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Final Master's Portfolio

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A Final Portfolio

Submitted to the English Department of Bowling Green
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the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in the field of English
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Analytical Narrative

I've always enjoyed the challenge of understanding the rules and intricacies needed to write well, and although I've written personally and academically my whole life, I never felt brave enough to call myself a writer. I started taking classes at Bowling Green State University when I was a sophomore in high school as a College Credit Plus Student which meant that when it came time to officially enroll at BGSU, I needed to know what I wanted to study right away. I chose communications and psychology because of my fascination with human behavior. While I adore these fields and would study them again if given the choice, I felt a longing to pursue English all throughout my undergraduate studies. It wasn't until I was sitting at commencement that I had the overwhelming yet clear feeling that I wasn't done being a student. I knew that I wanted to pursue a career in writing, that I was going back to school, and that this time I would get it right: I was going to study English.

I began pursuing my Master of Arts in English in the fall of 2021. I'm interested in copyediting and understanding the technical side of language, which led to me specializing in professional writing and rhetoric. Through the classes I've taken in the MA program, I've discovered my passion for revision and helping others develop their writing into something they're proud of. Much of my time in the MA program centered around revision and peer feedback and enabled me to develop this skill of helping others develop their own writing. This program also opened my eyes to the importance of collaboration during the writing process and establishing writer-editor relationships. Many of the insights, skills, and lessons like these will undoubtedly guide the work I complete as I pursue a career in copyediting. On a more personal note, the MA program has been a journey to finding the confidence to call myself a writer. In the past, I never felt like I had the authority to do so because I believed I lacked the necessary

credentials and job experience. Therefore, the focus of the three revisions I completed for my master's portfolio centered around celebrating all that I've learned over the last two years and producing confident writing.

For my first revision, I selected an essay I completed with Dr. Hoy in English 6460: Professional/Technical Communication and Rhetorical Theory titled, "Feminism, Rhetoric, and the Impact of Audience Assumptions in Sewing Machine Manuals." I wrote this essay toward the end of the MA program as part of an intensive research project about technical communication theories. I focused specifically on the relationship between women and technical writing and how sexism has or has not been present in technical documents over the last century. This essay is important to me because it represents a culmination of all the skills and knowledge I've acquired over the course of the program. In this essay, I take full authority over calling myself a writer (especially a technical writer) through my detailed analysis, critiques, and suggestions for the two sewing machine manuals I examined. I was proud of the original draft I submitted to Dr. Hoy and felt it was the best it could be. However, through Dr. Hoy's feedback and the feedback I received from my peers and Dr. Nickoson in English 6910, I recognized there was a third theoretical approach to examine my essay from. This led to the addition of historical considerations in my essay and to conducting another analysis of the two sewing machine manuals from a historical lens. To complete this, I revisited readings from Dr. Hoy's class and conducted more research of my own. Ultimately, these revision activities led my essay to a new conclusion reflected via the "Limitations" and "Considerations for the Future" sections of the revised essay. Although I was satisfied with my original draft of this project, having additional people review it and work through my ideas with me was invaluable to showing me where I could expand my essay and how to make my writing better.

For my second revision, I selected an essay I completed with Dr. Duffy in English 6200: The Teaching of Writing titled, “The Importance of Fostering Students’ Voices in Writing.” Revisiting this essay was important to me because Dr. Duffy’s class was a pivotal moment for me as a writing student. Through his guidance and my peers’ encouragement, my time in Dr. Duffy’s class showed me not only the value of receiving feedback, but how crucial it is to provide others with *good* feedback. For this essay, I wanted to dig deeper into research on this topic and understand why teachers must provide students with good feedback and how this affects students’ writing. However, I don’t have any experience with teaching writing courses, and this was reflected via a lack of confidence in my original draft. Namely, many of my claims were passive or speculative because I didn’t have real-world teaching experiences to draw on and validate my ideas.

I approached the revision of “Fostering Students’ Voices” with the goal of reclaiming authority over my work. I focused on taking charge of my ideas by deleting passive statements. This made my writing more active and let my research stand out because it wasn’t buried behind uncertain phrases. I also created a freewriting activity included in the essay’s appendix that is ready for classroom use. My peer reviewers were immensely helpful during the revision process because they were both teachers and had unique perspectives to offer as they responded to my work. Through sharing their own teaching experiences, they also validated the arguments made in my essay and gave me the confidence boost I needed to claim full authority over my writing. Completing this revision showed me that my confidence was always there, but it was shrouded by a fear of saying something incorrect due to my lack of real-world experience. Ultimately, I learned that I need to give myself more credit and celebrate what I’ve learned rather than fearing what I don’t know. This project was invaluable to me because it taught me how to respond well

to other's writing which is a skill that I will use throughout my career as I build relationships and work with other writers.

For my final revision, I selected another essay I wrote with Dr. Hoy in English 6430: Ethics in Professional/Technical Writing titled, "Technical Writing: Ethics of the Humanization of Accident Reports." In this essay, I sought to define technical communication and investigated the balance between humanistic and scientific components in technical writing as exemplified by accident reports. I wrote this essay in my first semester of the MA program when I had little knowledge of what technical writing is. Therefore, revising it for my portfolio was important to me because it brought my learning experience full circle, allowing me to revisit the essay with the knowledge I'd gained over the three semesters that had passed since I wrote it. Similar to my second revision project, many portions of the writing in "The Ethics of Accident Reports" were passive and lacked confidence. When approaching revision, I deleted passive statements to emphasize the essay's research and to let my ideas stand for themselves. I also offered clarity in places that were unclear as identified by Dr. Nickoson and my peers, added additional research as suggested by Dr. Hoy, and included photographs to support my arguments and demonstrate the significance of this topic to my audience. Revising this essay was rewarding because it made me recognize how far I've progressed as a writer—especially a technical writer—in the last two years.

The importance of revision is among the most valuable lessons the MA program taught me. When I submitted the original drafts of these essays, I believed they were the best they could be. After some time away from them, I realized there was much more to say, many more perspectives to explore, and that, if given the chance, I could complete revisions of these essays

indefinitely and never really be done writing them. This showed me that a final draft doesn't mean that a piece of writing is finished. There is always more to say.

Another valuable skill the MA program helped me develop was responding to other's writing. Not having come from an English academic background, I rarely had opportunities to engage in peer review in my undergraduate studies. Now I recognize how crucial collaboration is to the writing process and that nobody writes in isolation. Even when we write alone, everything we say is a response to other pieces of writing or experiences we've had. This is reflected in all three of my revisions: after reading more widely and gaining new experiences, I had more to say on topics I thought were otherwise finished.

The MA program has been an immense help in developing my confidence in my writing abilities. I pursued a Master of Arts because I want to become a copyeditor, and I wanted the knowledge and credentials to pursue this line of work and perform on the job with confidence. My experience in the MA program has opened my eyes to the value of being brave, writing something, and sharing it with others. I am so grateful to my peers and instructors who helped me learn and grow over the course of the last two years. They were all so kind, encouraging, patient, and inquisitive, and pushed me in the best ways possible. Moving into my career, I hope to emulate these same qualities as I help other writers improve their work and gain confidence in both their writing abilities and in calling themselves writers, too.

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Dr. Hoy

English 6460

7 October 2022

Feminism, Rhetoric, History, and the Impact of Audience Assumptions in Sewing Machine Manuals

Introduction

The field of technical communication has historically been dominated by men. Though it has grown increasingly accepting of women as it has evolved in recent decades, scholar Katherine Durack shared a startling insight that, especially in past generations, "women are accepted as users of machines, particularly those that are used for housework, but such knowledge is not considered as competence with *technology*" ("Gender, Technology, and History" 39). This statement was the catalyst for my research, leading me to investigate the everchanging relationship between women and technology. This took form in the analysis of two sewing machine instruction manuals. The manuals share a one hundred two year age gap, allowing me to investigate how society's changing beliefs regarding women's duties influenced the technical writing found in each manual. This is an important consideration to apply to the writing choices exhibited in the manuals because, as the second inspiring scholar for this essay, Linda Driskill, asserted, technical communication is influenced by what writers and readers "know, feel, or believe" (59).

The focus of this research project is to conduct a comparative analysis of both manuals to gain insight as to how rhetorical, feminist, and historical theories intersect with technical communication. This research is important because it reflects on how even in a field as gender-

neutral and objective as technical writing, there may still be inadvertent sexism buried in technical documents. This sexism is both informed and obscured by society's understanding of a woman's role. Investigating this issue in sewing machine manuals from feminist, rhetorical, and historical perspectives will shed light on this topic and spark discussion about how the field of technical communication can improve moving forward.

Theoretical Foundations

Feminist Approach

The first perspective this paper uses to investigate the sewing machine manuals is a feminist approach. Within the field of technical communication, feminist theory is understood as considering women's experiences and how those experiences shape women's perceptions and interactions within the field. However, it is difficult to provide a concrete definition of this theory because many feminist theorists have varying opinions and beliefs and therefore resist a uniform definition for fear of minimizing individual experiences. Instead, they choose to view women as sites of differences rather than someone who can be lumped into a singular definition that insinuates all women's experiences are alike (Lay 148).

Despite holding some differing views, all feminist theorists share the same founding principles within the field of technical communication. These include celebrating differences, theory that activates social change, acknowledging one's background and values, the inclusion of women's experiences, studying the gaps and silences in traditional approaches, and supporting new sources of knowledge (Lay 148). This means that feminist theorists call for scholars to abandon traditional, positivist views to technical communication that value science and objectivity above all else, often rejecting human experiences as a result. Feminist theorists

advocate for the inclusion of humanism, of how scholars' experiences, particularly as women, shape how they read and write technical documents and communicate in the field.

Considering sewing machine manuals from a feminist theory perspective is especially important because sewing is a traditionally feminine activity. In *The Young Lady's Friend,* a book on etiquette, Strasser astutely observed that 19th century society believed that "a woman who does not sew is as deficient in her education as a man who cannot write" (Durack, "Authority and Writing Strategies" 185). This is very different from modern working women who, by contrast, "tend to reject conventional female occupational interest patterns [like sewing]" (Tipton 162). However, it is important to understand these conflicting attitudes when examining both old and modern sewing machine manuals, especially when analyzing if the manuals are biased toward female audiences. Regarding Lay's principles of feminist theory identified above, this essay is especially concerned with acknowledging one's background and values and how women's experiences are included in technical documents. These principles will guide the analysis of the documents conducted in this essay. It is worth noting that analyzing sewing machine manuals from a feminist perspective is appropriate because the manuals describe a piece of machinery and technology—traditionally "masculine" concepts—that was originally made for women. The sewing machine represents a nearly perfect intersection between feminism and technology.

Rhetorical Approach

The second approach this paper uses to analyze the sewing machine manuals is a rhetorical perspective. Traditionally, rhetoric has been understood as "persuasion" and an appeal to audiences' ethos, pathos, and logos, and therefore absent from the objective and factual field of technical communication. However, modern scholars understand that rhetoric is far more

complex and expansive. In technical communication, rhetoric is the understanding that all acts of communication are contextually situated. This means that communicators bring their own "values, beliefs, perspectives, knowledge, authorities, politics, expectations, and constraints that enable or limit their ability to read and use technical documents" (Bosley 296). In any situation, both writers' and readers' backgrounds influence how they write and interpret technical documents. In simplest terms, modern day rhetorical approaches ask scholars to consider how context shapes communication.

Considering rhetorical perspectives is another important approach to use when analyzing the sewing machine manuals because the time period, or *context,* in which each document was written significantly influences the choices made by the writers. This essay is especially concerned with investigating rhetoric about how society's understanding of a woman's role impacts technical writing choices. This will be applied to the analysis portion of this essay primarily through reflecting on the manuals' language use and audience assumptions, including users' gender and existing sewing knowledge.

Historical Approach

The third approach to technical communication this essay uses to analyze the sewing machine manuals is a historical perspective. Technical communication has traditionally favored objectivity, a strict adherence to facts, and an absence of subjective qualities often labeled as "humanistic factors," such as emotional and personal considerations. This approach to technical writing, called "positivism," believes that "sensory data are the only permissible basis for knowledge; consequently, the only meaningful statements are those which can be empirically verified" (Miller 612). This view devalues—and perhaps condemns—emotion, positing that valuable information is only that which can be directly observed or proven. More specifically,

this refers to facts and quantitative data. Positivist scholars even sought to establish an "observation language" for technical communicators that is "free of the emotion and metaphysics which pollute ordinary language" (Miller 612). This suggests that, historically, qualitative data was not only believed to be unreliable due to its subjective nature; human experiences were likened as "pollutants" whose presence lowered the quality of technical documents.

Modern technical writers' views are not as rigid as the positivists. While some still favor the positivist approach, there have been many calls to "humanize" the field in the last handful of decades. This view is reflected by scholars such as Russel Rutter who described technical communication as "one-third writing proficiency, one-third problem-solving skill, and one-third ability to work with other people" (Rutter 133). This inclusion of humanistic factors is important because all technical documents are created for people, whether it is for the purpose of delivering information or helping people accomplish a task.

While many modern technical writers hold more closely the views of Rutter than in the past, the exclusion of humanistic factors remains a common practice in the field. This likely stems from the field's positivist history because in its effort to remain practical—or *technical*—it has "cleansed itself of subjectivity" so intensely that it doesn't place people first at all (Rutter 148). This is a disservice to the field considering that all technical communication is created *by* people *for* people. Although Rutter's article is outdated, the debate over including humanistic factors is still relevant today and one that I frequently encounter as a technical writing student. Today, this debate has evolved into questioning whether technical writing programs should be housed within engineering or English programs at universities.

Considering these historical approaches to technical communication will inform my analysis of each sewing machine manual, providing insight on the writing conventions

exemplified by each. The manuals' large age gap offers an intriguing perspective about how technical writing has changed as a result of the ongoing historical debates within the field over the last century. With humanistic vs. positivistic ideas in mind, I will analyze how humanistic factors are or are not incorporated into the manuals' writing and graphics, as well as how objective the language is.

Methodology

The remainder of this essay is dedicated to the analysis of a 1915 Singer sewing machine manual and a 2017 Brother manual. Specifically, a comparative analysis is conducted that investigates the similarities and differences between the manuals within the scope of feminist, rhetorical, and historical approaches to technical communication. Although the manuals are from two different companies, both Singer and Brother are popular, long-established sewing companies in the United States, and both machines evaluated were intended for light-duty, everyday sewing projects, perfect for beginners. Therefore, the manuals were comparable and appropriate for this research. I intentionally sought manuals with a significant age gap to better investigate how the writing may differ due to contextual differences of the time each was written.

Due to the large amount of material analyzed between the two manuals, it was best to utilize a general approach when conducting the comparative analysis that considers the manuals in their entirety rather than focusing on specific portions of each manual. To accomplish this, I read each manual, took extensive notes, and conducted a thorough analysis of my observations. After identifying similarities and differences between the two manuals, I sorted my findings into either feminist, rhetorical, or historical categories. Additionally, I identified subcategories within these three groups. The subcategories that were best represented in the manuals from a feminist approach include tacit knowledge, female depictions in graphics, and machine maintenance.

Rhetorical perspectives were best observed via jargon, audience, diagrams and graphics, and writing style. Lastly, historical perspectives were best reflected via the manuals' creators and technical writing conventions. This essay explores each of these subcategories in depth and demonstrates how they relate to their respective theoretical approach to technical communication.

Analysis

Brief Overview of Manuals

The Singer No. 115 Sewing Machine and its user manual were released in 1915. The manual is 32 pages and includes many graphics that coordinate with the instructions. Its writing style diverts from modern manual writing standards because the instructions are delivered in paragraph form, much like a book, and it includes no method to navigate the manual aside from bold-font headings. Users must flip through the manual until they find the directions they need to complete specific tasks. The machine is listed as appropriate for "family use," which is the equivalent of an average or beginner sewer.

The Brother LX3817 Sewing Machine and its user manual were released in 2017, just over a century after the Singer model. The Brother manual is 45 pages, but also includes a full Spanish translation, making it 90 pages total. Given the scope of this project, I strictly examined the English version for comparison. The Brother manual conforms to modern day formatting guidelines, including graphics that demonstrate instructions, modular documentation, step-by-step instructions, and a table of contents and index to make navigation easy for users. The machine also appears to be for beginner use.

Feminist Perspectives

The three feminist theory subcategories identified via my analysis include tacit knowledge, female depictions in graphics, and machine maintenance. The following analysis explores these topics in depth and reflects on how they compare in the Singer and Brother manuals.

Tacit Knowledge

Both manuals relied on "tacit knowledge," which this essay identifies as knowledge that users are expected to already have before using the machine, or knowledge that is inherent to users. This was especially apparent in the Singer manual because users needed a familiarity with sewing machines and their terminology to understand it. The following quote is an example instruction from the Singer manual which demonstrates this finding:

> Place the spool of thread on the spool pin at the top of the machine, lead the thread toward the left through the thread guide (1, Fig. 11) at the back and at the top of the face plate, down, under, and from back to front between the tension discs (2, Fig. 11), up back of the tension thread guard (3, Fig. 11), down into the loop of the take-up spring (4, Fig. 11)… (*Instructions For Using Singer* 10)

Singer attempts to overcome this issue by including "Fig." references to a diagram of the machine. This choice was likely meant to aid beginner users, but this was poorly executed considering that without established sewing knowledge, beginners would spend more time translating the directions than using the machine.

The Brother manual better explained sewing concepts to beginners. For example, its "The Main Parts" module (*Operation Manual Brother* 6) explicitly defined each of the machine's parts and their functions, something Singer overlooked. However, Brother also relied heavily on jargon in its written instructions. Of course, this is appropriate in both manuals because it is

unrealistic to expect them to explain how to use the sewing machines without referring to sewing terminology. Although, Brother boldly stated that its machine "is not intended for use by persons (including children) with… lack of experience and knowledge, unless they have been given supervision or instruction…" (*Operation Manual Brother* 3). This explicitly reveals Brother's assumption, or rather declaration, that users must have existing sewing knowledge to effectively use the machine. Singer made no such claim, but a similar assumption can be gleaned from their jargon heavy writing.

This has tremendous implications for feminist theory, specifically when considering who these manuals assume their users are. Historically, sewing is considered a female activity and the skill was "learned by girls from their mothers" (Durack, "Authority and Writing Strategies" 182). Learning to sew initiated girls into a "community of women" (Durack, "Authority and Writing Strategies" 185). Perhaps Brother was alluding to this history when stating that only those with experience or sewing knowledge may use their machine. Singer likely did not need to make such a distinction given the time period in which it was written. However, if sewing is considered a skill passed on primarily among women, then to claim or assume that only experienced users should use the machine is to imply that it must only be used by women. This risks excluding male users and subsequently jeopardizing modern society's values of acceptance and gender fluidity. It also risks relegating women to the traditional roles they have fought so hard to break free of as they moved into the workplace in recent decades, a shift that has caused women to "transform themselves" by hiding or even rejecting their domestic skills (Gajjala 28). I do not believe excluding men or patronizing women was Brother's intention in limiting the machine's use to experienced users—it was likely a safety concern—but perhaps the company did not consider the weight of its statement given sewing's strong feminine history.

Female Depictions in Graphics

Feminist theory is especially relevant to the graphics depicted in both the Singer and Brother manuals. It must be noted that neither manual used gendered pronouns and therefore never directly addressed a female audience. However, each time a person was depicted in either manuals' graphics, they appeared markedly female. Additionally, Singer's 1915 logo is of a woman sewing as shown in Figure 1, but this is no longer true for the modern logo.

Figure 1. Singer 1915 Logo (Instructions For Using Singer, cover page).

Female skewed graphics are especially prevalent in Singer's manual. The only body part depicted is a hand, which is appropriate considering that sewing is a handcraft. Each graphic consists of a very detailed drawing rather than a photograph which means the document's creators could have made the hands appear as gender neutral as they pleased. Even so, it was apparent the hands belonged to female users because of the well-manicured nails and the slender fingers which can be seen in Figure 2. One could easily argue against this feminization of hands in the manual. However, given that it was written in 1915, a time when women were primarily homemakers, this is a logical and likely accurate observation. With the knowledge that "technologies and writings about them reflect and reinforce cultural values and beliefs" (Durack,

"Authority and Writing Strategies" 181), this finding indicates that Singer believed its users were primarily female and therefore reinforced the gender constructs of its time.

Figure 2. Singer's Feminized Hand (Instructions For Using Singer 5).

Brother's manual, though modern and written in a time of increased gender fluidity, equality, and acceptance, exhibits similar behavior. Its graphics include both hands and feet which is appropriate given that sewing machines now use foot pedals, a feature that was absent from the Singer No. 115 model. Brother's graphics differed because they were far less detailed, more technical, and the appendages shown appeared significantly more "neutral," that is, less markedly feminine. A "neutral" hand can be observed in Figure 3 which entails more androgynously shaped fingers and nails. A "feminine" hand that more closely resembles features of Singer's hand, such as slender fingers, is shown in Figure 4.

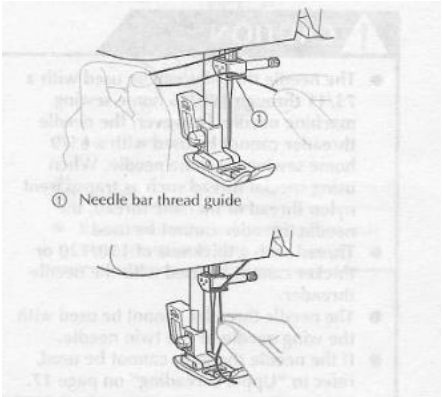


Figure 3. Brother's Neutralized Hand (Operation Manual Brother 18).

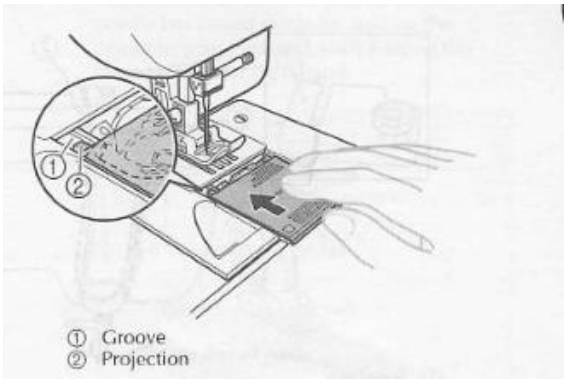


Figure 4. Brother's Feminized Hand (Operation Manual Brother 16).

These are admittedly nitpicky features that could be easily argued against, however, what *does* stand out most in Brother's graphics is the consistent depiction of a foot adorned with a slipper as seen in Figure 5. On the surface, this can be dismissed as a house slipper any man or woman may wear. From a feminist perspective, one cannot help but conjure up images of a dutiful housewife in her morning robe and slippers, seeing her husband off to work as she stays home to tend to domestic tasks and preserve antiquated ideals of femininity. The house slipper arguably symbolizes generational binarism, idealizing men as breadwinners and women as homemakers. This is not an isolated incident. While conducting research, I browsed other modern sewing machine manuals and concluded there is a definite feminization of the foot. This is exemplified in Figure 6, a graphic taken from a modern Singer manual which depicted its users wearing "flats," a piece of traditionally female footwear.

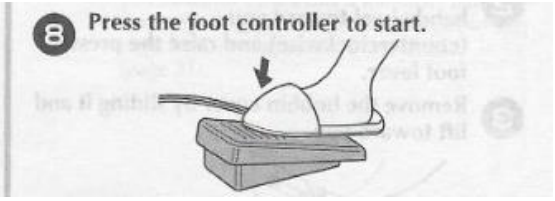


Figure 5. Brother's Feminized Foot (Operation Manual Brother 14).

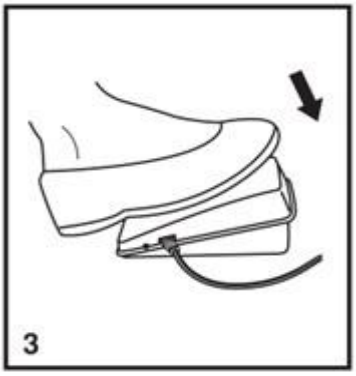


Figure 6. Modern Singer's Feminized Foot (Singer Instruction Manual 23).

Gajjala introduced the idea that "gender roles are integral to how work is organized into public and private spheres" (24), where "men's work" traditionally took place in public workplaces while "women's work" was in the privacy of the home. If sewing usually takes place in the privacy of one's home and can be done barefoot or in socks, one may question why it is necessary to place shoes on the feet depicted in the graphics at all. Brother likely included shoes to maintain a professional image, but by doing so, they subliminally gendered their machine's

users, making it apparent that their assumed audience is female. Had a foot pedal been included with Singer's machine, its manual certainly would have exhibited the same bias given the strict adherence to gender roles in 1915.

Machine Maintenance

Durack observed that women are accepted as users of machines but not as possessing technological competency ("Gender, Technology, and History" 39). This attitude has been historically justified by the belief that women have a natural aptitude for domestic skills like sewing, rendering such knowledge inherent (Durack, "Gender, Technology, and History" 39). In other words, women are accepted as operators of machines, particularly ones used for "women's work," but are not accepted as knowledgeable or capable of understanding the mechanics of the machine itself. This concept was best exemplified by the instructions regarding machine maintenance in both manuals.

The Singer manual demonstrated this by including a section titled "To Oil the Machine" (*Instructions for Using Singer* 16-17) that warns users of the importance of oiling to maintain the machine's health. It then listed instructions for oiling the machine. This contrasts Durack's point because it shows Singer trusted that their users, regardless of gender, possessed the knowledge and skillset to complete this technical, dirty, traditionally "masculine" task of caring for the machine.

The Brother manual also included a machine maintenance module that provided instructions for machine care, storage, and troubleshooting issues. Interestingly, the manual explicitly stated users must *never* oil the machine because it was produced with a sufficient amount of oil for long-term use (*Operation Manual Brother* 40). Users were instead directed to contact a Brother Service Center if complex issues like oiling arose with their machine. This

strongly contrasted Singer's manual because even though society today is more progressive and technologically advanced, Brother's users were not trusted with complex tasks. One explanation for this is that Brother's manual writers assumed maintenance tasks were too advanced for their audience. Or, perhaps this is a reflection of how far advanced technology is today, rendering once crucial tasks like oiling the machine unnecessary. Both explanations are plausible. However, since Brother instructed users to never correct complex issues themselves, it appears more likely users were deemed incompetent to work on a complex piece of machinery. Additionally, Brother likely had a desire to make more money by providing machine services to users, leading Brother to encourage users to seek help from the company for machine maintenance.

I commend the Singer manual in its acceptance of users as competent operators and machine caretakers, especially considering that their audience was likely exclusively women. By doing so, Singer acknowledged that users possess knowledge and skills beyond sewing itself that are not simply inherent. By allowing users to care for the machine, Singer also contradicted the belief that "women and machines were fundamentally incompatible" (Durack, "Authority and Writing Strategies" 184). Despite the Brother manual being written in a time that is far more accepting of women partaking in "masculine activities," it performed significantly worse at deconstructing this belief when compared to the Singer manual.

Rhetorical Perspectives

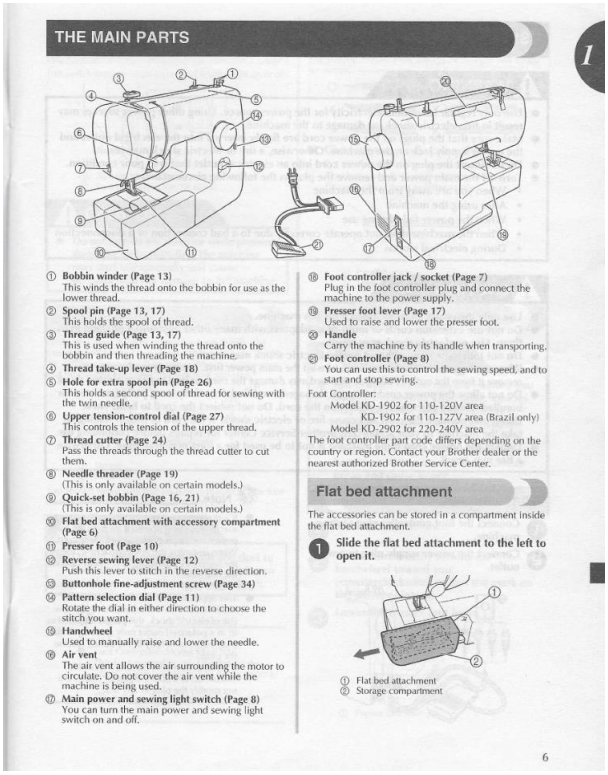
The four subcategories identified when applying a rhetorical approach to the Singer and Brother manuals include jargon, audience, diagrams and graphics, and writing style. This portion of the analysis explores these topics in depth and reflects on how they compare in both manuals overall.

Jargon

This discussion relates to the "Tacit Knowledge" subsection explored in the feminist theory portion of this essay, but jargon also has strong connections to rhetoric. This is because the "success of technical documents often rests on its ability to align itself with the appropriate audiences using the appropriate verbal and visual language" (Bosley 296). Both Singer and Brother's reliance on jargon was an appropriate writing choice for users who are already familiar with the sewing community and its terms. By contrast, it was a less appropriate choice given that both machines were made with beginner sewers in mind. As a result, this made instructions that were likely clear and concise to experienced sewers appear challenging to novice ones.

This was an especially cumbersome obstacle in the Singer manual. For example, when explaining to users how to "bind" with the sewing machine, it suddenly began instructing users on how to make a "French fold" without specifying what that term meant or how it related to "binding" other than that both skills required similar processes (*Instructions For Using Singer* 25). Singer repeatedly glossed over jargon with little explanation, leaving inexperienced users to learn for themselves or to read on in confusion. Brother made efforts to overcome this obstacle by explaining sewing terms to users, an example of which can be seen via a list of definitions included in Figure 7. When examining this finding from a rhetorical perspective, it is clear both manuals assumed users already had a background in sewing and were, at the very least, moderately skilled. This was especially true of Singer's manual, but Brother's appeared more assumptive that if users did not already have experience, then they had easy access to help. This is a fair assumption considering the technological age we live in today and the rise of online crafting communities that "opens up alternate epistemologies of learning" (Gajjala 29).

Therefore, modern users have more access to sewing guidance than previous generations who were limited to in-person learning.



THE MAIN PARTS

1

① **Bobbin winder (Page 13)**
This winds the thread onto the bobbin for use as the lower thread.
② **Spool pin (Page 13, 17)**
This holds the spool of thread.
③ **Thread guide (Page 13, 17)**
This is used when winding the thread onto the bobbin and then threading the machine.
④ **Thread take-up lever (Page 18)**
⑤ **Hole for extra spool pin (Page 26)**
This holds a second spool of thread for sewing with the twin needle.
⑥ **Upper tension-control dial (Page 27)**
This controls the tension of the upper thread.
⑦ **Thread cutter (Page 24)**
Pass the threads through the thread cutter to cut them.
⑧ **Needle threader (Page 19)**
(This is only available on certain models.)
⑨ **Quick-set bobbin (Page 16, 21)**
(This is only available on certain models.)
⑩ **Flat bed attachment with accessory compartment (Page 6)**
⑪ **Presser foot (Page 10)**
⑫ **Reverse sewing lever (Page 12)**
Push this lever to stitch in the reverse direction.
⑬ **Buttonhole fine-adjustment screw (Page 34)**
⑭ **Pattern selection dial (Page 11)**
Rotate the dial in either direction to choose the stitch you want.
⑮ **Handwheel**
Used to manually raise and lower the needle.
⑯ **Air vent**
The air vent allows the air surrounding the motor to circulate. Do not cover the air vent while the machine is being used.
⑰ **Main power and sewing light switch (Page 8)**
You can turn the main power and sewing light switch on and off.
⑱ **Foot controller jack / socket (Page 7)**
Plug in the foot controller plug and connect the machine to the power supply.
⑲ **Presser foot lever (Page 17)**
Used to raise and lower the presser foot.
⑳ **Handle**
Carry the machine by its handle when transporting.
㉑ **Foot controller (Page 8)**
You can use this to control the sewing speed, and to start and stop sewing.

Foot Controller:
Model KD-1902 for 110-120V area
KD-1902 for 110-127V area (Brazil only)
Model KD-2902 for 220-240V area
The foot controller part code differs depending on the country or region. Contact your Brother dealer or the nearest authorized Brother Service Center.

Flat bed attachment

The accessories can be stored in a compartment inside the flat bed attachment.

1 **Slide the flat bed attachment to the left to open it.**

① Flat bed attachment
② Storage compartment

6

Figure 7. Brother's Sewing Definitions (Operation Manual Brother 6).

Audience

Jargon signifies that writers have made audience assumptions, especially about existing knowledge, which is true in both Singer and Brother's case. Neither manual explicitly stated it was written for women, however, I have provided sufficient evidence throughout this essay to demonstrate how this appears to be a subliminal assumption that drove many of the writing and rhetorical choices in both manuals. Both machines also appear suitable for beginners, but is this truly the case? Throughout my evaluations of each manual, it was important to remember that they were instructing users how to use the sewing machine, *not* how to sew. Although, these topics are so intertwined that it is nearly impossible to discuss one without simultaneously explaining the other. In other words, users are also learning how to sew when learning how to

use the machine. Since both manuals relied so much on tacit knowledge, this raises questions as to whether a true novice could learn to use either machine solely from their instruction manuals.

This leads to questions regarding who learns to sew. In Singer's 1915 manual, women were undoubtedly the target audience, many of which already had sewing knowledge. In modern times, Gajjala introduced the idea of "new domesticity," or women's "return" to embracing domestic skills and posed the idea that such activities may be indicative of "upward class mobility" (33). This is because learning skills like sewing requires time and access to learning resources, often technological ones. Considering the fast-paced, work centric lifestyle of the modern world, finding enough time to learn how to sew is considered a leisure activity often associated with higher social classes. Sewing also requires frequent purchases of fabric and other materials which can be costly. It is possible Singer and Brother both assumed their manuals' audiences were of higher social status and therefore beginners had plenty of time to learn and master this skill and all the associated terminology.

Diagrams and Graphics

Both manuals relied heavily on diagrams and graphics to illustrate written directions with varying degrees of success. Including graphics was appropriate considering that sewing is a hands-on task that often requires demonstration. However, Singer presented the most problems in this category. Figure 8 shows one of only two diagrams that thoroughly labeled all parts of the machine at the beginning of the manual. While it was a well-made diagram, Singer failed to continue labeling machine parts in subsequent graphics as exemplified in Figure 9. Instead, the manual referred to machine parts' names within the written directions to "label" it rather than physically labeling each diagram. This was a poor choice because it assumed users were masters of the machine after viewing the main diagram in Figure 8 only one time. This meant

inexperienced users needed to inconveniently flip back to the main diagram at the beginning of the manual each time they struggled to understand the subsequent unlabeled diagrams.

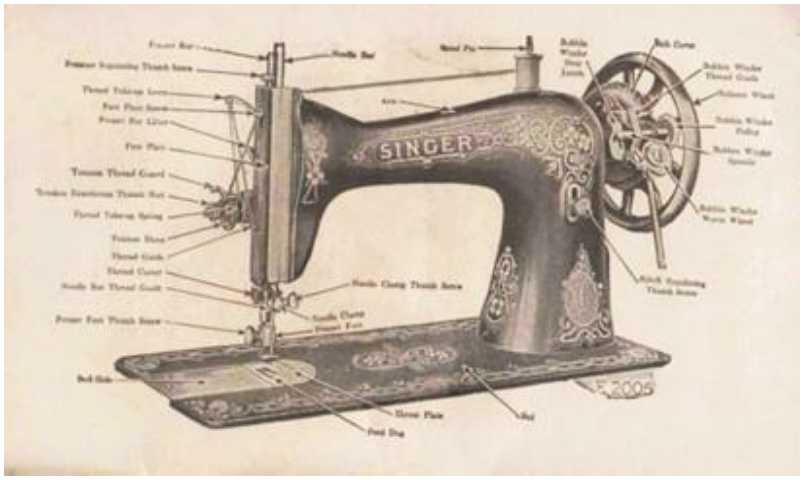


Figure 8. Well Labeled Diagram (Instructions For Using Singer 2).

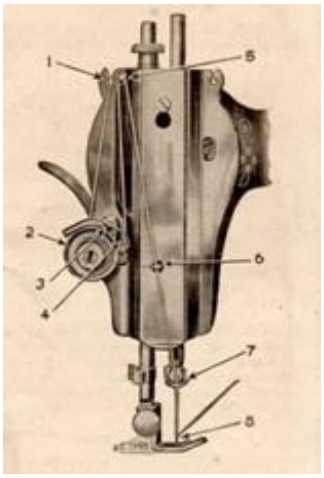


Figure 9. Poorly Labeled Diagram (Instructions For Using Singer 11).

The Brother manual exemplified a corrected version of this issue. It similarly relied on graphics to explain directions but, by contrast, it consistently labeled all parts referenced in each of its graphics. This is different and much improved from the Singer manual which, as Figure 9 showed, left floating, unlabeled numbers that corresponded with earlier graphics in the manual, making reading graphics more of a hindrance than a help. From a rhetorical perspective, Brother's manual demonstrated a better understanding of audience because, by continually labeling their graphics, they acknowledged that their users possess differing levels of knowledge and experience and that some users may still be trying to learn the machine and all its parts.

Writing Style

The manuals exhibited stark differences in their writing styles. This is unsurprising since they were written in different centuries and were therefore situated in different contexts. This is a significant rhetorical aspect to grasp because "context is a source of meaning for writers and readers" (Driskill 59). This means that the time when each manual was written significantly influenced the technical writing choices. Singer's writing especially stood out because it diverted

so much from modern manual practices. For example, it was written in paragraph form like a novel and the instructions constantly made references to “Figures” in the middle of sentences which made reading it choppy and sometimes confusing or jarring. Admittedly, I am no expert in the manual writing standards of 1915, but it appears there were little to no regulations within the field of technical writing during this time which therefore explains Singer’s writing style. This topic is explored in more depth within the historical perspectives section of this essay below. Contrasting Singer’s writing style, Brother’s manual aligned with today’s standards of modular documentation and numbered, step-by-step directions.

The language and terminology in both manuals were highly comparable. Each manual often used the same terms or, if not, slightly altered versions. For example, machine parts such as “spool pin” and “thread cutter” used the same label in both manuals, but Singer used the term “Stitch Regulating Dial” (*Instructions For Using Singer* 2) for what Brother called the “Pattern Selection Dial” (*Operation Manual Brother* 6) to describe a part with identical functions. Keeping rhetorical considerations in mind, this demonstrates an acute understanding of audience and the importance of using language that users are familiar with. The relative consistency of the sewing machines’ design and terminology is a testament to the mastery of this craft, exemplifying how even a century later and situated within different historical, social, and cultural contexts, the basics of the machine have remained the same. Despite the massive learning curve beginners face upon entering the sewing community, they can rest assured knowing that sewing knowledge is highly transferable and worth the investment of time it takes to learn it.

Historical Perspectives

The two subcategories identified when applying a historical approach to the Singer and Brother manuals were manual creators and writing conventions. This section explores how these topics compare in each manual when situated within the field of technical communication.

Manual Creators

It was unclear who wrote the instructions and created the graphics in both the Singer and Brother manuals. This is an important consideration because sewing has a long history of being labeled a "feminine" activity, while technical communication has often been labeled as a "masculine" activity due to its subject matter. If sewing is a skill that has historically been taught and passed on among women, it is appropriate to (1) question if men are part of this tasked demographic and qualified to write these manuals, and (2) surmise that women needed to be consulted at some point during each manuals' creation. However, upon closer inspection of Durack's assertion that "women are accepted as users of machines… but such knowledge is not considered as competence with *technology*" ("Gender, Technology, and History" 39), this suggests that men are considered masters of the sewing machine itself, while women are secondary users who are masters at *using* the machine but not understanding its mechanics. This imposes a double standard: men can do anything women can do, but women can only do what men tell them they can do. It is important to clarify that this attitude was not present in either of the Singer or Brother manuals, both of which aligned more closely with positivist approaches to technical communication that value a strict adherence to objectivity. However, the absence of authorial credit on these manuals is a relevant finding to discuss considering how women have historically been obscured in the field of technical communication by having their inventive accomplishments "misclassified, trivialized, or attributed to men" (Durack, "Gender, Technology, and History" 37).

Technical writers' demographical characteristics have seen considerable change over the last century. According to *Intercom,* a magazine owned by the Society of Technical Communication, as of 2019, "the majority of technical communicators (57 percent) are female; 40 percent are male and 1 percent identified as other. Two percent chose not to identify their gender" (Carliner and Chen). This is a big difference from previous decades when technical writers were predominately male. While the gender identity of the individuals who helped create the Brother and Singer manuals should be irrelevant, this is an important factor to consider when questioning if the manual creators were highly skilled and knowledgeable about the machine and its uses and therefore "qualified" to write the manuals. Choosing qualified writers to create these manuals is critical because this impacts the quality of information provided to users. This then directly affects users' ability to effectively and safely use the machines. This issue appears more relevant to the Singer manual because in 1915, there were much stronger social constructs about what was considered "men's work" and "women's work." While the activity of sewing was labeled "women's work," the creation of the sewing machine itself was a technical task that was believed more appropriate as "men's work." Based on this knowledge, it is feasible that the Singer manual was written in part by men, but given the attention the manual pays to the activity of sewing itself—such as by describing how to make "French folds" (*Instructions for Using Singer* 24)—it is likely women were consulted during the writing process.

In both manuals' case, the lack of authorial credits is likely because the manuals are owned by the companies Singer and Brother, not the individuals who wrote the manuals. This is a standard practice in technical writing because it allows companies to retain ownership of the written material that employees create. However, this leaves room for ambiguity surrounding the creation process of these manuals. Since users are unable to learn the identities of the technical

writers, this keeps them from learning about the writers' roles or experience level at the companies they work for as well as the writers' credentials. When authorial credit is given to the companies themselves as exemplified in both Singer and Brother's case, this suggests users are expected to trust these companies based on name value and reputation alone. Users must trust that the information provided in each companies' manual was written by someone who is highly knowledgeable on the subject, is accurate, and will enable them to effectively and safely use the machine.

There are many reasons technical writers are not credited for the manuals they create—such as protection from user lawsuits and keeping manual ownership within the company—and I am not suggesting the field adopts this practice. However, based on the analysis of the Singer and Brother manual, it appears that technical writers' identities are routinely obscured from the work they produce. Regardless of the writers' gender identity, this practice subsequently buries their technical contributions as Durack suggested, and it also requires users to trust that these companies are hiring qualified writers who will instruct users on how to effectively and safely use the machines.

Technical Writing Conventions

The first technical writing convention observed in each manual was the difference in formatting. This finding strongly overlaps with the "Writing Style" discussion had in the rhetorical perspectives portion of this essay. To reiterate, Singer's manual was written in paragraph form and read much like a novel, whereas Brother's manual followed modern writing standards of modular documentation. When reexamining this finding from a historical perspective, this difference is explained because of major developments and changes the field of technical communication has seen in the century between each manuals' creation.

When the Singer manual was written in 1915, technical writing was a largely undefined field and had long struggled to distinguish itself from engineering and general writing studies. Technical writers were in heavy demand during World War II because "each new airplane, gun, bomb, and machine needed a manual written for it" (Connors 341). After the war's end, the field had effectively established itself as "more than an adjunct function of some other activity—it was a job in itself" (Connors 341). This left the field with the task of identifying all the conventions and nuances that would continue to distinguish it from other branches of writing today.

Considering that the Singer manual was written in 1915, well before the technical writing boom of World War II, the effects of technical writing's general ambiguity during the time period it was written in are easily observed. This explains why Singer's manual was written similarly to a novel and why it has no clear method for users to navigate the information. Singer's manual diverts so strongly from modern technical writing standards because there were little to no standards when it was created. By contrast, the intense development and evolution of the field in the last century is evident in Brother's manual. Brother's manual is clearly a piece of *technical writing*—one that is distinguishable from other types of writing and warrants its own genre.

The second most notable factor observed in the manuals' technical writing conventions was the consideration of humanistic factors. This was best observed by the inclusion of warnings and hazards associated with each machine. In Singer's manual, there were little to no safety warnings included, and when warnings were issued, they were buried in paragraphs so that they did not stick out easily to users. Example warnings from Singer's manual include "do not run the machine with the presser foot resting on the feed without cloth under the presser foot" and "do

not try to help the machine by pulling the fabric lest you bend the needle" (*Instructions for Using Singer* 4-5).

By contrast, Brother's manual consistently issued safety warnings throughout the documents that were clearly labeled with large, bold font and warning symbols to draw readers' attention. Brother even included an "Important Safety Instructions" module (*Operation Manual Brother* 1-2) at the beginning of the manual before instructing users on how to use the machine. Brother's warnings consisted of a variety of risks, including fire, electric shock, damaging the machine, or injuring oneself during use.

The delivery of these safety warnings has heavy implications regarding the attention to humanistic factors in the manuals. In Singer's case, there appears to be little attention paid to users' safety. There are few warnings in the manual, and the ones included are buried in paragraphs, not easily discernible, and appear more concerned about damaging the sewing machine than ensuring users' safety. This attitude is further exemplified by the fact that the few warnings included in the manual were listed under the heading "To Ensure Perfect Action of the Machine" (*Instructions for Using Singer* 4), indicating Singer's stronger concern for the machine than the users. By contrast, Brother's safety warnings are plentiful, easily identifiable, and demonstrate concern for both the machine and users' safety.

These differences can be attributed to multiple things. For example, Brother includes warnings of electrical shock and fire hazards because the machine is electrically powered. These warnings are absent from Singer's manual because it was operated by a hand crank and did not pose such risks. Therefore, the differences in technological advancement of the machines themselves changed the severity and types of risks associated with each machine, which then affected the warnings included in the manuals. In addition to protecting users and the machine,

Brother likely included such blatant safety warnings to protect the company from lawsuits in case any accidents occur with users. This suggests Brother anticipated more issues with their sewing machine because it had more apparent risks than Singer's.

These differences in safety warnings also reflect the longstanding debate of incorporating humanistic factors into technical communication. The Singer manual reflects the positivistic attitude that focuses less on humanistic factors in favor of objectivity. Considering the lack of technical writing standards in 1915, it is also possible including safety warnings was not an explicit requirement of the field. This is likely because it was not until the postwar era that there were many cries to humanize technical communication (Connors 342). Since the Singer manual was created before these historical occurrences in the field, it is plausible that incorporating humanistic factors such as safety warnings was not a priority in Singer's manual.

Brother's manual exhibits the results of these historical technical writing debates. It is markedly more user-centered, focusing on how users' behaviors may affect the machine *and* themselves. For example, Brother's "Troubleshooting" module (*Operation Manual Brother* 42-44) is highly indicative of humanistic considerations because it attempts to predict how users might use—or misuse—the sewing machine, then suggests actions users can take to fix these issues. This shows consideration not only for the machine, but for the actions of the people who use it. Brother demonstrates an understanding that their manual is a document that people will use, not simply an explanation of a sewing machine.

Limitations

A considerable limit of this essay is a lack of discussion regarding how American society's understanding of a woman's role has changed from 1915 to today, and the role race has played in these expectations. Upon conducting such research, I discovered that sewing is deeply

rooted in this history, and scholar Bettina Aptheker shared that the idea of "the housewife" and idolizing women's domesticity was associated with "affluent white women, but soon became an ideal for all women" (Pascale 49). Therefore, the idea of women's domesticity and "homemaking" is associated with "whiteness" and a push to impose Western values on other cultures. Especially in the early 20th century, this created many difficulties for immigrant and minority women who needed to work to help support their families but were also expected to uphold Western ideals of domesticity to prepare for their futures—marriage, home, and family life (Sassler 186). Upon these discoveries, it became clear this essay shares intersections with racial and cultural considerations. While these findings may have fit within the feminist or rhetorical sections of this essay, they extended beyond the scope of a technical communication framework. I was unable to explore these topics with the amount of depth they warranted without jeopardizing the objective, analytical nature of this essay.

This topic is important to consider because cultural context undoubtedly influenced the writing produced in both the Singer and Brother manuals. Notably, this intersection of race and culture and promoting "white ideals" was not apparent in either manual. Perhaps this is the result of "good" technical writing, meaning that the writing produced was objective and did not promote social ideals onto its readers. Or alternatively, considering how prevalent this issue was in 1915, perhaps Singer's manual did not feel the need to push domestic ideals onto women because it was assumed that a woman who was reading their manual (and therefore learning to sew) already ascribed to Western ideals. Today, sewing is considered more of a leisure activity associated with higher social classes due to the time and funds it requires. Therefore, this leads to questions regarding how Brother's manual intersects with classism.

I am not suggesting that race, gender, or class narratives be incorporated into technical documents. That would blur the line between technical writing and journalism and negate the characteristics that distinguish technical writing from other fields. Knowing how strongly these factors of race, gender, and class influenced the users of the Singer and Brother manuals, as well as Singer and Brother's understanding of these users—including audience assumptions, purpose, and language use—I am instead suggesting technical writers consider how their documents are culturally situated. Specifically, they should consider what assumptions they are making about their audiences, how those assumptions are culturally informed, and how their writing may or may not reinforce cultural ideals onto users.

Despite their dedication to objectivity, technical writers are still human and biased by nature. Their values, beliefs, and attitudes unavoidably influence the writing they produce. To dismiss the influence of social factors such as race, gender, and class expectations that society imposes upon its members is a disservice to the users of the documents that technical writers create. This would continue to perpetuate positivistic practices of silencing human considerations in the field. Therefore, it is important to consider how our culture shapes writing, even in fields as objective as technical writing.

Conclusion

The prevailing insight this research revealed is that feminist, rhetorical, and historical approaches to technical communication share *significant* overlap. This was continually demonstrated in my discussions of audience, jargon, writing style and conventions, and tacit knowledge. Even though I separated these factors into feminist, rhetorical, and historical categories, they so strongly impacted one another that it was impossible to limit them to only one category. Each factor played a significant role across multiple theoretical frameworks.

This leads to a second insight that, regardless of their intentions, Singer and Brother's manuals both appeared to be written with the assumption that their audiences were primarily female. This subsequently influenced every aspect of the documents, including writing style and graphics. Interestingly, neither manual used female pronouns, but the idea that sewing machines are primarily used by women was, perhaps subconsciously, embedded into the documents. This presents major implications for what society believes are "women's activities" and a "woman's role" today. It raises questions regarding how much our cultural attitudes and beliefs have evolved over the last century. Are we truly as progressive as we believe we are today, or are we simply blind to our own biases because they are implicit in our culture?

Even though I strived to remain objective in this essay, my own biases undoubtedly influenced my analysis, especially considering that I was raised by the generation of women Gajjala said were taught to value work, economic independence, and education above domestic skills (28). Surely, I internalized similar beliefs from my family and societal cues, but I also question why a woman cannot be both. Why must a woman choose to embrace either a professional or domestic self, sacrificing the other in the process? I believe this topic requires further research. Such research would contribute significantly to fields beyond technical communication, providing much needed insight about the narrative society continually creates about women's roles, knowledge, and skills inside and outside of the home.

Considerations for the Future

Sewing has its own significant history which undoubtedly influenced every aspect of the creation of the Singer and Brother sewing machine manuals analyzed in this essay. There are issues of race, gender, and class to be further explored here which is evidenced by the fact that these social factors intersected with multiple theoretical frameworks in this essay. However, due

to the objective nature of these frameworks within the confines of technical communication, I was unable to explore these humanistic factors in as much detail as they warranted. For future research, I suggest investigating how social factors influence the creation of technical documents such as the ones analyzed in this essay. It may be necessary to expand the scope of these discussions beyond technical communication and to engage in multidisciplinary collaboration. Other disciplines to consider for future exploration of this issue include social disciplines concerning human behavior and psychology, and humanitarian disciplines related to gender, race, and class constructs.

Appendix

Instructions For Using Singer Sewing Machine No. 115: Lock Stitch, For Family Use. The Singer Manufacturing Company, 1915, https://ismacs.net/singer_sewing_machine_company/manuals/singer-model-115-sewing-machine-manual.pdf.

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The Importance of Fostering Students' Voices in Writing

Introduction

Writing pedagogy has traditionally emphasized technical correctness and the mechanics of writing above students' ideas. While understanding the mechanics of writing is important, making this the central goal of a writing classroom risks mistaking "obedience for development," and these teachers may "trick themselves into rewarding students who are merely canny enough to write in the ways that School [sic] requires" (Straub 4). Rather than developing their own ideas or voice, students instead learn how to write for the purpose of meeting assignment expectations to receive a passing grade. Therefore, it is unsurprising writing students commonly express feeling like they do not have anything important to say and that they *cannot* say anything important because they are "just students" and their writing does not matter because it is "just for a grade."

Fortunately, modern writing pedagogy has shifted away from this product-oriented teaching approach toward a more student-centered and process-oriented approach. This means that teachers' goals have shifted toward emphasizing the content of students' writing to help them develop, refine, and clearly express their ideas. Teachers are more concerned with helping students develop what they want their writing to say rather than how technically correct they can write it. This student-centered approach to teaching writing is critical because it fosters students' voices by allowing their individuality to enhance their work. Every writer brings their personal

values, beliefs, culture, and experiences to their work, and it would be a disservice to silence students' voices for the sake of producing technically "perfect" writing. This essay explores this topic in depth, discussing what inhibits students' voices, why teachers must foster students' voices, and teaching strategies that can be used to accomplish this.

Factors That Inhibit Students' Voices

Anxiety and Fear

One of the largest obstacles nearly every writer faces is anxiety. In writing, this typically manifests as a worry or fear about how "good" or "bad" one's ideas and skills are. Even when students do manage to write something, they often still fear they will seem dull when putting their thoughts to paper (Maguire 256). It can be easy to dismiss these fears as nonsensical voices in the back of students' minds and to tell them to ignore it, but it would be harmful to dismiss their feelings because doing so ignores the major role that anxiety plays in students' avoidance of writing tasks (Tehrani 163).

Tehrani asserted that product-oriented classrooms where teacher feedback is focused on how technically correct students' writing is produces high levels of anxiety in students (163). This suggests that students' anxiety stems from a much deeper, very human place: fear of judgement. This is true for nearly all writers, but especially for students who lack confidence in their ability to articulate their thoughts on paper. If considering confidence on a spectrum in this scenario, students at the extreme low-end may not even attempt to complete their writing assignments if they believe they do not possess the skills to be successful. This may result in them receiving a failing grade, and although failure rarely feels good, these students might feel somewhat relieved because they avoided judgement via their work.

Lack of Confidence

Students commonly feel discouraged upon the discovery that they do not write as well as they thought they did. For students who pride themselves in being strong writers, receiving an unsatisfactory grade or receiving feedback that highlights copious mistakes often makes them feel unsure of themselves. Experiences like this then shake their writing identity to its core, leading them to question if they were ever a good writer and if they should give up. This can all be traced back to a fear of being judged and perceived by others via their writing.

This lack of confidence in the writing classroom has long-lasting effects on students. In a case study where writing teachers reflected on their confidence in teaching and in their own writing abilities, one participant, Anne, shared that during her experience as an undergraduate student, "I came to this realization that I did not write well, or did not write as well as I thought I did […] That has impacted my practice when I teach students" (McConnel and Beach 77). Anne did not elaborate on what this impact was or how significantly she experienced it, but it is clear her identity as a writer had been shaken, leading her to question her abilities as both a teacher and a writer. Anne shared that she learned to lean on her colleagues and school community to foster confidence in herself.

Lack of Support

Unfortunately, not all students have a support network they can rely on when they feel unsure of themselves. Reasons for this include writing classrooms that emphasize a product-focused pedagogy, or these students lack someone they can turn to for help. When students lack support during tough moments of the writing process, they are at a much higher risk of having their confidence and passion for writing stamped out and, consequently, their voice. These students are at risk for never developing their voice because they genuinely believe they can

never be a "good" writer, a belief that was perpetuated by the lack of support needed to navigate through those inevitably difficult, doubt-filled moments.

Lack of Agency

Students often feel like they do not have anything worthwhile to say or that what they have to say does not matter. This is especially common when students believe they are simply writing for a grade. When writing feels meaningless like this, it is difficult to get students to care about their work and to recognize that regardless of who reads it, they are still saying something. Another participant in McConnel and Beach's case study, Mark, shared that, "… a challenge we have as high school English teachers, as teachers of writing, is to get students to care because it shows up in the product" (76). To help with this issue, Mark said that giving students control helps dispel the hierarchy in the classroom and allows their voices to shine through in their work (McConnel and Beach 74). This implies that not allowing students to retain control of their own work significantly impacts how important they perceive their writing is and if they feel their work belongs to them or to their teacher.

When teachers do not allow students to retain control over their own work, the "priorities of the instructor become the priorities of the student" (Kasper 58). Students then write to please their teachers instead of themselves. This easily silences students' voices, making their work feel like it no longer belongs to them. Instead, writing becomes a trivial task to pass a class rather than a chance for students to express a piece of their minds.

Feedback

The feedback students receive on their work plays a tremendous role in writing inhibition, particularly negative feedback that focuses on correcting grammar and usage. When investigating the relationship between self-efficacy, outcome expectancy, and writing

apprehension, Pajares and Johnson asserted that students' beliefs about their self-efficacy, or their ability to write, is influenced by the "verbal persuasions they receive from other people, particularly those people whose judgements they value and respect" (314). This is one reason why teachers' feedback often holds so much power over students. Not only do teachers assign grades, acting as judges of writing, but students often look up to their teachers. Students equate their teachers' comments with a measure of how valuable their work and ideas are, and it hurts when teachers respond negatively to their writing. When teachers give papers back that have been corrected to the point that they look like they were trampled on with cleated boots, the students often feel like they have been trampled on too (Diedrich 221). Therefore, teachers must consider how their feedback can significantly impact students' attitudes and beliefs about their abilities.

Why Teachers Must Foster Students' Voices

Valuing Students' Perspectives

Teachers must foster students' voices to avoid producing generations of formulaic writers who share one goal: to receive a passing grade. Writing instruction encompasses more than completing assignments. Teachers are helping students learn how to communicate. They are shaping the minds of each new generation of writers, and because writing is an inherently personal activity, teachers are encouraging students to examine their own beliefs, attitudes, values, and experiences, and to make meaning of them. Teachers are helping students recognize their place in the world and what they think about it. In many ways, writing instruction not only teaches students how to write, but how to think. When considering writing as thinking, suppressing students' voices is the equivalent of not allowing them to think for themselves. This shows the importance of process-oriented classrooms because by valuing students' ideas above

mechanical correctness, writing becomes “a process of discovery in which ideas are generated and not just transcribed” (Kasper 59). This idea reflects Kenneth Burke’s “parlor metaphor” which posits that all scholarship is in unending conversation with each other (Moxley and Veach). In this metaphor, a person arrives late to a parlor where others are already engaged in heated conversation about a topic. The person sits and observes for a while, shares and argues their perspective with the group, and later leaves even though the conversation is still in progress. This is exactly what happens when students write: they enter the ongoing conversations being had by other pieces of writing on a topic, and then they offer their own perspective. Writing acts as students’ voices, enabling them to speak. When teachers instruct students to research and write about topics that interest them, teachers are inviting students to “enter the conversation.” Therefore, it is critical teachers encourage students to pursue the ideas that intrigue them. This allows students to think via their writing and discover what they want to add to the ongoing conversations being had.

Teachers must also foster students’ voices to help students recognize that what they have to say matters. Students of all ages may experience feeling patronized because of their youth or lack of experience, but these are unfair reasons to discredit the value of their work. Youth and inexperience do not make their lives less rich or their writing less meaningful. This is especially important to consider when providing feedback to students who speak English as a second language (ESL). Far too often, writing teachers focus on ESL students’ grasp on the mechanics of writing rather than their ideas, believing that a mastery of grammar is needed to communicate ideas clearly. ESL programs are typically product-oriented, teaching students how to write to pass a test that demonstrates their competency rather than helping them “develop their potential to discover and express their ideas” (Kasper 60). This approach to writing instruction for ESL

students dismisses the significance of the diverse and culturally rich backgrounds they come from. To silence these students' voices for the sake of producing grammatically correct sentences is a disservice not only to those ESL students, but to any potential reader of their work.

Writing Experiences are Formative

Students' experiences in writing classrooms are formative and have long-lasting effects. In McConnel and Beach's case study, Mark also shared, "If you don't have confidence in your writing, and that can be anchored back to your middle school experiences as a student—if you're not confident in your own writing, it will impact the degree to which you are influential or impactful as a writing teacher" (78). This has important implications for students too, showing how students' experiences in writing classrooms will frame their opinions about writing for the rest of their lives. Therefore, it is important teachers create positive writing environments where students feel encouraged to explore their ideas, safe to take risks, and allowed to make mistakes as they learn.

How Teachers Can Foster Students' Voices

There is no concrete method for fostering students' voices in writing classrooms, and to provide a definite answer extends beyond the scope of this essay. Instead, this section offers confidence and voice fostering strategies teachers can adapt for their classrooms as they see fit.

Assign Journaling Activities

In an article discussing confidence boosting strategies for students in writing classrooms, Frank Maguire offered many suggestions, the first of which being that students should keep a writing journal where they can record their thoughts, feelings, ideas, and experiences (256). Maguire specified that teachers should never evaluate or correct these journals for errors, and it should be used strictly for the purpose of stretching students' writing muscles. This tactic is

effective at taking the pressure off students to write well or to "sound smart." It also pushes students past one of the most anxiety-inducing hurdles of writing: getting words on the page. If students are not receptive to a writing journal, teachers can incorporate freewriting activities into their lesson plans, an example of which is included in the Appendix. Including freewriting activities provides students with the same low stakes writing opportunity to practice writing that a journal would. Using these types of low stakes writing assignments in classrooms is important because it gives students a space to write without the fear of judgement, encourages creativity, and allows students to experiment with style. This leads students to discovering new ways to express themselves in all forms of writing (not just freewriting) and helps them refine their voice as writers.

Set Clear Expectations

Another strategy Maguire shared for fostering confidence in students is to set clear assignment expectations. This is effective because "beginning writers need guidance through the phases of the writing process, and they should never be left to struggle alone" (Maguire 256). This suggests that it is important for teachers to set their students up for success. Success does not necessarily mean achieving an "A," but rather that students feel they understand the assignment and are capable of completing it. This provides them with a sense of agency which is important because they already bring enough of their own writing hurdles into the classroom. The last thing teachers should do is pile more confusion and anxiety on students. Teachers cannot do the work for students, nor should they make it exceptionally easy, but teachers should offer clarity and guidance through the writing process wherever they can.

Provide Meaningful Feedback

Another confidence-fostering strategy teachers can use is to "respond to the content in

students' papers before correcting errors" (Maguire 257). This is critical because "by responding to content, the teacher delivers the message that what the student has to say about a topic is meaningful" (Maguire 257). This shows students not only that they are heard, but that their ideas are worth hearing. This signifies to students that their writing is meaningful which will improve their attitude toward their work. To fully demonstrate the significance of this approach, imagine the situation in reverse: a classroom in which students do not engage or participate at all in what the teacher says. Consider how a teacher may feel in this scenario: as if they are blowing hot air and nobody is listening or cares about what they have to say. Engaging with students' words but not their ideas risks making them feel this same way. To avoid this, teachers must approach students' writing as readers, not as judges or graders. Teachers must trace their reading experiences for students and note the questions, thoughts, and feelings their students' writing evokes. This signifies to students that their writing is meaningful and affects those who read it; it is not just a tool to demonstrate linguistic competency.

In *Writing Across Borders,* a video that interviewed teachers about responding to ESL students' writing, Vicki Tolar Burton shared, "It's important to talk about what helps them most to improve as writers" (25:21) and that she asks her students, "How do you want me to respond on your paper?" (25:31). This strategy is monumental in aiding writing development because it prioritizes the student's goals, allowing the teacher and student to work together to achieve them. Burton showed that one of the most effective ways to help students develop their voice is to ask them where they want help. This situates teaching as a reciprocal relationship; teachers do not hold all the answers, and students are not empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge. Students bring their own knowledge, ideas, and questions to the classroom, and teachers are responsible for helping students understand and express them.

Another feedback component teachers must consider is the tone they use when responding to students' work. As discussed earlier in this essay, Pajares and Johnson discovered that students are strongly influenced by the feedback they receive from people whose judgments they value and respect (314). It was also discovered that students' deeply held beliefs are often tied to their sense of self, meaning that "to criticize the writing of someone who prides himself as a competent writer can be akin to criticizing the person" (Pajares and Johnson 326). Therefore, teachers must keep in mind that when they respond to students' writing, they are not only responding to the work, but to the person. Writing is inherently imbued with students' beliefs, attitudes, and experiences. To respond poorly to students' writing is dangerous because it significantly impacts how students view themselves as writers. Teachers must be mindful in their responses and remember to be kind. They should not patronize students by being overly positive, but there is no need to be harsh. Constructive feedback, not critical, is key.

Give Students Control

Students must be taught how to proofread their own work because it allows them to "become independent and to exercise control over their writing" (Maguire 257). This is important because the "feeling of autonomy that comes from self-reliance builds the foundation for independent writing to take place" (Maguire 257). This gives students control over their work and ensures they feel they are writing for themselves, not to satisfy their teachers. There was strong agreement across multiple sources explored in this essay—including Maguire, Kasper, and McConnel and Beach—that letting students retain control over their work is one of the best ways to develop their voice.

Another way to give students control over their work is to incorporate nonjudgmental principles into classrooms. This idea was adapted from Gallwey's principles of how to approach

tennis which postulate that “learning proceeds most effectively and effortlessly when the learners allow themselves to move naturally through the learning process” (Kasper 58). Although Gallwey’s nonjudgmental principles were intended for sports, this idea can be applied to learning any skill. In a writing classroom, the idea of “moving naturally through the learning process” implies that students are allowed to make mistakes. This is an important part of learning because mistakes are where learning often happens. Of course, learning occurs with success too, but mistakes are how students recognize ways to improve their work in the future.

Kasper described a nonjudgmental classroom as one that is student-centered and uses a process-oriented approach rather than a traditional, product-oriented one (59). When connecting nonjudgmental principles to ESL students, Kasper made two important discoveries. First, Kasper does not explicitly teach ESL students grammar, rather, “students acquire and improve their use of the grammatical structures they need to express ideas most effectively through a series of progressive attempts to refine and clarify those ideas” (59). Second, a product-oriented approach to writing instruction stifles students’ ideas and makes for negative writing experiences, but a process-oriented approach that focuses on expressing students’ ideas produces more positive writing experiences (64). These findings have applications for all writing students, revealing that focusing on developing students’ voices makes for more meaningful writing experiences, and even when students do not work exclusively on grammatical skills, they still gain those skills as they develop other writing abilities.

Create Writing Communities

In McConnel and Beach’s article, Mark proposed the idea of turning writing classrooms into writing communities to create an atmosphere of camaraderie. To achieve this environment, Mark suggested that when students say they cannot do something, teachers should empathize

with them and respond with, "'I've reached that same point and this is how I overcame it'" (McConnel and Beach 74). Mark also suggested that teachers open this discussion to the class and encourage students to share their struggles and successes with each other. This shows students that not only are their writing experiences valuable, but sharing their experiences can help other writers, too. It also shows students that their teachers are "not the only writer[s] in the room" (McConnel and Beach 74) which gives students further control over their work.

When reflecting on giving students control, Mark said this is fantastic for fostering students' individuality because a willingness to give them control "gives way to a community in which student voices are given weight" (74). That is, Mark not only *says* he is not the only writer in the room, but he *shows* his students that this is true. He lets his students act like writers—because they *are*. Creating an environment where students feel safe to share their ideas and seek help is important because "a flourishing writing community can inspire creativity and embolden individuals to follow their own instincts rather than bowing to disciplinary convention" (McConnel and Beach 81). This reflects one of the most significant reasons for fostering students' voices: to encourage individuality and avoid producing generations of formulaic writers.

One of the best ways teachers can naturally integrate writing communities into classrooms and give students the control Mark discussed is to talk about the writing process. This is as simple as having a class discussion and giving students the floor. That is, let students lead the discussion. Allow them to freely share their writing successes, struggles, and questions as a group. For an example of how this type of discussion can be modeled in a classroom, refer to the Appendix.

Peer Feedback

In another study that investigated students' attitudes toward feedback received from peers and teachers, Tehrani found that students had a stronger, positive inclination toward teacher feedback and that it was seen as "the main source of their learning, motivation, and modification of writing" (167). Tehrani also found that students had no negative attitude toward peer feedback, but they valued teacher feedback much more, most likely because they view teachers as substantially more experienced (167). However, the value of peer feedback is largely unclear to students (Tehrani 167).

If students are educated on how to properly provide feedback to each other and on why peer feedback is important, they will likely value this process more. Using peer review would also bring students closer to creating the writing community Mark advocated for in McConnel and Beach's case study because it would create an open dialogue where students can collaborate with other writers and offer each other advice, praise, and support. Modern writing pedagogy is already moving away from product-oriented classrooms to process-oriented ones. Perhaps advocating for peer review and creating writing communities is the next big transformation that needs to happen in the writing classroom.

Conclusion

Every student brings a unique perspective to the writing classroom. Each comes from a different social, economic, and cultural background that influences their experiences, how they interpret the world, and what they have to say about it. It is therefore crucial teachers help students learn to hone their voices as writers. Doing so will celebrate students' individuality, help them discover their thoughts, values, and beliefs in more depth, and teach them how to effectively share their experiences with others. Prioritizing students' voices above the mechanics of writing in classrooms is important because teachers are responsible for giving students the

tools to write well and to teach them *how* to use those tools, not *what* to write. Teachers and students can all learn from each other by listening to (i.e., reading) what others have to say. Readers will easily forgive and forget an imperfect sentence, but a well-crafted message will leave a lasting impression on readers that extends far beyond the page.

Appendix

Freewriting Activity Handout

Part I

Freewriting Directions:

Using a piece of paper or a computer, write about any topic of your choice. Your writing can take the form of a journal entry, poem, structured essay, a combination of drawings and a narrative, or other. The only requirement is that you must *write*.

You don't have to share your writing if you don't want to. The purpose of this activity is to practice. There are no rules, grades, or rubrics for this activity. This is *your* writing. You decide what it sounds and looks like.

To help you get started, here are some topics you might write about:

- How you're feeling
- Describe a memory
- Your plans for the weekend
- A hobby you enjoy
- A book, movie, or music that you like

Part II

Discussion Questions:

At the end of class, we will have a group discussion about our freewriting experiences. Some questions to consider are:

- Was it easy or difficult to start writing about your topic?
- How did you feel about this activity before completing it? How did you feel after?
- Did your writing turn out how you wanted it to? Why or why not?
- What are the strengths of your writing? What would you like to improve?
- Did you feel like you had control over your writing? Why or why not?
- How did knowing that you didn't need to share your writing with others affect your approach to this activity?
- How was this writing experience similar to writing a formal essay? How was it different?

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Technical Writing: The Ethics of Humanizing Accident Reports

Technical communication is viewed as an objective and fact-based field, but what happens when technical communicators must articulate subjective human experiences? Sam Dragga and Dan Voss investigated this topic in depth in their article, "Hiding Humanity: Verbal and Visual Ethics in Accident Reports." They analyzed numerous accident reports ranging from vehicular accidents to worksite incidents and found that document creators often disregard the suffering victims endure and, subsequently, the victims' humanity. This act of "hiding humanity" is common in accident reports, prompting Dragga and Voss to call this technical writing practice into question. They concluded that communicating about the loss of human life with disregard to the victims' suffering is biased and unethical because it is the "ethical obligation of the technical communicator to sustain the humanity of the victims" (Dragga and Voss 61). Failing to maintain victims' humanity risks reducing their lives to impersonal statistics.

While Dragga and Voss' claim has merit, it has sparked debate among technical communicators. As a current writing student myself, I have encountered Dragga and Voss' "Hiding Humanity" article numerous times in my studies. Each time, it was met with similar reactions: some viewed it as eye-opening and important, some thought it was exaggerated or infeasible, and others found themselves in the middle ground, agreeing with both sides. As my colleagues and I debated this issue, it often circled back to two points of contention. The first was that sustaining victims' humanity falls outside the scope of technical writers'

responsibilities. This led to the second point which was that technical writing is an inherently objective, scientific, and fact-based field. Many times, my colleagues argued that sustaining victims' humanity is simply not what technical communicators do.

In this essay, I investigate what technical communicators do. I then reflect on current accident report writing practices, the effects of emphasizing emotions in accident reports, and potential negative effects of emphasizing humanity. This leads to an ethical discussion where I analyze the ethical implications of humanizing accident reports. The purpose of this essay is to critically analyze research regarding this topic to gain a deeper understanding of why technical writers may choose to humanize or not to humanize accident reports and the ethical implications of that decision.

Defining Technical Communication

Finding a clear answer about what technical communicators' responsibilities are is surprisingly difficult. In a study that asked technical communicators and subject matter experts (SMEs) to explain the value that technical communicators contribute to organizational communication, Rice-Bailey found that there was much ambiguity surrounding the role of technical communicators (240). In the study, technical communicators primarily spoke of themselves as investigators, interpreters, and audience advocates (Rice-Bailey 236-237). While SMEs held similar perceptions, they also felt that technical communicators played an important role in building organizational relationships (Rice-Bailey 236). This implies a qualitative, subjective aspect of technical communication. Notably, many technical communicators in Rice-Bailey's study did not identify with this qualitative aspect which further exemplifies the ambiguity within the field.

If technical communicators and SMEs cannot come to an agreement, it is understandable why there is confusion about what technical communication is to those outside the field. Therefore, I sought to understand technical communication as an outsider to the field to help remove my own biases (to the best of my ability) as I attempted to define a technical communicator's role in this essay. Most outsiders would turn to Google for answers, but a quick search asking, "What are technical communicators?" yielded little help. Google was unable to provide a concrete definition or to explain the profession without using the word "technical" itself, but many sources (both scholarly and not) exhibited this same behavior. Technical is widely understood as "having special and usually practical knowledge especially of a mechanical or scientific subject" (*Dictionary by Merriam-Webster*). This provides context as to why many technical communicators in Rice-Bailey's study did not identify with qualitative responsibilities such as building relationships and why some of my colleagues believed emphasizing humanistic aspects in accident reports was beyond the scope of technical writers' responsibilities. By definition, technical communication is an inherently scientific and objective field that distances itself from the subjectiveness of human experiences.

To confirm this, I turned to the Society for Technical Communication (STC). The STC stated that technical communication is a broad field and includes communication that exhibits at least one of the following characteristics: "communicating about technology or specialized topics… communicating by using technology… [or] providing instructions about how to do something" ("Defining Technical Communication"). Each of these characteristics reinforces the idea of technical communication as quantitative, scientific, and objective. Notably, these criteria all lack a qualitative, humanistic implication. Considering that the STC is a highly respected association within the field, it is no surprise that many technical communicators perceive their

work as strictly objective and scientific. They have likely internalized the image put forth by the STC and reflect that image in their own writing practices.

Based on the STC's criteria, it appears true that maintaining a victim's humanity in accident reports is not what technical communicators do. It also justifies why current accident reports emphasize statistics and facts more than the victims themselves. Although Dragga and Voss' call to humanize accident reports appeared reasonable, when considering what technical communicators *actually* do, they may have been too idealistic. Afterall, if technical communicators reported on the lives of victims in accident reports, there would be little to distinguish the field from journalism. However, Dragga and Voss were not suggesting that accident reports should include feature length stories about victims' lives, but rather that technical writers should not unnecessarily remove a victim's humanity from a report. This can be accomplished by a gesture as simple as replacing an "X" on a diagram depicting an accident (Figure 1) with a more human looking symbol, such as a stick figure (Figure 2). Notably, the

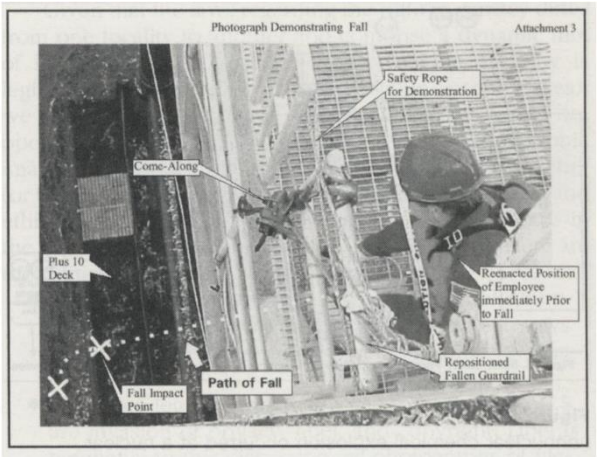

Figure 1. Dehumanized Image (Dragga and Voss 71).

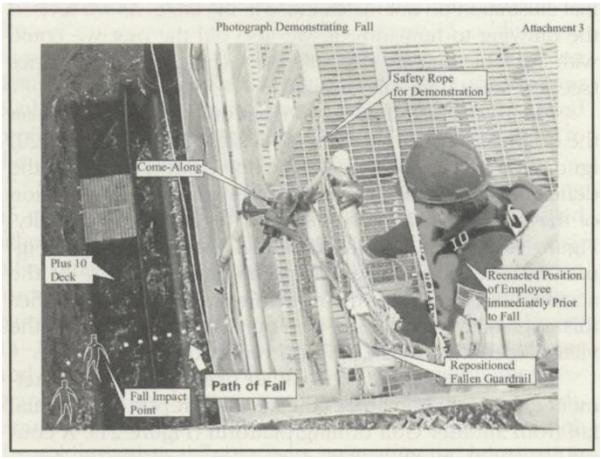

Figure 2. Humanized Graphic (Dragga and Voss 78).

accident depicted in Figures 1 and 2 includes another human being and information about how they kept that person safe during the reenactment of the accident. This demonstrates how adding humanistic elements to technical documents does not need to be a massive change that re-

envisions the field. It can be accomplished through small changes to writing practices technical writers already partake in that ensure humans are at the center of all document decisions.

It is important to recognize that Dragga and Voss were not investigating what a technical writer's responsibilities should or should not include in "Hiding Humanity." If that were the case, their article could easily be disregarded because, by definition, emphasizing humanity is not what technical communicators do. Instead, Dragga and Voss questioned the ethics behind technical writers' current practices, especially when writing about topics as subjective as human life. Their intent was not to admonish the entire field of technical communication, but rather to inspire an ethical conversation that invites readers to rethink what it means to be a technical communicator.

Current Accident Report Writing Standards

When investigating how to improve the quality of accident reports (specifically within the South Asian aviation industry), Jha and Sangeetha discovered that, according to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the sole purpose for accident investigations is to prevent future accidents (148). They cited that the ICAO recommended a common accident report format which includes four sections: information about the accident, analysis of the accident, conclusions and findings, and safety recommendations (Jha and Sangeetha 149). In another study that analyzed accident reports, Salguero-Caparros et al. similarly stated that conducting quality accident investigations is important for preventing future accidents (329). After reviewing literature about accident reports, Salguero-Caparros et al. found that accident reports commonly include components such as an initial report of the accident, information collection and analysis, and corrective measures (329). Jha, Sangeetha, and Salguero-Caparros et al. each provided their own recommendations on how to further improve accident reports, some

of which included incorporating more humanistic elements. Both studies revealed that the criteria for what currently passes as a *quality* accident report does not include any components that explicitly draw attention to victims. One explanation for this is that it is implied victims will be included in the reports when explaining the accident or when providing future safety recommendations. Since the nature of accident reports is to discuss harm caused to humans, the entire document will be imbued with information relevant to the victims. In this way, it would be impossible to separate the victims from the document because there would be no accident report if no humans had been harmed in the first place. Another explanation is that since technical writing is inherently objective and industry focused, technical writers have intentionally chosen not to emphasize victims because to do so would include information that is irrelevant to the technical report and detracts from the accident investigation.

In another accident report study, Sauer discovered that the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) encouraged technical writers to "produce a single, chronological narrative of the investigation and recovery—a static picture or 'snapshot' of the mine at the moment of disaster" (156). Sauer explained that these singular narratives, called "fault trees," exclude human agency to create a one-dimensional accident report that represents only a "single context or point of view" (156). Creating a "snapshot" of worksites at the moment of disaster places the focus solely on the accident. It fails to acknowledge the tragedy of lives being lost or the lasting effects accidents have on other workers. For example, some may suffer from injuries long after the accident has occurred, and others may suffer from emotional trauma after witnessing a coworker die (such as post-traumatic stress disorder). I am not suggesting accident reports should delve into narratives about the long-lasting effects victims' coworkers and grieving families suffer. Rather, it is important to recognize that accidents are much more

complex than the singular moment of disaster. They are dynamic events that are affected by the actions that occurred before, during, and after them, too. Accidents have long-lasting effects on people (especially those who witnessed it) and risk inhibiting workers' ability to work safely and effectively on jobsites in the future when they are impacted by the emotional trauma accidents cause. Sauer supported this dynamic view of accidents and reimagined "fault trees" by creating a new, three-dimensional accident model that "reveals the role of individual agents, the interaction of events, and the significance of individual events in the disaster" (157). It is critical to consider all aspects surrounding an accident to fully understand how to prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future.

Even though accidents are dynamic events, Rice-Bailey noted that technical communicators often view their work as static instead or dynamic (239). This means technical communicators align more so with the one-dimensional fault trees that focus on facts and the singular moment in which an accident occurs. When considering this finding alongside the definition of technical communication (a heavily scientific and objective field), it is easy to understand why accident reports often overlook the humanization that Dragga and Voss called for. This also provides insight about how technical communicators justify the current criteria for a quality accident report—none of which emphasize the victims—as discovered by Salguero-Caparros et al., Jha, and Sangeetha's studies.

After reviewing these sources, it is evident there is a lack of humanization in current accident reports. The moment of disaster is the focal point of the document and frames how the accident is investigated and written about. While this is an appropriate choice to properly analyze an accident as defined by technical communication practices, this habitually overlooks the suffering victims endure. Similarly, the events that occur before and after an accident are also

overlooked. These components are important to consider to fully understand why an accident occurred and how to prevent similar accidents from occurring in the future.

The Impact of Emotions in Technical Documents

The biggest argument against humanizing accident reports is a fear that doing so invites subjectivity into technical documents. This is because humanizing accident reports unavoidably invites subjectiveness, more specifically, *emotion*, into them. Technical writers who strongly identify with the STC's values and ideals view including subjective information in technical documents as inappropriate, especially because of the field's inherent objectivity. When considering the nature of accident reports, it is easy to dismiss them as factual documents devoid of emotion, and when looking at what constitutes a *quality* accident report by technical writing standards, they appear as cold, callous documents with little sensitivity to the tragedy of human life being lost.

A common argument (or rather justification) for these writing standards is that including emotions in accident reports distracts readers from the content of the report. However, accident reports are not devoid of emotion because it is impossible to communicate anything with absolute objectivity. Dragga and Voss agreed with this argument, stating that technical communication "does not operate in an emotional vacuum: it might elicit or encourage *different* emotions in readers… but it is always tinged with emotion" (Dragga and Voss 78). This is because technical documents are written by humans and therefore imbued with biases, whether intentional or not. Bias in this case refers to the idea that people have inherent values, attitudes, and beliefs that influence their thoughts, actions, and communications. People can never fully separate themselves from their own biases because that would mean they would have to separate from their sense of self. Therefore, anything humans communicate will always have a degree of

implicit bias, whether intentional or unintentional. Even as I report on the ethics of accident reports in this essay, it is impossible for me to remain absolutely objective. My beliefs have undoubtedly influenced the way I interpreted the research I conducted and how I write about it now. It would be dishonest (and even unethical) of me to proclaim myself as a completely objective communicator.

Since technical documents are written by humans, they are no exception to biases either. As Ornatowski and Bekins noted, attempting to communicate impartial science is impossible because all communication is "rhetorical and constructed according to (and to appeal to) the values, purposes, and expectations of particular audiences" (263). Ornatowski and Bekins also importantly noted that communication is often politically influenced. This idea can be extended to technical writers who may feel pressured *not* to humanize accident reports because it is an expectation of the field. This pressure can come from their bosses, colleagues, and especially the organizations they work for that push writers to produce accident reports that continue to disregard humanistic components in favor of "technical" writing.

Those who argue against the presence of emotions in technical communication often point to sadness, fear, and anger as examples. Researchers Xie et al. categorized these into ethical emotions (anger, outrage, and guilt) and loss-based emotions (fear, worry, and sadness) (451). Regarding accident reports, the inclusion of loss-based emotions are likely the ones being rebuked. However, it is unlikely that including these emotions in technical documents will negatively impact readers or reduce the readability of the information being conveyed. A stickler for technical communication formalities may grow irritated with an emotionally colorful document, but including these emotions would not harm them. This is because people "negotiate ownership and agency over emotions" (Pickering 240). Therefore, including emotions in a

technical document will not hurt readers because they decide for themselves how they feel about what they are told. Acknowledging that an accident is tragic will not cause a reader to become dejected unless they interpret it as emotionally devastating. Most importantly, allowing emotions more prominence in accident reports will likely *increase* readers' understanding of the report. This is because positive emotions such as trust and compassion are necessary for effective learning to take place (Pickering 241). Compassion is especially important because when readers can relate the victim to themselves or to their coworkers, this makes the accident feel less abstract and appeals to readers' "ability to internalize the information" (Lancaster 214). By contrast, if employees read accident reports and feel no emotional connection to the information, the document will not leave a lasting impression on them. They will quickly forget it and the report will not be as effective at encouraging employees to behave cautiously on the job in the future (which is one of the most important purposes of accident reports). Therefore, enabling readers to connect with victims' humanity is profoundly effective at communicating the severity of accidents and the importance of safe jobsite practices.

Emphasizing emotions in accident reports is possible because "risk is not only about coolheaded judgement… but also related to a variety of strong emotions, such as fear and anger" (Xie et al. 450). Just as Dragga and Voss asserted, Xie et al. agreed that accident reports are not absent of emotion. And when images are included in accident reports, they evoke even stronger emotions and a higher perceived risk in readers (Xie et al. 451). In accident reports, this is crucial to getting workers to take suggested preventative measures seriously. Figures 3 and 4 demonstrate this concept below. By viewing the images, readers can infer the suffering victims endured during the accidents and feel compassion for those who died. This further impresses the

severity of the accident upon readers and the importance of practicing safe jobsite behaviors to avoid something similar happening to them or their coworkers.

Figure 3. Burnt Overalls from Deadly Accident (Dragga and Voss 72).

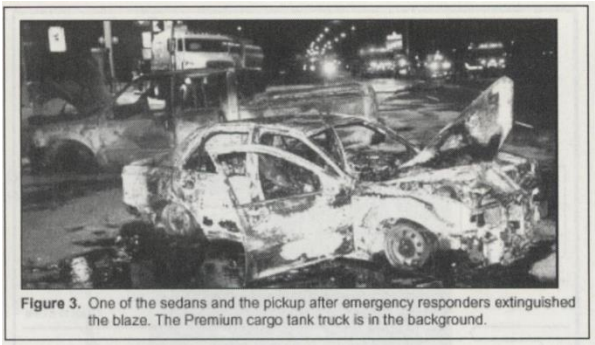

Figure 4. Burnt Car from Deadly Accident (Dragga and Voss 66).

Lancaster specified that people should always be conveyed as subjects, not objects, in technical documents (213). Dragga and Voss agreed, saying that images in accident reports should focus on the victims, not the objects that were damaged in the accident (66). Figure 3 keeps the focus on the victim because it depicts what someone wore during an accident, but Dragga and Voss criticized Figure 4 for focusing on damage caused to objects (the cars) rather than the person. I disagree with this criticism because the severity of the accident and suffering the victims endured can easily be inferred from the decimated state of the car. In Figure 4's case, it is the photo's caption describing the vehicles involved in the accident, not the photo of the vehicles themselves, that detracts attention from the victims. This demonstrates that technical communicators must think carefully about how they depict victims in images *and* how they describe those images. To emphasize humanity, victims must be the center of the images and the text. In images that are more object focused, Dragga and Voss suggested including information about the people involved in the accident (either in the caption or in the image itself) to keep

victims at the center of the discussion. An example of this is shown in Figure 5 below which depicts an airplane being recovered after a deadly crash. By including casualty information, the photo prompts readers to consider the lives lost in the crash.

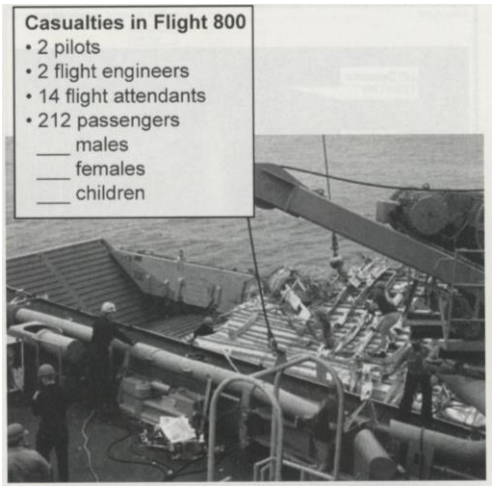

Figure 5. Humanized Plane Crash Accident (Dragga and Voss 72).

Xie et al. also noted that "specific emotions lead to specific actions… [and] the same emotion may trigger different action tendencies" (451-452). This further illustrates Pickering's idea that people negotiate their own emotions. Therefore, technical writers should not fear including loss-based emotions in accident reports because readers always decide what to do with the information they are given. Some may feel sad or angry and try to create safer working conditions, and others may feel unaffected and do nothing at all. Although, one could argue that if the purpose of accident reports is to prevent future accidents (as stated by Jha, Sangeetha, and Salguero-Caparros et al.), Xie et al.'s study implies it is beneficial to emphasize emotions in accident reports because it has a greater effect on readers and will save more lives in the future. This conclusion is reflected in a statement from a Sauer study where a miner shared that humanized visuals "'make you think' and 'When you get back to the mine and see that belt [object involved in the accident] you think about the accident and how he [the victim] died'"

(Lancaster 216). Making these connections is essential to recognizing the importance of the safety protocols made before and after accidents to prevent more accidents from occurring.

Negative Effects of Humanizing Accident Reports

Including humanistic elements in accident reports appears to have overwhelmingly positive effects. These effects include emphasizing the humanity of accident victims and increasing safe jobsite practices among workers who read the reports. However, Lancaster discovered that there are potential negative impacts of humanizing accident reports, specifically when reports reach outside audiences. When investigating the effects of fatalgrams (accident report images and diagrams that depict human figures to represent the victims involved in the accident) from the mining industry, Lancaster found that when these images reached public audiences, they were sometimes misused and viewed as amusing or an epitome of "human stupidity" (212). In the most extreme cases, some people made merchandise—including t-shirts, postcards, and coffee mugs—using the fatalgrams and sold items online as gag-gifts (Lancaster 217). Examples of these items are shown in Figures 6 and 7. The appropriated fatalgram shown in these figures are from a real accident report from 1998 when a mine worker, Basil D. Hall, fell in front of a mine car, was struck by the vehicle, and died (Lancaster 217).

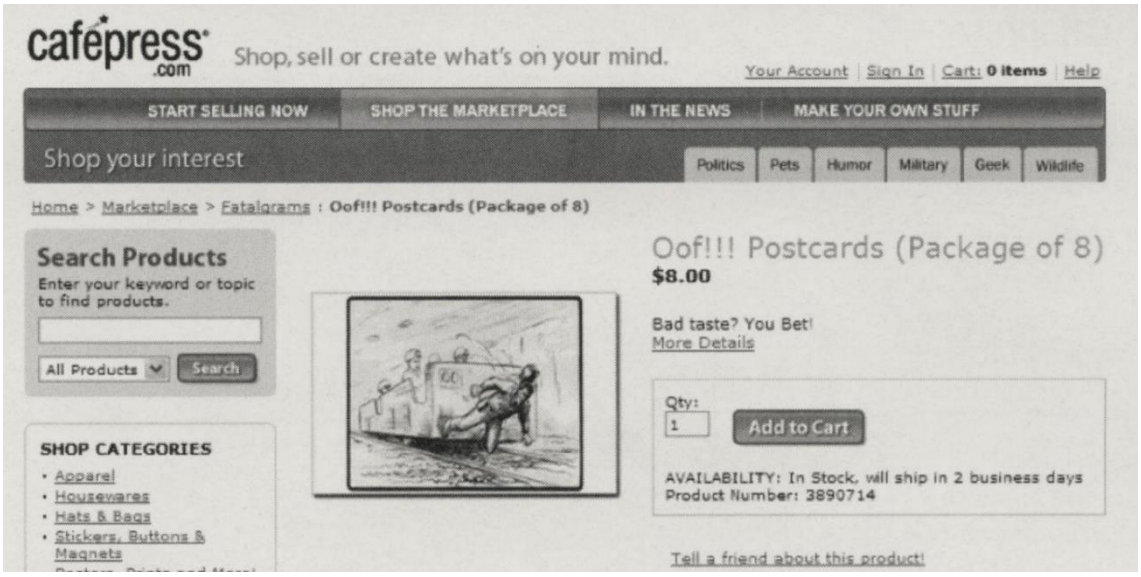

Figure 6. Postcard Fatalgram (Lancaster 220).

Figure 7. Coffee Mug Fatalgram (Lancaster 219).

Note that these items are described as “Oof!!!” (Figure 6) and “Squished Guy Mug” (Figure 7), and both include the option to “Tell a friend about this product!” These details add to the humorous tone and complete disregard for the tragedy the fatalgram depicts. Instead of emphasizing the victim’s humanity as intended, the public’s misuse of fatalgrams imparts the exact opposite effect by mocking victims and disregarding the feelings of those who knew and cared for them. Consider how Basil D. Hall’s family, friends, and coworkers would feel upon viewing these items and seeing Hall called “Squished Guy.” In addition to crassly disrespecting a tragic accident, mocking fatalgrams belittles the dangers surviving workers must face every day. Each time they go to work, their lives are at risk.

Most people will not mock fatalgrams or seek to profit from them, but the misuse of these images profoundly effects how seriously the public and other workers within the industry perceive accident reports to be. This is because “the negative effects of just a few public responses can conceivably undo the positive efforts of MSHA to recognize victims of mining accidents as human beings who were valued by their communities and loved ones, and MSHA’s

efforts to prevent future accidents" (Lancaster 217). The misuse of fatalgrams detracts from victims' humanity by turning their deaths into a joke. To amend this issue, Lancaster called for consideration of who is responsible for producing these negative outcomes. The people who exploit these images are undoubtedly accountable, but technical communicators must also accept responsibility for writing practices that "make such knowledge available to the many people who have little concern for ethical use of technical information" (Lancaster 218). "Many people" refers to anyone who is not part of an accident report's target audience, especially those who are not part of the industries these reports are written for (such as the mining industry). Lancaster provided many suggestions to fix this issue, one of which included producing two versions of accident reports: one for audiences within the respective industry that includes fatalgrams, and one for anyone outside of the industry (i.e., the general public) without fatalgrams.

Lancaster's study revealed the humanization of accident reports is an important practice that increases safe jobsite practices among workers who read the reports, but this can have negative or even opposite effects when public mockery of fatalgrams alters "miners' perception of serious information to one that is joking, embarrassing, or disregarding" (Lancaster 216). This suggests a need to carefully consider how technical communicators humanize their documents. This includes consideration for *how* technical information is presented and *who* information is being presented to. This is supported by Lancaster's finding that fatalgrams appear comic-like or cartoonish and, when paired with serious, technical documents, this sends mixed messages—"one that invokes a sense of humor linked to our comic-book literacies and one that invokes a sense of gravity [seriousness] linked to our news-reporting literacies" (220). It is therefore crucial to analyze how text and images work together to create meaning, what meaning they

convey, and who that meaning is conveyed to. Technical communicators must remain conscious of who reads accident reports and how those readers might use (or misuse) the information.

Ethics Discussion

I have discussed a technical communicator's role, a brief history on accident reports, the implications of inviting subjectiveness (emotion) into accident reports, and the potential negative effects of humanizing accident reports. Understanding these topics is crucial because it is easy to examine accident reports or technical communication and point fingers at areas that need improvement, but this topic becomes complicated when asking if accident reports are "unethical" as Dragga and Voss accused them to be. This is because even though something may appear blatantly unfair, that does not necessarily mean it is unethical. In this portion of the essay, I synthesize the research discussed thus far and offer insight on the ethical implications of current accident report writing practices. I also provide multiple ethical viewpoints to demonstrate the complexity of this issue, including situational ethics, utilitarianism, and Kantianism.

I began my research for this essay confident that excluding humanistic aspects from accident reports was unethical. However, after learning more about what technical communicators do and why there is a lack of humanization in the field, I do not believe this practice can be so easily criticized. When considering the definition of technical communication and its writing conventions, excluding humanistic elements from accident reports is not outrightly unethical and technical writers are not behaving maliciously when doing so. However, Xie et al. and Lancaster's articles revealed that emphasizing emotions (i.e., humanistic aspects) makes accident reports more effective. This finding led me to question if it is therefore *more* ethical to humanize accident reports because it will better protect workers from future accidents. Ultimately, I concluded that not humanizing accident reports is a seemingly ethical choice, but

technical communicators must examine this issue on a personal level and decide the ethics of it for themselves. This type of thinking aligns with situational ethics, also known as shades of gray.

Situational ethics postulates that people alter their ethics depending on the situation to produce the most beneficial outcome. Ethics in these situations can be questionable (as I have discovered is the case with accident reports), but Allen and Voss were careful to point out that shades of gray should never be used as a rationalization for behavior (19). To remain ethical while navigating through shades of gray, Allen and Voss emphasized the importance of values and specified that decisions must be made *after* weighing one's ethical values to ensure they do not act in their own best interest (35). Making decisions before weighing one's ethical values encourages people to bend their values to support their choices and skews toward unethical behavior.

The STC cited legality, honesty, confidentiality, quality, fairness, and professionalism as the top values within the field of technical communication ("Ethical Principles"). These values and their descriptions listed on the STC's website made no reference to human life. The STC did, however, mention that they advanced the field of technical communication with their integrity, meaning that by following technical communication practices, they are being good technical communicators and advancing the field. This shows that the STC values following rules and conventions and that adhering to technical communication practices is highly valued by technical communicators. This is not to say that technical communicators do not value human life, but it shows that as a profession, they do not highly value humanizing documents because this practice is not a convention within the field. In this respect, they value maintaining scientific integrity above subjective, humanistic experiences. When situating this within Allen and Voss' values approach and shades of gray, this supports the idea that not including humanistic aspects within

accident reports is an ethical choice. This is because omitting humanistic information from accident reports aligns with the STC's values and shows that technical communicators are acting based on the field's values when writing accident reports, not their own personal interests.

Another popular ethical approach is the utilitarian view which posits that ethical choices are ones which produce the best possible outcomes. This view can be separated into two types: act and rule. Act utilitarianism is when choices are made to produce the most desirable outcome regardless of the action, whereas rule utilitarianism specifies that an act is correct if it produces the best outcome *and* conforms to rules that may apply to the decision process (Markel 67). From this perspective, the choice to humanize accident reports is in conflict with itself because the ethics of this choice differ based on which type of utilitarianism one uses to examine this issue. Considering that valuing human life is generally a universally accepted value, an act utilitarian would argue to humanize accident reports because it is always the best choice to value human life. Humanizing accident reports would accomplish this because it would emphasize victims' humanity rather than silencing their suffering. It would also make reports more impactful to readers (as shown by Xie et. al and Lancaster's studies), causing readers to act more carefully on jobsites in the future which would further preserve human life. By contrast, a rule utilitarian would argue against humanizing accident reports because it would not conform with the conventions of technical communication, nor would it align with the STC's values and definition of technical communication. While the STC's conventions are not law and there would be no real consequences for choosing to humanize accident reports, it would not align with the expectations of the profession and would appear unethical in this way.

A third view of ethics is the Kantian view which values truth and believes that in any situation, people should always be the ends, never the means (Dombrowski 53). This means that

ethical decisions must always act in people's best interests. When applying this concept to accident reports, this raises questions about whose interests are best to honor: the technical communicator interested in maintaining the integrity of their field, the accident victims' sense of humanity, or the workers interested in future preventative measures? This again points to shades of gray. If a technical writer chose to value their field (i.e., their own interests), this crosses the line from "gray" toward unethical as outlined by Allen and Voss. However, if the technical communicator chose their field not for their own professional interests, but to maintain their profession's integrity and values, this choice appears ethical. This reflects Allen and Voss' point that one must weigh their values before making a decision to make ethical choices (35). This also shows that it is important to evaluate *why* a technical writer chooses to humanize or not to humanize an accident report before this decision can be labeled as ethical or unethical.

Alternatively, consider the issue of humanizing accident reports in reverse: is it ethical to expect technical communicators to forsake their profession's customs to behave ethically by someone else's standards (that is, those arguing to humanize accident reports)? It seems that in this situation, no matter the decision, the technical communicator's values will always be in conflict and no true ethical end can be achieved. This raises questions of fairness. That is, is it fair to expect technical communicators to change their profession's customs for accident victims' sake? Or, is it fair to silence victims' suffering for the sake of keeping technical communication *technical*? Though similar in nature, "fairness and ethics are not the same thing" (Allen and Voss 35). "Fairness" refers to impartiality and a "lack of favoritism toward one side or another," while "ethics" appeal to our morals and values systems (*Dictionary by Merriam-Webster*). Even if it appears unfair to silence victims' suffering in accident reports and, subsequently, their humanity, it is not inherently unethical when considered in the bigger picture of technical communication

and the field's values. However, is this choice *fair*? This question is as complex as Dragga and Voss' initial call to reevaluate the ethics of accident reports and therefore warrants extensive research. This finding points to a need for technical writers to consider their writing choices on an ethical spectrum that accounts for their morals and values as well as technical writing conventions to fully understand the ethics of technical writing practices.

Conclusion: Ethics Uncertain

I hoped to provide a concrete answer regarding the ethics of humanizing accident reports. Instead, it has become clear why this topic was so heavily contested among my colleagues and within the field of technical communication. Just as Ornatowski and Bekins concluded in their research regarding humanistic aspects in technical communication, it is clear there is "no final, definitive answer" (267). This issue exemplifies situational ethics because there is no correct or incorrect answer. When considering technical communication in its entirety, it appears not humanizing accident reports is still an ethical decision. However, this writing practice should be left to each individual technical communicator to analyze and decide the ethics of themselves. They must evaluate their morals and values compared to their writing practices to understand why they make specific writing decisions and the ethics of those choices. As long as technical writers remain consistent in the values that guide their work, whether it be their personal values or their professional values, they are more likely to behave ethically regarding the humanization of accident reports. However, if technical writers alter their values depending on the reports they write, sometimes vacillating between personal and professional values, this risks becoming unethical behavior.

Regarding ethical approaches, this topic presents as "solid, or legitimate, gray" because it asks technical communicators to weigh their personal values against their profession's values

(Allen and Voss 34). This is not a matter of technical communicators making self-serving choices to benefit themselves because they do not gain anything personally by choosing to humanize or not to humanize accident reports. Ultimately, it is about technical communicators' choice to serve the accident report victims or to serve the conventions of technical communication. The ethics of this situation are best placed on a spectrum where technical communicators must evaluate their own beliefs to determine where they stand on this issue.

Moving Forward: Does Technical Communication Need to Change?

There was an overwhelming consensus among the research included in this essay that it is time to reevaluate what is considered technical communication. Ornatowski and Bekins reflected this attitude by suggesting a reevaluation of how technical communication is taught because changing the field begins with how it is taught to writing students (265). Students must be taught how to humanize the field beginning in the classroom rather than being put on the job and expected to navigate the ethics of technical communication themselves. Similarly, Pickering felt that technical communicators need to begin seeing themselves as agents of change rather than "as a passive transmitter of information" (241). This again suggests technical communicators must rethink how they talk about and teach technical communication. Rice-Bailey suggested that technical communicators need to engage in discussions about the value of their work and that they be introduced to practicing very specific skills (including humanizing the field) starting in the classroom (242). This list of suggestions is in no way exhaustive, but it provides a small glimpse into additional literature on this topic. While none of the sources I evaluated when conducting research on this topic explicitly labeled the lack of humanization in technical communication as ethical or unethical, many scholars provided suggestions on how to improve this issue.

Incorporating humanistic aspects into accident reports is not a change that will occur overnight, and it is possible it may never occur within technical communication. I agree with the resounding suggestions made by the research this essay evaluated that to see change in the field, it must begin in the classroom. Learning to balance humanistic aspects and the scientific integrity of technical communication is a skill that can be developed through experience. Technical writing students must be taught how to properly incorporate humanistic aspects into their writing to bring this issue of humanizing accident reports into balance and, hopefully, to more definitive ethical grounds.

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