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REWRITING THE UNWRITTEN: DECORUM AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE  
IN TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

by

Jennifer L. Scucchi

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Technical Communication and Rhetoric

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY  
Logan, Utah

2020

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## ABSTRACT

Rewriting the Unwritten: Decorum as a Tool for Social Justice in

Technical Communication

by

Jennifer L. Scucchi, Doctor of Philosophy

Utah State University, 2020

Major Professor: Dr. Jared Colton

Department: English

With the recent turn to social justice in Technical and Professional Communication (TPC), it is important to develop a variety of theories and methods that can address issues of power and oppression within TPC. Additionally, some of these theories and methods should work to engage resistant audiences and persuade them to not only be aware, but to also take meaningful action for change. Social justice efforts should also consider the intersectionality that occurs when multiple marginalizing factors intersect, compounding the experiences of oppression for those who fall into each unique category. In this dissertation, I present a theory and method of decorum that can help achieve each of these goals by shifting the lens of focus in social justice research from *who* to *how*. That is, decorum transfers the central point of concern from identity (i.e. gender, race, sexuality, etc.) to the specific ways in which marginalization actually transpires.

This shift occurs through what Hariman (1992) calls “symbolic display.”

Symbolic display to refer to texts, language, acts, behavior, and notions of place that are

embodied in practices of communication and aesthetics. Decorum, then, encompasses the unwritten rules and expectations that govern symbolic display. By focusing on symbolic display—and thus decorum—researchers can engage resistant audiences by removing the negative connotations that are often associated with identity politics while also addressing the intersectionality of people’s lived experiences.

To demonstrate how this theory and method can work, this dissertation presents a pilot study which focuses on the experiences of women working in the Utah tech sector. Placed within the larger context of the tech sector at large, this pilot study demonstrates the benefits, challenges, and implications for decorum as a theory and method of social justice research in TPC.

(231 pages)

## PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Rewriting the Unwritten: Decorum as a Tool for Social Justice in

Technical Communication

Jennifer L. Scucchi

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Jennifer L. Scucchi

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND DECORUM

### Introduction

Sitting down to dinner with a small group of friends in a packed restaurant, my friend's coworker—a man I have never met before—asked me what I do for work. I mentioned that I teach at the local university, and he immediately responded with “you’re not one of those feminists, are you?” Taken back by his sudden brashness with a total stranger, I politely responded, “well, yes I do identify as a feminist.” With a look of disapproval on his face, he proceeded to tell me that we cannot be friends because I “hate men.” Though he claimed to be joking after several other people at the table chimed in to express their disapproval of his sentiments, and to claim their own feminist identity, it was clear that he despised the word (and the people associated with it), and for the remainder of the dinner, conversation was tense and uncomfortable.

Though this particular incident was markedly audacious, conversations such as these are an all-too familiar territory for me. And it's not just the term feminism that puts people on edge, either. I've found that many hot-button words like *race*, *gender*, *queer*, *LGBTQ*, *diversity*, *inclusion*, and even *disability* and *mental illness* immediately stoke the fire of controversy for many politically-conservative people; or these words put the fire out entirely. In fact, there's no better way (as I learned early on in my teaching career) to make a classroom of conservative college freshman fall silent than to announce that the topic of discussion for the day will be gender, race, or sexuality. Over the years I have encountered family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, and even teachers at my children's school who have struggled to discuss these issues in a productive way, even many who truly cared about the social problems associated with these terminologies. They become

defensive—with the assumption that others are accusing them of being racist or sexist—or they shut down entirely out of fear they will say something wrong and offend someone else.

It is not just in my personal life that I have encountered resistance to culturally weighted words--such as *feminism* and *race*--and discussions about the social issues with which those words are associated. In 2017, TIME magazine made waves when they announced that their annual Person of the Year issue would be dedicated to “The Silence Breakers”--the (primarily female) voices who launched a worldwide movement against sexual harassment and assault (Zacharek, S., Dockterman, E., and Edwards, H.S., 2017). During a year-long firestorm of public sexual assault allegations--many coming from and against famous actors, directors, CEO’s, venture capitalists, and other high-profile people--women from all over the world and from all walks of life started opening up about their own personal experiences with sexual harassment and assault. The #MeToo movement became the most well-known outlet in which women began to publicly reveal and/or discuss their experiences. Though the hashtag had been around for some time, having been originally started by Tanara Burke in 2006 as a way for women to support each other by sharing experiences of sexual abuse, the hashtag was re-energized in 2017 when actor Alyssa Milano encouraged her fans and others to spread the hashtag in order to draw greater public attention to sexual harassment and abuse, primarily against women. Women across the world posted #MeToo on their social media feeds, many of them also sharing the more specific details about what had happened to them (Johnson, C.A., and Hawbaker, KT, 2019). Women were becoming more united, and the crimes against women that have long been dismissed were gaining greater recognition in the

public eye than ever before.

However, as is often the case with social problems often associated with gender, there was an enormous amount of intense backlash. Many people immediately associated the #MeToo movement with feminists, and the word once again became synonymous with man-hating, and it didn't take long for critics to fire back, particularly among radical right-wing conservatives who were decrying the destruction of the traditional family. They accused women of being selfish for only caring about the issues that directly affect them; or playing the victim role to gain attention, such as when life coach Tony Robbins accused women of using the hashtag to "gain significance" (Wang, 2018); or for explicitly attacking men while forgetting that women are also perpetrators of sexual violence; or most importantly, outright denying these women's claims, instead pointing the finger to them for wrongfully accusing men. Of course there were also the typical responses that occur anytime a woman reports sexual misconduct, lines such as they probably deserved it, or they were asking for it, or they shouldn't complain if it helped advance their career, or they are just overreacting. Right-wing political commentator Candace Owens captured these victim-blaming sentiments when she tweeted that "the entire premise of #MeToo is that women are stupid, weak & inconsequential. Too stupid to know what men might want if you come to their hotel room late at night. Too weak to turn around and tell someone not to touch your ass again. Too inconsequential to realize this." (Owens, 2018). Unfortunately women have been hearing these comments resonate in the back of their minds for years, but just as they have used social media to give a voice to their own pain and struggles, so have others used the same platforms to silence these women's efforts.



In 2018, the hashtag #himtoo emerged as a symbol against false rape and sexual assault accusations (Morris, A., 2018). It was first used in this context by a mother who, in response to the popularity of the #MeToo movement, tweeted that her son would not go out on dates because he was afraid of being falsely accused of sexual assault. Though the son publicly denied this, and even showed support for the #MeToo movement, #himtoo gained momentum as the antithesis to #MeToo, with men using the hashtag to outwardly express opposition to #MeToo. What's notable about this backlash is that it once again worked to silence women by once again placing responsibility for rape and sexual assault on women and letting them know that if they do report, nobody will believe them.

Just like the acquaintance that accused me of hating men while at dinner with friends, the backlash to the #MeToo movement was in response to specific terms and phrases that became culturally associated with gender (in)equality. For those who don't immediately and outwardly support gender equality, these words can be seen as a weapon or an attack, so people often become immediately defensive when such language is used; or they simply choose not to engage in what can be interpreted as controversial discourse. Filmmaker and feminist activist Thomas Keith (2013) describes the backlash he received after his first film, *Generation M: Misogyny in Media and Culture*, was debuted. Responses to his pro-feminist film came from three types of men:

D-Bro (or dumbass bro)--"unapologetically sexist men" who "are not interested in a dialogue that critically examines male privilege or men's violence toward women and other men" but rather "carry a preemptive hostility toward anyone who dares challenge their privilege and the sexism that goes with it" (pp. 300)

I-Bro (or “I’m not sexist, bro!”)--men who “carefully conceal their sexism” and “masquerade in the guise of egalitarian, profeminism[s]” but “are often the guys who victim-blame the most” and resist the idea that sexual assault is a serious problem (pp.301-302)

M-Bro (or marginal bro)--men that “long for a serious and meaningful relationship with a woman and [who] realize that the bro-universe of masculine dumb-assery is not getting it done”; many of these men also “have female friends, sisters, or other female family members who have experienced first-hand the damage of being sexually assaulted by a bro, and these men want no part of that lifestyle” (pp.303); these are the bros that “get it” and, according to Keith, are also the only ones who can have a positive influence on the other bros.

As Keith explains, the first two types of bros are common and make progress extremely challenging. They choose not to engage in critical thinking and discussions about the topic; they refuse to evaluate their own beliefs and ideas empathetically; and they are often defensive and dismissive. Such attitudes are common, and until men side more with the M-Bro, progress will continue to be difficult.

Responses like those I have just discussed demonstrate that these types of controversial topics (i.e. gender, misogyny, feminism, rape, etc.) can incite automatic resistance, avoidance, and illogical rationalization from people who are not ready to face the issues head-on. Many social justice scholars have argued that making people uncomfortable by introducing controversial topics into conversations (in casual, professional, and/or educational settings) can be an important part of learning and growth (Berlak 2004; Boler 1999, 2004a, 2004b; Boler and Zembylas 2003; Faulkner and

Crowhurst 2014; Kishimoto and Mwangi 2009; Mintz 2013; Zembylas and McGlynn 2012). While I do not disagree with this, it is also important to recognize that this is an approach that will not always work for everyone. As Keith (2013) points out, not everyone will respond to a straight-forward approach. Certainly there is a time and place for such engagement, but there should also be other strategies available, especially for those resistant to change or even critical discussion of social justice problems. Recognizing that confirmation bias can push people to retreat from controversy or only favor arguments that support their current beliefs (Klayman, 1995; Maynes, 2015; Nickerson, 1998; Torres-Hardin & Meyers, 2013), an approach to discussing controversial topics that opens resistant people up to new ideas is a strategy that can be valuable in certain situations.

### **Contention in TPC**

The adverse reaction to social justice language that I have discussed, and which calls for an alternative approach to meaningful discussion, is not exclusive to public and private social discourse. The abrupt, automatic, and futile reactions to culturally weighted words such as *feminism* and *race* are common in academic discourse as well. Scholars in Technical and Professional Communication (TPC) have even discussed the problems that arise with this type of language within the field. Frost (2016) notes that she has “found that responses to feminism often are tied up in rhetoric about bias; that is, people seem to believe that feminism is a particularly biased perspective” (p. 12). This belief that feminism is bias has the potential to dissuade some who might believe in the goals of feminism from outwardly identifying as feminist and conducting crucial feminist research. The same can be said about other social justice issues commonly believed to be

biased, such as race and sexuality. The heavily weighted language that has traditionally been used to discuss these issues has likely contributed to the noticeable shortage of social justice research in the field until more recently. As Jones, Moore, & Walton (2016) point out, TPC has a long history of using “objective, apolitical, and acultural practices, theories, and pedagogies” while focusing on the primary concern of “practical problem solving” and pragmatic effectiveness (p. 212). They, along with other scholars in the field, are working to help other scholars move beyond a “practical” approach and engage with issues that have political and social significance.

Even though scholars such as Frost (2016) and Jones, Moore, & Walton (2016) have initiated the formal conversations about the resistance to conversations that engage with the political and social aspects of TPC, analyzing the textbooks we use in the field provides further evidence to substantiate these claims that there has been a resistance to addressing issues of social justice within TPC. Textbooks provide an ideal text for analyzing the field’s larger agendas because they are written primarily to educate students about the most important aspects of TPC. Textbooks are intended to prepare students with the knowledge and skills they will need to be successful in a career as a technical communicator, so the values of the field will be largely represented in these textbooks. To better understand TPC’s pragmatic history and learn more about the field’s values and primary emphases, I conducted some preliminary research in which analyzed 16 TPC textbooks that have been published over the last three decades, looking for any mention of discriminatory or biased language. Because language is a primary emphasis in TPC, *discriminatory* or *biased language* would indicate a concern for issues of social justice that are directly related to TPC, so any mention of this type of language would indicate a

concern for social justice.

While I expected to find that most textbooks would at least have some mention of discriminatory or biased language, most textbooks said little to nothing about social justice in any great sense. These findings support Jones, Moore, and Walton's (2016) observation that the field is primarily concerned with practical problem solving and pragmatic effectiveness, while having little concern for the issues directly related to power, marginalization, and oppression. Though scholars are discussing issues of power more and more, the textbooks still reflect a value in pragmatism. Out of the 16 textbooks analyzed, only 10 made any mention of discriminatory or biased language. Out of the 10 that did mention it, only one textbook discussed the topic in great detail. The other nine only briefly mentioned discriminatory language. Even further, gender was the only consistent category mentioned in all ten textbooks; race, disability, age, and religion were only mentioned in a couple others, and only very briefly. Most notably, excluding one textbook, any mention of discriminatory or biased language was always associated with the need for TPC practitioners to protect themselves and their employer from legal repercussions, again demonstrating what Dilger (2006) refers to as a hyperpragmatic focus of the field and its practitioners.

This hyperpragmatic focus that has traditionally defined the field can make discussions of power—and especially power as it relates to gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, (dis)ability, age, and social class--uncomfortable and challenging. Or even worse, a hyperpragmatic focus makes these issues feel tangential, not a core component to the discussion or something that should be given a significant amount of attention. That is not to say that TPC scholars and practitioners do not care about these issues, or

that they would just prefer to ignore them. In fact, there have been many scholars—especially in recent years—who have made great strides in bringing these issues to the forefront of the field. Over the last decade, many of these TPC scholars have focused their research specifically on social justice (Agboka, 2014; Colton & Holmes, 2018; Colton, Holmes, and Walwema, 2018; Colton & Walton, 2015; Dilger, 2006; Frost, 2016; Jones, 2016; Kirsch & Royster, 2010; Koerber, 2000; Meloncon, 2013; Palmeri, 2006; Pass, 2013; Petersen & Walton, 2018; Walton & Jones, 2013; White, Rumsey, & Amidon, 2016; ). The work of these scholars has proven invaluable to the field and to the larger questions of power, marginalization, and oppression that they, and others in the field address. Many of these scholars have relied on proven theoretical approaches such as feminist theories, critical race theories, queer and gender theories, cultural theories, and disability theories to inform their analyses. These theories ground the research in proven methods and give it legitimacy in a field that has not historically been attuned to social justice issues.

The problem, then, is that because TPC's history is deeply rooted in the practical application of clear, concise, and "neutral" language with a focus on efficiency, introducing theoretical frameworks that focus on the political and social aspects of TPC can be a challenge for those who hold strong to the practice of clear, concise, and neutral language that has traditionally defined the field. It would be beneficial to social justice initiatives to have available a theoretical approach that can encourage scholars and practitioners who still hold true to the field's historical roots to look critically at the relationship between TPC and power. In this dissertation, I argue that, in supplementation to the great work already being done in feminist, race, and disability studies, we need a

language and a framework that resists the knee-jerk polarization of political issues that are associated with power and aspects of cultural identity. Language that does not hold immediately divisive connotations—which is often the case for words like “feminism” and “diversity”—can be used to prompt TPC scholars, practitioners, and educators to engage in discussions they would otherwise avoid. A theoretical framework of decorum can provide this kind of language and an approach to research that can open up discussions about social justice with resistant audiences in ways that might not otherwise happen.

Frost (2016) tackles this problem—focusing her analysis on the term “feminist” in particular—expressing the need for a theoretical approach that invites those who do not immediately identify as feminist to engage in discussions about gender that are crucial to a more comprehensive understanding of TPC. Rather than trying to persuade colleagues to identify with a specific group or identity, Frost contends that we should use an approach that “encourages a response to social justice exigencies [and] invites participation from allies” (p. 5). If the goal of social justice research is, as Frost explains, to make issues of power and marginalization apparent to as many audiences as possible, then it is important to identify a language and theoretical approach that appeals to audiences who do not immediately identify with particular social justice movements or are resistant to them altogether. Though Frost’s approach may not work for everyone (as I discuss further in Chapter 2), her ambition is echoed in this dissertation.

### **Decorum and Symbolic Display**

A significant challenge that comes with achieving this goal of engaging as many

people as possible with social justice research is ensuring that the issues associated with that agenda are not reduced solely to identity politics; or worse, simply ignored altogether. To circumnavigate this difficulty, I propose a theoretical approach to social justice research that focuses on the ways in which power is implemented through decorum via symbolic display. Hariman (1992) uses the notion of symbolic display to refer to texts (which can include any physical items that communicate meaning), language, acts, behavior, and notions of place that are embodied in practices of communication and aesthetics. For example, if I am in an office meeting at my workplace, some examples of symbolic display in this situation include my clothing (text), posture (act), chosen seat at the table (behavior), and the timing as well as the content of my verbal contributions (language and behavior). The clothing, posture, and seating are aesthetic while the verbal contributions are practices of communication.

The unwritten rules and expectations that govern these symbolic displays (such as those I just described) are called “decorum.” In other words, decorum dictates what is considered acceptable for my clothing, behavior, language, etc. Decorum has not typically been a specific focal point in TPC research or social justice movements, and therefore does not hold the overly and unreasonably negative connotations that other words do, particularly for those who do not immediately identify or empathize with these social justice movements. There are other theories that make mention of these unwritten rules and expectations, and some might even say that there are tacit theories/theorists of decorum already at work in the field on some level (Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Kenneth Burke, and Michel de Certeau to name a few). However, there are no comprehensive theoretical frameworks specific to decorum that explicitly and solely



concentrate on the implementation of power through the informal and unwritten rules and expectations that govern symbolic display. That is not to say that other theories, language, and approaches that have and will continue to be used by social justice scholars aren't effective, or that other important theories do not engage with decorum at some level. Rather, a theoretical framework of decorum can supplement past and current social justice approaches in hopes of appealing to an audience that might be resistant to language that is heavy with connotations they believe to be polarizing or detrimental.

I argue that when the conversation is not immediately associated with such contentious points of concern—such as gender, race, and disability—a wider audience of readers will more readily engage with issues of power that are inherent to decorum and are primary points of concern for other social justice initiatives. Likewise, even resistant audiences can be persuaded to think critically about the implementation of power by focusing on decorum, rather than what is often perceived as identity politics. Twentieth century rhetorician Kenneth Burke (Burke, 1969) has argued that persuasion is most effective when the rhetor consciously or unconsciously identifies and connects with shared interests, beliefs, and values of the audience. Articulating the unwritten rules and expectations (i.e. decorum) in a given rhetorical situation gives the rhetor and audience identifiable common ground on which they can deliberate. Because *all* people experience decorum, it provides points of identification in every situation and a framework for critical thinking that can be applied to circumstances beyond oneself. Thinking critically about decorum leads to questions about why those unwritten rules exist; who establishes those rules; what the consequences of adhering to and breaking the rules are; and how the rules are enforced.

For example, if I want to use theories of decorum to analyze my interactions as a woman with a man at a meeting in which I felt discriminated against, I would not immediately look toward gender, even if gender was of particular interest to me in this interaction. Instead, I would first identify the symbolic display that was exhibited from both parties, such as the way we both dressed; the way we positioned our chairs and bodies; the timing and content of the words spoken by each; and the length of time and volume at which each person spoke. Then, I would evaluate if those symbolic displays were in response to any particular decorum—especially any decorum that I would already be aware of through observation over time and/or research, such as it being acceptable for the senior men in that company to consistently interrupt lower-seniority women. I would identify that decorum and inquire further into why that decorum existed and who created it. Furthermore, I would also analyze what would happen if I or the other party had broken the decorum in that situation. This analysis could certainly lead to information or revelations that involve gender, but with the primary means of analysis focusing on decorum, I am not immediately inclined to draw conclusions about gender. Other intersecting factors are also likely to emerge from this analysis, such as class, race, and/or religion. Likewise, the content of my analysis also does not immediately provide ammunition for assumptions to be made by an audience that does not believe in gender bias.. Both of these situations are beneficial in that bias is reduced and other important factors that may not have been considered initially will be made more apparent and relevant. For audiences who do not immediately identify with my situation, the results can appear less bias, and thus more believable.

### **Decorum and Intersectionality**

The benefit of opening research up to being more inclusive of multiple factors is perhaps the benefit of decorum that is most valuable to scholars and research populations in particular. As the field becomes more saturated with research dedicated to aspects of cultural identity such as gender and race, TPC must also address the intersectionality between those aspects that are relevant to social justice research. Scholars both in and outside of TPC whose work has advocated for research methods that specifically identify and analyze the intersectionality among aspects of identity argue that this approach is necessary to fully understand the experiences of people who are marginalized across multiple axes of identity (Crenshaw, 1991; Marfelt, 2016; Moore, 2018; Muñoz, 2014; Richardson & Taylor, 2009). For example, Crenshaw (1991) describes how the “experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism, and how these experiences tend not to be represented within the discourses of either feminism or antiracism” (p. 1243-44). Though not all of these scholars are specific to the field, social justice research in TPC has and will continue to benefit from their call to action by examining the ways in which multiple aspects of identity (such as race and gender) intersect with issues relevant to technical communication. A framework of decorum provides one way to make these connections.

A theoretical framework based around decorum shifts the focus from specific aspects of cultural identity to the ways in which power is manifested through symbolic display. In other words, examining a situation from the perspective of decorum shifts the research focus from “who” to “how.” This shift in perspective allows for a multidimensional view of power, enabling analyses of gender, sexuality, race, (dis)ability, age, class, and other cultural markers at the same time and/or with the same

contexts that influence and are influenced by power relations in addition to the compounding effects of intersectionality. This shift in initial focus to “how” also naturally leads back to the questions of “who,” which are critical to answer if social justice is the ultimate goal. For example, we could analyze the decorum within an organization by interviewing employees to learn more about the unwritten rules that they must follow in their workplace, such as when it is appropriate to ask for a raise; or what type of clothing should be worn in the office; or who is expected to do various types of unofficial work (such as note-taking). This analysis will reveal differences and similarities among different employees, and connections can be made between these patterns and the various aspects of cultural identity with which these patterns are associated. In other words, my research (as demonstrated in later chapters) shows that by examining the acts and means of oppression, we can more easily understand experiences of marginalization as they directly relate to multiple—rather than just a singular—aspect of cultural identity. This multi-layered approach is beneficial to the research population, opening up opportunities for justice, because focusing on the means of oppression (the “how”) ultimately leads back to the people involved, providing a more complete picture of power dynamics within a given situation.

Going back to the previous example of decorum in the workplace, for instance, the research might reveal that asking for a raise is only acceptable at particular times within the employee’s career, but those times are dependent upon not just gender and gender expression/identify, but also class and religious affiliation (i.e. a non-Christian woman must wait longer than a Christian man). If gender had been the primary focus in this situation, we likely would not have realized that class and religion also played a role

in the discrimination that was occurring and could have oversimplified or misconstrued the compounding effects that were present. Having a more complete recognition of the ways in which multiple factors create unique instances of discrimination, by focusing on the means of oppression rather than the specific points of identity that might be associated with discrimination, can illuminate factors (such as religion in this case) that may not have been considered previously, yet still have significant influence.

Working reversely from the means of oppression back through decorum leads to important questions about power, such as “who are in positions of power to write and reform decorum?” “What are the consequences of following and/or breaking decorum?” And “how can we use a knowledge of decorum to promote social justice through TPC pedagogy and practice?” If we take the previous workplace scenario as an example, then we might begin to question how it came to be that Christian men had a distinct economic advantage in the workplace. We could ask further questions about what happened to non-Christian women when they asked for a raise before it was deemed appropriate. These questions/answers could lead into further examining the company’s official policies for raises. By making the company aware of the discrepancies in their promotion practices--of which they may be unaware--the company could look for ways to improve their system and make it more equitable for all. Solutions could include revising official company policies; improving workplace communication practices; or even implementing a third-party promotion committee. Though the purpose of this dissertation is not to outline specific strategies for changing decorum, as it instead lays out the theoretical foundation on which decorum can be applied to work toward change, the main idea is that understanding the relationship between decorum, power, and oppression can inform

processes that ultimately work toward positive change. As such, decorum-focused research initiates a move toward social justice using technical and professional communication strategies.

At the broadest level, then, this dissertation examines how a theoretical framework informed by decorum can continue the expansion and enhancement of social justice research within the field of TPC. More specifically, this research examines the ways in which TPC establishes, reflects, perpetuates, and challenges decorum and the hierarchies associated with that decorum. I also use this knowledge of decorum to identify and advocate for change that promotes social justice, though the primary concern of the dissertation is to lay out the theory and foundation which others can build upon and use to find solutions to specific problems which are of interest to them. In this dissertation, I do the following: (1) explain how decorum can inform social justice research by focusing on the implementation and disruption of power through symbolic display; (2) discuss the benefits of using a theoretical framework informed by decorum, primarily in its ability to engage resistant audiences and address intersectionality; and (3) provide a case study that demonstrates, expands on, and emphasizes different elements of these points.

The case study will focus on Utah's rising technology sector, commonly referred to as Silicon Slopes (though not to be mistaken for the non-profit organization that has trademarked the term). I have chosen this particular point of focus for my case study because the technology sector—particularly in Silicon Valley—has a widely-known reputation for a decorum that is visibly marked by gender discrimination (Chang, 2018; Reader, 2017; Vassallo, Moore, Madansky, Mickell, Porter, Leas, & Oberweis, 2016), so

I hypothesize that there will be evidence of discrimination in Silicon Slopes that also emerges out of this research. Utah's technology sector—which is rapidly becoming a major force in the technology industry, with billion dollar companies such as Qualtrics, Pluralsight, and Domo making the state their home—has been displaying similar discriminatory characteristics reflective of those occurring in Silicon Valley (AvidXchange director, 2018; Bennett, 2018; Betts, 2016). However, while more and more are acknowledging these problems, there has been limited research focusing on the culture of Utah's tech sector, so this particular research site allows me to collect new data and provide much needed insight to the culture of what is quickly becoming a booming hub for technology, while also demonstrating the potential for the theoretical framework of decorum I present in this dissertation.

With a focus on decorum in Utah's tech sector for each case study, this dissertation will attend to my broad research agenda and will likewise demonstrate a need for further decorum-based research in TPC. I fully anticipate that many of the tensions associated with decorum will be expressed in ways that relate to gender, though I also document other tensions and issues that may emerge as they will be important to the analysis of intersectionality. By analyzing this one specific correlative factor of decorum (i.e. gender) in-depth, we can begin to understand the importance of learning more about decorum and its role in exclusionary and hierarchical practices. Simultaneously, this research will demonstrate the need to further examine these situations of exclusion and the intersectionality between other aspects of cultural identity that are occurring.

### **Contextualizing Decorum**

Though decorum has not traditionally been a focal point for TPC or cultural

studies, a contemporary framework of decorum is very interested in and connected to much of the work done in these fields. To further establish these relationships among decorum, TPC, and cultural studies, I will briefly discuss some of the ways in which they are connected in this chapter and extend that discussion further in Chapter 2. First, I define and contextualize decorum within a contemporary framework of social justice. I then establish the contexts in which decorum is relevant to TPC, particularly in the field's recognition of its own humanistic and political nature. Then, I describe the specific ways in which issues of power, which are a particular focal point for decorum, have been addressed within the field. I take an intersectional approach, with a specific focus on gender, race, and disability—as these have been the primary areas of concern in TPC. Finally, I discuss how these research agendas have given way to the work of contemporary TPC scholars whose work focuses explicitly on social justice.

Decorum has a long history within rhetorical studies, with its use varying over time. Contemporary scholars of rhetoric define decorum as a system of common codes that are embodied in communication practices and that establish social control and hierarchy in any given culture, government, or organization (Stoneman, 2011; Hariman, 1992). As Ethan Stoneman (2011) points out, when it is removed from the immediate task of speech-making, “decorum captures not only the rules governing social composition and conduct in general but also the communicative practices that constitute a person or group’s proper mode of social exhibition” (p. 132). In other words, decorum works to create meaning by defining what is and is not appropriate in a given context; it encompasses the unwritten and/or informal rules that establish acceptable (and unacceptable) modes of communicative acts in every form. These communicative acts



include behavior, speech, dress, gestures, and anything else that communicates an idea, power, and positionality in some way, both intentionally and unintentionally, including what might be seen as inaction or silence (Ratcliffe & Glenn, 2011; Glenn, 2004; Reynolds, 1969). To put it simply, decorum is the appropriateness of symbolic display and is thus a disciplinary practice.

As a disciplinary practice, decorum is intrinsically connected to power because it is always associated with hierarchy (Hariman, 1992). A person's status in the hierarchy is both influenced by and reflected in decorum. Demonstrating an understanding of and adhering to decorum elevates and/or maintains that person's status. Likewise, a person's ignorance of or failure to follow decorum typically downgrades their ranking in a hierarchy. However, following decorum does not necessarily equate to a high level in the hierarchy, but it does typically enable that person to at least maintain their status without being demoted. For example, when President Trump took office in 2017, he immediately began changing the decorum of White House press conferences. During the Obama administration (and other previous administrations), reporters were allowed to speak quite freely; finish their questions before the President responded; were responded to with respect by the President; and were often allowed to ask follow-up questions. President Trump quickly changed the decorum of these press conferences by frequently speaking over reporters; not allowing them to finish questions; telling them to sit down and/or stop talking; and not allowing any follow-up questions. These changes were not officially recorded in any rulebook or manual; rather, they were unofficially redefined by the actions and words of Trump and his administration, who are in a position in which their actions can determine changes in decorum. These new, unofficial rules are meant to

silence reporters who disagree with and directly challenge Trump's authority, even though it is never actually stated in any official documentation. As such, Trump uses this new decorum to establish a hierarchy, placing different reporters on different levels of the hierarchy based on how well they do or do not follow the new decorum, and he enforces these rules by publicly denouncing anyone who breaks them.

For instance, CNN correspondent Jim Acosta was banned from the White House after a heated confrontation during a live press conference on November 7, 2018. Trump ordered Acosta to sit down and quit speaking after Acosta asked Trump if he was "demonizing immigrants" by calling a caravan of Central American migrants "an invasion." Acosta refused to sit, and he continued to question the president (who refused to answer the question), at which point Trump ordered a female White House intern to take Acosta's microphone. As soon as Acosta's microphone was taken, Trump told Acosta that "CNN should be ashamed of itself having you working for them. You are a rude, terrible person. You shouldn't be working for CNN. You're a very rude person. The way you treat Sarah Huckabee is horrible. And the way you treat other people are horrible. You shouldn't treat people that way" (Morton, 2018).

What's notable about this situation is that Trump used Acosta's breaking of Trump's new decorum to publicly condemn Acosta and expel him from any further White House press conferences. Because Trump holds a position that enables him to exercise at least some power in establishing and enforcing decorum, he used Acosta as an example to others to demonstrate the consequences of breaking decorum within that space. Even for those who do not necessarily agree with Trump's characterization of Acosta, there is still no denying that there were consequences for breaking decorum. In

an interview after having his press pass revoked, Acosta noted that “I think [Trump and his administration] are trying to shut [reporters] down. I think they’re trying to send a message to my colleagues” (Morton 2018). Acosta was correct in his assumptions, which became evident with the Trump administration’s response after federal judge Timothy Kelly ordered Acosta’s press pass to be reinstated (Stelter & Shortell, 2018). In an interview with Chris Wallace on *Fox News Sunday*, Trump criticized any reporter who does not follow decorum, and went even further to announce that he and his administration “are now writing rules of press conference decorum” (Eggerston, 2018). Of course, these new rules will not be decorum, or at least will not be the initiation of that decorum, which almost always emerges without official documentation (Stoneman, 2011); but the fact that they are forced into writing official rules demonstrates that decorum was a first choice in Trump’s attempt to oppress those who challenge his power, and he only secondarily attempted to use official documentation to assert power. This brief analysis of the events involving Acosta and Trump demonstrates that Trump used decorum as a tool of oppression and provides just one example of the ways in which decorum is used as a rhetorical device that can establish, usurp, perpetuate, and challenge power.

### **An Implied Decorum in TPC**

Decorum has not yet been identified as a significant rhetorical framework in TPC, in the way I just described. However, there are several topics of concern in the field that are directly or tacitly related to decorum. In particular, the field has a strong history of looking at unofficial rules, assumptions, and expectations. Most notable of this type of research is that which deals with genre and best practices. Genre has been researched and

discussed across multiple disciplines. From literature, linguistics, to composition and rhetoric, genre has been a primary topic of concern for many scholars who study communication.

While genre has been defined in numerous ways, Miller's (1984) vision of genre as a social action is most persuasive and relevant to decorum. While other genre scholars have focused primarily on genre as a form (Campbell & Jamieson, 1982), Miller contends that genre has more to do with what it *does*, rather than what it looks like. That is not to say that rhetorical action is the only important component of genre. Miller is also careful to situate Kenneth Burke's terms "motive" and "situation" as important factors that contribute to the way genre functions. Burke dealt heavily with motive in many of his works. Though his vision of "motive" has been interpreted in many different ways, the most common interpretation is "that which 'moves' or induces a person to act a certain way" (Benoit, 1996, p. 67). Bitzer (1995) extends Burke's discussion of "situation," offering a conception of the term that identifies specific elements that contribute to and define the relationship between rhetoric and genre, including the exigence, people, objects, events and constraints. As Miller demonstrates, genre is a response to recurrent rhetorical situations, but that the primary goal of genre is to move and shape society. Genre is therefore a rhetorical tool used to incite motive, and thus action. The work of Bahktin (1986), Devitt (2004), Clark (2007), and many others I will discuss in Chapter 2 also helps place genre as a rhetorical tool for social action, so it can be studied in terms of its role in shaping societies and cultures, an important concern for social justice research.

Moreover, the history of the field is infused with people addressing the need for

more dialogue about power. Over the last twenty years, many scholars in TPC have made significant strides in bringing a greater awareness of and attentiveness to social justice. While the history of the field has been somewhat limited in its efforts to recognize TPC as an inherently political discourse, there have been many scholars who have worked to challenge these ideals. These scholars have helped redefine what TPC is and what it can do, starting with the recognition that TPC is a humanistic endeavor (Miller, 1979; Rutter, 1991), then moving into the cultural and political dynamics (Blyler, 1998; Herndl, 1993), and now more recently exploring the ways in which TPC can advance social justice initiatives (Savage & Matveeva, 2011; Agboka, 2014; Colton & Walton, 2015; Jones, 2016; Peterson, 2018; Colton & Holmes, 2018; Peterson & Walton, 2018; Walton, Moore, & Jones, 2019; Edenfield, 2019; Edenfield, Holmes, & Colton, 2019). In addition, the work of these scholars provides a foundation upon which further theorists and researchers can build, extending the core values and initiatives that have made their work imperative. This dissertation, then, is written in contribution to the social justice movement in TCP.

### **Decorum as a Tool for Social Justice**

Walton, Moore, & Jones (2019) have described the social justice movement in TCP as “a fundamental and widespread shift in what the field is about, what it does, what it is for” (2019) that is backed by a coalition of scholars who have dedicated their life’s work to the pursuit of justice. Every article, book, and project that works toward the goals of this coalition is valuable and should be not only celebrated, but used ....it is my hope, then that this dissertation, and specifically the theoretical framework of decorum for which this dissertation lays out, will be a resource for other scholars in this coalition. As I

know other scholars feel, it is my hope that others will examine, adopt, repurpose, and reuse my work for the benefit of many.

As I demonstrate throughout this dissertation, decorum is a valuable tool for social justice research in TPC. . Decorum can be used when looking at both textual and non-textual elements of TPC. The non-textual elements ((i.e. communication that does not immediately look, act, or sound like words on paper/screen/etc.) are important to note because while the field of TPC has historically been heavily text-focused, numerous scholars have also argued for rhetorical considerations in TPC that are not considered to be a “text.” However, decorum is also intertwined with text, and genre is one of the most significant ways we can focus on text in order to bridge a connection between decorum and topics in TPC. Genre focuses on the ways in which patterns are reproduced to achieve a certain outcome. For example, resumes are a genre of TPC that are used to communicate a person’s skills and their ability to do a job well. While no two resumes look exactly the same, most resumes follow a similar pattern and fall within the guidelines that are typical for the genre. There is no one official rulebook for how to create a resume; and although there are many books, websites, articles, and even videos dedicated to helping people create an effective resume, the genre is guided by a set of rules and guidelines that are fluid and primarily dictated by the needs of the people using the genre (i.e. employers). Genre, then, deals with the more technical and textual aspects of TPC that are unofficial yet have significant rhetorical influence on communication. Decorum builds and expands on genre by further addressing the unofficial expectations and rules of acceptability for texts within TPC.

Decorum also helps address the non-textual elements of communication that

likewise play a significant role in TPC. It is not enough to understand what the text alone is doing. It is also necessary to understand the larger communication structures that influence and are influenced by the texts, particularly when we are thinking about TPC in terms of social justice. For instance, studying a company memo from a generic perspective can help us understand both the constraints and advantages of the genre in terms of communicating about new policies that are meant to promote gender equality. However, to know if this genre has an effect on *all* of the ways that gender inequality is communicated within the company, it is necessary to also examine the non-textual elements of communication, such as eye contact, off-the-record conversations, body language, timing, etc. Studying decorum as an inherent element of TPC, then, can help bring to light those elements of communication that are part of TPC but not always prioritized.

Numerous TPC scholars have highlighted the importance of non-textual elements of technical communication, particularly in their rhetorical capacities. Embodiment is one important topic that has been addressed within TPC. Scholars studying the relationship between embodiment and TPC are interested in how the body incorporates technology and how that affects communication (Meloncon, 2013; Miles, 2009; Risku, 2010; Swacha, 2018; Tham et al, 2018). Silence has also been addressed within TPC (Barrett-Fox, 2016; Glenn, 2004; Jones, 2016). These scholars demonstrate how even though silence does not readily appear to be rhetorical, it does in fact work as a means of influence. Like the work of these scholars, much of the work that decorum does lies beyond the boundaries of “text,” but—like the other non-textual emphases in the field—still have significant impact on communication.

It is important to note that while this dissertation is specifically focused on TPC, a theoretical framework of decorum is applicable across many disciplines and to a variety of research agendas. In particular, research that focuses on power dynamics, culture, and/or social justice will certainly find the theoretical framework beneficial. Similarly, research that studies organizational communication, business communication, and cross- or intra-cultural communication can find a use for a theoretical framework of decorum. Because technical communication in itself is used across multiple disciplines and sectors of business and society, scholars in these areas could readily adapt this framework to their specific needs.

Whatever the project, and whatever the discipline, I readily encourage other scholars to use this framework in the pursuit of justice and equity.

### **Outline of Chapters**

To support my larger argument, explain the benefits of using a theoretical framework of decorum in social justice research, and demonstrate a method for applying a theoretical approach focused on decorum, this dissertation is presented according to the following outline:

#### **Chapter 2: Decorum, Social Justice, and Technical Communication**

Chapter 2 addresses three primary things. First, I discuss the move toward social justice research within TPC. I frame this move within the larger humanistic and ethical agendas of the field, and then specifically discuss the efforts of more recent scholars whose work paves the way for decorum-based social justice research. Though I have already discussed this to an extent, in Chapter 2 I delve further into the social justice turn in TPC in more specific detail. Next, I begin establishing decorum as a viable tool for



TPC social justice research by juxtaposing it with the theories and methods of other TPC research that has already been legitimized, including genre studies. Finally, I will extend my definition and theory of decorum and position decorum within the larger theoretical lenses that inform social justice research on a broader scale. Because of decorum's history and relativity to other, complex theories of culture, power, and communication, I will spend a significant portion of the literature review examining decorum itself. This section will engage decorum in conversation with the work of Foucault, Bourdieu, Burke, De Certeau, and Goffman.

The term *decorum* is fraught with fluctuating meaning, so it is crucial that I present a brief history to contextualize my approach to decorum as a rhetorical theory and method. Though I will not dedicate a significant portion of my argument to the historical dimensions of decorum, its near absence from rhetorical studies over the last century requires an understanding of the term's evolution over time to legitimize decorum as a valid rhetorical framework. Likewise, this historical framing will re-envision the term within contemporary contexts, particularly within TPC. The few pieces of contemporary research that do directly address decorum will demonstrate the value of using decorum as a primary focal point in research (Duffy & Pell, 2018; Duerringer, 2016; Hariman, 1992; Stoneman, 2011).

Chapter 2 will also delineate the theoretical underpinnings that inform (and are informed by) my vision of decorum. Namely, I will take a Marxian/Gramscian perspective of cultural hegemony, which is commonly defined as “the superimposition of a dominant society that limits beliefs, explanations, perceptions, values and mores and suppresses alternative views” (Ward, p. 287). In these instances, the ruling class

manipulates the culture of society by imposing their worldview in ways that make it appear to be natural, making other ideologies therefore unnatural and wrong (Bullock & Tronbley, 1999). Cultural hegemony provides the foundational ideology that informs my vision of decorum.

Intersectionality will also be an important topic in Chapter 2. I will discuss the need for social justice research to include dimensions of intersectionality between varying aspects of cultural identity by identifying and discussing the work of scholars such as Crenshaw (1991), Orbe & Harris (2013), and Marfelt (2016). Likewise, I will demonstrate that the goal of decorum-focused research is to *discover* the various intersections rather than to begin with them being predetermined. Though none of the works just listed are specific to TPC, the call for intersectionality is applicable to all social justice research, no matter the discipline in which it takes place.

### **Chapter 3: Decorum in Utah Tech—A Pilot Study**

In Chapter 3, I begin to present a case study. This case study is presented as a supplement to the overall theory that is the main purpose of this dissertation, working to both support the legitimacy of a decorum-focused research theory and method and provide an outline for how that research can be approached. To achieve these objectives, I examine the decorum of Utah's technology sector. Though I hypothesize that gender will be the foremost concern in this space, I also document any other emerging issues. To examine the decorum of Utah tech, I first discuss the history of the technology sector at large, including its reputation for gender inequality (Francher, 2016). For this, I primarily rely on research and mainstream publications that look at Silicon Valley, which has been considered to be the hub of technology innovation since the 1970s. In order to argue that

Silicon Valley is similar to Utah's tech sector—which has adopted the nickname Silicon Slopes—I directly compare the characteristics of each area and discuss the relationships they have with one another, paying particular attention to the ways in which technology transfer (Mowry et al., 2015; Allen, 1984) impacts the culture of tech companies. I also discuss my analysis of published interviews with women currently working for Utah tech companies in Chapter 3. I use these interviews to establish themes and language that are used throughout chapters 3 and 4.

Because decorum is fundamentally informal and off-the-record, establishing the decorum of a given rhetorical situation can prove to be challenging for researchers. There are no official documents that outline decorum, at least in its inception, so it is necessary for researchers to use methods that identify and explicate participants' knowledge of decorum within a rhetorical situation. Questioning participants through an anonymous survey provides one of the most effective means of identifying decorum because participants are able to articulate their knowledge of decorum without fear of repercussion. Likewise, it gives participants an opportunity to articulate the unwritten rules and expectations they must follow but may not readily identify as significant. I discuss the reasoning behind the methods I present, in addition to the results of the survey in Chapter 4, using the information gathered to inform the subsequent interviews and analysis of job ads that will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. The results of this survey reflect those of the published interviews in that women believe their gender has an impact on their experiences in the workplace, and that in order to succeed they must follow specific rules of symbolic display that are highly gendered. This gendered decorum will be based primarily on male dominance within the space.

I also discuss the results of the follow-up interviews that I conducted with women who took the survey. These interviews give a more comprehensive view of women's experiences working in the Utah technology sector. These interviews are used to further explain the decorum in this space and justify an approach to social justice research that uses decorum as a theoretical foundation.

#### **Chapter 4: Gender, Religion, and Discrimination—Results of the Pilot Study**

My discussion in Chapter 3 demonstrates that the decorum in Utah's tech sector is what I will call gendered (i.e. heavily influenced and divided by gender) and hypermasculine (i.e. being primarily defined by masculinity). Likewise, these results demonstrate that religion, age, race, and sexuality also have notable influence on the culture and decorum. I also discuss how these influences on decorum are always in flux, that there's never one specific, enduring decorum; rather, decorum is always changing, influencing oppression while also being influenced by oppression. With these influences on decorum as a lens, I then examine the ways in which this decorum, and the issues that are relevant to this decorum, are reflected in job ads posted by companies within the Utah tech sector. This is a rhetorical analysis based primarily on the ways in which gender, religious values, race, sexuality, and age are portrayed, both linguistically and visually. Using a coding scheme to maintain consistency, I determine which job ads are (1) addressing gender, religious values, sexuality, race, and age in any way; (2) specifically appealing to people according to these categories (such as women, people in the LGBTQ community, young people, etc.); and (3) deterring people according to any of these same categories. An in-depth analysis of each specific category will not be addressed here as that is not the primary focus of this project; however, specific examples are used to

demonstrate the ways in which decorum-based research can identify areas of concern that call for further research and analysis.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion—Decorum for Research, Pedagogy, and Beyond**

To conclude the dissertation, Chapter 5 ties all the previous chapters together and makes a final argument for the use of decorum as a tool for social justice research in technical communication. I discuss how the case study presented in the chapters 3 and 4 substantiate the value in using a perspective of decorum by providing a framework through which multiple--as well as singular--points of concern for social justice can be identified and evaluated. I explain how these case studies naturally call for greater attention to multiple aspects of cultural identity within the given space, and how the research methods and data collected can readily inform research that examines these issues starting from the perspective of decorum. Likewise, I discuss how future research in Utah's tech sector should use the framework of decorum-based research I have outlined throughout this dissertation to address the intersectionality of aspects of cultural identity that are crucial to social justice initiatives.

I also discuss the ways in which the data from my pilot study can be used to inform future research and provide additional reasoning for delving deeper into the important issues that are creating problems for women and others within the workplace. Because the primary focus of this dissertation is to outline a theory and method, I do not provide significant detail about solutions, but I do offer some insight into how the data collected in the pilot study, informed by the theoretical framework of decorum I outline throughout this dissertation, can lead to solutions. I primarily use the work of Dimaggio & Powell (1983) to make these connections. I also call for other TPC scholars to use the

methods and framework I have delineated to conduct social justice research in other spaces and with different populations, and outline implications that my research has for the workplace at large. Lastly, I explain how the theories and methods of decorum outlined in this dissertation can be used as a pedagogical tool. In this section, I explain the benefits of using decorum in the classroom and provide ideas for how it can be used in both composition courses and TPC courses, using my own personal experience from my own teaching.

## CHAPTER 2: DECORUM, SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

### **TPC and Social Justice**

While the move toward social justice in Technical and Professional Communication (TPC) has occurred more recently, this endeavor has been predicated, informed, and inspired by other scholars' work which is both directly and indirectly related to social justice initiatives. In its earliest stages, social justice ideas in TPC were beginning to form with the field's move toward humanism. While these earliest beginnings may not immediately appear to be directly part of a social justice move, it laid the groundwork for scholars whose work is explicitly aimed toward social justice. Recognizing the inherent human aspects of TPC has been crucial to understanding how humans use TPC in ways that oppress and marginalize, and also how oppression becomes apparent when examining TPC through a social justice lens. Similarly, the recognition of TPC as a humanistic endeavor also gave way to conversations about agency, the relationship between the writer and audience, rhetoric, and culture. Each of these explorations opened up the field to discussions about the ways in which TCP intersects with what I will refer to as "points of identity", including gender, race, disability, social class, sexuality, nationality, and more--each of which hold significant meaning in social justice research.

Though TPC research has traditionally focused on describing or improving the transfer of information (i.e. the hyperpragmatic focus), scholars have recognized and established the civic and political nature of TPC over the last 30 years (Blyler, 1998; Herndl, 1993), a transition that can in large part be attributed to the recognition of

technical communication as a humanistic endeavor (Miller, 1979). In her foundational work, Miller (1979) challenges the positivist notion of technical communication--which views plain language as an objective window through which the world can be understood by all--by untangling the subjectivity of language and rhetoric. This subjectivity, as Miller points out, demonstrates the humanistic elements that are undoubtedly at play in TPC. Knowledge and language, including in TPC, are human constructions permeated with values, ideologies, and attitudes, and must be treated as such. These ideas challenge the traditional notion that treats TPC as a neutral ground in which communication is free from bias.

Other scholars have since built on Miller's argument by making strong cases for approaches to research and pedagogy that encompass the human—and thus cultural and power—dynamics inherent to technical communication. Rutter (1991) defined the field of TPC by arguing for a vision of the field as inherently rhetorical and humanistic. He urged other scholars to consider these elements in their research as well. Katz (1992) pushed forward this call to explore the humanistic dimensions of TPC further by calling into question what he referred to as an “ethic of expediency”--that is, an ethic based on convenience and practicality at the expense of morality--that had permeated the field and dissuaded researchers and practitioners from recognizing the human elements of technical communication. This “ethic of expediency”--which Katz illustrates through his critical analysis of a memo sent by a Nazi officer during the Holocaust in which the execution of Jewish prisoners is discussed with a distinct disregard for their humanity--elevates the importance of ease and efficiency to the point of apathy and negligence for humankind.

Similarly, Herndl (1993) called for research and pedagogy that evaluate the power



relations inherent to TPC. Herndl's argument was extended by Blyler (1998), who developed a critical research perspective to re-examine the researcher-participant relationship. Similarly, Slack, Miller, & Doak (1993) examined the power of the author and audience by critiquing the traditional notion of the author as transmitter and audience as receiver. This notion of communication envisions the author as a simple transmitter of information, with no rhetorical influence on the information itself while the audience is just a receiver, who likewise has little to no influence on how information is interpreted. This research by Slack, Miller, & Doak (1993) has been used to inform pedagogical approaches that help students envision technical communication as a complex exchange between senders, receivers, and the mediums through which information is exchanged.

Each of these important works have helped scholars begin to rethink and reframe TPC in ways that address issues associated with power, and thus culture. the work of these scholars highlights concerns shared by cultural studies scholars. However Longo (1998) was the first to explicitly introduce cultural studies as a method for TPC research. Her work treads the path for other scholars whose work focuses specifically on cultural dimensions in TPC, such as the influence of culture on usability, research, writing, and the role of institutions in legitimizing knowledge. Dilger (2006), Britt (2006), and Grabill (2006) each endeavored to promote Longo's call for research informed by cultural studies methods. Dilger (2006), for example, demonstrates how a cultural studies framework enables a revisioning of usability that better addresses the needs of the user. Britt (2006) uses cultural research methods to contend that "technical communication is the means by which institutions define themselves and conduct their cultural work" (p.148). And Grabill (2006) demonstrates the value in using cultural research methods in TPC as a

means for studying the “rhetorics of the everyday,” a move that will enable greater contribution to civic life. This emphasis is important because until this point, TPC had not been directly concerned with or critical of the influences of everyday practices.

With these scholars working toward greater assessment and critique of the relationship between TPC and power, other scholars began addressing the need for more in-depth analyses of specific issues related to power. Gender has been frequently addressed by TPC scholars looking to explore issues of power (White, Rumsey, & Amidon, 2016). Many scholars have argued for feminist approaches to research and pedagogy, demonstrating that feminist research methods can highlight topics, problems, strategies, and solutions that are not apparent with other research methods (Allen, 1991; Gurak & Bayer, 1994; Hallenbeck, 2012; Herrick, 1999; Kirsch & Royster, 2010; Koerber, 2000; Lay, 1991). Petersen & Walton (2018) discuss the numerous ways in which feminisms have been used with TPC, giving a historical overview that begins with the influence of 18th century liberal feminisms and ends with postmodern and third-wave feminisms. They discuss the numerous benefits for the application of feminism to TPC research that have been outlined by multiple feminist TPC scholars, each with a different view point. Petersen & Walton’s overview cites the many scholars who have contributed to the field, describing how feminisms can provide new sources of knowledge by recognizing previously overlooked expertise (Hallenbeck, 2012; Malone, 2010, 2013; Petersen 2014; Smith & Thompson, 2002; Thompson, 1999; fill in gaps and silences by recognizing the contributions of female scholars and elevating the experiences of women as equal to those of men (Glenn, 2004; Gurak & Bayer, 1999; Rauch, 2012; Sauer, 1993; Walton, 2016); provide effective research methodologies such as interviews and research

participation that resists the dichotomy of comparison thinking (Agboka, 2014; Collins, 2004; Frost, 2016; Hirschmann, 2004; Royster & Kirsch, 2012; White, Rumsey, & Amidon, 2016); and reclaim women's expertise in science and technology (Durack, 1999; E.A. Flynn, 1997; Hallenbeck, 2012; J.F. Flynn, 1997; Lippincott, 1997; Shirk, 1997; Skinner, 2012; Tebeaux, 1998, Tebeaux & Lay, 1992).

Frost (2016) likewise argues for feminisms in TPC through what she terms *apparent feminism*. This methodology “seeks to recognize and make apparent the urgent and sometimes hidden exigencies for feminist critique of contemporary technical rhetorics” (p. 5). Frost's work looks to engage participation from feminists *and* allies who do not explicitly identify as feminist. Most notable in the work of both Petersen & Walton (2018) and Frost (2016) is a direct recognition of a perceptible resistance to feminisms and academic conversations that focus on gender.

Race and ethnicity are also contentious issues that have gone largely unaddressed in TPC research until recently, even more so than gender. However, several scholars have undertaken these topics over the last 20 years and have urged others to incorporate race and ethnicity into their own work. The *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* released a special issue in July 2012 that focused specifically on race and ethnicity. Contributors to this special edition examine the intersections of race, technology, rhetoric, and technical communication. Haas (2012) argues for “interdisciplinary, decolonial critical race research, curriculum design, and pedagogy” (p. 301) in TPC research that is specifically focused on technology and design as a way to resist the cultural imperialism that has long defined what is considered relevant and meaningful within the field of TPC. Other scholars also contributed to turning the field's

attention to issues of race by identifying problems with technical communication documents that had always been considered neutral, as the nature of the field had traditionally functioned under the premise that TPC is neutral.

To uncover how these types of documents can be problematic, Pimentel & Balzhiser (2012) critically analyze the 2010 census--a technical communication document--to determine how the technical communication practices (in the form of questions directly related to Hispanic origin and race) “contribute to dysfunctional racial dynamics” (p. 312). Evia & Patriarca (2012) use direct input from Latino construction workers to demonstrate the importance of acknowledging racial and ethnic dynamics of users when designing technical documents. These, and other scholars (Savage & Mattson, 2011; Savage & Matveeva, 2011) have established the exigency for research that addresses racial and ethnic dynamics of TPC, but there is still a greater need for more extensive explorations of these topics.

Perhaps the most ignored issue related to power in TPC, though, has been (dis)ability. Until recently, (dis)ability has not been a major area of concern for TPC scholars. There are, however, those who have addressed the need for more research on the intersection between (dis)ability, power, and technical communication. Much of this work has been focused around accessibility, in part because technical communication documents are directly concerned with issues of accessibility, even if its not readily apparent. Accessibility is often part of the work that technical communicators engage in as they create, revise, and share documents. To help make technical communicators more actively aware of the problems that diverse audiences might have when accessing documents, several TPC scholars have studied documents that have traditionally been

considered universally accessible, identifying ways in which users face challenges that may not have been previously considered. Roberts (2006) identifies ten common barriers people with disabilities face when accessing websites, research that has informed additional work involving accessibility. Clearly and Flammia (2012) extend Roberts' work by focusing specifically on difficulties faced by certain populations using self-serve documentation. Elmore (2013) continues the conversation by advocating for user design processes that actively incorporate the perspectives of people with disabilities. Others focus their work with (dis)ability to the TPC classroom. Oswal and Meloncon (2014) advocate for pedagogy that explicitly addresses accessibility as part of the course design while Colton & Walton (2015) demonstrate how student engagement with notions of disability can encourage more extensive discussions about power, privilege, and social justice within the TPC classroom.

The common thread among each of these scholars' work in gender (feminisms), race/ethnicity, and (dis)ability is a focus on the power dynamics inherent to TPC and the roles that technical communication plays in both establishing and disrupting hegemonic practices and the real effects to humans that occur as a result. Rather than just filling in the gaps in scholarship, though, many scholars are interested in helping enact change, to alleviate the problems caused by hegemonic practices. Research and discussions on ethics—which mostly addressed issues of honesty and clarity in early years—provide the crucial foundations for later scholars interested in a more in-depth approach to the relationship between power and technical communication, an approach that helps impact real change (Dombrowski, 2000; Dragga, 1997, 1999; Markel, 2001). As I mentioned previously, many technical communication textbooks address the ethics of practice and

are intended to inform future technical communicators about the potential ethical dilemmas they may face working as a practitioner. However, more recent TPC scholarship looks to move beyond a practical approach to ethics by looking deeper into the ways in which ethics can help shape both individuals and society at large. Scholars whose work focuses on this objective have incorporated more in-depth research and discussion regarding culture and intercultural communication (Amant & Thatcher, 2011; Devoss, Jasken, & Hayden, 2002); virtue ethics and ethics of care (Colton, 2016; Colton, Holmes, & Walwema, 2018); gender and sex (Gurak & Bayer, 1994); and user experience and design (Meloncon, 2013).

By bringing awareness to each one of these issues--all of which are core components to oppression--each of the scholars who have attended to this work have contributed to building the foundation on which the coalition of social justice scholars can continue to build. It might also be important to differentiate here what could be categorized as social justice research. The primary difference between research that examines points of identity and research that is specifically attuned to social justice is that social justice research not only looks to *identify* or *discuss* oppression; it also seeks to *challenge* and *eliminate* that oppression. As Jones (2016) points out, “the social justice perspective must not be purely descriptive but actively integrated into the research and pedagogy of our field in a way that promotes social change on a broader level” (p. 343). As such, social justice research must do three things: 1) identify oppression 2) seek a fundamental understanding of how, why, when, to whom, and by whom that oppression occurs, and 3) explore, identify, and/or implement strategies that will alleviate that oppression in some way.

With such a hefty endeavor in sight, it is crucial that social justice researchers continually seek out theories, methodologies, and methods that best support their specific research agendas. A contemporary re-envisioning of decorum within the context of social justice can provide one viable option. While the theoretical framework laid out in this dissertation may not be appropriate or best suited for every social justice project, it can and should provide a new perspective into the ways in which we think about, research, and discuss issues of power, and likewise how we use that knowledge to facilitate meaningful change.

### **Defining Decorum**

Given that the framework of decorum I have proposed is heavily based upon the term *decorum* itself, it's important to define and contextualize decorum as it pertains to rhetoric and social justice. Though a thorough historical mapping is neither necessary nor appropriate for this project, it is still important to have a basic understanding of decorum's history and evolution in order to capture decorum within a contemporary framework that is to be used for social justice initiatives. And, given decorum's reputation and usage within everyday contexts, a more detailed explanation of the term is called for as a means to rationalize decorum being used in the contexts for which I have laid out. To do this, I will briefly explain the use of the *term* decorum over time, as it relates to my current purpose of using decorum as a methodology. Do note that this is not a comprehensive historical record of *decorum*; rather, this summary serves to explain why decorum is seemingly a new rhetorical concept, particularly in my envisioning of the term as a tool for social justice research in TPC. Also note, that when I use the word "rhetoric" I am referring to the modes of persuasion, whereas when I use the terms

“rhetorical theory” and “fields of rhetoric” I am referring to the theories about those modes and the fields that employ them.

The history of decorum has continuously evolved. With its first inception in classical rhetoric, decorum became one of the most important aspects of rhetorical theory, yet over time, the rhetorical term also became shrouded in controversy. This controversy stems from the original vision and interpretation of decorum as elitist. That is, decorum was considered to be a prescriptive formula that only applied to the elite members of upper-class society due to its prominent use in public politics. Decorum, therefore, was not considered relevant to anyone else, so despite its prominence in classical rhetoric, the term has been given little consideration by scholars over the last century. However, a reevaluation of the term suggests that decorum is still a critical component to modern-day rhetoric, and only by reinvigorating the term can its full potential be realized. More specifically, decorum has the potential to bridge the gap between numerous points of rhetorical concern, acting as a unifying term. With a reevaluation of decorum and a revival of its relevance to contemporary rhetoric, decorum has the potential to be a central focus of rhetoric once again.

What makes decorum a key component of rhetoric--despite the appearance that it is not essential to the discipline-- is the fact that the fields of rhetoric are an open system. They are always in flux, always evolving. Rhetoricians continue to find new discourses, mediums, outlets, and structures that inform and are informed by rhetoric (Lanham 1993). Thus, it is essential that we reformulate the rhetorical tradition of decorum to meet the needs of an evolving practice. Decorum’s previous uses, discussions, applications, and definitions should inform but not completely encompass a contemporary theory of



decorum. In a world that is in constant political disarray, where issues of social justice are prominent in almost every facet of society, and solutions are seemingly never found (at least not in consensus), it is more crucial than ever to reevaluate the rhetorical landscape and access its full potential. Now is the time for a theory that can address these issues head on, by understanding each individual problem while simultaneously looking for solutions. Decorum holds the potential to do both; it can help us understand power, hierarchy, and injustice while revealing and/or evaluating solutions that are inherent to the problem.

### **History of Decorum**

In this section, I will discuss what decorum is at large, how it was first introduced, and its evolution over time. In doing so, I will also talk about specific decorum ideas, including ethical, mimetic, humanist, and cultural decorum. Additionally, I will provide examples of these different types of decorum, explaining them in relation to one another. Cicero first introduced the term *decorum* in his work *De Oratore*, but it was not the first time that the topic of appropriateness had been addressed in rhetoric. *To prepon* was the first expression dealing with appropriateness and referred to the rhetor's mastery of fitting into social roles. Similarly, *kairos* was (and continues to be) used to refer to the appropriate use of time. Cicero found both terms important but introduced *decorum* as a more unifying term that would appeal to both *to prepon* and *kairos*. According to Cicero, then, *decorum* is the aesthetic sense by which one masters the process of fitting in to social roles by adhering to common rules of appropriateness. Cicero's belief in decorum as a central aspect of rhetoric and communication is evident by his affirmation that "the universal rule, in oratory as in life, is to consider decorum" (21.7-21.71).

The concept of decorum continued to play an important role in rhetoric after Cicero's initial introduction, but the approach to decorum changed over time and according to the particular circumstances for which rhetoric was used. Isocrates, Aristotle, and Plato used an *ethical decorum* (Hariman, 2001). This approach suggested that the mean should be used as a measure of appropriateness; that is, what is considered appropriate lies between two extremes. For example, if I'm giving a speech about gender equality in the workplace to a mixed-gender audience, the first extreme would be for my speech to be very passive and nonchalant about the topic; I would say it was not a big deal, or that women probably were the root of the problem. The other extreme would be to speak very aggressively, perhaps even shouting and using expletives; I would completely blame men for every problem and launch personal attacks. Ethical decorum, then, would lie in the middle of these two extremes. The further away from the median I go with my speech, the more likely I am to be breaking decorum. Ethical decorum is thus the source of moderate speaking, which has become *synonymous* with a sense of tact.

However, ethical decorum also has the potential to present itself as unbiased and neutral, when in fact it is not. In the previous example, my choice to stay within the median boundaries of the two extremes described in the gender equality speech does not make my speech neutral or unbiased. This choice is rhetorical in that I opted for language and a display that would influence my audience's feelings, beliefs, and/or actions. I deliberately chose to keep my presentation within the boundaries of what the audience expected because I knew this strategy would be most appealing to that specific audience. We know, then, that *ethical decorum* is essentially bias because the median itself is bias, as is any deliberate rhetorical strategy.

*Mimetic decorum* suggests that it is appropriate to adhere to pre-established norms and standards that are fixed according to the natural order of life. In this sense, imitation is seen as natural and fitting according to social types. The problem with this approach to decorum is that it presupposes what is “natural” based on characteristics that are socially constructed. Using the previous scenario as an example, if--as a woman--it has been deemed “natural” for me to be subdued and non-confrontational, any display of anger, aggression, or potentially even passion or animation when talking about gender equality would (according to *mimetic decorum*) make me less credible. It would break the audience’s expectations for how I *should* behave, and I would potentially be seen as unfit, unnatural, and thus wrong.

Cicero’s version of decorum is considered *humanist decorum*. This version combined the ethical and mimetic views of decorum, but, unlike ethical and mimetic decorum, humanist decorum applied these ideas to rhetoric *and* everyday life. Cicero insisted that decorum did not just reside within the political arena but was also an integral part of the daily functioning of everyday social interaction. He considered decorum to be both the means and the end of human development, the artistic measure for composing oneself in harmonious relationship with others. Cicero’s recognition that decorum is an integral part of every aspect of life broadened the view and applicability of decorum to all communicative acts, an important step for future scholars who have come to recognize that decorum is also the means and the end to social control, not just human development. As I will discuss later on, Cicero’s notions of decorum have had the most influence on the theoretical framework of decorum I outline in this dissertation.

With the rise in education, the citizen was expected to be less of a public, political

individual and more of an educated individual. Along with this change in discursive practices came the shift to *cultural decorum*. Quintilian was the primary contributor to this new definition of decorum, which scholars now differentiate as *cultural* decorum, though Quintilian referenced these ideas as just “decorum.” He believed that decorum was the “chief virtue in a culture of taste that is the proper end of a liberal education” (Hariman, 2001). It is from this perspective that decorum became what many understand to be first and foremost a prescriptive tool of the elite. Appropriateness becomes synonymous with virtuous and is almost wholly defined by social class. There is little to no consideration of decorum outside of the realm of the educated upper-class. Rather, with this new envisioning of cultural decorum, decorum is regarded as the aesthetic and rhetorical displays for which the upper-class has deemed proper or fitting. Thus, any rules or guidelines of appropriateness falling outside of the realm of upper-class or elitist decorum was not considered decorum at all. As such, decorum became a rhetorical tool of the elite in the eyes of rhetorical scholars and therefore had no relevance to rhetorical situations outside that realm.

This hegemonic simplification of the word gave decorum an unfavorable reputation for years to come, concealing its actual complexity and nearly erasing it from rhetoric studies. If decorum only was applicable to one class of people—as it had come to be identified through Quintilian’s shift of focus—then it had little to no application to the larger vision of rhetoric and rhetorical studies, which over time has become increasingly concerned with the everyday modes of communication. Decorum being envisioned as an elitist tool, therefore, would seem irrelevant to the work of a majority of rhetorical scholars.

However, there were a few key rhetoricians in the 20<sup>th</sup> century who recognized the significance of decorum, looking beyond its reputation as a tool of the elite and envisioning decorum's potential as a concept for analysis and theoretical term for future scholars to expose power relations. They have begun treading the path for a contemporary theory of decorum that embraces decorum's history while also shaping its future. The work of Robert Hariman, Ethan Stoneman, Kenneth Burke, Michel Foucault, and Pierre Bourdieu are particularly valuable in reevaluating decorum within a contemporary context. In particular, the work of these scholars—when conceived within Cicero's vision of decorum—provides a critical and analytical perspective that has been lacking in much of the classical configurations of decorum. While the goals of the classicists were primarily centered around providing instructional tools that would improve civil discourse, the goals of the more modern scholars and rhetors are directed more toward analyzing and critiquing social and rhetorical structures as a means of power and oppression.

What is clear, then, from looking at the evolution of decorum is that it has never been a singular, static term. The history of the word itself demonstrates that, like other rhetorical terms, its evolution is necessary and productive. As we move further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century the world will continue to change, and so must the way we interpret it. It is imperative that we adopt new tools that provide the means necessary to adapt to these changes. Decorum is one of these tools, that when modified to function in a contemporary rhetorical landscape, has the potential to expand rhetoric's relevance and enable its use for research that is attuned to social justice.

### **Decorum as a Research Approach**

One of decorum's greatest advantages as a critical lens in social justice research lies in its flexibility. Decorum can be used to examine one particular cultural dynamic--such as social class or gender within a specific context--so researchers whose interests fall specifically within one cultural or political sphere can use decorum to learn more about that particular issue. However, decorum also has the capacity to examine multiple points of identity simultaneously and offer further insight into how the intersection of those points affects the ways in which people experience oppression. I demonstrate with more specific detail how these two different uses of decorum might actually look in Chapters 3 and 4 when I discuss a case study on women working in Utah tech. But for the sake of contextualizing decorum as a theoretical framework, I will first give a more general overview of how these two approaches work and why they are valuable for social justice research.

There are two ways in which decorum can be used with a narrow frame of reference in research. With the first approach, we can examine a particular research subject(s) or site, looking for phenomena that are directly related to the cultural or political dynamic we are interested in. This can happen through rhetorical analysis of a text, observation of an event, or interviews--just to name a few examples. Next, we would identify specific events, language, symbols, etc. within the research subject or site that fall within the definition of decorum (i.e. anything that appears to be or represent an unwritten rule or expectation for symbolic display). Finally, for this first approach to research, we would make connections between the theoretical components of decorum (which I will expand on in this chapter) and the actual phenomena taking place within our research site. These connections can help us draw conclusions and/or call for further

research.

So for example, if I am interested in learning more about discriminatory workplace experiences involving immigrant Latinx hotel workers, I would ask the workers (in various ways, i.e. survey, interviews, etc.) to first talk about specific experiences they have had that are related to their ethnicity. Observations could be another great option, one that would not necessarily call for direct questioning. The initial questions and/or observations will be informed by previous research that identifies common issues of discrimination that occur within the workplace and are immediately associated with a worker's ethnicity. Next, I would ask them to elaborate more on these experiences by having them identify the decorum in their workplace--including when and to whom that decorum applies, who decides that decorum, and what the consequences are for following and breaking that decorum. Having already discussed ethnicity, it is likely that the answers given will naturally be associated with ethnicity, though other issues will certainly come forth as well. The information gathered will be coded, and I will draw connections between the lived experiences, feelings, and ideas of the research participants and the theoretical underpinnings of decorum that are evident and noteworthy in regard to the research subject matter. This analysis will ultimately allow for a new perspective of Latinx immigrants' experiences in the workplace, adding to and complementing the already important work that other researchers are doing in that area.

The second approach to using a framework of decorum as the theoretical underpinning to research that is narrowed to a specific point of reference begins by first identifying the decorum within a given situation. Rather than starting specifically with the aspect of cultural identity we are interested in, we would instead first identify any

unwritten or unspecified rules and expectations within the given research site. Again, this could be identified through rhetorical analysis, observation, and/or interview and survey questions. Based on the decorum that is found, we would then ask some follow-up questions like: “To whom do those rules apply?” “Who makes those rules?” “How do you know those rules if there is no official documentation of them?” “What happens when those rules are broken?” Like the first method, the responses will be coded, but this time we will look specifically for anything that directly relates to the exact point of identity we are interested in. Because we were not specifically asking about that point of identity, it is likely that other points of interest will arise as well, but this method will allow us to filter out the points that we are most interested in and draw conclusions based on those specific dimensions of the research. Likewise, this approach gets research participants to focus on the decorum and who it affects rather than starting with race and an assumption that racism is happening.

To outline how this works and how it differs from the first approach, I’ll use the previous example of starting the research project with an interest in learning more about the ethnic dynamics of Latinx hotel workers. I would first ask my research participants to identify the unofficial rules and expectations their managers and coworkers have for them within their workplace. Using their answers to guide follow-up questions I would then ask for further details about the decorum they identified, such as “how do you know about this if it’s not officially recorded anywhere?” or “who makes those rules?” and “what would happen if you didn’t follow those rules?” I would then code this information and identify anything that relates to ethnicity. Though other factors may be involved in their workplace decorum (such as gender or family structure), I would still be able to



narrow my analysis to just ethnicity using a coding method that would allow me to isolate that information.

While these two research methods are effective as they stand, it is important to note that both of these approaches naturally lend themselves to a more comprehensive view of the research site and subjects. Ethnicity may be the primary focus in each of the previous examples, but decorum-focused research naturally allows for other important factors that have significant impact on these workers' experiences to be identified as well. With the focus being on decorum, factors such as family, migrant status, social class, ability, and age are not immediately factored out during the data-gathering process, so although ethnicity might be of major importance, it will not be the only issue that is discussed. Because there is no "coaching" or leading questions that will immediately prompt participants to discuss race, such research can prove to be more persuasive to resistant and highly critical readers. Likewise, decorum allows research participants to convey their experiences without having to filter out important factors that have an impact on their experiences. In this way, a theoretical framework of decorum is particularly noteworthy in its natural ability to allow for intersectionality.

Intersectionality, by definition, is the interconnection between social categories (such as gender, race, social class, etc.) as they apply to an individual or a group (International Women's, 2018; Crenshaw, 1991). It is especially important, when conceptualizing intersectionality, to focus on what it *does*, rather than what it *is*. What intersectionality does is guide the researcher's way of thinking about difference and sameness in relation to power; it provides a path through which we can think about and understand categories "not as distinct but as always permeated by other categories" (Cho,

Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013, p. 795). Intersectionality is particularly generative in social justice research in that it aims to identify and make sense of the overlapping, diverging, and sometimes conflicting ways in which oppression and discrimination occur because of its emphasis on the relationship between categories. Overall, intersectionality provides a way for us to understand these relationships and other factors that are involved--namely how outlying factors affect these categories, how they affect each other, and how these categories affect outlying factors.

To explain why decorum can be conceptualized as a theory of intersectionality, it is important to distinguish the framework from other approaches to social justice research. Most notably, decorum works to highlight intersectionality due to its unique focus on the “how” rather than the “who” in instances of discrimination. In other words, instead of examining a situation from the lens of *who* is discriminating and being discriminated against, decorum first seeks to understand *how* discrimination is occurring. This shift in focus expands the opportunity for discriminatory practices and experiences to be identified and highlights the unique results that occur when multiple social categories or points of identity converge. As such, we can more fully understand the nuances that are present when someone experiences multiple forms of oppression. The more we examine these nuances, the more patterns we can find and the more we can learn about how, when, why, and to whom oppression occurs. This knowledge informs action, which is a primary goal for social justice research.

Going back to the previous research example in which we were interested in learning more about the experiences of Latinx hotel workers, we can see how a framework of decorum can illuminate intersectionality. By focusing on *how*

discrimination occurs, we could examine how various people's experiences both relate and differ. We might see, for example, that single female workers experience more direct sexual harassment than married female workers, and certainly even more so than single or married male workers. We also might notice that an older, married female who resides in the country illegally experiences discrimination much differently than a younger, single male who has citizenship. And what's important about this distinction is not just that we know there is a difference, but we can also see what those differences are and how they are actually manifested in the unofficial culture of the workplace.

It would seem, with such benefits to the research, that intersectionality would be a very common theme across social justice research. Yet, many research methods do not make it a priority. Intersectionality is not a new concept, however. Intersectionality has been an important factor in a variety of research projects and across multiple disciplines. Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall (2013) argue for an identifiable field of intersectionality studies, noting three different approaches to intersectionality that define the field. Two of these approaches are encompassed within a framework of decorum. The first approach "applies an intersectional frame of analysis to a wide range of research and teaching projects" (p.786). These projects specifically adapt to or build on intersectionality to help answer a wide variety of research questions. A theory of decorum likewise looks to answer specific research questions with its inherent ability to examine a particular research subject/site with of intersectional framework.

The second approach to intersectionality that the Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall point out has to do with what they call "praxis," which "embod[ies] a motivation to go beyond mere comprehension of intersectional dynamics to transform them" (p. 786). In other

words, knowledge gained from intersectionality-based research (i.e. the first approach to intersectionality) should be used to enact meaningful change that improves the situation for those involved. It is the reciprocal relationship of influence between theory and practice that defines intersectionality studies. As a research tool grounded within the social justice initiative, a framework of decorum also seeks to build a complementary relationship between gaining knowledge and enacting change, making it a functional tool for intersectionality.

In addition, MacKinnon (2013) discusses how intersectionality can function “across and within disciplines and across and within political spaces” (p 792). In this sense, intersectionality does not require complete unity among the varying disciplines in order for them to collaborate. Rather, studies of intersectionality can occur within distinct disciplines and political arenas, but also among and between them. As a tool for intersectionality, a theoretical framework of decorum can also work in this way. Scholars can use the framework of decorum within the structures, traditions, and perspectives of their own discipline, yet they can also use decorum as a tool for collaboration. Decorum allows scholars to maintain their own unique perspectives, while simultaneously bridging gaps between diverging perspectives. As such, decorum acts as a tool for intersectionality by merging seemingly separate ideas, approaches, and research sites in a way that counts for and recognizes the importance of each perspective.

### **Cultural and Social Theories**

Positioning decorum within the sphere of cultural and social theories calls for an examination of how the theoretical framework fits into and also informs larger schools of thought. As my historical overview suggests, decorum has been given little consideration

since Quintilian narrowed its application to include only the realm of the elite. This envisioning of the word would naturally exclude it from anything being relevant outside that realm. However, just because the word “decorum” in itself has been misinterpreted and disregarded by most does not mean that the ideas, values, and objectives behind a contemporary re-envisioning of decorum have also been absent from the discussion.

Numerous theorists and scholars have, in their own unique ways, identified and discussed important elements that are all bound within a contemporary re-envisioning of decorum. Examining their work illuminates (1) the specific elements of decorum that are important to identify; (2) the significance of these elements within rhetoric, sociology, and social justice; (3) the ways in which decorum informs and is informed by these works; and thus (4) the validity of using decorum as a theoretical framework for social justice.

In the following sections, I will discuss each scholar individually and how each of their work both informs, and is informed by, a contemporary re-envisioning of decorum. These scholars are what I will call “tacit decorum theorists” whose work engages in the same themes, ideas, and issues that are important to a new vision of decorum, though they do not directly speak of decorum in itself or encompass every aspect of the theoretical framework of decorum that I discuss in this dissertation. It is also important to note that this is not an exhaustive list of “tacit decorum theorists.” Many other theorists and scholars have and continue to do important work within the realms of decorum. I have selected the following theorists for three reasons: 1) each of them have established a significant reputation within their respective fields, and if my goal is to bring credibility to decorum by weighing it against other established theories, then using well-respected theorists helps serve this purpose; 2) each theorist discusses specific elements of decorum

that are particularly important to the theoretical framework of decorum I am presenting; and 3) though not nearly as significant but still an influential factor, is that the work of these scholars resonates with me on a personal and scholarly level and has had a notable influence on the evolution of my thinking about decorum.

It is also important to note that not all the work by each of these theorists will hold equal weight, particularly as the theoretical framework of decorum is applied to a variety of situations. For example, Foucault's work is more relevant to institutional decorum, whereas the work of Bourdieu and Goffman will stand out more when examining less formal situations, such as informal conversations in the workplace. My hope is that as we apply a theoretical framework of decorum to research--in TPC and others fields--that scholars will continue to bring in the voices of other theorists whom they find relevant to the work they are doing with decorum and we can continue to engage in the important conversations for which each of the theorists work is significant.

### **Kenneth Burke**

Burke's vision of Identification suggests that we must find a common ground on which we can identify with our audience in order to be effective rhetors. These points of identification can include values, beliefs, assumptions, physicality, appearance, and more. Identification occurs in two similar, yet divergent ways. The first form of identification happens when a person identifies their personal self with something outside of them, including people and objects. For example, as a lower-middle class, white married woman with four children, raised in a rural, primarily white, right-wing community, I may find it difficult to relate to--and thus persuade--a single, upper-class, Black woman who was raised in a large metropolitan area in France. However, knowing that this

woman is also a mother, I would first be able to identify with that particular aspect of her identity. We would have similar experiences, feelings, and actions that are all associated with being a mother. As Burke points out, this form of identification will make it possible for me to more fully understand her, at which point I would better understand how to persuade her.

The second form of identification--exterior identification--occurs when someone identifies a person as belonging to a group. As with internal identification, external identification relies on actions, appearances, beliefs, values, and assumptions about others in order to identify which group they belong to. For example, if I am meeting someone new, I might learn that they are a liberal arts student that listens to Indie music and regularly hangs out at a local coffee shop whose coffee is sustainably sourced. I might also notice that they have a nose piercing, are wearing Chaco sandals, and a loose-fitting flannel shirt. Based on my knowledge from previous encounters with individuals that have similar appearance, behavior, and values, I might identify this person as belonging to the group that people call "hipsters."

Both forms of identification are important concepts to decorum, as decorum often provides points of identification, though we are not always aware of them. In the first example, the decorum of motherhood is something that I can personally understand and thus identify with. This internal identification is an especially important aspect of decorum in social justice research as decorum can be used to help us become more aware of the unwritten rules that guide our daily lives. Likewise, we can learn how decorum can both prevent identification and encourage us to better identify with those around us. In the second example, we can see how an internal understanding of decorum that is learned

through observation and experience can affect the way we view, categorize, and ultimately treat other people, in both the good and bad. If I identify someone as belonging to a group that I don't particularly like (let's say in this example I have a bias against "hipsters"), then anyone that I identify as belonging to that group will immediately be assigned that same bias (i.e. I now believe that this "hipster" is someone I can't get along with). In this way, external identification can prevent internal identification.

### **Goffman & Bourdieu**

Though Burke is considered a rhetorician, his ideas about identification are easily relatable to those of Erving Goffman and Pierre Bourdieu, sociologists whose work has had significant influence in their field, as well as others. Both Goffman and Bourdieu take interest in what might be considered the mundaneness of everyday existence. Though the humdrum day-to-day interactions of humans might not always make for the most sensational or flashy headlines, it is a crucial part to gaining a fundamental understanding of the ways in which our societies function. Just like decorum, Goffman and Bourdieu's attention to the everyday life do in fact arouse, entertain, and respond to some of the most important questions in our world. The elements of our everyday interactions that are seemingly hidden within our day-to-day existence can be--as Goffman and Bourdieu demonstrate--a crucial component to the ways in which we live and make meaning.

In the introduction of his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Goffman begins his discussion about social interaction and communication by pointing out one of the most important aspects of communication: that when an individual enters the presence of others, he/she immediately works to determine the situation. That is, a



person will learn information about other people in the situation to determine “what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him. Informed in these ways, the others will know how best to act in order to call forth a desired response” (p.1). What Goffman describes here is essentially a person’s attempt to understand decorum—or as Cicero might conclude, the person’s attempt to compose himself in harmonious relationship with others. As Goffman explains, when entering a new situation, a person must quickly determine the expectations for symbolic display that will guide the social interaction. The newcomer knows that the others will use “clues from his conduct and appearance which allow [the others] to apply their previous experience with individuals roughly similar to the one before them or, more important, to apply untested stereotypes to him” (p.1). As such, if the newcomer wants to make a good impression and let the others know he/she belongs and is part of the group, he/she will follow decorum.

In order to follow decorum, the person’s symbolic display must meet the expectations of appropriateness. Goffman pays special attention to symbolic display, though he does not directly use that specific term. His notion of “performance” encompasses what is essentially symbolic display. He defines performance as “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants” (p.15). Part of the performance is what Goffman calls “front,” which he defines as “the part of the individual’s performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance” (p. 22). Of most significance, when thinking about this concept in terms of social justice and intersectionality, is the “personal front” --the specific and individual characteristics that the performer carries wherever he/she may go. These can include

clothing, sex, age, race, visible disabilities, facial expressions, speech patterns, etc. In many cases, the performer has little to no control over their personal front, yet as Goffman points out, it still has a significant impression on the observer.

Goffman discusses that people use symbolic display to perform in ways that will ultimately achieve a desired goal, which is almost always to get the other person/people/audience to respond or behave in ways the performer desires. Whether this be simple social acceptance of the performer, or direct action (such as voting for the performer in a government election), the choices of symbolic display for performance are always selected in an effort to influence the audience in some way, even if the desire to influence is subconscious.

This idea of using symbolic display to influence others is certainly nothing new to the field of Rhetoric, which has long recognized the ways in which people use a variety of means to influence or even explicitly persuade specific audiences. Numerous rhetorical scholars have discussed the relationship between influence and communication, from Aristotle identifying the means of persuasion to Ratcliffe's (2005) examination of rhetorical listening as an extension of Burke's vision of identification. Decorum originated in the rhetorical tradition, but as I have demonstrated, many of its characteristics can be seen in the work of Goffman.

Many characteristics of decorum can also be seen in the work of Bourdieu, particularly in his vision of "habitus" (Bourdieu & Nice, 1977). Habitus can be described as a system of dispositions. Most important and distinctly different about habitus (when compared to other theories and concepts that are similar) is that habitus is embodied and becomes part of the person subconsciously. It is more of a physical than a mental process

and has to be performed physically to become part of the person's being. In order for habitus to exist, there must also be what Bourdieu calls "doxa." Doxa is comprised of the learned, unconscious beliefs that inform or persuade habitus. With doxa, the social world in which the person resides, and especially grows up in, becomes seemingly natural and taken-for-granted, making it difficult for people to identify with ways of being that differ from what they have always known.

Bourdieu believed that doxa and habitus together contribute significantly to social reproduction by creating and regulating the everyday practices that make up social life. Most importantly, Bourdieu's work with habitus is innovative because it finds the middle ground where the social order (laws, rules, etc.) meets the individual mind. This space is where dispositions reside. Dispositions are the public, and thus observable performance of an individual's preference.

It is important to note, however, that these preferences are often shaped by outside social forces, but also help shape those outside social forces in a circular process. For example, when selecting a drink at a bar, my preference would be a top-shelf whiskey mixed with cola. Conscious evaluation of this preference suggests that it was shaped by my social interactions with my network of friends whom I perceive to be of elevated status (according to my own standards). While I do enjoy other drinks, I almost always select the whiskey because it has become a disposition. It is also clear in this analysis of my own personal habitus that the disposition of others has had social influence on my own individual disposition. This influence of and on disposition is why Bourdieu considers habitus to be a primary factor in social reproduction.

Just like habitus, decorum can become part of people's everyday lives in ways

that seem natural and fixed. However, as we recognize how social reproduction works, it becomes evident that decorum is similarly influential to social reproduction much in the same way as habitus. Though decorum involves more than just a physical disposition, and people can and often are consciously aware of it, decorum has similar influence on the ways in which people define themselves and other people, particularly in the ways in which power structures are established, defined, and function. These definitions and categorizing of ourselves and others have significant influence on the way we feel and the decisions we make based on those feelings.

Bourdieu addresses this idea more fully with his metaphor of outsiders. According to Bourdieu, “[W]hen habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a “fish in water”: it does not feel the weight of the water, and it takes the world about itself for granted” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). When a habitus encounters a world of which it is *not* the product, then the water becomes obvious. Decorum works much the same way. The water (i.e. the social environment for which a habitus is appropriate) is *always* apparent to outsiders. While those who have the habitus that is appropriate for that particular water (i.e. they know and naturally follow the decorum that is established for that particular circumstance) don’t feel any weight or pressure, those who do *not* have the habitus become acutely aware that they don’t. They see, hear, know, and feel that they don’t belong--and others do too, even if it is not always apparent as to why. Attempts to follow decorum in these situations can prove futile as their attempts become more of what Goffman would describe as a “performance” rather than a true “habitus.” When they are performing, then, not only will they *feel* like they don’t belong; others may also see this “act” and likewise deem them to not belong. It is important to note that

his kind of judgement and othering often occurs subconsciously. People usually will *not* directly look at someone, point out the specific ways in which they are not meeting expectations, and then deliberately shun them. Rather, this kind of othering happens over time, when certain instances come up in which it is obvious that a person does not “fit in.” It is then that subconscious bias forms, and it is in the decisions made after such bias is formed that have impact on the person who does not “fit in.” These decisions are also not always deliberately done in a way that excludes or punishes someone for not meeting expectations for symbolic display, but if people are pre-conditioned to think, act, and feel that a person does not fit the bill, then they will wield power in a way that excludes the folks who seemingly don’t belong.

### **De Certeau**

Michel De Certeau’s most significant work *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) has commonly been used within rhetorical studies. In this work, De Certeau theorizes the repetitive and unconscious nature of everyday life. Using the terms “strategies,” tactics,” and “bricolage,” De Certeau discusses the ways in which we navigate our daily lives, particularly in how people establish and respond to means of control. According to De Certeau, “strategies” are the systems created by institutions and organizational powers to instill order and control. In this way, strategies can be tools/means of oppression (though not always deliberate or even apparent). “Tactics” are the ways in which people navigate the strategies that have been established by the institutions under which they must live and work, the ways in which they adapt to the given situation to make it work for them within the restraints that are present. Bricolage demonstrates the idea that people use

creativity to figure out and implement methods that will give them an advantage by either falling in line with or resisting the strategies that are oppressing them.

Decorum can be seen as a strategy, though not an apparent or even deliberate strategy, such as city development or education. However, every institution does establish strategies that are unwritten or unofficial, yet still just as or even more important than formal strategies. Institutions often don't even realize that they are doing this; rather, it often occurs as a natural process, the result of people coming together to form new organizations/groups/etc. As a strategy, decorum can and often does work as a means of control (though not always). Guidelines for what is appropriate are established by those who are in a position of power to both establish and enforce those guidelines, while those in lesser positions of power are expected to adhere to those guidelines. Tactics, then, can be seen as the tools people use to follow decorum (such as wearing a piece of clothing that has been deemed appropriate). As such, tactics include methods of symbolic display that deliberately adhere to decorum. They help someone gain advantage by demonstrating loyalty and obedience to the institution. However, when someone recognizes that the strategies established by the institution are working as a means of control and oppression—even if they are not deliberately created for that specific purpose--bricolage must then be used in order to resist that control by rewriting decorum. Bricolage is the redesigning, recreating, and adaptation of tactics by everyday or common people in an effort to defy the oppression they are experiencing. Bricolage exists on a spectrum with it being very subtle and seemingly insignificant to the larger institution on one end, and an outwardly deliberate defiance to the institution being on the other end. No matter where it lies on this spectrum, though, bricolage can always be seen as an attempt to challenge or

rewrite decorum.

For example, let's say during its first couple years of business, a small startup technology company establishes strategies that are designed to ensure that the two co-founders maintain control of the company as it continues to grow. These strategies include formal procedures, such as limiting stock options and only hiring workers through temporary contracts, rather than long-term employment. However, their strategies might also include establishing decorum that also meets the same end goal. This decorum might include things like "do not ask questions about the financial, proprietary, or inner-workings of the company" or "do not try to advance in the company on your own; the CEO will decide if and when that will happen without your input." This decorum, though unofficial and informal, similarly helps the co-founders maintain control of their company by oppressing the people who work for them. The workers in the company might spend some time using tactics that will help them follow the strategic decorum set in place by the co-founders, such as refraining from asking a lot of questions about the company or not offering to help on extra projects as it might seem to eager. The workers might feel that these tactics are beneficial because they help them demonstrate loyalty and competence for how the company functions. However, over time, when the workers start to recognize that the strategies have been set in place to oppress them, they will then turn to bricolage as a way to combat the oppression and advocate for a better position within the company. If a worker knows she cannot outwardly ask about the financial health of the company, then she might instead search through the company's files to which she has access to find that information on her own. This is considered bricolage because this worker is using the means available to her to gain knowledge that

she can potentially use to challenge the strategies set in place by the company. Rather than outwardly breaking decorum, she instead uses bricolage to work within the boundaries established by the company.

### **Foucault**

As each of the previous evaluations of decorum suggest, decorum sometimes works as a disciplinary practice. By this, I mean that decorum is a method and a means to exercise power, to modify and control human activity, at both a personal and societal level. French philosopher Michel Foucault dedicated much of his work to understanding and articulating disciplinary practices, to analyze how the change in power structures and relations affected punishment in the time before the 18<sup>th</sup> century to present day. His book *Discipline & Punish* suggests that the modern means of punishment (which began emerging in Europe during the 18th-19th centuries) shifted from the body to the soul, an evolution that was driven by discipline. At large, Foucault envisions “discipline” as a modality for the exercise of power. Though discipline comprises a variety of techniques, applications, instruments, and procedures, the primary outcome of discipline is the controlling of populations through control of a person’s movements and behaviors.

As Foucault describes in detail, using specific historical examples from military, penal, and educational settings, control through discipline occurs through the objectification and subjection of the populations (whomever that population may include). However, this control is not immediately apparent to those being controlled, and—as I discussed with other theorists—the system of control is not always deliberate. That is, those who are in the position to exercise discipline and control may not readily recognize that they are doing so, particularly if that control leads to oppression. Rather



than acting on an intentional and calculated effort to gain power and use it maliciously, those who are seen as the oppressor are often merely within a position to wield power and control; it may not even be a question of whether or not they should. They may even see it as something they deserve, something they have earned in some way. As Foucault explains, the system works without the recognition that it is doing so. The new ways and means of control, as Foucault describes, rely on subtlety; this subtlety is what makes modern discipline so effective. As Foucault notes, “it is a modest, suspicious power, which functions as a calculated, but permanent economy...[and] gradually invade[s] the major forms, altering their mechanisms and imposing their procedures” (p. 170).

At the core of this objectification and subjection--and thus discipline--lie three simple instruments: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement, and examination. As a disciplinary practice, decorum uses all three of these instruments. Drawing on Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon—which is the structural model for an ideal prison—Foucault describes each of these instruments. Hierarchical observation occurs when people in positions of power observe those which are deemed to be beneath them in a hierarchy. For example, a school principal observes the teacher, and the teacher observes the students. The observation is not meant as a means for learning or entertainment but rather as a means of control. This is particularly noteworthy when we think about hierarchical observation in terms of decorum. The hierarchical observation with decorum occurs by those with the most control or power. They gather information about the symbolic display that the subjects beneath them in the hierarchy use. The observation trains the subject to behave in certain ways—that is, to follow the decorum—by making him/her aware that they are constantly being watched--that their behavior matters and is

under constant scrutiny by those who have power greater than their own.

Another way in which people are disciplined with decorum is through what Foucault calls the “normalizing judgement.” The normalizing judgement is very closely related to decorum. It is a standard that establishes a baseline minimum in which everyone is expected to reach. Just like decorum, it is an expectation that all people that fall lower in the hierarchy are expected to meet, even if the standards are only relevant and/or achievable for those higher up in the hierarchy. If someone does not meet the standard, there will be punishment. The punishment is not physical, but rather psychological/emotional. Rather than physically hurting someone, the punishment involves making that person believe they are inadequate, an outsider, not normal, etc. The idea is that punishment will be a deterrent to behavior that falls outside of the norm, influencing that person to fall in line with the norm so they do not experience the feelings of inadequacy, rejection, etc.. Unlike decorum, though, the normalizing judgement is often a well-articulated, official, and/or formal standard. For example, in educational settings, standardized testing is considered to be a form of “normalizing judgement.” But decorum works in much the same way as a more formal normalizing judgement, with the exception that the norm is not always deliberately or officially dictated to those who are expected to follow it.

Examination is another tool of discipline Foucault discusses in his theory on discipline that is also closely related to decorum. Examination occurs when a higher-ranking person assesses and makes a determination about a lower-ranking person’s ability to meet the standard. Examination enables those in power to maintain and reinforce their ranking in the hierarchy by reinforcing standards that they themselves are

most capable of meeting. The person being examined is always subject to the person in power. The process of examination itself confirms the hierarchy by reinforcing the notion that certain people are better capable and/or able to make final judgements about others. Likewise, the results of this examination are also important in verifying the subject's place in the hierarchy by providing evidence of their aptitude. The subject never has control over the examination and is always subordinate to the person doing the exam and/or the people who set the exam standards and procedures.

When looking at decorum in relation to Foucault's discussion of discipline, it becomes evident that decorum can be considered what Scott (2003) calls a "disciplinary rhetoric." Decorum itself is quite similar to the "normalizing judgement" in that it establishes a standard to which people are expected to conform. Hierarchical observation is used to control those who are expected to follow decorum; it is an effective form of control because people are aware that they are always being observed. The fear of or aversion to punishment by the subjects ensures that they remain under the control of those in power. The subjects know that if they are seen breaking decorum--during the observation or the exam--that they will be punished, so they do their best to follow decorum to avoid the punishment. In this way, power is maintained with little overt effort and in a way that is not readily observable, and more importantly, difficult to challenge.

### **Articulating a Theoretical Framework of Decorum**

Articulating a framework of decorum for the purpose of research is not an easily straight-forward endeavor. Though decorum exists within every social interaction, it is precisely for that reason that it can be challenging to present a clear, straightforward, and simple method for applying decorum to a research project. Decorum itself can differ

greatly among different groups. In fact, one individual may find themselves navigating numerous and greatly varying decorum throughout a single day. For example, the decorum that exists in my house is quite different from the decorum in my office, which is a shared professional space. Even while at work, the decorum will vary depending on who I am working with. Let's say I go to a doctor's appointment during the workday; I have now encountered yet another decorum. After work I might take my son to a soccer game, where yet again I am faced with a different set of decorum. Then, let's say, I decide to go out to dinner with a group of friends later on in the evening. I will once again be dealing with different decorum. And most importantly, through all of those situations, I am expected to know and follow the decorum.

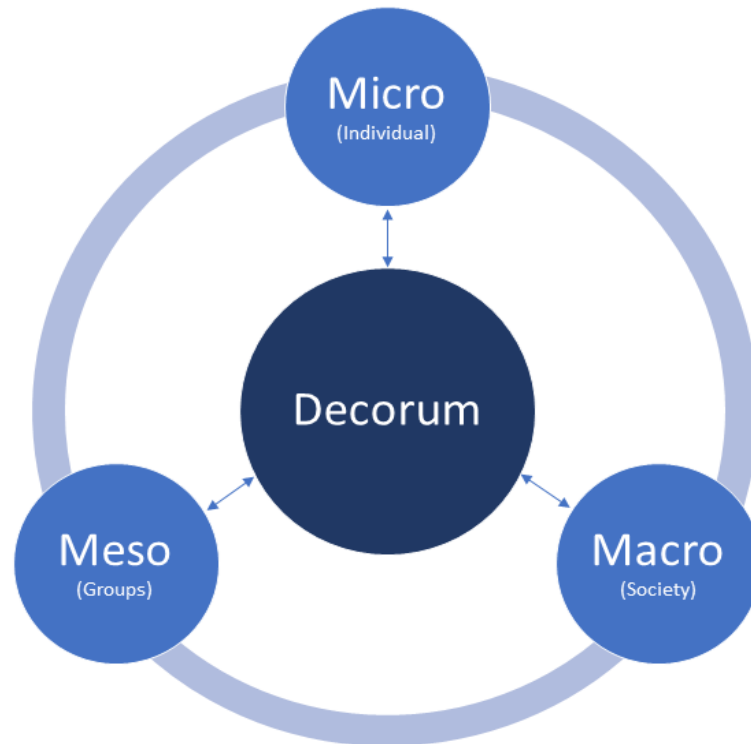
In each of these situations, the decorum I must navigate is very different and unique to those specific situations. But to demonstrate the complexity of decorum even further, we must also recognize that even if someone else were to be in these exact situations, the decorum would also be different than what it would be for me, simply because one aspect of the context would be different. Therefore, even if it were possible to articulate an exact formula for understanding decorum in the first particular situation, as soon as the context of that situation changes in any way, the decorum will also change.

Likewise, decorum is always fluctuating and changing, being modified and adapted, even when the main components of the context remain fairly consistent. What might be deemed acceptable one week can, and often does, change the next. The reasons for change can be nearly endless and are often difficult to pinpoint. Fashion is one example of decorum that can change without any obvious reason. Certain colors, cuts, and styles of clothing will be "in" for some time, but it always changes. What makes this

change in decorum interesting and difficult is that there is usually no direct or specifically articulated messaging that announces the change, yet people are still expected to know when it happens and what the new expectations are.

While these varying and complex characteristics of decorum can make it a challenge to streamline, that does not mean decorum cannot be used for a variety of projects and that researchers cannot have tools with which they work out the problems. In fact, one of the greatest advantages to using decorum is that it reveals so much more than is often expected (as I will demonstrate in the upcoming chapters). With that in mind, the following framework serves as a baseline for understanding and applying decorum to research. The first part of the framework (Figure 1) illustrates the relationship between decorum, individuals, groups, and society. The second part of the framework (Figure 2) outlines a basic process for applying decorum to a technical communication research project. This framework is not meant to be an exact formula; rather, it should be used as a baseline that is modified, updated, and adapted to each individual project. I expand on this framework more in Chapter 3, providing a more comprehensive overview of specific methods, procedures, and considerations that researchers can be thinking about when using decorum. Similarly, there are numerous examples--in addition to my pilot study--that further illustrate how this framework of decorum can be applied. I do not present the following framework (particularly the relationship between the micro, meso, and macro aspects of decorum) as a specific method for decorum-based research. Rather, this framework is meant to inform researchers about the ways in which decorum functions so they can best determine which methods (further outlined in Chapter 3) will work best for their specific projects.

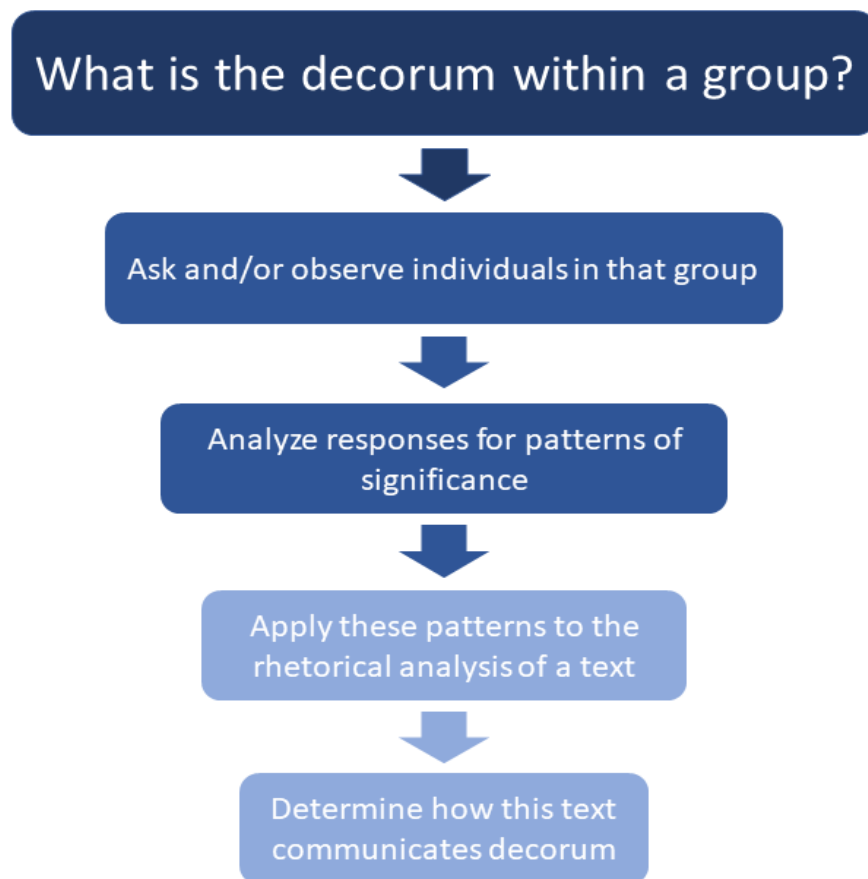
The relationship between decorum, individuals, groups, and society is outlined in Figure 1. It may be preferable for some to use the terms micro, meso, and macro as it can make analysis more uniform and bring continuity to research that engages with decorum, even when the context varies greatly. As the heuristic shows, there is always a reciprocal relationship between each of these entities, and it is often unclear where the process begins. For demonstrative purposes, let us begin with individuals. Individuals bring their own experiences of decorum together and form groups. The individuals within that group then use these past experiences to help create decorum specifically for the new group. In return, the newly formed group decorum then influences the individuals within that group. Those individuals--as well as the group as a whole--interact with society on a larger scale. Society is then influenced by those individuals' and the groups' sense of decorum, but those are both also influenced by society's decorum. The cycle is never the same, and never straightforward. Multiple influences can occur simultaneously, and most importantly, the cycle is constantly moving and reciprocating. The micro, meso, and macro levels all have an influence on the decorum for each level, and the decorum, in turn, influences each level, whether that be individuals, groups, or society at large.



*Figure 1: Circular relationship between the Micro, Meso, and Macro levels of Decorum*

Figure 1

With this in mind, we can begin to formulate a process in which decorum can be used as a basis for research. Figure 2 demonstrates one example of how this process can work. Since the primary objective of this dissertation is to outline a theory of decorum, the following example is not meant to represent the *only* research process for decorum-based research. Rather, it represents one possible way to approach a research project. As I discuss below, the process can be rearranged and adjusted to adapt to each specific project. It is also important to keep in mind that the ultimately, the goal for this process is to identify and challenge oppression. At its core, the theoretical framework I outline in this dissertation is driven by social justice. As such, every step in the following process should in some way relate back or look forward to the identification, articulation, and rejection of oppression and discriminatory practices.



*Figure 2: Example process of how to identify decorum*

Figure 2

In this process, we first begin by identifying decorum at the meso level. This is often where a lot of social justice research focuses, though it should be noted that this is not the only or even necessarily the most important place to start. However, knowing that the relationship between the three levels is reciprocal, we can easily adapt this process to begin with any one of the levels. In order to identify the decorum within a group, we must ask and/or observe those individuals. Because decorum is itself unwritten/informal, identifying it can be a huge challenge for any researcher. This is where tools such as surveys, interviews, and observations will be of value. After the data is gathered, it should be analyzed in a way that looks for patterns of significance. There is no one



specific way to identify these patterns; any coding schema will work so long as it identifies patterns that are relevant to social justice in some way and have been proven valuable by researchers in the field. Next, for research in TPC, these patterns should be applied to the rhetorical analysis of a text--or to keep things consistent, a “symbolic display.” This text(s) can include written, verbal, non-verbal, visual, audio, and more, if it communicates an idea in some way. The rhetorical analysis will help the researcher determine how the text communicates and/or reveals decorum, with the ultimate goal being to find and enact strategies that use technical communication as a means to changing oppressive practices of decorum.

As I have explained through this review of literature and articulation of the framework of decorum, decorum-based research can find a home within TPC and prove supplementary to much of the work already being done in the field. Likewise, a theoretical framework of decorum also provides the field with an additional approach for identifying, critiquing, and challenging oppressive and marginalizing practices. I have also hoped to establish with this literature review that decorum-focused research is not an entirely new voice in TPC; rather, it contributes meaningful dialogue to the conversations currently taking place within the field. While decorum is certainly not the *only* perspective that is valuable to social justice research in the field, it does offer a unique method and perspective that integrates elements of TPC research that have already been legitimized.

## --DECORUM IN UTAH TECH: A PILOT STUDY

To demonstrate how the theoretical framework of decorum that I have laid out in Chapters 1 and 2 can be applied to specific research projects, I present the theory, methods, and results of a pilot study that uses the framework of decorum in these next two chapters. Keep in mind that this pilot study is presented in a way that highlights the primary objective of this dissertation: to present a theoretical approach to social justice research in TPC using a framework of decorum. As such, every element of the pilot study—and the ways in which it is discussed in the following chapters—does not represent the entirety of the research conducted nor a full analysis of the collected data, as it would if the main focus of this dissertation were the decorum in Utah tech.

In this chapter, I lay the foundation for the pilot study, discussing the context in which the study takes place, the background and methods, and the step-by-step process with which I conducted the study. I also discuss the methods and approaches that other scholars can use for their own decorum-focused research. Discussion of these methods and approaches--which also include examples and rationale--will be scattered throughout this chapter and discussed in tandem with the specific approaches I have taken with this pilot study. For the purposes of this dissertation--that is, to propose a theoretical framework of decorum for social justice research, present the advantages of using this framework, and demonstrate how that framework can be applied--I will only be discussing my own research as a pilot study. I will not present a fully detailed analysis or conclusions about the research site itself but will instead primarily use the research and data as a means to fulfill the aforementioned objective for this dissertation. However, the collected data from the pilot study will be used in future research outside of this

dissertation that delves more deeply into the topics addressed in the pilot study. In Chapter 5, I discuss in more detail how the data and other findings from this pilot study can be used in future research, and in the classroom.

For this pilot study, I designed and distributed an anonymous survey and conducted two follow-up interviews with women working in Utah technology companies. The survey and interviews were designed to gather information about the decorum in which women working in Utah technology companies must navigate and particularly in terms of how that decorum relates to oppression and discrimination. I became interested in this particular subject and population when I started working for a Utah technology company. My work for this small, start-up electrical engineering company began in April 2017 as part of a research internship required for the completion of my degree. The product that the company was working on had deep personal meaning to me, so I ended up staying on with the company until August 2019. During the two-and-a-half year period that I worked for this company, I attended numerous technology events, such as the Silicon Slopes Tech Summit (twice), numerous startup networking functions, and business trainings; had conversations with many people across Utah's technology sector; competed in multiple technology startup pitch competitions; and observed countless interactions among people working in the technology sector. Having done some research on Silicon Valley for a course project just before my employment with the tech company began, I started to notice some interesting similarities and differences between Silicon Valley and Silicon Slopes<sup>1</sup>, which is what Utah's technology sector--with its primary hub

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<sup>1</sup> Silicon Slopes is often used as a general term in reference to Utah's technology sector at large. However, this term was created by and is officially trademarked and used by an organization that works to enhance, promote, and further develop Utah's technology

located in Utah Valley--has come to be known as.

While I will delve into the specific characteristics of Silicon Slopes and Silicon Valley later in this chapter, it is important that I first acknowledge my own position and potential biases in this pilot study. I identify as a woman, and like my research participants, I also worked for a Utah technology company during the collection of the data. I ended my work in this company just before the analysis of the data, but my personal and professional experiences have undoubtedly influenced my beliefs, ideas, and values pertaining to this particular research site and population. To avoid any potential bias affecting the analysis of data as much as possible, I use the participants' own words to the greatest extent possible. Rather than entirely relying on my own interpretation of the data, I use participants' own words when possible to more accurately represent their experiences, ideas, feelings, and opinions. I have also enlisted the assistance of my committee and an outside friend to offer their own insights into identifying the themes and patterns that are emerging from the participants' responses. None of these people have ever worked in the technology sector, and most of them identify as men, so their differing perspective provides valuable insight that is less (or at least differently) biased than my own perspective. With that said, I have also set out to provide a limited analysis of the data. For the purposes of this dissertation, my analysis is by no means comprehensive. If others interpret the data differently than I have in this somewhat restricted analysis, then the discrepancy just means there is greater room for more in-

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sector. When referring to "Silicon Slopes" in this dissertation, I am only referring to Utah's technology sector at large and *not* to the non-profit organization, unless otherwise specifically noted. Any ideas, claims, or discussions of "Silicon Slopes" is in no way about or directed toward the organization itself.

depth discussion. After all, the end goal with decorum-based research should always include awareness, discussion, and progress.

### **The Technology Sector at Large**

Before delving into the specifics of the pilot study, I first want to explore the technology sector at large, particularly in its reputation for inequality, discrimination, oppression, and abuse. The presentation of this reputation will provide much of the contextual background with which the pilot study—including the theories, methods, data, and analysis—can be understood. While reputation will certainly never fully represent an entire community, it does provide significant insight into a community’s inner-workings and the ways in which that community is understood by others (Hayden, 2000; Deephouse, 2000; Hall, 1993; Bromley, 1993). And in this case—where Utah’s Silicon Slopes is a fairly new community, but one that is seeing exponential and rapid growth and influence—understanding its relationship to the larger tech community can help researchers identify both its strengths and weaknesses in terms of social justice. Similarly, we can also use what we know about both sectors to understand the similarities, differences, and unique characteristics that impact the experiences of people working within these communities. Focusing on the technology sector also helps ground this project within the field of TPC, as technical communication is an integral part of the work done within the tech sector. All forms of technical communication—and many different types of technical communicators—work within this space, making it a particularly relevant workplace to study in terms of TPC.

### **Bro Culture**

Though discrimination in the technology sector has been discussed in the news

and other media outlets over the last couple decades, there has been increased attention given to these issues over the last several years. The term *Bro Culture* (also referred to on occasion as the *Boy's Club* or *Bro Code*) has been popularly coined as a way of summing up the culture of overarching sexism, racism, and discrimination that has in large part defined the technology sector, particularly in Silicon Valley (Weiner, 2020; Keith, 2013; Chrisler et al, 2012) . Though there is no one specific, concerted definition, some have defined *Bro Culture* as “a culture dominated by over-confident, arrogant, obnoxious men” (Benstead, 2018); “an aggressively masculine business culture--primarily associated with overconfident, but inexperienced, young white males (notably in the tech/venture capital industry) whose aim is to win at any cost” (Brake, 2017); “macho behaviors in general, but also to darker things like binge drinking, sexism, rape culture and other elements associated with hyper masculinity” (Sumter, 2017); and as a culture that “tends to prioritize young men over all other employees, creating an environment that’s ripe for toxic behaviors like excessive partying and systemic harassment of colleagues” (Cain, 2017).

DeGuzman (2015) describes this same cultural phenomenon but uses the term “brogrammer” as a way to personify the Bro Culture. The term “brogrammer” is a blended slang word in which “Bro Culture” and “programmer” are combined.

DeGuzman, who has worked in tech companies as a software programmer for many years, helps her audience of fellow tech non-bros that “the frat boys you thought you left in college have packed up their flip flops and shitty beer and moved into the desks next to you. The men that used to flood into finance, sales, and business are now ‘crushing it in Ruby’ and playing beer pong between deployments” (p. 194). She goes on to say that

these men are shaping the tech industry culture and are “largely responsible for incredibly sexist and misogynistic events like ‘Hackers and Hookers’” (p. 194), a sex-and-tech themed Halloween party that became the center of attention after the party announcement went public on Facebook (Kleinman, 2017). DeGuzman describes some of the programmers’ behavior that was detrimental to her as a young, female, queer, person-of-color. They would make excuses as to why she wasn’t good enough; assume she received promotions because she filled a diversity quota, rather than because she deserved them; make gay, rape, and genital jokes; and invite her to join in on rating women’s appearances.

Just like “programmer,” the word “Tech bro” is also commonly used in reference to the types of behaviors DeGuzman describes in the male-dominated culture of the technology sector. A “tech bro” has been described as a “US-born, college-educated, Patagonia-clad male whose entry level salary at one of the FAANG companies was at least \$125,000 and who frequently insists that his female co-workers give him high-fives. Typically works in product management or marketing. Had he been born 10 years earlier, he would have been a finance bro instead” (Wong & Cantor, 2019); “a white guy with money who’s making places like San Francisco and Seattle unbearable” and “men working in tech who have a disregard for other people because they believe that everyone in the world is treated equally” (Gardner, 2019); “male, somewhere in Silicon Valley, fresh out of college/dropout, 20 to 30 years old, into electronic cars/robotics” and is a software developer/strategist/engineer/whatever and went to a startup camp and works for a startup, or owns a startup, or wants to own a startup” whose attitude includes “assertion of one’s own dominance among the local population” (Elker, et al, 2016).

Whatever the term that is used, it is evident that the tech sector is dominated by young, affluent, white men (Alfonseca, 2019; Gomba, 2018; Hollon, 2018; Desjardins, 2017; Kolhatkar, 2017; U.S. Equal Employment, 2016). Much of this cultural phenomenon has been attributed to the major successes of a certain few, those whose tech companies have set the standard for what it means to be successful and have likewise set the standard for decorum across the industry. These “young, white, male, and socially awkward” tech pioneers--men like Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, and Mark Zuckerberg--have become the face of the tech industry in many ways (Shevinsky, 2015, p. 9). And despite a plethora of evidence that clearly shows women have played a significant role in each one’s rise to the top, these women’s stories have been erased from the public narrative. Rather than hearing about the incredible amounts of team-work, with both men and women from all backgrounds working together to make companies succeed, we instead hear a false account that nearly every tech advancement that has changed the world (e.g. Facebook, Google, Apple, Microsoft, and even the internet itself) is the direct and singular result of the programmer tech boys who seemingly run the show (Wiener, 2020; Chang, 2018; Rangarajan, 2018; Mundy, 2017; How did tech, 2017; Shevinsky, 2015; Davis, 2010).

When the culture, then, becomes dominated by a particular type of person, and those people end up with most of the power, it is a ripe environment for the kinds of behaviors that have been used to describe the Bro Culture. Sexism, racism, and classism become normalized, and the specifics of workplace decorum follow the same patterns. Silicon Valley is the most notable tech community when it comes to the types of sexism, racism, and classism that result from a hierarchy with young, white men not only perched



at the top, but inundating every other level as well. But the tech industry at large--including Seattle and Portland--has gained a reputation for the programmer, tech boy culture much in the same ways as Silicon Valley. But it's not just reputation that matters when it comes to bro culture. There are serious consequences for those who do not fit the programmer mold.

Emily Chang provides one of the most comprehensive and in-depth views of Silicon Valley's Bro Culture in her controversial book *Brotopia: Breaking Up the Boy's Club of Silicon Valley* (2018). Her book provides specific details and evidence that show just how far-reaching, impactful, and detrimental the Bro Culture can be, particularly for the women working in Silicon Valley. Her book supports what others have and continue to say about work environments in which women are seen as less capable; as only fitting into particular roles that have been deemed as "feminine"; as just not part of the in-group; as sexual objects to be used by men; as a hindrance to a company's progress due to their potential or actual role as mother and/or wife; and as a risk to a company's reputation. As such, women are faced with multiple forms of oppression that result from these beliefs and views.

While many of these problems are present for women in a variety of workplaces, some of them are unique to Silicon Valley. Some examples of the more common occurrences--in both Silicon Valley and the workplace at large--include:

- Discrimination in hiring practices
  - Inappropriate interview questions
  - Taking non-job-related factors into consideration, such as marital and family status

- Hiring women to fill roles that are not an official part of the job description (i.e. to be the “token” or to “keep the boys in line”)
  - Hiring based on unequal credentials (i.e. men require fewer credentials than women do for the same position)
- Exclusionary behaviors
  - Scheduling meetings during times that women are typically responsible for childcare
  - Holding meetings at inappropriate places (i.e. golfing, strips clubs, or racetracks)
  - Withholding important information that would play a key role in a woman’s success in a project or career advancement
- Discriminatory language
  - Using words like “bossy” or “emotional” to describe assertive behavior in women
  - Using gendered language that excludes women and/or promotes men (such as using “he” when referring to a person when gender is irrelevant)
- Financial Discrimination
  - Lack of wage transparency
  - Basing current pay on previous pay, rather than having a fixed standard
- Unrealistic and/or inconsistent expectations
  - Requiring collateral or co-signers on business loans for women but not men
  - Requiring additional proofs of concept for investments in women-owned

businesses

- Higher expectations for women
- Disproportionate recognition
  - Downplaying women's contributions and/or inflating men's contributions
  - Men getting promoted based on potential while women get promoted based on proven accomplishments and skills already acquired
  - Valuing "men's" work more than "women's" work
- Unproportionate workload sharing
  - Women asked to carry the load of "extra" or "secretarial work" that is beyond their scope of work, such as ordering lunch and taking notes
- Hostile work environments
  - Invitations to hotel rooms or after-hour private events by executives
  - Propositions for sex
  - Inappropriate stories, jokes, or conversations in professional spaces
  - Mishandling of sexual harassment/discrimination reports
  - Retaliation for defending oneself against harassment and discrimination
- Inadequate and/or predisposed benefits
  - Lack of benefits that encourage women to have successful careers, such as paid maternity leave, nursing accommodations, flexible work hours, remote work options, and onsite childcare
  - Workplace "perks" that are more appealing to men (such as ping-pong or video games in the breakroom)

This list, compiled from numerous sources which all discuss characteristics of sexism in

the workplace (Wiener, 2020; Connley, 2018; Mundy, 2017; Sarva & Fielding, 2017; Chang, 2018; Rangarajan, 2018; Gomba, 2018; Hollon, 2018; Mundy, 2017; How did tech, 2017; Shevinsky, 2015; Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011; Heilman & Eagly, 2008), is not meant to suggest that every form of oppression occurs in every workplace or involves every person in those workplaces. Nor does it suggest that these are deliberate actions taken by men against women. In fact, much of this behavior stems from unconscious biases (Whelan, 2013; Bodensteiner, 2008; Williams, 2003; Rudman & Kilianski, 2000) and is in some cases carried out by women (Gowland, 2018; Faniko, Ellemers, Derks, & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2017; Derks, Van Laar, & Ellemers, 2016). As we understand about decorum, it is a dynamic, constantly changing force. The expectations and rules are always being negotiated and changed, so the instances of sexism previously described that often occur in workplaces are not fixed and unwavering, nor are they evident in every workplace. But listing these occurrences in such a way can help illuminate the complexity, severity, and extent of the problem. It is likely that most women have faced at least some of these forms of oppression at one point or another in their career. However, the tech industry has acquired a reputation for *all* of these occurrences *and* to a sizable degree (Brady, 2019; Moscaritolo, 2019; Park & Funk, 2017).

### **Evidence from Online and Social Media Sources**

Any general internet search for “Silicon Valley + discrimination” will pull up a multitude of results that all discuss the many ways in which women and people of color are, and have been, oppressed within this space. The search result will include news articles, op-eds, social media posts, videos, and entire websites that all address these issues. It will include stories about specific high-profile companies and people--including

VCS, investors, CEOs, and more--but it will also include stories about oppression that occurs at a general, more every-day level and among people at every level of the workplace hierarchy. It will show that California's infamous technology sector seems to be inundated with bro culture in all of its forms and variances. It will show that these things have been going on for years, and that many women and people of color are continually forced to just deal with these problems if they are to have any hope of achieving a successful career.

For example, Sheelah Kolhatkar (2017) talks about "the tech industry's gender-discrimination problem" in her article published by *The New Yorker* Starting by outlining several high-profile legal cases that exemplify the problems women face in the tech industry, she goes on to point out that it's not just these high-profile cases that should be concerning, but that sexual harassment and discrimination are commonplace in the industry. Similarly, Anderson Sumarli's (2019) op-ed published in the *Los Angeles Times* describes his experiences pitching at multiple investor meetings with his business partner Yada Piyajomkwan. Sumarli couldn't help but notice a stark difference at every meeting between the way investors questioned him versus how they questioned Piyajomkwan, who is a woman. He talks about how they were often denied funding for reasons directly related to Piyajomkwan's gender, with one investor even blatantly saying he was "worried about investing in them because Yada may get married and drop out of the company" (para. 3). Examples like these two articles are exponential, and they all--in their unique yet unnervingly similar ways--expose the problems associated with *bro culture* in the technology sector.

While gender appears to be the primary focus of the tech sector's *bro culture*,

there are also plenty of examples of racial discrimination that come up as well. For instance, former tech employee Leron Barton talks about the way that Silicon Valley companies use “culture fit” as a means to justify racial discrimination during hiring, equating “cultural fit” as code for ‘will you be my bro?’ (Barton, 2019). He relates his own personal experience working in the tech industry as a black man, being ostracized by peers and witnessing a significant disregard for issues of discrimination by HR. Jessica Guynn similarly discusses the problems with racial discrimination in Silicon Valley (Guynn, 2017). In her USA Today article she points out that even while strides have been made in terms of gender discrimination, racial diversity has continually declined.

Kiara Alfonseca (2019) adds to Guynn’s points, addressing the need for more women of color in tech. She points out that when the tech workforce is comprised of primarily white men, a large number of minority groups get left out of the conversations that matter, leading to serious and unintended consequences. In one example, Alfonseca describes a situation in which Joy Buolamwini, an MIT computer scientist, found that several facial recognition software struggled or failed to identify faces that had darker skin tones or varied facial structures. In another instance, the non-profit organization ProPublica found a software used to predict the likelihood that criminals would become repeat offenders overestimated that risk for Black people and underestimated it for white people.

While these, and many other instances of discrimination and oppression have caught the attention of journalists and news outlets, a general internet search for Silicon Valley and discrimination will also uncover attitudes of individuals, not afraid to speak out, that reflect both the oppression of women (and other minorities) in tech as well as the

fight against that oppression. Take an article posted on Facebook by the popular news page World Economic Forum as an example. The World Economic Forum is known for its non-partisan news and op-ed articles that are based on peer-reviewed research and other reputable sources, and which represent a wide variety of social, economic, political, health, and other important issues across the globe. One particular op-ed titled “We have to fight for a fairer tech industry for women,” written by President and CEO of Booking.com Gillian Triggs, not only directly addresses the widespread and harmful culture of oppression that women face in the tech industry within the article itself, but it also prompted a flurry of Facebook comments in response to the article that exemplify the problem in real time. While many of these comments are intended to counteract what the article is arguing, what the comments actually do is support the article’s main points and provide additional evidence to show that sexism is real, pervasive, and damaging.

As you will see, these comments demonstrate genuine ignorance (e.g. “first you gotta find out if it’s genetic...dont [sic] want to force or manipulate a gender into something that is against their genetic makeup...this makes unhappy people”); disregarding gender discrimination as just an opinion (e.g. “well Just because people see it that way Doesn’t Mean it really is [sic]”); blaming women for the problem (e.g. “Women have the choice to join the tech industry, they just choose not to. Nothing to do with sexism or any of that nonsense. Nobody is actually stopping women from going into these fields, there’s actually more encouragement than ever. They are just choosing not to do so”); justification of gender discrimination via extraneous comparison (e.g. “Over 90% nursing jobs are with women. How can we fight this inequality?”); and outright sexism and misogyny (e.g. “As a grandma I like to see more moms attend to their kids,

stay home and make sure their kids are taking [sic] care of. So many young kids have problems these days because mom's [sic] are working! Kids are all alone! Let's talk about that issue").

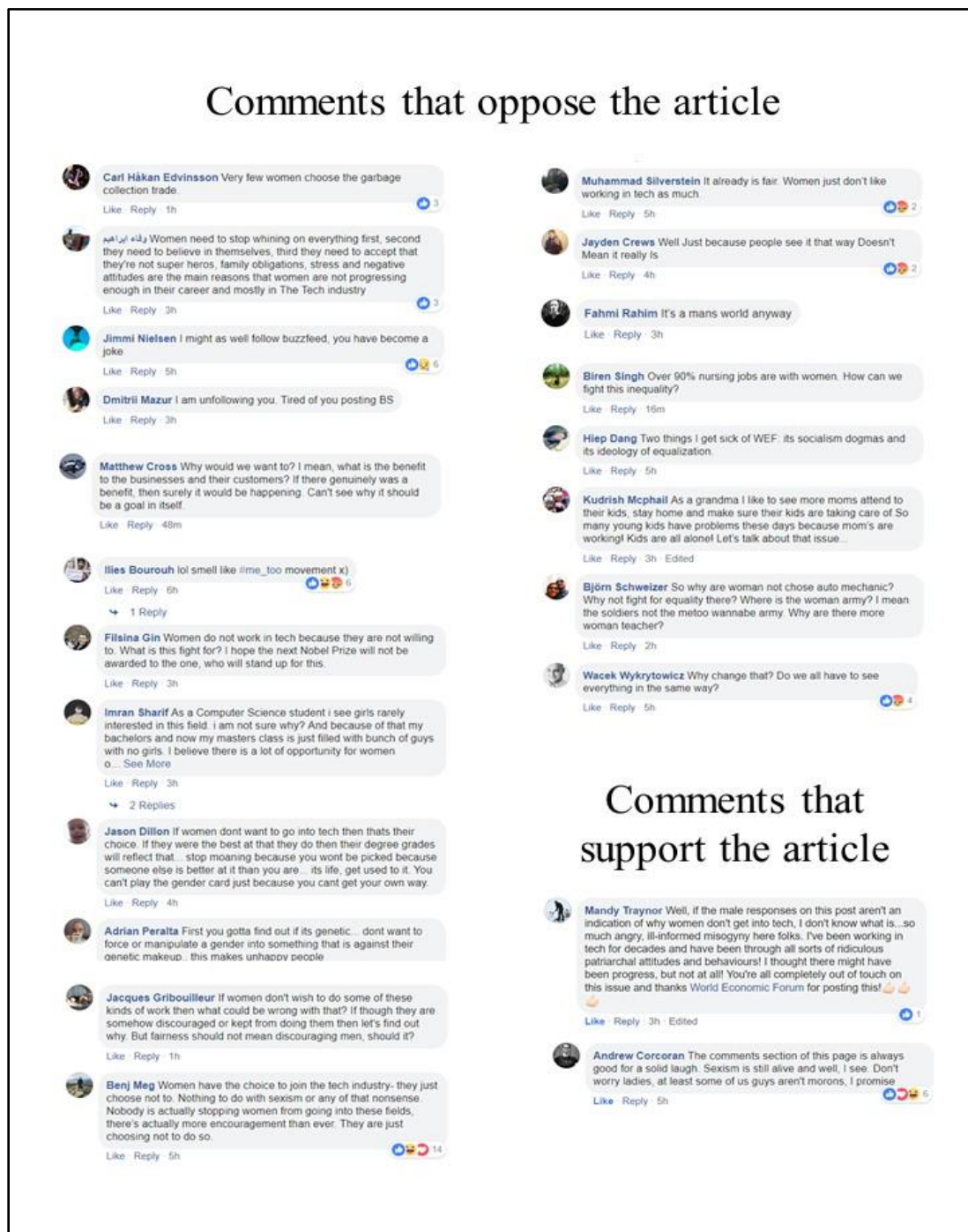


Figure 3: Facebook comment responding to a feminist article



Figure 3

These comments, from real Facebook users, not only corroborate the more formal arguments made by others in news/scholarly articles, op-eds, and reports; they also demonstrate the ways in which this sexism is perpetuated by society at large. It is revealing in itself that the majority of the comments posted in response to the article defend and/or expand on sexism in the tech sector, while only a small number of the comments combat sexism. The comments also support the notion that sexism is not merely just an issue that is of little significance to many people, but that in many instances, sexism is not even considered to be real, or even further, it is justified. However, these conversations continue to occur, with people coming from a multitude of backgrounds and perspectives weighing in, and discrimination in the technology sector remains at the forefront of these discussions. And though much of the reputation for sexism and racial discrimination is seeded and cultivated in Silicon Valley, the broader culture has been shown to extend beyond the geographical bounds of Northern California.

### **Beyond Silicon Valley**

With new areas of rapid technological and economic growth popping up in different areas across the U.S., it is important to understand if and how the workplace cultures in these environments compare to what we already know about Silicon Valley. The Portland, Oregon area is one of the most rapidly growing technology-focused areas in the U.S., and research on workplace culture in this area shows trends of oppression that are similar to that of Silicon Valley. Every year, PDXWIT (Portland Women in Tech)--a non-profit community organization which exists “to encourage women, non-binary, and

underrepresented people to join tech and support and empower them to stay in tech” (PDXWIT, 2019)--runs a survey to learn more about Portland’s tech culture, particularly in terms of its inclinations toward diversity, equity, and inclusion. The 2018 State of the Community survey found that many of the sexist and oppressive policies, behaviors, and characteristics previously listed were also occurring in Portland’s tech sector. These include lack of salary transparency (with 87% of respondents saying their company does *not* have adequate transparency); inadequate benefits (such as paid maternity leave and onsite childcare); disproportionate workloads for men and women; excluding women from important events; looking to women as a “mother” figure; and gender-biased language that excludes women (PDXWIT, 2018).

These results from 2018 prompted PDXWIT to expand the scope of their survey in 2019 (PDXWIT, 2019) to include a national audience, rather than just limiting it to Portland’s community. The survey also included more demographic questions that help identify bigotry and racism in addition to sexism, and the “company’s culture” was also included as a way of encompassing a more general sense of people’s experiences in the tech industry. The results show that only 29% of people felt that their company’s culture was “Inclusive and caring” and only 21% felt that it was “diverse.” However, what was most significant about the results of this survey is that it directly challenged the notion that oppression in the tech sector can be fully understood through binary gender lines alone. Rather, as the research about intersectionality discussed in previous chapters of this dissertation similarly suggests, those who experience multiple forms of oppression--whose identities intersect at the lines of various modes of oppression--face the greatest challenges.

With the goal of this pilot study being to identify decorum and its role in workplace oppression from the perspective of women working in Utah's technology sector, the PDXWIT studies--as well as the other contextual evidence previously discussed--demonstrates the benefits of examining Utah's technology sector from the perspective of decorum. Not only does this study delve into the emerging tech industry in Utah, which has not been the focus of many research studies regarding workplace discrimination; but the pilot study also demonstrates the benefits of decorum-based research in general. These benefits include approaching sensitive topics of workplace oppression and discrimination from a unique perspective; a means to identify and address intersectionality; and an opportunity to open up conversations with people who are resistant to discussing and enacting social justice work. As such, this pilot study--including the background, methods, data, and analysis that are discussed in the following sections--provides one example of how a theoretical framework of decorum can be applied to social justice research. However, I will also discuss other methods and approaches that can work for decorum-based research, since not every study will work in the same way as the pilot study. These methods are presented in conjunction with the discussion of other methods used for this specific pilot study.

### **Background and Methods**

Just as others have looked to understand the experiences of women in Silicon Valley and Portland's tech sector, it is also important to understand the culture of Utah's technology sector in such a way. To explore the culture of Utah tech more deeply, I have used the theoretical framework of decorum outlined in previous chapters. While I have applied the framework to this particular pilot study in the specific ways that I will

discuss, it is important to note that the framework is meant to be adaptable. Not every situation or research agenda will call for the exact methods described here. Rather, it is important and necessary for researchers using a theoretical framework of decorum to use methods that best suit the objective and the needs of participants and the researcher. Likewise--as is the case with this pilot study--there may be constraints that limit the available methods. With that said, though, there are a few important things that should always be considered when designing a project using the theoretical framework of decorum. In the following sections, I will outline several methods that can be effective for decorum-based research, particularly in identifying decorum and/or its role in oppression.

### **Ask Participants**

Because decorum is fundamentally informal and off-the-record, establishing the decorum of a given rhetorical situation can prove to be challenging for researchers. There are no official documents that outline the decorum in a given situation, at least in its inception, so it is necessary for researchers to use methods that identify and explicate participants' knowledge of decorum within a rhetorical situation. Questioning participants can provide the most effective means of identifying decorum because participants are able to articulate their knowledge and experience without fear of repercussion. Likewise, it gives participants an opportunity to articulate the unwritten rules and expectations they must follow but may not readily identify as significant—as well as the context that shapes those rules and expectation—until they are asked to point it out. Simply asking participants to formally communicate those rules has the potential to bring decorum to the surface and allow for discussion about what those rules mean for

the people involved.

Questioning participants can take several forms, each of which can be effective, depending on the research agenda and scope, time limits, access to participants, compliance protocols, funding, or other issues that might arise. Anonymous surveys are beneficial in that they do not require full IRB review; they can be distributed to a wide audience; they help researchers gather large amounts of data in a relatively short period of time; and they can be designed according to the researcher's needs (Cresswell, 2009). When designing a survey to investigate decorum, sliding scale and multiple choice questions can provide great quantitative data, while open-ended text-entry questions can provide more qualitative data that, in the case of decorum, can prove very valuable in identifying themes and patterns that may not be readily evident to the participant and/or researcher.

For example, if I was interested in learning more about the ways in which international students navigate classroom decorum at my university, I could design a survey for such students in which I ask them to identify--in open-ended questions--any unwritten rules or expectations that they have noticed in their classrooms. I might then use multiple choice questions to help them think through their answer(s) to the open-ended question(s) in more depth. I could ask them things like "Who do you believe has the most influence on creating these rules/expectations?" or "Are the rules/expectations for you and other international students different than the rules/expectations for other students?" A sliding-scale question could also be beneficial. I might ask participants to select their level of agreement with statements like "My grades have been negatively influenced because I have a difficult time following the unwritten rules/expectations" or

“I have little to no guidance on how to interact with my professor.” There is no single, correct way to design a survey for decorum, but questions like these can provide insight about classroom decorum as it is experienced by international students.

To gather more in-depth, qualitative data about decorum, questioning participants through interviews can prove to be a useful method. Interviews allow for open-ended questions in which participants have more freedom and ability to express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Interviews also give researchers the ability to clarify anything that the participant might not fully understand. Plus, researchers are able to dig into a topic more deeply by asking follow-up questions based on the participant’s initial responses. Going back to the previous example of international students, I could conduct several follow-up interviews with survey respondents. I would usually start by giving a more thorough definition of decorum with a couple examples, and then ask them to identify any examples of decorum in their classrooms that have stood out to them and if they have noticed if there is different decorum for different people. I would have a set of follow-up questions prepared based on their responses to these types of initial questions. For example, in my interview notes I would have various sections labeled something like “If they mention gender” and then have a list of follow-up questions that are specific to gender (or any other item of interest). Having these questions prepared ahead of time can help researchers navigate an interview that likely will not follow the exact order in which questions are listed, allowing greater flexibility for researchers to delve further into topics that are of particular importance.

### **Observations**

Observations provide another method for applying a theoretical framework of

decorum to social justice research. Observations give researchers the opportunity to gain a better sense of the behaviors that are both a component to and reflection of decorum within a given situation. These observations can be informed by previous research so that researchers can more readily identify behaviors, speech, and other occurrences that are part of decorum. This research can be formal, informal, primary, or secondary; but whatever the choice, it should be used as a way to inform the researcher about what to look for. The secondary research I discussed in the previous section, regarding discrimination in the technology sector, is one example of how a person might do preliminary research to inform their observation of decorum. If I were to do an observation of a workplace meeting at a Utah tech company, for instance, I would use what I had learned from my preliminary research to inform my observation and help me identify significant behaviors, speech, etc.

Using previous research is not a requirement, however, as observation may also serve as the starting point for identifying patterns of behavior that can then later be identified as decorum through other means, such as interviewing participants. In fact, observation allows researchers to identify behaviors and patterns that research participants may not even be aware of enough to articulate (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003); or, they may not cognitively associate those behaviors and patterns with the decorum under which they function (Angrosino & Rosenberg, 2011; Angrosino, 2007; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). For instance--going back to the previous example of classroom decorum--if I wanted to identify patterns of behavior in university classrooms that might be indicative of decorum, I could first observe several classes in which international students were enrolled. I would record any

notable behaviors and language, then analyze these notes further to identify patterns. A follow-up survey or interviews would allow me to point out these behaviors/patterns and ask participants specific questions about why these behaviors/patterns occur. For example, if I notice a pattern of the teacher repeatedly calling on non-international students, even if an international student had raised their hand first, I would bring this up in the interview, asking the student participants if they notice any significance in the way in which the instructor calls on students. Based on their answers, I could then follow-up with more in-depth questions, giving them the opportunity to both understand the decorum and speak more specifically about what that decorum actually entails on a regular basis.

In these ways, the benefits of observation are great, but there are a few challenges to observational research. First, most observations will require IRB approval, which may not be possible if time is limited. It may also be challenging or even impossible to find opportunities and/or appropriate circumstances for observation to occur, particularly if the researcher is interested in a controversial topic. This was the case for my pilot study, as I could not find any workplaces that would let me observe due to the fact that I was looking for information about what was considered a sensitive topic. It is also certainly possible for the observer to be biased, so it is important to put measures in place that account for potential bias (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Finally, researchers must also be aware that people's behavior can change when they know they are being observed (known as the Hawthorne effect), making it difficult to capture authentic patterns of behavior and speech (Rawlinson et al, 2010; O'Reilly, 2008; Hunt, 1985). In these circumstances, participant observer research might help alleviate some of the potential for



skewing of behavior (Jorgensen, 2015). Clark (2007), for example, was able to gain insight into the day-to-day activities and communication of a tech startup through participant observer research. These activities and communication helped him identify and critique the ways in which capital was distributed within the company. As Clark and others have shown, if the other participants recognize the researcher as a colleague and part of their group, then their exhibited behaviors are more likely to be aligned with what they would normally do if they were not aware of research observation taking place, leading to more accurate data and greater insight. Additionally, participatory research offers greater opportunity for the researcher to effect change within a group or organization, a primary concern for social justice research (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998).

### **Rhetorical Analysis**

Rhetorical analysis of texts is the last effective method for identifying decorum that I will address in this dissertation. Rhetorical analysis is commonly used in TPC, as it provides the most thorough theoretical and methodological support for textual analysis. Because texts are such an integral part of TPC, textual analysis should always be considered when designing a decorum-based study for TPC. Texts can come in a variety of mediums. Even though TPC has primarily focused on what might be considered “traditional” forms of text, such as business-related documents, resumes, meeting notes, presentations, emails, memos, etc., other examples of texts that are often relevant to TPC might include news and scholarly articles, books, interviews, television and movies, social media, visual communications, private messages, clothing, and more. With rhetorical analysis, texts can be analyzed according to their content and context, using rhetorical theories and methods as a guide for understanding the ways in which those

texts influence audiences in the specific ways for which the researcher is concerned. Rhetorical analysis centered around decorum can work for any medium that communicates ideas in any way, even if that medium is not readily identified as a “text.” Examining a variety of texts that are related to a researcher’s target population/site in this way can help the researcher identify new decorum and/or discover examples of decorum that have already been identified via other means.

### **Pilot Study: Methods and Overview**

For the scope of this pilot study, I limited my approaches to understanding decorum in Utah tech to direct questioning and rhetorical analysis. The constraints that led to my choosing these specific methods include the following:

- Limited timeframe
  - Finding an observation site proved impossible within the timeframe I had for completing the research.
- Limited scope of research
  - The main objective of this dissertation is to propose a theoretical framework of decorum, not provide a complete analysis of decorum in Utah tech.
- Limited access to participants
  - Utah is a large state geographically, and I live quite far from the main hub of Silicon Slopes
- A need for anonymity
  - Silicon Slopes is still rather small compared to other areas of tech, and with so few women employed by tech companies, identification can be a

real concern for participants.

To demonstrate how both direct questioning and rhetorical analysis can work, particularly when used in tandem with each other, I designed this pilot study to include two elements for each approach. For the first approach (i.e. direct questioning), I used a survey and interviews. For the second approach (i.e. rhetorical analysis of a text) I used published interviews and job ads. I will discuss the results (including data and detailed analysis) from each method in more detail in Chapter 4. For the remainder of this chapter, I will first explain my research question, then describe how I use the theoretical framework of decorum heuristic outlined in Chapter 2 to investigate and expand this question, and finally, I will explain the context of the Utah tech workplace as it relates to my pilot study, establishing the foundation on which the research results should be processed and understood. This conversation will continue into Chapter 4, where I discuss the data, analysis, and the results of the survey, interviews, and rhetorical analysis.

For most research projects that follow the theoretical framework of decorum that I have outlined in Chapter 2 (see Figures 1 and 2), the primary research question will be related to identifying decorum. As such, the primary research question for this pilot study is *“What is the current decorum in Utah’s technology sector, particularly as it relates to women?”* As you might notice, the first part of this question drives the research and can be adapted to fit a specific group (in this case, women in Utah’s technology sector). However, you will notice--as demonstrated by this pilot study--that the results might be applicable to a larger or different group than may have been originally intended. This potential broadening of research results serves as a starting point for further research and can be particularly beneficial to researchers who might be interested in intersectionality.

The methods I describe in this dissertation--including those that I did not actually use in my pilot study--are meant to help researchers address research questions related to decorum, especially if those questions are in direct relation to identifying decorum.

There is no one specific order in which the methods I describe must be applied. The order will depend on many factors, including the project time frame, access to research population, access to materials already available publicly or through other means, and the project end-goals. For instance, since my research question for this pilot study is focused on identifying the decorum within Utah's tech sector, and I have access to interviews that have been published on public websites in which women discuss items related to decorum, it made sense for me to first review those materials in order to start identifying themes and patterns associated with Utah tech decorum. I then used these themes and patterns in part to help construct survey questions. The interviewees were recruited from the survey, and the interview questions were informed by the survey responses, so it made sense for interviews to be conducted after the survey was distributed. However, if my research question was aimed more toward how companies can use decorum to improve their workplace culture, I might first begin with an observation or with interviewing employees and/or supervisors to get a sense of what problems need to be addressed in their workplace. In this case, I would be focusing on one or two companies (in order to have more depth of knowledge), so there would doubtfully be any publicly available data with which to start my research process. The interviews could inform survey questions, which would then be distributed to all employees, asking for their feedback on ideas and suggestions for changing decorum and workplace culture. As you can see from these two examples, the order in which the

research methods are applied must be considered on a case-by-case basis. Researchers should consider their end goals first, then work through any constraints in order to find the best course of action.

To identify the current decorum in Utah's technology sector, I took multiple steps. First, I analyzed published interviews of women currently working in Utah's technology sector, identifying topics, themes, and patterns associated with decorum. Then, I gathered contextual data about Utah's tech sector, including workforce demographics. Based on the information gathered from these first steps, I then designed a Qualtrics survey. I submitted for and received an IRB exemption approval, then contacted groups and organizations throughout Utah that are tech- and women-in-tech-related, asking them to distribute the survey link. After gathering the survey data, I reached out to participants who had contacted me about doing a follow-up interview. The interviewees signed the IRB-approved Letter of Consent form, and then I conducted two interviews via telephone. Both interviews were transcribed and then coded, along with the open-ended survey responses, according to the 11 primary topics/themes that were identified from both the preliminary and the primary research. The results of this analysis were interpreted according to the primary research question (what is the current decorum in Utah's tech sector?), in addition to noting all other important factors related to decorum that were mentioned.

For the second part of the pilot study--the rhetorical analysis of job ads--I first selected 6 job ads placed by Utah tech companies from public job-seeker websites. Each job ad was coded according to the topics/themes/analysis from stage 1 of the research process. In particular, this coding was aimed at identifying when a job ad seemed to be

specifically addressing any of the 11 primary topics/themes that had already been identified as significant to Utah tech decorum. The results of the coding were analyzed to determine if/when/how these ads were attempting to encourage or dissuade certain types of people to apply and if/how decorum was represented within the ads.

Given this basic outline of steps, it is beneficial to provide additional details about this process. As mentioned, I began my inquiry of decorum in Utah tech with rhetorical analysis of published interviews, not only because they were easily accessible, but also because they provided a good sense of women's experiences in Utah Tech, which gave me a better idea of what to look for moving forward with interviews. Many of the topics that are mentioned in the published interviews with women in Utah tech are associated with gender, but with a focus on decorum, I was able to catalog other notable issues as well. To pinpoint decorum in these interviews, I identified any mention of expectations and/or explicitly conscious manipulation of symbolic display, as well as any values, beliefs, and motives related to these activities that were mentioned. This strategy is a form of rhetorical analysis that does not necessarily follow any exact or prescriptive formula but instead relies on the researcher's knowledge of the targeted topics/ideas/themes (in this case a knowledge of decorum and the technology sector at large), which is then used to identify notable themes and patterns in the text. Literature reviews are therefore particularly important in decorum-focused research as this is where the groundwork for analysis takes place.

Researchers should try to become familiar with their research population/site as much as possible, and this knowledge should be presented to their audiences as well. Granted, this may not always be possible--or the purpose of the initial research itself is to

gain familiarity with the specific research population/site--so an in-depth knowledge is not absolutely necessary. However, any knowledge and familiarity about the history, culture, organization, policies, procedures, and people of interest can help the researcher better identify themes and patterns that are associated with decorum in that area of interest. Familiarity can be achieved through personal experience with the research population, site, and/or related issues--working, living, or participating in that site, for example. Secondary research methods can also be effective in helping researchers become more familiar with their area of study. Reading books, articles, and op-eds; reviewing social media sites and other less formal publications; or even just casual conversations with people who have first-hand experience with that site/population can give the researcher a better idea of how to proceed. For this pilot study, both first-hand experience (e.g. workplace experience, conversations, and observations) and secondary experience (e.g. reading articles, books, magazines, and perusing social media) have given me the familiarity needed to delve into the more specific aspects of decorum that are of interest when looking at women's experiences in Utah tech. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will discuss the results of some of this personal and secondary experience and how it helped inform my approach to decorum within Utah tech.

### **Published Interviews**

As outlined previously, one of the most important steps in this pilot study has been gaining a foundational knowledge of women's experiences in Utah tech. One of the most influential components to this research project has been published interviews with women working in Utah tech. These publicly available interviews were conducted by different Utah journalists and include the voices of women representing a variety of

occupations within the industry. Many of these women (most of whom hold senior-level positions) discuss the need for more diversity and inclusion within that space (Bennett, 2018; AvidXchange Director; Betts, 2016). Their comments suggest that the decorum in Utah's tech sector can be highly divisive and heavily influenced by notions of masculinity. Several of the women being interviewed mention the need to modify their behavior and speech in the workplace to fit specific criteria that are considered normal in order to be successful in their career. Similarly, several of the women mention the ease with which their male counterparts find success, noting there were significant discrepancies between the efforts that they as women had to put forth compared to that of the men around them. All interviewees call for Utah tech companies to be more inclusive of women and to provide better workplace policies and cultures that enable women to succeed.

For example, in one of these interviews Angela Sudbury, a woman working in a Utah technology company (AvidXchange director of software, 2018) discusses how she had to directly ask her male coworkers to stop scheduling early morning meetings, as those meeting times typically fall during the hours she is responsible for childcare (i.e. getting her children dressed, fed, and off to school). To identify decorum in this situation, I first identified her symbolic display of speaking to coworkers as a response to an unwritten assumption that people who typically work in her position do not have to provide childcare during the early morning hours. The decorum in this workplace is thus identified, though it was not specifically laid out in the interview.

These interviews support, enhance, and elaborate both my personal experience in Utah's technology sector and my previous knowledge about women in the workplace and



the technology sector as a whole. As predicted, these published interviews gave insights into the decorum of Utah's tech sector and the consequences it has on women working in that space. The interviews also led to more questions about how this decorum was created, who controls the decorum, what contexts create/enable this decorum, and what the best solutions are for changing this decorum to be more inclusive and less harmful. . For example, the fact that most of the women interviewed held seniority positions led to the question: do women in lower levels of seniority also experienced decorum in the same way? And if seniority does hold significance, will that also correlate with age? Or is age only significant if a woman holds a certain marital/family status?

It was questions like these that helped me identify topics/themes of significance that should be addressed in the survey and telephone interviews. As I will discuss in greater detail in the next chapter, the questions that were posed in the survey and follow-up telephone interviews were designed to allow participants to identify the decorum within their workplace. Some of the questions were also designed to establish context, which holds significant influence on the decorum of a given situation. As noted previously, context sets the stage for decorum by establishing foremost, who hold positions of power, who falls lower on the hierarchy, what is at stake in those situations for people at all levels of the hierarchy, and how each of these (and other contextual variables) influence the decorous expectations for that given situation. The questions in the survey and follow-up interview, then, have been informed by the contextual research discussed in this chapter regarding bro culture in the technology sector, in addition to my personal experience and published interviews from Utah.

## CHAPTER 4-- GENDER, RELIGION, AND DISCRIMINATION:

### RESULTS OF THE PILOT STUDY

#### **Context of Utah Tech**

One of the most important aspects of decorum that came through this pilot study is context. Context plays a crucial role in the way decorum is developed, applied, and changed. Every contextual element in each situation can and often does have significant influence. Even the slightest change in context can impact the way that decorum works within a situation, including who makes, applies, follows, and breaks decorum, how they do it, and why. Context also gives insight to the nuances that shape each person's experiences within that context. The components of this pilot study--especially the survey and interviews of women in Utah tech--offer a contextual framework that is evidently cultivating and continually influencing many of these women's experiences, particularly as it relates to decorum.

To understand the relationship between context, decorum, and oppression, I first start by laying out the context in which these women live and work. This context is described in the survey I distributed, the interviews I conducted, and by "Utah's Tech Economy" (Pace, 2019), a report sponsored by the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute at the University of Utah. The data from this report supplements what is not included in the survey and interviews, but it also helps further extend the data from the survey and interviews. After laying out the context for Utah tech, I discuss how this context has an impact on the ways in which these women perceive and then navigate their surroundings. More specifically, I discuss how these women's responses to questions directly pertaining

to decorum show that they are consciously aware of and adapting to decorum within their workplace. Finally, I delve into the survey results even deeper and bring in two in-depth interviews--one with an entry-level employee who recently graduated from a tech bootcamp and the other with a senior vice president of a large Utah tech company--in order to establish three important themes that are repeatedly showing up in both.

As is the case in many other geographical areas, Utah's technology sector is primarily a male-dominated space. In 2017 (which is the most recent year in which thorough, reliable data is available for the demographics in the Utah tech sector), only 15.2% of the Utah tech workforce were women (Pace, 2019), which is considerably lower than the national average of 22.5% in the tech sector (Bose, 2018). Certainly 22.5% is still a very low number, however, and thinking back to the discussion in Chapter 3 of the tech sector at large and its reputation for discrimination and oppression being directly tied to gender issues, there is certainly reason to question if the ratio of men to women in Utah tech itself causes, fosters, or even challenges oppression within that space. The same question comes to mind when looking at the racial and ethnic identities of people working in Utah tech. Pace's report shows that in 2017, 83.2% of the Utah tech workforce was white, with the remaining racial and ethnic profiles as listed in Table 2.

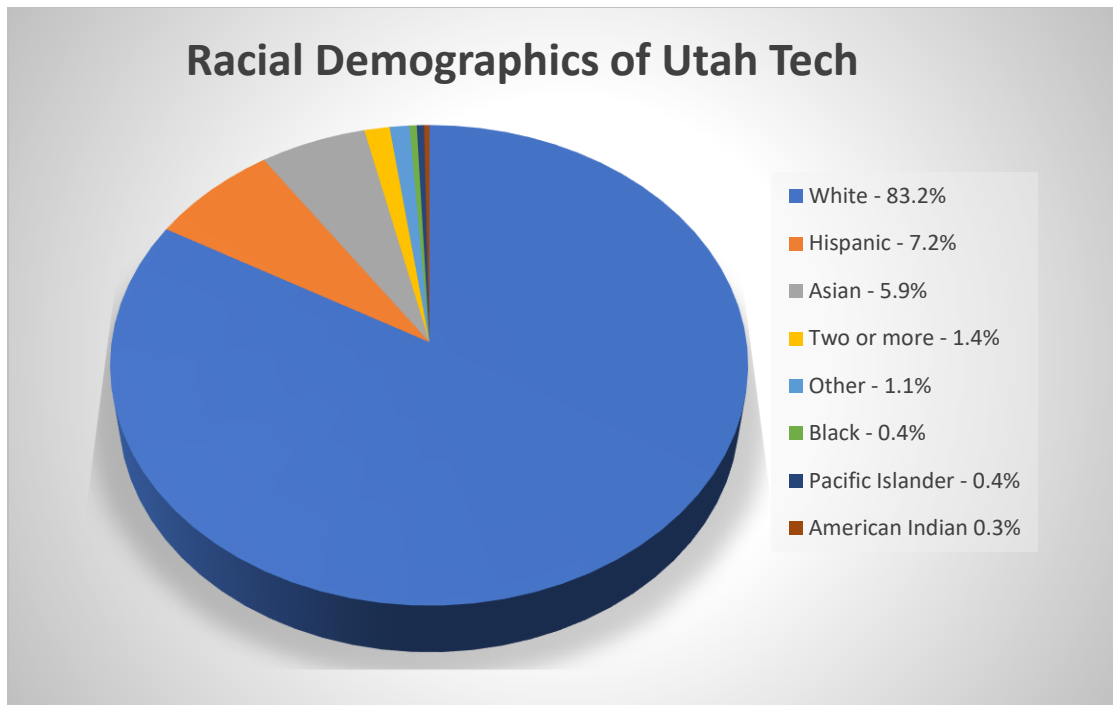


Table 1

What this data says about the Utah tech sector's workforce, then, is that it is primarily composed of White men, a statistic that corresponds with that of Silicon Valley and other areas of tech (Harrison, 2019; Rangarajan, 2018; Desjardins, 2017). Both the Women in Utah Tech Survey and follow-up interviews that I conducted also extend this data and make additional comments regarding how the largely unbalanced workforce affects them and others in their workplace, as I discuss in the following sections.

### **Women in Utah Tech Survey**

To gain a broader perspective and gather additional information about the decorum that exists for women working in Utah, and the ways in which they navigate that decorum, I distributed an anonymous survey to this target population. The survey questions were based on the themes, patterns, and ideas that were pulled from the published interviews and articles discussed previously, in addition to the characteristics

of decorum that have been outlined throughout this dissertation. The survey was created and delivered via Qualtrics. It was completely anonymous and was approved by USU's Institutional Review Board (Protocol #10004). I am uncertain of how many women received the survey link, as it was distributed through a variety of means that were untraceable. The survey link was primarily shared by Utah-based organizations dedicated to technology and/or women in technology. These organizations shared the survey via email, blogs, newsletters, and social media. They also encouraged others to share the survey link with anyone they know that might be interested in participating. From this distribution, 221 people started the survey, with 133 people completing it. In order to complete the survey, participants (at the time of the survey) were required to 1) Be age 18 or older, 2) identify as a woman/female, and 3) currently work for a technology company in Utah.

I chose to place these boundaries on the survey participants for a few reasons. First, I wanted to narrow the scope of research. Because this is a pilot study with limited time and resources, it was important to be selective. Similarly, human subjects research requires additional protocols for research involving children, so excluding anyone under the age of 18 made it possible to categorize the survey as exempt, saving a significant amount of time. Limiting age criteria was also another way to keep my scope of research small. Finally, and most importantly, I chose to only include those who identify as a woman (including trans women). I did so for a couple of reasons. First, it became clear to me from my preliminary research and personal experience in the tech sector that women are largely underrepresented in that space. Their voices, ideas, opinions, experiences, and expertise have historically been devalued within the tech sector (Ashcrof et alt, 2016;

Correll & Mackenzie, 2016; Mayer, 2006). As such, it is important for research to specifically focus on women in ways that they have not been done previously, bringing their stories and experiences to the forefront of discussions. We must learn from the women themselves and value their position and contributions as it is understood from their perspective. Limiting participation in the pilot study to just women narrows the view of the Utah tech sector to one particular group, providing insight that can be used by other scholars interested in expanding on this research and learning more about these women.

After answering qualifying questions (i.e. age, gender identification, & working in a Utah tech company) on the survey and agreeing to the study details provided in the Letter of Information, participants were then asked to enter a job title and seniority ranking. These two questions did *not* require an answer in order for participants to continue with the survey as some women's job title and ranking might be very unique and could cause apprehension about finishing the survey due to worry about being identified. Of the women who did respond to these two questions, most (70%) selected a ranking between Mid-level and Senior Management/Director, while 17% selected entry-level and 13% selected Vice President, Senior Vice President, or C-Suite. No other demographic or contact information was recorded. Just as I chose not to require a job title and seniority selection, I chose to limit demographic information to increase the likelihood that people would respond and finish the survey. As mentioned previously, Utah tech is still a rather small community. And with so few women in the workplace, and having heard rumors from my discussions with multiple women working in Utah tech about a supposed "black list" of women who were "too disruptive and

controversial,” I wanted to give women the opportunity to share their experiences openly and honestly without fear of their identity being uncovered and any retribution that might follow.

The remainder of the survey questions were all informed by my preliminary research—including personal experience—and were designed to gather more information about the decorum in Utah’s technology sector from women’s perspective. The remaining survey questions went as follows:

Please select the response that most accurately represents your own beliefs about each of the following statements (Strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree):

1. Women and men are treated differently in my workplace.
2. Women and men are given equal opportunities to contribute and advance in my workplace.
3. In my workplace, men have advantages that women do not (such as better pay, opportunity for advancement, work from home, or travel opportunities, etc.).
4. In my workplace, women must work harder than men to gain recognition.
5. I must be careful about the way I communicate, dress, and behave in my workplace.
6. Working in Utah’s technology sector is more challenging for women than it is for men.
7. In your workplace, or Utah’s technology sector at large, are there different expectations for men and women? (Yes, No, Prefer not to answer)
8. In your experiences, who defines the unwritten or informal expectations and rules

of conduct in Utah's technology sector? (Primarily men, Primarily women, A fairly equal combination of men and women)

9. While working in Utah's technology sector, have you ever purposely changed your behavior, speech, appearance, and/or body language to appear more professional or qualified? (Yes, No, Prefer not to answer)
10. Since working in Utah's technology sector, how many times have you been in a meeting where there are more men than women? (0-1, 2-5, 6-10, 10+)
11. In your opinion, whose ideas, opinions, and/or input is more valued overall in your workplace? (Men's, Women's, It's about equal)
12. In your experiences, how often do MOST men in Utah's technology sector make efforts to ensure women are included and treated equally? (Most men do this often, Most men do this some of the time, Most men rarely do this)
13. Please share any other information about your experiences working in Utah's technology sector that you believe will be valuable to the researchers.

Some of these questions were designed to get a more general sense of women's perception of their workplace and Utah tech overall, while others were more specific. The questions were also designed to be used as a comparison to the experiences of women in other areas of tech (such as Silicon Valley). Thus, these questions were informed by what other women have said they experience in their workplace. Some of these questions were also directly related to decorum. The final, open-ended question was the one in which I had the most hope for specific issues of decorum, and especially issues of decorum that had not been addressed in any of the survey questions, would come out. Open-ended questions provide research participants the opportunity to talk about anything they feel is



important but was not addressed in the other questions; or they might use this space to expand on or explain their answers to the survey questions (Reja et al, 2003). The responses to this final open-ended question did provide the most fruitful information, particularly regarding decorum, which will be discussed in the forthcoming sections.

One of the main issues that came up multiple times in survey respondents' answers to the open-ended question in which they were asked to provide any additional information that might be relevant was the ratio of men to women within Utah tech. There were 18 different comments specifically related to the fact that men significantly outnumber women and the detrimental effects that has on women. One respondent described Utah's tech sector as having a "male focused culture." The following comments from other respondents also support this notion, that the sheer ratio of men to women in itself is a problem, and that this ratio also leads to other problems that directly affect women in negative ways:

- "The huge gap in current workforce leads to a natural disadvantage for women."
- "When it comes down to it, there are more men than women and the bro code wins."
- "I have yet to interview with any company in Utah where nobody has commented on the fact, I am a woman. I am routinely--in fact, nearly always--the only woman in all meetings."
- "On the product team, I am the only woman."
- "I'm usually the ONLY woman in leadership meetings...working on predominantly male teams."
- "The more difficult part is dealing with the social/cultural aspects of being the

only woman in the group among a lot of men.”

- “The opportunity for growth for women, specifically women of color, is hard, especially when you are not spending time outside of work ‘bonding’ like men do over a bike ride or boat trips or just going out for drinks after work.”
- “I notice that getting women candidates for any tech job in Utah is difficult, sometimes we don’t get any women applicants.”

Based on what I knew from my preliminary research about the demographics of Utah tech, I posed questions to the survey respondents that specifically addressed gender to further understand how the male-dominated demographics influence the culture of Utah’s tech sector. Most importantly, I wanted to know more about the ways in which women experience this culture. These questions were designed to gain a more general understanding about the influence of gender on women’s experiences and their ability to succeed in their workplace. The following table shows the percentage of women that agreed with each of the statements listed.

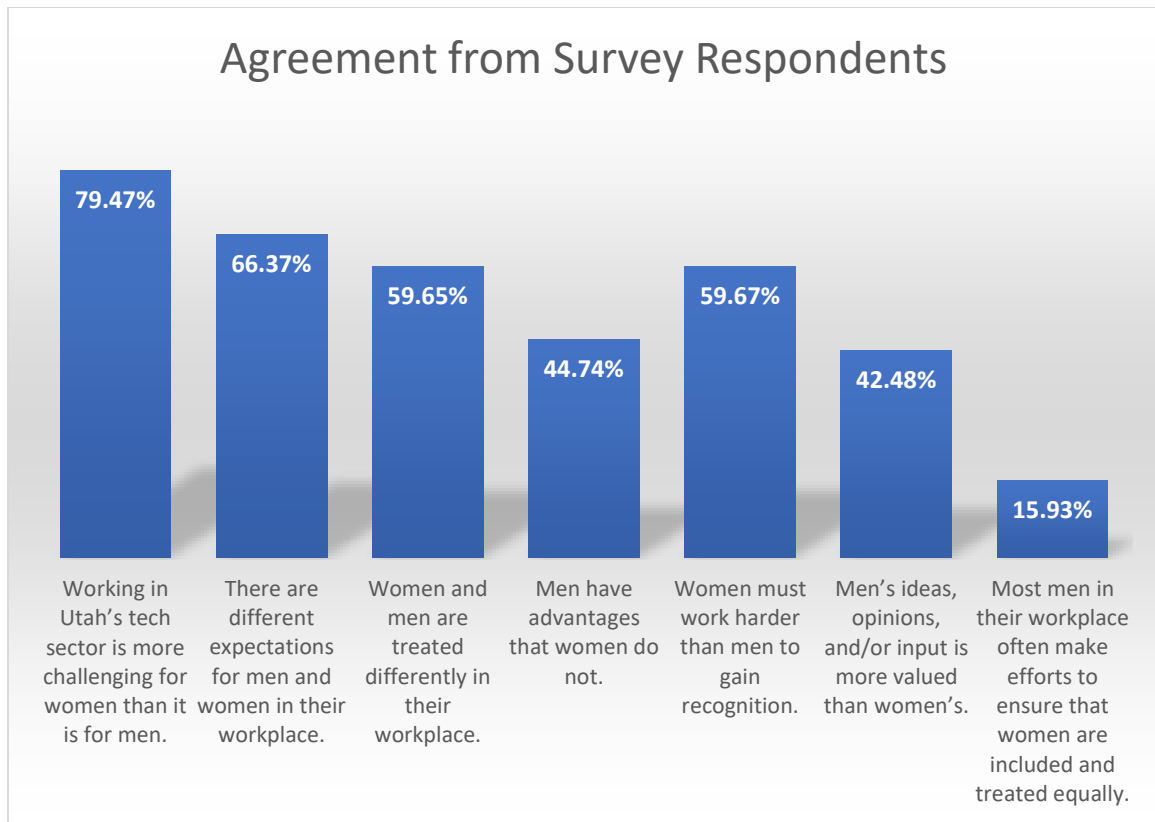


Table 2

As you can see from the table, many women identify gender inequality as a prominent factor in their workplace. A large majority (79.47%) of the survey respondents agree that working in Utah tech is more challenging for women than it is for men, and only a small percentage agree that most men in their workplace make efforts often to ensure that women are included and treated equally. These responses, and all those listed in Table 1, demonstrate that Utah tech is a challenging place for women to work.

These answers also suggest that the decorum in Utah tech is primarily defined by men. When looking at the demographics of Utah tech, and the responses of many women who point to the ratio of men to women as a source of contention, it suggests that as a system of power, the majority population has the power to establish decorum. That is not necessarily to say that this decorum is established intentionally as a means of control or

oppression over the minority; or that men do not want women to be a part of the workplace. Rather, it suggests that because there are more men, the decorum naturally follows what works best for them. It's created out of what Cicero describes as a desire to exist harmoniously. As discussed previously, even though decorum is *not* what is natural for everyone, it may start with what *feels* natural to those who are in the position to define decorum. In this case, it likely feels more natural for the men in Utah tech to follow certain criteria for symbolic display, but that same criteria does not work, and can even be oppressive for women. The potential for negative effects is why decorum must be examined critically, in order to promote fair and equitable workplace practices.

### **Personal Interviews with Women in Utah Tech**

To get a more robust understanding of the experiences of women working in Utah tech, I chose to implement a mixed-methods approach. Greene (2005) describes five purposes for using mixed-methods research. Triangulation and complementarity are two purposes for which I elected to conduct interviews with women who were currently working in Utah tech, in addition to Women in Utah Tech survey. Triangulation “seeks convergence, corroboration, or correspondence of results from multiple methods” (p. 100) while complementarity seeks “broader, deeper, and more comprehensive social understandings by using methods that tap into different facets or dimensions of the *same complex phenomenon*” (p. 101). Conducting comprehensive follow-up interviews with survey participants who represent the same demographics and work within the same tech sector provides the opportunity for the data from both the survey and interviews to converge, corroborate, and complement each other while also providing a broader and more comprehensive view of specific topics that were mentioned in the survey.

To recruit interviewees, I added a note to the end of the Women in Utah Tech survey that invited anyone interested in participating in a follow-up interview to contact me via email, which was provided on this same page. I chose this method of contact so respondents' contact information would not be tied to their actual survey response, further protecting their anonymity. I received four emails from women who were interested in a follow-up interview, and I sent each of them a Letter of Consent, which they were asked to sign and return. I also gave them the option of doing a face-to-face interview, a video call, or a regular telephone call. I had two women sign and return the Letter of Consent, and both women elected to do a telephone interview.

I wanted each interview to lead in a natural direction, particularly since I was seeking to learn more about decorum. Therefore, I had a script of interview questions<sup>2</sup> ready, but I was also prepared with numerous follow-up questions that were based on the responses to these primary questions. I also planned to just let the interview flow naturally, asking follow-up and clarification questions as needed. Most importantly, though, I wanted the respondents to do a majority of the talking with a minimal amount of guidance and questioning from me as possible.

### **Interview #1**

The first woman I interviewed, Brenda<sup>3</sup>, had recently graduated from a coding boot camp and was about to start a new internship with a large Utah software company at the time of the interview. Brenda had recently moved to Utah from California, and though she was well educated and had been working in another field for years, she

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix

<sup>3</sup> To protect interviewees' identities, pseudonyms are used and all potentially identifying information given during the interviews has been redacted.

decided to change her career path after moving to Utah. She and her husband moved because her husband's startup company decided to relocate to Utah. Like many other tech companies, the affordability of land/physical space/buildings, tax breaks, and a constant flow of young, college-educated, cheap labor made Utah the ideal place for her husband's company to expand. Having been around tech and looking forward to the possibilities it offered, Brenda signed up for one of the increasingly popular coding/tech boot camps in Utah Valley. These boot camps are designed to be a fast-paced alternative to traditional education, offering students the promise of skills, experience, and most importantly job placement. As Brenda noted, these boot camps have become a funnel for tech companies who are increasingly in need of cheap labor.

Much of the conversation with Brenda was focused on her experiences in the boot camp, but we also discussed her experiences with the interview and hiring practices in Utah tech companies, her friends' and colleagues' experiences in Utah tech, as well as what she called the "culture shock" that she has experienced from moving to Utah. I will briefly detail some important notes from Brenda's interview in this section, but further details are included as part of the subsequent sections that directly address Religion, Marital/Family Status, and Age/Career Span.

Shortly after moving to Utah, Brenda joined a UX (User Experience) boot camp that lasted 3 months and involved a great deal of hands-on group projects. She noted that the boot camp environment was intense, fast-paced, and competitive. She said that for most of her time at the boot camp she was "on a team with programmers and developers" and there "was a lot of pressure and expectation for women in particular...to fulfill the role of being meek and nice and modest, but also at the same time in conflict with that is

to be a leader and get things done and manage things but never do it in a confrontational way with a male component in the team.” She went on to note that “on the other hand, when the men of the team would say things that if I would have said might have come across as like, well, ‘you’re being too pushy or bossy’ or whatever, but for them it was totally fine” (Brenda, 2019).

## **Interview #2**

The second woman I interviewed, Allison, began working in tech about 19 years ago. She has been at her current company (a large, tech-heavy software company started and headquartered in Utah) for 3 ½ years. She holds a senior vice president ranking in the company, a position she earned from working her way up through 8 different tech companies and earning her MFA in Industrial Design (terminal degree), a career path of almost 20 years. Much of the conversation with Allison was based on the proactive steps that she and her company are taking to ensure that their teams are diverse and that all employees (and potential employees) are treated equally, fairly, and given the opportunity they need to bring out the best in the company and each other.

However, Allison also has first-hand experience with the decorum in Utah tech and how the contexts within her company and the Utah tech sector at large affects that decorum. Having worked in many different areas of the U.S.--with her only work in Utah being with her current employer--she offers a unique perspective that takes into consideration the similarities and differences among and between Utah and other areas of tech. She is also currently the only woman in her company’s leadership group, which consists of 13 total members and is situated just below the C-Suite. As the only woman in this group, the responsibility for the company’s diversity initiatives has fallen on Allison.

Though this is not something she necessarily intended to add to her work agenda when she joined the company, she feels an obligation to women and other minorities in tech--as well as to the company's development and success--and is therefore willing to take on the extra, unpaid labor.

One of the reasons Allison is motivated to make her workplace more diverse, inclusive, and safe for everyone comes from her experiences dealing with the kinds of oppression and harassment that are common for women working in tech. The most egregious incident happened early in her career, when she was in her early 20s. She was stalked by an older and more senior male coworker but was told by everyone she spoke to about it not to say anything because it could put her job at risk. Ever since then she has been "hypersensitive to interactions and making sure things aren't perceived in an incorrect way, or if someone does something, [she] will nip it in the bud really quick." She says that directly addressing problems right when they happen has had a positive impact because "people know [she's] serious." However, she is also aware that not all women are in a position to do that. She is "not scared to lose [her] job" and doesn't "have any financial constraints, like [having] a family to take care of financially...so [she's] not necessarily driven by making sure [she's] playing it safe."

### **Workplace Decorum: Acts and Means of Oppression**

Decorum is not just something that exists. It is constructed by people, changed by people, and experienced by people in multiple ways. Sometimes these acts are deliberate, but often they are not. As Foucault would suggest, much of the decorum arises out of the systems of power that are already in place and that work to enforce hierarchy through observation and control of populations. These systems of power also tend to feel natural



for those who are in the position to create decorum, as well as for those who easily follow that decorum, usually because they fit the same characteristics. Likewise, as Cicero might suggest, decorum often arises out of a desire to live harmoniously with others. By creating a set of cultural expectations that align with the values, ideas, practices, and habits of the majority, people will ideally get along better, out of a sense of sameness and togetherness. They can live harmoniously because the decorum has created what is likely considered by many a safe, productive environment. As such, some of the experiences people have dealing with decorum are positive--such as a couple women in the pilot study who noted that the decorum in their company was that all employees were treated equally. But for others, their experiences with decorum have proven to be challenging at the least, and oppressive at worst. It is important then, when looking at decorum in a specific context, to identify all the stakeholders in that situation and how the decorum impacts them, if it is beneficial or harmful.

The simple fact is that harmful decorum *does* exist in Utah tech, and it plays a significant role in shaping women's work and their experiences within their workplaces. One of the most important revelations that came from my pilot study survey and interviews was that women are very much aware of decorum in their workplaces and Utah's technology sector at large, and they take deliberate actions that are the result of this decorum. This is significant because, as Bourdieu suggests with habitus, the criteria and expectations for symbolic display are only visible to those who have difficulty following them naturally. In other words, because women are well aware of the unwritten rules—particularly those that relate to gender—they are *not* the ones who have the power to create and/or change the decorum. Likewise, the decorum is most oppressive to them

and not men because women are what Bourdieu would call “fish out of water” in this situation, constantly trying to meet the expectations that are difficult or even impossible for them to meet.

Interviewee Brenda, for instance, lamented that since moving to Utah, “a big part of how I navigate the world is just trying to figure out which rules are in play here so that I can take a stand and get whatever I need to done.” Similarly, interviewee Allison identified dress/wardrobe as one of the most important factors of decorum in her workplace, saying “recently I have become more aware of how I curate my personal look and style. You put a lot of thought into that to make sure you look professional, but you don’t look sexy... I don’t want someone to look at me and the first thing they think is ‘wow, they’re beautiful’ ...because sadly in our society that is what women are complimented on first and what they are told to aspire to, and so I think I’ve carefully curated my style so that is not the first thing people see... I just think that’s what it is for women in a workplace where there are not a lot of women.”

Furthermore, the Women in Utah Tech survey showed that 83.19% of respondents say that while working in Utah’s tech sector, they have purposely changed their behavior, speech, appearance, and/or body language to appear more professional or qualified. The response to this question suggests that women are aware of decorum and mindful enough of its impact on their ability to succeed in their workplace that they have deliberately chosen to change important aspects of themselves in order to find success. Furthermore, when asked whom they believe define the “unwritten or informal expectations and rules of conduct” (i.e. decorum), 71.93% of survey respondents believe that men do, while 27.19% believe it is fairly equal between men and women, and only

0.88% (which equates to 1 respondent) believe women are primarily responsible for defining the decorum. These responses show that not only are women aware of decorum, they also recognize what that decorum is, have a sense of who defines that decorum, and then purposely change the ways in which they present themselves in order to better fit that decorum because they are not naturally adaptable to the expectations. The obstacles that these women face in adhering to decorum demonstrates that decorum is an important topic of study in terms of social justice (especially considering that a majority of respondents believe decorum is defined by primarily men).

While numerous topics that are directly related to decorum were discussed and/or apparent in the survey and interview responses (e.g. speech/language, race/ethnicity/nationality, blatant harassment and abuse, and women oppressing women) for the purposes of this study I will only focus on three primary themes that were frequently mentioned and are relevant to both decorum and intersectionality: 1) Religion, 2) Marriage/Family Status, and 3) Age/Career Development. I chose these themes because they were repeatedly brought up in the survey and interviews, even without prompts; they have significance to decorum, particularly in that they demonstrate the importance of context in relationship to decorum; and they are of specific concern when it comes to intersectionality. In addition, even though these themes have been discussed in terms of gendered workplace discrimination in other geographical areas, they appear to hold different weight and/or meaning in Utah's technology sector.

### **Religion**

The state of Utah is well-known for its conservative, religious history and culture (McNamee & Arrington, 2019). As the primary settling place for the first members of the

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (i.e. LDS church, Mormon church) in the mid-1800s, Utah has been home to the largest population of church members ever since. There are currently 2,109,578 members of the LDS church living in Utah, which makes up 66% of the total population (Facts and Statistics, 2020). However, a majority of Utah's government representatives are LDS, including nearly 90% of the Utah state legislature offices (Davidson, 2019), the Governor ("Gary Herbert," 2019), and Lieutenant Governor ("Spencer J. Cox," 2019). The church has been well known to take strong political stances, lobbying for and against legislation and urging its members to do the same (Forgie, 2019; Harrison, 2017), so in addition to cultural influences, the church also has a strong political influence in Utah. In addition, the church headquarters--including the famous Salt Lake City temple (temples are considered to be the church's most holy location), a visitor's center, and a conference center where the largest gatherings of members occur biannually--are also located in Utah, making the state a popular tourist destination for church members who visit from all over the world. The presence of the LDS church throughout Utah is strong, and as my experience living in Utah has shown me, has significant influence on many aspects of private, public, and political life for everyone living in Utah.

To understand the context of the survey participants' and interviewees' responses from my case study in relation to the religious influence in Utah's tech sector, it is first necessary to describe some of the church's tenets that have particular impact on Utah culture and thus these women's experiences. Gender plays an important role in the teachings of the LDS church. The church has proclaimed that every person's gender "was established before [they] were born and is an essential characteristic of [their] eternal

identity” (Fulfilling Family Responsibilities, 2020). As such, gender is equated to the biological sex characteristics with which a person is born and should remain such throughout their life. In these teachings, gender is directly tied to family, which the church considers to be one of the core foundations of spirituality. In its “Family Guidebook” (Fulfilling Family Responsibilities, 2020) the church establishes the basic principles of gender roles within the family, explaining that “the father presides over the family and is responsible to teach the children and provide the necessities of life for the family” while the mother “helps [her husband] teach their children the laws of God” and are “primarily responsible for the nurture of their children.”

Leaders and members of the church take these directions that are passed down from church leaders very seriously, as the guidebook also explains that “the extent to which a family enjoys the blessings of the gospel depends largely on how well the father and the mother understand and perform their basic duties as parents.” The church has even directly taken a stance on *feminism*, though this stance has changed over time. In 1993 a prominent church leader Boyd K. Packer gave a talk on what he called the “gay/lesbian challenge,” “working mothers,” and the “feminist movement,” describing each as a “danger” to the principles of church doctrine and the people who follow these movements. He warns that while these movements may seem appealing, ultimately no person--and women in particular--can find comfort or solace from them.

Feminist movements from within the church (i.e. outspoken church members who identify as feminist) have had some impact on the church’s official view of feminism (Havens, 2019) though the changes have been characterized as “baby steps” (Stack, 2018). The church’s most recent public statement, released January 25, 2020 in the *New*

*Era*--a magazine published by the LDS church that is particularly meant for LDS youth--declares that “men and women are created equal--one is not superior to the other” but that “certain philosophies and social movements bearing the *feminism* label advocate extreme ideas that are not in harmony with the teachings of the gospel” which “can lead people to become distracted from (or even work against) the ideals of marriage and family” (What is the Church’s stance, 2020)--though none of those philosophies and social movements are specifically named. The statement even speaks for members of the church themselves, specifically stating that “Latter-day Saints frown upon such things.”

In addition to the cultural and philosophical influences that the LDS church has on Utah residents--and thus the Utah workforce--the relationship between higher education and the Utah tech sector can further explain these influences on decorum. Brigham Young University (BYU) is a private university owned by the LDS church and is in Provo, Utah. It is no coincidence that the largest hub for technology growth in Utah is also located within this same geographical area. BYU has a reputation for producing ambitious tech entrepreneurs, with many BYU graduates starting successful companies in the same geographical area as their alma mater. Companies like Pluralsight, Domo, Qualtrics, InsideSales.com, Owlet, and Scan were all started and are still owned/operated by BYU alumni. In addition, a disproportionately high number of BYU alumni work for these and other large Utah-based tech companies (Brown, 2019). Table 3 shows the percentage of each company’s workforce who are BYU alumni:

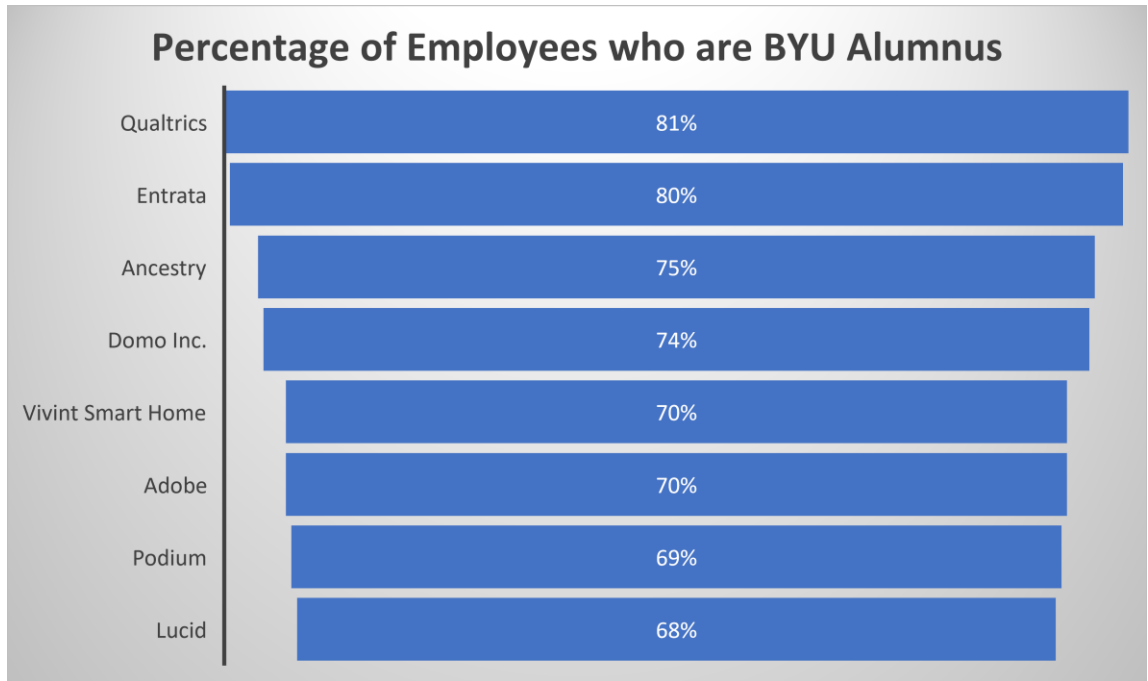


Table 3

Considering that 98% of BYU students are active members of the LDS church, it stands to reason that their values, beliefs, and cultural practices will have significant influence on their professional work and the culture of their workplace, particularly if a majority of the workforce comes from a similar background. In response to Brown's article that details these BYU alumni workforce statistics, one person (who listed their name as Christine) associated this phenomenon with the notion of being "branded" (Christine, 2019). BYU brand, Christine notes, "could lead to a hiring bias because there is a desire to work with like-minded people" because in Utah "its [sic] nice to know that your co-worker would rather have a game night at home with the family or a picnic after church instead of wanting to go to the bar on Friday night" and "you have something to talk about in the office" and "won't be judged for your most fundamental beliefs by the person next to you at work." Christine goes on to say that this type of hiring discrimination "creates a 'safe' work environment" for other LDS workers. This bias

appears to be well known in Utah and has created a specific decorum that is unique to the state, as Christine also notes, saying “Utah seems to have an unspoken rule that you MUST include your mission to signal your religion to employers or to prospective employees, so everyone in the hiring process knows what ‘side’ you’re on, regardless of education.”

The significance of the LDS religion’s influence on Utah’s workplace culture in the technology sector is evidenced by the responses from both the Women in Utah Tech Survey and the subsequent case study interviews. Ranging from more general statements about the cultural dynamics influenced by religion (e.g. “I am most often mistreated by LDS men because culturally women don’t hold the same rank as men in their religion”; “religion is a barrier for some”; and “it is so frustrating when you are not Mormon”), to more specific examples of *how* this influence impacts decorum, these responses all pointed to religion as having a *negative* influence on their and/or others’ experiences in the workplace. For example, several of the case study participants specifically addressed the notion that belonging to the church offers significant benefits that non-members don’t have access to. In my first interview, Brenda said that “so many people that graduated [the UX bootcamp] in my cohort had full-time jobs right away because of people they knew in the Ward, and they just got the job because they were in the ward, and so the rest--if you weren’t [a church member]--you were an outsider automatically” (Brenda, 2019). Brenda also talked about how it is “pretty assumed” that everyone in Utah is LDS, and that although this assumption wasn’t present “so much in relationship with work [they] were doing” it was consistently present in “group meetings, or at lunches, or in the spaces people would be talking about it, like when general conference happened in the



Fall and everyone would be talking about it.” This constant “outsider” status made it difficult for Brenda and the other non-member cohorts to be taken seriously, build meaningful networks, and find good jobs after graduation.

For these women, religious affiliation was one aspect of the context in which they work that created decorum for which they could not adapt to easily. Assumptions were made about people in their workplaces based on religious affiliation. The religious affiliation also had significant influence on the other contextual aspects of the workplace—like race and gender in particular. The way that the case study participants spoke about the religious influence also suggested that religion (and everything that was influenced by religion, including coworkers’ perspective) was not readily apparent to their coworkers. It is what Bourdieu would consider habitus for those who are members of the LDS church, making the rules of symbolic display on visible to those who are non-members. As such, religion appears to have significant influence on decorum for women within Utah’s tech sector.

### **Marital/Family Status**

In addition and relation to religion, marital and family status were identified by many survey respondents and both interviewees as an integral part of the decorum in Utah tech. In these responses, marital and family status were always tied to gender. However, unlike instances of gender discrimination based on marital and family status in other geographic areas of high populations of tech (and the workplace more broadly)--in which women who are married and/or have children are discriminated against (see Chapter 3, “Bro Culture”)--women in Utah tech tend to face discrimination if they are *not* married and/or do *not* have children. According to the women in my pilot study, there is

an unwritten, yet very clear expectation that *all* women should be married and have children. Even further, for women who are married and have children, the expectation is that they stay home (i.e. do not work outside of the home) to raise their children. In other words, the decorum for many in Utah tech is that only single women with no children should even be working outside of the home and that those women should consider the pursuit of marriage and subsequent children more important than the pursuit of a successful career.

Several women related these phenomena to religion (the LDS church in particular). These women noted that religion is the most important influence on defining personal gender roles for many people in Utah, but that these gender roles are expected of everyone, even those who are not members of the predominate religion. In the talk that was discussed in the previous section, given by LDS church leader Boyd K. Packer, he declared that the only time a woman working outside of the home is justified in doing so is if “there is no other way.” However, he also warns against people using this justification too often, saying that “if we are not very careful, we will think we are giving comfort to those few who are justified and actually we will be giving license to the many who are not.”

It is evident that these religious ideals have carried over into the Utah tech workplace. Interviewee Brenda made a direct connection between being questioned and harassed about why she doesn’t have any children and is choosing to work outside the home to the influence of religion, saying that it was always LDS cohorts who would “feel entitled to ask [her] where [she’s] at in [her] reproductive life or why [she doesn’t] have children at home.” Similarly, one survey respondent wrote “I think the problem is

cultural. I moved here from NY, and I definitely feel like men in Utah feel more strongly about ‘traditional’ values where a woman stays at home or leaves work to have kids.”

Another respondent expressed frustration with men who don’t “really see this as problem” and “act as though we (women) are complaining about a problem that doesn’t exist.” To her, “the problem is that women in Utah are expected to stay at home and looked down upon if they try to do otherwise.” For example, she continues, she “constantly get[s] asked why [she’s] not married and why [she] doesn’t have kids, and VERY rarely asked about [her] career goals. And men don’t see this as a problem.”

Another survey respondent even said she has “reported men to HR for insisting my place was at home.” In each of these examples, the symbolic display of men being comfortable questioning women about their marital and family status signifies the underlying decorum that this is just the expectation. This behavior demonstrates that to those questioning, it is seemingly natural and acceptable to ask such questions in the workplace. They don’t necessarily see it as offensive or inappropriate because from their perspective—which is heavily influenced by religious beliefs—this is something that is normal, natural, and just.

It was also apparent, based on the survey and interviewee’s responses, that much of the discrimination that was based on a woman’s marital/family status occurred during the hiring process. Interviewee Brenda noted that she had been asked questions about her marital and family status--questions that are illegal to ask (e.g. “what does your husband do?” and “why don’t you have any children?”)--at multiple interviews with Utah tech companies. She also mentioned a friend from her bootcamp who would wear wedding rings to her interviews with Utah tech companies “even though she’s not married, just to

‘fit in’.” The symbolism of the wedding ring sends a message to interviewers that this woman is married, and thus she fits at least one acceptable category for what is expected of women in Utah. This is what De Certeau would consider to be a “tactic.” She’s adapting her behavior in a way that is unnatural or unfitting to her as an individual just so she can have access to the advantages that are available to those who follow decorum, who demonstrate that they fit in to the dominant cultural ideals.

Several survey respondents also nodded to this problem of trying to adhere to the cultural standards of decorum during the hiring process. For example, one woman says she has “been seen as not being serious in my career (waiting for me to leave to have a child)” while another woman faced discrimination when she was “pregnant and interviewing.” After one of these interviews, the company told her “‘women have a hard time coming back after 3 months’ and they ‘didn’t want to get burned if I decided not to re-enter the workplace’.” Each of these situations again suggest a decorum that holds the expectation for women to have children and drop their career so they can stay home to raise their children. However, it’s difficult for women to adapt tactics that help them follow this decorum because the assumptions are based solely on their gender. While a wedding ring may help in some instances, there are still biases—even if they are unconscious—for which women have no simple or effective way of overcoming in the hiring process.

Even when women make it past the interviews and do get hired on, they face yet even more obstacles, particularly in discrimination based on the decorum that women belong at home. Interviewee Brenda said that in Utah “there are a lot of companies which say ‘well, we want women in tech because we hear that diversity is important and we

need you as our token person,' but when you get there you're not allowed to do things, like your position is not taken seriously." One survey respondent echoed the idea that women in Utah tech are only hired to fill the equality quota, saying she would hear comments like "because you are a woman, and international, and in computer science, you have this job" as if her experience and expertise was not enough to get her the job. Other women expressed similar feelings of their work not being taken seriously, with one survey respondent saying that she was "once hired to be the 'mom of the engineering team'--[because] they needed to get the all-male engineers to follow a schedule, and get their work done on time" while another respondent said she was directly "told [she] was hired because the team needed a motherly leader." In each of these instances, even though the women were qualified for the job, capable and ready to do their work, they were still held to standards and placed in roles that are specifically designated to women as part of the workplace decorum.

In all the pilot study responses, it is evident that marital and family status is a prominent point of discrimination for women in Utah tech. Primarily based on religion, Utah's decorum dictates that women are better served staying at home, raising children and being a wife. For women that do work outside the home, it appears common that this same gendered decorum dictates that women still be expected to maintain these gender roles within their workplace. As such, women and their workplace contributions are not viewed as equal to men, their work is not considered as valuable, and they must work even harder to achieve the same recognition as their male colleagues, demonstrating that decorum has tremendous power in dictating the experiences of women who work in Utah tech.

### **Age/Career Span**

The final point of decorum that I will focus on--Age/Career Span--was mentioned on multiple occasions in both the survey and interviews, and the decorum that is related to this has direct impact on the experiences of women working in Utah tech. Unlike discrimination based on religion and marital/family status, however, discrimination based on age and career span in Utah tech seems to more closely follow typical models of discrimination that are evident in other areas of tech, such as Silicon Valley. Likewise, religion and gender do not have as heavy of impact on the expectation for workers based on age/career span. In Silicon Valley, tech companies tend to favor younger employees (Meyer, 2020; Fried, 2018) --a phenomenon supported by ideas akin to that of Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, who said “young people are just smarter” (Geller & Allen, 2019). On the other side of the spectrum, young employees often face discrimination from employers who see them as “unpredictable” and “inexperienced” (Beaton, 2016).

According to the results of the Women in Utah Tech Survey and follow-up interviews, there are two ways that age discrimination occurs in Utah tech. First, people are mistreated because they are considered too old. This type of age discrimination is particularly present in entry-level positions and in companies that promote a culture of youth, fun, and innovation. These types of companies often recruit new hires from social media sites, tech bootcamps, college campuses, and other sites/events which are well-known for frequenting people under age 30 (Moran, 2019; Sudekum, 2019).

Additionally, Google and Facebook do not restrict companies from targeting certain age groups with their job advertisements (Kolakowski, 2018). As one survey respondent suggested, in Utah tech “youth matters, perception matters--and the perception is that

youthful men are more talented and able programmers.”

On the other side of the spectrum is age discrimination in which younger people are discounted and written off as ill-experienced, less skilled, and incapable of leadership or management positions. Younger people also tend to be oppressed by senior employees more so than older employees as younger employees often lack the seniority, credentials, knowledge, and financial security that is needed in order to take a stand against discrimination, oppression, and harassment. Both case study interviewees discussed the impact that both age and career span can have on one’s own ability to break decorum. Brenda, for example, talked about the difference in the way she and other female students in her bootcamp were able to deal with the “very targeted and very cruel” sexism coming from a male student in her cohort. Even though “he was that way toward every woman in the class,” Brenda “was the only woman that was married and [able] to fall back on that if [she] got dropped out of the program.” Knowing the position of the other women, she took the lead in making the bootcamp’s leaders aware of the problem. Allison expressed a similar pattern in her career, saying that--in regard to the potential of losing her job for speaking up against oppression-- “in my early career I would have cared more...but now there’s plenty of opportunities out there.” Both women’s experiences show that younger employees with less experience are often faced with the burden of having to choose between keeping their job/advancing their career and working in an environment free from oppression. In other words, younger employees cannot use bricolage to fight against the oppression that they face due to the decorum that is in place. They are forced to only use tactics, to adapt their own behavior rather than challenge the expectations that oppress them.

Several survey respondents also mentioned age as a factor that influenced the decorum within their company and had a direct impact on their ability to advance their career. One woman wrote that “I’ve been assumed multiple times to be less experienced because I am a young female.” Echoing this same experience, a different respondent said “I have been limited in my opportunities because it’s assumed that my career isn’t as important as a man’s career in the exact same phase of life I’m in” while another woman expressed similar frustration with being written off by senior employees, saying “it’s more established women who think that younger female professionals have to ‘pay a tax’ or ‘pay their dues’ to be taken seriously.” In each of these instances, the contextual element of age and/or career span has a direct effect on the expectations and biases that come from those who are in positions of power and are able to oppress workers.

### **Rhetorical Analysis of Job Ads**

Though the methods of decorum-based research I have laid out in this dissertation can be used across disciplines, I will offer here a method that is most appropriate for the field of Technical and Professional Communication (TPC): rhetorical analysis of a text. That is not to say that this method cannot be used in other disciplines. Rhetorical analysis is something that can and does span multiple disciplines (Marquez, 2015; Hyland & Bondi, 2006; Giltrow, 2002). However, rhetorical analysis of text is a foundational method for TPC research (Melancon, 2013; Haas, 2012; Britt, 2006; Grabill, 2006; Ornatowski & Bekins, 2004; Koerber, 2000; Amant, 1999; Doheny-Farina, 1992; Reynolds, 1992; Rutter, 1991). As such, this section demonstrates how traditional TPC methods can inform and be informed by a consideration of decorum, and why decorum is appropriate and beneficial to TPC.



One of the common themes that came out of my preliminary research and both the interviews and pilot study is that there needs to be serious consideration for hiring practices when addressing issues of discrimination. Hiring practices can have significant influence on a company/organization's diversity through both conscious and unconscious discrimination of potential employees (Sheats, 2019; Krakowiak, 2019; Amadiou & Roy, 2019; Blommaert et al, 2012; Hozer et al, 2006; Uhlmann & Cohen, 2005; Harcourt & Harcourt, 2005; Petersen & Saporta, 2004; Horvath & Ryan, 2003; Gouvier et al, 2003; Bendick et al, 1997. Several survey respondents and both interviewees spoke to the challenges women and minorities face during the hiring process. Interviewee Brenda stated, for example, that "I haven't made it to interviews *because* I'm a woman." Interviewee Allison is well aware of the discrimination that occurs during the hiring process, so she has been involved in the efforts to ensure the hiring process is fair and providing opportunity for the company to create the most diverse teams possible. Strategies their company is using to promote diversity and inclusion are focused around "making people aware of the value that a diverse team can bring...making leaders aware as they hire that these things are important."

When thinking about hiring practices in terms of TPC, job ads (i.e. job board postings, job announcements, job descriptions, recruitment materials, etc.) have significant rhetorical impact. As Lanier (2009) demonstrates with his research that analyzed job ads to identify skills technical communication employers desire, job ads are important artifacts of technical communication. They provide a great source of content for rhetorical analysis and useful insight to the hiring process and potential oppression that occurs during that hiring process. One of the most important reasons job ads should

be examined as a TPC artifact is because they reveal the criteria that employers are seeking in an employee. Likewise, these ads display information about the company/organization in a way that is rhetorically significant. As such, job ads are especially useful in terms of social justice because these ads are meant to attract and deter certain applicants based on both the employment criteria listed in the ad and the ways in which the company portrays itself (Burn et al, 2019).

At first glance, the employee criteria listed in jobs ads are largely based on a person's abilities to perform the required work, but a generic review of job ads indicated that they revealed other criteria that attract and deter people with certain characteristics, such as women, mothers, people of color, people of a certain age, people with disabilities, and people in the LGBTQ community. An analysis of job ads from Utah's tech sector allowed me to determine if and how companies are using technical communication to communicate specific ideas to their primary audience (i.e. potential future employees). More specifically, I can use rhetorical analysis of job ads to pinpoint language and visuals that establish, perpetuate, or challenge the decorum of Utah's tech sector by looking for particular themes, patterns, and practices that are directly related to the three primary themes discussed in the previous sections: marital/family status, religion, and age/career span.

### **Methods and Procedures**

To begin my analysis, I identified 10 job ads that had been posted by Utah tech companies. Because this is a pilot study, I limited my analysis to only 10 listings. Because the purpose of this dissertation—and the pilot study itself—are to present the theoretical foundation and methods for decorum-based research, a small sample size is

appropriate in this instance. These listings are not meant to represent the entirety of the Utah tech sector, but rather offer an informative glimpse at the ways in which decorum is present, communicated, and used rhetorically in several recruitment material examples from Utah tech companies. Similarly, this small sample size helps establish the relevance of job ads to social justice research in TPC, showing the significance of this type of analysis and providing foundational research that can generate and inform future research that involves job ads and other forms of technical communication that communicate decorum in some way. The job ads in this case study were collected from online public forums including job seeker websites, online classified ads, and the companies' own websites. After browsing through these different mediums, 6 final job ads were selected for further review based on the following criteria:

- Must be a job for a Utah-based tech company
- Must be written and posted by the company itself (this criterion excluded job ads posted by tech employment recruiting/job placement companies, which are numerous on job posting websites)
- Must display one or more of the three themes of decorum discussed in this chapter (marital/family status, religion, age/career span) in some way (i.e. wording and/or visuals in the job ad itself or on the company's website)

In addition, I elected to ensure that every selected listing came from a different company, as to cover a larger research population and offer greater diversity in the small sample size. I also chose a different job title--including both technical and non-technical positions-- for each listing to gain a broader view of differing descriptions/criteria. Any patterns or themes that are evident based on these selection criteria (other than what I

discuss in this dissertation) should be considered as a point of inquiry for future research studies.

The primary research methodology used for the job ad analysis is rhetorical analysis. Because there is no specific method of rhetorical criticism established for decorum--as Hariman (1992) and Stoneman (2011) do not outline a heuristic in their work on decorum--I use a conglomerate of concepts and procedures taken from Foss's (2014) explanation of generic, feminist, and ideological criticism. Generic criticism, as Foss explains, "is rooted in the assumption that certain types of situations provoke similar needs and expectations among audiences and thus call for particular kinds of rhetoric" and seeks to "discover commonalities in rhetorical patterns across recurring situations" (p. 193). Generic criticism is relevant to a decorum-focused analysis of job ads because it helps identify patterns that occur among different examples of the same genre, such as the language used by each company to represent themselves as an "equal opportunity employer." Also, just like decorum, genre is concerned with unofficial rules, assumptions, and practices (as discussed in Chapter 1). In the case of job ads, I'm looking at the ways in which the job ad genre (which includes the informal guidelines and practices used with the specific purpose of recruiting ideal employees) are shaped to communicate the company's decorum in a way that appeals to (and deters) specific types of people.

Feminist and Ideological criticism both come into play at this point, in that they offer a critical examination of the ways in which ideologies--particularly ideologies of domination and oppression--are communicated rhetorically within each job ad. Because the pilot study--including the preliminary research, published interviews, survey, and

personal interviews--have already provided information about the common ideologies that produce the decorum within Utah's tech sector, that information can then be used to identify those ideologies as they appear in job ads. The Feminist Criticism applications in this project include "analysis of the construction of gender--or whatever aspect of identity is [the] focus...and explanation of what the artifact suggests about how the ideology of domination is constructed and maintained or how it can be challenged and transformed" (p. 158). The applications of Ideological Criticism that are implemented in this project include "identifying the nature of the ideology...and identifying strategies in support of the ideology" (p. 244). More specifically, hegemonic ideologies, which "represent experience in ways that support the interests of those with more power" (p. 242), are of most importance to this analysis.

For this project, Utah tech job ads were analyzed to determine if and how ideologies about gender, religion, and age--and particularly how they are framed within an ideology of domination--appear and how those ideologies perpetuate or challenge the decorum of Utah tech. To perform the analysis--incorporating key concepts and procedures from Generic, Feminist, and Ideological Criticism--I first identify key themes, terms, and patterns that represent the three areas of decorum that were previously discussed and for which the job ad analysis will focus. These key themes, terms, and patterns include words, images, and ideas related to the following:

- Gender--such as use of gendered pronouns, visual representations of gender, etc.
- Marital/Family Status--such as parental leave, childcare, family healthcare, etc.
- Age--such as games, free snacks, retirement, experience, promotions, etc.
- Religion--such as values, care, direct religious references, etc.

- Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion--such as non-discrimination disclosures, inclusivity, diverse thought, etc.

Any mention of workplace culture or company mission statements in the ads were of particular concern. I also gave special attention to sections of the ads that describe the company and/or offer reasoning for why someone would want to work for that company. Visuals were also analyzed for the themes described above.

## **Results and Discussion**

Most of the job ads are focused primarily on the skill sets that are required for the open position. Each ad provides a list of necessary skills that the new employee will be required to have, and most companies prefer to have people with experience. Most notable, however, is how many of the ads address the company's culture, using rhetorical strategies that appeal to people in a certain way. Every job ad and/or website includes something notable regarding the marital/family status, age/career span, and religion. Gender is also a very prominent theme that is visible in several job ads. In all circumstances, it is apparent that each company is in some way addressing decorum, working to establish their company's culture and appeal to potential employees who are able to adhere to the decorum of that company. In each case, the ads appear to be perpetuating or challenging many of the problems seen in Utah tech.

A few of the job ads are appealing to younger employees. The first is for a Software Development Engineer for SnoFolio, a "Snowsports Training Management System that provides skiers with an on-slope performance training portfolio." In addition to looking for an ideal candidate "with an entrepreneurial mindset," the company also lists "Outdoor Enthusiast" as the first qualification. Both qualities are typically associated

with risk-taking practice, something more common among youth. The ad even describes the company's culture as "innovative and risk-taking." This competitive spirit, often associated with young men, is also seen in another job ad posted Traeger Wood Pellet Grills. The company is "looking for individuals who are committed to winning" in a culture based around "innovation and constant growth and development." This same ad lists employee benefits that are more appealing to a younger applicant, such as tuition reimbursement, "company provided meals throughout the week, Utah Gold Ski and SLC City Golf passes" and "Discounted Gym Memberships."

These types of benefits listed by Traeger in their QA developer job ad are also primarily male-focused. While those benefits could be enjoyed by all, it is primarily men that golf, ski, and use gym memberships. Another job ad placed by the company Objective, also lists benefits that are male-driven. They, too, list "gym membership" with the addition of a "stocked kitchen with sodas and snacks," another benefit that appeals primarily to young men. The recruitment page on Objective's website offers additional evidence that the company is seeking to perpetuate (though perhaps unconsciously) the young, male decorum that appears to be common in Utah tech. They have a photo of a man golfing, list benefits of "Corporate Golf, Top Golf, Ready Gunner, and Ski Passes" for company employees. This webpage also says it provides a "relaxing and fun workplace for everyone" in a "relaxed environment where co-workers tend to become genuine friends." They back this statement up by listing "Nintendo Switch Tournaments" and an "all-you-can-drink soda machine" as additional benefits. This company also retains "the close-knit vibe of a small startup company," which tends to be more appealing to young, single men than it is for women, particularly those who have a family

they are providing for.

Other company's job ads look to be appealing to potential employees who are older and have families, rather than young single people. For example, TestOut's ad seeking a QA Engineer for Web Applications describes their company culture as "a business casual environment with company employee events as well as company family events." They also emphasize the company's qualities that make them a more family-friendly company, such as "a real 40-hour work week without the pressure of late hours or slow times with no projects," "paid time off and holiday pay," and "a CEO/Owner who cares about you and shows it." Additionally, the "Careers" page on their website includes headings like "We are family" and "Work/Life Balance." However, the visual rhetoric of this webpage could also deter women from applying, even if they are attracted to the family values the company conveys. The main photo on the "Careers" page (Figure 4.1) shows all of the company's employees. It is a small group, and everyone appears to be quite happy together, but there are very few women in the photo, and the women that are there are all bunched together in one small section of the group. This photo acts as a visual depiction of the company's employee dynamics, suggesting that this is a male-dominated company in which women must stick together and are not readily intermingling with their male colleagues.



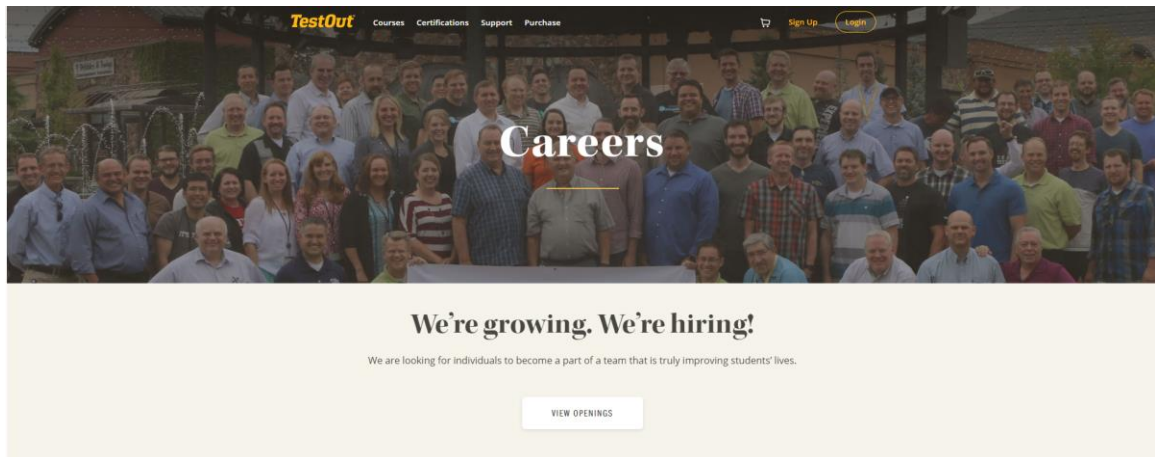


Figure 4: Banner from TestOut's Careers webpage

Figure 4

Furthermore, the other photos on TestOut's "Careers" page only include men depicted as employees.

Similarly, the visual rhetoric on Deseret Digital Media's website also portrays a male-dominated workplace, a potential deterrent for women who might be interested in applying for the posted iOS Developer II position with the company. In the website's main photo (see Figure 4.2), there are three men depicted at the center of the room. One is speaking, one has a computer open, and the other is holding a pen and paper. Surrounding the three men are six women, whose focus is on the men, and who appear to only be listening and not actively working. While this photo may not intentionally have been used to deter women, its depiction of a male-dominated space in which women are subordinate to men and whose work does not appear to matter as much as men could certainly discourage women from applying.

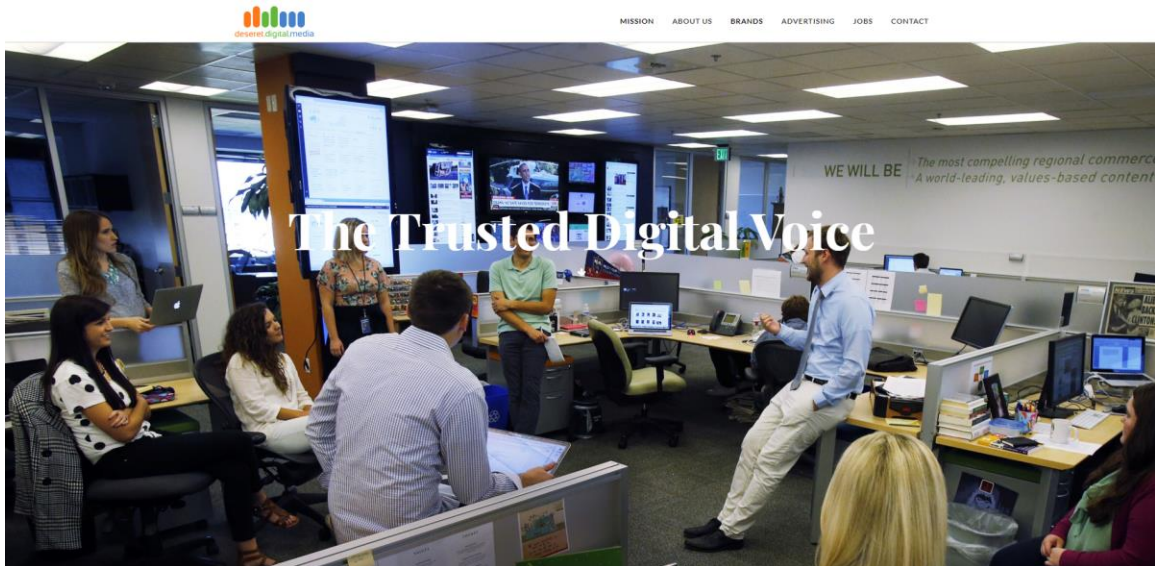


Figure 5: Photo from Deseret Digital Media's Career webpage

Figure 5

Deseret Digital Media's religious references could also dissuade people from applying for the position. In their job ad for the iOS Developer, they describe their company as having "a uniquely values-based mission [that] seeks to be strategic to its owner, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." They narrow down their list of employee prospects even further when they say, "all candidates need to fully support the company's mission statement: 'To be trusted voices of light and truth influencing hundreds of millions of people worldwide.'" While the ad does not directly say they only hire members of the LDS church, it is highly insinuated with this rhetoric. And to narrow the candidate pool even further, their final statement on the job ad says the company is an "equal opportunity employer" but only lists M/F/D/V (Male/Female/Disabled/Veteran) as the protected categories.

Compare this to Pluralsight's equal opportunity employer statement and the differences are noteworthy in regard to each company's decorum. Pluralsight's final

statement on their job ad for a Marketing Technical Architect says “Bring yourself. Pluralsight is an equal opportunity employer. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, religion, gender, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, national origin, genetics, disability, age, or veteran status.” Unlike the ad from Deseret Digital Media, this ad actively promotes a decorum that welcomes diversity by including every legally protected category *and* categories that are not legally protected but represent groups of people who are often discriminated against. In conjunction with this language in their job ad, the “Careers” page on the company’s website also lists “Equality” as one of the six main things the company “believe[s] in.” The visual rhetoric on the website also supports the impression that Pluralsight is a company dedicated to diversity and inclusion. They have multiple rotating pictures on the “Careers” page top banner, with each picture representing a diverse workforce. Women and men are represented equally, in addition to a diversity of race/ethnicity. This symbolic display represents a direct challenge to the more typical unwritten rules and assumptions that are common in Utah tech; that is the decorum which assumes young, white men should be dominant within the workplace.

Overall, each of the job ads that have been analyzed represent decorum as it relates to gender, marital/family status, religion, and age in their own unique way. While not every company represents decorum in the same way, there are similar themes displayed throughout every ad, themes that support the results of the survey and interviews. The rhetorical analysis of job ads also supports previous research and information about the decorum of Utah tech and the tech sector at large. It is important for companies to be aware of the message they are sending to potential employees, as

these technical communication documents are the first insight they have into understanding the company's decorum. Though it is not readily evident that these ads are *purposely* depicting these companies in a way that might deter people with certain personal characteristics from applying, it is crucial that these companies are aware of the messages their recruiting materials are sending—about their company's culture and the expectations for symbolic display which may be difficult or even impossible for many potential applicants to measure up to. For those companies that are working to challenge the negative aspects of Utah tech decorum, these job ads can provide a springboard for greater diversity and inclusion, while also promoting fair hiring practices that can be emulated by others. It is crucial that companies recognize their company's decorum and the effects it has on employees and the workplace culture, both positive and negative. Companies must use this knowledge to eliminate oppressive practices, including those that occur during the hiring process. As such, recruitment materials, such as job ads and website pages, should use rhetorical strategies that convey the company's dedication to diversity, inclusion, and equality. These texts should encourage *all* qualified individuals—regardless of their personal identity—to feel confident in applying for the position. While this might be only one aspect of the hiring process that will be improved by giving attention to decorum, it is certainly an important one.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION--DECORUM FOR RESEARCH, PEDAGOGY, AND BEYOND

I have theorized that research that uses decorum as a theoretical foundation and as a method provides additional support for social justice movements within Technical and Professional Communication (TPC). I established the exigency for an approach to topics associated with social justice (such as sexism, racism, etc.) that does not immediately evoke resistance and allows for exploration of these topics without immediate bias. As I have discussed throughout this dissertation, language that is associated with controversial topics can be associated with interpretations and connotations that summon both conscious and unconscious bias, and thus resistance to critical thinking. For example, some people might equate the word “feminism” to man-hating, or even “diversity and inclusion” to the removal of white men, making it feel like a personal attack to those who have not fully engaged with the concepts.

I defined and framed decorum within this context, then explained how decorum-focused research can offer scholars a means to engage resistant audiences in important discussions without the immediate defiance that often occurs when trigger words (such as feminism, racism, equality, etc.) are mentioned. While these issues are certainly going to appear within decorum-focused research, I have hoped to illustrate how an emphasis on decorum as an act and means of oppression provides an alternate route of discovery for important issues surrounding social justice for folks who do not immediately recognize or identify with oppression and the numerous ways in which it occurs for certain populations. This is particularly true with regards to more localized challenges in which sexism and racism look different than they might in other contexts..

Following other scholars' work on intersectionality, I have also discussed the need for social justice research to engage with multiple dimensions of identity simultaneously, which can save researchers time and resources and provide data that can be used for a variety of projects. Furthermore, I have made note that the call for research which directly addresses the compounding effects of intersecting modes of oppression (i.e. intersectionality) also initiates a call for *methods* of research that can centralize intersectionality as a vital factor to enacting social justice. The capability to address intersectionality is one of the main benefits of decorum that I have hoped to illustrate in this dissertation.

To demonstrate both primary benefits that are offered by decorum-based research in TPC (that is, providing a language and alternative means of discussion for resistant audiences, and addressing multiple dimensions of identity simultaneously), I have also presented the results of a pilot study (Chapter 4) in which I used the theory and methods of decorum that have been laid out in chapters 1-3. This research uncovers the acts and means of oppression that manifest the decorum within the Utah tech sector, and more specifically the impact each of these have on women in particular.

The pilot study revealed that for women, the appropriate social behavior (i.e. De Certeau's strategies) within their workplace is often to remain silent, to quietly accept disparaging language from co-workers and supervisors who express their disapproval of specific behaviors, such as working outside of the home. Because it is acceptable for people to make such demeaning comments within the workplace (i.e. there are no immediate consequences that deter this behavior), the symbolic display is indicative of a decorum that is clearly dictated by those who hold a higher ranking in the hierarchy than

these women and whom evidently have no problems following the decorum themselves. For example, when the dominant culture makes it “inappropriate” for women to not have children, or to have children *and* work outside of the home, women who do not have children, or working mothers, often face direct or indirect discrimination and oppression that is not readily apparent to those who belong to the dominant culture.. Other examples of acceptable, but often unstated practices that are indicative of decorum in Utah tech include preferential treatment in hiring practices given to candidates who display symbols of belonging to the LDS church, or at least adhering to the expectations of the LDS church (e.g.. listing your affiliation with the appropriate religious school such BYU, listing an LDS service mission on a resume, or wearing a wedding ring to an interview).

To conclude this dissertation, I discuss the implications for the theory and methods of decorum which have been laid out in previous chapters, as well as the pilot study. I first discuss how my findings can be used to advance social justice in several ways: 1) through the study of intersectionality, 2) through future research, education, and initiatives within the Utah tech sector, 3) by promoting equitable practices within workplaces in general, and 4) through critical pedagogy within higher education. Though I do offer some solutions (or at least *ideas* for solutions), I do not give an exhaustive breakdown of potential solutions as that is not the intent of this dissertation. However, it is important to at least recognize and consider how the theoretical framework of decorum I have outlined in this dissertation can help inform, shape, and implement solutions.

### **Social Justice Techniques**

The most important aspect of decorum that has been addressed in this dissertation is its application to social justice. While this dissertation focuses primarily on social

justice movements within TPC, it is important to note that decorum can and should extend beyond TPC, to be used in capacities that have need for a theory and method as I have described. Though the results of the pilot study discussed in this dissertation--and the pilot study in itself--do not address every aspect of social justice that it could, it does provide clear evidence that decorum provides a useful tool for social justice research. To guide future research and provide additional details on decorum's application to social justice research, in this concluding chapter I will discuss in greater detail what this dissertation reveals about intersectionality, implications for Utah tech and the tech sector at large, and approaches for using this information to improve the workplace.

### **Intersectionality**

In this dissertation, I hope to have reinforced Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall's (2013) declaration that "the widening scope of intersectional scholarship and praxis has not only clarified intersectionality's capacities; is has also amplified its generative focus as an analytical tool to capture and engage contextual dynamics of power" (p.788). As mentioned previously, the term *intersectionality* is used to represent the cumulative and complex ways in which multiple forms of oppression intersect, overlap, and multiply the experiences of marginalized groups. Intersectionality occurs in different ways and is context-dependent, meaning that for every situation in which oppression occurs, there will be different experiences of intersectionality, depending on the circumstances of each particular situation. But the overall idea is that when a person has multiple marginalized forms of identity, it causes a unique experience of oppression that cannot be equated to the oppression experienced by someone with only one marginalized form of identity (i.e. a black woman with a disability will experience oppression much differently than a white



woman with no disability). Moreover, intersectionality has “brought to light the invisibility of many constituents within groups that claim them as members but often fail to represent them” (Crenshaw, 2015).

Intersectionality was evident within Utah’s tech sector via an exploration of symbolic display and the decorum that dictates the symbolic display. By focusing only on the experiences of women within this space (who were already understood to be a marginalized group), the overlaying factors of intersectionality were easily identified. The three primary marginalizing factors were discussed in Chapter 4: religion, marital/family status, and age. The results of the pilot study demonstrate that the addition of each one of these factors changes the ways in which these women experience oppression. However, there were also other marginalizing factors that were identified by both the survey respondents and the interviewees (such as race, nationality, and education). Women in the pilot study expressed the compounding marginalizing affects that they were forced to deal with as the result of having multiple forms of marginalized identity. For example, one survey respondent stated that “people sometimes in their speech say things that are discriminative...these comments include - “Because you are a woman, and international, and in computer science, you have this job.” Another said that “sexual, age, religion discrimination is prevalent” while another noted that male coworkers “always interrupt females or steal ideas while a female just said it...when you are not a mormon [sic] and have an accent is even worse.”

Most notably, none of these women were specifically asked about race, age, religion, or education. A focus on decorum and symbolic display is what prompted these women to relay their experiences of intersectionality. Their comments were made based

on questions that were centered around identifying the decorum within their workplace and the Utah tech sector at large. This demonstrates three things. First, intersectionality is such a significant factor in how oppression is experienced that these women (not critical theorists, etc.) were cognizant of it enough to relay that information to the researcher without being prompted to do so. Second, these comments show that decorum can be an effective tool for identifying intersectionality. If women were only asked to discuss one specific marginalizing factor, they would not have had the opportunity to reveal *every* factor of significance, or they may not have thought to discuss those other factors in conjunction with the specific factor for which they were specifically asked about. And finally, asking about decorum is less leading than specifically asking about intersectionality. Since many participants may not be familiar with the term “intersectionality,” it would also be necessary to describe what is meant by the term if I were to specifically ask them about it. Again, this would bring in language that could lead participants to only identify certain aspects of their experiences, rather than giving them the opportunity to relay their experiences in their entirety. Prompting research participants to consider *decorum* and *symbolic display* provides both a catalyst and an opportunity to discuss their experiences of oppression as a whole, rather than having to subdivide their experiences in order to answer the question more directly.

What this dissertation--and pilot study in particular--demonstrates, then, is that decorum can be used as a technique for social justice research. More specifically, decorum provides a means to identify intersectionality, which research has been increasingly acknowledging as a crucial component to social justice. If we want to impact truly meaningful change, it is first necessary to understand what oppression actually

looks like. Intersectionality is central to an understanding of the variable, nuanced, and complex nature of oppression, and thus an understanding of how to alleviate that oppression. This dissertation demonstrates that in addition to the great work already being done, decorum provides an additional tool to aid researchers in the pursuit of social justice.

### **Implications for Tech in Utah and Beyond**

With the Utah tech sector experiencing significant growth within the last few years (Semurad, 2019; Nielsen, 2019), and with growth expected to continue (Semurad, 2020; Raymond, 2019), it is important that research regarding workplace culture and ethics be conducted within this space specifically. Moreover, such research should be used to benefit employees, improve workplace conditions for all, and enhance the diversity and inclusion practices of Utah tech companies. As my pilot study suggests, there is still considerable work to be done in each of these areas within Utah tech. I have addressed some of those issues throughout this dissertation, but to conclude my discussion of the pilot study, I will also describe other areas of concern that future researchers can focus on and outline a few strategies that can be implemented in order to help companies (including managers, directors, supervisors, and other employees) create and promote decorum that is more inclusive and which better provides for equal opportunity for all.

Most notably, this pilot study has revealed that there is considerable practices of discrimination and oppression occurring within Utah tech workplaces, and that these instances are directly related to decorum. The decorum in Utah tech is often directly associated with gender, marital/family status (particularly for women), religion, and age

(as I have discussed in Chapter 4); but it is also related to race, nationality, education, and sexual orientation (though potentially more factors exist that were not apparent within this study). The pilot study also revealed that these factors are not completely separate from each other; rather, they intertwine and overlap, influencing each other in complex ways. For example, women who have endured belittling comments about their child-bearing status are experiencing decorum that is based on gender, religion, and age. The religious influences create cultural expectations that women and men should be married at a young age, and that women should also stay at home to raise children. The same religious influences create the expectation that men work full-time to provide for their families. As such, the confluence of gender, religion, and age create a particular decorum--where questioning women about their marital and reproduction status is condoned and all women are encouraged to make motherhood a top priority--that is unique to Utah tech.

To further understand the importance and role of gender to the decorum of Utah tech, this issue should be directly addressed in future research. While this dissertation has focused primarily on the experiences of *women* in Utah tech, future research should investigate the experiences of employees who identify as *men* and those who identify as *non-binary/genderqueer*. Similar methods from this pilot study should be used, and when possible, questions similar to those that were asked in the survey and interviews from this pilot study should also be used in order to compare responses from each group. This strategy will reveal differences and similarities in perception of Utah tech decorum based on gender. As several pilot study participants noted, they believed many men did not realize that the decorum heavily favored men, so understanding the perspective of people

who do not identify as women will give additional information as to whether or not this belief aligns with the perception of men working in Utah tech, for whom the decorum could be invisible.

Similarly, it is important to learn more about the experiences of other marginalized groups within Utah tech. This information could be acquired in a couple different ways. First, a survey focused on decorum that is designed to be distributed to *any employee* could also include additional questions about participants' demographics, including race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, social class, age, education, and sexual orientation--in addition to the questions about gender and seniority that were included in this pilot study. Providing the same questions for all employees would enable researchers to gain a better understanding of how a person's factors of identity influence their perception and experience of decorum and oppression within their workplace.

Another strategy would be to create a specific survey for each marginalized group that is more specific to their experiences. Narrowing the scope to a specific group allows more targeted language and in-depth questions than would not be possible in a survey meant for any employee. Using more targeted language does limit the benefit of not having leading questions, but a more specific set of questions might be worth that loss. A specific survey for each marginalized group also provides the opportunity to bring in other social justice theories to help inform the research participants' experiences. For instance, if I survey only non-heteronormative employees, I could ask questions that pertain only to their unique experiences working in Utah tech. The survey could first ask non-heteronormative employees what is considered acceptable in regard to displaying (via any symbolic display, i.e. language, clothing, non-verbal communication, etc.) their

sexual orientation. Then--since this pilot study has already presented strong evidence that tech workplaces in Utah are heavily influenced by the values and beliefs of the LDS religion--they could be asked follow-up questions about the role they believe religion plays in these experiences.

While these questions could be asked of all employees, if we know that those taking the survey are non-heteronormative, I could ask additional follow-up questions that are more relevant to this particular population, such as “Describe a time at your workplace in which you felt uncomfortable revealing your sexuality” or “What are the similarities and differences between how people treat you based on your sexuality at work versus other places in Utah?” Likewise, by focusing only on sexual orientation, I can more readily center my analysis around queer theories and tie this work into other research that focuses on sexual orientation within the workplace.

It is also important to apply the knowledge gained from this dissertation and pilot study to other areas of tech. As I discussed in Chapter 3, the tech sectors of Silicon Valley, Portland, and other areas are also functioning within a culture heavily influenced by gender-specific decorum that has harmful effects for women in particular. What the results of the Utah tech pilot study indicate, however, is that not all areas of tech manifest harm to women in the same way. The decorum that underlies the acts and means of oppression is influenced by the context in which that decorum is produced. For Utah, religion plays a crucial role, but other areas of tech will likely be influenced by different (or similar) contingent factors that are specific to the people, culture, governments, etc. within those areas.

Contextual considerations should be made more of a priority in future decorum-

based research as well. Because context is so important to the ways in which decorum is produced, negotiated, perpetuated, and changed, more focus should be paid to the variances that occur when context changes. Rather than viewing decorum as a static phenomenon, decorum should instead be understood as dynamic, ever-evolving, and most importantly, context-dependent. When possible, researchers should integrate strategies that identify, account for, and analyze the dynamic aspect of decorum. Understanding when, where, how, and why decorum fluctuates can better inform solutions.

The acts and means of oppression in Utah tech that have been uncovered by the pilot study --and the context from which they are produced-- also show that there are similarities between Utah tech and other areas of tech. These similarities call for further attention. Using the data and analyses from this dissertation, researchers should investigate other areas of tech in terms of decorum. Doing so can provide other data that can be used to compare, converge, and corroborate the data from Utah tech and produce more comprehensive understandings of the factors that allow for and create oppression and the ways in which oppression can be changed.

### **Workplace Significance**

While the pilot study in this dissertation has focused primarily on workplaces in Utah tech (and to some degree the tech sector at large), it does have applications for the workplace in general. In particular, this dissertation demonstrates the benefits of using decorum-based research to gain knowledge about harmful workplace practices—whether they are deliberate or unconscious—and what can be done to change them. Likewise, decorum-based research can also reveal positive aspects of workplace decorum that can

be exemplified and amplified. Whether the harmful and/or beneficial practices are evident in decorum based on religion, age, gender, and marital/family status (as it is in Utah tech), or whether the decorum is based on something else, the theories and methods outlined in this dissertation can be applied to any workplace setting.

Many times, when oppression is occurring within the workplace, it can be traced back to the workplace culture (Wong, 2019; Mills, 2018; Soloman, 2001; Diamond, 1997; Sheppard, 1994). As such, efforts to create a workplace culture that welcomes diversity, values equity, and promotes inclusivity are extremely important. By focusing on decorum--which I have shown to be directly connected to the practices that comprise workplace culture--companies can better diagnose the inconsistencies and injustices within their workplaces in ways that make change, rather than just focusing on awareness. While these efforts should be a priority for *all* people within the company/workplace, those with seniority have greater ability to actually make changes *and* enforce them. To do so, management teams should work to identify what their company's decorum consists of, how it affects all types of employees, and how and by whom this decorum is used as a means of oppression, and in some cases, hopefully as a means of empowerment.

While the purpose of this dissertation is not to provide an exhaustive or comprehensive list of solutions to the problems that were, and can be identified through decorum-based research, it is still important to at least make connections between these findings and the work of other researchers who have studied organizational change. Dimaggio and Powell (1983) identify three ways in which organizational change occurs. Following Weber's school of thought, Dimaggio and Powell identify the three



mechanisms of institutional isomorphic change: *coercive*, *memetic*, and *normative*. With coercive isomorphism, change occurs as the result of pressure from other organizations for which they are dependent or by larger cultural expectations. It could also be the direct result of a government mandate or policy change. In any of these instances, though, the change often feels forced, the result of persuasive measures specifically aimed at making the change occur. For example, a company might decide to interview more diverse job candidates because the store that sells the most products for their company has suggested they do so. The change is made, then, out of fear of losing money rather than because it is ethically sound to interview diverse candidates. Memetic isomorphism occurs when an organization mimics or models themselves after another organization due to uncertainty or ambiguity. In other words, if an organization does not have a clear path, or does not know if their processes or structures will work, they take on characteristics of other organizations. For example, a start-up company might copy the diversity and inclusion policies and practices of another larger, successful company because they have no experience in that area. Normative isomorphism occurs because of *professionalization*, which is the “collective struggle of members of an occupation to define the conditions and methods of their work” (p. 152). It is in this process that organizational norms are created as groups working in similar fields and occupations work to define themselves. In doing so, they create expectations and a culture that extends beyond one single organization. For example, the Society for Technical Communication is a non-profit organization whose primary goal is to advance the profession of Technical Communicator. They provide a list of ethical principles (Ethical Principles, 2020) and offer resources that provide a set of norms for anyone working in the profession. The way

in which normative isomorphism has influenced the organizational norms of the tech sector are evidenced by my research, including how Utah's booming industry adapts many of the characteristics of other tech sectors who have been in the process of professionalization for many years. This is one example of normative isomorphism.

When looking to ways that information about workplace decorum can be used to make organizational changes, then, each of these isomorphic processes that DiMaggio and Powell describe should be considered. Because the symbolic displays deemed acceptable or unacceptable within a workplace--particularly those which are not readily associated with an official policy or procedure--can and do act as means of oppression., it is essential that all people in an organization, including boards of directors, management teams, supervisors, and employees themselves, be aware of these systems of common codes that are embodied in communication practices (i.e. decorum). As such, organizations should implement strategies that both work to discourage harmful decorum and create workplace cultures that are conducive to diversity, inclusion, and equality. The three processes of organizational change can be used as one way to envision how change can occur.

Coercive change is typically the fastest way to enact change within an organization, but it does not always have the best results. This dichotomy occurs because coercive measures are typically drawn up by those at the top of the hierarchy, yet are applied to every person, no matter their position in the hierarchy. Because there can often be a large disconnect between what management *thinks* is happening and what is *actually* happening, the coercive methods may be ill-fitting, inappropriate, and ineffective. Similarly, the actual lived experiences of those falling lower in the hierarchy may not be

understood as problematic by those who are making the policy changes, particularly if the management teams do not represent the workers. This was seen in the pilot study, where the majority of upper-management teams (particularly in the C-Suite) of tech companies are comprised of white men, making it difficult for them to enact policies/programs/etc. that directly address the challenges faced by people who are not white men. That is not to say, however, that coercive measures cannot be effective. It is just important that care be taken in making sure these measures are taken with the direct input and collaboration with all people in the organization and with a strong understanding of their experiences.

Surveying employees anonymously is a great first step in this process, but companies can also make observations, implement effective means for employees to report instances of discrimination without fear of retribution, and have open discussions that explicitly address workplace culture with people at every level of the company. The goal should be to understand people's experiences as they truly are, including what makes them feel accepted and an active part of the team and what makes them feel oppressed in any way.

For example, pilot study interviewee Allison, who works for a large tech company well known for its efforts to be diverse and inclusive, noted that her company had recently hired a full-time diversity and inclusion specialist whose primary duties are to understand the company's culture throughout every level (from hiring practices with potential employees, to everyday workplace behaviors, all the way up to the C-Suite) and initiate strategies to make the company more equitable and diverse. This new hire planned to distribute anonymous surveys to every company employee, audit the company's policies, provide ongoing education for all personnel, and make conversations

about the company's culture and practices more open and sensitive to employee needs. While this strategy is classified as coercive isomorphism, bringing in a third party and making understanding a priority before any changes are implemented increase the likelihood that the changes will actually make improvements (Dimaggio & Powell, 1983).

These types of strategies can be effective for any company looking to revamp the company culture and improve overall employee well-being. Policy changes—while they may be least effective in changing people's mindset—still can provide an effective strategy to at least initiate progress and establish the company as having a culture of inclusivity. For example, if someone in the company notices that only young employees are invited to social gatherings that take place after hours, policies can be implemented that restrict any after-hours gatherings to 4 or more employees (note that the appropriate number will depend on the size of the company or department) and that discussions about work be limited; or, if more than 4 employees are to attend, then every employee must also be invited via email and/or notice posted in a shared space (such as a breakroom). Other behaviors, such as discriminatory language, can be more challenging to regulate via policy. However, employee training that specifically addresses the problems within that particular workplace--supported by policies that yield more severe consequences for misbehavior--can also be effective strategies.

Codes of conduct can also facilitate improvements in workplace culture. Though they may not act as official policies, codes of conduct provide explicit guidelines of appropriateness within the workplace that help make decorum visible. Expectations should be delineated descriptively and precisely and should directly address the

embodied practices of symbolic display that are deemed to be acceptable and unacceptable modes of communicative acts. In other words, codes of conduct should lay out what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior, language, and dress. Likewise, it would be helpful to also include the reasons why these codes of conduct have been outlined as they have. Providing reasoning can help people understand how behaviors can be harmful and empowering. Codes of conduct delineated in this way can help set a tone for the workplace, educate employees, and make it easier for oppressive behaviors to be penalized.

Likewise, codes of conduct—when used by professional organizations and as part of the educational process for a specific trade—can work as a form of normative isomorphism, which DiMaggio & Powell argue is more effective in changing organizations than are coercive measures. While I will extend further on teaching recommendations in the next section, it is important to note that any educational program whose aim is to professionalize its students to do well in their specific trade has the opportunity, and one could argue the responsibility, to establish norms for the workplace that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. The decorum within the educational setting itself should reflect these norms, and a frank and open discussion of workplace decorum as part of the curriculum should be present as well. In the tech sector, for example, bootcamps are a popular educational path for many looking to find employment, particularly those who are young and/or inexperienced. These bootcamps should take direct action in establishing decorum that students will take with them to the workplace. As interviewee Brenda described, the bootcamps had the same decorum as the workplace and she would have liked to see more effort by the bootcamp she attended in making

decorum that is conducive to equity and inclusion part of the process of professionalization.

The high outpouring of students from bootcamps similar to that which Brenda attended suggests another opportunity for change as well. The nature of the technology sector as a fairly new and developing field provides plenty of opportunity for mimetic isomorphism that can work to create workplace cultures that are more favorable to diversity and equity. Start-up companies are constantly popping up in the tech sector, and each one can look to others as an example for the type of workplace culture they want to create. While this can be problematic, with so many other companies having embraced a more oppressive culture (as I discussed previously), for those companies who deliberately seek out companies that are committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion, mimetic isomorphism can be a very effective strategy. Making these progressive companies an example for others can help newly developing companies model their workplaces after those who are actively working to eliminate oppression. The Women Tech Council in Utah, for example, is helping to make these companies more visible through their “Shatter List,” which awards and publicly recognizes Utah tech companies that are committed to “creating and enacting practices and cultures that remove the glass ceiling” (Shatter List, 2020).

Though no single approach to organizational change—whether it be coercive, normative, or memetic—will be enough to completely eliminate or undo harmful workplace decorum, these approaches can work as a starting point for companies. These strategies should be further developed, within the context of each organization, and through the lens of decorum. Every person who has stake in the company should be

involved throughout the process of change, and every person should *know* that their voice matters and has weight. While no organization or company will approach change the same, they can seek to understand decorum through the methods outlined in this dissertation, then use that information to enact change through the methods described by Dimaggio & Powell. In all, change that eliminates oppression and promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion should be the ultimate goal.

### **Teaching Recommendations**

While most of this dissertation is focused on decorum as a theory and method, it is also important to discuss the potential uses of decorum as a pedagogical tool. In fact, one of the most beneficial uses of decorum, from my own experiences, has been in the classroom, using it as a tool for greater in-depth discussions and critical thinking. In particular, from my perspective, decorum has helped my students engage with challenging issues and discuss difficult topics in meaningful ways. Additionally, incorporating decorum into the curriculum has helped my students to recognize injustice within their own lives, discerning their individual positions and those of others.

Decorum works as an effective pedagogical tool for critical thinking because it prompts additional questioning and deeper thought, particularly for students who are not accustomed to examining social problems in such a way. Asking students to simply identify decorum within a given situation allows for additional inquiry as to when, where, why, and by whom that decorum was established. It leads to questions (either naturally or through the guidance of the instructor) about how the decorum is implemented, learned, taught, rewarded, and punished. The answers to these questions then open the door for exploration into how these elements of decorum play out in real life, including how the

decorum differs depending on the context and how decorum is both indicative of and actively carrying out oppression.

Most notably, though, decorum offers a language that helps better facilitate these important discoveries and conversations, especially with more resistant students. In my own teaching experiences, I have tried a variety of approaches for critical thinking and methods for gearing that critical thinking toward issues of social (in)justice. Early in my teaching career, I relied on feminist, queer, and critical race theories--using language that is common when discussing the issues surrounding those theories. Terms such as racism, sexism, feminism, sexuality, and gender evoked either direct opposition and refusal to engage in meaningful thought and dialogue, or more commonly, total silence. Even words like diversity, inclusion, and privilege had similar results.

For example, in a lesson on audience awareness in my second-year composition course, I was teaching empathy as a strategy for understanding the audience's perspective. As part of this lesson, I showed the class a video in which the concept of privilege--and the negative consequences of not having privilege--is demonstrated via a race for \$100 bill (Peter D., 2017). In the video, the teacher has his students (all teenagers) line up for a race, letting them know that the winner will get a \$100 bill. He tells students before the race begins that he's going to make some statements, and that if those statements apply to them, they can take two steps forward. Statements include things such as "take two steps forward if you grew up with a father figure in the home" and "take two steps forward if you've never had to help mom and dad with the bills." The video shows, with each passing question, most of the white students moving forward while most of the black students remain at the starting line. The teacher says "I want you



guys up here in the front to just turn around and look. Every statement I've made has nothing to do with anything any of you have done--has nothing to do with decisions you've made...we all know that everyone up here [at the front] has a better opportunity to win the hundred dollars. Does that mean these people back here can't race? No. We would be foolish to not realize that we've been given more opportunity. We don't want to recognize that we've been given a head start, but the reality is that we have. Now, there's no excuse. They still gotta run their race...and the reality is that if this was a fair race, and everybody was back on that line, I guarantee some of these kids would smoke all of you."

While this video was meant to engage my students in a conversation about privilege--about recognizing other people's positions and empathizing with the challenges they face--the comments made by several students in the class made it clear that the word "privilege" evoked racist ideologies and deterred them from deeper critical thought. With all but one student in the class being apparently white (though she likely passed as white to the rest of the class), immediate comments included frustration at the idea of privilege itself; resentment for the perceived notion that they, as white people, did not earn their position in life; and even an outright racist comment about slavery for which one student was told to leave the classroom. These comments, in turn, made the only black student in the class feel hated and shunned, and justifiably angry (as she expressed to me when I pulled her aside after class). She also felt frustrated at herself for not speaking up. While I don't believe that the frustration and anger from her and others in the class were necessarily unproductive, it would have been beneficial for everyone to have an alternate approach to the topic of racism and privilege. If we, as educators, are really committed to persuasion and change, to helping our students think critically and

empathetically, then we must have multiple approaches available and use those most appropriate for the situation. In this situation from my own class, for example, our discussion in the following class was focused on decorum, and students were better able to articulate their experiences and feelings and were likewise better able to understand those of others.

This--and other similar situations--showed me that language infused with social justice connotations may have the opposite effect of what I was trying to achieve. While I did not eliminate using this language entirely, I instead learned that for a conservative group of students (which is often the case in classrooms at my University), it is more effective to introduce such language *after* the concepts associated with oppression have first been introduced. Decorum has provided the most efficient means for students to think critically about power and oppression without immediately rejecting any notions of social justice embedded within.

### **Composition Courses**

While my discussion of decorum as a tool for pedagogy in this chapter focuses primarily on technical communication pedagogy, it should also be mentioned that decorum can be used in any classroom where communication is of relevance to the curriculum. In addition to my technical communication course, I have also personally used decorum in my first- and second-year composition courses. As mentioned above, in these composition courses, decorum was an effective strategy to get students to consider the structures of power within their own lives and how communication acts to both reinforce and challenge those structures, eventually leading to discussions that explicitly focused on racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression. While I present these cases

anecdotally, more studies on the effectiveness of decorum as a pedagogical strategy should be done.

The discussions about decorum in my composition courses were typically intertwined with lessons on rhetoric. Students first learned the basics of rhetoric, with a focus on the ways in which symbolic displays (such as language and visuals) influence the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others. We discussed ethos, pathos, logos, and kairos at a basic level, as well as the rhetorical situation and the importance of context. Within this framework, we then moved into decorum. I provided a definition and examples that were easily tied back into our discussion of rhetoric, and I showed them a few funny videos (such as a couple scenes from television shows *Seinfeld* and *Impractical Jokers*) to help students see decorum play out in actual scenarios. Additionally, these humorous videos helped students start to engage with the concepts of decorum in a more playful setting and tone, making the basic concepts of decorum easier to grapple with and understand.

After discussing the basic definition of decorum and discussing a few examples as a class, I then asked students to choose a situation in which they spend a significant amount of time (such as work, school, with family or friends, etc.). They were then asked to list or describe at least three unwritten rules (i.e. decorum) within those situations. Students shared their list with neighboring peers, describing the unwritten rules they had listed and what effect it has had on them individually within those situations. Next, students were asked to pick one of the unwritten rules they had identified and answer the following questions about that decorum:

1. To whom does this decorum apply (i.e. who has to follow the rule)?

2. Is the rule the same for everyone, or are there different rules for different people?  
Or people with no rules at all?
3. What are the consequences for not following decorum? Are the consequences different for different people? If so, explain how.
4. Who makes that rule? What does that person(s) stand to gain from having this rule in place?

After writing these answers out individually, students then discussed them in small groups. I rotated around the room to answer questions and offer additional thoughts to provoke deeper critical thinking. After group discussions, we came back together and discussed the decorum that a few student volunteers shared with the rest of the class.

While we worked on answering the above questions about each student volunteer's situation, I guided the discussion so as to prompt students to consider the implications it has for the people involved in that situation. After discussing decorum in a humorous way, and then a personal way, students were more open to discussions that were more directly focused on issues of social justice than they had been in other discussions in which these issues were brought up.

### **Technical Communication Courses**

Technical communication courses may not readily appear to be an ideal or even appropriate setting to discuss decorum. However, as I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, decorum and TPC are always intertwined, so using decorum-based methods for teaching technical communication courses can prove beneficial. There are several effective strategies that can help instructors use decorum in their TPC coursework and class discussions. From my experience, decorum has proven to be a great way to talk

about common topics in TPC, but in a way that has greater implications for social justice. While technical communication pedagogy's roots lie in the practical application of hard skills in the workplace (Connors, 2004), students must also understand the greater impacts that technical communication has on society (Henry, 2006; Wills, 2006) and how they can enact meaningful change in their personal, professional, and civic lives by making ethical and moral decisions (Kienzler, 2001).

One of the easiest and most accessible ways to get students thinking about decorum in TPC is through genre. Preceding a unit on decorum with a discussion on genre gives students the foundations to start thinking about unwritten rules and expectations, but in a way that is not apparently challenging or even directly connected to their belief system. Most students will not immediately associate genre with racism, sexism, oppression, etc., so it can provide a theoretical and structural model which can be referred back to when those issues do arise. Likewise, discussing genre in relation to decorum can give students language, concepts, and orientation to dive deeper into more critical issues related to social justice.

As discussed in Chapter 1, genre is a response to recurrent rhetorical situations, but the primary goal of genre is to move and shape society. Framing genre within rhetoric establishes rationale for examining genre (and eventually decorum) in terms of social justice, since genre is a rhetorical tool for social action that plays a vital role in shaping societies and cultures (Miller, 1984). To bridge a connection between genre and decorum, TPC instructors should begin by asking students to consider how the foundations of genre--that is, unofficial guidelines and expectations--might be evident in other aspects of TPC. To work through this thought process, start with a discussion about what the

unofficial rules and expectations are for a specific genre. For example, you could ask students to list standard practices and guidelines for creating user manuals. After compiling this list and further discussing how those guidelines are shaped, changed, and communicated, then ask students to consider what unofficial rules and expectations are apparent *within* the genre that are not necessarily part of the genre itself (i.e. not included on the list that was just created). One example that could be used with user manuals is to point out that they might include jargon which suggests there is an expectation that the user will be familiar with this language enough to effectively perform the tasks laid out in the manual. Though this expectation may not be explicitly stated within the user manual--and the genre itself does not have this expectation--the manual still communicates the expectation symbolically.

After working through a few examples similar to this, instructors can then move into decorum itself. They can start by defining decorum and placing it within the rhetorical concepts for which students are already familiar. In defining decorum, they must also define “symbolic display” and “communicative acts,” similar to the way I have worked through those definitions in this dissertation. In doing so, instructors should make sure to provide plenty of examples and ask students to think of examples on their own as well.

As students begin to grasp these concepts, it is then possible to start moving more directly into the relationship between decorum and social justice within TPC. As many other TPC scholars have illustrated in their work, TPC is always dealing with issues of human rights, therefore leaving open the opportunity for oppression to occur through the practice and use of TPC. Instructors should assign Duerringer’s (2016) article, which

discussed the controversy surrounding the decorum of eulogies after Sandy Hook Elementary shootings. This article brings in elements of genre, decorum, and social justice as it deals with the attack from pro-gun supporters on President Obama after giving his public eulogy at the public memorial for the victims of Sandy Hook. These pro-gun activists accused the President of breaking decorum--and thus dishonoring the victims--by making what they considered to be political statements aimed at stricter gun control. There were many public arguments regarding this controversy, and Duerringer contends that efforts to constrain the decorum of eulogies in this situation “only reduces the circumference of human tragedy to the individual” (p.79) and fails to recognize the larger impact that the victims’ deaths have on their families and society at large. Duerringer’s article can prompt discussion about the use of decorum to both reject and promote certain ideologies.

In addition to this reading, providing examples of the relationship between decorum and issues of power and oppression can help students understand how this relationship actually plays out in TPC practices. This also works as a scaffolding strategy, building concepts progressively and adding depth with each new concept. Additionally, working through examples with peers and the instructor can help them start to identify potential injustices on their own. One example that most students can readily relate to and that demonstrates how decorum and TPC intersect to create injustice is through user policies/agreements for online apps. It is well known that online apps almost always require users to accept the terms and conditions of a use policy/agreement before they are allowed to download and/or access the app’s functions. These policies/agreements lock users into a contract with the app’s owner. However, because the policies/agreements are

typically extremely lengthy and filled with legal jargon, most users have no idea what is actually in them. The decorum in these situations, then, is to quickly just click “Agree to terms” as soon as the policy/agreement pops up, without ever reading a single word of what they are actually agreeing to. A great in-class activity would be to have small groups find one of these user policies/agreements, read through it, and then identify and share with the class anything they find that users would likely not actually agree to if they knew it was there. After sharing these together as a class, instructors can then guide students to start thinking about how the people creating these apps’ user policies/agreements are using technical communication documents to enact a decorum which ultimately serves to benefit themselves at the expense of their apps’ users.

Another possible direction that could help students think critically about the relationship between TPC, decorum, and social justice is through (dis)ability. Issues of accessibility are a primary focus for many TPC scholars. As Colton & Walton (2015) have demonstrated, disability offers an effective means to engaging students with social justice issues in TPC. Decorum can also be introduced with this approach and can help students better understand decorum itself and how decorum both contributes to and is indicative of oppression. The system of common codes that are embodied in communication practices of TPC documents can reveal that people with disabilities experience oppression in ways that are likely not apparent to others. Texts that are not accessible for diverse users reflects a decorum that outlines the appropriate modes of communication as being tailored for users who do not have any type of disability. For instance, the poor quality of the closed captioning for an online video demonstrates that the video’s publisher assumes their audience will not find it inappropriate. This publisher



thus perpetuates a decorum that implies people should adhere to the primary system of communicative acts (i.e. viewing *and* listening to the video simultaneously) in order to have access to the full content and experience of the video. As such, those who are not capable of adhering to this decorum due to disability experience oppression.

To help students grapple with the relationship between TPC and decorum, students should have the opportunity to complete assignments that further challenge them to consider this relationship. Whether the assignments are done individually or within groups, it is important for students to work through examples on their own. I have also found that students will be more enthusiastic and committed to the project if they choose something that has meaning to them. For example, one assignment could ask students to identify a piece of technical communication that they frequently use or engage with. They should then identify the genre and discuss what the guidelines and expectations are for that genre. Next, students should analyze their selected artifact and answer questions that help them identify decorum, as well as its origins and purposes. In addition to questions that help students identify the decorum--such as “what does this document expect from its users?” and “in what ways does the language used in the document convey values and beliefs?”--students should also answer questions that help them think critically about that decorum. These questions can be similar to those listed in the previous section, such as “Is the decorum the same for everyone, or are there different rules for different people? Or people with no rules at all?” and “What are the consequences for not following decorum?” and “Are the consequences different for different people?”. Though students may find it challenging to answer these questions, the process of analyzing their document will help them see that, although it is not always readily apparent, TPC is laden

with meaning that has direct impact on its users and others.

To move students toward a more active role in social justice by using decorum, then--and help them to see how they *can* make a difference as a technical communicator--it is important to discuss and practice using technical communication as a means for change. One way to do this is to provide an example of injustice that most people in the class could identify with. I have found the exponential increases in tuition and fees at universities seems to be an issue most college students tend to agree on. Using this example, then, instructors should first discuss the problem in-depth. They should identify reasons for the drastic increases, who controls these increases, and what the consequences are for students, faculty, universities, business, and society at large. Though this discussion can go in many directions, I have found that one issue typically discussed in-depth is the challenge that many young people face in finding a job that can provide the financial and personal resources they need to support them. Students lament that most jobs--even entry level jobs that offer low wages and no benefits--often require the person to have a bachelor's degree, even though those types of jobs did not used to. For most, they feel a bachelor's degree is a necessity to even have a chance at living above the poverty line. Using this specific problem as a starting point, then, instructors can work as a class to identify genres of technical communication that could be relevant to companies having a minimum requirement of a bachelor's degree. Job descriptions are one genre, as are company policies. Instructors can then discuss with students how they, as technical communicators, can use these genres to impact change.

To conclude a unit on decorum within TPC classrooms, it is important to ensure that students feel equipped to use their knowledge about decorum to help advance social

justice in their future endeavors, particularly in their work as technical communication professionals. However instructors approach teaching decorum in TPC and its relationship to social justice, though, students should be able to 1) understand symbolic display, and how it works in creating decorum, 2) recognize when and how decorum is used as an act and means of oppression, and 3) take action to make changes for social justice.

### **Challenges and Considerations**

The process of writing this dissertation--from preliminary research, to conducting --was challenging, enlightening, and encouraging. The process was not straight-forward, tidy, or linear, which (as I am coming to find) can often produce the most interesting and valuable results. I have spent countless hours, days, and months pondering decorum, looking for it everywhere, and trying to understand the way it functions in all levels of society. Decorum has become a part of my everyday experience--as a scholar, as a teacher, as a mother, and just as a human being. I have come to define much of the world through what I know about decorum. While I know this is likely a common experience for many PhDs as they finish their dissertation, I do find that decorum does offer a unique benefit to my life that extends beyond my work as a researcher; and I think there is much to be said about the fact that my family now considers decorum in their own everyday lives.

With that said, it is also relevant to mention the frustrations that have come out of my work with decorum. Much of the frustration during the research and writing process of this dissertation came from the fact that I so strongly empathized with the experiences of the women who had entrusted me to tell their stories. As a woman who has worked in

Utah tech, I understood their position and the challenges they were facing. I questioned if things would ever change, and if my work would even have an impact, considering the extent and depth of the problem. However, I was also motivated by this same frustration. It made me realize that any effort to change the situation for these women is important and worthwhile.

The critical thought process on my own work was not unproductive, however, as it helped me evaluate the limitations of my research and the ways it could be improved. Most importantly, I realized that I could have made improvements to the survey questions. In particular, I would have asked more questions on demographics (although these would have been optional in the case that people would be concerned about protecting their identity). This demographic information--such as age, race, and religion--would have enabled a more comprehensive analysis of the women's experiences according to these particular demographics. I would have also asked more direct questions about decorum itself and included a definition of decorum so participants would have the context needed to give a more thorough response. I believe a more specific focus on decorum would have produced more responses related to issues other than gender. Multiple choice questions and a Likert scale also proved to be somewhat limiting. These types of questions were mostly effective in identifying context, but the open-ended question provided the most fruitful responses directly related to decorum.

While I realized that the survey did not produce the best possible results, I used that insight to adjust the interview questions. Specifically, I focused on decorum from the beginning of the interview, providing a definition of decorum early on, then asking interviewees to first identify decorum within their workplace before moving into more

specific questions. This strategy proved more effective in gaining a broader sense of the different issues affecting both women that I interviewed (and other women they personally know whose stories they also shared). However, because gender is such a strong factor in their experiences of decorum, gender still proved to be the most prominent topic in both conversations. When they did discuss other factors--such as age and religion--they were always in relation to gender. I do not have enough information to determine the cause of this, but it is something to keep in mind with future research. That is not to say participants choosing to focus primarily on one specific aspect of their identity when thinking about decorum is problematic, or even a limitation; but it is something to be aware of and investigate further in forthcoming research projects that employ the theory and methods of decorum which I have outlined in this dissertation.

### **Conclusion**

With the important progress that has been made toward social justice within the field of TPC, it is critical that this work keeps moving forward. Many scholars have contributed significant research that is both advancing the field *and* making social justice a main priority. These scholars use a variety of theories, methods, and approaches, and examine an even larger array of research sites. As these, and others continue to contribute their time and efforts to social justice in TPC, it is important that the field as a whole continues to identify additional theories, methods, and approaches that are effective while also questioning, restructuring, and redefining the theories, methods, and approaches that are currently in use.

As I have argued in this dissertation, decorum--as a theory and method--can provide an effective approach to social justice research in TPC. That is not to say that

decorum should be considered the *only*, or even the *best* approach; rather, it provides one option for researchers and instructors, in addition to those approaches that have already been established as advantageous. Feminist theories, queer theories, critical race theories, cultural theories, and more are all crucial components to the advancement of social justice within TPC and beyond. The theoretical and methodological approach to decorum that I have laid out in this dissertation is both informed by these other theories, and also informative *to* them. And, just as these other theories have and will continue to develop and change over time, so should decorum (as I have delineated it in this dissertation).

As TPC scholars, we must unite in an effort to bring equality to our field, to our work, to our students, and to the many people whose lives are directly impacted by the practices of technical communication. We must continue to forge paths on which everyone can contribute to the betterment of society and the critical efforts toward social justice. The theory and methods of decorum I have described in this dissertation can add an important piece to this complex and challenging task. It can work to invite resistant audiences into the conversation, encouraging them to consider acts and means of oppression from a perspective that is less contentious. Decorum can open up conversations and ideas, helping research participants to identify and voice their own experiences of oppression without the boundaries of having to focus on only one specific aspect of those experiences. This flexibility given to research participants provides researchers additional knowledge about the ways in which multiple factors of oppression compound and multiply to create unique and more damaging harm (i.e. intersectionality). Such attention to intersectionality is imperative to making meaningful and lasting change.

Similarly, the theory and methods of decorum as a pedagogical tool that I have

outlined in this chapter help advance the social justice movement from within the classroom. Engaging TPC students with issues of social justice is vital to advancing the practice of equitable and just practices outside of the academe--in the places where it often matters most. If TPC students understand the complex ways in which their work as technical communicators shapes people's experiences and lives, they will be better equipped to make important decisions and take deliberate action toward social justice.

It is my hope that TPC scholars, educators, and students will use the theories and methods of decorum I have outlined in this dissertation to promote social justice and create lasting change for the good of others. I encourage all to use these theories and methods broadly, with situations for which they feel passionately and for which change is necessary. Additionally, I invite others to expand on the ideas in this dissertation, challenge them in meaningful ways, and most importantly, adapt and improve them to better achieve their purposes of social justice.

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## APPENDIX

### Interview Script for Women in Utah Tech

I just want to start out with a few general questions. Some of these will be repeats from the survey, so my apologies for that. Because the survey is anonymous, there's no way for me to identify which responses are yours. And just to help get the most out of our conversation, I do want to just say that I would really like you to be completely honest with me, even if you might think I'm expecting a different answer. The point of this interview is to really get some good specific details from someone who is actually working in Utah tech, so please share as much as you'd like. And of course, if you don't feel comfortable answering a question that's no problem. Just let me know and we can move to the next. And if you want to end the interview at any point, please just let me know.

How long have you been working in tech?

How long have you worked at your current company?

How many tech companies total have you worked for?

How many of these companies have been in Utah?

What is your current title and ranking in the company you work for now?

What is your educational background?

What factors influenced your decision to pursue a career in tech?

With my research, I am trying to better understand the ways in which *decorum* influences the experiences of women working in Utah's technology sector. By decorum, what I

mean are the unwritten or unofficial rules and expectations that guide behavior, speech, dress, etc. in a given situation. So, for example, when getting in line at a grocery store, decorum says that you should not cut in front of people. There are typically no official rules posted anywhere in the store that say you can't cut in line, but common knowledge of appropriateness dictates that this behavior is unacceptable.

Can you think of any examples of decorum in your workplace that stand out to you? This can include decorum that runs across the entire company, decorum that is particular to a certain group, or even decorum that exists between individuals.

Have you noticed if there are different expectations or rules of appropriateness for different people?

In your opinion, what are the cultural factors that contribute to this decorum? In other words, what cultural forces have the most influence on the unofficial rules and expectations?

\*\*\*If she mentions Gender\*\*\*

You mentioned that women have different expectations in the workplace, so the following questions are more specifically related to your experiences as a woman.

Have you ever felt like you were treated differently or stood out in the workplace or at social or professional events because you are a woman?

Are you currently married?

Do you have children?

[IF APPLICABLE] Have you ever faced any bias, resistance, or assumptions from coworkers, subordinates, or superiors that are directly related to you being a (wife) and/or (mother)?

Does your company have a parental leave policy?

Do women feel comfortable taking this leave?

Overall, do you find it difficult to balance family and work life?

What are some of the biggest challenges for you?

What can your company, co-workers, and superiors do to improve work-life balance?

I'm going to name several things that research shows to be common barriers for women in the workplace. As I name each one, just answer yes if this has ever been a barrier and no if it has not.

Lack of mentors

Weak professional networks

Cultural barriers

Unrealistic expectations

A Male dominated work environment

Work/family conflict

Women don't compete hard enough for top jobs

Discrimination/bias

Is there anything else that is directly related to gender that we didn't address but you feel is important to mention?

\*\*\*If she mentions religion\*\*\*

You mentioned earlier that religion plays a factor in Utah tech's workplace decorum.

What are some of the religious expectations, assumptions, and beliefs that get carried over into the workplace?

Have you seen religion being openly discussed in the workplace?

In what contexts is it brought up?

Do you think that non-LDS workers face barriers that LDS workers do not? Or do LDS workers have advantages that non-LDS workers don't have?

\*\*\*If she mentions race\*\*\*

You mentioned that race is an important factor in the experiences of people working in Utah tech. In your opinion based on your own experiences, what beliefs and assumptions about race get carried over into the workplace?

Have you ever witnessed racial bias or discrimination in your current or previous workplaces?

Do you think that there are advantages disadvantages for certain races that other races do not have?

\*\*\*If she mentions age\*\*\*

You mentioned that age is an important factor in the experiences of people working in Utah tech. In your opinion, how does age play a factor in the workplace? Are there certain beliefs or assumptions about people based on their age?

Do people of a certain age have advantages or disadvantages that others do not?

Have you seen people try to make themselves appear older or younger so they better fit in better with the workplace culture?

Have you seen try to appear older or younger so they can advance in their career?

I'd just like to wrap up our conversation with some more general questions about your own personal experiences working in Utah tech as well as some general demographic information.

Overall, what would you say has been your biggest obstacle working in Utah tech in general?

What has been the best thing about working in Utah tech?

Where do you see your career going in the future?

Do you think there is anything that could prevent you from achieving these career goals?

Are there any other issues that are relevant to workplace culture that we have not discussed but you think are important?

And then just for basic demographic information that helps with statistical data

How old are you?

What is your degree?

What is your ethnicity?

What is your religious affiliation (if any)?