What's in a Tweet? A Graduate Student Rumination of the 2021 ATTW Virtual Conference

Morgan C. Banville[1]
1 East Carolina University

Abstract

This article weaves narrative, tweets, relevant literature, and conference session summaries from the 2021 ATTW Virtual Conference. Topics include discussion of power, language, and a short guide for graduate students (predominantly first-generation) to assist with navigating virtual conferences. The article includes questions and ideas that scholars in technical communication may be interested in further exploring, and urges such scholars/instructors in positions of privilege to support graduate students. The reflections center a graduate student's position as a white cisgender woman and first-generation college student exploring the uncertainties involved with attending and navigating power relations at a virtual conference. This positionality informs a reflection of sessions from panels such as the DBLAC Anti-Racist Writing Workshop, Responsive Technical Communication Pedagogies and Institutional

Practices, Critical Technical Communication Practices and Pedagogies, User-Generated Content and its Effects on the Technical Communication Profession, Technologies and Pedagogies, and more.

Contextualizing the Reflection

On June 7, 2021, I tweeted: *Writing becomes the most central activity that we do (in academia and life) #DBLAC #attw21.* Throughout the remainder of this reflection, my identities are used to inform/reflect on how various sessions influence/d my position as a first-generation graduate student, first-time attendee, and live tweeter for the 2021 Virtual Association of Teachers of Technical Writing Conference (ATTW). My tweets will be in italics.

I became a live tweeter for the ATTW Conference when a call was released by the conference organizers seeking those who were looking for opportunities to get more involved. To provide some context for this reflection, this was my first time attending ATTW; the 2020 conference was canceled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Because this was my first time attending ATTW, and further my first technical communication centered conference, I thought this role would be a great opportunity to interact more with attendees, presenters, and the material itself. And I was right. Tweets included within this reflection were approved in June of 2021 by conference presenters who noted whether their presentation(s) could be live tweeted. In the following sections, I intend to discuss the rhetorical situation of the conference, the conference theme of power, and myself as an attendee/tweeter, all central to guiding my thinking about conference sessions. It is important to note that this reflection is not chronological in relation to the timeline of the conference but is rather categorized by larger themes.

The Conference

"Writing, at heart, is an exchange of power." This guiding statement introduced participants to the Digital Black Lit and Composition (DBLAC) Anti-Racist Writing Workshop with Dr. Khirsten L. Scott during Day Two of ATTW. This writing workshop guided my thinking for the rest of the conference, as I had the opportunity to not only present, but also live tweet throughout various sessions.

During each session, I considered how both presenters and I were thinking more intentionally about exchanges of power. My positionality informs my reflection of sessions from panels such as the DBLAC Anti-Racist Writing Workshop, Responsive Technical Communication Pedagogies and Institutional Practices, Critical Technical Communication Practices and Pedagogies, User-Generated Content and its Effects on the Technical Communication Profession, Technologies and Pedagogies, and more. As a first-generation college student, I found that this conference provided a space where varying types of knowledge were explored. As a graduate student, it can oftentimes feel intimidating to present research, especially when those attending panel presentations are scholars you've cited within your work or read within the classroom space. And because we know that power relations in technical communication function "to dominate and oppress" (Walton, Moore, and Jones 2019, 108), it occurred to me that despite emphasizing through my tweets how individual sessions discussed power, I began to consider how power influenced *graduate students* navigating the virtual conference, especially those from multiply marginalized positions.

The Keynote Address on Day Three from Maria Barker and Dr. Rachel Bloom-Pojar, "The Power of Language in Building Confianza with Communities," contributes to the themes that I intend to reflect upon throughout this manuscript, such as

theorizing power structures, ethics of care, and the rhetorical implications of language. Though not directly related to the experience of a graduate student, I connected with an important consideration that Barker and Dr. Bloom-Pojar expressed: the lack of resources and knowledge that first-generation college students have but must seek out. I bridge their Keynote to some conference-related questions that I've asked my own mentors such as: What are the "rules" of a conference? How do you create a conference presentation? How are graduate students expected to "act" within a virtual space? What is the etiquette associated with tweeting for a professional organization? What do you do when you're unsure of a question from an audience member? And the list goes on.

Barker and Dr. Bloom-Pojar encourage researchers to connect to communities without an agenda, let relationships and community interests guide project development, and make findings accessible to the community. They state that as academics, we need to think more carefully and critically about the barriers—the infrastructures and norms—that prevent people from getting the education they need and want. One such barrier is the language we use. To quote the session abstract, "The words we choose to use when communicating with others say a lot about how much people can trust us. The ways we speak, sign, write, react, and express ourselves have the power to connect and to cause harm." The words we use within different contexts have power. In fact, as feminist scholar Trinh T. Minh-ha argues, "a hegemonic system of thought is troublesome because it often is unmarked; thus, it often is unnoticed and confused with what is natural" (Foss, Foss, and Griffin 1999, 233).

June 8, 2021: Kim [Lyndsey Kim] discusses plain language in connection to power and access in the technical communication classroom #F6 [What You Don't Know CAN Hurt You: Dismantling Information Asymmetries Surrounding Digital Privacy in the TPC Classroom] #attw21

From course readings, discussions, presentations, and interactions, I've come to recognize and question the language (Standard Academic English) that is often privileged within higher education (of course, this is applicable elsewhere). But as Minh-ha notes, recognizing such power structures are difficult because of their normalization, which is why instructors and technical communicators must engage with Barker and Dr. Bloom-Pojar's call for approaching norms carefully and critically. For example, Barker and Dr. Bloom-Pojar note that particularly, if a student is the first generation of the family to get a higher education, their parents won't already have the resources and/or knowledge needed to truly succeed. These resources and/or knowledge include *already* knowing or understanding the language of power that is used within academic spaces.

Thus, I return to a few of my own questions: What are the "rules" of a conference? How are graduate students expected to "act" within a virtual space? I resonate with Barker and Dr. Bloom-Pojar's Keynote, who put into words what I had been feeling at my first technical communication conference. *I don't know what I don't know.* We need a guide. A repository. Anything to guide those who are not in the position of "already knowing" or understanding the ways to navigate conferences, especially in virtual spaces. The following section explores one space that fostered community throughout the virtual conference.

Power and Virtual Writing

June 7, 2021, tweeted by fellow live tweeter Patti Poblete (@voleuseCK): Dr. Scott has created a virtual space for workshop participants--helpfully asking folks to "sign in" for a head count. The structure of the space itself is nice: Affirmation, setting intentions, and reflections upon the work we've just done. (#ATTW21 #DBLAC Scott)

I began this reflection with reference to the DBLAC Anti-Racist Virtual Writing Workshop on Day Two led by Dr. Khirsten L. Scott and shifted into my Day Three reflection on the Keynote from Barker and Dr. Bloom-Pojar. According to the DBLAC Virtual Writing Group "About" page (and also referenced during the Day Two Workshop), DBLAC "is an education-focused non-profit that serves as a learning community for academic professional development, networking, and resource-pooling." The non-profit supports "work by emerging scholars connected to fields related to language and composition." Perhaps the most essential part of the group is their emphasis on creating programs that model "Black feminist and communal practices for connections and coalition-building."

June 7, 2021, tweeted by fellow live tweeter Patti Poblete (@voleuseCK): DBLAC started out as a support network for Black graduate students, but it's also a learning community, a resource provider, and a space for anyone who supports Black education (#ATTW21 #DBLAC Scott)

During the workshop, I viewed Dr. Scott's utilization of various activities to promote interaction amongst presenters as a coalitional space; that is, I felt a strong sense of community through shared experience. This was not just in the physical (virtual) place but also in the intention participants' set when responding to the workshop's guiding questions and through setting writing goals. As Walton, Moore, and Jones (2019) write, we need to consult "a theory of power that explicitly accounts for how power enables and constrains coalition building, social justice, and advocacy" (106). In order for this virtual space to remain in community, I won't disclose details but will rather reflect on my personal experiences and insights. This workshop was not live tweeted, which Dr. Scott alluded was purposeful as a means to create coalition-building and safety amongst attendees, and questions posed throughout the session were kindly asked to be kept paraphrased and/or to ourselves. Before we set our goals during the DBLAC Anti-Racist

Virtual Writing Workshop, participants shared positive affirmations about our writing intentions. This promotion of positive energy created a platform for participants to interact throughout the session for continued encouragement and motivation.

Beginning the DBLAC Anti-Racist Virtual Writing Workshop session with such positivity created a feeling of camaraderie. One question that I paraphrased from the workshop asked, "why I write," and the ideas behind the conference theme of language, access, and power instantly became more connected. The DBLAC Virtual Writing Workshop space provided me an opportunity to explore writing outside of the traditional classroom; the reasoning behind writing for me is to process, consider, reflect, and re-envision. How does my position allow me the opportunity/space to write? I found that writing is never *for* me but rather *for* others to read or comment on. To quote what a mentor, Dr. Michelle Eble, once said to me (as I'm sure many others have said/been told before), "Writing is never done, it's just due." But throughout my schooling, and well into the graduate program(s), despite my interest in writing it was always an assignment, something to complete. For my students, for my instructors, for the expectations of the university. These realizations were made apparent throughout the hour-and-a-half spent writing and reflecting in the workshop. Based on my personal experiences outside of the conference space with having my writing surveilled, I came to better understand the blur between public and private; furthermore, the experiences assisted in my understanding of how events may shape a scholar's research agenda and positionality. To consider the power writing has and the expectations behind an assignment made me re-evaluate how much my language has power, especially as I generated social media content as a live tweeter.

Power and User-Generated Content

Being given the opportunity to live tweet the conference sessions afforded me the chance to connect with scholars through social media (Twitter), a space that replaced what would have been an in-person interaction. Despite this affordance, as I reflect on my tweets, which include tagging scholars and implementing conference hashtags, I wonder about the implications as a graduate student. My experiences as a live tweeter have prompted several questions: Is there a "guide" for how to engage in social media platforms? How do our identities influence the ways we interact within a public/social space? For someone who has yet to present individually at a conference in-person (at the time of this conference in 2021), how do interactions shift from online when conferences (eventually) move to hybrid or in-person again?

Central to my own work with surveillance, as well as my role as a live tweeter, is thinking through power dynamics and the content I was creating on social media as a user. I adopt Amidon et al.'s definition of a user, which are individuals who are integrated into platforms within specific roles, which influence the types of content, data, or metadata they might introduce to a platform (2019). As we think about user-generated content, we must also consider how there is a privileging of hierarchical power, both visible and invisible to users. For example, Reyman (2013) discusses how technologies cannot be viewed as sole agents in meaning-making; technical communicators must also include human agency in digital composing. Reyman writes that one "consequence of separating an author-user from the productive act of generating user data is that it privileges a structure in which the technology provider automatically assumes ownership and control over user information" (526). Amidon et al. (2019) write how oftentimes users "may not understand, see, or access the full range of content, data, and metadata they create while interacting in such platforms" which has implications for the extent to which "service and

platform developers retain ownership and control over their data."
These quotes contribute to the questions I posed considering
interaction, power, and data within social media spaces. It is an
important reminder that "the contributions of users make data
possible: user data generation depends on users, on their
interactions, participation, and production. It does not exist
without them" (Reyman 2013, 527). While I note the affordances of
creating a community virtually in lieu of an in-person event, one
way we may think about power within the conference space is
through *who* attended, *who* live tweeted, and *what* quotes were
being pulled to tweet from sessions. Our identities are always
already present, though not always apparent. Are thoughts or
intentions from sessions represented correctly, in accordance with
the presenters? Are those who are unable to attend and/or unable
to attend certain sessions receiving the information they expected?
What are the power imbalances that are in/visible within the
virtual space, and through attendee interactions?

*June 8, 2021: Really interesting to consider how communities enact power
on social media - referencing Jhaver, Chan, and Bruckman. Discussion of
specific anti-social justice subreddit: active moderation, traceable history,
and there is research about the community. #E4 #attw21*

Though I do not have an answer to all the prompted questions, I do
provide some insights for graduate students towards the end of the
reflection. My hope is that those reading will turn inwards and
reflect on the ways that they engage within online spaces, and
further how power plays a role within these spaces. These are big
questions that I anticipate would include lengthy and complex
answers that vary based on our interlocking identities and
positionalities. As we continue to think about language, access, and
power in technical communication, I invite readers to also refer to
these questions posed on Day Three by Dr. Michael Trice (E4) in
"Reworking Language, Access, and Power: User-Generated

Content and its Effects on the Technical Communication Profession":

- How might technical communication professionals build productive and ethical alliances with users, influencers, moderators, and other key players who interact with user-generated content?
- What do professional technical communicators need to know about algorithms that alter the circulation of user-generated content, such as YouTube's evolving monetization protocol or Facebook's recent attempts to more aggressively identify and flag misinformation?
- What has the COVID-19 pandemic taught us about user-generated content and its effects on technical communication?
- What are some ethical principles that technical communicators should consider when we interact with user-generated content?
- How will the post-pandemic recovery shape technical communication — or vice versa?

Dr. Trice's questions contribute to further unpacking and determining the role power plays in technical communication, especially in relation to user-generated content (such as the content I was creating as a live tweeter). I include these questions from Dr. Trice to further assist those who mentor/guide graduate students, as well as offer a few questions for graduate students to discuss with their mentors and/or communities regarding ways to navigate user-generated content, and the future of technical communication. Because of my role as a live tweeter, I find it valuable to include information about users and user-generated content. Graduate students occupy a level of precarity as they navigate the many roles (instructor, student, colleague, peer) in the higher education space. Further, when stepping into the social

media space, graduate students embody an added layer of precarity.

Power in Technical Communication: From Theory to Practice

To contextualize power and graduate student precarity, it is essential to consider how the themes of the conference and field definition contribute to our understandings of power in technical communication. As Collins (2008, as cited in Walton, Moore, and Jones 2019) writes, "the relationships between systems of oppression and the individual shift from context to context" (114). Power is especially central to the history of the field of technical communication and determining the current role of technical communicators. Power is dynamic, however, as is the "relationship between the oppressed and the system of oppression" (Walton, Moore, and Jones 2019, 114). Power may be exerted throughout the knowledge-making process through the influence that technical communicators have in ensuring that those within the process are heard. This attention to power is what Frost and Eble (2015) advocate for in asking technical communicators to "resist, subvert, and intervene" (6). I also see Frost and Eble's call as defining attributes to the role of a technical communicator and how they may wield the power the field has sought to legitimize for decades. Blyler, as cited in Kynell-Hunt and Savage (2004), discusses reimagining legitimacy, especially in technical and professional communication. Blyler discusses how legitimacy can be obtained through empowerment–that is, groups coming together to advocate, relate, and/or interrupt (borrowing from Ryan et al. 2016) dominant ideologies to create change. This is different from what societal expectations are: legitimacy is often determined in relation to dominant societal and systemic values of approval.

This notion of legitimacy and dominant systems helps us think about a few questions posed from Dr. Megan Poole's (D4) presentation during Day Three, "The Haptics of Making: Appealing to Multiple Literacies in the Technical Writing Classroom." Two questions in particular help rhetoricians consider multiple literacies in the technical writing classroom: Do your students show resistance to giving up their prior knowledge? Or otherwise resist taking on new experiences that they cannot yet imagine being related to their majors? Within this session, Dr. Poole discussed Makerspaces as responsive technical communication pedagogy, encouraging instructors to utilize such spaces to foster open learning. According to Tham (2019), "A 'Makerspace' is the most common reference used to identify an open workspace dedicated to maker culture practices" (22). Dr. Poole mentioned that in the technical writing classroom, there was a wide range of backgrounds and/or majors which allowed for a lack of shared expertise when entering the Makerspace. Therefore, within Dr. Poole's Makerspace specifically, the hierarchy of prior experience was flattened, and all students were openly learning together. This "neutral" collaborative space gave students the opportunity to work on creative technical projects as well as engage in the sharing of resources and support(s). Ultimately, Dr. Poole argues that Makerspaces assist in removing prior expertise from the learning: all students were novices. Because the goal of Makerspaces is to engage in shared expertise and oftentimes to make technologies accessible to those who may not otherwise have access to it, future research should include an exploration of how background knowledge does influence learning within the space. Dr. Poole further questioned that when the "hierarchy is flattened" in Makerspaces, how must and can multiple literacies be balanced in the classroom so that some ways of knowing are not privileged over others?

June 8, 2021: Poole's students would comment about the endless revision in their Makerspace - "I know more about tech writing than I thought I

did." What about haptic literacy promotes easier engagement within the classroom? #attw21 #D4

Dr. Poole's presentation on Makerspaces and further questioning of how ways of knowing may not be privileged over others contribute to a common theme that I've been grappling with: understanding the role of technical communicators in navigating dominant power structures. The social justice turn in technical communication focuses on language, access, and power through amplifying the agency of groups who are oppressed based on material conditions (see Jones 2016, 347; Walton, Moore, and Jones 2019). The conference theme of "language, access, and power in technical communication" was not just the conference's goals but also was embodied through the organizers and those who were in attendance. For example, as Dr. Carrie Grant (D2) discussed during Day Three in "Whose Tech Comm Do We Care About? The Trust-Building Tactics of Girls' Technology Camps," trust in technical communication employs an ethic of care, requires relationships, and demands understanding of history and context. Not only are our systems and language structures built by Western white heteropatriarchal societies, but they are also systems that engage in oppression through power-over language and push to conform to the colonizer's language (see Trinh T. Minh-ha in Foss, Foss, and Griffin 1999). Employing ethics of care in technical communication appears to me as explicitly feminist principles. For example, Sally Miller Gearhart defines feminism as liberation from domination (Foss, Foss, and Griffin 1999). Gearhart posits that rhetoric as persuasion is violent. When we equate rhetoric with persuasion, it suggests that there is a persuader and someone being persuaded: a power dynamic.

June 7, 2021: Still thinking about some of the takeaways from @Sunkesharee [Sweta Baniya] #ATTW21 presentation, especially within my own research. One implication is valuing local knowledges and

expertise as well as the importance of women in disaster response. Immediately connected to #rethinkingethos [Ryan, Myers, Jones 2016]

During Day Two, Dr. Sweta Baniya (B1) discussed "Using Transnational Risk Communication Methods: Language, Power, and Access During Disasters." I include this tweet and presentation as an example of a persuader/persuaded power dynamic. Language and meaning making are based on our experiences; therefore, when we create meaning from situations, we as rhetoricians and technical communicators must be careful to consider the rhetorical implications of creating meaning that isn't inclusive of the impact on different bodies. For example, Dr. Baniya notes in her presentation that technology helps to mediate public actions, and that official and unofficial assemblages interact, intersect, and cooperate with each other. Technology use is therefore a tool to mediate public actions, though we must be mindful not to view technology as a *thing*. As Slack and Wise (2005) demonstrate, "the formulation of technology as things that are useful deflects vision toward the tool-like use of these things, and away from the work or role of these things beyond matters of usefulness" (97). Further, Haas (2012) writes, "technology is informed by cultural and rhetorical theories as together these theories interrogate how inequalities of power are produced, maintained, and transformed through culture and its rhetorics" (288).

June 7, 2021: @Sunkesharee [Sweta Baniya] defines transnational assemblages in the context of disasters as coalitional networks of people, organizations, or entities, who connect via online and offline mediums through objects like phones and computers across National borders as well as the people who gather to respond to a specific situation of natural or political crisis #ATTW21

Based on Dr. Baniya's definition and the ways in which technologies mediate public actions, I wonder about the ways we as rhetoricians and technical communicators can continue to call

attention to and disrupt power dynamics. How do technologies, digital and not, influence the ways dominant power structures and systems are produced and maintained? Due to the illusion of choice users are "given" and the current normalization of technologies within our daily lives, there is a precedent to address issues of power with such technological infrastructures. Technical communicators are poised to question and address issues of ethics, user-generated content, surveillance, and misinformation.

Power and Graduate Student Mentorship

Some of the questions that the previously mentioned scholars, such as Dr. Trice (see above for the list of questions), posed also have implications not just for technical communicators but for community building and mentorship with/of graduate students. During the Council for Programs in Scientific and Technical Communication Graduate Student Committee (CPTSC-GSC) listening session at the end of Day Three, it was determined that technical communicators and those in positions to mentor/advocate for graduate students should listen to graduate students. Part of this move toward mentorship/advocacy is also graduate students connecting and building a space where they may voice what they want to advocate for. The listening session was fundamental for technical communication graduate students to question and interrogate what matters most to them at that moment in time. What do *we* need? What would *we* like to advocate for? The conference seemed to come full circle at this point: during the listening session, I was reminded that the DBLAC Anti-Racist Virtual Writing Workshop that created community at the first session I attended on Day Two was founded by graduate students seeking support in similar ways to the CPTSC-GSC. According to the DBLAC Virtual Writing Group "About" page, the Virtual Writing Group was organized and led by Khirsten L. Scott and Lou Maraj from Summer 2018 through Summer 2019. The majority of

DBLAC's programming is geared towards Black graduate students; however, the group mentions their increasing awareness of the "collective and universal need for community, especially in intellectual pursuits."

To support graduate students, especially those in precarious and vulnerable positions (which, arguably are all graduate students but to varying degrees due to intersectional identities and systemic power imbalances), those who are in positions to create space for students should follow the DBLAC's goals in promoting supportive communal interactions. The CPTSC-GSC listening session contributes to the ongoing conversation on how to better support graduate students and determined that it would be beneficial to ask fellow technical communication graduate students across the nation to provide input on what they'd like future conference roundtables or listening sessions to focus on. Topics that were brainstormed included, but are not limited to: pedagogical materials, design examples, job market materials, publication guides, and so forth.

One of the first things that I was told as a first-year PhD student was to "find my group." My group? How do you find a group? Moving from a different state, over 700 miles away from family and friends, was challenging. It brought with it a range of emotions, from excitement to loneliness and everything in-between and around. Is my cohort my "group"? Am I supposed to find friends outside of the classroom? How? In this new location?

I often "joke" about there needing to be a "guide" for first-generation college students. Navigation of institutional expectations is near to impossible without a trusted resource. For me, I was (and am) privileged to have mentors that I can turn to for questions not just about professional life, but also personal life. I also recognize that not every graduate student has that trusted mentor or person to turn to. I'm not quite sure how or when I

stumbled upon the Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication Graduate Student Committee (CPTSC-GSC), but they quickly became my "group."

The listening session at ATTW was crucial to the CPTSC-GSC to begin collaborating on a FOCUS manuscript for *Programmatic Perspectives*. In the article, we centered graduate students' precarity, which helps us consider issues of labor, citizenship, risk, and oppression. Graduate students occupy precarious positions due to their various roles: overlapping and interlocking as students, teachers, and scholars. Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s, posits that existing feminist frameworks fail to account for the idea that "it is in the intersections of race, gender, class, sexuality, and other seemingly discrete markers of identity that we can see societal injustice and violence enacted differently" (De Hertogh et al. 2018, 5). Intersectionality, especially when viewed within the context of higher education/the classroom space, may assist instructors/scholars in understanding issues associated with the intersection of race, class, disability, and sexuality; "for Crenshaw, intersectionality points particularly to the differential imposition of power and state violence" on Black women (De Hertogh et al. 2018, 5).

Further contributing to the conversation surrounding intersectionality, Dr. Oriana Gilson and PhD Candidate Lisa Dooley (F6) discussed on Day Three "A Layered Approach to Socially Just Pedagogy: Decolonial and Intersectional Feminist Rhetorics in the TPC Classroom." During Dr. Gilson and Dooley's presentation, they explored an "intersectional feminist rhetorical methodology" which is "committed to identifying and challenging exclusionary rhetorics of efficiency and propelling the agentive power of those whose embodied realities places them outside of the normative user-group imagined by, and constructed through, a specific policy." I include their presentation as one to reflect upon in relation to the Graduate Student Listening Session because of

the implications for understanding and attending to the intersectional identities graduate students have. Graduate students also experience varying states of vulnerability and precarity based on their positionality, agency, power, and professional and relational dynamics (Banville et al. 2021, 1). Graduate students and instructors alike may utilize the intersectional feminist rhetorical methodological framework to call attention to and both address/replace unjust behaviors and practices. This framework by Dr. Gilson and Dooley calls for instructors to be explicit in designing and enacting socially just pedagogical practices which is helpful guidance as we reflect upon both how and why we teach.

Ultimately, our goal within the CPTSC Graduate Student Committee and from our article is to open a conversation regarding the vulnerable positions that graduate students occupy and invite faculty and program administrators to join us in this conversation to act as allies in our ongoing work (Banville et al. 2021, 1). After my first virtual technical communication conference, I walked away with some takeaways and jotted down notes for fellow first-gens intending to attend a virtual conference (my advice would be slightly different for an in-person conference and will be explored in a workshop during ATTW 2022). It is crucial to note that this list is not neutral nor applicable to all people and cases. I am specifically reflecting from the narrow perspective of a white, cisgender, heterosexual woman whose experience as a first-gen looks *very* different than those who are most harmed by systemic oppression (especially those who identify as Black, Indigenous, disabled, LGBTQIA+, and/or a person of color). As Walton, Moore, and Jones (2019) write, aligning with work by Patricia Hill Collins, "existing and persisting often requires building or supporting coalitions" (112). This creation of community and navigating support(s) (that may not even exist) is a challenge. Reflecting upon the virtual conference and my experience as a graduate student, I would suggest to any graduate student reading this article (especially first-generation):

1. Attend conferences - but not all of them. Check with department faculty and staff for scholarships or available funding for you to attend. There is a temptation, and sometimes pressure, to feel as though you need to apply to every conference call that is solicited. Don't. Only apply to what you believe you are most connected to and what may benefit you the most. Once you attend the conference, know that you are not expected to attend (or even try to attend) every presentation. It may feel like there is an obligation to attend fellow colleagues or friends' panels as well: support who you can, but also protect your mental space.

2. Find your group. If you're like me and are asking yourself, "what does this even mean?" then reach out to professional organizations to see if they have a graduate student committee or offer writing accountability groups. Being in contact with people from across the nation who were/are in similar positions as myself (but not in my university) was/is monumental in combating feelings of imposter syndrome, issues with power and positionality, and genre conventions, amongst other topics.

3. If you're at a conference and are unsure of how to respond to a question, pause. Your pause gives you a moment to consider. If you do not know the answer, kindly respond that you'll carefully consider that question, and write down the person's contact information. It's okay (and human) to not have an answer for everything. Similarly, if you attend a panel and have a question, ask! This is an opportunity to connect and learn from other researchers in the field.

4. Collaborate, if you can. How? Well, one of the best things I've done is create a social media account (though this does

come with many other implications to consider). One of the upcoming conferences I am attending (RSA 2022) is a panel that began from Twitter interactions. This is another way to find your "group." My very first tweet on the account asked users to tag other accounts to follow in technical communication, so this was helpful in curating a feed that relates to my interests.

I am certain that there are many other suggestions that other first-generation students would have regarding conference-related advice, such as genre conventions of presentations, accessibility guidelines, navigating interpersonal interactions, and more. As we think about the theme of language, access, and power, I encourage those who are in a position of privilege to create a space for students to ask questions and voice concerns. This includes both undergraduate students and graduate students. As conferences shift to in-person formats, conversations about financial obligations, clothing choices, planning, format of the conference, accessibility concerns, and other preparedness tips are crucial to have as a department. To believe that graduate students know or "should" already know how to navigate professional commitments is inaccurate and ableist. And to believe that they've attended conferences prior to their PhD (or Masters) program is *also* inaccurate. Graduate students begin programs with various understandings and knowledge, and just as we are not to assume undergraduate students have the "expected" knowledge base when they walk into the classroom, we should also take care to not assume the same of graduate students.

References

Amidon, Timothy, Les Hutchinson Campos, Tyanna Herrington, and Jessica Reyman. 2019. "Copyright, Content, And Control: Student Authorship Across Educational Platforms." *Kairos* 24, no. 1. http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/24.1/topoi/amidon-et-al/index.html.

Banville, Morgan, Meghalee Das, Katlynne Davis, Evelyn Dsouza, Allison Durazzi, Emily Gresbrink, Elena Kalodner-Martin, and Danielle Stambler. 2021. "Identity, Agency, and Positionality: Considerations of Graduate Students in Technical Communication." *Programmatic Perspectives: FOCUS* 12(2). https://cptsc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Identity-Agency-and-Precarity.pdf

DBLAC Virtual Writing Group. 2022. "About." https://sites.google.com/view/dblacvwg/about?authuser=0

De Hertogh, Lori Beth, Liz Lane, and Jessica Ouellette. 2018. "'Feminist Leanings: Tracing Technofeminist and Intersectional Practices and Values in Three Decades of Computers and Composition." *Computers and Composition* 51: 4-13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2018.11.004

Foss, Karen, Sonja Foss, and Cindy Griffin. 1999. *Feminist Rhetorical Theories.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Frost, Erin A., and Michelle Eble. 2015. "Technical Rhetorics: Making Specialized Persuasion Apparent to Public Audiences." *Present Tense* 4(2): 1-9. http://www.presenttensejournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/FrostandEble.pdf

Haas, Angela. 2012. "Race, Rhetoric, and Technology: A Case Study of Decolonial Technical Communication Theory, Methodology, and Pedagogy." *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 26(3): 277-310. https://doi.org/10.1177/1050651912439539

Jones, Natasha N. 2016. "The Technical Communicator as Advocate: Integrating A Social Justice Approach in Technical Communication." *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* 46(3): 342–361. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047281616639472

Kynell-Hunt, Teresa, and Gerald Savage. 2004. *Power and Legitimacy in Technical Communication: The Historical and Contemporary Struggle for Professional Status*. Routledge.

Reyman, Jessica. 2013. "User Data on The Social Web: Authorship, Agency, And Appropriation." *College English* 75(5): 513–533. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24238250

Ryan, Kathleen, Nancy Meyers, and Rebecca Jones. 2016. *Re-Thinking Ethos: A Feminist Ecological Approach to Rhetoric.* Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Slack, Jennifer D., and J. Macgregor Wise. 2005. *Culture + technology: A primer*. New York, NY: Lang.

Tham, Jason. 2019. "Multimodality, Makerspaces, and the Making of a Maker Pedagogy for Technical Communication and Rhetoric." Retrieved from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, https://hdl.handle.net/11299/206361.

Walton, Rebecca, Kristen Moore, and Natasha Jones. 2019. *Technical Communication After the Social Justice Turn: Building Coalitions for Action.* Routledge.

About the Author

Morgan C. Banville is a PhD Candidate in Rhetoric, Writing, and Professional Communication at East Carolina University. She researches the intersections of surveillance studies and technical communication, often informed by feminist methodologies. She is the Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication (CPTSC) Graduate Student Committee (GSC) Co-Chair and *The Peer Review Journal* Graduate Co-Editor. You can find her recent work in the Proceedings of the 38th and 39th ACM International Conference on Design of Communication as well as *Programmatic Perspectives*, *The Dangling Modifier*, *The Peer Review Journal*, *IEEE Xplore*, *constellations: a cultural rhetorics publishing space*, and the *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*.