

- Welcome back to In My Shoes, a podcast about different perspectives on shared experiences across the University of Michigan campus. My name is Rebecca Fantone, the host of this podcast. Today, we're switching it up again where you'll hear from the producers of the podcast about their thoughts and feelings on code-switching and how that has changed during the process of producing this series. Let's go around and introduce ourselves.

- My name is Field and I'm a graduate student in the Department of Chemistry at the University of Michigan.

- Hello, I'm Ayomide. I'm a senior studying biomolecular sciences at the University of Michigan and I'm a cisgendered Nigerian-American woman.

- I am Juniar and I am a PhD candidate in the applied physics program at the University of Michigan.

- My name is Danielle and I am a chemistry PhD student at the University of Michigan.

- Hi, my name is Rebecca. You probably know me as the voice who starts off all these episodes. I'm also a graduate student here at the University of Michigan in the chemistry program. My pronouns are she, her, hers. And I unexpectedly was chosen to be the voice of this podcast to start us off all the time, so it's nice to finally really meet you.

- Hi, I'm Ginger Foltz. I'm a faculty member in the Chemistry Department. I'm a cis white female. I was a first-generation college student and the youngest of five children.

- Now, I guess we can head into the discussion part. I won't lie, I was not here when this team was formed and when this topic was chosen, so I wanted to start off with, why did we choose code-switching as our topic for the series?

- Yeah, so I think it started with that, actually Ayomide and I were sort of on the original team exploring code-switching as a possible option for this podcast. And I think we both sort of thought that it was a pretty interesting and complex and pretty nuanced topic that I think a lot of underrepresented people on the UM campus experience that we thought it could be useful to get some different perspectives on in terms of sort of sharing how different people might experience code-switching across the UM campus community.

- I remember when we were listing topics on the whiteboard and honestly, I think the most impactful or salient experience I've had at Michigan is having to code-switch 'cause I came from a very tight-knit Nigerian community and I came to Michigan and it was like, okay, now you're a Black woman, and now I have to consider what it means to be a Black woman in predominantly white spaces. I remember that was the reason we had put up the topic on our whiteboard.

- Going back to that whiteboard idea, I remember looking at the whiteboard at all the lists of topics and there was so many good ones to choose from. And when people in the group started talking about their experiences with code-switching, I became really interested in this topic. I didn't know much about it before starting this podcast. That kind of makes sense, as a cisgender white woman, I don't have to code-switch as much as other groups might have. I was really interested in learning about this topic a bit more and diving deep into the

complexities of code-switching, especially with our students and faculty, staff members of the University of Michigan.

- All right, so before this show, I admit, I had a vague idea of what code-switching was, but I found when listening, especially to the Monica and Priya episode and they explained what code-switching is and their own experiences in code-switching, that was when I truly learned that there are different types of code-switching, especially in regards to visible and invisible identities. I was wondering what other people thought about that.

- One thing I should have said at the beginning of when we were introducing ourselves, I should have mentioned that I am a non-native English speaker, because I think that's one of the main identity that I think is relevant to this conversation. My first introduction to code-switching was in the context of social cultural interactions, and especially in a white space, but as we were getting ready to start the designing, for example, questions for the podcast with the guests, I started diving into some of the literature about code-switching, even the origin of code-switching. And I remember even when we were picking the topic that we wanted to cover, we had this, I brought up in one of the meetings about what I found. For example, a lot of people, the main studies about code-switching was from the point of view of language. A little bit of background with code-switching, and I think it's gonna be a good preface for this conversation, is that code-switching, actually the term was coined by this social linguist from Norway. Her name is, I'm gonna butcher her name, Einar Haugen. And she coined the term around 1954, and eventually, African-American in the U.S. around the '70s started looking at code-switching from the point of view of intercultural communications. At the end of the day, code-switching is many a thing of language, but when you think about the other social cultural contexts in which people talk and communicate with one another, then it becomes a more complex topic that is not solely on language. For example, taking into consideration race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and even generation, and how different groups of people interact with each other, each one of these categories exerts some type of influence on the type of language that is used and also the type of pattern in interactions. Then you start talking, when African-Americans start applying that concept in the context of intercultural relations, then you start questioning things and you start hearing things about white space. And then there is this thing of now in addition to understanding when people code-switch, there is also the question of why people code-switch. At the end of the day, there is this exchange, especially in spaces where the hierarchy or the dominant identity in these spaces is whiteness, is your ability to buy into those standards as a way of either fitting in, but also surviving and thriving in those spaces. I am rambling a little bit, so I'm gonna pass on to the next person if they wanna add something.

- Yeah, so I guess I can build on what Juniar just talked about. Whenever I first learned about code-switching was in the context of academic writing and how we sort of expect students to match their writing style to fit with the academy, whenever they're taking English courses. Within this context, I sort of learned about what code-switching was and then how it really did apply, I guess more broadly, to other people's actual experiences in daily life and how that type of code-switching is a day-to-day thing for a lot of people from underrepresented groups who have to sort of fit into this white culture or white society that is proposed to be the norm society, especially in academic spaces. Whenever I was learning about this, or first heard the term code-switching and learned

about it, it made me reflect on my own identity as a gay man and how, in a sense, what I do whenever I'm in professional spaces is act straight or act straight so that I can try to fit into these white, professional, straight spaces. And realizing that that is a type of code-switching, I think, was really valuable for me because I could sort of have a name to understand why I wasn't necessarily comfortable in certain spaces because I wasn't really able to be who I was. And then, sort of thinking about my discomfort that I've experienced in a number of sort of professional spaces where it's not necessarily okay to be gay or to sound gay or to act gay or to, I don't know, talk about drag race, or things that you like to watch that are associated with gay culture, be uncomfortable in those spaces. I think I still am uncomfortable to a degree talking about these things even right now. And just sort of being able to know the cause of that comfort and then to think about how a lot of people experience code-switching to a much higher degree than I do and how that might influence how they are interacting on a day-to-day level with people in similar spaces, I think, has been really useful for developing understanding about sort of, I don't know, the different experiences that people are going through on campus on a day-to-day basis.

- You bringing up the levels of code-switching reminds me of the debate we've had for most of this podcast of what should we consider code-switching, which form should we prioritize capturing, and I think that was a really valuable experience because as Juniar mentioned, the use in America really started with African-Americans noting that they were in predominantly white spaces and were having to change their personalities, change the way they speak, change their mannerisms, and stuff like that. That's how I've always, that's always been my definition of code-switching. And so, realizing that it is almost like a spectrum, I think, was a really valuable experience 'cause I guess it kind of opened up the conversation for more people to be included for us to realize that it actually impacts all of us, even if it is to varying degrees.

- I guess what, coming back to that, is why we had, one of our things was like, why do we need to name what code-switching is? Why do we need to understand what it is? And I think early on, when we started our recordings and everything, it was like, I really felt like I didn't know and I also felt like I wasn't someone who even had something to say about code-switching. And I think two things happened for myself. One, I recognized when code-switching happened for me, which happens in a gendered way. But then, I think tapping into that really helped me to understand better how code-switching might happen for other people. Not that I can fully step into their shoes, but you can begin to have, not empathy, but start to understand what it might be like if I've gotta do this one or two times a week or whatever it is, what's it like to do this all the time? And start to think about what that would be like.

- Yeah, I think that's a really important point to make is, I realize the title of our podcast is In My Shoes, but I think it's really important to emphasize that you can't really truly step into someone else's shoes and know how they experience things or how they experience code-switching. Yeah, so just to echo what Ginger was saying, I think it's really important to know that true empathy is hard to reach. And even if you are able to be made empathetic by naming and understanding code-switching, I think it's important to emphasize that empathy isn't action and that it's more understanding and developing an understanding so that you can take action and know that action needs to be taken. But that just feeling that empathy itself is a first step in a process.

- I just wanna say, I feel like a lot of people like to make fun of how in this day and age, we always have to have a label for something, but there truly is so much power in naming something, whether an experience, a feeling, an identity. And I just wanna, I just felt like that sentiment that I have really encompasses the power that is identifying these experiences and then being able to use them to empathize and act on it.

- I wanna bring up a question that Paula posed during the recording between her and Taylor. She professes by saying that I wanna be the devil advocate in saying, what if code-switching is just part of the professional culture of some of these spaces? And I can speak from my own personal experience. As an outsider coming to the U.S., English is not my first language. A lot of the spaces that I entered, especially in the context of academia, I just saw some of those behaviors that everyone was also leading to were just that, it's the professionalism in those spaces. And the more you look at what is aligned, what is considered to be professionalism, and the degree in which people who don't come into those spaces with these skills, or the skills that are closest to these, most of them are actually unspoken rule of those spaces. Then, it started to become a whole different thing that it's very by design that the things that we consider to be professional are very much close to whiteness. I'm trying to be coy here, but...

- I was thinking about that, Junior, a lot that, especially lately, that part of what it seems like we're meant to be doing on campus is to help everyone learn how to be professional in society or whatever job or thing they're gonna go do afterwards. But it really does seem like professional is a white construct, and in that sense. And so, now I think a lot before I even use that word to talk to somebody because what is behind, that's a really loaded thing to tell someone that they need to behave professionally. And also, I was thinking about what you just said, which is that there's a lot of unspoken rules around being professional that I think come across.

- And the constant fear that if I let it slip, if one time, one incident, I let the mask fall off, the cost of it all, what I might lose. Yeah, and I think that added this layer of mental costs too that Monica and Priya talks about in the episode.

- Yeah, it definitely came up a lot in their episode, this sort of idea, because in there, it was like, there's this layer of gender. If you act emotional or you respond in a certain way, and it doesn't matter if the person before you behaved badly, if you respond in an emotional way, then it's tied automatically to your identity. And Monica talked about that as either being a woman or a Black woman even worse from her perspective that if you respond that way, then that's where it leads you. And so, you have to, even if it's natural and right for you to feel that way and to respond that way in that space, you feel that you can't.

- And Junior, I wanted to speak more to how you mentioned the fear of putting that mask down 'cause currently, I'm in the process of writing my med school applications. And at the same time, I wanted to begin my lock journey. And you know I have always loved your locks. Since the first day I saw them, I was like, okay, I'm eventually gonna do that to my hair. And so, as I was considering doing research and beginning the process, I was like, when I sit down for interviews, they're gonna see these locks before they see my GPA or whatever extracurricular activities I participated in and all of those things, and it was like, that was such a, I don't know if the word is a visceral experience where I was like, if

I decide to lock my hair, it could impact my ability to get into med school. And yeah, that just blew me, but-

- And it's 2021. You would think with all the things that are taking place about around like Black women's specifically natural hair, you would think these things wouldn't be a problem, but it's very much a problem. The amount of time that my mom had told me that having locks gonna prevent me from getting a PhD, not the PhD, getting a job, is absurd. Back home in Haiti, a big part of you preparing for the professional world is to get a perm. Yeah, it's absurd, but it's a reality, it's a reality.

- I love that you mentioned how absurd it seems in 2021, but I think the presence of hair discrimination and even what happened in the Capitol a few weeks ago had me really thinking that we kind of think of white supremacy as something that's enacted by certain individuals and a certain crop, a certain part of the crop of people, but really the whole country was built and founded and operates by white supremacy, which is what even makes code-switching necessary for anybody who's basically not straight, cis, white male, basically. And so, I think going forward in our conversation, that's really something to think about. It underlies every single aspect of America. It just manifests in different ways every single day, every moment, every year. And that's why it continues. Things continue to happen because it's just re-manifesting 'cause it's literally at the foundation of our country.

- I am so glad that you brought this up because I was reading an article of this Black woman talking about her experience with code-switching, and a good chunk of that article, she talks about how within the Black community very often, when Black people code-switch, they are viewed as sell out, they are selling out, they are doing all of that. But she kept saying, yes, this is not just a thing with fitting in, but it's also a thing of surviving. And this article had me thinking about the ways in which Black people entering, and even being able to navigate in and climb up the ladders of this professionalism thing, and how we ourselves can become agent of white supremacy in very weird way by even policing all the Black people who come into the field under the guise of showing them the rule of how things are done here. We can easily become agent of white supremacy irregardless of skin color, to be honest.

- Yeah, that definitely came up when Paula and Taylor, in their conversation. I think it was Paula who said, it's racism, or it's a product of racism that you have to, that people will have to code-switch and just to operate within that system. And it could be about comfort or discomfort, but it's even in certain situations about survival. And I think that's coming back to the differences in terms of someone's identity, the visible and invisible identity and the complexity there, which is that, do I do this because I feel uncomfortable or more that I am worried or feel like I have to make other people feel comfortable or do I do it because I know that I will not either succeed in advancing in whatever I'm trying to do or even that it can be a life-threatening sort of situation, and I think that's where that kind of spectrum comes back in that I think all of us in this, all of the producer's experience podcasts, but the degree to which we're at risk when we don't code-switch or maybe even the frequency with which, or the context in which we have to code-switch vary based on those visible and invisible identities.

- This brings up actually a good point that I wanted to put in. There was always a question, especially when going back to the invisible and visible identities of is code-switching a choice? And I think, especially

in my opinion, and I hope other people agree with this, but I don't, if you feel like that your safety is at risk or if you're not going to succeed, or when there's some kind of danger to your professional life, your career, personal life, anything like that, if there is some kind of risk involved if you were not to code-switch in a situation, then is that even a choice? It isn't. And so, I always thought, listening to, especially to Sam and Dezi's episode of how they discuss their code-switching, and I think this is maybe something with more experience they will realize, but I know in my personal experience that when I've had to code-switch, because similar to Field, where I didn't feel safe to be my open queer self, and I had to act more heteronormative, I couldn't talk about specific interests or even people I might be interested in dating or seeing, even casual conversations, not just in professional situations. That's not a choice I want, that's not a choice. I am being forced to make this decision of acting or talking about certain things. And I just wanted to really highlight that because I think sometimes, especially white people who are becoming agents of white supremacy, they convince themselves that what we do is a choice, but when there is a risk to your safety or your career or anything like that, then it isn't a choice.

- I would like to argue the opposite to an extent.

- Okay.

- I think, I believe ultimately, and I don't know if this might just be semantics, I think it ultimately is a choice. I kind of, I decide. It happens subconsciously now when I switch tones or gestures and stuff. But I think that it is essentially a choice, but it's one that's kind of forced, which kind of goes back to when Juniar mentioned the idea of sell-outs. It's like, anybody, personally, I can decide to get locks, all the tattoos and piercings I actually desire, dress the way I want, and it will make everything in my life difficult. That's a choice. I can also decide to refrain from the tattoos and piercings I actually want, dressing how I actually would like to express myself, and it will make everything easier. I think that it is a choice. I just think it's unfortunate that choosing to express ourselves has very adverse consequences depending on our identity. Yeah.

- Thank you for listening to In My Shoes, a podcast about different perspectives on shared experiences across the University of Michigan campus. In My Shoes was produced with the support from the University of Michigan Center for Academic Innovation. This episode was edited by Ellie Dactor. Find us on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, or SoundCloud. For updates on the most recent episodes, follow us on Twitter @inmyshoes.