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TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION INCLUSIONARY INTERVENTIONS

INTO ACADEMIC SPACES

by

Sam Clem

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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Logan, Utah

2023

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ABSTRACT

Technical Communication Inclusionary Interventions
into Academic Spaces

by

Sam Clem, Doctor of Philosophy

Utah State University, 2023

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Department: English

In this dissertation, I draw on de Certeau's (1984) concepts of tactics and strategies to identify three academic spaces in US higher education writ large in which institutional strategies have led to the marginalization of certain knowledges and knowledge makers: technical editing, graduate instructor development, and online trans research methods. Within each of these spaces, my research demonstrates how multiply-marginalized and underrepresented (MMU) individuals and communities have developed tactics to work in, around, and through these oppressive strategies. Throughout this dissertation, I work in the discursive spaces between strategies and tactics to suggest inclusionary interventions into exclusionary academic strategies. In the technical editing space (Chapter 2), I provide a theoretical framework—the inclusive editing paradigm—that can help shift technical editing away from its exclusionary foundations in grammar and language policing for American Standard English and toward an understanding of editing based in dialogue, inquiry, and advocacy. I propose a new definition of technical editing in Chapter 3 and describe how I used that revised definition to teach a professional editing course based in social justice—another inclusionary intervention. In Chapter 4, I discuss an intervention into the exclusionary editing space of scholarly review by creating an anti-racist scholarly reviewer workshop. To support inclusion in graduate instructor development (Chapter 5), I propose a

participatory action research design that actively includes graduate students in creating programmatic communication related to wellbeing. Finally, in Chapter 6, I propose a framework for equitable research in online trans communities that can help mitigate the harm and anti-trans violence that currently scour the United States. From these five inclusionary interventions, I conclude that scholars of technical communication *can* intervene in the institution of higher education so that MMU knowledges and bodies are more equitably included in our professional spaces, our research methods, and mentoring activities by (1) identifying institutional strategies that serve as gatekeeping mechanisms, (2) developing research methods that work with vulnerable communities to better understand how they participate in and challenge those institutional strategies, and (3) building wellbeing and care into our teaching and research practices to better support the wellness of the scholars and communities that are excluded by gatekeeping institutional strategies.

(236 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Technical Communication Inclusionary Interventions
into Academic Spaces

Sam Clem

While many efforts have been made to make higher education in the US more equitable, there are still academic spaces in which some knowledges and some knowledge makers are marginalized. In this dissertation, I identify three such spaces: technical editing, graduate instructor training, and online academic research in trans communities. When editors make revisions based solely in American Standard English, as most editing practices and teaching are currently based, they risk marginalizing non-heritage speakers of English and speakers of various dialects of English, like African American Vernacular English. I suggest that by shifting our focus of editing from grammar policing to editing for underrepresented audiences, we can make editing a more inclusive space for marginalized voices. I give examples of how to create these kinds of interventions both in the editing classroom and through workshops for faculty. Next, I address how programs can better support graduate student instructors' sense of wellbeing. I suggest that one of the best ways to develop inclusive interventions in graduate instructor training is by inviting graduate students to help design the ways in which departments communicate student wellbeing. Finally, to intervene into the anti-trans violence that continues to scour the United States, I propose an intervention into the ways that academics study online trans communities. Through these kinds of interventions, I demonstrate that we can continue the work of creating more inclusive spaces in higher education.

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Because of Rachel, the cohorts before me—Cana, Jamal Jared, Ryan—and the cohorts after me—Hannah, Wes, Margaret, Elle, and Dorcas—I never felt alone in this process². You all gave me the accountability to keep going even when I most wanted to stop. Cana Itchuaqiyag taught me so much about how things are done, all the clever ways to make shit work for you, and why you just keep cashin' those checks. Jamal Jared Alexander taught me about self-worth and that I'm an expensive MOFO. Ryan Cheek taught me about fighting for my values and not backing down to anyone. And Hannah Stevens taught me how much of an impact it can have on your day to know that you've *always* got someone ready to respond to a ridiculous text.

I'm incredibly grateful for my dissertation chair, Dr. rylish moeller, for pushing past my sometimes disgusted and bewildered facial expressions when presented with

¹ Rachel, just because I named you first doesn't not mean that you have to name me first. I will happily accept any mention in your acknowledgements... though I'd be skeptical of being listed in any position after ten. Just saying.

² It should be a surprise to no one that this is the point in writing this acknowledgement in which I started crying. Reader, please imagine all of the rest of this acknowledgement spoken through blubbery tears.

unconvincing information or feedback, for always starting our meetings with decidedly un-academic chat (which was often the preamble I needed get to the academic stuff), and for teaching me and consistently modeling to me the ways that academics can stop tearing each other down just to build themselves up. One of my first interactions with you was at a critical reading night at Rebecca’s house. I was leading the meeting and had chosen an Erin Frost article. Amid criticism, you stopped the group and you said, “While there might be things she could’ve done better, I think this is a pretty awesome piece to have been written by a graduate student observing something on vacation!”³ Four years later, I haven’t forgotten that moment or that reminder that we simply can choose to be generous—that doesn’t make us a lesser scholar.

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³ This might not be exactly what you said, but it was something like that. Surely, you had slipped the f word somewhere in the original comment that I’ve left out here because I’ve already written shit and MOFO.

empowering to share in the tensions of liberatory teaching, as well as the process of pursuing a PhD.

Apart from my committee, I'd also like to acknowledge Dr. Rebecca Walton, who helped guide me through the first years of the program and my dissertation progress. Your tiny, excited clapping that is so uniquely you kept me motivated and always wanting to share my progress. Another big thanks to Dr. Beth Buyserie for always entertaining my need for pleasant distractions from work and for always being transparent about the ups and downs of working in (and against) the academy.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Academic spaces continue to need inclusive interventions.

The academy holds both exclusionary and liberatory potential. Researchers have documented its exclusionary potential to segregate, marginalize, and dominate, and researchers will continue to expose exclusionary practices as they manifest in university policies, recruitment practices, and curricula. The academy's liberatory potential is perhaps best identified when tactical shifts—what bell hooks (1994) might call “interventions”—emerge, resonate, and begin to chip away at exclusionary practices. Scholars from across the academy, including many in technical and professional communication (TPC), call for and continue to implement interventions into academic spaces, with the goal of making the academy more diverse, equitable, and inclusive. In the chapters of this dissertation, I present five inclusionary interventions based in TPC scholarship and practices that continue the work of making space in the academy for multiply marginalized and underrepresented (MMU) scholars, students, and knowledges.

As a scholar of TPC, I am interested in community-based tactics for developing and sustaining non-normative knowledges in academic spaces and how to better integrate those alternative ways of knowing into the academy. In other words, the questions that guide my research include what tactics have MMU communities developed so that their knowledges and experiences can survive and thrive in higher education, and in what ways can scholars of TPC intervene into the institution of higher education to better include these knowledges and experiences? In this dissertation, I

present five scholarly articles that interrogate different academic spaces in which MMU scholars, students, and knowledges continue to encounter marginalization and propose community-based, inclusionary interventions into the systems that marginalize them.

As many in TPC have recognized, the field has taken a turn toward social justice (Eble & Haas, 2018; Jones, 2016; Walton, Moore, & Jones, 2019). Jones & Walton (2018) define social justice work in technical communication as

how communication broadly defined can amplify the agency of oppressed people—those who are materially, socially, politically, and/or economically under-resourced. Key to this definition is a collaborative, respectful approach that moves past description and exploration of social justice issues to taking action to redress inequities. (p. 242).

By interrogating different academic spaces in which the communicative practices of oppressed people have been de-legitimized and proposing equity-based interventions, I am contributing to the field's focus on social justice and the active role that technical communicators can and should take in redressing inequities in academia.

That said, the work of institutional change is slow and cyclical. Sara Ahmed (2021) describes the work of seeking inclusive institutional change in higher education as scratching at a brick wall with your fingernails—scraping, carving, making indents in which you can start to take hold, dangling by only your fingertips as you start the process over again with the next indent. It is in this spirit of scraping at the brick wall that I present the following inclusionary interventions: in themselves, they are neither complete nor enough. They exist next to, on top of, and enmeshed with thousands of other scratches, the work of many others who have done and continue to do the work of intervening into exclusionary practices in higher education.

Institutional strategies in higher education can serve to marginalize non-dominant bodies and knowledges.

In coining the term *tactical technical communication*, Kimball (2006; 2017) draws on de Certeau's (1984) delineation between strategies and tactics. Strategies represent the actions—the rules and power—of institutions, whereas tactics describe the actions of individuals as they navigate the spaces in, around, and between institutions. From a TPC perspective, Kimball (2017) writes, “Strategies are best understood as attempts to control individual agency through systems of rules, conventions, and expectations” (p. 3). In this dissertation, I focus on the rules, conventions, and expectations of one institution: the system of higher education in the US.

Next, I will discuss three exclusionary strategies identified in my research that constrain the individual and collective agency of MMU students and scholars: linguistic hegemony located in technical editing textbooks, curricula, and practices; exploitative labor practices in graduate education and their effects on graduate student wellbeing; and inequities between researchers and participants in online trans communities. I chose these research sites and strategies according to the following criteria, which I developed in consideration of broad principles informed by access, embodiment, and tactical technical communication:

- Do I have access to this academic space, practice, or community?
- Is there evidence that certain bodies and knowledges have been marginalized in this academic space?
- Is there evidence that marginalized bodies and knowledges have adapted tactics to survive in this academic space?

Exclusionary strategy: Technical editing as the gatekeeper of linguistic hegemony

Scholars in TPC have recognized the systemic exclusion that exists within our programs and in the academy more widely. For example, drawing on Patricia Hill Collins's (1989) definition of "traditional," Shelton (2020) asserts that the continued dominance of traditional (i.e., Eurocentric and masculine) paradigms in academia lead to the flattening and erasure of varying experiences, knowledges, and bodies (p. 20). In technical editing, the dominance of American Standard English (ASE) often results in the flattening and erasure of non-ASE forms of language. In her description of ASE's oppressive impact on Black Language and her calls for linguistic justice, Baker-Bell (2020) succinctly states that "standard English is a byproduct of white supremacy" (p. 6) and continues that "the policing of Black Language and literacies in schools is not separate from the ways in which Black bodies have historically been policed and surveilled in US society (p. 12). Through language policing for ASE, editing instructors risk flattening Black Language and linguistic diversity into something palatable for White audiences or erasing that diversity altogether in exchange for the monolingualism of ASE.

In technical editing scholarship, we can find examples of devaluing non-conformity with ASE. Rude (2010), writes, "[Students] really have no claim to the title of 'editor' if they are not experts on these basics [i.e., ASE grammar and punctuation]. That means not just punctuating and using grammar correctly but knowing why" (p. 58). Rude negates the possibility of students becoming editors if they don't have a thorough knowledge of grammar and punctuation and the rules underlying their use. This sentiment devalues the expertise of editors who do not master and uphold the strictest standards of ASE, in part by declaring deviations from ASE as "unprofessional" and

those who allow them as less employable than those who do not (Walton et al., 2019, p. 30). Edenfield and Ledbetter (2019) rightly critique how the criteria for demonstrating expertise is often inequitable and derived from institutional strategies:

Institutions are often involved in the determination of these criteria [of expertise], whether they are educational, financial, or both [. . .] When marginalized groups, such as women of color, members of the trans community, and immigrants are not well-represented in institutional settings, the criteria that is produced for what “counts” may not represent or include those groups. This exclusion, in part, can result in gatekeeping necessary information. (p. 3).

When we apply Edenfield and Ledbetter’s argument to the context of technical editing, we can begin to identify some of the ways in which ASE serves a gatekeeping mechanism for keeping marginalized groups from claiming linguistic expertise. The linguistic hegemony of ASE is one point of exclusion that I will address in chapters II and III of this dissertation.

One specific context of editing that has received growing attention in TPC for its potential to exclude certain knowledges and knowledge-makers is scholarly peer review. In *Anti-Racist Scholarly Reviewing Practices: A Heuristic for Editors, Reviewers, and Authors*, 19 TPC scholars acknowledge the existing oppressive philosophies and practices of scholarly review in the field of TPC. These philosophies and practices can reinforce white, dominant, and patriarchal norms by refusing to interrogate sometimes ages old practices; shielding racist behavior behind anonymity; and exploiting the labor of Black, Indigenous, and scholars of color (p. 4). Peer review processes, along with technical editing processes more broadly, are in need of equity-based interventions. In chapter IV, I describe one such intervention into scholarly peer review.

Exclusionary strategy: Exploiting graduate student labor and wellness

Research and resources in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) can unintentionally marginalize non-tenure track instructors (Simmons et al., 2021), including graduate instructors. This academic marginalization is particularly concerning, since graduate students represent a steady 20% of the academic labor force going as far back as 2003 (Curtis & Thornton, 2013, p. 7 as cited in Laubach Wright, 2017). The concentration of graduate student labor is even higher in certain departments like English, where “graduate labor is the labor foundation of the department” (Laubach Wright, 2017, p. 277, italics original). Labor required by graduate instructors often compound with other stress-inducing characteristics of graduate education like low status, frequent evaluations, high workloads, financial difficulties, paper deadlines, pressure to publish, peer pressure, and lack of permanent employment (Kurtz-Costes, Helmke, & Ulka-Steiner, 2006; Mays & Smith, 2009; Schmidt & Hansson, 2018). As a result, there is strong and growing evidence of a mental health crisis in graduate education (Evans et al., 2018), with graduate students reporting levels of depression and anxiety six times higher than the general population (p. 282). The COVID-19 pandemic has only worsened mental health among graduate students (Barreira & Bolotnyy, 2022). Indicators of ill-being are higher in underrepresented graduate student populations like trans/gender-nonconforming students (Evans et al., 2018), women students (Devine & Hunter, 2017; Evans et al., 2018), and students of color (Osorio et al., 2021). Among doctoral students, low levels of wellbeing have a significant impact on the personal lives of students (Scott & Takarangi, 2019, p. 15) and contribute to surprisingly high rates of attrition (up to 50% of doctoral students don’t finish their degrees [Schmidt & Hansson, 2018, p. 2]), strong intentions to leave academia after graduation because of exhaustion with the PhD process (Hunter & Devine, 2016), and reduced research outputs and

productivity (Scott & Takarangi, 2019). High rates of attrition combined with less research productivity means fewer opportunities for graduate student knowledge to be produced and legitimized. Chapter V of this dissertation provides one example of how interventions into graduate instructor wellbeing can be structured.

Exclusionary strategy: Research inequities can exclude MMU knowledge-making activities

Even research undertaken with social justice goals can have negative impacts on marginalized and underrepresented communities if researchers' methods—from conception to dissemination—are not equity-based (Chicago Beyond, 2018). Chicago Beyond identifies seven inequities held in place by power differences between researchers and researched communities: access, information, validity, ownership, value, accountability, and authorship. Scholars in TPC have posed decolonial (Agboka, 2014; Itchuaqiyag, 2021) and feminist (de Hertogh, 2018) research methods, but not enough attention has been given to LGBTQIA+ communities at large (Cox, 2019; Jones, 2016), and trans communities more specifically (Edenfield, Holmes, & Colton, 2019; Moeggenberg, Edenfield, & Holmes, 2022). Moeggenberg, Edenfield, & Holmes (2022) demonstrate how even technical documents meant to build inclusion—like Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) statements—can actually work to oppress trans people. Edenfield, Holmes, & Colton (2019) conclude that “Institutions are invested in heteropatriarchy” (p. 187). This institutionalized investment—demonstrated by the use of non-tactical, strategic communication like Male/Female identity checkboxes on a EEO statement—works to negate the existence of non-binary bodies and identities.

Adding to the dire need for social justice in trans communities is an alarming “national epidemic” of fatal anti-transgender violence that has steadily grown since 2013 (Human Rights Campaign, 2019); that is, trans lives in the United States are very

literally at risk of harm. Trans and non-binary students in higher education are no exception to high rates of violence. A report from the Association of American Universities (2020) indicates that 65.1% of TGQN (transgender women, transgender men, non-binary/queer gender, gender questioning, or gender not listed) students reported having experienced harassment since starting school, which is higher than the rates reported by student who identify as women (59.2%) and men (36.2%) (p. 47). Mitigations must be implemented to better advocate for and with trans communities to reduce harm and augment wellbeing. In chapter VI, my co-authors and I present a framework for conducting ethical research in online trans communities.

These exclusionary strategies and the interventions or tactics that MMU scholars have engaged to eradicate them make up the three primary research sites of this dissertation. In each chapter, I expose some of the rules, conventions, and expectations that collectively act as exclusionary strategies. I then present community-based approaches to intervening into those exclusionary strategies. To do that, I draw on scholarship of tactical technical communication and my personal experience with tactics.

MMU scholars, students, and knowledges have developed tactics to survive and succeed in institutions of higher education.

While strategies represent the power of institutions, tactics can be understood as the actions of individuals—and communities of individuals (Edenfield & Ledbetter, 2019)—as they negotiate the rules of institutions (de Certeau, 1984). As Kimball (2006) writes, “Individuals use tactics to survive and to come as close to achieve their purposes as possible” (p. 71). As tactics may work to empower those without institutional power, scholars like Ding (2009), Holladay (2017), Colton, Holmes, and Walwema (2017), and Edenfield, Colton, and Holmes (2019) have recognized the potential for tactical technical

communication to achieve social justice aims. In this section, I describe the ways in which MMU individuals and communities have developed tactics to survive and achieve their purposes in three academic spaces: technical editing, graduate student wellbeing, and online trans research. I end with a caveat about how tactics must be paired with ethical frameworks.

Tactics in Technical Editing

Frequently cited literature on tactical technical communication includes scholarship on technical editing. Mackiewicz (2011; 2014) and Cryer (2012) analyze the editing comments of “amateur” editors on the online forum Epinions. Epinions is a product review site, where any person willing to provide an email address can rate products and write reviews (Mackiewicz, 2011, p. 422). The editors—called Advisors within the site—are site users who have been tasked by the company with providing feedback on reviews, helping to improve the quality of the reviews and the effectiveness of the site (Mackiewicz, 2011, p. 422). Mackiewicz (2014) classifies the Advisors as amateur editors because they do not receive financial compensation for their effort, they “lack the relevant training and education that professional editors possess,” and they do not have any control over the final content of the site (i.e., they can make editorial suggestions, but compliance with those suggestions is not required) (p. 421). Importantly, Mackiewicz concludes that, as amateurs, “They are not gatekeepers to the site” (p. 421). Gatekeeping is the role of the institution; it is strategic. In contrast, Advisors take on a tactical position within the site creating user-generated content (Pflugfelder, 2017, p. 27, referencing Mackiewicz, 2010, 2011, 2014).

Perhaps because of this amateur or tactical space that Advisors inhabit, the editing strategies they employ often contrast with established editing practices. For example, Mackiewicz’s (2011; 2014) analyses of editing comments indicates that

Advisors make namely substantive or comprehensive editing suggestions, which “counter[s] a prevailing view of editors’ work” that focuses mostly on “making minor changes in punctuation, word choice, and syntax” (2014, p. 422). That is, a tactical approach to editing, carried out by people who have no formal training in editing, actually achieves what scholars in editing have called on as necessary—and lacking—in professional editors: a greater focus on comprehensive editing that enhances text comprehension over grammar and mechanics (Albers, 2019; Melonçon, 2019). This shift in focus, Mackiewicz (2014) claims, moves the work of editors from commodity work (i.e., rote, mechanical work that does not make a large contribution to the text) to the kind of meaning-making, symbolic-analytic work described by Johnson-Eilola (1996). In section two of chapter III, I present a revised definition of technical editing that centers this understanding that editors are meaning makers and describe how using that revised definition to guide my course design led my students to understand that effective editing is often based in substantive edits rather than copyedits.

Like Mackiewicz, Cryer (2012) studies the editorial approaches of Epinions Advisors, though he does so through the lens of gender and gendered language strategies. He begins by collecting language strategies from “a variety of studies on gendered language and its use in technical communication” (i.e., Allen, 1994; Bosley, 1994; Brown & Levinson, 1986; Durack, 1997; Markkanen & Scröder, 1997; Treichler and Kramarae, 1983) and refining those strategies for his purpose, though he gives no detail about how those strategies were refined. From this collection and refinement, he establishes six language strategies and classifies them as either feminine and masculine: hedging, praise, welcome, and connection are categorized as feminine, while directs to advice and command are coded as masculine. It is important to note that at least two decades before Cryer’s publication, scholars like Brody (1993) had already provided evidence that language is never inherently gendered but rather discourses and social

constructions of gender lead to assumptions about the masculinity or femininity of a text. Using a feminist critique of writing metaphors from the 17th century through the 1990's, Brody argues that to serve the industrial, capitalist cultures of 17th century England and America, direct, forceful, productive, and 'true' writing was attributed with masculine virtues—language can and should be “mastered” and honed to perfection by the writer (p. 138). Specific to editing, this masculine understanding of writing leads to the understanding that “Editing must be cutthroat” (p. 182). Feminine writing, on the contrary, is associated with texts that are ornate, passionate, wordy, decadent, or (heaven forbid) pleasurable (p. 25). Combining Brody's critique of language genderization with Cryer's study, we might best understand Cryer's language categories not as inherently masculine or feminine communication strategies but rather as strategies that, through centuries of discourse and socialization, scholars and students in the US have come to associate with masculine and feminine traits. Through his analysis of Epinion Advisor comments, Cryer concludes that Advisor comments were more successful in motivating reviewers to edit their reviews if the Advisor used hedges—a feminine strategy—in their comments. That is, even though traditional editing might be considered more masculine (Brody, 1993; Popham, 2019, p. 101), tactical editing is more successful when following feminine language strategies.

These sources on Epinions Advisors, though specific to one context, provide important insights into the ways in which tactical technical editing can and does occur. Advisors often adopt counter-normative approaches to editing by focusing on comprehensive editing, rather than copyediting, by using hedges in their editorial comments. As the authors of these studies indicate, clearly the task of technical editing is occurring on the Epinions site. Just as the authors who hire me are often constrained by their ability to pay for costly editing services, Epinions Advisors are constrained by their lack of financial compensation. Working through in, around, and through these

constraints, editors have developed tactics to complete their tasks in sometimes unexpected, sometimes counter-hegemonic, ways.

For the last seven years, I have worked as a freelance translator and editor, working solely with academic scholars who are heritage speakers of Spanish, not English. These scholars hire me to edit their academic articles for submission to English-only journals. Strict language standards in academic publishing leave these scholars and their work often marginalized, their articles sent back to the authors for language editing prior to consideration for publication. The high cost of quality translating and editing services means that mainly scholars with large sources of government or personal funding have the ability to acquire editing services like mine. From this position of language editor, I have been able to observe and/or participate in some of these authors' tactics for navigating academic publishing. For example, scholars without access to the necessary funds might offer editors and translators author status on their publication as compensation for editing or translation services. Additionally, rather than editing for American Standard English (ASE) correctness (which most of my editing contracts stipulate should be my main function), I tend not to worry about strict adherence to ASE, editing instead language for what I interpret 'sounds' like it was written by a heritage speaker of English. For example, I never pay attention to whether or not a modifier dangles, I mix up 'that' and 'which' at will, and I doubt the word 'whom' has ever graced a final copy of the papers I have edited. Most notably, even though I have been taught to avoid culturally-specific phrases and idioms when writing for international audiences (St.Amant, 2019), I will often intentionally pop those phrases in, particularly complicated propositional verbs (e.g., fed up with, reach out to, put onto, pop in). In these ways, I edit the texts in such a way as to actively generate cultural bias among the reviewers; I use the flaws of the current US peer review system, the cultural bias that favors heritage English speakers, to my editorial advantage. In de Certeau's (1984)

words, I use tactics to make academic texts habitable—a space where reviewers want to dwell—by “insert[ing] both the messages of their native tongue and, through their accent, through their own “turns of phrases,” etc., their own history” (p. xxi). Working in the cracks of the peer review system is partly what led me to recognize the need for anti-racist scholarly review trainings, a topic I describe in detail in chapter III.

Tactics in Graduate Student Wellbeing

The field of TPC has yet to develop scholarship specific to how their graduate students experience and navigate wellbeing, though there are some hints in existing research. For example, Jamal Jared Alexander has led a line of research on the need to develop more equitable recruitment strategies for MMU graduate school applicants in terms of graduate program websites (Alexander, Stevens, & Walton, 2022), multicultural centers (Alexander, 2022), and recruiting trips (Alexander & Walton, 2022). In underlining the need for institutions to have and promote cultural spaces and associations, like the Graduate Students of Color Association (GSCA) that Alexander developed at Utah State University, Alexander and Walton write, “Associations, such as GSCA, create an inclusive environment that supports the educational achievements and well-being of MMU graduate students by enhancing campus life through political, social, academic, emotional, and cultural support” (p. 175). In this scholarship Alexander, along with Stevens and Walton, presents concrete approaches to making graduate recruitment more inclusive, thus supporting the wellbeing of MMU applicants.

While not specific to our field, there is a body of literature from SoTL that seeks to better understanding grad student wellbeing and the tactics that graduate student utilize to continue their academic progress. Using a Black feminist framework, Shavers and Moore (2014) studied ways in which Black women protect themselves and navigate wellbeing while pursuing doctoral studies at primarily white institutions (PWIs). Their

main finding was that all of their participants report utilizing an “academic mask,” hiding aspects of their true selves and instead presenting themselves as “interested and excited” (p. 397), “super-confident” (p. 398), “professional” (p. 398), and un-emotional (p. 399). While this tactic of using the academic mask allowed the students to succeed academically, it also carried a cost. Participants reported that using the mask often led them to feel “incomplete, disconnected, and exhausted” (p. 404), leading the researchers to conclude that for this population, wellbeing and academic success are mutually exclusive.

Similar to the academic mask, a study by Devine and Hunter (2017) indicates that PhD students utilize façades of conformity (FOC) as a self-preservation tactic to succeed within higher education. FOC occurs when students disguise their own values so that it seems like they align with the values of their institutions. FOC behaviors include actions like “explicitly stating opinions [students] do not actually hold, displaying emotions that are not really felt, and/or conforming with organisational expectations for behaviour” (Hewlin, 2003, cited in Devine & Hunter, 2017, p. 337). What I take from this description is that institutional strategies have established the opinions, emotions, and behaviors that PhD *should* exhibit to be successful. Students who do not inherently align with these institutionally-valued opinions, emotions, and behaviors learn to conform to them—they develop tactics, even if only as a façade. Like the participants in Shavers and Moore’s (2014) study, PhD students who reported using FOC more frequently also scored higher in levels of emotional exhaustion; that is, in using tactics to improve their academic success, students experienced less wellbeing.

While not specific to the graduate student experience, there is some TPC scholarship on how tactical technical communication operates within healthcare and wellness more broadly. Holladay (2017), studying online autism spectrum disorder (ASD) discussion boards, identified ways in which one community’s values conflicted

with the diagnostic language they encountered in medical institutions. By participating in discussion board posts—their tactical technical communication—the community self-advocates for important changes in technical knowledge, vocabulary, and underlying understandings of disability. Alexander and Edenfield (2021) examine the tactical approaches to medicine implemented by two (sometimes intersecting) communities: African American and trans communities. They describe how African American communities have relied on Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) and folkways for self-care and how trans communities have turned to Internet resources like online discussion forums to create and disseminate information on hormone medical literacy outside of the Western medical institutions that often marginalize them. While these two examples of tactical approaches to health care are not situated within the context of graduate education, I would like to call attention to how members of these communities—people who identify as autistic, Black, trans, and/or any combination of those identities—are graduate students. As such, the wellness-related tactics from these communities might also be at play as these students navigate the institution of higher education.

In my own experience over four and a half years of being a graduate student, I have come to experience the myriad of ways in which (a) graduate students are expected *not* to be well, and (b) community-based tactics for overcoming illbeing. I have often been labeled—to put it politely—as being “very frank.” In describing me as such, I might not be unlike what Ahmed (2010) calls a “killjoy”: a “willful subject” or simply “someone who is in the way.” So when tenure-track friends and colleagues would ask me how work on my dissertation or degree requirements was going, I would often respond with a fairly detailed description of the difficulties I was facing at any given moment. Their responses were always empathic; they could remember going through the same or similar struggles. While their empathy was not concerning, the kinds of comments that often

followed were. They were quick to share what I might describe as “grad school horror stories,” negative experiences that would illustrate how common negative experiences in graduate school are. Even when there were not stories attached, their comments often worked to *normalize* graduate student illbeing: “Oh yes—that’s just part of the process,” “Don’t worry; this too shall pass,” “We’ve all been there.” From these encounters including hall talk and pre-meeting chit chat, I came to understand that illbeing was an expected part of grad school life.

The potential illbeing of my own grad student life was compounded with the arrival of COVID-19, shutting down much of university life in my second semester of PhD studies. Like my immediate predecessors, and unlike the following cohort of graduate students, I did not originally make the decision to pursue a doctorate during a pandemic, though I did ultimately choose to continue that pursuit. To stay current with coursework while raising two young children mid-pandemic, I adopted and adapted many tactics. For example, upon learning in fall 2021 that chapters in a multi-paper dissertation that had already been accepted for publication would be “pre-approved” by the committee, and, thus, the committee couldn’t require revisions on those chapters, I set out to find and get published in the quickest turn around publications in our field. Through the quick publications that would also count toward my dissertation, I was able to ease some academic pressure and enhance my wellbeing. Like other graduate students do, I approached dissertation writing tactically, considering the existing structures of the institution—the rules, conventions, and expectations of the university—and finding a way to hone my own “subtle power and quiet tenacity” to “make [my] way through institutional rules while trying to build [my] own [life] and live [it] as [I] see fit” (Kimball, 2017, p. 3).

Tactics in Online Trans Communities

There is a well-established vein of TPC scholarship led by Avery Edenfield on the use of tactics within online trans communities (Alexander & Edenfield, 2021; Edenfield, 2021; Edenfield, Colton, & Holmes, 2019; Edenfield, Holmes, & Colton, 2019; Edenfield & Ledbetter, 2019). To overcome the institutional and systemic barriers that often prevent trans persons from accessing and receiving health care, members of trans communities have turned to public online forums and discussion boards to share user-generated instructions and troubleshooting for do-it-yourself (DIY) hormone replacement therapy (HRT) (Edenfield et al., 2019). Edenfield et al. (2019) indicate two major categories of tactical technical communication found in the DIY HRT online forums: (1) primary user-created content, like user-written posts that provide medical instructions or links to existing user-written materials; (2) secondary content, or what the authors call “tactical referrals,” in which users are directed to existing institutional medical information, but that information is re-purposed by trans communities to meet their own needs (p. 185-186). Edenfield (2021) adds that the COVID-19 pandemic has compounded issues of access to hormones and healthcare for many trans people, leading to an increase in online DIY tactic sharing. Those tactics include sharing information on “alternate sources for hormones, methods for stretching doses,” “new medications,” and recipes and processes of homebrewing hormones (p. 18-19). The public nature of these forums is important for providing open access to users who do not always have institutional access to other forms of medical information. That said, publicly-available information also comes with the risk of providing access to trans-exclusionary groups and individuals. For example, Edenfield et al. (2019) underline the importance of researcher caution when studying these kinds of forums because it can happen and has happened that information from those forums get used by trans-exclusionary parties to

limit access to information and services, creating an “existential threat” to the trans communities that the information originally intended to serve (p. 184).

My relationship to the above-mentioned tactics in online trans communities is that of an outside observer and ally. I was invited to work on Dr. Edenfield’s larger trans rhetorics project as a summer research assistant in 2021. That said, there are ways in which I have participated in inclusionary tactics implemented by LBGTQIA+ communities to navigate higher education. For four years, I taught English in the School of Business and Administration at the Universidad de Concepción. Over those years, I never had a student openly identify themselves as part of a LBGTQIA+ community. The lack of students openly identifying themselves as LBGTQIA+ was in no way surprising given that Chile has a reputation as one of the most homophobic countries in Latin America (Long, 2012). Chile was one of the last Latin American countries to decriminalize homosexual sex, which didn’t happen until 1999 (Long, 2012), and same-sex marriage was not legal until March 2022. With this hostile political environment toward LBGTQIA+ communities, no institutional resources from the university in terms of an inclusion center or support groups, and no visible expressions of allyship from students or faculty, I was led to believe that LBGTQIA+ communities in Chillán operated solely underground.

It was very surprising, then, when I left that Business School and went to work in the English department at the Universidad del Bío Bío. I found that in each of my classes a number of students publicly identified themselves as LBGTQIA+ within the first weeks of the semester. It seemed clear to me that the English department had informally been deemed an appropriate space to be out, even if no institutional discourse indicated this. While my observations are anecdotal, there is evidence that student perceive some majors, namely in the social sciences, as more LBGTQIA-friendly (Forbes, 2022; Furrows, 2012), and that students who identify as part of LBGTQIA+ communities

disproportionally gravitate towards majors in the social sciences and arts (Reidy, 2021). Specifically, English classes are cited as a place in which students feel more comfortable coming out (Forbes, 2022). By choosing certain majors and then choosing to disclose their identities within their classes, the students in my English classes demonstrated what Cox (2019) calls “working closets,” or ways in which LBGTQIA+ professionals “navigate and succeed” (p.1) in professional spaces by rhetorically choosing to conceal or volunteer their LBGTQIA+ identify to different people in different spaces at different times. These students were making tactical decisions about how they navigated academia and a heteronormative national culture *vis a vis* the major chose and the moments in which they came out.

While I was not privy to the tactical communicative practices among students to indicate which majors they might chose, I realized that the English pedagogy major was a tactical space. This realization has helped me understand how identifying the use of tactics can help us recognize exclusionary strategies at work in our institutions. Upon recognizing students’ use of tactics, I developed ways that I, as the instructor, could support their tactics. When talking to potential students, I would drop indicators that LBGTQIA-identifying students and topics were already part of the program (in ways that would not identify the students or with the students’ permission, of course). For example, I might mention a thrilling rhetorical analysis that one young man wrote about his boyfriend’s text. On the last day of class, we would have karaoke day, and I would give students extra credit for dressing up. The first semester, I came to karaoke day in drag, dressed like a stunning Freddie Mercury, and sang “Bohemian Rhapsody” to and with the class. I will never forget one student who came in drag as Katy Perry and belted out the most inspiring rendition of “Hot n Cold” that I may ever hear. In these small ways, I attempted to support my students as they tactically navigated their way through an academic institution that too often underserved them.

A Caveat about Tactics

As tactics can empower marginalized groups to succeed within institutions that marginalize them, TPC scholars have demonstrated how tactics can lead to more socially just outcomes (Ding, 2009; Edenfield, Colton, and Holmes, 2019; Holladay, 2017). While some might assume that all tactics necessarily align with social justice aims because of their anti-institutional nature, Colton et al. (2017) hedge that this is not always the case, that ethical judgements about tactics must always be contextualized. As foreshadowed in some of the previous descriptions, tactics, while providing a way to achieve a certain purpose, are not always “good” or beneficial for the people and communities who develop them. The most well-researched example of this are the studies on graduate student wellbeing (Devine & Hunter, 2017; Shavers & Moore, 2014), which clearly indicate that implementing tactics for academic success is often detrimental for students’ wellbeing. In terms of technical editing, while I might use tactics to shift the cultural bias of reviewers toward favorable results for the authors who hire me, by doing so I further codify the system of gatekeeping that has led the authors to seek my services in the first place. Furthermore, the publicly-accessible nature of online discussion boards can also serve as a double-edged sword: it can provide life-saving access to information about hormone replacement to folks without institutional access to or support for transition services, but that same access is then available to the myriad of anti-trans movements and individuals who can use information from those boards to thwart transition efforts. So while tactics are necessary for MMU students and scholars to survive and succeed in higher education, it is also important to recognize that they are limited and contextual.

The goal of tactics is not to create institutional change; it is to survive and to adapt institutional contours to one’s own needs. As de Certeau (1984) writes in describing the tactics of popular or ordinary language, “The actual order of thing is

precisely what “popular” tactics turn to their own ends, without any illusion that it will change any time soon” (p. 26). While tactics might not seek to change institutions, they can be a signal to those of us doing social justice work that current institutional strategies are marginalizing certain individuals and communities to the extent that those communities have created tactics in response. Evidence of tactical technical communication can direct TPC scholars toward issues that need equity-based interventions. Through interventions, we can start to close the gap between community-based tactics for survival and exclusionary institutional strategies.

By implementing tactical interventions, TPC scholars and practitioners can affect the institutions that currently marginalize MMU scholars, students, and knowledges.

Kimball (2017) indicates how the line between tactics and strategies is unfixed as “individual actions can become institutional strategies by force of repetition” (p. 4); that is, tactics that once served underrepresented persons to “counter a feeling of helplessness in a dominant culture” (Kimball, 2006, p. 67) can come to form part of that same dominant culture, part of the same institutions whose strategies previously marginalized them. Holladay, in describing how the tactical technical communication of online discussion boards could be used to reform psychiatric diagnostic language, claims that “acknowledging the successful tactics of users opens opportunities for technical communicators to become allies in the process of reforming institutional practices in the interest of social justice” (p. 21). Here, Holladay gives precedence for the use of tactics in developing interventions at the institutional, or strategic, level with the specific aim of social justice.

Though specific to the context of risk communication, Huiling Ding has an extensive body of scholarship that maps the transgression of institutional injustices that lead to community-based tactics that lead to what she calls “tactical interventions” (2009; 2013) or “strategic entry points” (2009; Ding, Li, & Haigler, 2016). In this scholarship, Ding draws on de Certeau’s concepts of tactics and strategies. Citing de Certeau, Ding (2009) connects the concepts of tactics and interventions: “As “an art of the weak,” a tactic depends on “a clever utilization of time” and always watches for “the precise instant of an intervention [which can be] transform[ed] into a favorable situation” (de Certeau 1984, p. xix, p. 39, cited in Ding, 2009, p. 329-330). From this excerpt, we recognize the kairotic (or timely) nature of interventions: the timing must be right for an intervention to be successful. I argue that we are currently in a kairotic moment that supports inclusionary interventions into academic spaces. Dr. Benson Clayton (2021) indicates that the “recent triple crisis” of the COVID-19 pandemic, social unrest from the systemic racism exemplified by George Floyd’s murder, and enduring racial inequities in higher education have collectively spurred a push for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in institutions of higher education across the United States. One report indicates that between 2014-2019, American universities increased spending on DEI efforts by 27% (Insight into Diversity, 2019). Scholars and academics can take advantage of this kairotic moment and the institutional support and funding that currently accompany it to intervene in exclusionary practices in higher education.

Aside from being the right time, successful interventions must also occur in the right place. Ding (2013) describes the importance of having an intimate understanding of the local situation in which tactical interventions into risk communication form:

Therefore, analysis of transnational risk conflicts requires unwavering and constant attention to the unique local material contexts, political and ideological structures and priorities, communication practices, economic interests, and

cultural differences surrounding all involved individual cultures and transnational key players. To better understand the cause of such drastic differences in transnational risk management approaches, one has to look beyond the discourse networks surrounding the risk conflicts and investigate the material conditions and historical contexts that helped to shape and determine local responses. Only with such deep and localized knowledge can one find out ways to participate in the analysis and intervention processes and negotiate mutually acceptable solutions to transnational risk conflicts. (p. 146).

In this quote, Ding emphasizes the importance of local contexts and localized knowledges in forming effective interventions; while understanding the community discourse is important, it is not enough. Scholars of TPC must consider the embodied experiences and socio-historical contexts in which strategies, tactics, and interventions exist. The importance of localization had a huge impact on the spaces in which I chose to intervene and methods that I used to create those interventions. The topics of this dissertation are informed by my lived experience participating in tactics used by MMU communities to navigate higher education. That said, my positionality in relation to those tactics was not always that of a marginalized body but rather was often that of a (potentially) marginalizing body. Because of this, I had to be very conscious and intentional in the research methods I used so as to not further exploit my position of power as an institutional researcher. That is why the methods used in each of the five interventions I present below are based in collaboration, participation, and reflective description.

In the following sections, I describe five inclusive interventions into three spaces of higher education so that MMU scholars, scholarship, and knowledges can be better included and valued. Drawing on community-based knowledge and lived experience, I propose that tactics originally developed for the survival of MMU knowledges in

academic spaces can begin to shift toward institutional strategies for inclusion. As institutional interventions, the practices and theories presented in this dissertation inhabit the space between tactics and strategies—they attempt to integrate tactics developed by and for MMU scholars and knowledge into the same system that has and often still does marginalize them. Tactics will arise naturally spontaneously as individuals and communities encounter and learn to work around the rules of institutions. For institutions seeking greater equity, members of that institution can use tactics as sign-posts for potentially exclusionary strategies. Working in collaboration with excluded parties, institutions can develop inclusionary interventions, like those described here.

Inclusionary Intervention: Introducing the Inclusive Editing Paradigm

At least two scholars have already begun applying critical frameworks to the field of technical editing. Smith (2020) indicates that a more rhetorical approach to editing can lead to social justice gains. Popham (2019) describes editing with a feminist lens as a way of mitigating the dominance of patriarchal paradigms in the subfield. In chapters II and III, I draw on TPC social justice work outside of technical editing to extend Smith and Popham's arguments and provide social justice interventions into the practice and teaching of technical editing. As Dr. Cheek and I demonstrate through a rhetorical analysis of technical editing scholarship in chapter II, there is a tendency in this scholarship to prioritize instrumentalism, vocationalism, and capitalist markets in the definitions, practice, and teaching of editing, as in TPC scholarship more broadly. Rather than basing our understanding of editing on a neo-liberal foundation, I argue that we must shift toward an inclusive editing paradigm based in dialogue, knowledge-sharing, and advocacy. In chapter II, I outline the theoretical framework for the inclusive editing paradigm. Then, in chapter III, I demonstrate how that framework can be applied to the

teaching of technical editing and what impact that shift has on students' perceptions of editing.

In terms of the editing that happens during scholarly peer review, early in 2021, the editors of publications in TPC released a statement, #InclusiveTPC, committing their publications to the work of anti-racist and inclusive practices. Some of their approaches to increasing inclusion in TPC publications are “revising review guidelines, diversifying editorial boards, increasing transparency of guidelines across websites and via social media, updating diversity statements, making changes to staff, developing more mentoring policies, and more” (Ross et al., 2021). In *Anti-racist scholarly review practices* (2021), the authors provide a heuristic for editors, reviewers, and authors to re-imagine themselves participating in a system of inclusivity rather than gatekeeping. One point of this heuristic is to “Recognize a range of expertise and encourage citation practices that represent diverse canons, epistemological foundations, and ways of knowing” (p. 7). In chapter IV, I draw on these sources to describe the anti-racist reviewer training I prepared as an inclusionary intervention into academic peer review.

Inclusionary Intervention: Weighing the Enormity of Graduate Student Labor

Organizational and institutional discourses have a “powerful ability” to impact individuals' conceptualizations of wellness (Derkatch, 2018). University programs are one such example of an organization that influences the language of wellness (Stambler, 2020). Research in graduate student wellbeing and faculty development emphasize the need for institutional and programmatic interventions to create the conditions for better wellbeing (Evans et al., 2018; Hurd & Singh, 2021; Ryan, Baik, & Larcombe, 2021; Scott & Takarangi, 2019), particularly for underrepresented graduate students (Osorio et al., 2021). In chapter V, Dr. Beth Buyserie and I respond to these calls for programmatic

intervention by developing a participation action research project that actively includes graduate students in the programmatic communication of wellbeing in one writing program. Through the participatory action research methodology, my co-author and I were able to connect with community-based tactics for wellbeing within one community of graduate students while working collaboratively with those students so as to develop strategic interventions rather than simply usurping their tactics for goals of the institution.

Inclusionary Intervention: Trans-centered approaches to research

TPC has developed many critical, equity-based approaches to research, with foci in feminist theory (de Hertogh, 2018; Frost, 2016), decolonial and Indigenous frameworks (Agboka, 2014; Itchuaqiyaq, 2021), queer theory (Ramler, 2021), and multilingual inclusion (Cardinal, Gonzales, & Rose, 2020). This scholarship recognizes the colonial, heteronormative, Eurocentric, and oppressive context in which academic research has operated and continues to struggle against. In chapter VI, my co-authors and I build on these foundations in inclusive approaches to research to address research in the context of online trans communities, thus adding to the gap in scholarship on LBGTQIA+ issues in TPC.

Content Preview

Chapter II: Unjust revisions: A social justice framework for technical editing

Status. Published

Clem, S., & Cheek, R. (2022). Unjust Revisions: A Social Justice Framework for

Technical Editing. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, 65(1),

135-150. doi: 10.1109/TPC.2021.3137666.

Abstract. Background: There is a lack of conceptual framework for how to develop more inclusive practices in the subfield of technical editing. *Literature review:* Some researchers have posited theories, like feminism and rhetorical theory, as ways to conceptualize technical editing. This piece extends that literature into social justice using Walton, Moore, and Jones's 3Ps heuristic of positionality, privilege, and power. *Research questions:* 1. What ideologies are circulating in technical editing pedagogy? 2. How might technical editing pedagogy become more inclusive? *Methodology:* We conduct a rhetorical analysis of the major academic works in technical editing, including books, textbooks, and academic articles, and compare them to an established framework for social justice in technical and professional communication—the 3Ps heuristic. *Results:* We find that there are strong instrumentalist underpinnings to much of the current literature in technical editing, making the goal of technical editing linguistic conformity to American Standard English (ASE) at the expense of linguistic diversity. We offer a conceptual framework, the inclusive editing paradigm (IEP), to challenge that linguistic hegemony in technical editing and provide technical editors with theoretical and practical foundations for developing a more inclusive editing practice. *Conclusions:* More work needs to be done to shift technical editing in a more inclusive direction. We call on practitioners, academics, and users to contribute to this dialogue.

Contribution. This article stemmed from a seminar paper I wrote for Dr. Keith Grant-Davie's ENGL7400: Advanced Editing class titled "(The Elusive) Inclusion of Technical Editing." The original idea for "Unjust Revisions" and the framework of that article, such as performing an ideological analysis of existing scholarship in TE and comparing those ideologies to Walton et al.'s (2019) 3Ps, along with the inclusive tenets of dialogue and redefining efficiency, came directly from my seminar paper. We combined this wider framing with content from Dr. Cheek's seminar paper in that same class on feminist

approaches to technical editing. I took the lead in drafting the paper, though Dr. Cheek's contributions were substantial, particularly in applying feminist theory. I submitted the CFP and drafts and served as the corresponding author with the publisher.

Chapter III: Teaching technical editing for social justice

Status. Accepted with minor revisions to *Technical Communication and Social Justice* on 1/16/2022.

Abstract. Responding to calls for an inclusive editing paradigm in the teaching of editing (Clem & Cheek, 2022), I revised my professional editing course to align with social justice values. I describe the revisions that took place in terms of definitions, curriculum, learning objectives, and assignments. Having taught the course in spring 2022, I performed a content analysis of one of the course assignments where students define technical editing. Results indicate that students' conceptualizations of editing shifted over the semester from copyediting-based definitions to definitions based in editor/author relationships, rhetorical awareness, and substantive editing.

Contribution. As a solo-authored chapter, I was the sole contributor to this piece, though I did receive helpful feedback from my committee chair in developing and revising the article. The content for this piece came from the process of revising and teaching ENGL4400: Professional Editing. In revising this course, I drew heavily from the course I proposed in my comprehensive exams. I first taught the course as instructor of record in spring 2022, at which time I collected the relevant data for this study.

Chapter IV: Cultivating ethics in the peer review process

Status. Published

Bryson, R. W., & Clem, S. (2022). Cultivating ethics in the peer review process. In *The 40th ACM International Conference on Design of Communication (SIGDOC '22)*, October 6-10, 2022, Boston, MA, USA. ACM, New York, NY, USA.

Abstract. After describing the content and implementation of an anti-racist scholarly review training informed by recent scholarship in technical communication (TC), the authors reflect on an unanticipated outcome of that training: a participant using language from the training in an attempt to silence an author they were reviewing. We analyze this experience through a framework of modern virtue ethics scholarship and explore ways to cultivate more ethical peer review practices. Drawing upon elements of ethical self-cultivation articulated by Vallor, we use concepts of moral habituation, relational understanding, and reflective self-examination to understand how to cultivate more ethical, reflexive peer review processes.

Contribution. The work on this article was fairly evenly divided between Rachel Bryson and I, separating work between the topics of the article, though we worked collaboratively to organize the paper and draw relevant conclusions. I developed and implemented the anti-racist scholarly review training and described the contents and effects of that training in the article, while Rachel Bryson drafted most of the content on virtue ethics. The idea for the article came when I approached Rachel Bryson seeking advice on what I should do about the outlying review described in the article. At the time, she was reading about virtue ethics in Dr. Jared Colton's class and, thus, drew the connection between the issue I was facing and virtue ethics. In the revision phase, I revised any suggestions related to the description of the training or review and helped brainstorm ways to draw more tangible takeaways for readers, including ways to increase

dialogue between reviewers and editors and ways to include ethics more explicitly in reviewer training workshops.

Chapter V: Questioning neoliberal rhetorics of wellness: Designing programmatic interventions to better support graduate instructor wellbeing

Status. Published

Clem, S. & Buyserie, B. (2023). Questioning neoliberal rhetorics of wellness: Designing programmatic interventions to better support graduate instructor wellbeing. *Communication Design Quarterly*, 11(1), 32-41.

Abstract. Previous research has recognized the neoliberal trends that permeate the rhetorics of academic wellness, placing the responsibility for wellbeing on individuals rather than institutions and systems. In this study, the authors implemented a participatory action research (PAR) project to collaborate with different stakeholders in one university writing program and develop programmatic approaches to support the wellbeing one subset of academic faculty: graduate student instructors. Along with an account of how we adapted our PAR methodology to align with the wellness needs of our participants, we also provide a description and analysis of the intervention developed collaboratively in the PAR group. We end with five takeaways that researchers and stakeholders in graduate student education can apply to developing programmatic interventions that better support graduate instructor wellbeing: 1) research methodologies should adapt to foreground wellbeing; 2) productive conversations about wellbeing should start by acknowledging and validating the lived experience of graduate instructors; 3) students want to be involved in programmatic processes and procedures that support their wellbeing; 4) facilitating (but not requiring) non-productive social interaction among grad students can support GI wellbeing; 5) the work of supporting

wellbeing is never fully done—we call on administrators, faculty members, and students to continue this work.

Contribution. This article was the product of Dr. Beth Buyserie's and my participation in the ETE Scholars Award Program at Utah State University. This is a competitive program that comes with a \$4,000 grant to develop and carry out a project related to SoTL. Since our proposals for the project were very similar (applying critical pedagogies to the teaching of English), and because the ETE SoTL committee was concerned about the ability of a graduate student to develop and carry out a SoTL project alone, ETE asked if Dr. Buyserie and I would consider collaborating on one project. Accepting ETE's request to work together, Dr. Buyserie and I met and developed the original research questions and study design. I conducted and drafted the literature review, and also wrote the introductions and conclusions. Dr. Buyserie contributed mainly to the methodology section, as PAR is a methodology she had used extensively in other projects and was already quite knowledgeable on. She led the PAR group meetings while I took observational notes. I also completed the member checking with participants once we had a working draft of the article, revising as needed. When CDQ gave us a revise and resubmit decision on our original manuscript, requesting very significant revisions to better align the article with the design of communication, I completed those revisions and resubmitted the piece. It is important for me to acknowledge that the entire framing of the project—programmatic interventions to graduate instructor (GI) wellness—wouldn't have been possible without Dr. Buyserie's willingness and desire to advocate for GIs from her role as the Director of Composition. As such, her contribution to this project was invaluable.

Chapter VI: Trans* vulnerability and digital research ethics: A qubit ethical analysis of transparency activism

Status. Published

Cheek, R., Clem, S., & Edenfield, A. C. (2021). Trans* vulnerability and digital research ethics: A qubit ethical analysis of transparency activism. In *The 39th ACM International Conference on Design of Communication (SIGDOC '21)*, October 12-14, 2021, Virtual Event, USA. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 7 pages.

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Abstract. Trans* communities across the United States are under assault. Researchers seeking to work with trans* people and other multiply marginalized and underrepresented communities must attend to ethical research practices within the communities in which they participate. Digital research ethics is particularly murky with issues of embodiment, vulnerability, and unclear IRB guidance. Comparing two transparency activist organizations—Wikileaks and DDoSecrets—we introduce “qubit ethics,” a trans*material, trans-corporeal ethics of care as praxis within vulnerable online communities. We then demonstrate how this unique approach to research design allows for the complex entanglements that is trans* life, particularly digital life. Finally, we present clear take-aways for qubit-ethics informed social justice research.

Contribution. This publication stemmed from my experience as a research assistant for Dr. Avery Edenfield. When I came on to the project in summer 2021, Dr. Edenfield and Dr. Cheek already had a working framework for their inclusive design of online research, the qubit framework. They had already submitted an article outlining the qubit framework for publication in another academic journal. My main contribution for this piece was helping to frame the exigence for qubit ethics for publication in a design of communication-based venue. I did this by connecting the qubit framework to queer and

trans theory from literature both in and out of TPC and establishing the current existential harm to trans and queer communities that necessitates interventions like qubit research methods. Though the framework was already developed, I also helped Dr. Edenfield and Dr. Cheek to recognize ways in which the framework applied to the specific case study on transparency activism. Finally, I did most of copyediting before final publication.

CHAPTER II
UNJUST REVISIONS: A SOCIAL JUSTICE FRAMEWORK
FOR TECHNICAL EDITING

Status: Published

Clem, S., & Cheek, R. (2022). Unjust Revisions: A Social Justice Framework for Technical Editing. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, 65(1), 135-150. doi: 10.1109/TPC.2021.3137666.

Abstract

Background: There is a lack of conceptual framework for how to develop more inclusive practices in the subfield of technical editing.

Literature review: Some researchers have posited theories, like feminism and rhetorical theory, as ways to conceptualize technical editing. This piece extends that literature into social justice using Walton, Moore, and Jones's 3Ps heuristic of positionality, privilege, and power.

Research questions: 1. What ideologies are circulating in technical editing pedagogy? 2. How might technical editing pedagogy become more inclusive?

Methodology: We conduct a rhetorical analysis of the major academic works in technical editing, including books, textbooks, and academic articles, and compare them to an established framework for social justice in technical and professional communication—the 3Ps heuristic.

Results: We find that there are strong instrumentalist underpinnings to much of the current literature in technical editing, making the goal of technical editing linguistic

conformity to American Standard English (ASE) at the expense of linguistic diversity. We offer a conceptual framework, the inclusive editing paradigm (IEP), to challenge that linguistic hegemony in technical editing and provide technical editors with theoretical and practical foundations for developing a more inclusive editing practice.

Conclusions: More work needs to be done to shift technical editing in a more inclusive direction. We call on practitioners, academics, and users to contribute to this dialogue.

Introduction

Decades after the field began its humanistic journey [1]—reconciling itself with rhetoric [2], feminism [3], [4], and cultural studies [5]—the social justice turn in technical and professional communication (TPC) profoundly altered the direction of our discipline by inviting us to rethink the purpose and methods of our endeavors [6]. One such endeavor is technical editing (TE). TE is described by Howard [7] as a “pervasive and yet, ironically, overlooked topic in TPC” (p. x). In this article, we begin with a rhetorical analysis of academic literature on TE, outlining trends that work both toward and against social justice aims. Through this rhetorical analysis, we argue that the subfield of TE has only begun to interrogate its instrumentalist foundations and that a framework for conceptualizing social justice work in TE is needed. Drawing on Walton, Moore, and Jones's [6] 3P heuristic, we then propose just such a framework.

From the 3Ps of positionality, privilege, and power, we discern and articulate three principles for TE that can serve as a critical intervention into status quo TE practices and turn the subfield toward more inclusive practices. Taken together, these three principles compose what we call the inclusive editing paradigm (IEP), which we argue ought to be adopted as a more socially just approach to TE.

1. To affirmatively attend to differential *positionality* among authors, editors, and audiences, TE should dispense with the rigid enforcement of hegemonic grammars [8] and instead root itself in dialogic participation [9] and an ethics of care [10]–[12].
2. To affirmatively attend to differential *privilege* among authors, editors, and audiences, the subfield of TE must re-evaluate its relationship to instrumental understandings of efficiency. Doing so requires adopting an apparent feminist lens [13] that elevates critical inquiry over rote production.
3. Technical editors must attend to the multiplicities of *power* by becoming knowledgeable about how structural oppression insidiously manifests itself in editing relationships. This means adopting a theory of active equality [14] and understanding themselves as social justice advocates [15] in their theorizing, teaching, and practicing of TE.

Acknowledging that to be successful, any critical intervention ought to be accompanied by practical takeaways, we incorporate tangible strategies for enacting social justice in TE classrooms, relationships, and workplaces alike throughout our description of IEP. That said, as an initial presentation of our theoretical framework, the takeaways from this article will be most applicable to academics and instructors of TE.

Figure 1. Practitioner Takeaway

Practitioner Takeaway
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current ideologies circulating in technical editing texts are based in instrumentalist values of efficiency, neo-liberalism, and linguistic conformity to American Standard English at the expense of diversity and inclusion. • The subfield of technical editing must make structural, practical, and ideological changes to become more equitable and inclusive. • Implementing the inclusive editing paradigm (IEP)—based in ethics of care, redefined efficiency, and coalitional work—practitioners, academics, and users of technical editing can begin moving toward more inclusive, equitable practices.

Literature Review

Walton, Moore, and Jones [6] offer a common language for and shared understanding of the coalition building necessary for social justice work in the field of TPC. Part of this shared language, along with oppression and justice, is inclusion, which “exists where everyone's contributions are sought and valued, and where difference is preserved, not assimilated” [6, p. 9]. It is their conceptualizations of social justice and inclusion, specific to the field of TPC, that we use to analyze previous scholarship in TE and develop a conceptual framework for promoting inclusion in the subfield.

Although it is not central to their discussion, Walton, Moore, and Jones describe in a footnote how excluding all non-ASE language represents “linguistic and societal normalizing” that serves to “marginalize those whose professional personas resist colonial, patriarchal expectations” [6, p. 30]. The newest and best-selling textbooks in TE (see, e.g., [16] and [17]) include lengthy sections on grammar and usage, all exclusively mechanics of ASE. The exclusion of all but ASE represents a way in which TE not only participates in oppression but also codifies that oppression. (This kind of

codification is a concern expressed in [6].) The more we exclude other forms of English from the academy, the more codified that norm becomes, and the harder it is to change.

Regardless, work has been and is being done to center the importance of social justice and inclusion work in TPC. As a heuristic to aid in this effort, Walton, Moore, and Jones offer the 3Ps: positionality, privilege, and power [6]. The first P, positionality, asks researchers to understand how identity is relational, historical, fluid, particular, situational, contradictory, and intersectional [6, p. 65]. Important to their discussion are the ways in which individuals can and do hold multiple, often contradictory identities at once. They highlight how certain identity markers confer expertise. We argue that “technical editor” is indeed one such identity marker that confers expertise in language use and form.

The second P, privilege, prompts researchers to recognize the unearned advantages that come with certain positionalities or identities in certain contexts. The authors describe privilege in terms of five ontological instantiations that construct margins and centers and lead certain individuals and groups of individuals to reside in those often-competing spaces. Privilege is self-validating as folks with privilege can define knowledge and meaning in ways that perpetuate the value of their positions and identities, much the way ASE has been defined and valued. To enact social justice work, Walton, Moore, and Jones [6] claim that we must actively center the knowledge and experience of multiple marginalized identities.

Finally, the third P, power, addresses the ways in which power is distributed relative to privilege and positionality. Using Collins's [18] concept of domains of power—structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal—Walton, Moore, and Jones [6] offer TPC a theory that centers the experiences of multiply marginalized and underrepresented (MMU) people. Importantly, they note that although some practices are limited to one domain of power, language use permeates all four. They conclude that

“Indeed, exclusion and marginalization happen through language use and through norms of language” [6, p. 123]. As such, TE, which explicitly states and polices language norms, is an apt site of research for social justice work. In fact, Walton et al. mention “problems with editing” [6, p. 126] among the “wicked, complex problems” facing technical editors that “require theoretical perspectives” [6, p. 127].

Several examples of TE scholarship incorporate theory as a way of addressing this wicked problem. We will outline only two of the most recent attempts in this literature review, as the other most relevant examples are used as artifacts of analysis in the research methodology section. Smith argues that the often-taught prescriptive language rules common in TE need to be replaced with a more rhetorical lens. He suggests that incorporating findings from empirical research on TE is one way of adopting such a lens. This return to rhetoric, Smith believes, may help situate TE within the social justice turn in TPC [19].

Popham [20] incorporates feminist theory into TE pedagogy in a chapter titled “Teaching Editing through a Feminist Theoretical Lens.” She identifies three activities in which a feminist lens can be applied to TE:

- Adding an “editorial sense of equality and respect” [20, p. 101]
- Using feminine metaphors to describe editing work
- Emphasizing the role of emotions and empathy in editing

Popham hedges that the intention behind her application of feminist theory to TE is not primarily for social justice aims but rather for showing how theory can inform editing practice. She concludes that texts edited with a feminist framework “may look the same, perhaps exactly the same” [20, p. 106], but the process is different. While Popham's application of feminist theory to TE is a useful step toward greater inclusion in the subfield, we believe that her argument should be taken further, insisting that both

changes in the process and the product are necessary for addressing injustices in the editing process. We offer the IEP as just such a continuation of Smith and Popham's theoretical frameworks.

Research Questions

Within this context of explicit calls for social justice in TPC and recent attempts at redefining TE through critical theoretical lenses, we pose two questions.

RQ1. What ideologies are circulating in TE pedagogy?

RQ2. How may TE pedagogy become more inclusive?

Methodology

Ideologies are rhetorically sustained patterns of belief that influence personal and collective behavior. Ideologically focused rhetorical criticism [21], [22] is a revelatory research methodology useful for exposing underlying value systems that animate and are reproduced by text. We are particularly concerned with revealing hyperpragmatist ideologies circulating in TE pedagogy and practices. Scott, Longo, and Wills [5] critique hyperpragmatism as a “hegemonic ideology and set of practices that privileges utilitarian efficiency and effectiveness” over critical reflection. They also warn that

the main goal of hyperpragmatist pedagogy is to ensure the technical writer's
(and technical writing student's) professional assimilation. [5, p. 9]

Extending Scott et al.'s critique, we discern similar ideological commitments to presumed objectivity and instrumentalist expediency in TE. In examining and critiquing the rhetoric of significant instructional texts on TE, our rhetorical criticism makes space for the rhetorical invention and articulation of the IEP. Texts that teach or theorize about

how to teach TE are an ideal starting point for understanding the ideologies circulating more broadly within TE as an academic and professional field. In choosing artifacts for analysis, we began with the texts presented to us as students in a graduate-level TE course. We identified additional artifacts from the bibliographies of those resources and by keyword searching “TE” in the databases for the IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication, the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, the *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, *Technical Communication*, and *Technical Communication Quarterly*.

Rhetorical critics are empowered to embrace their subjective encounters with texts as generative examinations of phenomena [23]. Criticism is unique in that it relies on subjective sensemaking that is communicable but not usually replicable. The TE artifacts that we have chosen to weave into a broader tapestry of rhetorical criticism are intended to support a call for more inclusive editing practices—that is, the version of the truth that we are seeking. Our selections are not intended to be read as a wholesale characterization of all TE research to date. We acknowledge that there are counterexamples and counterarguments that could be made in defense of TE as a field and in defense of some of the texts we specifically critique. However, such defenses, even when persuasive, risk leaving intact obscured and problematic ideological commitments to exclusionary practices.

Our performance of rhetorical criticism is not an act of negativity about the field; rather, it is a demonstration intended to give way to more generative and inclusive thinking about how we teach and practice TE. Rhetorical theorist Lester Olson argues that

Judgment distinguishes criticism from other scholarly activities within the humanities Criticism is neither objective nor subjective because criticism solicits an audience's intersubjective assent. A critic asks others to consider a

judgment. In response, audiences might not accept a critic's ideas, or may actively engage them to reshape and form their own assessments—all of which enhances an appreciation of “creative productions,” even in the absence of consensus [24, p. 252].

We have no doubt that there are teachers and practitioners who already engage in social justice-informed TE, but what we discern through our criticism is a need for more theoretical grounding to justify expanding inclusive approaches to the discipline. The following section is an invention of text built out of the fragments of TE pedagogy. By nature, fragments are incomplete and somewhat arbitrary, but what unifies the texts that we have chosen is their intention to theorize about and teach the practice of TE.

Results

Rhetorical Criticism of TE Artifacts

Tracing the genesis of TE back through time leads us to an overprivileged period in the Western intellectual tradition: the Greco–Roman era, where the Hellenistic grammarian Dionysios Thrax wrote the earliest known surviving manual formalizing usage rules for the Greek language. The manual is thought to have been in use for 15 centuries [25]. We are not the first to recognize this connection to our field, as others have noted the connection between the *techne* (in this context, a handbook) attributed to Dionysios and the discipline of technical communication as we know it today [26], [27]. In modern terms, we might even consider Dionysios's work to be one of the first known style guides. It helped lay the foundation for several millennia of editors elevating linguistic norms to the status of rules. As Dionysios wrote, “without due observance of

these rules” writing is degraded, and the “habits of readers [become] ridiculous” [28, p. 4].

Of course, the colonizing dominance of the “Western tradition” has suppressed many alternative theorizations about the nature of language that do not rely on the enforcement of an external grammatical system [29]. Indeed, as Foucault notes that as the grammatical inquiry was formalized as a discipline in the 16th century, it was “based upon the same epistemological arrangement as the science of nature” [30, p. 35], which describes, categorizes, and infers with a ruthlessly detached sense of objectivity. As a result, many of the foundational assumptions behind TE in the western academic tradition have come to rely on an instrumentalist codification and deployment of language.

Fast forward several centuries later to the roots of technical communication as a discipline that was “ancillary to industry” and where the typical communicator was probably male, perhaps ex-military or a former technician, of middle age, and probably a long-term employee. [31, p. 156]

Not much changed over the course of 2000 years when it came to who was writing the rules for proper writing—mostly cis-men from the dominant ethnic group of the period. Miller's work introducing humanism [1] and axiological concerns [32] to technical writing represented a disciplinary caesura. That is, a fracture was born between instrumentalism and humanism (and now posthumanism) that continues to this day, but TE pedagogy and practice is a niche of our discipline that is still, we argue, overrepresented by exclusionary ideologies.

In one of the first anthologies specifically dedicated to the topic of TE, Zook [33] reviewed all the literature from the Society for Technical Communication (STC) proceedings and journals from 1965 to 1974 to identify the most pressing issues in TE. Some common topics found were style and mechanics and increasing productivity

and efficiency. There are, though, some notable exceptions that begin to acknowledge the relational and humanistic importance of TE. For example, Briggs [34] emphasizes that dialogue cannot be forced or prescribed and argues for using Martin Buber's concept of I-thou communication as a keystone for editing by dialogue. Osborne [35] preempts scholars such as Slack et al. [36] in recognizing the contributory role of technical editors in adding and modifying meaning.

One of the foundational texts for TE is Dragga and Gong's *Editing: The Design of Rhetoric* [37]. This book extends Miller's humanistic rationale for technical writing, arguing that “Editors are artists” [37, p. 11] and establishing rhetorical theory as the philosophical foundation of editing practices. The authors structure the book into the four rhetorical cannons—*invention*, *arrangement*, *style*, and *delivery*—to outline how editors can use rhetorical theory to achieve the objectives of editing: accuracy, clarity, propriety, and artistry. As a rhetorical process, editing is never static [37, p. 217] and is always contextual: “It is the editor's job to see that ideas receive expression appropriate to their importance, complexity, aim, and audience” [37, p. 14].

That brings us to the present day, where two prominent and recently published texts on TE deserve some attention for what they do and do not do in advancing TE theorizing and practice to become more inclusive. First is a comprehensive and career-focused 2020 TE textbook by Cunningham, Malone, and Rothschild [17]. Although the authors claim that their textbook provides “an expanded and capacious view of TE” [17, p. xi], their pedagogical approach carries exclusive rhetorical entailments. A significant portion of the book is dedicated to directives about how best to enforce linguistic norms by identifying, categorizing, and controlling errors in documents. To be fair, as we will continue to point out, it is not necessarily these authors whom we are criticizing, but a collection of discursive practices circulating in the field that we argue conceal injustices in status quo approaches to TE.

In fact, Cunningham et al. make a nod in the right direction.

Editing for social justice is using your authority as an editor to ensure equity, if not equality, for audience members as well as others who might be affected by the document. This ethical responsibility requires an awareness of the ways in which wealth, privilege, and status (among other things) operate in society. [17, p. 33]

We agree with this statement but find further discussion on the topics of ethics or social justice lacking. For example, according to the glossary, ethical issues are addressed in only 20 of the book's 496 pages. In the second chapter, the authors encourage editors to plan ahead for their projects by thinking through a number of questions. The tenth question that they pose is, "What legal and ethical issues must be considered?" In this section, issues of ethics are relegated to one paragraph claiming ethical documents "should not be discriminatory" [17, p. 33].

Several discussions of ethics are separated from the main text in pop-up boxes. In the pop-up box titled "Inclusiveness and Sensitivity in Copyediting," which in our opinion contains the deepest discussion of inclusive editing ethics, they encourage editors to "treat all readers and users fairly and with respect" and to be inclusive by not seem[ing] to disparage anyone on the basis of gender, race, age, marital status, ethnic or religious group, sexual orientation, physical attributes, health or disability status, or country of origin. [17, p. 286]

These specific calls for inclusivity break from previous textbooks and thus indicate a trend in the field. We argue, though, that ideologically, ethics and social justice remain minimized concerns that contrast against the otherwise instrumentalist ideologies of editing for ASE.

In another section of the text titled "Is the document well written and designed?" the authors claim that

Writers who learned English as a second or foreign language (ESL or EFL) sometimes require much editing for style and copyediting for grammar and usage. In fact, a significant percentage of respondents in a survey of editors state that editing the writing of ESL authors was the more challenging aspect of their work. [17, p. 244]

This framing of multilingualism is informed by what Gonzales calls the deficit model [38], where “multilingualism is positioned as an ‘issue’ or communicative ‘problem’ to be overcome” [38, para. 31] rather than an asset to be valued, as others have advocated. For example, Cardinal et al. [39], in presenting Multilingual User Experience (UX), argue that linguistic diversity should be interpreted as a valuable opportunity rather than an obstacle.

Another recent publication in TE is Flanagan and Albers’ edited collection, *Editing in the Modern Classroom* [40]. Aside from Popham’s chapter on feminist theory in TE [20], there are limited references to ethics or social justice in the book. In fact, in the last chapter, Melançon [41] argues that a lack of attention to ethics is common among undergraduate and graduate TE courses. This observation leads us to believe that the oversight is common across the field of TE: if we teach TE without attending to ethics, our students will go on to practice TE without attending to ethics.

In 2017, Lang and Palmer lamented the static nature of TE, claiming TE, as it is currently taught, might be better called “classical editing” [42, p. 298]. After reviewing common textbook and course descriptions for TE courses, alongside job postings for editor positions, the authors concluded that TE classes and textbooks tend to be text-based editing with a focus on copyediting, grammar, and markup [42, p. 302]. For Lang and Palmer, this approach to TE does not meet the needs of the marketplace, which they argue requires multimodal editing skills. One of their conclusions is that copyediting and grammar should become a supplemental course. This course would refresh students on

the fundamental skills (not only writing correct, standard, edited English but the ability to articulate and fix errors in said work) [42, p. 307]. Important to our discussion is our disagreement with the insistence that there is a clear and correct form of English that should be imposed and that neoliberal market values should determine the content and structure of our TE courses.

The best-selling TE textbook, according to Lang and Palmer [42], is Rude and Eaton's *Technical Editing* [16]. Indeed, this text was assigned in the graduate TE course that we took together, where the idea kernels for this manuscript first started popping. Rude and Eaton apply a rhetorical view of editing, arguing in the preface that editors are not “grammar janitors, people who clean up mistakes on paper.” Rather, editors “must also offer much more: analysis, evaluation, imagination, and good judgement” [16, p. xix]. This framing, though, seems a bit belied by the half of the text focused on rote copyediting skills. It is also worth noting that invoking the custodial profession in such a derogatory way is a bit classist—a point that becomes much clearer under the IEP precisely because it seeks to elucidate machinations of power in the editing process.

In our opinion, Rude and Eaton lean too heavily on the instrumental needs of corporations without first acknowledging how power and exclusion often mark such communities. For example, in “Editing for Global Contexts,” chapter author Maylath acknowledges that although English is not the most common first language, as there are far more Chinese and Spanish speakers globally, the lingua franca of international editing is English thanks to “the spread of the former British Empire and the later dominance of U.S. military and business power” [43, p. 302]. This fact is posited without any interrogation of the ethics of accepting it as normal and acceptable. Evidencing and compounding this problem, Maylath also points out that

writing in a single language is often far cheaper than paying for multiple translations and localization for each language, nation, or region. [43, p. 302]

There is an instrumentalist efficiency [13] embedded in his logic—linguistic erasure justified by economic expediency.

To be clear, we do not mean to imply that any of the aforementioned authors are unethical people—our criticism is aimed at exposing the underlying ideological commitments to instrumentality and hyperpragmatism that TPC scholars and practitioners have embraced over the course of many generations of teaching and practicing TE. Those who have written TE textbooks may not believe that they have constructed texts built on corrective grammars and a deficit model, but that, we argue, is because instrumentalist ideology conceals such insight. This is one reason why a part of the IEP must be reconsidering the need for prescriptive mechanics in TE.

There has been some attempt within the field to reconceptualize the need for prescriptive mechanics, which could be considered an inclusive practice. Connatser [44] calls for the inclusion of “organic grammar” in accepted writing practices. Organic grammar might be considered what the field of linguistics has long labelled “heritage language,” a language that is often acquired orally and often from a very young age. Mirroring the idea found in Rude and Eaton that technical editors are specialists in language [16, p. 8], Connatser continues, “an expert is someone who not only knows the rules but also knows when to break them” [44, p. 265]. In this way, he suggests that the acceptance of organic grammar aids the “silent speech” of the reader [44, p. 272].

We agree with Connatser's overall argument that prescriptive grammar should be eased but would go further to include not only the organic grammar of what are presumably well-educated Americans (from the examples given) but also the grammar of non-heritage speakers of English. Insisting that technical editors be language experts (and by “language,” Connatser seems to mean ASE) limits the inclusion of the field to people with the access and ability to learn the strict standards of scholarly English, even

if they may already be experts in their own forms of English. This limitation furthers the idea that “others” must be literate in two cultures—the dominant culture and their own.

Audience awareness, which, should MMU readers be centered as intended audiences, could pose a potential for inclusive practices, is a priority in effective technical communication, and that fact is reflected in the literature on TE. Albers [45] emphasizes the importance of comprehensive editing to increase human–information interaction. Rude and Eaton [16] also devote considerable space to teaching comprehensive editing in their textbook. That said, Albers's study shows that many graduate editing students struggle to identify and express global-level editing comments. By editing comprehensively, editors engage with problems in a text that impairs human–information interaction. Although some editors are tentative in making global changes because they might change the author's voice, Albers responds that “The job of an editor is not to preserve an author's voice, but to preserve the organization's voice and reputation” [45, p. 124]. Whether the organization is the academy or a business, the agency and identities of editors and authors are negatively impacted by such an orientation in TE. ASE grammar and mechanics rules set out in TE textbooks are a significant way in which technical editors are trained to normalize and sometimes eviscerate the unique voices of authors; this, as Albers seems to suggest, is a result of teaching that the editor's primary obligation is to an organization rather than an author whose writing the editor has been entrusted with.

Before moving to the next section, where we do the constructive work of inclusive paradigm building, it is important to emphasize that our criticism should not be taken as a condemnation of authors but as a necessary, even if polemical, precursor to paving a more inclusive path for TE. We know that there are many TE academics and professionals who care deeply about social justice and are working every day to create better futures for their students, peers, organizations, and communities. Nonetheless,

exclusionary practices are often a result of the paradigmatic investments that we have collectively made as a discipline, which can be obscured by discourse. Criticism is the work of critical thinking and is a process rather than a product. We have little doubt some will disagree with our characterizations; however, we hope to have at least demonstrated an exigency for new paradigmatic work in TE that incorporates recent groundbreaking social justice theorizing circulating in TPC more broadly.

Inclusive Editing Paradigm

Having already identified the ideologies of existing literature in TE, we now draw on social justice ideologies and Walton et al.'s [6] 3Ps heuristic to establish a more inclusive framework for the field. In this section, we will outline the core principles of an IEP. Throughout our description, we propose practical approaches to implementing these principles. That said, inherent in IEP is an understanding that any editing practice should be localized and contextualized to the intersections of positionality, privilege, and power that might exist in the editing situation. For that reason, we hedge that not all approaches would be appropriate in all editing situations. We suggest these approaches as a starting point for further conversation about how to implement a more inclusive TE practice.

Dialogic Participation Through an Ethics of Care

As demonstrated in our rhetorical analysis of TE scholarship, there is a desire in the field to police language. Norms and preferences are articulated as rules to be applied through stringent enforcement—a practice that is several millennia old. Contesting this process of linguistic policing in editing pedagogy is critical because language is the medium through which cultural hegemony is produced and reproduced. Technical editors are deputized to standardize and normalize the chaos of language. In accepting

this role, editors serve powerful cultural interests over authors and audiences alike. Editing can be a discursively violent process of establishing authority over creative expression—a way to contain the radical potentiality of language to liberate instead of suppressing. A social justice approach to teaching editing must be cognizant of the way that ASE is rooted in and helps to sustain structural oppression.

We should train editors that their job is to care for a text rather than police it. This starts by recognizing that ASE is an “oppressor’s language” and that we must enable and empower authors to “make English do what we want it to do” by “tak[ing] the oppressor’s language and turn[ing] it against itself” and “liberating ourselves in language” [8, p. 175]. By privileging collaboration over correction [10], editors become enablers of the radical potential of texts to disrupt cultural hegemony. In a grammar of care approach, the editor’s role is to facilitate revolutionary relationships capable of challenging instead of colluding with the desire of powerful institutional interests that suppress creative liberatory expression. An editor that takes a grammar of care seriously recognizes both the arbitrary and yet powerful nature of discourse to either support or intervene in cultural logics of normalization.

Drawing on a body of feminist theorizing known as ethics of care [11], [12], we contend that hegemonic grammar of ASE may be productively countered by teaching aspiring technical editors to adopt a grammar of care in their professional endeavors. Held writes that

the central focus of the ethics of care is on the compelling moral salience of attending to and meeting the needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility. [11, p. 10]

Technical editors and the writers that they work with must take responsibility for attending to and meeting one another’s needs. The same goes for TE instructors and their students. Pedagogy rooted in an ethics of care, as Shevalier and McKenzie [46] have

argued, is more culturally responsive than traditional approaches—an effect, we argue, that is needed in TE practices as well. Monchinski succinctly argues for such an approach to pedagogy, writing that a pedagogical ethic of care “recognizes and celebrates the primacy and importance of human relationships” [12, p. 131].

In practice, the editor(s) and author(s) might start the editing process by acknowledging their humanity. This could include a short conversation about how individuals are feeling at the moment or important situations the person is going through in life outside of the editing context. In this pre-editing space, those involved begin to recognize and account for their positionality. They might discuss how each of them came to be working on this document and why. For example, Clem often edits academic articles written by nonheritage English speakers. She might use this time to establish her positionality as a heritage English speaker and an editor dedicated to social justice and reflect on how that positionality might affect her work on that particular document. In this way, a relationship between the editor and author can begin to form and take primacy. From there, dialogue can be used to deepen that relationship.

We believe that inclusive TE must involve good faith dialogue as a critical component. Dialogue encourages technical editors to communicate extensively with authors about the intended audience and message of the text and identify the author's and editor's positionality and privilege in relation to the present rhetorical situation. Inclusive editing is not an independent practice to be done in isolation. Applying Allman's [9] description of dialogue to TE, we emphasize the difference between discussion and dialogue. For Allman, discussion results in students acquiring or offering knowledge for instructor assessment, whereas the objective of the dialogue is to *use the knowledge or thinking of each member of the group, together with the people who are external to the group ... to critically investigate the theme or issue*

that the group is considering or seeking to understand more critically. [9, p. 163, italics original]

In this sense, dialogue is not a simple exchange of thoughts and ideas but rather a critical co-construction of knowledge. Allman emphasizes that this form of communication is a continuous, counterhegemonic process [9]. This conceptualization of dialogic communication runs in sharp contrast to the editing process's communication “chain” described in TE textbooks [17]. This chain analogy creates a sense of hierarchy and linearity, and the example that they provide of this communication chain between author-editor-audience comes in the form of various stages of “cleaning up” the text and getting approvals from various stakeholders. In this context, editors serve as just one cog in the editing machine, one link in the chain, rather than centering and celebrating the humanity of that position. We propose a complete restructuring of this hierarchical conception of editing.

Rather than assuming that the editor holds a privileged position as a language expert, dialogue establishes all stakeholders as co-creators of knowledge. In this sense, editors use their knowledge (of form and grammar, perhaps, but also of lived experience and caring) along with the knowledge of the other stakeholders to critically investigate the document. Editing, then, moves from a place of prescriptive, hegemonic “fixing” to a space of counterhegemonic dialogue. The editor is asked not to assume correctness or expertise but rather co-create meaning and correctness with those affected by the text. Dialogue leverages the technical editor's intermediary position to restructure the power dynamic between author–editor and editor–audience.

IEP would entail several changes to editing processes. A significant amount of the TE literature is dedicated to editor commenting strategies. Boettger, for example, describes strategies for creating constructive comments, comments written to convince the author to accept the comments and, thus, improve the document [47, p. 49]. We

argue that this strategy insists on persuasion and assessment rather than dialogue. That said, Boettger outlines a very common process in editing as it is now: the editor is sent an existing document, the editor suggests fixes to the document via direct changes to the text or comments, the author reads those comments and decides whether to accept or reject the suggestions.

Dialogic participation would insist that practice of merely accepting/rejecting comment suggestions is insufficient for inclusive editing. Comments might be used to highlight moments of confusion or to pose genuine—rather than guiding—questions. Ideally, a dialogue would not be relegated to comments and track changes alone; those might serve as a mere starting point for conversation. In situations where synchronous dialogue is not possible, we could imagine the value of using chat messengers, such as Discord or Slack, to facilitate more frequent, less structured dialogue than emails and reports. Instances of communication should be iterative and interactive, back-and-forth, particularly at the beginning of the editing process so that the editor and author can learn together what is effective or not in the text, co-creating expectations for the document.

Reconceptualizing Efficiency in the Editing Process

For decades, researchers in TPC have critiqued the field's preoccupation with instrumentalist forms of efficiency. As a “God term” [48, p. 351] for the discipline, efficiency is a prized skill and quality of technical communicators and their work products. Training editors to enforce ASE language norms in what they edit commits to a paradigm of efficiency in writing/reading that reproduces a problematic ethic of expediency [2] rather than an ethic that embraces cultural and linguistic diversity in writing. Frost's apparent feminist methodology [13] suggests a rearticulation of the term “efficiency,” one that redirects focus away from energy spent on a task toward the quality

of the task, with particular emphasis on the people affected by the tasks. This reconceptualization, Frost claims, is necessary for achieving “ethical, effective, socially just technical communication” [13, p. 16].

We can use Frost's apparent feminist understanding of the word “efficiency” to critique current practices in TE. Frost warns that the danger of efficiency is that it can easily become so embedded as a cultural value that it is no longer explicitly discussed—the shifting balance of energy expended versus goodness done is not articulated—and it is then a small step to using efficiency to justify racism, sexism, ableism, and other evils. [13, p. 17]

Traditional conceptions of efficiency have led technical editors to become practitioners of exclusion and linguistic oppression. The “correctness” of ASE grammar and mechanics has become naturalized, even when it is not an inherently natural subject. Take, for example, this excerpt from a popular TE textbook.

[Readers] may be impatient with delays and distractions caused by reading. Unnecessary information, difficult words, clumsy sentence patterns, unusual structures or style, missing information, or difficulty in finding information diverts readers from the content and task. [16, p. 19]

Later in the book, the authors reiterate,

When readers encounter variations from established structure, they may become frustrated and also lose confidence in the information. [16, p. 251]

From these two examples, we understand that the objective of a technical editor is to increase the reader's efficient use of a text in the sense that more content can be covered in less time. Efficiency is achieved by conforming to the readers' expectations, recreating existing structures, and not “distracting” the reader with “unusual” forms. This is the kind of efficiency based on energy expended rather than goodness done that Frost critiques. When TE textbooks instruct the reader to “correct” spelling, punctuation, and

grammar, errors and mistakes are those that do not conform to ASE. In this way, efficiency becomes synonymous with singularity. Linguistic singularity can quickly become an example of the “other evils,” comparable to and perhaps part of the racism, sexism, and ableism that Frost describes in her critique of efficiency.

At risk in this ASE hegemony is the potential for linguistic diversity. Gonzalez and Baca make an explicit call for developing cultural and linguistic diversity in online technical communication programs [57]. Although the context of their article is online instruction, the authors highlight how linguistic diversity is and should be considered an asset rather than a challenge to overcome. They call for TPC instructors to teach students to “rhetorically enact their diverse languages and communicative practices for various audiences” rather than rely solely on ASE [49, p. 276–277], and to learn to “liste[n] to, identif[y], and replicat[e] linguistic variation ... rather than adhering to ‘neutral’ or normalized languages” [49, p. 277]. In this way, Gonzalez and Baca have recognized the value that variation rather than singularity holds for our students and the eventual audiences that they write for.

We believe that this concept is fruitful in the context of IEP and call on editors to listen to, identify, and replicate linguistic variation rather than strictly enforcing ASE. Through dialogue, as presented in the previous section, editors can position themselves in a constant state of development, learning from the author about how to identify and replicate the variations in the language that the author is attempting to create. One small yet potentially paradigm-shifting move that technical editors can make is to start the dialogue with this question: What language do you want to base this text on? We have been taught that “correct” language is congruent with ASE but that this is not the only option available. As Gonzalez and Baca assert [49], expanding conversations beyond different named languages (e.g., English, Mandarin, Urdu) and into the nuances and diversity within named languages is a way of bringing race and culture into the picture.

Starting a dialogue with inquiry rather than assumption is a way of destabilizing the authority of hegemonic grammar. Inquiry is curiously respectful where instrumentality is dominantly inflexible; inquiry provides critical power tools [36] to editors to better understand differences and challenge gatekeeping practices, while instrumentality applies norms as rules to regulate writing processes; inquiry contests power in language while instrumentality operationalizes power differentials by rigidly maintaining the hierarchy between editor (who knows best) and writer (who must defer to the editor to get their work out).

To develop diversity in instructors, Gonzalez and Baca suggest professional development that includes translation and bilingual training [49], a suggestion that we also find applicable in the case of IEP. TE should include translation and bilingual training as part of professional development activities. In this way, editors can build competency in identifying and listening to texts written in languages (named or otherwise) that they may be initially unfamiliar with. MMU communities [6] have long been required to become fluent in numerous languages—those of their communities and those of the dominant elite. IEP seeks to shift that necessity of multi/translingualism from the authors to the editors. Once editors have been trained in and practiced identifying and implementing other forms of language, they may be better equipped to advocate for MMU audiences and authors.

By honoring linguistic variation, TE can move away from a technocratic understanding of efficiency toward Frost's apparent feminist understanding of the term, where the "notion of efficiency relies on the existence of diversity for its value" [13, p. 17]. For an inclusive, socially-just paradigm of TE, the current understanding of efficiency, whose overwhelming emphasis is on energy spent, must be challenged.

There is currently a self-perpetuating aspect to the use of ASE in technical documents: technical editors are trained to use ASE exclusively based on the

understanding that one standardized language is easier—more efficient—for readers who are not required to “muddle through” difference; readers then come to expect only ASE, thus justifying the editor's exclusive use of that form. IEP seeks to disrupt this cycle. It seeks to retrain authors, editors, and audiences to value and seek difference rather than conformity. Part of this retraining involves allocating more time for the editing process and integrating editing throughout the development process of the text, starting at the beginning.

Textbooks on TE, including Rude and Eaton [16] and Cunningham, Malone, and Rothschild [17], lament that editing practices are too often relegated to an end-product activity, where editors receive existing documents and a limited timeline for editing. These circumstances discourage dialogue. In other areas of TPC, we can identify where shifts have begun to take place that value the quality of the product over time spent. For example, Colton and Holmes argue that technical communicators should include closed captions as an integral part of video production as an act of social justice [14]. Producing closed captions can be a time-consuming task, but it is one that adds quality and equality to the product. So, too, must TE build equality and equity into its processes. Doing so entails starting a dialogue with editors from the beginning of the drafting process rather than at a back-end checkpoint and incorporating technical editors as collaborators throughout the creation process. In this way, the value of technical editors is relocated from an end-product service to ongoing symbolic-analytic work, as proposed by Johnson-Eilola [50].

Active Equality Through Advocacy

Following Cheek's characterization of neoliberalism as “a socio-political-economic philosophy that subordinates the institutions of government to market forces” [51, p. 8], neoliberal pedagogy in this article may be understood as the cooptation of the

public good that we call education by corporate philosophy and interests. Much of the work featured in Flanagan and Albers' edited collection, for example, couches its exigence in terms of training editors to be better servants to their future corporate employers [40]—a theme that unfortunately runs through too much of higher education. Lang and Palmer explicitly implicate the ineffectiveness of TE courses for not “meet[ing] the marketplace demands for new editing competencies” [42, p. 307].

Perhaps no critical pedagogist's writing about the neoliberal usurpation of higher education is more cited than Henry Giroux, who has made a career of theorizing resistance strategies to the corporate takeover of public education institutions. Giroux writes that

higher education is increasingly defined as an adjunct of corporate power and culture.... No longer vibrant political spheres and ethical sites, public spaces are reduced to dead spaces. [52, p. 55]

We contend that traditional editing pedagogy is rife with neoliberal ideology. Why enforce arbitrary “rules” of language? Why learn “correct” and “incorrect” ways of producing thought through symbolic form? Why do teachers have a responsibility to promote ASE grammatical practices? Too often, the answer to these questions is that educators have a responsibility to inculcate employable skills so that our graduates can obtain and maintain employment. Although we concede that it is ethical to help students navigate an otherwise unjust economic system, how we do so matters. The university should resist, not indulge, its role as a site of corporate power, and on an admittedly small scale, editing educators can aid in such resistance by replacing neoliberal pedagogical justifications and impulses with a practice of active equality.

The linguistic oppression inherent in strict adherence to ASE has been long noted. For example, the Conference on College Composition and Communication's “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” statement, which affirms that students have a

right to use the “dialects in which they find their own identity and style,” was first adopted in 1974, nearly 50 years ago [53]. So although the presence of this injustice has been long acknowledged, large-scale changes in the institutions—whether they are academic, professional, or social—in which technical editors find themselves to structurally affirm the value of linguistic diversity have perhaps yet to occur.

Shelton recognizes how the field of TPC is often in tension between its stated humanistic values and the practical needs of the workforce [54]. Lang and Palmer's argument for TE to teach both fundamental skills (i.e., correct ASE) and multimodal editing because those are the needs of the marketplace demonstrates this tension that leaves linguistic diversity as valuable only insofar as employers value it [42]. This position, in which editors might be able to recognize the injustice of linguistic singularity but are waiting for liberal institutions to validate and distribute justice, can be interpreted as the passive equality described by Colton and Holmes [14].

Drawing on Colton and Holmes's concept of active equality as social justice praxis [14], as well as Shelton's call to shift the TPC field out of neutrality [54], we believe that technical editors should begin verifying the equality and human dignity of both authors and audiences through the practice of TE. Active equality implies that individuals can and should enact socially-just actions that are integral to equality but have not yet been institutionalized. In the context of TE, those actions include centering the experiences of MMU authors and audiences, advocating for MMU communities, and rejecting the hegemony of ASE.

IEP reiterates the claims of Walton et al. [6] that MMU communities and individuals must be intentionally centered in our considerations of equality and equity. The audience is already a key consideration in TE literature. Albers, for example, suggests that human-information interactions, or how people interact with the information in the text, should be the top priority of technical editors and TE

instructors [45]. The focus of editors must be shifted, he claims, from sentence-level comments to editing for the overall content, where the audience's interaction with the text is the main concern. IEP supports this primary concern for the audience and his suggestion that “audience needs should become a staple of the technical communication curriculum” [45, p. 122].

What IEP would contribute to Alber's conclusions, though, is a more nuanced, explicit discussion of who gets included and who gets excluded when performing audience analysis. Albers acknowledges the existence of multiple audiences, but a socially-just approach must go beyond a general acceptance that multiple audiences exist and include intentional conversations about the effects of texts on MMU audiences, even when MMU individuals are not the intended primary audience of the text.

For Jones, focusing on the human experience and humanistic values of TPC means “deconstructing and dismantling hegemonic ideologies” to “remove the objectifying power of the dominant” [15, p. 346]. In this sense, a human focus to TPC, and in this case editing, is inseparable from social justice. Discussions of positionality, privilege, and power must be incorporated into the design and editing of all documents. As Costanza-Chock reminds us, “design always involves centering the desires and needs of some users over others” [55, p. 77], but the choice about which users occupy that privileged space is a political decision, one that should be made intentional and apparent. As technical editors, we must advocate for the desires and needs of MMU audiences to be centered rather than marginalized.

In practice, this means that technical editors should be researching which audiences are privileged and which are underrepresented in any given rhetorical situation. We recognize that this task might be difficult for editors, particularly because the positionality and privilege of the editor might, in some situations, make it difficult to identify structures of power and oppression. To put it in terms of Walton et al. [6], not all

editors will be able to recognize oppression in all situations, let alone reveal, reject, or replace those instances of oppression. For this reason, their call for coalitions is an important and necessary component of IEP.

Coalitions, driven by MMU groups and experiences, can help inform IEP. Coalitional knowledge can help technical editors recognize instances of oppression and determine appropriate responses. Walton et al. describe a coalitional approach that requires those who are not living at the intersections of oppression to approach change-making with humility; to listen more than they speak or lead; and to sometimes divest themselves of self-serving plans, ideas, and ways forward. [6, p. 134]

In this sense, coalitions are based on relationships of humility and caring.

Again, as in ethics of care, individuals, particularly MMU individuals, are centered to ensure that equality and social justice remain constant objectives. Since the summer of 2020, in forums such as the ATTW list-serv, some editors of journals in the field of TPC have made explicit claims to include antiracist and inclusive practices into their publishing practice. This is an important step toward building coalitions for more inclusive TE. But as Colton and Holmes remind us, editors should not wait for changes to institutionalize before enacting social justice [16]; editors should begin practicing IEP.

We would like to concretize this section with an example. We work and study at a predominantly White institution in the western US. In April 2020, as part of our university's response to COVID-19, hand-washing and social distancing instructions were posted on the walls of buildings across campus. These instructions would fall into the criteria for technical communication as described by the STC. Of the four COVID-19 safety-related posters hung around campus, three included images of people or people's skin. In all instances, this skin was White-coded. These included images of hands being

washed, faces expressing symptoms of COVID-19, and hands that belong presumably to a doctor (given the stethoscope and white jacket visible in the image).

When Clem brought the issue up to other graduate students in technical communication, there was an overwhelming opinion that since the majority of students on campus identify as white, this move by the publishers was not only justified but a good example of audience analysis. The IEP, however, helps to expose this situation as an instance of injustice because power relations were not taken into account. While neither of us participated in the design or editing of these texts, our experiences with institutional documents lead us to believe that they went through various levels of “sign off” before being posted. Given this reality, we would propose an IEP approach to creating and editing those documents that approximate the following steps.

1. A system for perpetual and ongoing dialogic communication between editors and authors should be set up at the beginning of the project and maintained throughout the project. We suggest that collaborative project management tools, such as Slack or Discord, may be very helpful in facilitating communication between and beyond the exchanging of drafts. Collaborative writing software should also be leveraged wherever possible because editing and writing are better understood as intertwined and without cleanly distinguishable phases.
2. Potential stakeholders, with a particular emphasis on MMU communities, should be identified alongside mechanisms of accountability for authors and editors. As part of this process, all participants in the writing process must reckon with their own positionalities, biases, privileges, and assumptions that may affect their interactions with a text. Is everyone in the Zoom room White? If so, that fact may conceal injustices such as the overrepresentation of White folks in a technical communication artifact.

3. Disagreements or uncertainties should be approached with a grammar of care and inquiry rather than prescription. For instance, should the drafts of these documents show a repeated representation of White-coded skin to the exclusion of all other skin tones? Taking stock of power means that the editor might prompt the authors to consider the entailments of that choice in the context of historical anti- Blackness and other racial caste systems maintained by White supremacy.
4. Simply instructing the author to change the tones would be counterintuitive to IEP as it would further entrench the power dynamics of editor-as-expert, even if the product was more socially just. Instead, we expect the editors to pull from knowledge built through their participation in coalitions to advocate for MMU audiences—in this case, students of color. They might draw on long-term, mutually beneficial relationships that they have formed with MMU stakeholders in the community, such as the university's multicultural center.
5. It is important at this point to emphasize the dangers of extractive research—that is, research for self-serving purposes (for a more in-depth discussion of extractive design research, refer to Costanza-Chock [55]). We are not suggesting in this example that editors exploit information from entities such as the multicultural center. Rather, we encourage editors to inform themselves by reading scholarships written by MMU individuals and groups and by building meaningful, intersectional, nonextractive coalitions with community partners.
6. Finally, we believe that the role of the editor does not end at publication. Even when we approach editing with the best intentions, there may be unintended consequences of the documents that editors help produce. Perhaps this is the case with the COVID-19 posters that the designers and editors simply did not consider matters of equality thoroughly enough. Wittkower, in a piece on

antidiscriminatory design, describes how even when antidiscriminatory processes are in place, mistakes will be made [56]. The difference, though, lies in how we respond to those mistakes; antidiscriminatory design—or for us, inclusive editing—must respond from a place of deep humility to recognize and revise when mistakes are made.

IEP and the 3Ps

When a technical editor receives a document to edit, the first question they should ask themselves is, *Is this text something that I am supposed to be able to understand or access?* In this way, editors must acknowledge their positionality. To answer this question, technical editors must understand their personal identities (at that exact editing moment). Using dialogue, they must work with the author to understand the specific context in which the text was written: Who, specifically, is the intended audience? What, specifically, is the intended message? Assumptions are not to be made.

The second question that the technical editor should ask themselves is *Why am I being asked to edit this?* This question addresses the privilege of the technical editor. Editing puts a person in a particular position of privilege; they can either confirm or refute the knowledge claims made in the text, as well as the mechanics and language used to make those claims. Who is being asked to do that work? Members of the same community? Outside experts (“experts” in ASE)?

Eaton et al. found that 90% of authors usually follow copyediting comments and 72% usually follow comprehensive editing comments [57, p. 135]. This shows the power that an editor can have over texts. Because of this power, it is important for technical editors to ask a third question before and throughout the editing task: *How can I help ensure that MMU audiences are considered during the editing process?* With this question, we emphasize how editors should make a conscious, critical assessment of the

power associated with the TE position as it relates to the context of the text that they are editing. Inclusion in editing must be centered around the margins, and this means drawing on the strength and knowledge of intersectional coalitions. With these considerations in place, we believe that TE can begin its shift from an exclusive to inclusive practice.

Conclusion

In the last section of their book, Walton et al. [6] present the four Rs. A part of this argument is that not all actors are positioned equally in systems of privilege and power. We recognize that not all practitioners or instructors of TE will be able to reveal, reject, or replace exclusive editing practices. There are innumerable limitations to when and how we can begin dismantling the hegemony of ASE, a fact underlined by our own use of ASE in this article. We do hope, though, that this article presents readers with the opportunity to recognize the discrimination and detriment that noninclusive editing practices can produce. We propose IEP as a starting point in a long-lasting dialogue about how the subfield of TE can become more inclusive and who and what the title “technical editor” can potentially encompass. We encourage stakeholders in TE—practitioners, instructors, researchers, users—to continue this dialogue about the contours of inclusive TE within their own contexts and lived experiences. We particularly wonder about and leave for further investigation the ways in which concepts of rigor potentially impede inclusive practices in TE and whether and how editors might inclusively edit texts outside of their own heritage languages.

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CHAPTER III
TEACHING EDITING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

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Abstract

Responding to calls for an inclusive editing paradigm in the teaching of editing (Clem & Cheek, 2022), the author revised their professional editing course to better align with social justice values. The author describes the revisions that took place in terms of definitions, curriculum, learning objectives, and assignments. Having taught the course in spring 2022, the author performed a content analysis of one of the course assignments where students define technical editing early in the semester and revise their definition at the end of the semester. Results indicate that students' conceptualizations of editing shifted over the semester from copyediting-based definitions to definitions based in editor/author relationships, rhetorical awareness, and substantive editing.

Keywords

Technical editing; teaching editing; definitions of editing; content analysis

Introduction

Editing is one of the core courses in undergraduate technical and professional communication (TPC) curricula (Melonçon & Henschel, 2013). Around 85% of all institutions with a technical communication program offer an editing course, making editing “the most common course across all curricula in the United States” outside of service courses (Melonçon, 2019, p. 185-186). Despite the prevalence of editing courses, scholars have recently recognized issues in the pedagogy and content of these courses, such as a lack of feminist theoretical approaches to editing (Popham, 2019), inadequate teaching of comprehensive editing (Albers, 2019), omitting the topics of ethics, visuals and design, and intercultural concerns in editing (Melonçon, 2019), and not preparing students to edit texts for the usability of international audiences (St.Amant, 2019). In this disciplinary moment of re-evaluating the objectives, content, and pedagogies associated with technical editing (TE), I suggest that we also consider social justice as a core aim of TE courses and build our TE pedagogy accordingly.

While the field of TPC has taken a turn toward social justice (Haas & Eble, 2018; Walton, Moore, & Jones, 2019)—or “how communication... can amplify the agency of oppressed people” (Jones & Walton, 2018)—the subfield of technical editing (TE) is still just beginning to confront issues of social justice and inclusion (Clem & Cheek, 2022). The ideologies currently circulating in TE are the presumed objectivity of editing and instrumentalist expediency based in the linguistic singularity of American Standard English (ASE) (Clem & Cheek, 2022). And yet there is well-established research in TPC refuting that technical communication is ever neutral or objective (Jones, 2016; Jones & Williams, 2018; Shelton, 2020) and valuing the need for diversity and inclusion (Gonzales & Baca, 2017; Jones, Moore, & Walton, 2016; Savage & Matveeva, 2011; Walton et al., 2019). For example, Baker-Bell (2020) describes the anti-Black linguistic

racism that is inherent in ASE, or what she terms White Mainstream English to signal the always, already racialized nature of language standardization. Gonzales (2022) urges TPC scholars to “recognize the embodied nature of language” which makes linguistic diversity such a “critical component” of TPC (p. 12). With this expanding disciplinary focus on social justice and calls for linguistic justice, TPC is well-positioned to apply social justice aims to additional spaces of scholarship and practice, like technical editing.

In this paper, I describe how I revised a course in technical editing to integrate social justice aims. Through these revisions, I shift the curriculum of the editing course from TE’s current core of prescriptive usage rules (Smith, 2020) toward an inclusive editing paradigm (Clem & Cheek, 2022), one that explicitly values social justice and linguistic diversity. I began the revision process by re-defining the term *technical editing* to align with social justice. Using this definition as a guide, I developed the topics and assignments and chose readings for the course. I was interested in determining if and how these definitional and curricular changes would affect students’ understanding of editing. After describing the course, I present the results of a content analysis from one of the course assignments in which students defined and then (potentially) redefined technical editing. After engaging in the social justice-based course, students’ conceptualizations of TE took on a much more nuanced, rhetorical understanding of editing. These results can inform editing instructors as they consider the potential goals and outcomes of their courses.

Revising a Definition of Technical Editing

Many in TPC have recognized how critical and widespread TE is within the field (Flanagan, 2019; Murphy, 2010; Melonçon, 2019), while also acknowledging that it is

under-researched (Albers & Flanagan, 2019b) and overlooked (Howard, 2019), to the point of being “the most underdeveloped subfield of technical communication” (Boettger, 2019, p. 47). Attributing to this underdevelopment is the fact that the term *technical editing* doesn’t have a well-established definition (Flanagan, 2019). As Rude (2009) argues for the case of TPC, defining a field is important for establishing values, purposes, and disciplinary identity. Thus, by clearly defining *technical editing*, we participate in establishing the values, purposes, and identity of that subfield.

Flanagan (2019), in her extensive literature review of technical editing research, determines that there are five types of definitions for the term *technical editing*: (1) technology-based, (2) rhetoric-based, (3) actor- and activity-based, (4) discipline-based, and (5) levels-based. While Flanagan provides the categories and examples, she does not offer a new definition or suggest a preference between existing definitions or category of definitions. Instead, she leaves establishing a preferred definition as an open question for future empirical inquiry (p.39).

Directly connecting the importance of defining TE with the teaching of TE, Melonçon (2019) argues that a clearer definition of TE is crucial for our programmatic and pedagogic aims. Echoing Flanagan, she writes, “It is clear that there is not one “editing,”” but she continues that, “for TPC, we need to advance discussions around what editing does mean and, more importantly, what definitions guide the creation of “editing” courses” (p. 187). Drawing from these sources (i.e., Rude, Flanagan, and Melonçon), I understood that an important first act in revising my technical editing course would be establishing a clear definition of technical editing, a definition that would guide not only my curricular choices but also the values, purposes, and identity of the course.

As Flanagan’s analysis of TE definitions indicates, there are enough existing definitions of the term to warrant categorization, meaning I had many options on where

to start mining definitions. I decided to start with the most recent TE textbooks. The primary audience of TE textbooks is students in technical communication (Cunningham, Malone, and Rothschild, 2020, p. x). Working with a textbook definition was appealing to me because the purpose of textbook definitions is to inform the practice and development of future generations of technical communicators and editors. Definitions proposed in scholarly articles can lead to post-publication discussion, in which the scholarly community debates the merits of proposed definitions. For this reason, I chose to focus on a textbook definition.

Cunningham et al. (2020) is one of the most recent textbooks published on TE. It was published after a noticeable decade since the release of the last edition of the best-selling textbook in technical editing, Rude & Eaton (2010). For these reasons—the recent publication date and the intended audience of the text—I decided that Cunningham et al.’s definition would be a solid place to begin. These authors provide a definition on the topic in the preface of their textbook:

Technical editing... is actually a form of quality assurance that helps ensure that documents in any medium are appropriate for their context and are produced at the highest quality for the lowest cost. (p. ix).

There are a number of parts to this definition. From it, we understand that TE (a) is quality assurance, (b) assures document appropriateness, and (c) is based in principles of market-based production. While there were aspects of this definition that I found useful, namely idea (b) that allows for a great range of tasks that an editor might do given different rhetorical situations, there were other aspects, namely (a) and (c) that I thought could and should be revised to better align with social justice values.

I began revisions with part (a) of Cunningham et al.’s definition. I was concerned that framing editing as quality assurance might downplay the symbolic-analytic work (Johnson-Eilola, 1996) that editors do in making meaning. To revise this part of the

definition, I drew heavily on the work of Slack, Miller, and Doak (1993), who claim that technical communicators are authors, meaning makers, who always, already “facilitate, sustain, generate, and disrupt relations of power” (p. 15). Power is one of Walton, Moore, and Jones’s (2019) 3P’s of social justice work in technical communication; therefore, I thought considerations of power should necessarily comprise part of my revised definition.

Slack et al. (1993) argue that technical communicators are authors, meaning makers, an understanding that I believe can be aptly applied to the context of technical editors as well. In their article, the authors describe two other views of technical communication prior to authorship: transmission and translation. The goal of communication in the transmission view “is to assure that messages are accurately encoded and that they are transmitted with minimal noise over clear channels” (p. 18); meaning is transported from the sender to the receiver, and the editor’s job, then, is to ensure the quality reception of that message. This is the view of communication that I interpret from Cunningham et al.’s definition based in quality assurance and much other scholarship in TE. For example, Rude & Eaton (2011) have a whole section on undesirable document noise, like misspelled words, grammar errors, and inconsistencies, which are “annoying and distracting” for the reader (p. 24-25).

To revise, I replaced Cunningham et al.’s (2020) phrasing that “Technical editing... is actually a form of quality assurance” with “Technical editing is a form of meaning making...” In my revised definition, editors, as authors, move beyond both the transmission view of communication into actors who wield communicative power. This move doesn’t come without repercussions. Slack et al. (1993) warn that recognizing technical communicators as meaning makers—power holders—necessitates an “attention to ethics grounded in an understanding of how power works” (p. 94). In becoming authors, editors become ethically responsible for the texts they produce and the editing

processes in which they participate. My course, then, would need to include training students in how to ethically handle texts and their authors.

The second part of Cunningham et al.'s (2020) definition that I wanted to revise was part (c) “[documents] are produced at the highest quality for the lowest cost” (p. ix). In my opinion, this part of the definition sets editing up as a market-driven endeavor—a production-based task that aims to get the best product for the least amount of money. Framing labor in this way seems like a set up for the exploitation that Walton et al. (2019) warn can and does operate within TPC (p. 27) and is also a prime example of the instrumentalist values of efficiency that are prevalent in TE, as identified by Clem & Cheek (2022). Katz (1992) and Frost (2016) have made very compelling arguments for how market-based understandings of efficiency can be at odds with ethical actions. Frost (2016) specifically indicates how cultural diversity is too often stifled by productivity-based understandings of efficiency (p. 16). For this reason, in revising, I deleted reference to cost-based production for something that I thought might foster more inclusivity; highly influenced by Jones (2016), I added reference to how technical editing should be based in advocacy.

Jones (2016) extends Slack et al.'s (1993) claims to argue that technical communicators are not only authors but advocates, obligated to make positive change in the world (p. 345) by eliminating marginalizing silences and legitimizing non-dominant perspectives (p. 346). To apply Jones's argument to technical editing, I added that editing “advocates for underrepresented audiences and authors.”

Reflecting further upon Jones (2016) and the ways in which editing might facilitate marginalization, I decided to make one final revision to my definition of TE. While I appreciated Cunningham et al.'s (2020) indication that editing should help ensure that documents are “appropriate for their context” (p. ix), I couldn't help but question how appropriateness might be another term, much like efficiency, that can be

used to silence and exclude. I immediately started searching TPC scholarship for descriptions of appropriateness. I started with feminist and critical race scholarship in TPC, most likely because my lived experience has taught me that *appropriate* is a gendered and racialized term, but I didn't find any critical discussions of the word. I found many TPC scholars using the term to describe methods, assessments, contexts, responses, work, etc., but no one defining or examining it the way that other terms like "efficiency" (Katz, 1992; Frost, 2016), and "technology" (Durack, 1997; Haas, 2007) have been interrogated. In fact, Faris & Moore (2016) hedge that terms like "appropriate" are "amorphous, undefined, and possibly even impossible to define given that they play out differently in different contexts" (p. 59).

One very related term that scholars have critiqued, and that has much overlap with the term 'appropriate', is professionalism. Hull, Shelton, and Mckoy (2020) provide three testimonies about their experiences with professional dress in academia as Black women, concluding that the white, Western, heteronormative construct of professionalism "not only colors the academy, but also shapes disciplinary standards in raced and gendered ways" (p. 16). Cox (2019) adds that the field of TPC has associated the term "professional" with "ideas that are objective, neutral, deraced (or white), degendered (or male), and sexualized (or straight)" (p. 8). In these ways, TPC scholars have recognized professionalism as a normative term, one that includes the perceived appropriateness of what academics wear (Hull, Shelton, and Mckoy, 2020) and if and how they come out as LBGT at work (Cox, 2019).

Outside of TPC, there have been more direct inquiries into the connection between appropriateness and identity. Chapell (2006) describes a gendered "logic of appropriateness," in which assumptions about appropriateness are labeled neutral although they are in fact masculine. In relation to race, Sanchez & Chavez (2010) describe how Spanish-speaking Latinos are perceived (both within their community and

out of it) as more “appropriate” candidates for affirmative action than non-Spanish-speaking Latinos, as the former are perceived as having a greater minority status than the latter. While appropriateness is not analyzed directly by these authors, their study clearly implicates appropriateness as a racialized concept. Jones (2016) does not mention the word appropriate in her article, but I believe including in the definition of TE that technical editing must critically examine and expand the meaning of appropriateness in ways that advocate for underrepresented audiences and authors sets the subfield up for the kinds of critical interrogations into power and social justice that Jones calls for.

In revising my editing course, I started by developing a definition of technical editing that aligned with social justice aims. I sought to challenge existing definitions and ideologies in TE, drawing explicitly on existing social justice scholarship in the field. In doing so, I edited Cunningham et al.’s (2020) definition to establish the definition of TE that I used throughout my revised course and curricula:

Technical editing is a form of meaning making that helps ensure that technical documents in any medium are appropriate for their context while critically examining and expanding the meaning of appropriateness in a way that advocates for underrepresented audiences and authors.

This definition establishes that editors are authors, meaning makers, who can and should use the power provided to them through their position as editors to advocate and make space for underrepresented authors and audiences. I designed the revised TE course around the values, purposes, and identity of my definition of TE. For example, ethics takes a center role in the course to prepare students for meaning making and advocacy.

Revising the Content of a Technical Editing Course

To align the teaching of technical editing with social justice, I propose that we necessarily need to shift our understanding of what constitutes the fundamentals of editing. In existing literature, we can find a myriad of references to the foundations, fundamentals, and basics of editing. For example, Rude (2010) writes, “[Students] really have no claim to the title of “editor” if they are not experts on these basics [expertise in grammar and punctuation]. That means not just punctuating and using grammar correctly but knowing why” (p. 58). Here, Rude negates the possibility of students becoming editors if they don’t have a thorough knowledge of grammar and punctuation and the rules underlying their use. Lang & Palmer (2017) reiterate Rude’s claim that the fundamental skills for editors are “not only writing correct, standard, edited English but the ability to articulate and fix errors in said work” (p. 307). Melonçon (2019) writes that one of current strengths of TE pedagogy is teaching editing fundamentals, “[s]pelling, grammar, punctuation, style” (p. 177), although she does hedge that we’ve got too narrow a focus on teaching them (p. 181).

From these examples, we come to understand that the fundamentals of editing are a strong understanding of the grammar and conventions of ASE. Even though some TPC and TE researchers have already suggested that we break from prescriptive ASE usage (Connatser, 2004) and nonessential and fake grammar rules (Weber, 2010), those suggestions are based on an understanding that editors first know the rules of ASE and, thus, know how to break or deviate from those rules intentionally. In this sense, the fundamentals of editing don’t change, in fact they are further solidified. From my perspective, requiring all communities to adopt a singular language for technical communication, a language that is not equally accessible to all communities, exemplifies multiple forms of oppression in TPC as described by Walton et al. (2019). It exemplifies

marginalization by devaluing (and even deeming unemployable) the knowledge expertise of those who do not learn and use ASE, in part by critiquing deviations from ASE as “unprofessional” (Walton et al., 2019, p. 30). Being delegitimized as ‘unprofessional’ is also an example given by Walton et al. (2019) of powerlessness. Finally, establishing ASE, the dominant culture in TE, as the norm by which all correctness is judged is a form of cultural imperialism. As we can recognize from Rude’s (2010) comments about not considering her students ‘editors’, the linguistic singularity imposed in TE through the exclusive use and knowledge of ASE significantly reduces the pool of people who could be considered editors; it is exclusionary. And yet, there is also scholarship in the field that recognized how reframing our methodologies away from exclusion, technical communicators can acknowledge and value that “all individuals have their own diverse technical expertise” (Frost, 2016, p. 15). In reframing the foundations of TE away from the reproduction of ASE and toward the advocacy for underrepresented populations, we might better recognize the technical editing expertise that non-experts of ASE can and do have. In this reframing, ASE becomes just one very common rhetorical option, but, importantly, it ceases to be the *only* option. In providing rhetorical options for students, we can at once provide options for students to prepare for the job market while also teaching them to ask difficult questions and, hopefully, start to shift the hegemony of ASE.

In the remainder of the article, I will present the new foundations that I propose as content for my revised technical editing course. Broadly, the course responds to Clem & Cheek’s (2022) claims that an inclusive editing paradigm is necessary for a social justice approach to teaching editing. I also follow the guidelines of Gonzales and Baca (2017), who call for increased linguistic and cultural diversity in TPC courses. This approach rejects teaching practices and vocabulary that are culturally specific to heritage English speakers in the US and emphasizes how “[r]ather than teaching students to

always adapt their linguistic practice to SWE [standard written English], TPC instructors can benefit from helping students to rhetorically enact their diverse languages and communicative practices for various audiences” (p. 277). In this way, the editing course I’ve designed emphasizes that ASE is only *one* option that technical editors might use, but it is not the *only* option.

ENGL4400: Professional Editing

I taught “ENGL4400: Professional Editing” with a social justice framework as a 15-week course in spring 2022. My institution is a primarily White institution in the western United States. As per department policy, the course is capped at 20 students; 19 students completed the course that semester. ENGL4400 is senior-level, undergraduate course. It is a required course for Technical Communication and Rhetoric (TCR) majors, but also fills university breadth requirements for a communication intense course. Of the students in spring 2022, around a quarter were TCR majors, another half were non-TCR English majors, and the last quarter were non-English majors.

The course is made up of four units: 1) Situating ourselves in TE; 2) Theory and ethics is TE; 3) Comprehensive editing, and; 4) Style. In this section, I provide an overview of each unit and the kinds of topics addressed in that unit. The complete syllabus for the course, complete with assignment descriptions and suggested readings, is available in the Appendix.

Unit 1: Situating ourselves in technical editing (Weeks 1 and 2)

I use this unit to establish students’ prior knowledge and conceptualizations about technical editing and to teach them the technology they will be asked to use to edit texts throughout the semester, namely Microsoft Word and Adobe Acrobat. Albers

(2019) argues that one of the difficulties with teaching comprehensive or higher-level editing is that students can get overwhelmed by the high cognitive load of these tasks and revert back to prior knowledge (p. 124). To be able to formatively assess my students and ensure that they aren't cognitively overloaded, I wanted to start with a sense of what their prior knowledge is to identify if and when they revert back to it. To do this, they begin by writing a definition of the term *technical editing*, and then editing a document with tracked changes on (Changes Reflection 1). With these two assignments, I establish a baseline of how students conceptualize and practice editing.

Unit 2: Theory and ethics in TE (Weeks 3-6)

Amid Melonçon's (2019) critiques of TE pedagogical practices, she expresses concern at the "noticeable omission" of ethics (p. 184). The definition I developed for TE invokes questions of ethics and how prepare students to ethically engage with texts, authors, and audiences, meaning that ethics needed to form a solid base of my course. Popham (2019) also calls for more explicit integration of theory, specifically critical theory like feminist theory, into the teaching of TE. In this unit, we start by interrogating who and what has been involved in ASE's rise to dominance (week 3), the kind of sociohistorical approach to teaching the systemic elements of communication described by Spinuzzi (1996, p. 303) and Savage (2013, p. 12). We then incorporate readings and discussions of critical approaches to theory and how those theory might or could be applied to editing. Since there is little written about critical approaches to editing, this unit is primarily discussion- and imagination-based as we co-create an understanding of what ethical and socially just editing might entail. By week 6, after engaging with and practice the application of these theories, we then analyze what is currently written in TE textbooks about ethics (in this case Rude & Eaton's chapter on ethics) to determine what content the class would add/subtract/edit about that chapter.

Unit 3: Comprehensive Editing (Weeks 7-11)

Albers (2019) argues that comprehensive editing is the most important level of editing because it helps ensure human-information interaction, i.e., it helps readers comprehend texts better. That said, the graduate TE students in his study were only competent in making sentence and paragraph level edits, not comprehensive edits, leading him to the conclusion that TE pedagogy in comprehensive editing is “inadequate” (p. 125). Albers & Marsella (2011) indicate that with instruction, students can effectively change their editing strategy to focus on more comprehensive edits than copyedits, but to do that, they need to learn about and practice effective ways of communicating with the author, particularly through comments. We begin this unit with developing an editing plan, which Rude (2010) identifies as a key step in improving overall edits. From there, we discuss and craft editorial comments and communication strategies between author/editor before moving into content for comprehensive editing suggestions—organization, cohesion, and visual design (a topic that Melonçon [2019] indicates as having too little coverage in current TE pedagogy).

Unit 4: Style (Weeks 12-15)

Melonçon (2019) argues that TE pedagogy has too narrow a focus on copyediting, with an average of 8 weeks spent teaching copyediting and only 3 on comprehensive editing (p.181). In the design of this course, I respond to Melonçon’s call to de-emphasize copyediting. Particularly in the wake of my critique of ASE-centric, neo-liberal definitions and approaches to editing, I had a very hard time deciding if and how much ASE to teach. While Clem & Cheek (2022) have denounced the neoliberal ideologies that insist TE course content should be driven by the needs of the market, I can also recognize that my students have a need for economic stability and employability. I was

finally swayed by Brimm's (2020) argument that workforce preparation can be productive even within a counter-hegemonic pedagogy. Brimm insists that because instructors are employees and "are our institutions" (p. 95), we can model for students the tension of participating within an oppressive institution while simultaneously critiquing that institution and advocating for alternatives. In this way, we can prepare students to get jobs but also provide them with the critical tool set to recognize, reveal, reject, and replace injustices and oppression within their professions.

This unit allows some opportunity for students to learn and practice ASE grammar and mechanics, while also providing them with the choice on whether or not and to what extent to do so. Shapiro, Cox, Shuck, & Simnitt (2016) developed a 'teaching for agency' framework that emphasizes the need for students to not only have choices in the classroom but also have an active awareness of the choices available to them. In this way, the authors argue, instructors and programs can shift from passively appreciating the linguistic diversity to actively empowering students with the agency to control "how they position themselves in a text and in the wider community" (p. 48). That is my intention with this unit. The readings are fairly prescriptive, but at that point in the semester the students have the vocabulary from previous units within which to analyze and ultimately determine what to do with the information presented in the sources.

Assignments

All of the assignments in this course are reflective in nature. There is strong evidence in the scholarship of teaching and learning about the effectiveness of reflective assignments for facilitating and deepening student learning (Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, & Norman, 2010; Yancey, 2016). Specific to the context of TE pedagogy, Melonçon (2019) affirms the importance of metacognitive work for facilitating students' knowledge transfer to different contexts, a skill she argues is vital for all technical

communicators (p. 179). Jones & Walton (2018) add that the reflexivity in the TPC classroom (particularly the reflection inherent in personal narrative) is necessary for students to be able to engage meaningfully in issues of social justice. Melonçon (2019) indicates that metacognitive work is already a frequently used *supplemental part* of TE coursework (p. 179). In my course, I move away from the grammar, spelling, and punctuation quizzes found in *all* 86 TE courses included in Melonçon's (2019) study, and base the grade of the course exclusively on reflective assignments. This move aligns with my teaching philosophy and the values of social justice pedagogies in TPC (Medina & Walker, 2018), which work to destabilize existing power and privilege relations in the classroom. I complete list of assignment descriptions can be found in the Appendix.

Impact of course on students' definitions of editing

To identify if my social justice-based curriculum had an impact on how students define and conceptualize editing, I intentionally created two assignments: "Definitions of TE" and "Revised Definitions of TE." In week 2, I asked students to "In no more than 3 sentences, write a definition for technical editing." I gave them resources on how to write an effective definition, but I asked them specifically to not refer other sources before writing their definitions—their definitions should be a reflection of their own current understanding of the term. Then, at the end of the course, in week 15, I asked students to revisit their original definitions. In the "Revised Definitions of TE" assignment, students were given the opportunity to revise their original definitions of TE, providing a 1-paragraph reflection about what they chose to revise, what they didn't, and why. Students were not required to revise their definitions to receive full credit, but they were asked to indicate why they didn't change anything in their reflection.

Through the Defining TE assignments, students tracked changes (or lack of changes) to the definitions of technical editing that they wrote during the first weeks of class, prior to engaging in course content. In compliance with my university's institutional review board protocol (#13100), once the course was completed and grades submitted, I had data from the students' "Revised Definitions of TE" assignment pulled and de-identified. Then, following Gibbs's (2018) proposed process for line-by-line thematically coding and categorizing of written texts, I completed three rounds of coding, moving from descriptive to analytic codes of the original and revised definitions.

Codes for TE definitions, original and revised

Of the 17 students who completed the "Revised Definitions of TE" assignment, 16 decided to revise their original definition. The one person who decided not to revise indicated in their reflection that though their understanding of the topic had evolved over the semester, their original definition was broad enough to encompass those shifts.

In their original definitions, 13 students made explicit mention of copyediting or grammar correction being a main role of technical editing. Seven of those students kept their original reference to copyediting in their revised definitions. Two students added a hedge to their reference to copyediting, indicating that copyediting is only "sometimes" or "potentially" a part of technical editing. Importantly, this is the only category of codes that decreased in instances between the originals and the revisions: two students completely removed their previous mention of copyediting; two students removed references to "identifying errors" and "correcting problems", which they elaborated in their reflections related to copyediting; and one student removed their previous indication that copyediting was the *only* task of technical editing, emphasizing instead

that it is only one of many tasks. After the revisions, nine students had a direct reference to copyediting in their definitions of TE, four fewer than the 13 original references.

Compared to copyediting, fewer students (8) started with a reference to substantive editing in their original definitions of TE. After revisions, though, the instances of substantive edit outnumbered those of copyediting 11 to 9. Reference to substantive editing was tied with advocacy of author and audience awareness for most instances in the revised definitions, all with 11 students including those codes as some part of their revised definition.

The biggest change between original and revised definitions were the “advocacy for the author” code, which went from 0 to 11 instances, “audience awareness”, which went from 1 to 11 instances, and “communication/relationship with the author”, which went from 0 to 7 instances. These large gaps between original and revised definitions can indicate where the majority of the class shifted most greatly in their understanding of TE. Close behind these three codes were “expanded considerations of text (not just written documents)” and “rhetorical situation”, which both increased instances by six between the original and revised definitions (2 to 8 and 1 to 7 instances, respectively).

The rest of the codes had few instances, but included “suggesting changes rather than making changes” (1 original instance; 5 revised instances), “developing ideas” (0 original instances; 3 revised instances), “design/visual aspects” (2 original instances; 4 revised instances), “advocacy of audience” (0 original instances; 2 revised instances; “accessibility” (0 original instances; 2 revised instances); “ethics” (2 original instances; 4 revised instances), and “considerations of underrepresented identities; i.e., race, gender, sexuality” (0 original instances; 1 revised instances). While these codes didn’t have many instances, they do represent parts of the learning objective or values used to develop the course and, as such, were useful to track. A summary of changes in code instances from the original to revised definitions can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Instance of codes in original and revised definitions of ‘technical editing.’

Code	Instances in original definition	Instances in revised definition	Difference
Copyediting/grammar correction	13	9	-4
Substantive editing	8	11	+3
Advocacy for the author	0	11	+11
Author awareness	1	11	+10
Communication/relationship with the author	0	7	+7
Expanded considerations of text (not just written documents)	2	8	+6
Rhetorical situation	1	7	+6
Suggesting changes rather than making changes	1	5	+4
Developing ideas	0	3	+3
Design/visual aspects	2	4	+2
Advocacy of audience	0	2	+2
Accessibility	0	2	+2
Ethics	0	1	+1
Considerations of underrepresented identity	0	1	+1

Students’ revised understanding of TE

The assignment prompted students to provide a paragraph-long reflection indicating what they changed, what they didn’t change, and—most importantly—why they did/not make those changes. I triangulated the results of the definitions codes with themes present in the reflections. From this analysis, I have categorized three strong themes of how students defined and conceptualized editing at the end of the course.

1. Effective editors co-create expertise and understanding with authors.
2. Effective editing is based on a strong rhetorical awareness.
3. Effective editing focuses on the text as a whole, rather than focusing solely on grammar.

In the following sections, I describe each theme in more detail and reference data from codes and reflections to illustrate each point.

Effective editors co-create expertise and understanding with authors. For the majority of the students, the relationship between the editor and the author was the biggest shift in understanding editing that they made. “Advocating for the author” was tied for the highest number of instances in revisions and represented the biggest increase from original to revised definitions. The third most increased code was “communication/relationship with author.” These large increases indicate that students hadn’t previously considered communication and relationships with authors as a key part of editing but came to such an understanding by engaging in the course content.

One of the other codes that aligns with this theme is that editors should suggest changes to a text rather than make direct changes. In this way, the role of editor shifts from one of fixing and correcting, where language authority and expertise lies with the editor, to one of collaboration and providing guidance. Referring to why they changed their definition to include editors suggesting rather than making edits, one student wrote,

[U]ltimately the author decided if they accept or reject those changes... I think that the changes in my definition highlight the idea that an editor is only offering some guidance to the author about changes that would help them reach the audience they want to.

In this reflection, the student indicates that power ultimately lies with the author, whereas the editor becomes a guide or rhetorical mentor in the writing process. Another student acknowledges directly how editors cease to be the ultimate language authority in their revised definition of TE: “It’s important to clarify that the changes that technical editors suggest are not absolute because technical editors are not objectively more knowledgeable on an author’s paper than the author.” This student set expertise squarely in the realm of the author rather than the editor. With these shifts in knowledge and authority, editors take on the role of collaborators and guides rather than policers of language. In fact, as one student points out, focusing too heavily on fixing and correcting can alienate the author/editor relationship, which is so central to their revised definitions of TE: “An editor should not make a writer feel as if their work needs to be constantly fixed. Instead, an editor should help an author express themselves in the most effective way possible.”

Effective editing is based on a strong rhetorical awareness. As previewed from the students’ reflections in the previous section, the objective of working so closely with and for the author was often so that the resulting text could be more effective in the given rhetorical situation. Behind “advocating for the author,” the “audience awareness” code had second highest increase in instances. With that increase, this code was tied for the highest number of instances, or one of the most common features of the students’ definitions. There were an additional three definitions that included reference to rhetorical situations; we can understand audience awareness to be an integral part of a rhetorical situation. Combining these two codes would mean that rhetorical awareness was the most common feature of the student definitions, with 14 of 17 students making specific reference to rhetorical awareness in their revised definitions.

In their reflections, students referred to rhetorical awareness as “critical to being able to properly edit” and “one of the most important parts of editing.” One student

describes how deeply entrenched an editor is in the rhetorical situation of a text, whereby an effective editor serves as a *bridge* between author and audience:

I added a sentence to clarify the role of the editor as a bridge between writer and audience. The sentence contains emphasis of the responsibility of the editor to not alter the message of the author but also to communicate clearly. By leaving the author's message in a confusing form, the editor fails the audience; by completely altering the author's message for the sake of the audience, the editor fails the author.

This reflection recognizes the role of editors to represent not only for the author—as mentioned in the first theme—but also to represent the audience. Only through a solid understanding of the author's message and the audience's needs can an editor achieve the role of effective bridge and, thus, effective editing.

This newfound rhetorical understanding of editing became, along with author relationships and substantive editing, a foundation of the students' definitions of TE. Importantly, and as I will describe in greater detail in the next theme, rhetorical awareness became more important for students than copyediting, and even influenced how students conceptualized copyediting. Of the four students who removed reference to copyediting in their revised definitions, all of them added reference to audience awareness and three of them added reference to rhetorical situations. One student summarized their shift in editing emphasis: "Instead of making a document grammatically correct, the editor's focus should be on making the document easily understandable for its audience." This student redirects their original focus on copyediting toward audience awareness and more substantive editing, the topic of the last theme.

Effective editing focuses on the text as a whole rather than focusing solely on grammar.

There is much overlap between this theme and the previous two themes, but there were

so many reflections that related specifically to a shift away from ASE and toward substantive editing that it warranted a separate theme. From the codes, substantive editing was one of the three most common references in the students' definitions. While copyediting maintained one of the highest instances among codes, it was dethroned as the prominent point of reference, giving way to substantive editing, author relationships, and rhetorical understanding. That said, it's important to recognize that students didn't completely write off the importance of grammar and copyediting. Rather, their understanding of copyediting shifted from a perspective of correctness toward a rhetorical understanding of how grammar and mechanics can and do play a role in crafting texts that are appropriate for the particular author, audience, and purpose in which that text exists. For example, in recognizing how grammar can be manipulated rather than being simply correct or incorrect, one student commented, "[the class readings] showed me that grammar and punctuation have a similar purpose to editors themselves, to manipulate language to provide a variety of meanings." In this reflection, we understand that rather than policing language, editors manipulate it to better serve the purpose of the text.

Some of the reflections indicated how the students moved away from ASE and grammatical correctness and toward a more nuanced understanding of how ASE has become culturally situated to equate with correctness. Commenting on the subjectivity of language, one student wrote, "Especially regarding those who do not use SAE, it's important to recognize when a grammatical change is subjective, and it's easy to get caught up in a mindset of prescriptive SAE editing when tackling a work without first looking at the larger picture." In this case, the student shifts their understanding from objective ASE toward a more wholistic understanding of a text and its language usage. Another student makes specific reference to how grammar and correctness are culturally situated:

My original definition of TE was more a definition of copyediting. I took out “the correcting of improper speech” because what is improper speech when speaking in general terms? I feel that, like our discussions of unjust revisions/feminist theory/etc., saying “improper speech” conveys a strict message that should be avoided in culturally aware, respectful editing.

From these reflections, we can recognize how students have complicated their understanding of grammar and copyediting. By the end of the semester, students have not disregarded copyediting and grammar as useless or unimportant. Rather, they have situated grammar as only one part of the larger rhetorical situation of a text.

Conclusions

As instructors of technical editing consider pedagogical reforms to strengthen their curriculum and pedagogical aims, I propose that incorporating social justice as part of these reforms can have meaningful impacts on the future of the field. To align with my personal and pedagogical values, I redesigned a senior-level professional editing course around an inclusive editing paradigm (Clem & Cheek, 2022). Comparing student-written definitions of the term *technical editing* from week 1 and week 15 of the course, I determined that there were significant shifts in how students defined and conceptualized technical editing after engaging in the course. Their original definitions focused almost exclusively on copyediting and grammar, though about half of the students also mentioned substantive editing. In their revised definitions of TE, written at the end of the course, copyediting became a lesser consideration, topped by relationships with authors, rhetorical awareness, and substantive editing. These results align with Albers & Marsella’s (2011) findings that students can be effectively taught comprehensive editing

skills when shifting the focus of TE curriculum and Moeggenberg et al.'s (2022) conclusion that comprehensive editing skills can help students enact more inclusivity.

To begin redesigning my course, I first developed a definition of TE that I used to guide the values and curricular decisions of the course. The definition I propose in this article is admittedly broad. I made this move specifically to make space for myriad of individual and rhetorical contexts in which editing can and does occur. I invite other teachers, scholars, and practitioners of editing to add to and revise my proposed definition according to their own understanding and personal experience with editing.

Something that was particularly important for me was to have a definition of editing that includes specific reference to advocating for underrepresented populations. While I do believe that the three themes in student definitions--effective editors share expertise and authority with authors, effective editing is based on a strong rhetorical awareness, and effective editing focuses on the text as a whole, rather than focusing solely on grammar--indicate an important shift toward a more inclusive paradigm of technical editing, they also did not include much reference to advocating for underrepresented populations. In that way, I feel that my objective of having students gain a specifically social justice conceptualization of editing was not successful. Advocacy and conversations of underrepresented populations were the main focus of the first half of class, but I can recognize that they may need to center more explicitly and more frequently in the latter two units if students are to consider these aspects more thoroughly in their definitions of the term. I also recognize that as an assignment turned in for a class grade, students may have responded with what they thought I wanted to read.

While considering those limitations, it's important to recognize that my course was designed from a new and innovative understanding of what technical editing is and what it can be. My focus on ethics, theory, and comprehensive editing stood in sharp

contrast with what students originally understood editing to entail and can be used by other instructors in other institutions. Within that context, I feel satisfied with the students' end-of-semester understandings. As I continue the work of revising my course, I hope that other instructors and practitioners of technical editing can add to this conversation of how to better incorporate social justice into our learning and understanding of this important subfield. By teaching students the importance of linguistic justice and diversity through editing, we can work to develop more inclusive foundations of editing.

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Appendix: Course Syllabus

English 4400: Professional Editing

Course Overview

In this course, we will work together to revise our understanding of editing. To start, we will consider the context in which editing currently exists and how it came to exist there: What existing assumptions do we have about what editing is and what editors do? How have we come to form those assumptions? What role do language, knowledge, and power play in those assumptions? From there, we move from what is toward what could be by engaging in critical frameworks and theories that can inform our conceptualizations of editing. With these theoretical frameworks in mind, we then begin to analyze texts to determine how changes to the structure and language of the text might affect the intended audience(s), the author(s), and the editor(s) themselves. While analyzing the texts, we consider the best methods for creating dialogue between the audience(s), author(s), and editors(s) through the editorial comments we make and the texts we help create.

Course Objectives

Upon completion of the course, students should be able to

- Assess the ethical and social justice implications of editing and adapt editing techniques in light of those implications.
- Analyze the rhetorical situation surrounding a given text and create editing priorities and objectives based on that situation.
- Determine the most appropriate methods for communicating with authors and suggesting revisions.

Required Text & Materials

All texts and materials for this course are open educational resources (OER), meaning that they are available for free either through the Canvas course or through the [institution's] e-library. We will be using Microsoft Word and Adobe Acrobat to make edits on texts and documents. This software is available for you to download to a personal computer for free as a student at [institution]. This link takes you to the Adobe request form. All computers in [this institution's] computer labs, including the English department computer lab, come equipped with Word and Acrobat.

Assignment Descriptions

Defining TE (2 assignments; 5% of final grade) The first week of class, before engaging in others' definitions of TE, you will write a definition of "technical editing". Your definition should include the purpose, tasks, and skills of technical editing. At the end of the course, you will revisit your preliminary definition of technical editing and revise it. You will submit your revised definition along with a 1-2 paragraph reflection that describes what changes you did or did not make and *why* you did or did not make those changes.

Changes Reflections (4 assignments; 30% of final grade): At the end of each unit, you will find your own or be given a text and asked to edit it. Using the skills, tools, and understanding that you've developed during the unit, you will edit the document, tracking each of the changes you make to the document. Each change should be accompanied by a short comment that indicates why you made the change you did. You will also make a 2-paragraph or 2–3-minute audio or video reflection describing what changes you made to the document and why. The reflection must begin with a description of the rhetorical situation surrounding the editing act—who is the author, what is the author's purpose and message, who is the intended audience, and what is

your role as editor. You will turn in both the document with tracked changes and the reflection.

Week in Review (10 assignments; 45% of final grade): Each week, you'll complete a "week in review" assignment. These assignments are designed to help me track your learning in the course as well as to check in with you. We will decide as a class the day/time for these weekly submissions. Week in review assignments will typically ask you to reflect on that week's readings/assignments or delve deeper into a topic from class discussion. There will be a week in review assignment every week except the weeks that you have a changes reflection assignment (weeks 2, 6, 10, and 15).

Learning Circles (5 assignments; 20% of final grade): Early in the semester, you will submit your preferences for a book related to technical editing. Students will be put in groups of 3-4, and each group will read a different book. Your group will meet four times to discuss the content of your book. As a group, you will decide how to divide the content on the book into four meetings, assigning yourselves a certain amount of reading in a given period and assigning roles for each person for each meeting. The roles are:

1. **Discussion Leader:** Your job is to develop a list of questions that your group might want to discuss about this part of the book.
2. **Summarizer/Reporter:** Your job is to prepare a summary of the session, highlighting the group's discussion and conveying the key points, main highlights, and the "essence" of that session's reading. Your notes will be uploaded to Canvas as evidence of progress in your group. No specific format is required for your submission.
3. **Connector:** Your job is to connect content from the book to other content, readings, and discussions from our class. How does this source support/challenge other claims that we've encountered in class?

Roles must change every meeting. The reporter for each session will upload their notes to Canvas. In week 13, the group will make a 5–7-minute presentation of the 3 most important takeaways of the book and how those takeaways relate to the rest of the course.

The book options for this course will be determined by the interests of the students and the availability of OER material from the library.

Schedule with Readings and Assignments

Unit 1: Situating ourselves in technical editing

Week 1: Defining TE

- Readings: Kreth & Bowen, 2017
- Assignments: Week in review 1

Week 2: Tools and technology in TE

- Readings: Track changes in Word 2) Getting started with Acrobat
- Assignments: TE definition; Changes reflection 1 (diagnostic)

Unit 2: Theory and ethics in TE

Week 3: ASE and the standardization of language

- Readings: “Normative linguistics and text quality”, Van de Poel, Carstens, & Linnegar, 2012; “Language”, hooks, 1994.
- Assignments: Week in review 3

Week 4: Rhetorical theory

- Readings: “Understanding the rhetorical situation”, Cunningham et al., 2020; Lyons, 2000.
- Assignments: Week in review 4; Learning circle summary 1

Week 5: Feminist theory

- Readings: Popham, 2019
- Assignments: Week in review 5

Week 6: Social justice theory

- Readings: Clem & Cheek, (2022); “Ethics”, Rude & Eaton, 2010.
- Assignments: Changes reflection 2

Unit 3: Comprehensive Editing

Week 7: Evaluating the document

- Readings: “Comprehensive editing: Definition and process”, Rude & Eaton, 2010,
- Assignments: Week in review 7; Learning circle summary 2

Week 8: Communicating with authors

- Readings: Mackiewicz & Riley, 2003; Sommers, 1982
- Assignments: Week in review 8

Week 9: Editing for organization

- Readings: “Editing for Organization”, Cunningham et al., 2020
- Assignments: Week in review 9; Learning circle summary 3

Week 10: Editing for visual design

- Readings: “Chapter 1: How to think about editing” and “Chapter 2 “Editing for Readers”, White & White, 2020.
- Assignments: Week in review 10

Week 11: Cohesion

- Readings: “Cohesion”, Kolln, (1999)
- Assignments: Changes Reflection 3

Unit 4: Style

Week 12: Clarity

- Readings: Pick your own two chapters from the “Clarity” section in Hacker & Sommers, 2020
- Assignments: Week in review 12; Learning circle summary 2

Week 13: Style

- Readings: Pick any two readings (Clarity, Grammar, Punctuation, Mechanics, or Research) from Hacker & Sommers, 2020 that you haven’t read yet.
- Assignments: Week in review 13; Learning circle presentations

Week 14: Style

- Readings: Pick any two readings from Hacker & Sommers, 2020 that you haven’t read yet.
- Assignments: Week in review 14

Week 15: Reflection

- Readings: None
- Assignments: Revised definition of TE; Changes reflection 4

CHAPTER IV
CULTIVATING ETHICS IN THE PEER REVIEW PROCESS

Status: Published

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Abstract

After describing the content and implementation of an anti-racist scholarly review training informed by recent scholarship in technical communication (TC), the authors reflect on an unanticipated outcome of that training: a participant using language from the training in an attempt to silence an author they were reviewing. We analyze this experience through a framework of modern virtue ethics scholarship and explore ways to cultivate more ethical peer review practices. Drawing upon elements of ethical self-cultivation articulated by Vallor, we use concepts of moral habituation, relational understanding, and reflective self-examination to understand how to cultivate more ethical, reflexive peer review processes.

CCS CONCEPTS • Social and professional topics → User characteristics; Race and ethnicity.

Additional Keywords and Phrases: peer review, virtue ethics, anti-racist design, academic publishing

Introduction

The social justice turn in technical communication (TC) frames the problem of injustice as a technical communication problem and invites TC scholars, practitioners, and teachers alike to collaboratively develop solutions to that problem [1]. One specific context that has received growing attention in TC for its potential to exclude certain knowledges and knowledge-makers is scholarly peer review.

There is a growing body of literature in TC that outlines how scholarly review can be and often is exclusionary and suggests approaches to more equity-based practices [2-5]. In 2021, 19 TC scholars collaborated to develop *Anti-Racist scholarly reviewing practices: A heuristic for editors, reviewers, and authors* (hereafter, ARSRP) [3], which acknowledged the existing exclusionary and oppressive philosophies and practices of reviewing in the field of TC. These philosophies and practices can reinforce white, dominant, and patriarchal norms by gatekeeping dominant norms; shielding racist behavior through anonymity; and exploiting the labor of Black, Indigenous, and scholars of color [3]. In this document, the authors provided a heuristic for editors, reviewers, and authors to re-imagine themselves participating in a system of inclusivity rather than gatekeeping. ARSRP complements Alexander et al.'s [2] SKK framework that effective peer review is specific, knowledgeable, and kind, though ARSRP added explicit calls to center anti-racism. Also early in 2021, the editors of publications in TC released a statement, #InclusiveTPC, committing their publications to the work of anti-racist and inclusive practices. One of the approaches indicated in the document for increasing inclusion in TC publications is “revising review guidelines” [6]. From the language and publication dates of this scholarship, we understand that inclusive scholarly review practices are a current priority for the field of TC.

ARSRP and the SKK framework provided important, foundational concepts and practices for more inclusive peer review. This paper builds on that work by applying those frameworks and reflecting on the effects of that application. We begin by describing an anti-racist scholarly review training that was developed using the ARSRP and SKK framework as guides. From there, we identify one potential drawback of the training: as inclusive peer review processes are still budding, we, as a field, have yet to cultivate a shared understanding and ethics of those processes. While there are many ways in which this understanding might be cultivated, in this paper, we suggest that Vallor's [7] framing of virtue ethics, including moral habituation, relational understanding, and reflective self-examination, can help us better understand how to cultivate more ethical, reflexive peer review processes that center anti-racism and inclusion.

Description of the Anti-racist Scholarly Review Workshop

As a graduate student in TC, Sam researches approaches for making technical editing more inclusive to alternative knowledges and knowledge-makers. When they were asked to edit a collection on graduate student instruction, they wanted to implement the approaches to inclusive and anti-racist editing and peer review described in scholarship like [8], [2], and [3]. The edited collection was to be written for and by graduate student instructors, so the peer reviewers were also graduate student instructors. Recognizing that most graduate students never receive formal training in peer review [9] and wanting to make the peer review process of their book explicitly and intentionally anti-racist, Sam decided to host a workshop that presented anti-racist scholarly review strategies and gave participants an opportunity to practice those strategies with peers. The event was sponsored by the center for teaching and learning at

the authors' institution. Graduate students on the center's listserv were invited, along with the peer reviewers from Sam's edited collection, though participation was completely voluntary. The one-hour workshop was hosted virtually over Zoom during the first week of December, 2021. There were 17 participants, of which three served as reviewers of Sam's edited collection.

Content of the Workshop

In November 2021, Sam met with the editor-in-chief and managing editor of *Technical Communication Quarterly* (TCQ) to brainstorm content for the workshop. During this meeting, we drew heavily from ARSRP [3]. This meeting greatly informed the content and organization of the workshop, as described below.

After introductions, there were five minutes of group discussion around the prompt: "Think of a time when you were assessed or evaluated by another person (e.g., peer review, performance evaluation at work, test, dissertation/thesis defense, annual review). Broadly, what kind of feedback or comments were most useful? What kind was the most painful or difficult to receive?" This activity served not only to get participants interacting with each other but also to frame them as always, already experts on the topic, valuing their previous lived experiences as knowledge.

Next, Sam presented a summary and graphic of the SKK model of peer review outlined by Alexander et al [2]. The best practices presented were to be specific (by giving detailed, actionable comments and prioritizing coherence over copy editing); knowledgeable (by becoming familiar with the journal and looking for gaps in literature, especially by underrepresented scholars); and kind (by interpreting the role of the review as a mentor, advocating for the author, and making suggestions for greater inclusivity).

One of the main concerns identified by the editor and managing editor of TCQ with the peer reviews they receive is that there is an overemphasis on minute details and

copyediting and not enough emphasis on broader ideas and content of the paper. They believed that training reviewers to focus on cohesion might help move reviewers toward more comprehensive editing. This suggestion aligns with calls in technical editing literature for increased focus and training in global-level (rather than sentence or paragraph-level) problems that can impair how users interact with and comprehend texts. In the next activity, participants were prompted to question if the different sections of an article inform one another by skimming the introduction, conclusion, methods, and headings/subheadings. Sam modelled the processes of reviewing for coherence using a full-length article and the participants practiced the same technique on another full-length article.

In the next activity, participants applied the SKK framework to revise review comments to be more specific, knowledgeable, and/or kind. All of the comments related to the article they had just reviewed for coherence. All of the example comments were provided in a Google doc, and participants added their revised comments below each example. After 10 minutes of revising comments, as a group, we read through each original comment and the revised comments to identify trends in the revisions and discuss what reviewers hoped to achieve through their revisions.

Next, participants were presented with point A from ARSRP: “Recognize a range of expertise and encourage citations practices that represent diverse canons, epistemological foundations, and ways of knowing” [3]. Sam summarized the practices from this heuristic point as reviewers must (1) recognize that citation practices are political, (2) recommend relevant work by underrepresented scholars, (3) interrogate existing canons and recognize why they might be purposefully uncited, (4) respect lived experience as expertise, and (5) reimagine the field beyond your perspective and beyond what might currently exist. At this point, Sam emphasized that the responsibility of the participants as anti-racist scholars is to be/come familiar with underrepresented

scholars and knowledges in their respective fields; that is not work that a workshop can do for them.

After establishing the reviewers' responsibility in anti-racist practices, the next activity invited participants to think critically about how to apply that understanding in a tricky situation. Participants discussed what they would do if they recognized that an author was citing marginalized or underrepresented (MMU) scholars, but doing so through string citations without actively engaging in the MMU scholars' research. With this activity, participants recognize the slippery nature of anti-racist work, in which simply citing underrepresented scholars isn't the only consideration—reviewers must also consider how those scholars are being cited [11].

The workshop ended with a list of suggestions and suggested resources for reviewers to continue informing and supporting themselves in the practice of anti-racist scholarly review. These suggestions included findings and engaging in scholarship by MMU scholars; establishing coalitions of support at different levels of power [1]; reflecting on their current citation practices; and creating systems of accountability. During this part of the workshop, participants were encouraged to share ways in which they have or could strengthen their practice of anti-racist reviewing.

Benefits and Drawbacks of the Anti-racist Reviewer Training

While the remainder of this paper analyzes the specific context of a drawback of this training, and offers a possible framework for addressing this drawback, we want to pause here to recognize the vast importance of developing, implementing, and evaluating resources and training in anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices. We have provided the previous description of Sam's training as one way to enact and apply the anti-racist and social justice frameworks that many TC scholars have already developed and continue to

develop. We call on others in the field to continue the work of making sense of and applying SKK and anti-racist scholarly review practices within the specific contexts and contours of their institutions and communities.

In this case, Sam was uniquely situated as both the facilitator of the anti-racist reviewer trainer and the editor of a book for which a number of the training participants served as scholarly reviewers. This position provided Sam with a perspective on how the reviewers who participated in the training transferred the skills from the training into their reviews. While this paper is not a systematic investigation of the impacts of anti-racist reviewer training on reviewer feedback (though this training was a pilot for just such a study), there was one unexpected result of the experience that led the authors to reflect seriously on the meaning and impact of the training: one participant used the specific language presented in the training to silence the voice of an author in their review for Sam's edited collection. Reviewing a text of 5,000 words, the reviewer wrote over 4,000 words in comments to the author and over 1,400 words of summary in the reviewer recommendation document, often explaining the rationale for such thoroughness as trying to be specific enough for the author to make necessary revisions. This practice aligns well with the SKK framework, which emphasizes specific, actionable feedback, but we are concerned with the labor that 5,500 words of feedback suggests and that the quantity of feedback surpassed the length of the original text.

The extensive critical feedback—feedback the authors would not label 'kind'—was often framed by the reviewer as an act of kindness, relating to the author that the reviewer was indicating any and all perceived flaws in order to help the author. In relation to coherence, the reviewer gave a number of suggestions about organization, but these suggestions were to delay or downplay evidence of lived experience to center more 'valid' evidence. In this sense, the reviewer seemed to have considered the importance of coherence but was not yet ready to accept some of the tenets of ARSRP point A to respect

lived experience as expertise [3]. In these ways—by overpowering the author’s voice through more feedback than the original text, by framing potentially harmful critiques as long-term kindness, and by using coherence to marginalize the author’s lived experience as a scholar of color—the reviewer applied the content of the training in such a way as to silence the original author.

After reflecting on this problematic review, Sam, who had never edited a book before, was at a loss about what to do. Subpoint of B in ARSRP [3] indicated that “Editors...intervene before sending potential traumatic reviews to authors” (p. 8). Sam believed that sending the review as it was could be harmful to the original author and, thus, felt that some kind of intervention was necessary. As their usual course of action, Sam brought the case up with their PhD cohort for brainstorming and advice. We talked through many options, including sending the chapter to a different reviewer. While each option had merits, Sam decided to summarize some points of the reviewers’ comments in their own words, and only the summaries were sent to the original author of the text. In this way, Sam believed they were mitigating harm to the author, respecting the effort and concerns of the reviewer, and keeping within the book’s publishing timeline.

During this informal meeting, fellow PhD student Rachel indicated the potential for a virtue ethics framework to make sense of the experience and to suggest possible directions for future trainings and interactions with reviewers. While other frameworks could also be applied, one benefit of a virtue ethics lens is that it considers definitions and behaviors of commonly valued virtues, such as kindness, that people may not interpret or enact in the same way. Importantly, virtue ethics emphasizes the key role of learning and practice in developing the types of virtues valued by humans across cultures—things like honesty, fairness, compassion, and more. When applied to peer review practices, virtue ethics can help ground behavior as a reflection of the kinds of traits we do (and ought to) value in academic editing and publishing: inquiry, dialogue,

and kindness. What follows is an overview of how a virtue ethics framework can open up spaces to reassess current practices and enact more inclusive ones.

Virtue ethics

Description of Framework

Technical communicators have long attended to questions of ethics in the field. Katz's [12] landmark essay about the ethic of expediency in the Holocaust defined ethics as "human character manifested in behavior" (p. 260). In exploring devastating examples about how plainly written, efficient technical communication can be used to expedite genocide, he asked whether technical communicators may contribute to harmful outcomes when we don't explicitly consider ethics. This move toward integrating ethics more fully into discussions of technical communication practice and teaching was echoed by Dragga [13], who advocated for further attention to ethics in TC and identified "two major perspectives on ethics: that is developing good character (chiefly through narratives of heroic lives) versus determining right behavior (chiefly through analysis of moral dilemmas)" (p. 162). This two-fold framework is echoed in Cook's [14] work, which identified ethical literacy as one of the core literacies that should frame technical communication programs and pedagogies.

Some scholars have argued that ethics tends to focus on how we understand individual, rather than social, action for good [15]. Savage [16] acknowledged this individualist perspective, noting that "expecting the individual to act alone on the basis of a personal ethical standard effectively disempowers most people" (p. ix) because structural imbalances of power favor the "ethics" of those with the most power in a given context. Noting that collaborative, ethical decision-making is complex and challenging,

Savage wrote that his “own preference is to leave ethics in the category to which it is consigned in contemporary mainstream culture and to turn to social justice with all of its connotations of politics and ideology” (p. x). Such a stance is consistent with the social justice turn in technical communication, but it is also somewhat reductive of the broad scope and applications of ethics. As Walwema et al. [17] contended, “we do not agree that the field should be content to accept a reduction of ethics to ‘personal concerns.’ To do so would be to miss the vital ways in which ethics can connect to other more highly relevant areas of inquiry” (p. 259). Within the scope of this paper, one such area of inquiry is peer review and inclusive editing. Because of its inherently interpersonal scope, peer review cannot be thought of as merely the purview of individual ethics; rather, an exploration and application of ethics, specifically virtue ethics, can help provide a framework for more inclusive peer review.

It is important to note that virtue ethics is one of many possible ethical frameworks through which to examine the peer review process, and virtue ethics is by no means exclusionary of antiracist goals and practices. For example, Itchuaqiyaq & Walton [4] applied Gloria Anzaldúa’s framework of *conocimiento* to the practice of editorial and peer review processes, where they noted the ways in which Anzaldúa’s stages of *conocimiento* “provide a structure for engaging in the manuscript review process in a way that mediates among potentially conflicting worldviews” (p. 379). While Itchuaqiyaq and Walton’s work was not framed explicitly as virtue ethics scholarship, the principles they applied from Anzaldúa highlight the ways in which peer reviewers can engage in more deliberate ethical practice as they “help repair wounds created from the embedded and internalized racism and other systems of oppression in academe” (p.392). Their section of reviewer takeaways mirrored many elements of Alexander et al.’s SKK framework, and they specifically noted how kindness—a virtue—can be enacted in the review process as reviewers “advocate for inclusivity, acknowledge a manuscript’s

strengths, and provide prompt feedback” (p. 392). Such a definition can assist peer reviewers in understanding more explicitly how to enact virtues, like but not limited to kindness, in the peer review process, regardless of the specific ethical lens applied.

Virtue ethics is an ethical framework that has roots in several ancient philosophical traditions. Dragga [18] noted that in Confucian virtue ethics, achieving perfection involves a two-fold process requiring both individual and collective application. Similarly, ancient Greek virtue ethics emphasized how the cultivation of virtues had both internal (individual) and external (social or public) goals. As Colton and Holmes [19] explained, using the virtue of justice as an example, “being just is a reward unto itself—one feels good about being just and wants to be identified as just; however, being just also achieves good ends—the equal and fair treatment of others” (p. 35). In this example, individual motivations and actions contribute to a collective good as well as to an individual sense of well-being.

For a more explicit treatment of virtue ethics, we turn to the philosopher Shannon Vallor [7], who argued for “virtues [to be] more consciously cultivated...and exercised not only individually but *together*, in acts of collective human wisdom” (p. 10-11; italics original). Vallor’s virtue ethics framework outlines seven core elements that can be found in classical and contemporary traditions, and while Vallor’s work did not explicitly discuss antiracism or peer review, her framework can be used to better understand how the process of peer review can be tied to individual virtues activated and practiced for the common good—antiracism being one such virtuous practice. Processes of identifying and cultivating virtues for individual and collective well-being ties in well with other frameworks, including Anzaldúa’s *conocimiento*, which Fernández and Gamero [20] defined as an “iterative process of conscious de-construction/re-construction of the self, others and the social world” that “exposes the individual to deeper, often new and complex, or contradictory, ways of knowing that transcend

normativity, hierarchy, objectivity, and duality in thinking and being” (p. 16). Again, the emphasis on individual insight, critical reflection, and cultivated action underscores a connection between virtue ethics, antiracist practice, and broader inclusive practice in peer review. When not approached ethically, peer review can be harmful and exclusionary. Cultivating virtues in the peer review process can help reviewers understand how to avoid harm and magnify help.

The following section expands on Vallor’s virtue ethics framework by applying the first three elements of her framework—moral habituation, relational understanding, and reflective self-examination—to the peer review case described above.

Virtue Ethics in the Context of Peer Review

The challenging peer review experience articulated above was certainly an outlier in Sam’s experience as a book editor. Yet it was also clear that some of that reviewer’s comments and practices as a peer reviewer were explicitly tied to the reviewer’s interpretation of Sam’s antiracist scholarly review training. Given the relative simplicity of the SKK heuristic outlined as part of the training, Sam was surprised to notice the language of the training reflected in the peer review in ways that seemed unkind and exclusionary. At the root of this disconnect is the challenge in assuming that everyone will interpret and enact virtuous behavior similarly. For example, the reviewer believed they were enacting kindness (and specificity) by pointing out, in detail, all the flaws and weaknesses they perceived in the text they reviewed. But for Sam, the level of specificity was unkind, and they elected to send the chapter author a summary of reviewer feedback rather than the harsh feedback itself. This led both Sam and Rachel to question how reviewers might cultivate more ethical practices in partnership and dialogue with editors.

Vallor's concept of moral habituation provides some insight. Vallor [7] described moral habituation as a process of "setting down...some basic patterns of moral activity that in turn open up the possibility for more specific, refined, and intentionally directed habits of moral activity to develop" (p. 66). Vallor's discussion of this form of deliberate, intentional habituation is drawn from the classical concept of *hexis*, or the practice of right actions, and she noted that "one's access to human models of moral excellence becomes important" in enacting the "appropriate *mean* relative to the circumstances" (p. 68; italics original). This concept of *hexis* is connected to the Confucian philosophical concept of *li*, which Vallor defined as "ritual action" or practice, as well as the rites that "embody a vast repository of culturally specific, standardized, and highly formed social practices with action-guiding content spelled out in rich detail" (p. 70). We can apply the concepts of *hexis* and *li* to the context of peer review, particularly in the relationship and dialogue between editor, reviewer, and author.

The academic peer review process tends to be linear and discreet. Authors submit work to editors, who in turn assign peer reviewers. Peer reviewers read author work and submit comments back to the editor. Editors then pass along (or, in some cases, summarize) reviewer feedback to authors. To preserve the standard of anonymous peer review, neither the reviewers nor the authors are explicitly aware of each other's identity. As a result, all communication is funneled through editors. If a peer reviewer's feedback is particularly harsh, off-track, or insufficient, the editor may respond or intervene, as Sam did. But established practices do not generally provide for, expect, or encourage much dialogue between editors, reviewers, and authors. In the context of virtue ethics, the *hexis* of ethical, inclusive peer review requires learning and practice, which is less likely to happen without dialogue on the review process. Non-dialogic peer review practices rely on individualized sense of what it means to be knowledgeable or kind, for example, but when individuals define and enact knowledge or kindness differently from

how editors or authors do, that individualized sense falls short of supporting collective well-being and may, in fact, perpetuate harm and marginalization. By engaging in dialogue, the editor may be able to function in the role of a “human model of moral excellence” [7, p. 68] as Vallor described, with “moral excellence” in this case being defined in less lofty terms as someone with experience, insight, and oversight to the entire process of peer review and editing. Such perspective enables editors to provide training and feedback that encourages specific ways of enacting virtues such as knowledge and kindness. Similarly, returning to the concept of *li*, academic publishing is replete with “culturally specific, standardized, and highly formed social practices” [7, p. 70] that may lead reviewers to believe that a certain form of rigor and critique in peer review is not only requisite but desirable—attributes explored in the ARSRP as well. Editors could provide feedback to reviewers, even in brief ways, which could help reviewers cultivate more socially just, inclusive forms of peer review.

Vallor’s second element in her framework is relational understanding, which is based on the concept found in classical ethics traditions that “the human person [is]...a *relational being*, someone whose identity is formed through a network of relationships” [7, p. 76; italics original]. The concept of relational understanding contrasts with frameworks such as utilitarianism, in which the self “ought to act *autonomously*, without relying on the external guidance of others” (p. 76; italics original). Drawing upon classical traditions, Vallor noted that relational understanding has roots in friendship and filial piety. Buddhism adds the sense that “all beings are causally interconnected,” and virtues like equanimity “seem to require the cultivated person to practice ethical ‘neutrality’ and to extend loving kindness...and compassion...to *all* creatures” (p. 81; italics original). The utilitarian framework of autonomy and individuality may seem common and even desirable in a peer review context; after all, more collaborative, dialogic approaches to peer review would require shifts in established practices as well as

different patterns of labor and engagement for all involved. Yet the concept of relational understanding can be perceived as both descriptive and prescriptive of the human and technological interconnections that take place in the peer review process.

While we cannot always predict how behaviors and motivations shape engagement with peer review, we can recognize that even when mediated through technology, peer review is fundamentally about the interconnections between individual humans. In writing about care as a virtue, Vallor [7] noted that established systems, particularly ones with unequal levels of privilege “have long allowed individuals to divest themselves of the responsibility for caring practices by delegating these responsibilities to hired substitutes or, increasingly, by using technology to meet needs that previously could only be met by the active labor of human caregivers” (p. 139). The anonymity of peer review can distance reviewers and authors from caring for each other, shielding behaviors like racism [3]. Relational understanding demands that we recognize our place within systems and our relationships with other people and that even “anonymous” interactions are interpersonal. As Clem & Cheek [8] described in their inclusive editing paradigm, editors (which would include peer reviewers) must develop an ethics of care for the texts and authors they are entrusted with; they are responsible for attending to and prioritizing the humanity of authors (p. 142). Editors and peer reviewers should take care to acknowledge, reinforce, and emphasize the relational understanding at the heart of the peer review process. Connecting to our shared humanity during trainings, through empathy-building exercises and informal discussions, and as often as possible during peer review process can help us develop relational understanding.

Finally, Vallor [7] identified the virtue of reflective self-examination as a key element of her virtue ethics framework, which applies to cultivating more ethical peer review practices. Vallor explained that “a good life presupposes a lifelong habit of reflective self-examination, in which one turns a critical eye upon one’s actions and

dispositions” (p. 84) and aligns those actions with desired character and attributes. Concepts of self-reflection are common in many philosophical traditions and comprise a common form of inquiry in higher education. Yet perhaps paradoxically, the practice of self-examination cannot be undertaken effectively in isolation; rather, individuals rely on both external and internal inputs in order to have self-reflection increase critical awareness. For example, the peer reviewer cited in this paper may have earnestly felt they were enacting specificity, kindness, and knowledge in their feedback. Without information to the contrary, that reviewer would likely perceive very little need or desire to engage in reflective self-examination. As a result, the call for reflective self-examination relies on both relational understanding and moral habituation, as well as on recursive feedback about their peer review feedback and how that feedback may be received or interpreted by authors and editors. More training and dialogue throughout the peer review process could encourage opportunities for reflective self-examination that allow for greater awareness of how to enact more inclusive practices. Additionally, in situations where editor feedback to reviewers is not established, reviewers could request such feedback as part of a self-reflective process.

Conclusion

Within the field of TC, editors and scholars have enacted significant contributions designed to make the peer review process more inclusive. For example, ARSRP [3] emphasizes how current practices can reinscribe racism by perpetuating systems and practices that are “opaque and contain hidden tacit practices that can exclude new scholars, especially those who are already marginalized.” Recognizing established norms that may be exclusionary requires a reassessment of standard practices and a commitment to increased dialogue between authors, reviewers, and editors. ARSRP

details concrete practices editors can undertake to increase transparency and flexibility and to call awareness to current practices that perpetuate harm. These important contributions help shape anti-racist editorial practices. Current scholarship in technical editing also emphasizes the need for increased dialogue between editors and authors. Clem & Cheek [8] argued that dialogue is a necessary component of inclusive editing practice, noting that "Inclusive editing is not an independent practice to be done in isolation" (pg. 142). Instead, dialogue between authors and editors disrupts the power imbalance between editors and authors and values "the knowledge of the other stakeholders to critically investigate the document. Editing, then, moves from a place of prescriptive, hegemonic 'fixing' to a space of counterhegemonic dialogue" [8, pg. 142]. The powerful potential of dialogue between editors and authors could also be leveraged to encourage more ethical, inclusive peer review. In most cases, reviewer guidelines are designed to instruct reviewers about expectations for feedback, but such guidelines are generally linear rather than dialogic. Reviewer trainings such as the one implemented by Sam can play an important role in opening up spaces for dialogue and interaction about what constitutes ethical peer review—and how we can cultivate and enact more ethical review practices. Including discussions of ethics into these types of trainings can help to define and cultivate ethical peer review practices that rely on shared definitions of ethical actions and inclusive practice.

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CHAPTER V

QUESTIONING NEOLIBERAL RHETORICS OF WELLNESS: DESIGNING
PROGRAMMATIC INTERVENTIONS TO BETTER SUPPORT GRADUATE
INSTRUCTOR WELLBEING

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Abstract

Previous research has recognized the neoliberal trends that permeate the rhetorics of academic wellness, placing the responsibility for wellbeing on individuals rather than institutions and systems. In this study, the authors implemented a participatory action research (PAR) project to collaborate with different stakeholders in one university writing program and develop programmatic approaches to support the wellbeing one subset of academic faculty: graduate student instructors. Along with an account of how we adapted our PAR methodology to align with the wellness needs of our participants, we also provide a description and analysis of the intervention developed collaboratively in the PAR group. We end with five takeaways that researchers and stakeholders in graduate student education can apply to developing programmatic interventions that better support graduate instructor wellbeing: 1) research methodologies should adapt to foreground wellbeing; 2) productive conversations about wellbeing should start by acknowledging and validating the lived experience of graduate instructors; 3) students

want to be involved in programmatic processes and procedures that support their wellbeing; 4) facilitating (but not requiring) non-productive social interaction among grad students can support GI wellbeing; 5) the work of supporting wellbeing is never fully done—we call on administrators, faculty members, and students to continue this work.

Keywords

Wellbeing, Participatory Action Research, Graduate Students

Introduction

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the trauma it has caused, academic instructors and administrators have had to reassess their approaches to self-care and wellbeing and how they communicate those approaches to stakeholders. Many academic resources marginalize non-tenure track instructors (Simmons et al., 2021), including graduate instructors. For graduate students, this academic marginalization compounds with other stress-inducing situations like frequent evaluations, high workloads, financial difficulties, pressure to publish, and peer pressure (Schmidt & Hansson, 2018). As a result, there is strong and growing evidence of a mental health crisis in graduate education, with graduate students reporting levels of depression and anxiety six times higher than the general population (Evans et al., 2018). Indicators of ill-being are higher in underrepresented graduate student populations like trans and gender-nonconforming students (Evans et al., 2018), women (Devine & Hunter, 2017; Evans et al., 2018), and students of color (Osorio et al., 2021). This is a problem not only because these are real people with real suffering, but also because these high levels of ill-being contribute to the

very high rates of attrition, particularly among doctoral students, with up to 50% of students who start doctoral work not receiving a PhD (Gardner, 2008; Jiranek, 2010; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Schmidt & Hansson, 2018). Problems with graduate student wellbeing not only affect the students but also the institutions where they study. Poor mental health leads to reduced quality and quantity of research outputs, lost productivity, and poor degree progress (Scott & Takarangi, 2019). All of these factors have led scholars to conclude that the current state of graduate student wellbeing is “bleak” (Scott & Takarangi, 2019, p. 20), to the extent that “wellbeing and academic perseverance cannot coexist simultaneously” (Shavers & Moore, 2014, cited in Schmidt & Hansson, 2018, p. 11).

Neoliberal universities, while claiming to support wellbeing, often frame wellbeing as an individual endeavor, one that places the responsibility for mental and physical wholeness with the graduate student or faculty member (Hurd & Singh, 2021; Smith & Ulus, 2020). As Hurd and Singh (2021) note, these approaches separate personal and academic wellbeing, reinforcing binaries of academic productivity as somehow removed from work/life balance (or the person as a whole being). These institutional discourses and programmatic communication, rather than addressing the sources of ill-being, instead profess to care for the person while simultaneously privileging academic output. But research in graduate student and faculty wellbeing repeatedly emphasizes the need for interventions to be institutional rather than individual (Devine & Hunter, 2017; Evans et al., 2018; Hurd & Singh, 2021; Osorio et al., 2021; Ryan, Baik, & Larcombe, 2021; Schmidt & Hansson, 2018; Scott & Takarangi, 2019; Shavers & Moore, 2014; Smith & Ulus, 2020).

The authors of this paper represent different roles in one university writing program: author 1 is a graduate student in the program and at the time of writing was the graduate student representative. As the representative, author 1 was often the contact

person between department administration (e.g., the Director of Graduate Studies and curricular chair) and graduate students and served on the department's Graduate Advisor Committee. Author 2 is the Writing Program Administrator (WPA), whose responsibilities include training graduate student instructors (GIs). Recognizing the concerning national trends of graduate student ill-being and calls for institutional interventions to better support academic wellbeing, the authors developed and implemented a participatory action research project that, in collaboration with GIs in the writing program, seeks to question neoliberal rhetorics of wellness and identify programmatic approaches toward GI wellbeing. Therefore, the following questions guide our research: What should be the role of programs in supporting and facilitating graduate student wellbeing? How might programs engage in collaborative practices that promote wellbeing? How can programs best communicate the goals and purposes of wellbeing in graduate student education?

Literature Review

Recent conversations in the rhetorics of health and medicine (RHM) have emphasized that organizational and institutional discourses have a “powerful ability” to impact individuals’ conceptualizations of wellness (Derkatch, 2018, p. 155). University programs are one such example of an organization that influences the language of wellness (Stambler, 2020). We extend this scholarship by investigating the rhetorics of wellness in one university writing program. Like many writing programs, this program relies on the labor of graduate student instructors to teach first-year writing and introductory technical communication courses.

While much current research has focused on instructors fostering the wellbeing of their students, there is a limited but growing vein of literature that explores how to

cultivate the wellbeing of academics (e.g., Smith & Ulus, 2020). This recent discourse originates in the field of management, and it provides frameworks for applying RHM to institutional settings. These conversations emphasize that our understanding of academic wellbeing must shift from a neoliberal, individualistic focus on self-care to an institutional mitigation of mind-body harm (Hurd & Singh, 2021; Smith & Ulus, 2020). Most of this scholarship, though, is still theoretical; it recognizes a need for change but does not yet offer practical suggestions on how to work toward an institutional culture that communicates and cultivates the wellbeing of academics.

Although research on the wellbeing of academic faculty is currently sparse (Hurd & Singh, 2021; Smith & Ulus, 2020), presenting an opportunity for future research, there is an existing large strand of literature related to graduate student and PhD student wellbeing. GIs hold dual—and often competing—identities as both students and faculty. These competing roles can lead GIs to complicated sense of “identity whiplash” as they navigate in, around, and between their student identity, instructor identity, and other personal identities (Simmons, Silva-Enos, & Kelley, 2022). Within this liminal space that GIs occupy, both the literature on faculty and student wellbeing is relevant to their experiences and roles at the university. Like the limited literature on faculty wellbeing, much of the scholarship on graduate student wellbeing focuses on a *lack* of wellbeing by measuring things like stress, depression, burnout, exhaustion, and sleep problems (Schmidt & Hansson, 2018, p. 5). This literature also emphasizes the role that programs and institutions must play in creating meaningful and impactful interventions in wellbeing, for example, through policy, procedures, and communication (Devine & Hunter, 2017; Evans et al., 2018; Osorio et al., 2021; Ryan, Baik, & Larcombe, 2021; Schmidt & Hansson, 2018; Scott & Takarangi, 2019; Shavers & Moore, 2014). The majority of research on graduate student wellbeing originates in the fields of education and education research (Schmidt & Hansson, 2018, p. 3), leading to calls to expand that

research into other fields (p. 10). This study responds to that call by exploring graduate student wellbeing within the context of writing programs.

While all of the above cited research on graduate student wellbeing involves graduate students as research participants in some fashion, only one, Ryan et al. (2021) invites graduate students to actively participate in designing suggestions for wellbeing interventions. This gap in participatory design is one that technical communication scholars are well positioned to fill. In analyzing the rhetorics of wellness in a university employee wellness program, Stambler (2021) suggests that “directly involving [employees] in the research and design process” is necessary (p. 179). Beyond the specific context of rhetorics of wellness in university programs, other technical communication scholars like Spinuzzi (2005) have emphasized the importance of participatory design in technical communication research, particularly for research with social justice aims (Rose, 2016).

Research Design and Methodology

Participatory Action Research

In response to calls from research in graduate student wellbeing for change “to occur at the institutional rather than individual level” to improve graduate student wellbeing” (Scott & Takarangi, 2019, p. 20), we intentionally chose participatory action research (PAR) as our methodology. As a methodology, PAR foregrounds critical theory, social justice, and transformative action or praxis (Brydon-Miller et al., 2011; Chilisa, 2012; McIntyre, 2008). Additionally, PAR intentionally involves the local program, community, or stakeholders as an inherently necessary part of the methodology and project design (Brydon-Miller et al, 2011; Chilisa, 2012; McIntyre, 2008). Therefore,

PAR allows us to foreground the experiences and expertise of graduate students in our local program, as we believe their insights are critical for a project on graduate student wellbeing.

PAR's roots in social justice—which examines structures of power, oppression, and resistance—are also essential to our research design. According to McIntyre (2008), PAR “includes an emphasis on equity, oppression, and access to resources for research participants” (p. 5). Because we agree that neoliberal institutions place most of the responsibility for wellbeing on the individual, PAR's roots in critical theory and social justice allow us to examine, foreground, and respond to the *structural* challenges to wellbeing within our local context. As such, PAR allows both researchers and participants to act on their commitments to equity and social justice, and to collaboratively shape programmatic approaches to wellbeing.

Technical communication scholars committed to social justice also recognize participatory action research as a valuable research methodology. As Jones (2016) explains, participatory approaches to research “allow technical communication scholars to engage in critical dialogue and influence action that supports social justice outcomes” (p. 335). Crabtree and Sapp (2005) utilize PAR to “encourage the creation of partnerships . . . with groups who are most marginalized” (p. 10) and to enact change in communities, including those affected by globalization and colonization. Agboka (2013) relies on action research to challenge “unidirectional” communication practices (p. 30) and to question participatory approaches where the researcher's design does not align with the needs of the participants. Collectively, scholars in technical communication who are committed to social justice recognize PAR as a beneficial methodology for sharing power among researchers and program/community members, for questioning the limits of the research, and for communicating and solving problems at local and structural levels.

Study Design

Within our writing program, we have already engaged in a number of conversations on mental health and wellbeing in the classroom, including discussions on the rhetorics of mental disability in the graduate pedagogy seminar (framed by scholars such as Price [2011]); a professional development session on mental health and trauma-informed pedagogy, led by a graduate student; and multiple informal conversations with graduate students regarding wellbeing, managing the workload, and creating work-life balance. Additionally, our School of Graduate Studies has recently called for a greater focus on graduate student wellbeing as part of its strategic plan. Therefore, we knew that the program as a whole was invested in mental health and wellbeing, creating an ideal space for a PAR project. Based on these collective community-driven interactions and dialogues, we asked the following three research questions:

- What should be the role of programs in supporting and facilitating graduate student wellbeing?
- How might programs engage in collaborative practices that promote wellbeing?
- How can programs best communicate the goals and purposes of wellbeing in graduate student education?

Recruitment

Our potential participants included all graduate instructors in the program, though we were specifically focusing on the approximately 12 Master's and Ph.D. graduate students who would be continuing on to the following year. To reduce the possibility of coercion (author 2 serves as the GIs' supervisor), a colleague outside our department sent a recruitment email to our graduate instructor listserv. We recruited

participants in the Spring semester, so that we could work on the project in the summer out of respect for graduate student wellbeing and workload during the regular academic year. The timing of recruitment was important: we wanted GIs with at least one semester of experience in the writing program because they would have a more developed sense of the ways in which the program is— and is not— supporting and communicating wellness. Because of our inclusion criteria, the timeline of our study was necessarily short. As most of the graduate students in the department are master's students on a two-year plan, we designed the study to last less than one calendar year so that it would start and finish before second-year students graduated. Author 1's status as a graduate student on a strict timeline to graduation also led us to design a study that would be completed in under a year.

Out of approximately 12 graduate students who were continuing on the following year, three gave consent to join the study. PAR does not privilege quantity in terms of participants, but rather values collaboration with those who are full members of their community and have the desire, time, and energy to work toward change. Rather than having a large number of participants, as might be desirable with other research methods, we wanted participants who were most involved and most interested in our research topic. In this case, we had three volunteers who had deep ties to the graduate community, both through administrative positions and graduate student organization representation. Our small group size provided opportunities for deeper and more specific insights to programmatic wellbeing, as well as for greater collaboration between all of the participants. PAR's focus on community engagement "provides a space within which community partners can come together and a process by which they can critically examine the issues facing them" (Brydon-Miller et al., 2011, p. 387). Therefore, three participants in collaboration with two researchers, all of whom have a commitment to the program, had the potential to affect positive change in our local context.

Despite the importance of wellbeing, we recognize that the topic of wellbeing itself may be triggering for some, including those who are experiencing moderate or severe distress in terms of mental and/or physical health. As we continue with this work, we will need to navigate the fact that some graduate instructors will chose not to participate—not because they are not interested in wellbeing, but because the subject itself can be difficult to discuss. Therefore, in our study’s current iteration, we understand that we are likely missing the perspectives of key members in our community; a PAR project on wellbeing needs to find ways of responding to all community members’ needs, not just those participating in the research.

Methods

To begin, we administered a survey via Qualtrics that consisted of a combination of 10 multiple choice and open-ended questions regarding graduate student wellbeing. We asked participants to provide their own definition of wellbeing; to describe what responsibility the writing program should have for student wellbeing; to identify what aspects of the program—including grading, student and faculty collaborations, and professional development sessions—both supported and/or challenged their wellbeing; and to give preliminary suggestions for how the writing program could better support graduate instructor wellbeing.

We also designed and implemented a series of four PAR groups to 1) gauge how and in what ways wellbeing is currently being communicated to GIs, 2) collaboratively develop additional definitions and strategies for enhancing wellbeing, and 3) create action steps toward communicating program-supported wellbeing. The first three PAR sessions provided opportunities for all participants and researchers to engage in PAR’s “process of questioning, reflecting, dialoguing, and decision-making” (McIntyre, 2008, p. 6). For each PAR session, author 2 facilitated the discussion while author 1 took

observation notes. To engage in member checking (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Saldaña, 2013), the observation notes were sent to all participants after each session; participants had the options of clarifying information and identifying sections of the conversation that they preferred we not share outside the PAR group.

While our original study design involved four discussion sessions involving just the PAR group, during our second meeting, the group decided explicitly communicating wellbeing in a face-to-face setting to the incoming cohort of GIs was a top priority. The group wanted to actively partake in implementing the wellness communication strategies that we were developing. In response to that decision, the final PAR session took place at the new graduate instructor orientation at the beginning of the following academic year.

Reflexive Revisions to the Study Design

While we as researchers are committed to PAR, we learned new insights about the need to connect participatory methodologies with participant wellbeing. A PAR study on graduate student wellbeing must not only privilege community partnerships, but also attend carefully to participant wellbeing—something that we had not explicitly considered in previous PAR projects. Although our participants had expressed initial interest in the work, we quickly realized that the participants (and the researchers) were overwhelmed with the stress of completing the semester. Additionally, we were collectively still trying to cope with the ongoing pandemic, increased cost of living, and environmental stress due to the regional drought, as well as our state's recent attacks against critical race theory and transgender athletes. These individual and structural stressors significantly impeded our ability to begin the project. Notably, only one participant responded to initial recruitment emails. Admittedly, as researchers we initially experienced stress when we realized that our study might fail due to lack of participation—and due to the pressures to publish, we briefly valued the need to research

over the need to attend carefully to our collective wellbeing. Ultimately, however, we chose to prioritize both the wellbeing of the participants and the needs of the program over the external pressure to complete the study quickly and publish our research. Below, we highlight three revisions we made to how we as researchers communicated wellness in our research design and communication with participants.

Revising language in email communications

As we were drafting our reminder email to participants, we initially had a sentence that urged participants to complete the survey while taking care of their wellbeing. However, we realized that the common (implicit and sometimes explicit) message of “We care about your wellbeing, yet please still complete the work” was problematic, particularly for a voluntary study on wellness. Therefore, when we reminded the participants about the survey, we revised our initial message to write “As a reminder—and we mean this—if it’s not helpful to your wellbeing to continue with the project, please remember that you can opt out of the study at any time.” We briefly went on to provide options for the participants in how they might or might not engage in the study. While we do not presume that revisions such as these automatically enact wellbeing, we stress that researchers should carefully analyze how they frame wellbeing in their communications to participants: is simply stating that the researchers care about wellbeing enough? What other messages in the communication might unintentionally detract from the focus on wellbeing? Additionally, comments like “take care of your wellbeing” might still place the crux of the responsibility for wellbeing on the individual. Therefore, we considered how we might redesign our study and our communication with participants so that we were acknowledging participant stressors and taking more responsibility for participant wellbeing (or at least not increasing illbeing).

Questioning Action

In critiquing neoliberal-based rhetorics of wellness, Derkatch (2018) exposes how “wellness [when framed by profit-driven institutions] is an aspirational state that prompts constant activity even to maintain the status quo, regardless of where one falls on the wellness spectrum” (p. 144). This critique of the rhetorics surrounding wellness forced us to question how the need for *action*, which is inherent to participatory action research, might at times *harm* wellbeing rather than support it. While we are not opposed to action—and are dedicated to action that promotes social justice—Derkatch's critique forced us to reflect on how neoliberal institutions utilize the rhetoric of action to place responsibility for action mainly on the individual. Action, in the neoliberal context, is equated with always needing to do more in order to satisfy external pressures for ever-increasing productivity. Instead, we ask how action might also involve concepts like pausing, doing less, prioritizing self- and community-goals over institutional goals, focusing on quality over quantity, reflecting on priorities, and saying “no” to requests. Therefore, in our redesign, we slowed down the pace of our study; while initially we had planned on holding the four PAR sessions in a relatively short span of time, we spread out the sessions to give participants time to rest—and to process previous sessions' discussions. We had originally planned on having participants read 3-4 scholarly articles, but given the general exhaustion, we summarized key scholarship and/or asked participants to read only brief excerpts of the articles; we provided flexible options, so participants could also choose not to read the excerpts and prioritize their own lived experiences and thoughts during the PAR group discussions. To clarify, we did not completely reject PAR's commitment to action grounded in social justice—yet the project allowed us to reconsider the connections and tensions between action and wellness,

choosing in this study to slow down participant action in favor of wellbeing. We believe that these changes helped communicate our commitment to the participants' wellbeing.

Communicating wellbeing in PAR meetings

We also reflexively considered how to communicate wellbeing during our PAR group meetings. Author 2 had recently attended a workshop given by healer and scholar-activist Della V. Mosley, who prioritizes wellbeing, “particularly [for] Black people and all queer and transgender People of Color” (Mosley, 2021). In Mosley’s workshop, she/they prioritized self-care by calmly stressing that participants could always turn off the camera, take breaks, listen, and/or choose to leave—whatever they needed to do to take care of their wellbeing. Mosely also emphasized that if staying in the space and engaging with the topic was healing, then we as participants were encouraged to stay. Author 2 intentionally cited Mosley’s practice to begin the PAR focus groups and encourage multiple forms of wellbeing throughout the PAR sessions.

Results

In designing our study, before recruiting or participating in the PAR groups, authors 1 and 2 had an expected product in mind for what we wanted to develop through the study: a list of communication strategies that the writing program could implement to better support the wellbeing of its GIs. We had imagined an 8- or 9-point bullet list titled “How programs can better communicate wellbeing to GIs.” But as we had to adapt our research methods to the contours of the situations and participants of the study, we also had to accept and support when the PAR group determined that an alternative product would be most useful and meaningful for them and the program. Rather than listing ways the department could better support GI wellbeing, the group wanted to

enact those methods. The decision to create a wellbeing intervention presentation at the new GI orientation and the decisions about how to communicate wellness during that intervention were part of the generative and creative process of our PAR research. In the sections that follow, we present first descriptions of our participants as their understanding of wellbeing shifted throughout the study, arriving by the end of study at an understanding that they had a role in communicating wellness to other GIs. We then present the communicative decisions made by the PAR group in our presentation at the GI faculty development orientation.

Processing wellbeing through PAR group participation

To demonstrate how the PAR group members participated in a process of critically examining the topic of graduate student wellbeing within the constructs of PAR, we provide here thick descriptions (Creswell & Poth, 2016) of the participants' experiences through the pre-PAR group survey and PAR group participation. Just as each participant's conception of wellbeing affected the group's understanding of programmatic approaches to wellness, so too did the group's conception of wellbeing affect each participant. In this way, the culminating wellbeing intervention can be understood as our PAR group's collaborative understanding of when, where, why, and how to communicate wellbeing in our writing program.

Josephina

In response to the survey question asking what initial thoughts the participants had about the potential relationship between wellbeing and equity, Josephina responded,

The first thing that comes to mind are the students that are discriminated against because of mental illness. It is hard for me to know if I should disclose my mental

illness to professors because their responses can vary so much and don't often lead me to get the support I need. Sometimes when I disclose, professors are so concerned with consoling me that they don't address how my mental illness might affect my grade. Other times, professors assume I'm grubbing for accommodations rather than trying to communicate my experience. If I don't disclose, professors automatically assume that I'm intentionally not meeting their expectations and must be reminded to prioritize those expectations above my own mental health. So whether or not I disclose my mental health, I can't have a productive conversation about how my mental health is affecting the class.

It is important to note that this comment came from a student who reported feeling “somewhat supported” by the program in their wellbeing, rather than “neither supported nor unsupported,” “somewhat unsupported,” or “extremely unsupported”; that is, even within the context of feeling somewhat supported, the student was still uncomfortable with and unwilling to discuss issues of wellbeing with the faculty in the program. This student's comment encapsulated the exigence for this research—to better support GIs and develop equity in our program.

From the beginning of the study, Josephina indicated that programs have a lot of responsibility in supporting the wellbeing of GIs, but she added an important hedge: agency cannot be taken away from individuals when dealing with wellbeing. For her, then, the objective for programs is to “create an environment where someone can feel comfortable communicating and being vulnerable,” but it was still the responsibility of the individual to seek help and to support their own wellbeing. In her experience, programs often do not achieve supportive environments because productivity, grades, and success get emphasized over mental health; they get expressed as “the only things that matter.” Here, before engaging in research or discussions on the neo-liberal trends

in graduate education and wellbeing, she had already begun to recognize tendencies for programs and institutions to value production over all else.

Between responding to the survey and our first PAR session, Josephina read selections from Hurd & Singh's (2021) critique of neo-liberal approaches to faculty wellbeing in the academy. In our first PAR session, she was the first to comment, and it was with a thoughtful reflection about how productivity, wellness, and the academy become intertwined: "Even when the university accepts that your wellbeing is important, it's because they are worried about the productivity of the employees, which seems counterproductive." In this comment, she recognizes the ability of wellbeing to be coopted by institutions for their own benefit. She continues throughout the session to identify ways that she has navigated wellbeing in her role as GI and considers if and how a program might be able to institutionalize those strategies. For example, she describes how important connections with cohort members was and how vital those social connections have been for her wellbeing. For her, the program integrating more cohort collaboration and social time at a programmatic level would be "a way for the administration to recognize that wellbeing is important" and "for the program [to say] community matters." By starting with her individual tactics and moving them into programmatic spaces, and by reiterating how much of a role individuals have even in programmatic approaches to wellness, this participant complicates the idea that interventions into GI wellbeing can be entirely programmatic or individual; instead, they are two necessary parts of a whole. For authors 1 and 2, who came in to this study armed with neo-liberal arguments and research on the necessity of *programmatic* intervention, this was a humbling and reflective consideration.

Genevieve

One major theme that carried throughout Genevieve's participation in the study was connecting the experience and positionality of GIs with the experience and plight of workers in the workplace. In response to the question, "What is the responsibility, if any, of a writing program in contributing to graduate instructor well-being?", Genevieve responded, "Any workplace should care for the well-being of their employees, colleagues, and peers. Writing programs are no different. If anything, the contingent nature of graduate instructor work may make a focus on well-being even more important." Here, and in other comments throughout the study, Genevieve centers GIs' position as a worker over that of a student. As workers, GIs require support for their employers—universities.

Within this context of GIs as employees, Genevieve often comes back to idea of productivity and how productivity is framed and valued within the program. For example, in one of our PAR sessions she lamented that "There isn't a discussion about what productivity is and what it means." In her experience in the program, she finds that only one model of productivity has been modeled to her by the faculty, one in which graduate students should emulate the professional paths of highly successful tenure-track faculty in the department. But this model did not fit with her professional goals, leading her to suggest that our program needs to acknowledge various professional paths and definitions of productivity. While her perception of the program's prevailing concept of productivity felt burdening to her, it did not keep her from imagining something different: "Sometimes I think in the academy we are as tied to productivity as any corporation or business. But what if we had time just to be, and to be with others, in ways that felt restorative, even if we didn't 'learn' something specific?" For Genevieve, reconnecting with peers and faculty in less-structured activities that focus more on

creating social connections than producing something could help programs better communicate and support GI wellbeing.

Alex

In her responses to the survey and participation in the PAR sessions, Alex was quick to point out the existing trope of graduate student illbeing. In line with the findings of Osorio et al. (2021), Alex indicated that the requirements of her GI position were unrealistic:

I think that graduate students are expected to not be well while they are graduate students. I don't think it's realistic to be taking several classes, working on independent research, and teaching 45 students, do all of those things well, and also prioritize ourselves over that work

For her, these unrealistic expectations are particularly concerning within the context of stagnant GI stipends that have not reflected the recent drastic increases in cost of living. While perhaps a constraint of participating in the PAR group with representatives of writing program, Alex frames the issue of grad student illbeing as an issue in academic culture broadly: "I think that academia culture expects graduate students to just survive 'the grind.'" With all of these factors, she believes that it is very difficult for GIs to be well.

One theme that Alex came back to a number of times was if and how GIs can say "no." Concerned about high workloads, coupled with the high emotional labor of tending to her undergraduate students' wellbeing, she thought that GIs needed to be taught and modelled different strategies for saying "no." Alex recognizes how power dynamics between professors/GIs/undergraduate students play a role in her understanding of when she can say "no" and to whom; as a result, those power dynamics affect her wellbeing. For example, in discussing how GIs can practice self-care by not engaging too

deeply in their undergraduate students' mental health concerns, Alex commented, "As a grad student, it can be hard to say no to a professor who has far more power than you; as a grad instructor it can be difficult to say no to your own students." In this comment, she describes how saying "no" is difficult for her in both her role as student and as instructor. As a group, we discussed the importance of positionality and how GIs' dual role as both student and instructor often complicate that positionality and perceived power. Importantly, the GIs' perceptions of their positionality, privilege, and power (Walton, Jones, & Moore, 2019) would come to weigh on their decisions about what they were capable of communicating in terms of wellness and how.

Building on and dialoguing with these individuals' contributions, the PAR group developed a programmatic intervention to GI wellbeing, which was enacted during their last PAR session.

Intervention at GI orientation

To enact their understanding programmatic approaches to communicating GI wellbeing, the PAR group decided to create and implement a presentation to the incoming GI cohort. The content of the intervention reflects the group's understanding on how programs can best communicate wellbeing. The rhetorical decisions about who, what, where, when, why, and how to communicate wellness to the new GIs give us important insights into the design of wellness communication.

When: Every year the WPA organizes and implements a one-week, 40-hour faculty development orientation that helps new GIs to understand and prepare for their role as graduate instructors. The orientation takes place the week before the start of the fall semester, usually mid-August. The exact day and time of the presentation (Wednesday from 11:00AM-12:00PM) was mostly determined by availability in the orientation schedule; so, rather than collaboratively decided as the best day and time within the

orientation, the day and time was decided by the WPA and then presented to the group for approval.

The timing of this orientation (the week before school starts), the length of the orientation (with scheduled activities from 9-4 most every day), and the content of the orientation (which ranges from lesson planning, to introductions to pedagogy, to accessibility, and much more) lead many GIs to feel that GI orientation is a very stressful event. For example, Alex, in discussing the content of the intervention emphasized that we needed solid closure to our presentation because “It is a stressful, full week.” Yet, this was the timing that the group determined most effective for an intervention. Orientation is often the GIs’ first interactions with the department in their new role as GIs, and the group thought it important that wellbeing be *explicitly* addressed among those first interactions

Where: Aside from room changes for lunch or short break-out sessions, GI orientation is held in one classroom in the English department building. The PAR group intervention was held in the same classroom where the GIs had been participating in the rest of the orientation, in one of the English department classrooms. Although we had no explicit discussions about where the PAR group participants would position themselves, the three participants sat in desks at the front of the room near the board where the PowerPoint was projected. Author 2 sat behind the computer also at the front of the room, and the WPA sat in the back of the room among the new GIs. The new GIs were seated in desks that were in no particular order but that all faced the front of the room. Each of the PAR group members, including the researchers, positioned themselves as standing at the front of the room facing the new GIs during their presentation.

Rather than at a local hang out or more programmatically ‘neutral’ space, the intervention was held in the English department building. For a programmatic intervention, this space might be apt for demonstrating that wellbeing literally has a

place in the English department. That said, it can also bring with it institutional understandings of how to operate and ‘be’ in that space, as observed by the participants naturally positioning themselves separate from and in front of the new GIs.

Being in-person was also a large consideration for the PAR group, all of whom had spent a large part of their graduate education in the wake of COVID-19 and the frequent transition of GI events to virtual spaces. Alex, for example, described her desire for programmatic events to return to in-person delivery and how neo-liberal concepts of productivity weigh on that desire. In reflecting on the writing program’s last professional development event, which was the first one held in-person in almost two years, Alex said, “I felt like I was entering a community. When I enter zoom, I feel like I’m starting a meeting; I have to be productive. Whereas in person doesn’t have that effect.” The group’s strong agreement with this comment helped lead to the decision for an in-person intervention.

Who. The intervention was presented to a group of 11 new GIs, the entire incoming GI cohort of that academic year. All of the PAR group participants and the researchers participated in presenting the intervention. Each of the topics were divided up and tasked to a particular person or pair of persons. Most often, the topics that each person presented aligned with their interests and their themes of discussion throughout the study. For example, Josephina created content that attempted to form social relationships between participants, and Alex tapped into the trope of graduate student illbeing. The researchers were not sure if and how they should participate in the intervention, but as the content of the intervention was developed, it became clear that their participation was encouraged and necessary. As mentioned in the methodology section, while our original study design involved the participants engaging in scholarship on graduate student wellbeing, the researchers ended up summarizing much of that research to save participants’ time and energy. As such, researcher 1 was the person who

had done the most research and had the deepest understanding of current academic scholarship on GI wellbeing. The group thought that this information was important to present to the new GIs and considered that researcher 1's familiarity with that scholarship made them the best candidate to present that section. Additionally, the group determined that the participation of researcher 2, as WPA, was invaluable in communicating the program's commitment to GI wellbeing.

What. The PAR group designed a one-hour intervention with an accompanying PowerPoint made up of 13 slides. The content of this intervention can be understood as the group's collaborative understanding of how to best communicate wellbeing to GIs. To begin, Josephina and Alex asked the new GIs to list adjectives that come to mind when they think of graduate students. The list included: busy, stressed, burned out, underpaid, scattered, frustrated, (emotionally and academically) intelligent, creative, tired, romantic(ized). After the first six responses, one of the new GIs recognized that all of their answers were very negative and prompted the group to consider positive aspects of being a GI. In this activity, the group established prior knowledge about what it means to be a GI.

After creating this list to get an understanding of the new GIs concepts of living as a grad student, Alex and Josephina presented memes (Figures 1 and 2) that depict the stress and physical anguish of being a graduate student, identifying a trope of graduate student ill-being. As indicated by the list of adjectives created by the group, and the chuckles in response to the memes, even as not-even-started-the-first-day-of-school GIs, the group was well familiar with this trope. Alex, who had meditated on the theme of graduate student illbeing many times during the study, led the development of this portion of the intervention. This part of the intervention taps into cultural understandings of the graduate student experience, making explicit and analyzing what are often tacit conceptions about what being a graduate student entails. By taking a

moment to address and assess what is really getting communicated (and normalized) in these memes, the GIs start to recognize the discourse that currently surrounds GI wellbeing.

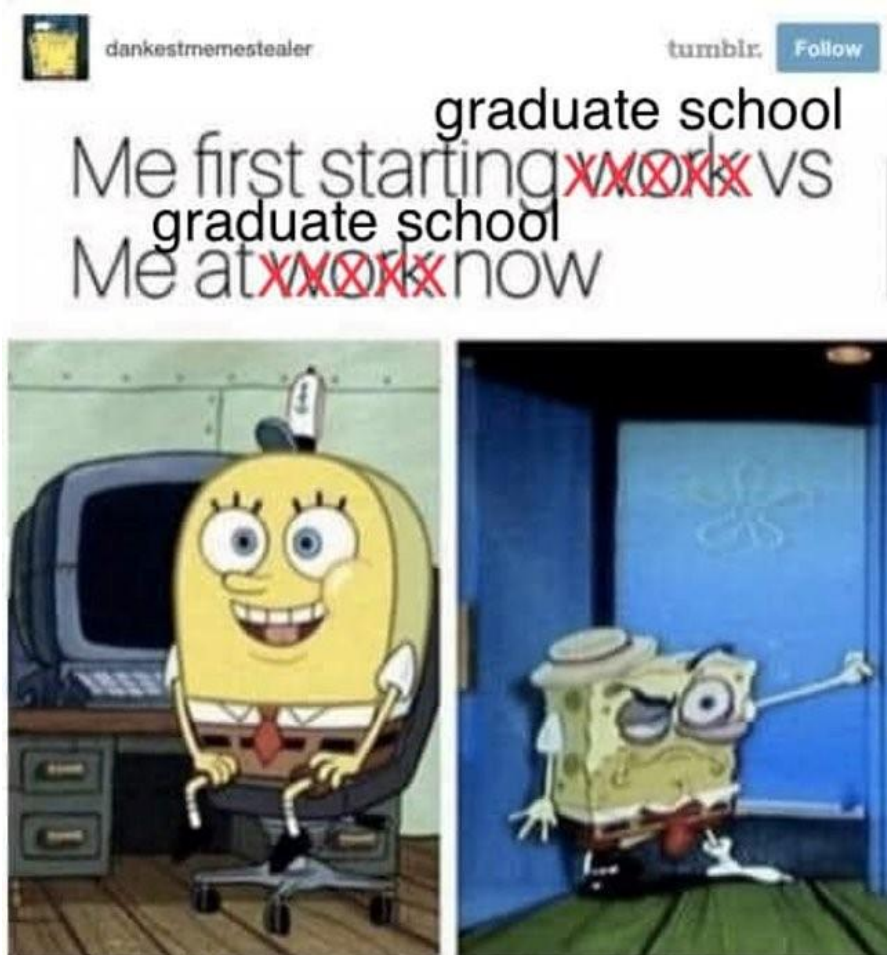
Figure 1: Meme used to present the trope of graduate student illbeing.

someone: “maybe i should do a PhD”

current grad students:



Figure 2: Meme used to present the trope of graduate student illbeing.



With this baseline understanding of popular rhetorics surrounding graduate student illbeing, Josephina and Alex then prompted the new GIs to answer the following questions: “What is wellbeing and what role do departments and programs play in supporting GI wellbeing?” These were variations of questions that the researchers had asked the participants directly in the survey. We understand that those questions were useful enough in encouraging the PAR group’s reflections on wellbeing that the group felt they were adequate to present to the new GIs as well. By asking these open-ended questions and engaging in dialogue with the new GIs, the PAR group continues the work of developing collaborative understandings of the concept of GI wellbeing with the new

GIs: they offer the new GIs an opportunity to participate in and collaborate on a programmatic understanding of wellbeing and the program's role in that wellbeing.

After a 5-minute discussion on those open-ended questions, researcher 1 provided the new GIs with a brief overview of recent scholarship related to GI wellness, including definitions of wellbeing and trends in graduate student illbeing. Researcher 1 is the person who found the articles and information that we discussed in the PAR groups and had done previous research on GI wellbeing. The group thought that synthesizing researcher 1's understanding of current scholarship on the topic would be useful for the intended audience. There were two important changes that researcher 1 made to presenting that information, though, based on their participation with the PAR group.

(1) After presenting existing definitions of wellbeing, like that of the WHO (cited in Hurd & Singh, 2020), researcher 1 added the caveat that definitions of wellbeing might assume normativity, potentially excluding folks with some mental disabilities like depression and anxiety. (2) While programs and institutions play an important role in effective interventions to support graduate student wellbeing, individuals have agency in their own wellbeing. These changes better reflect the group's perception of wellbeing rather than simply reiterating existing scholarship on the topic. The decision to include this information in the intervention was based on the group's understanding that engaging with academic scholarship around the ideas and terms related to GI wellbeing gave GIs a useful context and vocabulary for interrogating their own program's approach to GI wellbeing.

In the next part of the intervention, researcher 2 presented wellbeing resources available to GIs and what actions the writing program had already taken with the objective of supporting GI wellbeing, like re-designing first-year writing courses to involve less grading. The group insisted that researcher 2, as the WPA, present this information to demonstrate that there is existing programmatic support for GI

wellbeing. After engaging in our PAR sessions, the group also included a caveat to this discussion that while the program is doing different things to support GI wellbeing, not all interventions will work or will work as effectively for all GIs.

Genevieve led the next section of the intervention, which prompted GIs to consider what kinds of questions they might ask to support their wellbeing, who they might ask those questions to, and how they might ask those questions. Particularly in the 2nd PAR session, the group talked about how difficult it can be to navigate the GI experience, for example when working with faculty, choosing committee members, or engaging undergraduate students, particularly given the dual identities of student-faculty member that GIs hold. The group recognized that we could not know all of the questions that new GIs might have, but we could identify groups of questions and model how to ask some kinds of questions. At this point, the new GIs were directed to an existing programmatic document that indicates who GIs can contact with different kinds of questions (e.g., pedagogical questions should be directed at the WPA; questions about degree completion should be directed at the DGS; etc.).

From there, the PAR group split the new GIs into small groups for discussion. Each PAR group participant participated in one of the small groups so that the new GIs could ask questions or bring up a topic of conversation. The group thought these small groups would be less intimidating for some new GIs and give them the chance to ask the PAR group more specific questions related to GI wellbeing. Additionally, it provided the setting for new GIs to meet and get to know GIs with more experience in the program, which was important for the PAR group's goal of facilitating personal connections between GIs.

Finally, reflecting one of the PAR group's understandings that programs can help grad students form social circles, and that individuals maintain agency in their own wellbeing even amid programmatic interventions, the orientation ended with a getting-

to-know-you activity where the GIs drew pictures about what things they do to support their wellbeing. After drawing, the GIs moved around the room to look at each other's pictures. This activity reflected two of the group's understandings: 1) The writing program could and should help GIs develop social communities, but it should not force them into doing so. By having students draw activities that are important to them, and allowing the opportunity for peers to observe those drawings, the program facilitated peer connections by allowing GIs to recognize common interests among themselves. In this way, the program can facilitate social connections without forcing social events and activities on to the already full schedules of GIs. 2) As highly influenced by Josephina, this activity demonstrated how individual approaches and agency related to well-being can be encouraged even within programmatic interventions; that is, while rejecting the neo-liberal assumption that wellness is an entirely individual endeavor, programs can still make space for individuals to develop their own wellbeing.

Conclusion

While Derkatch (2018) rightfully critiques rhetorics of wellness that require individuals to continually improve themselves to be “well,” we argue that *programs* should continually monitor and support wellbeing. We must recognize the role that institutions and programs play in the wellbeing of faculty and revise institutional and programmatic communication about wellbeing in light of that recognition. In this paper, we have provided a PAR model to collaboratively engage in conversations of wellbeing with graduate instructors. In foregrounding the structural care of graduate students, we ask programs to replace rhetorics of individual responsibility with communication practices that actively promote and support both academic progress and graduate instructor wellbeing. This is not to *ensure* wellbeing or to claim that we have “fixed”

wellbeing for all graduate students at all times. Rather, it is to recognize that programs have a responsibility for the wellbeing of their graduate students; simultaneously, programs should also humbly collaborate as partners with graduate students in working toward wellbeing. However, we recognize the tension of working against neoliberalism from within a neoliberal institution like higher education. While working toward the greater wellbeing of graduate students may result in gains for the institution (for example, through better retention and graduation rates), benefiting the institution was not our main objective with this study. Instead, our objective was to support the humanity and wellness of the people in our program, including ourselves. In this case, authors 1 and 2 took on the additional work of developing and implementing this study, but our goal was not simply a permanent increase in our individual workloads. Rather, we hope that by starting more dialogues about the role programs play in wellbeing, and through research methods like PAR, we can encourage the formation of larger coalitions of actors who can take action to mediate graduate student illbeing.

As a PAR study designed to foreground the wellbeing of graduate students in our local context, we do not pretend that our study is necessarily generalizable to all contexts. However, we believe our model of developing programmatic approaches to communicating wellbeing, our understanding of the need to foster wellbeing in a subset of faculty that is often marginalized, and our emphasis on foregrounding wellbeing in our PAR study design can be applied to multiple programs. Furthermore, our PAR group's decisions about when, where, how, and why to communicate wellbeing to GIs can inform future work and research related to communicating wellness in programs. Walton, Moore, and Jones (2019) offer technical communicators committed to social justice a heuristic to review our model and ongoing work. Walton et al. urge all technical communicators to *recognize, reveal, and reject* injustices—and *replace* those “unjust and oppressive practices with intersectional, coalition-led practices” (Walton et al., p.

134). In engaging in a PAR project on wellbeing, we have strived to recognize, reveal, and reject structural factors that impede or harm wellbeing, while providing suggestions on how to replace those injustices with communication practices that foreground graduate student wellbeing. Importantly, the communicative strategies presented here are limited to what the graduate students participating in our study believed was within their power to enact. Most of their strategies focused on revealing the injustice of graduate student wellbeing to incoming generations of students rather than rejecting or replacing the practices that they understood to harm their wellbeing. From the results of our study, we offer five takeaways from our project that we hope are valuable as other graduate programs attend more consciously to their own graduate instructor wellbeing:

Research methodologies should adapt in order to foreground wellbeing. This was our most unexpected takeaway from the project. PAR foregrounds community engagement, but PAR fails if the wellbeing of the participants is not considered. If graduate programs are striving to communicate wellbeing, we need to do so not only through our programs, but also through our research designs, methodologies, and methods, both qualitative and quantitative. In our study, that meant changing the language of our emails, reducing the workload of participation, and re-inventing the product of our research.

Productive conversations about wellbeing can start by acknowledging and validating the lived experience of graduate instructors. The GIs in our study began their intervention by connecting to the tropes and experiences that surround graduate student life. They used a medium that was familiar and approachable to GIs—memes. While making moves toward more equitable, supportive programs is our objective, we must first stop and take stock of where we are now. Importantly, graduate students themselves need to be involved in that process of taking stock.

Students want to be involved in programmatic processes and procedures that support their wellbeing. During this study, we had to re-invent the product of our research from

a written strategic plan for how to communicate wellbeing in grad programs to a GI-led intervention into the wellbeing of an incoming GI cohort. The participants of the study wanted to effect immediate change rather than wait for the often slow process of writing, approving, and disseminating policies. To support GI wellbeing, programs can identify ways in which they could more actively include (and compensate!) GIs in the design of their programs.

Facilitating (but not requiring) non-productive social interaction among grad students can support GI wellbeing. Productivity was a term that was often brought up and criticized in our PAR sessions for its perceived value in the program and its insistence on constant action. The GIs in our study insisted that institutional pauses and moments to connect with other graduate students were an important part of their wellbeing. In their intervention, that meant dedicating 10 minutes to social connections at the end.

Programs can consider how they define productivity and how to integrate opportunities for students to connect with other students and with faculty without GIs feeling the need to ‘produce’ something at all programmatic events.

The work is never fully done, but continues. In following Walton et al. (2019), technical communicators and program administrators need to reveal and replace injustices, and continuously reflect on what might be working and what injustices still need to be addressed. We urge other programs committed to wellbeing to consider how they, too, might question neoliberal rhetorics with programmatic approaches that better support graduate instructor wellbeing as part of larger social justice efforts, even within neoliberal institutions like higher education. While this takeaway might initially seem at odds with our previous critique of the neoliberal value of action, we frame this takeaway as a reminder that social justice and equity work can never be done, as injustice and inequity constant shifts and takes new forms. We believe that by opening dialogue, reconsidering our communicative strategies, and revealing injustice, we can challenge

the neoliberal institutions we are part of. To do this, we need coalitions of people and programs so that the responsibility for wellbeing does not fall solely on the shoulders of individuals like WPAs and graduate students. As we make this call for ongoing work, we are critically aware that we also need to continually recognize, reveal, reject, and replace injustices that negatively affect wellbeing. Our work of challenging neoliberal structures is also ongoing and never complete.

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CHAPTER VI

TRANS* VULNERABILITY AND DIGITAL RESEARCH ETHICS: A QUBIT ETHICAL
ANALYSIS OF TRANSPARENCY ACTIVISM

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Abstract

Trans* communities across the United States are under assault. Researchers seeking to work with trans* people and other multiply marginalized and underrepresented communities must attend to ethical research practices within the communities in which they participate. Digital research ethics is particularly murky with issues of embodiment, vulnerability, and unclear IRB guidance. Comparing two transparency activist organizations—Wikileaks and DDoSecrets—we introduce “qubit ethics,” a trans*material, trans-corporeal ethics of care as praxis within vulnerable online communities. We then demonstrate how this unique approach to research design allows for the complex entanglements that is trans* life, particularly digital life. Finally, we present clear take-aways for qubit-ethics informed social justice research.

CCS Concepts: • Social and professional topics → Gender;

KEYWORDS: Vulnerability, trans*materialism, transparency activism, social justice, research ethics, rhetoric

ANTI-TRANS* VIOLENCE & DIGITAL RESEARCH

Trans*¹ bodies and communities across the United States are under siege.² The Human Rights Campaign has labeled fatal anti-transgender violence a “national epidemic” that has not slowed down since the organization began tracking this violence in 2013 [3]. The National Center for Transgender Equality [4] adds that murders of trans* people surged in 2020, with more murders in the first seven months of 2020 than in all of 2019. At the time of writing in 2021, seven trans* women have been murdered in the month of April alone [5]. Fueling this very literal threat of death to trans* bodies, particularly the bodies of Black trans* women [3], right-wing extremists have pushed hateful ideologies against trans* communities as wedge issues. They have teamed up with trans-exclusionary “feminist” groups such as the Woman's Liberation Front to argue that trans* rights “threaten the safety and sanctity of women-only spaces” [6]. Trans* exclusion becomes a point of interest convergence between conservatives and these “feminists,” leading to an increase in anti-trans* legislation, such as bills penalizing medical professionals who provide medical treatment to trans* youth or to banning trans* youth from participation in same-gender sports.

Statistics alone cannot adequately convey the human toll such violence takes on the physical, social, and psychological health of trans* communities. Digital and technical communication researchers can help by leveraging narrative expertise to bring the lived realities of harmed communities to the forefront of academic, corporate, and policy debates about abating endemic anti-trans violence. However, and because of the

trans-modalities of modern media, digital research can too easily become extractive and potentially harmful to subject communities. In theorizing a trans*material trans-corporeal ethics of care (qubit ethics) approach to digital research we hope to enrich practitioner and scholar tools for thinking through the ethical implications of internet-based research activity.

Digital research as social justice activism

We are in an increasingly dangerous moment for trans* men and women, a fact that needs to be acknowledged and critically reflected upon. Non-trans* people who live in safety have an obligation to generate change so trans* people can move about in the world safely, access the healthcare they need, witness their children grow up, care for their families, date and fall in love. It is imperative that social justice-minded scholars and researchers use their social and academic capital to mitigate threats to the trans* community.

One path to socially-just research alongside trans* communities may be through analyzing contexts and objects of analysis that meaningfully impact trans* lives every day, particularly those with a veneer of justice and safety. Historically, the internet has provided the space for openness and socializing that was unavailable “offline” for many LGBTQ people [7, 8, 9, 10]. In fact, Weinrich [11] traces queer uses of digital space back to the Department of Defense, where LGBTQ folks participated in the development of the internet. As such, digital research plays an important role for researchers who seek to better understand trans* and queer public, cultural, and technical [12] rhetorics. However, upon close inspection, and keeping in mind our earlier consideration of transphobia as a unique point of interest convergence, it becomes clear that digital spaces do not always provide the safety and justice they appear to offer, especially for

trans* users. In fact, more insidious examples may lie within progressive spaces themselves.

Take, for example, transparency activism, research, and reporting. This activism is motivated by the public's right to know how institutions and corporations act behind closed doors, particularly when the decisions and actions of those organizations impact the public. Transparency activism, research, and reporting has a long and storied history within civil rights reform. In 1892, investigative journalist Ida B. Wells-Barnett brought the horrific lynching of Black men to the attention of white audiences. Undercover, Nelly Bly exposed the inner workings of a women's asylum and led an effort towards national reform. More recently, this work primarily occurs in digital spaces. The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) released the Panama Papers, revealing currents of dark money in the form of “the offshore holdings of 140 politicians and public officials from around the world” [13]. This reporting led to the recovery of billions of dollars in assets and the downfall of political leaders around the world. These examples evidence the ways in which transparency activism tends to occupy a progressive space. Unfortunately, transmisogynistic infiltration has, at times, tainted some of these seemingly progressive environments.

Digital transparency activism

WikiLeaks is perhaps one of the best-known outlets of digital transparency activism.

Wikileaks

.... [S]pecializes in the analysis and publication of large datasets of censored or otherwise restricted official materials involving war, spying and corruption. It has so far published more than 10 million documents and associated analyses. [14].

It has been accused of playing an outsized role in the results of the 2016 United States presidential election [15] by strategically timing the release of information discovered

through hacked email accounts, though at the time of writing no one has been charged [16].

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND TRANS* TECHNICAL RHETORICS

In their award-winning 2019 book, Walton, Moore, & Jones argue that the field of technical and professional communication (TPC) has taken a turn toward social justice, claiming that “[i]njustice IS a technical communication problem” [17]. Citing decades of social justice work and trends in the field, they call on technical communicators to take an active, explicit role in addressing injustice. Arguing for the importance of the trans* experience is an important extension of that call. While literature in TPC on LGBTQ issues is still underdeveloped [18], attention to these topics is slowly growing. For example, Cox [19] argues for the use of queer rhetorics in TPC pedagogy. In 2019’s SIGDOC, Moeggenberg & Walton [20] described how queer theory can inform design thinking pedagogy. Ramler [21] offers a framework for queer usability, which centers the experiences of potentially LGBT users. In a comment we do not mean as criticism, Ramler’s case study of Tumblr follows a trend that is common in some literature in which “queer” is understood as an identity marker (i.e., the Q in LGBTQ). The tension of whether queer is most-appropriately applied as an identity or an intangible concept is one that queer studies has and continues to wrestle with. For example, in an oft-cited definition, Halperin describes queer as “whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominate” [22]. Thirteen years later, he published another article that critiques the way queer theory has been normalized and pacified by the status quo force that is the academy [23]. In this article, Halperin recognizes that one appeal of queer studies is that through it, academics can escape the “irreducibly sexual” identities of lesbian and gay [23]; that is, queer theory can provide an escape from materiality and

corporeality. But what then of the very existential threat to existence experienced by folks inhabiting materially queer bodies?

Queer Online Vulnerability

Vulnerability within digital spaces can present a difficult challenge for researchers. In fact, part of the exigence for this manuscript is one author's (Edenfield's) experience with his university IRB office in planning a digital research project within trans* online forums. De Hertogh [24] has raised similar concerns within vulnerable online communities, concerns which led her to develop a “feminist digital research methodology,” a methodology De Hertogh describes as:

An intersectional methodology that helps rhetoricians of health and medicine contend with the overlapping rhetorical, technological, and ethical frameworks affecting how we understand and collect health information, particularly within vulnerable online communities. (p. 480)

As one example of how digital spaces can be harmed by researchers, a widely read magazine published an unredacted exposé of one popular trans* forum, an online disclosure which resulted in punitive action offline. We are intentionally vague as to disrupt further amplification of the story and its harmful effects. In instances where disclosure itself puts the community at risk, online amplification and virality can compound offline and online risks. As De Hertogh has discussed, issues of privacy, disclosure, risks of publication, and offline impacts add to the difficulty of ethical decision making.

Research Guidelines

The Association of Internet Researchers has provided guidelines for online research. In their most recent guidelines—Internet Research Ethics (IRE) 3.0 [25]—they encourage ethical deliberations beyond informed consent, writing:

[W]e emphasize deliberative processes of ethical reflection. At the same time, we believe that in times of Big Data, experimental research needs to be done that requires considerations beyond informed consent, but further includes careful reflection on research design, the context of research, and the basic requirement to minimize associated risks and harms. An ongoing ethical reflection might be more helpful and beneficial in the long term for society than now restricting research. (p. 2, italics ours)

“Involved Subjects” includes this statement regarding the vulnerability of online research subjects:

A primary ethical imperative is to avoid harm - to subjects as well to researchers. But the primary question is, who are the subjects? This question then interacts with a classical ethical principle: the greater the vulnerability of our subjects, the greater our responsibility and obligation to protect them from likely harms. (p. 17)

The authors add that LGBTQ individuals and/or communities and other minority communities may require specific attention [25]. Like De Hertogh and the Association of Internet Researchers, we recognize the complexity of digital research within/alongside vulnerability communities, and the potential online and offline impacts and harms research can bring. We posit an ethics of care formulated around the qubit (qubit ethics) as a way for researchers to, as recommended in IRE 3.0, “emphasize deliberative processes of ethical reflection” [25] with specific attention to trans* spaces.

QUBIT ETHICS & TRANSPARENCY ACTIVISM

Qubits, also known as quantum bits, are the base unit of quantum computing. They exhibit unique properties that, in defying supposedly absolute physical laws, illustrate what feminist theorist Barad has argued is the basis of ethics: mattering. That is, all beings and all things “are already materially entangled across space and time” [26] in ever expanding and differentiated new expressions and relations. Qubit ethics is a trans*material trans-corporeal ethics that helps theorists bridge the gap between applying ethical systems derived from physical phenomena and the virtual experiences that are increasingly inseparable from in-real-life (IRL) phenomena. As we will demonstrate in the following sections, virtuality has mass—that is, IRL experience is both encoded in and by virtual systems. Within the context of anti-trans* violence and threats to existence outlined above, we argue that qubit ethics are a necessary consideration for researchers who are dedicated to or would like to actively involve themselves in the mitigations of this social injustice. To demonstrate the queer potential that qubit ethics can provide researchers, we return to our discussion of transparency activism.

A case study of WikiLeaks and DDoSecrets

Distributed Denial of Secrets (DDoSecrets) is a 501(c)3 non-profit collective of transparency activists who index leaked data to make it accessible for journalists, researchers, and the public at large. Two archival operations, BlueLeaks and the Parler data dump, helped launch DDoSecrets into public discourse and establish them as the new kids on the transparency block. BlueLeaks, a 269GB trove of hacked information from more than 200 law enforcement agencies released in the wake of protests over the murder of George Floyd, secured DDoSecrets a spot in Twitter infamy by having the

collective's handle and website links banned by the social media giant [27]. Seven months later, after the January 6th U.S. Capitol insurrection, DDoSecrets released 70TB of data scraped from Parler [28], a social media company that has attracted right-wing communities because of their loose content moderation policies. In addition to being used as evidence in former President Trump's second impeachment trial, the scraped Parler data is has been used by law enforcement to research, track down, arrest, and prosecute insurrectionists across the country.

The DDoSecrets collective is a rising star in the world of online activism, filling the void left by the embattled WikiLeaks founder, Julian Assange. This changing of the transparency activist guard is not an accident as DDoSecrets appears to be set up to avoid many of the ethical and legal pitfalls that contributed to the demise of WikiLeaks. In fact, one member of DDoSecrets, Emma Best, published over 11,000 private messages exchanged between the WikiLeaks Task Force, a group of ten individuals chosen by Assange to help him run the organization. Best [29] has written that the “chat log shows WikiLeaks’ private attitudes” and “examples of homophobia, transphobia, ableism, sexism, racism, antisemitism, and other objectionable content” (para. 3-4). For example, while discussing a controversy over a statue of Chelsea Manning while using her “dead name” (her formerly used, male name), an anti-trans* sentiment thinly veiled as woke, ironic humor pervaded the conversation:

- WikiLeaks: They probably thought Bradley Chelsea Manning was a good way of getting the popular name in, and the new one, and not getting diverted. But that's going to happen regardless thanks to statist fake radicals.
- WISE Up Wales: Gender identity politics is a nightmare. & a gift to the state, unfortunately.

- WISE Up Wales: There's no liberation where the fight's ended up: now we've 'the cotton ceiling' where blokes who say they feel like they're women possibly only part time, complain that lesbians won't have sex with them!
- WikiLeaks: Manning does have Y chromosome and male genitalia.
- WISE Up Action: Hah, well Chelsea prefers trans* (with a * OK?) It's a fucking minefield!! [29] [comments are examples and are not sequential]

The above comments should not be surprising when considering Assange's lengthier history with gender violence—specifically his seven-year stay in the Ecuadorian embassy hiding from two sexual assault allegations in Sweden [30]. During that time, the WikiLeaks Twitter account, reportedly run by Assange himself, posited Assange as the victim of a global conspiracy and attacked feminism as statist and reactionary. Writing about Assange's rhetorical tactics to avoid prosecution, criminologist Julia Downes [31] argues that “counter-claims of victimhood can be made by the privileged, to deflect from the experiences of survivors and a need for accountability” (p. 47). Such behavior is at odds with an organization that has elevated truth seeking to a near transcendent universal good.

The story of DDoSecrets reads differently. From the “progress pride flag” imbued logo to their pronoun conscious “About” page [32], trans* and queer identity are embedded at the heart of the organization—a stark contrast to the white non-trans* ident-ideology of Julian Assange and the transphobia of his WikiLeaks Task Force. Ident-ideology is our term for describing a privileged identity functioning metonymically for an ideological cause. In this case, the privileged identity is the white non-trans* male Julian Assange, and the ideological cause is transparency (or anti-state secrecy) activism. Unlike ideological identities (e.g., political partisanship or religious sectarianism), which articulate identities that follow from ideological difference, ident-ideology names

ideology that follows from particular—sometimes personal but always social—identity. Cult leaders like Jim Jones, Charles Manson, and David Koresh are all examples of ident-ideology, where atomistic personal identities become representative, in part or in whole, of a larger ideological cause. Design based evidence of the ident-ideology of Assange may be observed in the Official WikiLeaks Shop where nearly every product commodifies his name, likeness, and/or words. Assange is WikiLeaks and WikiLeaks is Assange.

Our contention in this article is that to understand the nuanced differences between WikiLeaks and DDoSecrets that make them fundamentally different transparency activism organizations, we need a construct for ethics that takes social and material effects of gender seriously. The queer collectivity of DDoSecrets separates their transparency activism from WikiLeaks' operations in a way that may be easily missed by journalists and the broader public for whom leaked data has more appeal than the assemblages that make access to leaked data possible. As we describe in the next section, queer collectivity is rooted in a trans*material (spacetimemattering) and trans-corporeal (inter-bodily connectedness) ethic of care that we call qubit ethics. Based on a qubit ethical framework, we argue that DDoSecrets, unlike WikiLeaks, exhibits ethical awareness of and sensitivity to the impact virtual disclosure has on the physical world.

A qubit ethical analysis of transparency activism

Bits, or binary digits, are the basic unit of information in computing. Although bits may conjure up ones and zeroes, they may also be expressed as other binary states like on/off and true/false. Juxtaposed against qubits, bits are flat, fixed, and deterministic. Bits are to qubits as biological essentialism is to trans*materiality; that is, although qubits are materially grounded, their potentiality is near infinite. In this section, we demonstrate that ethics too may be understood as bits and qubits. More

specifically, we argue that when it comes to transparency activism, WikiLeaks exhibits bit ethics, characterized by the qualities of position, isolation, forcing, and adherence, and DDoSecrets exhibits qubit ethics, characterized by the qualities of superposition, entanglement, tunneling, and decoherence. The table below (Table 1) compares the bit transparency ethics of WikiLeaks to the qubit transparency ethics of DDoSecrets.

Table 1: WikiLeaks Bit Ethics vs. DDoSecrets Qubit Ethics

Bit Ethics	Qubit Ethics	WikiLeaks (bit)	DDoSecrets (qubit)
Position – preferencing fixed binary states of existence (something or nothing)	Superposition – accepting diverse and indeterminate states of existence (something, nothing, and everything)	Unitary identity: Julian Assange; cult of personality; white cis male indent-ideology; good/evil	Multiplicitous identity: queer collectivity; archive as public memory – temporally boundless; moral complexity
Isolation – privileging hierarchical order and individualism	Entanglement – accounting for the interconnectedness of all beings and things regardless of	Source disclosure practices (Russia); publishing without source permission (Phineas Fisher); free	“Public good” mission; consistent transparency ethic; respects

Bit Ethics	Qubit Ethics	WikiLeaks (bit)	DDoSecrets (qubit)
(something is more than nothing)	space, place, or time (nothing is something; something is nothing)	market ethic (radical individualism)	relationships with sources while also contextualizing the sources within the broader ecology of indexed data
Forcing – compelling change through the exercise of power (something must be)	Tunneling – coaxing change through the revelation of power (something is)	Transparency as power brokering and geopolitical manipulation; editorializing data dumps	Transparency as revelatory social justice (notable apocalyptic tone in motto).
Adherence – demands ideological attachment to	Decoherence – embrace of shyness as tactical movement for queer collectivity (we)	Justice4assange.com; singularity is too rigid to be durable. Assange's arrest has meant defunct movement.	Collectivity is resilient and makes direct observation difficult.

Bit Ethics	Qubit Ethics	WikiLeaks (bit)	DDoSecrets (qubit)
a singularity		WikiLeaks' website still	
(I)		exists but has been inactive since November 2019.	

Position vs. Superposition.

Position describes a preference for fixed determinate states. Something is or it is not. In contrast, superposition accepts all states in an indeterminate yet very material manner. A flipped coin is positioned to land on heads or tails, but a spun coin is superpositioned to be heads, tails, and everything between heads and tails, at least for the duration of the spin. The ident-ideology of Julian Assange is positioning that promotes a unitary identity ideologically imposed on the transparency activism of WikiLeaks. Position enables binaristic thinking which, we argue, radically short circuits ethical behavior by refusing to entertain moral complexity. Assange, and thus WikiLeaks, seems to understand their purpose as transcendent, their cause righteous, and their critics as evil, unenlightened, enemies. In contrast, the queer collectivity of DDoSecrets comfortably superpositions themselves in the gray mess of transparency activism. DDoSecrets embraces a multiplicity of identities that constitute the collective. Unlike WikiLeaks, DDoSecrets also refuses to editorialize or attempt to control the media narrative surrounding their leaks. They spin the coin without regard for where it may fall, understanding their superpositioning as archivists and indexers whose role is to

inform and enable rather than persuade and determine. Case in point, “Best says [the group] is moving toward a ‘co-op’ model with a ‘horizontal structure’ of leadership, with no single person in charge of the group’s direction” [27, para. 17]. As Edenfield has pointed out, “cooperatives have historically been a site of social justice work” [33]. DDoSecrets potently combines online queer collectivity, cooperative organizing, and a radical ethical commitment to transparency at all costs.

Isolation vs. Entanglement.

Bits are isolated, discrete units of information. Qubits are never alone, even when they are alone; that is, their entanglement with other (and their own) matter, touching, and what Barad [34] calls “self-touching” or intra-activity, effectively prohibits isolation. Bits, isolatable as they are, privilege order (one comes before the other) and atomization (individualism). Built on such a bit foundation, the Assange/WikiLeaks assemblage made many selfish and individualistic missteps such as publishing material without a source’s (not institutional source, rather, the collector of information source) permission and refusing to disclose when information came from state-sponsored hackers, as was the case with the hacked DNC emails [27]. Qubits are too entangled to act selfishly; they function in a broader ecology that spans non/existence. As a collectivity, DDoSecrets is built on relational entanglement—with one another, with their sources, and with their audience of journalists, researchers, and the broader public. In their espoused beliefs and observable behavior, DDoSecrets appears to recognize interconnectedness and their specific transparency facilitating role in a much broader ecology of social justice activism.

Forcing vs. Tunneling.

Forcing is the characteristic activity of a bit—it compels through physical coercion like flipping switches, polarizing magnets, or pressurizing vacuum tubes. Tunneling, on the other hand, has no need for physical coercion, not because it is absent physicality but because it may ignore other physical bodies. Where there is a barrier, a bit will push while a qubit will simply teleport. For the Assange/WikiLeaks assemblage, transparency activism was a means for geopolitical power brokering. Decisions about who was targeted, what data was leaked, and how information was presented—as evidenced by Best's [29] WikiLeaked archive— often appear to be made vengefully and to amass influence. Forcing is a means of persuasion to enact personal will; it is the *modus operandi* of an organization that ident-ideologically privileges the will of its white cis leader over the mission that supposedly governs said organization. Practiced as forcing, transparency activism does little more than sow chaos under the guise of championing truth. DDoSecrets, we argue, practices tunneling. In revealing injustice, rather than enforcing their will, DDoSecrets operationalizes transparency activism without the need for coercion; that is to argue they practice transparency as revelatory social justice rather than geopolitical manipulation. Their commitment is expressed in apocalyptic [35] terms: *veritatem cognoscere ruat cælum et pereat mundus*—roughly translated as ‘know the truth, though the heavens may fall and the world burn’ [32].

Adherence vs. Decoherence.

Rhetorically, the difference between adherence and decoherence may be understood along two axes: strategy/tactics and brash/shy. Borrowing from Kimball's use of De Certeau's distinction between strategy and tactics to articulate tactical technical communication [36] as a user-centered non-institutional approach, we contend that bit ethics are institutional. Bits are bound to their binary logic: one-zero,

on-off, true-false, good-evil. No space is left for the messiness of activism and research in transparency work when guided by bit ethics. Once the medium of a bit is wiped away, adherence fades. WikiLeaks.org is still online but the last published action on the site is from November 2019, perhaps due to Assange's arrest that year. The collectivity of DDoSecrets, in contrast, exhibits shyness by nature—they are prone to tactical subversion through revelation over institutional power building. As such, they are a far more flexible transparency organization; the fall of an ident-ideologue will not doom the collective. The brash and rigid nature of the Assange/WikiLeaks assemblage made statist targeting more effective; the organization that cannot bend will break. The decoherence of qubits makes their measurement the basis of their dissolution, but that does not mean they disappear. Any transparency researcher or activist in DDoSecrets may be targeted, but the collective appears designed to move on. Decoherence is durable because it is tactically shy—it can bend, break, and be reconstituted elsewhere. The world may burn, but the collective truth will win out.

IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCHERS

Our purpose for this manuscript is to investigate the opportunities a hybrid quantum/trans*/feminist theory of research in virtual environments poses for online research practices, particularly in trans* spaces. We have argued above and elsewhere [37] that trans* digital research necessitates an ethic of care that attends to the vulnerabilities of those communities. In this final section, we draw from our above qubit ethics analysis of DDoSecrets concepts that researchers can take away from qubit ethics, offering specific applications for researchers, academics, and practitioners alike. As a reminder, our definition of research is wide and encompasses the research of

transparency networks, citizens, nongovernmental organizations, journalists, activists, scholars, among others.

Research should consider superposition

Superposition is the ability to contain all possibilities at once, thus rejecting binary notions of existence. A basic starting point for applying this ethic is ensuring that research options are never limited to binaries, that there is always the potential for an alternative option. Researchers should embrace gray messiness and work with stakeholders to make decisions. For example, when designing surveys, attending to superposition may include rejecting and restating questions that are based in dichotomous assumptions: male/female, gay/straight, black/white, dis/abled. Recall that even sliding scales would not encompass superposition.

Research should consider entanglement

Entanglement accounts for the interconnectedness of all beings regardless of space, time, or place. Entanglement shows us how legislation titled “Save the Adolescents from Experimentation” in 2021 in Arkansas, U.S. affects all trans* and non-trans* people alike across all countries and times. Because of these complex interconnections, research must consider its implications before, during, and after and understand the relationality of our being. For example, returning to the challenge about disclosure, attending to quantum entanglement requires researchers to consider that digital impacts are not fixed in time and space. An accidental disclosure may linger in web indexes for years. Heeding quantum entanglement requires researchers to consider research impacts—including those within stakeholder communities—far after the research is done.

Research should consider tunneling

Tunneling rejects the constraints of what currently exists. In tunneling is where we find a queer potential for social justice. Walls have been constructed over a history of injustice. But those walls can't hold us. Consider the roots of the LGBTQ liberation in the United States: Stonewall was a riot in response to police brutality against trans* women and other gender expansive identities. Considering quantum tunneling means cultivating an awareness of “shy” communicative actions that are not always available to non-trans* and otherwise majority people. Yet, recall that disclosure can be a risk itself; researchers must also consider entanglements when encountering tunneling. Not every idea discovered through research should be shared. Decisions about disclosure should not be based on self-serving interests but should be deliberated within the communities those disclosures impact.

Research should consider decoherence

Decoherence is the inability to maintain form once measured. Research, research subjects, and knowledge are constantly shifting, fluid notions. As soon as something is measured (researched), it restructures to avoid common form. For example, researchers should be careful with who and how we do research to avoid destabilizing communities with our observance. And further, as De Hertogh [22] commented, participation in those communities is also ethically difficult.

In sum, as mentioned at the beginning of the piece, transparency activism represents a space that, while seemingly progressive, can also fall into national trends of transphobia and violence. Researchers from many disciplines can learn from DDoSecrets research and publishing ethics, particularly regarding queer collectivity. Research that

seeks to bring about social justice for communities must never forget the people whose bodies and lives are on the line.

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Footnotes

- ¹We have chosen to use trans* in this article because, as Halberstam [1] recognizes, adding an asterisk in internet search functions as a wildcard (p. 368) and, thus, adding it to a word names "expansive forms of difference, haptic relations to knowing, [and] uncertain modes of being" [2].
- ²As we share such miserable, terrifying data emphasizing how trans* bodies are always already at existential risk, we invite readers to pause and to reflect on the reality described above: the harms done, lives needlessly lost, dignity and humanity denied.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Designing Inclusionary Interventions for Higher Education

As a scholar of TPC, I am interested in community-based tactics for developing and sustaining non-normative knowledges in academic spaces and how to better integrate those alternative ways of knowing into the academy. By building diversity, equity, and inclusion into academic spaces, we can institutionally legitimize the knowledge and lived experiences of MMU scholars and students, moving the academy toward its liberatory potential. In the previous chapters, I provide five examples of different equity-based interventions into three academic spaces, all deeply rooted in TPC scholarship. As Ding (2013) reminds us, effective interventions require an “unwavering and constant attention” to the local, material, and discursive contexts in which individual tactics and institutional strategies exist (p. 146). To localize these interventions, I considered what institutional strategies might be impeding equitable access to those spaces, what kinds of tactics MMU communities have formed in response to those strategies, and what kind of middle ground might be formed between those strategies and tactics. Adapting to these features, the interventions were always context-driven. They were impacted at least in part by my lived experience, my relationship with the both the academy and the underrepresented population(s), and my understanding of the strategies and tactics at work in the particular situation. As localized interventions, I do not believe that the specific interventions described in the body of this dissertation will

always or often be effective, useful, or appropriate in other contexts. That said, there are some characteristics of these interventions that I believe can be useful to consider when designing future TPC-informed interventions. Scholars of TPC can intervene in the institution of higher education so that MMU knowledges and body are more equitably included by (1) identifying institutional strategies that serve as gatekeeping mechanisms, (2) developing research methods that work with vulnerable communities to better understand how they participate in and challenge those institutional strategies, and (3) building wellbeing and care into our teaching and research practices to better support the wellness of the scholars and communities that are excluded by gatekeeping institutional strategies. In the following sections, I outline each of these three principles and relate them to evidence from my interventions.

Identify institutional strategies that serve as gatekeeping mechanisms.

In their book, *Technical Communication after the Social Justice Turn*, Walton et al. (2019) describe the four Rs in relation to social justice work in TPC: to mitigate injustice, technical communicators must recognize injustice, reveal injustice to others (particularly others in different positions of power), reject injustice by refusing to participate in unjust practices, and replace unjust practices with more equitable ones. In any given situation, individuals are positioned differently to injustice and, thus, might be better or worse positioned to participate in one or more of the Rs. For example, it was not until I began editing articles for non-heritage English speakers that I really began to recognize the injustice that those scholars experience in the publication process. Injustice exists all around us, but, quite simply, we don't know what we don't know. Because injustice can remain invisible, working to recognize and reveal gatekeeping strategies in higher education is so important, and so difficult. As Frost (2016) describes in her appeal for apparent feminist methodologies in TPC, one of the difficulties in

mitigating injustice is that it is often covered up under the guise of natural and neutral, making it difficult to identify. Through a rhetorical analysis of technical editing textbooks, I establish in chapter II that just such an occulting of oppression occurs when technical editors are taught that ASE is neutral, that it is equivalent of correctness. While English has been standardized, there is nothing inherently ‘natural’ about its standardized form. By observing the ways in which scholars without access to ASE navigated editing and academic publishing, I was able to identify the institutional strategies excluding their knowledge and develop an intervention accordingly.

Chapters II, III, and IV recognize the role that editing plays in knowledge creation and legitimation. Through interventions, technical communicators, and technical editors more specifically, can use their position as language experts to push the bounds of what and whose knowledge gets created and legitimized through editing processes. For example, in chapter II, Cheek and I interrogate the current instrumentalist ideologies present in editing textbooks that deem deviations from cost-effective ASE texts as illegitimate and in need of revision. These ideologies can be used to stifle the knowledge of non-ASE users, but through an ideological intervention that centers dialogue, inquiry, and advocacy—the inclusive editing paradigm—technical editors can learn to value linguistic diversity. In chapter III, I tested this theory by integrating the inclusive editing paradigm into the curriculum of the professional editing course I was teaching in spring 2022. Engaging in the course material led students to change their understanding of editing from one of strict grammar policing toward one of rhetorical awareness of authors and audiences that extends far beyond ASE. By shifting their focus from copyediting to substantive editing, these students allow for the legitimation of non-ASE texts and knowledges. Finally, in chapter IV, Bryson and I describe an intervention into one of the ultimate knowledge legitimation practices in

higher education: peer review. Through anti-racist trainings and interventions, the peer review process can work to actively value diversity rather than exclude it.

Develop research methods that work with vulnerable communities to understand how they participate in and challenge institutional strategies.

Scholars in TPC have already posed a variety of research methods that are informed by and designed with vulnerable communities as active participants. This dissertation adds that we should not consider those methods as closed or final. Rather, as oppression and inclusion change faces, as tactics transform into strategies, as vulnerable populations and the institutions that marginalize them change and shift, so too should our research methods change and shift. For example, TPC scholars have recognized participatory action research (PAR) as an inclusive method for achieving social justice aims (Carlson, 2020). Yet, as chapter V describes, when studying graduate instructor (GI) wellbeing, Dr. Beth Buyserie and I quickly realized that action inherent in PAR might not be conducive to GI wellbeing. By connecting to our deep knowledge of the local context and by intentionally pausing to listen to what our participants were telling us (or perhaps more accurately, listening to the silence of what our participants were not telling us), we were able to adapt our research method to better align with our specific participants' needs. From this experience we learned how even inclusionary research methods can be implemented in ways that exclude if not adapted carefully.

Adding to this point, I believe that the qubit ethics research method described in chapter VI encourages researchers to consider how research sites, participants, and knowledge are constantly in motion, and so too should our research methods move in response. For example, with a qubit understanding of research, we recognize decoherence, or the ways in which something once measured changes form. Just like qubits, communities are “rhetorical, fluid, and engaged in meaning-making practices”

(Edenfield & Ledbetter, 2019, p. 3); communities are constantly de-and re-cohering, adapting to their localized contexts. As such, our research methods also need to be fluid and community-centered.

Build wellbeing and care into our teaching and research practices.

To develop effective interventions into academic spaces, we need to prioritize the wellness of the people who inhabit those spaces (including ourselves!). Each of the chapters in this dissertation seeks to mitigate the illbeing of MMU scholars and students: by implementing more inclusive editing practices, we can ease the struggle of many non-heritage speakers of English who are attempting to get published; by intervening in programmatic discourses of wellness, we can support the wellbeing of MMU graduate instructors; by cultivating inclusive research ethics, we can avoid the exploitation of online trans communities. As many feminist scholars have recognized, prioritizing care often means working against masculine and patriarchal notions of research, work, and productivity. In that sense, we have to break from the status quo, from what has often been done before. For example, caring for a text, as Dr. Cheek and I suggest in chapter II, means straying from a traditional understanding of editing and into a new paradigm where the relationship between the author and editor takes precedence. As I demonstrate in chapter V, caring for research participants might put us at odds academic pressure to collect data and publish, yet participant wellbeing should ultimately be more important than publishable results. In editing as in research, the interventions of this dissertation indicate moments in which we have to decide and enact our values, our priorities.

While the wellbeing of MMU communities is important and what drives many scholars into social justice work, we must also recognize the importance of our own wellbeing. In my experience, social justice work in higher education is emotionally

exhausting. But we can't pour from an empty cup. We can't continue the vital work of inclusionary interventions if we burn out. So we must consider teaching practices and research methods that are conducive to our own wellbeing. For me, talking with people, collaborating on ideas, learning from others are all acts that support my wellbeing. Recognizing and respecting these personal sources of wellbeing, I chose research methods that would draw on those sources, namely qualitative, narrative-based methods developed with multiple co-authors. I drew heavily on the moral and academic support of my co-authors. By collaborating with peers and mentors as co-authors, I drew from their narratives, their expertise, to support my own work and wellness.

Directions for Future Research

The framing of technical communication inclusionary interventions into academic spaces could lead to many lines of future inquiry. Broadly, as TPC scholars, we can continue to identify academic spaces in which strategies have excluded certain communities, what tactics those communities have developed to survive, and how interventions might fill the gap between those tactics and strategies. The three academic spaces I have identified in this dissertation—technical editing, graduate student wellbeing, and online trans research—could also benefit from future research.

Lines of Inquiry in Technical Editing

Related to technical editing, there have already been recent calls for additional research on the topic (Albers & Flannagan, 2019). Chapter II describes a theoretical framework for inclusive editing. Additional work is needed to determine how the inclusive editing paradigm might exist and be practiced within the diverse professional contexts in which editors find themselves. As recognized in the article, my experience as

a technical editor greatly influenced my understanding and writing of the topic. That said, my experience is very narrow to editing academic articles written for publication in scholarly journals. An inclusive editing paradigm in that context might have far different consequences than an inclusive editing paradigm applied to the editing of jet manufacturing guides. Additionally, my experience stems from a privileged positionality within the editing dynamic: I am the person with the access to American Standard English and US American publishing systems that the authors who contract me want. Including the voices and knowledge of those who contract editing services would be a necessary perspective even in the already limited context of editing for academic publishing.

As for peer review, recent scholarship on the topic recognizes the need for intervention into exclusionary peer review processes (Anti-racist peer review, 2021). In chapter III, I describe one such attempt at an intervention, though, as the article details, there were limitations to that intervention. With the problems in peer review having already been well-identified, I believe that the work of TPC scholars now is to develop interventions, implement them, and evaluate the impact of those interventions so that they can be further fine-tuned to better accomplish their purpose. Scholars could evaluate the impact of interventions like peer review trainings on reviewer feedback and on author perceptions of reviewer feedback.

Lines of Inquiry in Graduate Student Wellbeing

As noted in chapter V, there is little to no research specific to the experiences of wellbeing of TPC graduate students. In developing our GI wellbeing intervention, we had to draw on resources from other fields, like SoTL and management, to develop our framework. There is a huge potential for future scholarship on the ways in which both MMU and non-MMU graduate students experience wellbeing within their TPC programs

and how to design institutional interventions that support that wellbeing. From the results of our research in chapter V, I believe that research related to how programmatic expectations are communicated to students through technical documents like websites and student handbooks could provide fruitful data for strategic interventions.

Graduate instructors are both students and faculty members. Our literature review for chapter V indicated that even more than the gap in research on graduate instructor wellbeing, there is a noticeable absence of research on the wellbeing of academic faculty. Scholars in TPC could benefit from introspective research on the ways in which faculty experience wellbeing and how that experience is shaped by institutional discourse. Particularly as the field takes a turn toward social justice, we might question what impact teaching and learning about social justice has on the wellbeing of MMU faculty and students.

Lines of Inquiry in Online Trans Research

Moeggenberg et al.'s (2022) recent scholarship clearly implicates institutional documents in trans oppression. Further research that could support online trans communities in higher education might look at the institutional documents and interfaces that students interact with, like learning management systems, syllabi, and student handbooks, to determine if and how they might work to oppress trans students. In Utah, as in many other states, there is also recent policy and legislation that seeks to exclude trans students, particularly in matters of athletics and access to gender-neutral bathrooms. As scholars of TPC have established that regulatory writing and policy are technical communication issues (Williams, 2006; 2009), how to best intervene into trans-exclusionary policy would be a very timely and necessary site of inquiry.

Better understanding the rhetorical needs and desires of trans communities overlaps with some of the other lines of inquiry addressed above. For example, TPC

scholars and editors might work to develop social justice style guides in their publication venues that advocate for trans people and the equitable representation of trans communities in writing. More research can be done on the specific experience of trans grad students in TPC programs, how they experience wellbeing, and how they could be better supported institutionally in their wellbeing. In this way, future research should maintain an intersectional focus on the ways in which underrepresented identities can be compounded.

A Caveat about Interventions

Just as I ended the introductory section on tactics with a caveat—that tactics might be necessary, but they are not always ‘good’—I will end with a caveat about interventions. While the objective of universal inclusion is ideal, there are limits to inclusion. Designers of communication, research, and pedagogy must all make important decisions about who and what will be included and who and what will be excluded by their design decisions. Interventions cannot include all individuals and all communities equally. An intervention that works to include one population might lead to the exclusion of another. Because equality is not possible, equity becomes even more important when considering inclusionary interventions. While we can’t design interventions to be equally inclusive, we might be able to design interventions that are equitable. To do so means centering the most marginalized individuals and communities when designing interventions. It means developing a deep knowledge of the rhetorical and material situations in which exclusion occurs to identify who and what are most marginalized. It also means that we will necessarily fail.

In theorizing five principles of anti-discriminatory design, Wittkower (2016) indicates that the fifth principle is that, even when we’ve implemented all of the other

anti-discriminatory principles, we will inevitably find that we are not able to catch every problem, to anticipate every instance of discrimination; we will fail. And so, the fifth principle reads, “When something goes wrong, admit that it’s a real problem, that the user is not wrong or unimportant, and try to fix it” (p. 7). That’s what the interventions of this dissertation entail: they identify that something is wrong, they recognize that those problems are real but that MMU individuals and communities aren’t wrong or unimportant, and they propose one way to try and fix those problems. Just as I have drawn on the work of many TPC scholars before me who are invested in inclusionary interventions into academic spaces, I present these interventions so that future scholars can consider them, use them, and fix them so that we might better accomplish our purpose of equity in the academy.

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APPENDIX: COAUTHOR PERMISSIONS

To whom it may concern,

I, Ryan Cheek, give Sam Clem permission to use, as chapters in their dissertation, the articles titled "Trans* vulnerability and digital research ethics: a qubit ethical analysis of transparency activism," which is published in the *Proceedings of the 39th ACM International Conference on Design of Communication (SIGDOC '21)* and "Unjust revisions: A social justice framework for technical editing," which is published in *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*.



Ryan Cheek

3-23-2023

Date

To whom it may concern,

I, Beth Buyserie, give Sam Clem permission to use, as a chapter in their dissertation, the article titled "Questioning the rhetorics of wellness: Designing programmatic interventions to better support graduate instructor wellbeing," which is published in *Communication Design Quarterly*.



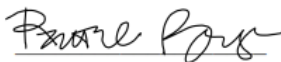
Beth Buyserie

3/29/2023

Date

To whom it may concern,

I, Rachel Bryson, give Sam Clem permission to use, as a chapter in their dissertation, the article titled "Cultivating ethics in the peer review process" which is published in the *Proceedings of the 40th ACM International Conference on Design of Communication (SIGDOC '22)*.



Rachel Bryson

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BIOGRAPHY

Sam Clem (she/they) is a fourth-year PhD candidate in Technical Communication and Rhetoric at Utah State University. Her professional interests focus on the intersections of language, identity, and wellbeing, particularly ways in which organizations can affect health and wellness. They have eight years of experience in higher education, where their teaching, research, and service have sought to actively challenge oppressive practices in the academy and center community-based knowledge.

EDUCATION

PhD in Technical Communication and Rhetoric, Exp. May 2023

Utah State University, Logan, UT

MA in Teaching, January 2011

Pacific University, Eugene, OR

BA in History, June 2009

University of Oregon, Eugene, OR

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Graduate Instructor, August 2019–Present

Department of English, Utah State University

- Teach introduction to academic prose; research writing in a persuasive mode; writing for the workplace; digital writing technologies; and professional editing.
- Teach topics including proposal writing, resume writing, conducting research, technical writing, and designing with Adobe Acrobat, InDesign, and Photoshop.
- Earned consistently high teaching evaluations from students and colleagues:
- Student evaluation of teaching (SETs) have indicated Excellent Teacher and Excellent Course in every course I've taught over eight consecutive semesters.
- Awarded English department Graduate Instructor of the Year 2022.
- Designed and implemented research projects in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), leading to publications and presentations of the results at local, regional, and national conferences.
- Earned a Teaching Scholar Certificate in Diversity Mentorship and Inclusive Teaching from the university's center for teaching and learning.

Technical Editor and Translator, December 2016–Present

Research Nucleus in Environmental and Natural Resource Economics

- Complete comprehensive editing and copyediting of academic reports, papers, and articles for publication in international journals.
- Provide feedback for research and article development based on the intended audience for the specific research questions and publication venues.

Diversity and Inclusion Specialist, August 2020–August 2022

Office of Empowering Teaching Excellence, Utah State University

- Developed and implemented professional development workshops, events, and programming to improve the mentorship of underrepresented students and inclusive teaching practices at USU.
- Performed extensive objectives-based program evaluation after first developing the objectives on which the program was evaluated.
- Developed strategic plans and suggestions for improvement based on the results of the program evaluation.
- Collected and analyzed data from original research on the effectiveness of teaching among underrepresented student populations.
- Created productive collaborations between various departments on campus including Student Affairs, the Office of Retention and Recruitment, the Inclusion Center, and the School of Graduate Studies.

Instructor, ESL, March 2014–August 2017

Universidad de Concepción, School of Business and Administration

- Taught Communicative English for Business I, II, III, and IV.
- Designed and implemented various educational outreach projects including community ESL classes and pedagogical preparation classes for teachers of immigrants.
- Served as the English Editorial Assistant for the business school's academic journal, *Revista Academica & Negocios*.

Advanced English Academy Coordinator, February 2014–August 2016

Colegio Concepción de Chillán

- Designed, implemented, and coordinated an academic program for over 550 advanced-level k-12 English students to improve oral production and fluency through play.
- Observed and evaluated department faculty to create specific professional development plans.

PUBLICATIONS

Clem, S. & Buyserie, B. (under review). Questioning neoliberal rhetorics of wellness: Designing programmatic interventions to better support graduate instructor wellbeing. *Communication Design Quarterly*.

Clem, S. (forthcoming). Clem on Small and Longo, ‘Transnational Research in Technical Communication: Stories, Realities, and Reflections (Studies in Technical Communication)’ , *H-Sci-Med-Tech*, H-Net Reviews.

Clem, S. (Ed.). (2022). Exploring how we teach: Lived experiences, lessons, and research about graduate instructors by graduate instructors. Utah State University.

Clem, S., & Cheek, R. (2022). Unjust revisions: A social-justice critique of technical editing. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, 65(1), 135-150.
DOI: 10.1109/TPC.2021.3137666.

Bryson, R. W., & **Clem, S.** (2022). Cultivating ethics in the peer review process. In *The 40th ACM International Conference on Design of Communication (SIGDOC*

'22), October 06-09, 2022, Boston, MA, USA. ACM, New York, NY, USA.

<https://doi.org/10.1145/3513130.3558982>

Cheek, R., **Clem, S.**, & Edenfield, A. C. (2021). Trans* vulnerability and digital research ethics: A qubit ethical analysis of transparency activism. In *The 39th ACM International Conference on Design of Communication (SIGDOC '21)*, October 12-14, 2021, Virtual Event, USA. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 7 pages.

<https://doi.org/10.1145/3472712.3473628>

Pérez, C.G, & **Clem, S.** (2017). Teaching methods used at a Chilean university 3 years after conversion to competency-based education. *The Journal for Competency-Based Education*, 2(4), 1-14. DOI: 10.1002/cbe2.1054

PRESENTATIONS

Clem, S., & Buyserie, B. (2022, Oct. 8). Participatory communication: Collaborative approaches to well-being in graduate instructor development programs. *The 40th ACM International Conference on Design of Communication (SIGDOC '22)*. Boston, MA, USA.

Bryson, R. W. & **Clem, S.** (2022, Oct. 7). Cultivating ethics in the peer review process. *The 40th ACM International Conference on Design of Communication (SIGDOC '22)*. Boston, MA, USA.

Clem, S. (2022, Aug. 17). Multiply-marginalized and underrepresented students' perceptions of instruction at USU. Empowering Teaching Excellence (ETE) Conference 2022. Logan, UT, USA.

White, L. & **Clem, S.** (2022, Mar. 4). The abundant benefits of pedagogical partnerships. Teaching for Learning (T4L) Conference 2022. Virtual Event.

- Clem, S.** (2021, Dec. 3). Best practices in anti-racist peer review. Empowering Teaching Excellence (ETE) Seminar Series, 2021. Virtual Event.
- Clem, S.** (2021, Aug. 18). Pedagogies of (self) care: Cultivating personal wellbeing in your teaching practice. Empowering Teaching Excellence (ETE) Conference 2021. Virtual Event.
- Alexander, J.J., Bryson, R., **Clem, S.**, & Walton, R. (2021, June 7). Black Feminist Theory in TPC: Inclusive Practices as Administrator, Teacher, Practitioner, and Scholar. Association of Teachers of Technical Writing Twenty-third Annual Conference, ATTW 2021. Virtual Event.
- Clem, S.**, Cuch, M., Piper, D., Hawkman, A. M., & Tehee, M. (2021, Mar. 23). Culturally responsive and inclusive teaching. Panel. Intersections on inclusion: Critical conversations about the academy,
4. https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/inter_inclusion/4
- Soyer, M., Thurston, T., **Clem, S.**, & Tom, R. (2021, Feb. 25). Student-centered learning approach in online discussion via digital powerups. Teaching for Learning (T4L) Conference 2021. Virtual Event.
- Clem, S.** (2020, Nov. 11). Stating your positionality: Self-reflection as a starting point for inclusive teaching. Empowering Teaching Excellence Sparkshop Series. Utah State University. Virtual Event.
- Clem, S.** (2020, April 9). Whitewashing Academic Articles: An Overlooked Ethical Dilemma in Technical Editing. Student Research Symposium 2020. Logan, UT, USA.
- *This presentation was suspended due to COVID-19.*
- Pérez, C.G, & **Clem, S.** (2019, Nov. 9). The Students' Role in Competency-Based Education: Self-reports from a Chilean University. XXXV Encuentro Nacional de Escuelas Y Facultades de Administración (ENEFA) 2019. Pucón, Chile.

HONORS & AWARDS

Graduate Instructor of the Year. (2022). English Department, Utah State University.

Inclusive Excellence Fellowship. (2022). School of Graduate Studies, Utah State University.

- Competitive \$10,000 award to conduct research on how to better support the wellbeing of underrepresented graduate students on campus.

ETE Scholar Award. (2021). Office of Empowering Teaching Excellence, Utah State University.

- Competitive \$4,000 award to develop a participatory action research study that designs programmatic interventions to support graduate student wellbeing.

USUSA Graduate Enhancement Award. (2020). Utah State University.

- Competitive \$4,000 award for graduate students who have demonstrated service to Utah State University, the local community, and their field of study.

Hubbard Family Scholarship. (2020). College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Utah State University.

- Competitive \$7,500 scholarship for students who have demonstrated interest in, and commitment to, the protection of the Earth's ecosystems.

LANGUAGES

Fluent English

Fluent Spanish