- Welcome back to In My Shoes, a podcast about different perspectives on shared experiences across the University of Michigan campus. My name is Rebecca, the host of this podcast. In this episode, we'll continue to hear more from the producers about their experiences with code-switching and the underlying forces behind it. So tune in, follow along, and thank you for joining us. Everyone will introduce themselves again. And then we would like to dedicate this episode to Mel, one of our producers who have been instrumental in shaping the group's work throughout this series. Unfortunately, she was unable to join us during the recording of these episodes, and so, well, this one is for you, Mel. With that, here's our show.

- My name is Field, and I'm a graduate student in the department of chemistry at the University of Michigan.

- Hello, I am Ayomide, I'm a senior studying biomolecular sciences at the University of Michigan, and I'm a cis-gendered 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 of these episodes. I'm also a graduate student here at the University of Michigan, in the chemistry program.

- Hi, I'm Ginger Shultz, 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.

- So something I've been thinking about since this convo started was the fact that, so I'm Nigerian-American and I'm a black woman, so how I present myself in African-American spaces is different from how I present myself in Nigerian spaces, but even in Nigerian spaces, I'm naturally playing more upon the Nigerian aspects of who I am, you know, in African-American spaces, I'm, you know, playing more upon, like, the common existence of being black in America, and so this might be too at the real, but I'm kinda thinking, like, in what spaces do I show up as just, quote-unquote, myself? 'Cause I find that no matter what environment I, I'm in, I'm ultimately trying maybe not to assimilate, but trying to become part of the group, and I think that's like a natural human response. I don't know if that ties into intersectionality, like if I was in a group for just women, I would be playing upon, you know, those aspects of my identity more even though I think that I usually operate from a more, like, masculine perspective. But, so yeah, that's something I think about.

- That's something else I've been sort of thinking about, is like when are we actually ourselves? Because I don't know, like, I spend so much of my time working. So, so if I have, like if I code-switched in a specific way at work, then if I'm spending the majority of my time working, am I actually, like, my work self for the majority of my life? If I'm code-switching to pretend to be straight, does that make me straight, like, I don't know. But, like, fundamentally, I know that that's not true because I, that's not who I actually feel like I am. But this has been, like, something that's been on my mind a lot, I think, is, like, if we're code-switching in various situations, I think it's hard to sort of pin down which part of us is actually us, which is why I think it's sort of, I

think, a bit more complicated, like I think each of the ways that we code-switch are a part of who we are because, 'cause that is who we are, like, in those different spaces. And I think that sort of connects to kind of an important aspect of code-switching, which is that it really is just a human experience that we all do to different degrees whenever we're going into different spaces, and I think it's clear that different people code-switch a lot more or a lot less depending on their identities and, and whether or not they feel safe to express themselves or feel like they're able to express themselves in different places. But I do think it's, it's an interesting point to be made that it really is just fundamentally a human experience.

- This is kind of playing off of what you said, Field, and not necessarily having to do with intersectionality 'cause I don't have an intersectional experience, but I was thinking about what it means to be myself as well 'cause I think that's ultimately what, what's at the heart of all of this, it seems. And, you know, and that came up in every single conversation that we recorded. And in terms of being in spaces on campus at the University of Michigan, like I know that when I go into a classroom, like when I'm teaching in a classroom, and, and this actually comes back to why do we need to understand and name code-switching, like, I totally don't think I understood code-switching before we began this, and now I recognize when I do it, right, and I think both Monica and Priya said that after they started teaching their class on code-switching, they noticed more when they would do it, and they were more aware of it or the stresses that they felt. And, you know, when I started teaching, that was when I think I reflected on this a lot, were my gender. It was like a gendered space where it mattered because it, you know, as a woman teaching chemistry, there were people in the room who would not, you know, recognize or think about my authority, or someone who could teach chemistry, right, and so I was always adjusting things to try to appear as more of an authority. And, but over time, that became so tiring that I think my self just kind of slipped out. And now I'm just myself when I teach, you know, mostly, I mean, I still, you know, do certain things, but it's, it's like I just got too tired to keep it up. And I feel like I'm a better teacher for that instead of, because I was expanding all this energy trying to be something I wasn't, and, you know, I didn't allow that to happen, and so it's, it is natural, and I think we do it, but it's a, it's a shame, right, when, that, that we can't, and, you know, I guess there, you know, that's part of the cost. The cost is for ourselves in terms of our stress, and that's the cost we've talk about, talked about, but the cost is for everyone else too that we interact with, if, you know, they don't, they don't really get to interact with you, they don't get the value of who you are.

- I love that you mentioned being able to be a better teacher 'cause you were able to be yourself, and that reminds me of our conversation on professionalism, and we think about, like, a lot of companies nowadays are trying to diversify their board of directors, but, like, it won't matter if you have people with different identities there if the culture is still to present yourself as close to the white man as you can. And so I think that's another reason why it's really important to address code-switching and, like, in every environment, especially professional environments, because it is very valuable when you allow people to show up as themselves because when they are doing that, they're bringing to the table their unique experiences, not being tempered, you know, by a societal standard, but, so yeah, I think that's really important.

- Going back to this idea of professionalism and code-switching, this is something I've been thinking about now that we're in this very virtual

world and professionalism has definitely changed being on Zoom, where, you know, if there's pets in the background or if there's something going on, it's not seen as totally unprofessional because life is going on around us. And so I've been thinking, you know, like, after, like, hopefully, you know, soon we can start going back to the workplace and stuff, if these norms of professionalism are gonna change at all or if they're going to stay the same and go revert to how they were before. 'Cause I know for, like, some of my classes, like, it's okay if you don't have your camera on because they recognize that you might not have, you know, an okay home environment that you want to share with people, and so they're recognizing that, like, these norms of, like, attendance and that you have to be present in class as interacting has changed in this virtual environment. So I've just been thinking about that, like, will code-switching with regards to professionalism, will it stay the same and go back to its previous state after the pandemic? Or will it somehow adapt? And if it adapts, like, in which ways is it going to adapt? So something I've just been thinking about, thinking to the future, at the rest of professionalism, yeah. I don't have an answer, I have no idea.

- Code-switching really is about power, right? It's about you have to go into a room somehow and make the person in power feel comfortable at the expense of yourself.

- I think the crazy thing about this power dynamic, though, is that the people in power don't recognize their power. It's always people who do not have the power that are constantly changing who they are and presenting themselves to, I guess show the people in power that, you know, I'm like you, I can, you know, mesh with your culture, even though it's not who they are, it's not their true, authentic selves, but being someone, like, in that power, like as a white person, you know, I didn't think about how people around me might be changing as, like, who they're presenting themselves as around me until we started diving into this code-switching topic. And so I'm just thinking about, like, people who are not the majority are constantly changing who they are to please the majority, and the majority doesn't even recognize it, they don't recognize that it's an issue. And so how can we, I guess, change the system, or even begin to address the system when the majority has no idea what's going on? That's where I'm at right now.

- I would say that, you know, I think people in power knows they have power 'cause when you threaten to take it from them, they freak out, so they know.

- Well, I think they have power, and I think they recognize their power. I just don't think they recognize, like, these nuances that keep them in power, you know, like, they recognize, like I have this label, I have the status, I have, you know, this financial stability, that sort of thing. But recognizing, like, what led them to that place and what keeps them in that role. That's what I think people don't recognize who are in power.

- I think I understand what Danielle is saying because, like, from the moment that I got to campus, I have thought about being black every single day, several times a day. I know for sure my white, like, counterparts are not thinking about being white as they go to class and as they do anything. And I think that's what Danielle's referring to, like, they don't think about it, but I agree with you, Juniar, that they know they have power, I think of that ability to sit in oblivion, I think that really is power, like, to not have to think about, you know, think about race and think about disparities, et cetera, I think that is power,

so that's something I think there is a sort of sense of, there is a sort of awareness of that power.

- Mhmm. I agree.

- I guess a better way to word, word it would be, like, an awareness of privilege but not knowing exactly where that privilege comes from, just recognizing that you have it, whereas minorities recognize, like, all the little nuances because every single thing is based on those little nuances to them versus for the powerful and the majority, it's just a way of life, and that's how it's always been.

- Wonder, this is, this might be provocative, but, or not. I wonder if, you know, this, this then has something to do with why, you know, women, there's a movement for, you know, women are always, I guess the feminist movement has not all, has not served all women well, right, because white women, you know, are, are, kind of have tunnel vision on the issues of gender and they don't realize, I guess this now comes back to intersectionality, you know, that, that if they don't, if, if they're not advocating for all women, then, then, you know, they're not doing what they need to do, but because they sit in their privilege of being a white person, they can't recognize, you know, other things that are going on.

- And not just being a white person, but being a white cis woman. So much of womanhood is defined by the sex that you are assigned at at birth and that experience when it, womanhood is so much more than that.

- Mhmm.

- And it's not even just, you know, with white people, even, like, the Black Lives Matter movement was started by queer black women, and yet,

- Thank you!

- for sure, black men's issues are always at the forefront. But I think that's, I dunno, in a sociology class, they talked about that's just, like, the nature of movements, is that the majority, always, their needs and their issues and wants always get, gets pushed to the front, which is why I think black women are really the answer because we, we haven't been seeing the intersectionality and the levels to it from the beginning, and I think, as black women, we understand that everyone's liberation is tied, like, there is no just liberate black women or just liberate black men or just liberate queer people, like, it's literally, it's all tied, it's all one.

- Yes.

- So yeah.

- We, the, I, I was just realizing that the audience of the podcast won't realize that everybody in the room is just, like, going heck yeah, nodding their head to that.

- We should have low-deal clapping, and, and.

- That's what I was gonna say, I was like, in case my mic didn't pick up, I was silent clapping to Ayomide right there.

- It is so true though.

- Juniar, do you remember when you and Mel and I, we were sitting in the new biology building and having a conversation, we were trying to brainstorm, you know, and talk about our idea, and every time one of us said the word white, you know, we would almost, like, giggle because, right, like, and, first of all, like, we're, you know, you know, are other people gonna hear us talk about being white? You know, and things like that, like how, and now I, I will say white and talk about being white in front of lots of other people, and so being able to name that, even about myself or others, like, and then in our space where we knew that was what we were trying to do has really helped me to be able to say the word white in other places.

- I am not quite there yet 'cause even during this recording, I have this issue, do I say it, or should I not, or just doing a head nod so we know what I just said, but yeah, I am not quite there yet.

- It's definitely easier for me to say white than it is for me to say black.

- Yeah, if I'm in a room-

- Expand on that! Expand on that!

- Like, if I'm in a room and I wanna talk about something, like the color of a shirt that's black, but there is a black person in the room, I'll think of another way to describe that because that's calling it out, right, like, and I realize that I do that, maybe that's a form of code-switching, you know, but I, because I don't, maybe it's for my own comfort, I feel uncomfortable saying the word black with, when black people are in the room, in any context.

- I notice that a lot in my classes. Okay, sorry. Okay, I'm in, I've, I've done several creative writing classes, and I think, so I understand Juniar not wanting to say white and I understand Ginger not wanting to say black, and I think, for me, I say both very comfortably 'cause I, I already have developed an attitude of I'm here to make people uncomfortable. That's what I write my poetry about, it's what my writing is always about, and it's like, I think it's, it's what I'm about, like, forcing questions and making people uncomfortable. And so I've always noticed in my writing classes, I'll, you know, I'll, I'll, what's it called, I'll read out my poem and then people have to critique it, and it's about the black experience, and people are just like, yeah, just, they'll say some people have to go through this and it's unfortunate that, but, but they will not say black, it makes them uncomfortable, and I think you were completely right, Ginger, like, that we don't want to call out what's happening, it's because if you acknowledge that there is this different experience for black people, you're acknowledging that you're a part of the system that's perpetuating it also. And people don't want to do that. And in the same way-

- And then the next thing, what do you do with that, acknowledge that, like.

- Exactly, 'cause if you acknowledge it, then you have to, it's a call to action at the same time because you can't, you know, if you're not doing anything against it, you're a part of it. So when you acknowledge it, it's you have to do something about it, but people don't want to, so they don't want to acknowledge it either.

- Oh my God, with what you say, with what you say, Ginger, I was talking to one of my good friends, she's a Jamaican woman who is currently living in Canada. And we're having this discussion about how basically blackness as an identity is almost like they don't know what to do with it in Canada. She was telling me black people in Canada are called African-American while they are in Canada.

- Wow.

- That is crazy! The same thing you just described, she said, she went to this workshop she was leading, and towards the end of it, she was, like, going around and, and mingling, and then she was talking to some white, white people and they were pointing out the other black person who was at that conference, and they couldn't say, "This black person over there." They couldn't say it.

- That's amazing, in Canada, that they say, like, that just blows me away, but I, like, I've, I kind of feel that because the more that I try to say black, then when I think it, I see it with a capital B in my mind, and to differentiate it because, because I see it on Twitter or I see it other places, and, and that's where, like, I don't know if it's like respect to that identity, to have that capital letter on it, right, and I started trying to think of it that way, but also, like, I think at the bottom of it is absolutely your discomfort with, like, or you're in it, or I guess our avoidance of making anything uncomfortable is totally a thing. And then, so part of that is I don't wanna call somebody the wrong thing, you know, like I don't want to call somebody African-American if they're from Nigeria, right, I wanna, I wanna, like, you know, so, so there's a little bit of that, but that's, that comes back to, well, that's on me to make sure I know what the right, you know, and, and, like, it's not for the other person to tell me what I should call them. I need to, I need to educate myself and think about that.

- I think, to be honest, when I say white, I don't think about a single white person, I, I think of it as, like, the structure, what whiteness is, I think about it, how it affects people, even people in countries like Haiti who have no concept of what whiteness is but they still view it as a standard, that's what I mean when I say white people. I don't think of, like, a singular white person, to be honest, so.

- That's interesting.

- Juniar, I love that you mentioned white being a standard in Haiti 'cause it's the same thing in Nigeria. And it's like-

- We have no idea what, like, what, what is that experience, we have no idea, but it is the standard.

- Right. Yeah.

- It is a standard. I remember when I was in, in school in Haiti, 'cause Haiti has two official languages, Creole and French, but the majority of the population speaks Creole because of, like, education and access to education, so the educated speak French and a lot of the operating, like, pole, politics, and things like that are in French. I attended a private school run by nuns and I remember reaching, when I graduated from primary school to secondary school, they stopped teaching Creole as a language. And then they will have this thing where you get punished for, like, speaking in Creole during, like, the working hours of the school. And then they will say things like if you get caught speaking Creole, they

will tell you to express yourself as if like expressing yourself in, in Creole, it's not like you expressing yourself, it was just, like, very absurd. And then when you think of it in the context of, like, the history of Haiti, how we essentially were, like, not the white people, you know, like free, and then whiteness become this standard, it's, it's, it's a little bit tied and ironic, really, so. Yeah.

- Back to code-switching, that reminds me of how African-American vernacular English is, like, looked down upon. And like, like you said, it's like you're preventing, like how they are associated, they're saying that, you know, speaking in Creole is like you're not properly expressing yourself, it's like the same thing, it's like, oh, you're not speaking properly, it's like, so then, therefore, you don't deserve to be understood, and it's like I deserve to be understood in whatever way I choose to express myself, you know, and respect it also, and so yeah.

- It's the same thing with Patois in, in Jamaica, my, my friend, again, we're talking, and she's like, yeah, we, she speaks it, she doesn't even know how to write it. So she's, it's not even considered, like, a language, it's just like this deformed version of English. And anyone that speaks it is viewed as, like, uneducated and, but how do you even think about, like, the generation, like, 'cause usually language is this thing that allows people to, to keep up, like, things that are in the family line alive. So if you erase this language that, like, your great-great-grandmother speaks, how, how are you gonna have access to her stories, like, how, how are you gonna know? So. I don't know, it's quite sad.

- I think that was, like, a very deep point that you brought up, even considering that some languages and like, you know, some forms of, we call it broken English, which is, is a problem in and of itself, but some forms of that, like, contain expressions that don't actually translate to English.

- Translate, mhmm.

- So as you said, like, you're really losing huge parts of, like, history and, like, other people's story when you, you know, negate the validity of their language and the importance of it.

- It's also, I think a really good example of just, like, how, I mean, it is like whiteness destroying this culture and backstory and history. I know, for example, this is something that many white people have recently been discovering, is how there were many people, especially immigrants, who were coming in as, Irish and Italian immigrants who were originally came to this country in the 1800s, or not originally came to this country, that's the wrong word I want to say, but when they came, they were not considered white at first, and over time, they were assimilated into what is considered whiteness. And it just kind of hits home because I know my father always tells me of how his grandfather came from Italy and he refused to teach his children Italian because he was like, you are an American now, you're gonna speak English, and you will not learn Italian. And it was even crazier considering he owned a grocery store in the Italian neighborhood and many people would come in only being able to speak Italian and not English. And so they only had specific roles when helping with that business. But yeah, there was, like, my father has been trying to do some genealogy stuff and trying to place pictures and photos and stuff like that, that my grandmother had, and he's been trying to understand what the family history was, but he is pretty sure a lot of it is kind of lost because there was that refusal of passing it down

because, in his mind, being part of that status quo, that whiteness was more important than keeping that knowledge and history and culture in the family.

- I really love that story of your grandfather and your father because it highlights race as a social construct, which I think also brings to light that the situations, like professionalism, which make code-switching necessary, they're also, like, those ideas of professionalism or how people should present themselves are also social constructs, it's not actually a real thing, we make it real by participating in it, but, you know, ultimately, it's actually not necessary. So I think that highlighted that point.

- I saw on Twitter today, that of all their, like, discussion of the Native American communities giving the COVID vaccine to tribal elders first because they are the one, only ones who know their language. And so they have to protect their, that's one way of protecting their language. And I think it's just like everything else that, or not everything else, there's a lot of things that have happened with this, you know, kind of erasure of other cultures is that, you know, things are disappearing that, that we have to now fight for, you know, and, and make sure that they're, and there's always two side of it because you're, two sides of it because if you're the person in that situation, the person, if you're the, if you're the Italian immigrant and you don't want your, you know, you, you need to succeed in the country that you're in, then you are gonna learn the language in, and, you know, try to do that, but then your heritage is lost.

- Yeah.

- So I guess that's a cost of kind of code-switching that we, you know, in a kind of a historical way.

- And then once you have that, that, I guess that heritage loss to the loss of language, then who gets to decide what goes down in history about you is up to people who probably don't even have your best interest at heart, so they gonna, like, fit themselves as the savior and they gonna be glorified, and yeah. It's all very dangerous. I was gonna suggest, can we offer advice? I don't necessarily know advice if it's, like, specifically advice for navigating code-switching, having to code-switch.

- I would, like, love to have advice, but I personally cannot think of advice other than having conversations, like these have been very helpful with dealing not only with reflecting on my code-switching experience, but dealing with the very complicated feelings that arise from it. So that's the only advice I would give to someone, is find your people, find a good space that you feel comfortable being able to have these conversations with, and start exploring it, go out and read, like, like we've been saying, we've been reading so many articles, people's own experiences via Twitter, we now have this podcast series to get their experiences, share those, share what you've been reading and talk about them. But at the moment, that's all I can think of, I don't know if anyone else has advice.

- I, I think what Ayomide was talking about a little bit ago in terms of being uncomfortable, I think that's the advice, like, if we're, if we're ever going to, if this is going to change, we have to learn to be uncomfortable. And I think a lot of that is on white people, right? And we're in, in our perspective, like we have to learn, we're, we're the ones that have to learn to be uncomfortable and be okay with being

uncomfortable saying the word black or talk, you know, talking, talking about things that normally don't really affect us or don't seem to affect us.

- And building upon that idea, Ginger, as a white person, making other white people uncomfortable by asking these kind of questions and starting these kinds of conversations and asking, I guess, the hard questions that are, you know, challenging that person's ideas and kind of making them question, like, what are my beliefs, what are my values, and what do I need to learn about this topic and about the experiences of others. I think over the course of how many months we've been doing this, like a year and a half, I've learned so much from the readings, but I think I've learned so much more by just this conversations with the group here and going through these podcast episodes and diving deep into these statements from our podcast guests and just seeing what their experiences are. And there's probably a cat meowing in the background, and that's okay, so.

- I'll say as a, as a black woman, I think the most helpful thing for me has been reading as well and understanding the history behind things because when I first got to Michigan and I was, like, I'll never forget the moment I was in a sociology class and, like, the white male professor casually mentions that black women are three to four times more likely to die in childbirth than their white counterparts. And I remember hearing that, you know, class let out five minutes later, I go to physics and I'm sitting in physics not, trying not to cry next to one of my close friends, who's a white guy who's learning about physics. I did not learn shit that day because I was so devastated by that. And it's like, I felt guilty for feeling so strongly about it, I felt guilty for being distracted in my physics class that I'm paying for, you know, that I came here to study for, but I realized that there are so many things in the world today that affect me. And so by reading up on the history and realizing where these sentiments come from, realizing where these structures originated and stuff has been really helpful for me to understand that, like, I'm not alone in, like, in realizing and perceiving things differently and realizing like, okay, it's really feels like there's two separate Michigan campuses. And realizing I'm reading about the history of that has been very helpful for me.

- And I would say for those who feel the weight of having to code-switch more than they should be, engage in self-care, find your tribe, and I remember from the conversation with Taylor and Paulette, she talks about how she, when she, after a hard day, she goes home and then she, she has her time for herself, so engage in, in self-care and, and finding your tribe is also very important. And also the university or the places that you're in should also do what they need to do in order to make your life better because you equally belong to those spaces. So it's not all on you. That's what I'm trying to say.

- Yeah, I'll add too, like the self-care aspect, I feel like being a white person and, like, only in the past, like, few years, really thinking and engaging deeply with race, it's, like, very exhausting. So I think on the note of self-care, I think for white people especially, it's important to, like, learn to be comfortable with that exhaustion and to, like, keep going despite that, and not to just sort of slip into, like, oh, I'm exhausted, I should take care of myself, and, and, like, being, like, having that option as a white person is, like, a privilege, I think, so, so being able to push through that, especially whenever you're exhausted specifically whenever thinking about or talking about things surrounding race, I think is really important.