liggett (Ed.), *Preparing College Teachers of Writing: Histories, Theories, Programs, Practices* (pp. 63-75). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. (**Question 1** is the Informed Consent check-box.)
2. (**Question 2** provides an option of a Code Name.)
- 3-9: **Questions 3—9** ask for: gender, race, age, program status (e.g., first year), previous semesters teaching writing, previous teaching experience, and pedagogy courses taken.
- Questions 10—18** ask about teacher experience at the university level.
10. Is there a particular teaching pedagogy that may would identify yourself with?
11. What is your thought-process as you begin to prepare an ENGL 1100 syllabus? (Secondary: Are there any other issues or goals you consider?)
12. What is your thought-process as you prepare to teach a FYC class? (Secondary: Are there any other issues or goals you consider?)
13. Describe a difficult or surprising situation you encountered recently related to teaching writing, either in class or regarding a writing student. What was difficult or surprising about it?
14. How do you respond, to situations like this? (If no situation, skip)
15. What do you see as key principles for your teaching of writing? (In other words, what do you think is important for you to do as a writing instructor? What do you always try to do or not do?)
16. Could you say where those principles come from, or are related to? (Were they from something you read or learned, something you heard of or saw someone doing, some experience you had?)
17. Are there any other ways that the principles you mentioned earlier, or other principles, come into play as you plan classes or solve problems?

18. On a scale of 1-5—with 1 being "not much at all" and 5 being "quite a lot"—how often do you find yourself referring back to your teaching philosophy when you are involved in the following activities:

- Planning your syllabus
- Teaching your session
- Responding to student writing
- Problem-solving as a teacher

Questions 19—23 ask about the identity of graduate teaching assistants

19. On the topic of classroom teaching: can you please explain 1-2 things about classroom teaching that you are most concerned or anxious about? (Has your identity ever

20. How often do you consider your race as a graduate teaching instructor, or as a writing instructor in general?

21. Is your race something you think about as you prepare to teach certain material to your students? (Does this occur while you are teaching and are you aware of this?)

22. Has your gender ever made you change your teaching style in or out of the classroom? (Meaning, do you find your hiding or changing your personality?)

23. Do you have other comments about or reflections on your recent teaching or teacher-preparation that you'd like to add to this interview?

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

7/11/17, 1:19 PM



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office
4N-70 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office [252-744-2914](tel:252-744-2914) · Fax [252-744-2284](tel:252-744-2284) · www.ecu.edu/irb

Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: [Sterling James](#)
CC: [Nicole Caswell](#)
Date: 2/17/2017
Re: [UMCIRB 17-000111](#)
First Year Composition: Variations of Teaching Styles

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 2/16/2017 to 2/15/2018. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category #6, 7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The Investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).

The approval includes the following items:

Name	Description
First Year Composition: Variations of Teaching Styles	Study Protocol or Grant Application
GTA Interview Questions	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Revised IRB Consent Form	Consent Forms

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

APPENDIX C: IRB STATEMENT

This study is IRB approved and you are being invited to take part in this research because you are a doctoral student in the English Department's graduate program that has experience teaching composition. The amount of time it will take you to complete this interview is approximately one hour. If you agree to take part in this interview, you will be asked questions that relate to your teaching philosophy, race, gender, and your preparation to teaching first year composition. The interview will be audio/video recorded and if you choose not to be recorded, please express this to the research team. You do not have to take part in this research, and you can stop at any time. If you have questions about your rights when taking part in this research, call the Office of Research Integrity & Compliance (ORIC) at phone number 252-744-2914.