

# Black Technical and Professional Communication

November 30, 2020, 1:30 PM Eastern | Transcript

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## Opening Remarks

**Jennifer Sano-Franchini:** [0:00:00] So, hi, I'm Jennifer Sano-Franchini, my pronouns are she/her/hers and I'm Associate Professor of English and Director of Professional and Technical Writing at Virginia Tech.

And I just want to begin this event with a land acknowledgement. Although we've come together today from many different places, many of the resources that made this event possible are coming from Virginia Tech. And I want to acknowledge the land-based history that's contributed to our ability to come together today.

Virginia Tech rests on the traditional homelands of the Tutelo/Monacan people who have a continuing connection to the land Virginia Tech currently occupies. Our presence on this land is a consequence of colonization, forced displacement and genocide of indigenous people. Virginia Tech also sits on former plantation land worked by enslaved Black people, including the Fraction McNorton and Saunders families, amongst numerous others, who contributed to the creation and emergence of Virginia Tech as a major land-grant university.

[0:00:58] Although a land acknowledgement alone is not enough, it's an important social justice practice that makes visible the history and ongoing effects of systemic inequality in our society. With this recognition, we commit to educating ourselves about the local histories of the places we occupy, contextualizing our learning by deeply engaging with Native American and Black intellectual traditions, and attending to the impacts of our actions and our work on Black, Indigenous and other minoritized communities.

On that note, I'm very excited that we have seven esteemed panelists who will be speaking with you about Black technical and professional communication. We will have introductions, spend the bulk of our time with our panelists presentations, and we'll have some time for Q & A at the end. So please feel free to enter any questions that come up in the Q & A box— you should see a button at the bottom of your zoom screen, if you don't already see it.

Please note that this event is being recorded.

And a quick note for those of you on social media at the bottom left of the slide is the hashtag for this event, #BlackTechComm.

[0:01:56] So this event was organized as a response to national calls for action against anti-Blackness and white supremacy across domains, especially those that arose in response to the unjust and brutal murders of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Tony McDade earlier this year.

For instance, this past summer, the ATTW, or Association of Teachers of Technical Writing President Angela Haas issued a call to action for non-Black members in particular to take steps to redress anti-Blackness within our spheres of influence.

This call was followed by another by ATTW Vice President and our panelist Natasha N. Jones and ATTW Fellow Miriam F. Williams, who called for the just use of imagination that, quote, supports the deconstruction and abolishment of oppressive practices, systems, and institutions. They go on to explain that, quote, a just use of imagination is not destructive even as it seeks to dismantle, because using imagination in this way also calls for the replacement of oppressive practices with systems that are founded on equality, access and opportunity.

[0:03:01] In response to these calls within our profession, we in the Professional and Technical Writing program at Virginia Tech, started a working group to address anti-Blackness in Professional and Technical Writing, and our conversations led to the idea of an event like the one we are at today. So thank you to all who participated in this group.

In addition, the Conference on College Composition and Communication, or CCCC, released the CCCC Black Technical and Professional Communication Position Statement with Resource Guide, composed by our panelists.

So many units across Virginia Tech came together to make this event possible, and I want to thank the Black Cultural Center, College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, Center for Humanities, Engineering Communications Program and Materials Science and Engineering Diversity Committee, the Composition Program Writing Center, Center for Educational Networks and Impacts, Center for Communicating Science, and Engineering Communication Center.

Special thanks to Sylvester Johnson, Joe Forte of Athenaeum, Kristen Cox and Sheila Carter-Tod, who've met with me and provided guidance and support in the organizing of this event.

I will now turn it over to Dr. Carter-Tod, who will be introducing the moderators for today.

## Introduction of Moderators

**Sheila Carter-Tod:** [0:04:11] Thanks Jen. Today, as Jen mentioned, you will be able to submit questions through the question and answer button below on your screen.

We have three graduate students who have volunteered to moderate our session for us.

First up, we have Matt Homer, he's a PhD student in our Rhetoric and Writing program that focuses on Native Hawaiian communication practices, especially in response to the colonial reality of the modern techno, of modern technology as a form of technical communication.

Next up is our moderator, we have Chloe Robertson. Chloe is also another student in our PhD program in Rhetoric and Writing. Chloe's research interests are immigration documentation and communities. She's currently working on a book review of *Rhetorical Crossovers* by Cedric Burrows and *Linguistic Justice* by April Baker Bell.

Our third moderator is Luana Shafer. Luana is also a doctoral student in our PhD program. Luana focuses on addiction, alcoholism, and digital rhetoric. Specifically, she aims to analyze the embodied rhetoric of lived experiences within physical and digital community spaces for alcoholism support and recovery groups. She hopes to contribute to medical rhetoric conversations concerning patient advocacy and ethos.

As mentioned earlier, Jen has set up a session for us to tweet if you have something you want to send out, there will be other people that will also be tweeting. But to reminder, the hashtag is #BlackTechComm with a capitalized B, T, and C.

And with that, I will turn it over to Chloe Robertson, who will be introducing our panelists.

## Introduction of Panelists

**Chloe Robertson:** [0:05:56] Thank you, Dr. Carter-Tod.

So I'd like to start our introductions today with Kimberly C. Harper who is an Assistant Professor of English at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, where she directs the Technical Writing concentration for the Department of English. She created the monthly maternal health and reproductive justice podcast, *The Space of Grace*. And her work focuses on

social justice, race, ethos and technical and professional communication, maternal health rhetoric, mental health, and hip-hop discourse. She recently published her new book, *The Ethos of Black Motherhood in America: Only White Women Get Pregnant*.

Constance Haywood is a third-year PhD student in the Writing, Rhetoric and American Cultures department at Michigan State University. She's interested in Black feminist rhetorics and literacies, online community building, and digital research ethics.

Natasha N. Jones is an Assistant Professor at Michigan State University in the Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures department. She is also the current Vice President for the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing, and has won the CCC Best Article in Technical and Scientific Communication Award in 2020, 2018, and 2014, and the Nell Ann Pickett Award in 2017.

Temptaous Mckoy is an Assistant Professor of English with a specialty in technical communication at Bowie State University. She recently won the CFSHRC Dissertation Award and serves as an associate editor for the *Peitho* journal. Her work challenges the field of TPC to be more inclusive of informal, communicative and learning practices such as those in Black communities and HBCUs.

Donnie Johnson Sackey is an Assistant Professor of Rhetoric and Writing at the University of Texas at Austin and a Senior Researcher with Detroit Integrated Vision for Environmental Research through Science and Engagement, D-VERSE. He has worked with the Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition. And his work focuses on environmental public policy deliberation, environmental justice, and environmental community-based participatory research.

Cecilia D. Shelton is an Assistant Professor of Rhetoric and Writing at the University of Maryland. Her research focuses on uplifting and prioritizing the voices of Black folks and others structured into the margins in order to promote equitable solutions to social, political, and structural problems.

And lastly, Ja'La Wourman is a doctoral candidate in the Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures program at Michigan State University. She's a King-Chavez-Parks, KCP, Future Faculty Fellow and recipient of the 2020 Excellence Award in Interdisciplinary Scholarship for her work in Tanzania, East Africa with the Tanzania partnership program at Michigan State University.

Thank you all for listening, and I will now turn over to our wonderful panelists.

## Technical Communication Would Not Exist Without Black People

**Temptaous Mckoy:** [0:09:07] Hello everybody, how are y'all doin' today?

I don't know if they can talk back to me, okay, but I see in the chat, like y'all jumping down there so hey, y'all.

Good afternoon, my name is Temptaous Mckoy, Chair of the CCCC Black Technical and Professional Communication Task Force, and we are absolutely elated to be here with you guys today.

So I'm gonna go ahead and share my screen which has the slides on them. Bear with me one second. Alright, I'mma go and hit present. Boom.

So, you know, this always throws me off even when I'm teaching my students.

So, can everyone see the slides currently? Are we good on slides? Now, whatch'all lookin' at? No?

Desktop two, go to desktop two. Okay, here we go. This can we get it? Are we good now? See? Again.

It—aye, it happens to all of us, alright.

Well, welcome to the party.

So I'm going to be very brief in introducing what we're going to talk about here today 'cause I want to make sure we have time for everyone to ask any questions and things of that nature as well.

So again, if you're tweeting out on Twitter, Instagram, and everything else, the hashtag is #BlackTechComm, as well as #BlackTPC. So you can use either or both hashtags in order to thread this conversation together.

And again, we want to thank Virginia Tech for havin' us here as well.

[0:10:35] So forming the Black Technical and Professional Communication Task Force. So I just want to give you guys a little bit of background information on how this came together before we jump into everyone's work, if thas alright.

So, the conversation was really between CCCC Chair Vershawn Ashanti Young and I at NCTE 2019.

So in Baltimore, just having a conversation about how Black technical and

professional communication should be brought more to the forefront and the ways that we could go about doing that.

So he asks me, you know, who would be some great people that we would love to have on the Black Task Force to do this, and of course, I thought of those who were not only in my research network and things of that nature, but I wanted to make sure we tapped into Black technical and professional communication scholars that has specific research interests and specific contributions to the field of technical and professional communication, and that we're were much more explicit in their calls for Black technical and professional communication as well. And I want to make sure I highlight that because obviously there are so many of us, right. But everyone can't be on the committee. But I just want to kind of bring in a little bit on how we were able to select who was on the committee.

For those of you who may not have seen the research statement, which we do have plugged here below, I will place the link to the presentation in the chat box momentarily.

[0:11:58] Black TPC is defined as including practices centered on Black community and culture and/or rhetorical practices inherent in Black lived experiences. Black TPC reflects the cultural, economic, social, and political experiences of Black people across the diaspora. It also include the work of scholars in the academy and the contributions of practitioners. In all, Black TPC contextualize the experiences and cultures of Black people, through research, teaching, and scholarship.

So we wanted to make sure that we gave you all a working definition as you move forward, to understand and utilize Black TPC.

One more thing as I move on, the the Communication's Position Statement and Resource Guide is available even if you just do a quick Google in NCTE, CCC Black Technical Professional Communication, it'll be one of your first hits. I charge you all to make sure that not only you read the statement, but also read the letter that Vershawn Young and I penned together to our audience.

It was important and critical that instead of just giving everyone the position statement that we actually gave you all a resource guide to begin your research and to move forward.

So with that said, I'm going to go ahead and turn the floor over to Donnie Sackey.

## Black User Experience Design

**Donnie Johnson Sackey:** [0:13:16] Hi everyone, thank you for having me today and coming and listening to us speak.

Can you advance to the next slide, please, Temptuous?

Thank you.

So I spend a lot of time thinking about how design can improve environments and our relationship with environments and subsequently our relationships with each other.

So I've been pretty preoccupied in my research and teaching with thinking about how we can, as designers, address problems through writing based technical interventions via document or mobile application design.

My contribution today is to ask you to consider what would it mean to think of user experience design through a race-conscious lens, particularly an Afrocentric lens.

My decision to ask you to do so is a means to get you to consider the ways in which our approach to design through an apparent race-neutral lens is in fact an approach that privileges whiteness.

[0:14:13] Consider this.

Why do digital assistants for Apple and Android operating system sound white?

Or why did Apple's iOS 8 update with racially inclusive emojis still receive backlash from users of color?

Or why do darker skinned people experience more difficulty using automatic soap dispensers?

I offer these provocations to highlight a concern. Black people are rarely seen as users or designers of technology, which comes with a heavy price.

This is primarily caused by a lack of racial diversity in tech.

These problems I've highlighted are also largely the result of mostly, if not entirely white design teams unintentionally making discriminatory design decisions. For example, the example that I gave of the soap dispenser was the result of technical concepts— a global manufacturer of restroom hygiene systems, not bothering to test its dispensers on non-white users.

But these incidents aren't exactly isolated.

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[0:15:13] In 2015, a Black software developer alerted Google via Twitter that its service, Google Photos, labeled photos of him and another friend, as gorillas. Google's corrective to the problem was to censor searches on its service for the terms gorilla, chimp and monkey.

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In 2017, Face App, a photo editing service designed by a Moscow based team drew attention on account of a feature, labeled as a hotness filter. Many users of color criticized the feature because it lightened darker skin tones to achieve the desiring beauty effect. Rather than remove the feature from app, designers opted to change the filters label from hotness to spark.

In both these cases, it's likely that the design teams didn't train their algorithms on diverse enough datasets. Nevertheless, that doesn't address larger questions as to whether these features should exist or how can we develop robust systems of AI accountability in order to ensure that we're not encoding racism and white supremacy into our technology. I realize that some correctives had been to diversify design teams by bringing more people of color into the design process and broadening the picture of what users look like.

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[0:16:28] But still, beyond bodies in the room, we need to consider the tools that bodies use to facilitate experiences and environments. I want us to consider the heuristics that guide our design processes and how seemingly a-cultural approaches to design, or in fact cultural and preloaded with biases that marginalize the humanity of Black people and eradicating our perspectives.

I've really been interested in this idea of de-marginalizing Black user experience through Afrocentricity as a design heuristic, user experience design from the perspective of Black, technical and professional communication taps into Molefi Asanti's concept of Afrocentricity by placing the suppressed histories and experiences of the Black diaspora at the center of evaluating the social, economic, and political aspects of design.

These perspectives have been mostly driven by practitioners who push against the marginalization of Black lived experience in design thinking. Their perspectives encouraged us to consider design as it positively impacts and emerges from the needs of the Black community. Afrocentric design is a



recursive process that acknowledges designers as cultural beings who Charles Thomas notes, have the authorization to bless and damn as knowledge brokers.

[0:17:42] Afrocentric design is guided by six ethical principles that acknowledge the designer's responsibility as a transformative healer; demonstrate deep respect for spirituality; embrace the importance of agreement and consensus; acknowledge the necessity of dialogue, particularity, individuality, cooperation, and solidarity as part of an iterative design process; and promote self-determination and rebirth.

To contextualize some of these values, I'd like you to consider these questions at the bottom as heuristics and how they may apply to the examples of unintentional, discriminatory design I offered earlier. Beyond the inclusions of people of color in the design process, what if designers rigorously questioned the value and impact of a specific design feature on communities beyond their ideal users? What would it mean to make community stakeholders a part the design process beyond their roles as users? Or, what would it mean for designers to walk away entirely from ideas that community stakeholders acknowledge as harmful during the design process?

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[0:18:47] There are a handful of Black user experience designers who are doing this work already. I quickly want to acknowledge two women, AmberNechole Hart is a user experience designer based out of Georgia, who spent a lot of time exploring how Black perspectives and responses to past, current, and future realities can influence design, creating more conscious, innovative, and more importantly, inclusive work. I'm also really moved by the work of Jacquelyn Iyama, who is a user experience and product designer based in San Francisco. Jacqueline has done work on communication projects that improved public access in housing in Baltimore. I'm also interested in her thesis project, which is a conceptual design for an app-based service called allay, which seeks to improve mental health care access for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color by attending to distrust and stigma in healthcare institutions, cultural competency of therapists, and the accessibility of mental health resources. She's also the founder of Black UX Collective, which is a platform that highlights the work and experiences of Black user designers.

And so. My time is up, but I'm happy to talk more about like these two wonderful women and their work and also further think about how Afrocentricity can guide our approaches to design. So thank you.

## Black Entrepreneurship in Tech Comm

**Ja'La Wourman:** [0:20:05] Thank you, Donnie.

Can everyone hear me? Thumbs up.

So, Donnie kind of got us situated to think about UX and Black user experience.

My name is Ja'La Wourman, and today I'll be talking about Black entrepreneurship and technical communication.

This is also a focal point of my dissertation, which I'm currently working on. So you guys will get just a little snapshot, snapshot of some of the key things that I had been discovering in my research and why I believe that this is important to the work of technical communicators and writing studies scholars.

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So to begin I want to play this preview clip of a film that came out in 2019 on Netflix, *She Did That*.

[0:20:58] African-American women are the country's fastest-growing group.

These are the women who are raising the glass ceiling.

"I'm a product of people who were committed to seeing me thrive."

Dreamers.

"Could I have lost everything? Yes."

Doers.

"The Superwoman complex is real."

Risk takers.

"I have a Master's degree, you're asking me to print out agenda? I'm done."

"You don't get to diminish my hard work."

"The banks are not as excited to give us money."

"The backlash was, we're selling out."

"This is a time for us to begin to build our own table."

What's the secret?

"It's really just a matter of, you know, having the guts to do it."

How did she get there?

"To say that you went from your kitchen to being a part of the largest beauty company in the world?"

Take a step in her shoes to see, she did that.

[0:21:56] So as the trailer said, African American women are the country's fastest growing group of entrepreneurs. So this film—you can go back...

The film focuses on Luvvie Ajayi, she's an author and digital strategist, Lisa Price, who's a natural hair care founder of Carol's Daughter, Melissa Butler, founder of cosmetics line The Lip Bar, and Tonya Rapley the founder of My Fab Finance. So why entrepreneurship?

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So historically Black entrepreneurship has meant opportunities for equality, equity and a vehicle out of poverty. Throughout the years Black entrepreneurs have harnessed economic power to strengthen the Black community.

While many scholars approach technical and professional communication work from industry-related practices and workplace settings, something that I do as well, there's a growing need to understand how individuals have taken it upon themselves to solve problems with innovative solutions. Now this is why we can look towards entrepreneur writing and company design practices to understand their experiences and their methods. There's a lack of attention to the women, though, at the forefront of the entrepreneur movement. Not only in Black communities throughout the United States, but globally.

[0:23:16] So throughout my section, a key concept I want to leave in your minds is research in Black entrepreneurship means addressing multiple layers of oppression that ultimately lead to innovative solutions and technological advancements.

So when I say this, I don't want us to be left with a deficit mindset. I want you guys to know that although Black entrepreneurs and women and other Black individuals who have created businesses and are designing these companies, they recognize the oppression that is before them, but that propels them to think of innovative solutions which are technological advancements.

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So the need, culturally centered, inclusive practices.

[0:24:17] So my interests in this really stemmed out of, Adam Banks' 2005 book Race, Rhetoric and Technology, and a passage that I like that he states is,

"Those of us who care about ending systemic oppression must design new spaces, even as we point out the problems in our current ones. So when I read that, I instantly began to think about what does it look like to imagine new spaces that confront these systems that have kept a lot of marginalized Black and Brown and minority people silent, basically. Now Dr. Natasha Jones, who was also on this Task Force, in 2017, her study revealed that Black entrepreneurs' awareness of the possibilities and potential for acting in and pushing back against oppressive ideological structures and discriminant—discriminatory economic systems was very much apparent in the work that they do.

So I bring that up and I put these two quotes next to each other just to say that although we need to begin to think up imaginative—imaginary spaces, Black entrepreneurs and Black people are very much aware of what is against them, and they are up to the task to create new spaces.

The advent of social media and the digital era, however, represents the potential for the continuation of reclaiming media spaces, as sites of Black intellectualism and rhetorical practices in digital and public spaces traditionally not recognized in writing studies scholarship.

[0:25:28] So this is something that me and my co-author, Shingi Mavima, we described in our recent piece, and an example of this that I want to highlight is Blavity, Inc.

So to the right, I'm going to be discussing a company that I've kind of focused on over the years. Blavity, Inc. is a millennial technology company, a media tech company that is home to five brands. So within this company, they create user-generated content that centered on Black voices and community issues across the diaspora. So this models an Afrocentric approach. Now their brands reaches between 400 thousand to 3 million users between the five. And I bring up this company because it addresses what does it mean to imagine a space where we are directly confronting these oppressive systems that have tried to silence our voices? What do we do? We create new spaces.

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Blavity was founded by Morgan DeBaun.

And if you look to the right, you see the five brands. Shadow and Act which is media and film, Travel Noire which is a travel company, 21 Ninety, which is a women's empowerment brand, Blavity News, which highlights news in the Black community. Blavity Politics, which highlights politics within the Black community and issues that we care about, and Afro Tech, which is directly centered for technology and Black tech designers.

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Looking ahead, Black feminism as an intersectional approach, what does this all mean?

So shifts in our understanding of what counts as knowledge means is applying methods that are centered on social justice outcomes, but also looking to other fields to see what discussions have been overlooked within our own field.

Building on the social justice turn, we can look towards Black feminism as methodological framework when researching Black entrepreneurship in physical and digital spaces.

So for me, when I think about these spaces, Black entrepreneurship, I think about it's more than just writing. It's more than just looking at how they have designed the company. It's examining the experiences and the narratives that come with each entrepreneur and what it took for them to create this space. What can we learn and what, how can that inform us as we're doin' research in the workplace and in business structures.

[0:28:02] And I want to leave you guys with intersectionality, which was a term coined by Kimberly Crenshaw in 1989. Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberly Crenshaw, helps us describe how the identities we carry, our gender, class, sexuality, religion, location, and many others inform our experiences. Thus, understanding why a Black feminist framework means careful analysis of the intersecting, interacting, mitigating ways that these categories shape our experiences and can ultimately help Black women entrepreneurs along the way.

So some questions for you guys to consider that you might want to address during the Q & A section is what role might community, race, and identity play when researching entrepreneurship and technical and professional communication? And two, how does this current moment that we are in shift our methodological approach to conducting research for businesses and organizations?

Thank you.

## **Black Rhetorics of Health Communication**

**Kimberly Harper:** [0:29:11] Good afternoon, everyone. Can you hear me? Thumbs up. Okay, awesome.

My name is Kim Harper and today I'm going to talk to you all about Black

rhetorics of health communication.

We are experiencing a national moment where there's a lot of discussion about Black maternal health, and we hear the statistic that Black women are three to four times more likely to die in childbirth than white women, regardless of a Black women's access to education, her income, and the best medical care.

And so for me as I began, to think critically about Black maternal health, I thought about the larger discussion of the Black Lives Matter movement. And this understanding that Black lives do not matter in this country, because Black wombs, the source of Black life, does not matter.

And so historically in American society, we have a place where Black people only matter if we're adding value to the economy.

[0:30:08] So 400 years of chattel slavery where free labor is being provided. Then you have the sharecropping system where people are still impoverished. They are free, but they are economically disadvantaged and enslaved, and now we have the prison industrial complex that Michelle Alexander writes about in her book, *The New Jim Crow*.

And so when I really dove into, why are Black women dying, why do we have medical disparities in our communities, I came to the conclusion of race and racism. So there are issues that we have to attend to.

And after having my own birth trauma and giving birth to a beautiful daughter eight years ago, I realized that it's really the image and the ethos of the Black community and Black women and Black motherhood that plays a role in how we, why, why the health care that we receive, is not what it should be.

[0:31:07] And so as a result of that, I created Black rhetorics of health communication, BRHC for short, and Black rhetorics of health communication builds on scholarship from a number of areas which include rhetoric of health care, rhetoric of health and medicine, technical and professional communication, and a lot of other adjacent fields.

But it explicitly focuses on the experiences of Black patients and is grounded in the African rhetorical concept of *nommo*, which acknowledges the power of the word. So your word is your bond. We've heard that before. You are required to be truthful and honest and the word both written and spoken have the power to bring good into our worlds.

And so BRHC scholars seek to bring together academics, community organizations and health care professionals to discuss the design delivery and effects of written and oral medical discourses on Black patients.

And finally, BRHC scholarship seeks to redress social injustices within the medical system.

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[0:32:07] And so BRHC scholarship cites Black scholars who are not traditionally in TPC or RHM, and those adjacent fields, so if you've read the CCCC statement, there's a list of resources there as Temptaous said earlier, but I want to draw your attention to a few additional ones. Toni Morrison's work is paramount to what we do with BRHC scholarship because she talks about the fabricated African presence in literature and that can extend into TPC and what we're doing in medical discourse.

Also, the idea that we are constantly trying to prove that racism exists. It is, it is a distraction. And so we have to move away from that and began to just really do the work.

Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body* and Harriet Washington, *Medical Apartheid* are also two cornerstone works in this framework.

And when we talk about histories, theories, and methodologies, of course, Ja'La mentioned intersectionality and Kimberly Crenshaw, Chester M. Pierce who coined the term racial microaggressions, and Loretta Ross, she, along with 12 other Black women, started the reproductive justice movement, which is the right to have children, the right not to have children by way of access to abortion, safe abortion services and contraceptives and then a right to raise your children in safe and healthy environments, and so while all three of those are important to the Black community, the right to raise your child in a safe environment is paramount because Black bodies, Black people are over-policed by police departments and white citizen police who believe that there is an affront imposed on them when, when Black people are in so-called whites paces.

So these cornerstones help build the BRHC foundation.

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[0:33:59] And so in addition to citing Black scholarship outside of RHM and TPC, we also cite Black scholars. So Dr. Miriam Williams with her research on regulatory writing, Dr. Aimee Roundtree who has written about medical science writing, we have Dr. Cecilia Shelton and Dr. Temptaous Mckoy who are also on this Task Force who have provided us with a lens to see tech comm, Dr. Natasha Jones and her colleagues who have done a lot of work on social justice in TPC.

And I also want to shout out some up and coming graduate students and their work, Veronica Joyner who is writing about rhetorics of respect and Black maternal health in Jamal Jared Alexander, who is specifically looking at folk medicine, mental health, and perinatal health, which is important to our community obviously.

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[0:34:51] And so before I leave you, I just want to encourage you to think about a couple of core principles.

The full framework will include a— I'm going to share two with you here today.

One, acknowledging the history of medical abuse in a community within a society. So you cannot say that you are working to eradicate disparities without acknowledging the history. For example, if we look at the Black community and the medical testing that has gone on in our community. If we look at the idea that Black, Black people are able to sustain pain better than white people, you have to go back in history to understand that that is a remnant of chattel slavery. But here we are in 2020 and medical students are still, still have that misbelief that Black, Black people can withstand high levels of pain which affects the amount of pain medication they are given.

And so number two, acknowledging the power dynamic that affects consent between a patient and his or her healthcare provider. Again, the issue of consent. If we go back in history and look at the so-called father of modern day gynecology, J. Marion Sims conducted numerous experiments on enslaved Black women. Thomas Jefferson tested his smallpox vaccine on enslaved people. Henrietta Lacks. There, there's a history of a lack of consent in the Black community when they deal with the medical establishment.

[0:36:20] So I leave you with this question. As a scholar activists, are you engaging in community driven activism or community led activism as it pertains to rectify health disparities?

And my colleague Cana Uluak made me think critically about the difference between community driven versus community led activism, and we can have that discussion further.

So if you have any questions, please put them in the chat.

I'm going to pass it off to Dr. Shelton. Thank you.



## Black Activists as Technical Communicators

**Cecilia Shelton:** [0:36:51] Good afternoon. Thank you everybody for being here.

I'm gonna spend my time talking about Black activists as technical communicators.

So as technical and professional communication scholars and practitioners, we're concerned with action. Our disciplinary questions position us to ask how we communicate in ways that facilitate action. How do we communicate to solve problems, to make decisions, to make expert knowledge accessible?

One of the disciplinary questions that Black technical and professional communication asks is how do we get free? How we compose our worlds, political systems, cultural organizations our lives and even our bodies to achieve liberation and eliminate anti-Black violence?

The Black activist tradition is full of unnamed technical communicators asking and answering that disciplinary question. Some of them are listed here on the slide. You might recognize Victor Hugo Green, the person who created the, the Greenbook, Bruce Boynton, who actually passed just last week. You might have seen him in the news, but he inspired the Freedom Rides. And the Freedom Rides were essentially user testing of the Supreme Court case that he won, that meant that bus stations can no longer be racially segregated. The Black Panthers, their ten-point party, and you see the more contemporary representation of the Black Lives Matter movement, the hands up pose.

So with my time, next slide, please.

[0:38:22] With my time I'm going to talk about what it means for Black activism to be a kind of technical communication that we have not yet acknowledged in our discipline. And what it would mean for us to see Black people as technical communicators themselves and as users or audiences for technical communication.

The #BlackLivesMatter social movement, is a contemporary iteration of a long legacy of activism in the Black rhetorical tradition. Popular attention to the movement was renewed this summer in the wake of another string of state sanctioned Black death, featuring hashtag names. Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor George Floyd, among others.

Black Lives Matter protests of summer 2020 drew more diverse crowds in a much more favorable posture, even if performative from organizations and institutions. Everyone from our academic institutions to Adidas, to Pop-Tarts was tweeting and releasing about Black Lives Matter. Journalists and pundits

would have you believe that this outcome should be attributed to what some are calling The Great Awakening of white liberals whose greater awareness of racial injustice makes them more politically engaged and brings them into the streets, culminating perhaps with the multiracial protests we saw over the summer.

[0:39:36] But I'm here to correct that record and point out that the first iteration of the Black Lives Matter activism, not only prompting that awareness, but also shows up over and over again to hold power to account and to do the hard rhetorical and technical communication labor of documenting, counter narrating, organizing, and holding accountable people in power. And that's what moved our cultural awareness forward on anti Blackness and white supremacy.

In 2006, Elizabeth Britt argues that technical communication is how institutions and organizations define themselves and do their cultural work. Tech comm provides the infrastructure for these system to operate and reproduce themselves. So if that's true, then shouldn't we pay attention to the infrastructures for systems and strategies of resistance so that we can understand who is building them and how they're building them? And shouldn't we pay attention to how these infrastructures get replicated and taken up in other justice movements?

So in this slide, I want to sort of talk a little bit about how I did work to analyze Black activists as technical communicators.

[0:40:43] I saw Black activists as innovating on social media genres, constructing them not as static, form based responses to the recurring rhetorical situation of state sanctioned violence against Black bodies, but instead, genres are being formed in assemblages of human and non-human actors. And they are uniquely possible by way of the relationships between those actors, not just the existence of the actors themselves.

So you have a person with access to a camera on their phone with also with access to Twitter to upload pictures and videos that circulate immediately. But also that person has to have the social positioning to understand the cultural dynamics that are happening to make that important to document.

Moreover, I found that as rhetors riff on the genre conventions of both tweets and hashtags, they're deviations and innovations in the uptake of the genres are ways for them to assert agency in a situation where their power in the broader social, political, and economic systems are limited. This power's derived in large part from the opportunity to counter mainstream narratives about Black lives and bodies by drawing on the affordances of the new and digital media around them.

[0:41:55] While social media platforms are not designed for resistance, Black

rhetors use their expertise in navigating oppressive social structures to subvert the norms of these spaces and assert resistance while remaining under the radar in ways that obscure them from the white gaze for long enough to communicate and organize for justice. I see the use of hashtags as instrumental in this effort because they serve as a kind of digital hush harbor, where Black rhetors can engage in emancipatory politics suffused with particular forms of agency and identity.

Next slide, please.

So with that little bit of analysis and context, I want to spend the last few minutes of my time talking about what else is possible when we make these kind of interventions with Black technical and professional communication.

[0:42:41] So in order to make these connections between the Black activist rhetorical tradition and technical and professional communication, I started with heuristic questions that we can all consider. What if technical and professional communication is not meant to be neutral and objective and subjectivity is actually valued over the myth of objectivity? What if TPC doesn't rely on standard language practices or white supremacist notions of professionalism to make meaning? And what would happen if TPC considered expertise an ethos that isn't substantiated by credentials or titles?

My work extends these questions by taking a Black feminist epistemological foundation and stance, that ultimately I evolve into creating a methodology, a techné of marginality.

And I did this work in part because it was necessary for me to create what I needed but didn't have in order to do the work that I just explained. So I'll introduce it quickly and I'm writing about it now.

The tenets that evolved out of these heuristic questions and this Black feminist grounding.

[0:43:44] A techné of marginality is a methodological framework that brought its notions of work and workplace, expands the field of vision for technical communicators solving twenty-first century problems, and embraces cultural rhetorical practices as valuable ways of knowing and doing technical communication work.

A techné of marginality characterizes the critical and marginal standpoint from which historically marginalized groups experience the world, and then engage rhetorically as a techné, a flexible, dynamic, powerful, strategic, transferable, transformative tool that can be used to do tech comm work.

It offers a theoretical and methodological resources for technical communicators to move beyond cultural awareness and even cultural competence toward the integration of cultural analysis in the practice of technical communication. What's important here is that Black tech comm is more than a collection of topical inquiries into issues affecting Black people we're doing theoretical, methodological and pedagogical work too. So that work like ours that has been excluded in the past, can be centered and amplified moving forward. Thank you.

## Black Experience in Regulatory, Policy, and Legal Communication

**Natasha Jones:** [0:44:50] So, I'm going to talk a little bit about regulatory policy and legal communication.

Next slide, please?

Black folks understand that we live in a nation that operates under the myth of law and order, including laws and policies that have at times posited if we were even considered full persons under the law. Black folk have long-held formal and informal, intricate, varied, and complicated experiences with laws and policies. Take, for instance, Jay-Z's "99 Problems."

Play the clip, please?

So I, pull over to the side of the road I heard,

"Son, do you know wh—"

So I, pull over to the side of the road I heard,

"Son, do you know why I'm stopping you for?"

"Cause I'm young and I'm Black and my hat's real low"

Do I look like a mind reader, sir? I don't know

Am I under arrest or should I guess some more?

"Well you was doing fifty-five in a fifty-four" (uh huh)

"License and registration and step out of the car"

"Are you carrying a weapon on you, I know a lot of you are"

I ain't stepping out of shit, all my papers legit

"Well do you mind if I look around the car a little bit?"

Well my glove compartment is locked, so is the trunk in the back

And I know my rights so you goin' need a warrant for that

"Aren't you sharp as a tack?"

You some type of lawyer or something?"

"Somebody important or something?"

Well, I ain't passed the bar, but I know a little bit

Enough that you won't illegally search my shit

[0:46:17] You get the point.

Clearly, Black folks know that where laws and regulations can be used in the service of retribution, punishment, and penalization, these laws will be over-abundantly deployed against the Black community to imprison, detain, and disenfranchise.

On the other hand, laws and policies that can be used in the service of empowerment and agency will be withdrawn or withheld from our communities or we'd be just the subject of redistricting and rezoning.

Next slide, please? Actually stay on that slide, Dr. Mckoy.

Black folks know that, in order to survive, we cannot be under the assumption that we can ignore the role that laws play in our lives. "Why did he run?" "Why didn't she just show ID?" "Why didn't they just comply?"

We know that complicity and abiding by laws has little impact on the Black experience of state sanctioned violence and executions. Black folks are three times more likely to be killed by law enforcement than white folks, even though they are less likely to be armed. Black folks' experiences with laws have often been a point of survival.

[0:47:19] Our experiences ground our expertise.

In *The Fire Next Time*, James Baldwin talks about "the Negro experience in the white world" and he says, "In any case, white people, who profited by theft every hour that they lived, had no moral ground on which to stand. They had judges, they had juries, they had shotguns, the law and order, in a word, power."

Contextualized, our expertise has often been deployed in subversive ways and in order to help our community survive and navigate through spaces, places, and situations that ignore us, marginalize us, disenfranchise us and seek to eliminate us all together.

This is the Black experience in a nation of law and order.

We see examples of this in the latest election. Disenfranchisement of Black folk is as American as apple pie and our very electoral systems are— of our great

democracy are forged in anti-Blackness. We cannot honestly discuss freedoms without grappling with how Black folks are a part of how we as a nation, understand the operation of this democracy. Take, for instance, Stacey Abrams, and how she navigated and resisted in order to make discriminatory laws work for Black communities in Georgia.

[0:48:31] Black folks understand that resistance requires knowledge and expertise.

Sometimes expertise is overlooked simply because it resides in our homes and in our communities. But Black folks understand that even the boundaries of our communities, the very lines where we draw our neighborhoods to begin and end, are a result of applied laws in disproportionate ways.

Redlining, a means of separating Black folks from access to wealth has manifested the map of segregation across our country. On the surface, this seems to indicate that Black folks are passively impacted by the application of racist laws. However, we resist this because we understand that it is beyond the laws that keep us collectively in community with one another. They're also more blatant examples like Jim Crow Laws. And even as we protest, we recognize the work of the myth of law and order.

This summer, Black organizers worked to educate protesters on the dos and don'ts of protests, organized bail funds for jailed protesters and made visible the extrajudicial tactics that law enforcement were applying against those protesters, even as "respectable" folks cried out, "This is just pointless rioting and looting," Black folk were quick to remind the masses of Baldwin's words. Those who "profited by theft, have no moral ground on which to stand."

[0:49:50] Bottom-line, Black folks have always expertly engaged policy, laws, and regulatory communication as a means for survival and resistance, often out of the necessity in order to subvert oppressive practices of the State.

And even as I provide these examples, I know some in the audience will say, "But that's not TPC."

The truth of the matter is, tech comm has always located expertise in practice and application. Fundamentally, this is how we have historically engaged.

Those types of, "but that's not it" pushbacks come because of the devaluation of Black expertise. And to be quite frank, they are anti-Black at the core.

Yes, this IS TPC.

But for those of you who want more scholarly or academic examples, take the work of Dr. Miriam Williams, who's been writing about policy in tech comm for nearly two decades. In *Black Codes: Removing the Veil from Regulatory Writing*, William states that "historically marginalized groups, including African-Americans, are resistant to the traditional style of regulatory writing, not because they can't read regulations or hire attorneys to interpret the texts, but because laws written represent a veil that for so many years acted as a rhetorical accomplice to America's color line."

[0:51:02] She draws on W.E.B. DuBois' metaphor of the racial color line, and connects DuBois' work to laws that examined regulations and laws of the color line of his time. DuBois is then drawn in as a skilled writer and an engaged technical communicator working to place Black folks at the center of his examinations. What DuBois understood and what Miriam Williams later identifies is disenfranchisement by the "intentional breakdown in communication and government."

DuBois' data visualizations were recently published in a collection, and his infographics draw from the data from government documents and the census.

Thank you for the next slide.

DuBois should also be heralded an expert and visual and information design because in his infographics he revealed connections between laws, regulations, policies, and Black life during his time.

The editors of the collection note that DuBois' "cross-fertilization of visual art and social science mark an important transitional moment in the history of the disciplines while offering alternative visions of how social scientific data might be made more accessible to the populations and people for whom the data is collected."

And what does that sound like? Technical communication.

As we assert: technical communication would not exist without Black folks. Our knowledge, our expertise is legit, is valuable and is fundamental to understanding our field. Thank you.

## **Black Research Methodologies, Methods, and Ethics**

**Constance Haywood:** [0:52:38] Thank you, Natasha.

So I'm going to pick up pick up right where she left off.

And today I'll be talking a little bit around Black research and ethics, mainly how we come to it and what TC can learn from it.

Next slide, please.

So I want to read this quote by Godwin Agboka that says, "Intercultural professional communication research needs to develop a coherent body of new methodologies with their corresponding methods that are cognizant of local logics, rhetorics, histories, philosophies, and politics. By doing [this], our research approaches will answer the call of social justice, which hinges on reflexivity, liberation, and empowerment."

So with some of the ways that racism and anti-Blackness is coded into and within technology, and some of the ways that it impacts the ways that Black folks receive health care, and in some ways that it's at the root of Black folks being systematically targeted and killed by the hands of the state, we can also locate racism and anti-Blackness in the academy, particularly in the ways that intellectual communities have historically thought about, understood, and went about their research practices.

[0:53:42] I don't have to go into the full history of the ways that Black people have been harmed by and through research, and I won't, because that kind of historical recollection would take forever.

But I can confidently say that most of us are probably familiar with the Tuskegee syphilis experiment, just as we are aware of the gruesome history of reproductive health experimentation in this country that Black enslaved women endured. And somehow, somewhere, somebody okayed that work, and was okay with it. And it was and still is completely horrific.

What we may not all be familiar with though, is how pervasive harmful research practices in the academy are and can be, regardless of whether that harm impacts Black folks' physical bodies and health as previous studies, as the previous studies mentioned did or other parts of our selves that make up our entire being.

All of that to say Black folks both inside and outside, a, excuse me.

Black folks both inside and outside of academic spaces have always had to think critically about what it means to protect ourselves in a world that tends to view us curiously, objectively, and profitably in this, often overlooking and sometimes downright disregarding our rights, experiences, emotions, and all of the other things that make up our socially, culturally, politically complex selves.



[0:54:53] And so when it comes to research practices in technical communication and rhet/comp even more generally, we're not absolved from replicating harm and it's our responsibility to critically think about the things that we do, and put into motion in our scholarship and work.

And doing some early thinking and talking around the Black digital methods and methodologies section of the statement that we put together, I recall an early conversation between Ja'La and I, where we talked a bit about what Black TPC is, and because of the work that we both do, her with entrepreneurs and me with digital research ethics, we found ourselves in the middle of a conversation about how Black TPC and Black anything really is and always already rooted in Black experience and Black knowing. It's approaching a thing and thinking based on what I know, see, feel, hear, interpret, in what ways does this thing serve or not serve me and based on what? On all those things and so on, how do I get this thing to serve me, to protect me, to include me, to value me? To embrace my experiences, recognize them as valid, as integral and frankly as important.

[0:55:52] And so leaning more towards the Black digital research experience, though we acknowledge that research experiences in TC are not solely digital, it was important to begin thinking a little about the ways in which Black scholars have generally used our understandings and cultural knowledges to navigate research situations and cultivate research experiences, particularly those concerning Black people's spaces and communities. We started to talk, we started to discuss work that felt strategic in redressing harmful research histories. And moving towards the centering of identities and experiences from Black folks, seeing as though all of this deeply reflects and impacts how we value and protect our communities, as well as how we understand, develop, inscribe, and share our own methodologies, research methods, guidelines, understandings of ethics, and various other communicative processes.

Next, oh? Oh, you can go back one I think. Okay, so actually next slide, I'm sorry.

[0:56:50] So how does Black TC help us to think about research?

As we mentioned in the statement itself, Black research methods and methodologies tend to center Black experience as a way of understanding technology, community, ownership, and ethics through a cultural lens, and using Black understanding knowledge and experience to think through research in TC, we can better situate our research purposes and understand the potential impacts, thus allowing us to create research practices that are effective as they are empowering and social justice oriented.

It's important to remember that data is always already shaped by and through people and that Black research methodologies must continue to stress that data is never really separate from Black experience or identity.

It's important to say here too, though before I highlight folks' work that the research methods included in the NCTE list include practices and considerations from Black folks across fields of study. This should not be unfamiliar to any of you at this point as you've seen cross and interdisciplinary takes pretty much in all parts of this conversation and presentation so far. The thing to take away here though, is that because of our very existence, experiences, and orientations to the world around us, Black folks do TC work innately and across the significant number of places and spaces.

[0:58:03] And for me, when I think about research methodologies, methods, understandings of ethics, and all that, I find it all to be technical because it's telling me, showing me and allowing me to do a thing, but I can't fully know how to do the thing or understand a thing if certain perspectives are left out. So, instead of continuing histories of research where things like relationship, community, transparency, reciprocity are lacking, Black TC recognizes that our skepticisms with research, regardless of whether we're part of the research community or the participant community, is valid based on our histories.

And because of what we know to be evident, we have say in how, and what we want to do when it comes to conducting research and when it comes to being research. Because if you didn't know, Black research practices work to restore agency and power in places where it tends to lack. So people and populations that have not always had the ability and luxury to make decisions about their presence, their bodies, their representations, and much more in research.

[0:59:02] And on becoming and being a Black woman and Black feminist researcher myself, I've said and written before that for me because I'm researching and working within Black digital communities, my alignment to the values of these communities meet the first and foremost concern about the important work already taking place in them, and the well-being of the community members. It means I'm very much aware of those histories, those struggles, and those oppressions. And in building my practices, they should directly correlate to my responsibilities in collaborating ways that aim to avoid harm and work towards liberation in whatever forms that may take. That most of our work lives and thinking about how our practices are directly tied to the ethical obligations we hold and leveraging our power and position is to support the folks that we desire to collaborate with.

Next slide.

So, who might we cite and refer to to help us think about and through these things? Just so we can get an idea of what this actually looks like. I don't have any questions, but I've chosen to share a couple of quotes from brilliant Black scholars inside and outside of the field that I feel can provide folks in TC with a way to both think about and move forward with this kind of work.

[1:00:04] Agboka, as also quoted in the beginning of the presentation, said that technical communication researchers need to actively and progressively change a few habits. For example, we need to more progressively question our own assumptions, make participants active collaborators in research projects by positioning them not as subject-objects, but as equal participants. Employ reflexive research methods, be critical of our own approaches, and question our insider positions, even if we claim to be native to the research site.

And in sociology, while doing some super important work in developing mixed methods that better encapsulate Black women's identities and experiences, Nicole Marie Brown writes on her particular work that the honoring of Black women's experiences as legitimate through the use of auto ethnography is a reflective response that exposes the agency the algorithm and counterbalances its autonomy with that of a Black woman's narrative. For social scientists, our methods, are the procedures we employ to gain insight into social life in society. We choose methods based on what they allow us to do and understand. But methods also create. They can create legitimacy, disruption, and liberation.

[1:01:13] And as you see on this particular slide, I have photos of both Agboka and Brown as well as scholars, Catherine Knight Steele, Andre Brock, and our own, Natasha Jones.

And so in closing, when it comes to technical communication and beyond, Black folks are very clearly doin the work of centering people, centering identities, centering experiences, as a way to think more about how these things continuously impact the ways that we do the do, essentially. And in terms of research, all of these things make room for us to understand and develop our own means and routines of work, our research procedures, and our senses of ethics, all of which continuously shape the ways we see data, collect data, and understand identity as deeply implicated within it. Thank you.

## **Black Technical and Professional Communication as Community**

**Temptuous Mckoy:** [1:02:00] Okay, I guess it's me now, I'm not really good at hittin next and talking at the same time so don't y'all judge me, um, as this happens, please.

So I'm going to wrap us up by discussing Black Technical, Professional Communication as community.

See, told ya, I'm not good at clickin and stuff.

So Black TPC is exemplary of the need to amplify the voices, lived experiences and ways of knowing for Black individuals in and out of technical professional communication. As you all have heard so far, my award-winning dissertation covers a theory that I've thought of, amplification rhetorics, which centers the way of knowing, understanding lived experiences and languages as used in Black communities. And I've used that theory to look at it from the lens of technical and professional communication. As the panel, we were all working together to try to identify what was the best way to kind of conclude and bring things together. We realized that not only was the resource guide, but the panel was an example of my theory amplification rhetorics in practice.

[1:03:04] So I'll run through the tenets real fast.

So the first tenet would be your ways of knowing and understanding. So each of us have our own very distinct way of movin through the world and our understanding of life. Even though we have different age demographics, we're also from different regions. We—some of us are parents, some of us are single, some of us are we're just doing different things in our lives. So it has an impact on the way that we move through our day to day. Our way of learning.

I myself, Dr. Cecilia Shelton, Dr Kimberly Harper are all HBCU graduates here on the panel. So that has definitely impacted the way that we come to understand technical and professional communication is to and to support what Dr. um, excuse me, or about to be doctor, but a support what Constance Haywood has said, this builds on how you move through your understanding of technical and professional communication. Our experience as HBCU graduates, I from the illustrious Elizabeth City State University, has impacted the way that I look at technical and professional communication as missing other Black practitioners. So what does it mean for those practitioners to be there?

[1:04:13] And then finally, we have the usage of Black language and rhetoric. So I'm from the South if you can't tell, so you may hear me use a little bit more y'all and ya'll, and souls, and those up in there, and then it comes out in a different way in the way we produce our technical and professional communication documents.

So one way that I define technical and professional communication is communication that is derived from movin a community or a group of people to action.

So notice how I didn't say a group of academics, I didn't say a specific group or type of people. My grandmother is a Black technical professional communicator

because guess who I had to call to remember how to make stuffing this Thanksgiving? Me, okay. So that was one way that Black TPC can, could be communicated through different communities. So it's not just about what we're doing here in the academy, but what are you doing with your families? Again, we've seen the tweets, everybody had to learn how to cook on Thursday, all of a sudden. So whomever you had to call is a technical and professional communicator cuz they had to let you know how to move to action, right? So, that's just one of those things that I just want to bring to the forefront.

[1:05:25] So as we look at it as communities, the picture that you see here, I want to shout out Dr. Michelle Eble who's in that second picture here of all of us from ATTW, I think that was maybe 2019. I'm gonna go with 2019, 2018, don't make me lie to y'all. As you can see in that image, all of those all of us there were all from East Carolina University. So you have myself, Alisha, Cecilia, Kimberly Harper, and Jamal Jared. All from East Carolina, all doin Black technical and professional communication. And that's one way that we have our community, and we're connected in practice. Then we have Ja'La, with the picture of Dr. Adam Banks, Cecilia, and I again. So you notice once more, we're all connected in community and practice Black technical professional communication is inherently about community.

Okay, so instead of giving, you know, some of these additional reading sources here, I want to give you guys some questions that I want you to really sit here and ponder on, okay.

[1:06:27] My first question would be, does your theoretical framework block or create barriers for members of Black or other historically marginalized communities? Now, one thing that we always talk about is white lady feminism. That's just one example that comes to mind for a lot of people when we think of theoretical frameworks that may create barriers or block other people out. So I want you all to consider, Does your theoretical framework that you're creating or building on, does it create barriers?

The next one, do non-Black individuals or non-people of color develop theories that have community development, without suppression, at the center, right? So as you guys are doing all of your reading and your citing, I want you to really consider who does this theoretical framework benefit? As you listen to every panelists here speak, even though they were speaking specifically to Black individuals and Black communities, whatever those calls for changes are, would benefit everyone. Having consent as a medical practice will benefit everyone, is not just Black women that would have that benefit there. It's not just Black women that will be like, you know what? I'm in pain a little bit. Everyone is in pain, right? So what's helpful for us to consider, that how are your theoretical frameworks that you're citing and you're pulling on, do they benefit everyone else around you or just the communities that they're speaking to?

[1:07:50] Black TPC benefits everyone, hence meaning once more, you would not have technical and professional communication without Black people.

Next, will the work that you as a technical communication practitioner lead to the amplification of others or only benefit communities that you are already centered and privilege? So once again, that just echoes the same thing I've already said. Who is centered and who is privileged in the theoretical frameworks that you were using?

I myself, I am starting to learn more about disability studies. This is something that I personally, I did not know well, because I'm privileged enough to have certain elements that I didn't know that I was missing. So for me, I've had to step my game up and learn how do I bring in these same rhetoric of things that may not impact me personally.

What does that mean?

So the example I give a lot of times, I used to go to a lot of presentations and panels and I will step away the mic because I'll say I'm loud, y'all can hear me. Y'all, y'all, I don't need that mic. But it wasn't until I started to realize like, wait a minute, there may be someone in the back, that may not be able to hear me. There may be someone that needs that captioning of my speech and that wasn't something I ever considered until I started to work with members of other communities. Right.

[1:09:10] And then finally, is your question on how to implement Black TPC, centered around only yourself and your needs, or that of your students and fellow practitioners?

So we remember how like back over the summer right, everyone was droppin all these Black squares, right? Like, ohh~ And then we still had like a presidential election that we didn't know who won, right? Like we're just like what happened there. So what happened to all those Black squares? Right. So apparently you only did that Black square because it was beneficial for you. Did you actually do the work?

So as you ask questions regarding Black technical and professional communication or before we even get to the Q and A portion, are the questions that your answered are they really centered in you wanting to do better or is it because you wanted to be heard. Do you want to just simply show yourself as an ally or do you really plan to do the work before you ask that question, right? Because again, we all can show Black boxes all day, but we all see that a lot of that stuff was performative because if it wasn't we wouldn't have what done happen election Tuesday. So that was my portion there.

[1:10:20] As I bring you guys to a close here, I have some few words that the panel, all of us, we all thought of that we thought would be very critical and important to share with you guys.

So dear Black graduate students and Black TPC practitioners, is important that you understand that you are not alone. While we understand right now, it can be difficult to identify other Black TPC practitioners in the field, know that you are not by yourself.

We are right here with you and we are here to support you. Know that this community of Black TPC practitioners, those here on this panel, as well as others in the field, are here to support you and assist your growth. If there's a type of project that you want to do and maybe a panelists here does not cover that, reach out to one of us, and we can reach out to somebody else. We really good at connectin folks, right?

The journey is not easy but surely worth it. I want to make sure that I acknowledge that there's a lot of emotional labor that goes into doing this type of work because you're also doing reflective work on yourself. You starting to realize how these practices can actually impact the way that you yourself move throughout life.

[1:11:29] Four, stand in who you are. When you're not feelin sure, understand that many of us are email, tweet, text, DM away. We understand it can be difficult and you're trying to draw your ideas, especially when you have some students who are coming or are at programs that may not have Black TPC people there in their department, and you got these ideas in your head and you're trying to work through them. So we get how difficult that can be. But we want to make sure that we're here to support, you.

Number five, your Blackness is every bit a part of your work you are currently producing and will produce. Don't let anyone make you feel or think that this is not something worth interrogating, implementing, and valuing. One of most beautiful experiences I can say that I had at East Carolina was I had mentors that were willing to work with me, grow with me, and learn with me, as I focused on Black TPC at TRAP karaoke. Like it was a part of my Blackness. I love Gucci Mane, so they was able to work with me in that sense there.

Number six, don't let em have you twisted. Now. Some of y'all probably know what that word should be instead a twisted but we gon say don't let em have you twisted at this moment. Stand in who you are, stand firm in what you do.

[1:12:37] And number seven, technical and professional communication would not and cannot exist without you.

So what I'm going to briefly ask all of our panelists, so we had masks created, my panelists that have masks, everyone's did not get here, you know, due to the holidays and shipping. I'm going to ask that you please place your mask on or hold it up. We all have masks that have been created here. You have the— zoom in Ja'La, go 'head get your model on so we can see it good. Yeah, y'all zoom in. Thank you.

So if you would like to have own your Black technical and professional communication mask, you can do so. I will make the link available with the instructions.

Also, since we have graduate students here that are on the panel and it is so, so, so important that we support our graduate students, we're asking that you put your money where your pocket is. So we have their Cash App information available if you would like to donate, especially because we have Ja'La Wourman who is on the job market. So please help her as she prepares to go on the job market. Cash App available is available in the slides. So again, once I send out the slides y'all can get that as well.

[1:13:44] And finally, this is how you can contact all the members of the Black TPC Task Force.

We thank you all for your time and I wish to open the floor for moderators to handle questions. Imma stop sharin my screen, is that okay? Okay.

**Ja'La Wourman:** I think someone said they couldn't see the mask, so I'm just going to hold it up again because you were sharing your screen.

**Temptaous Mckoy:** My bad. Yeah. So if y'all don't mind hold up the mask again. So we have the mask created again, holidays, things of that nature. You can order your mask, they were created by the same woman who made my For the TRAP dissertation shirts.

Natasha Jones, can you come up a little bit so we can show our this is my neutral and objective technical communication shirt?

We have that shirt available as well that you— y'all, we have a business baby, don't play with it. You can purchase that shirt as well. So we'll make sure that information is available to you. But the masks were created by a Black woman business owner, so please help support her as well.

So again, we'd like to open the floor to any questions.



## Q & A

**Chloe Robertson:** [1:14:56] Just before we get into questions, I want to say we have Amilia Evans in the chat saying, could you please drop the link again to the masks, sort of and to everything that you've presented.

**Temptuous Mckoy:** Let me do that right now, yes ma'am.

**Chloe Robertson:** Thank you so much.

Seeing as I am unmuted, I'll go ahead and say we have, we have two questions that came in while you were speaking, which sort of speak to the same point.

So I will go ahead and say some of our attendees are curious in this difference between the community-led versus the community-driven sort of aspects of moving forward.

**Kimberly Harper:** [1:15:40] So that question came about because I was working with I am working with the March of Dimes here where I live. And I was, I was really pushing for community driven, community driven. And I actually went on Twitter and saw a tweet that Cana Uluak put. And she said that community-driven and community-led, they're two different things.

And I started thinking about that critically. And I realize that community-driven you go in and you work with individuals, you find out what they need, and then you continue to drive the machine. But for me, community led is you go in, you find out what they need, you give them the tools, and then they drive that machine.

And so when I thought about it in regards to Black maternal health, I said, wow, Black, Black granny midwives were the first, were a really good example of community health workers who had, who took these resources and worked in their communities to not only catch babies as they say, but also to deal with other public health issues that they saw when they were going out here in the deep, deep South and it was definitely impoverished.

So for me, it's not about community-driven anymore. It's about providing people with tools to lead their own initiatives. So when the researchers leave, the opportunity for moving forward doesn't go away with them because these people are now trained to now drive that machine and make adjustments as they see fit based on their own experiences.

**Chloe Robertson:** [1:17:18] Thank you so much for answering that.

Um, we did have— sorry, I'm on multiple devices.

We did actually have a question sort of in terms of this. You know, how are we instilling things, who are we listening to, you know who are we uplifting? We did have a question that came through before the talk actually from um Dr. Jim Henry, who was asking sort of what sort of materials do you provide or advocate for to support K-12 educators to sort of so even if you don't do it now I suppose, what would you advocate for to set them up to— What, sort of have this confidence and to work in the field of sort of, technical, professional communication and really sort of work with this Black praxis to quote directly once they're in college. And so that's that's a question to anyone.

**Donnie Johnson Sackey:** [1:18:25] Natasha, were you gonna?

**Natasha Jones:** No, go ahead, go ahead.

**Donnie Johnson Sackey:** Okay. So I mean, I think that's a really good question. I think that and I'll just sort of say this briefly and then sort of pass, pass the mic, so to speak.

I think that it might be important to work from local contexts. And that local context might be the community at your end. Or it might actually be the students themselves. I think one of the things that we might think about or consider is that students are a lot more knowledgeable about things than we give them credit for. Or they might have experience with things that they might not necessarily realized sort of fit into the frame that you're talking about. And I think I got to see that question a little bit earlier, I think it was more or less focused on sort of materials around social justice connected to the Black experience. I think it's important to actually work with students based upon what they already know and to build upon that. Rather than sort of seeking resources from outside the community.

**Natasha Jones:** [1:19:36] The other bit that I'll just add on is that, start with the statement and the resources that we put there because um, culling from those statements and then, adapting them for the K through 12 classroom allows folks to see those connections, to see that there are folks like them that are in college and teaching college and administering programs. So go ahead and expose them to the work that we're doing within the academy and within our communities. And be, let them kind of like what Donnie said, build up those resources with you. So I think that'll be a good approach to that as well.

**Temptaous Mckoy:** [1:20:24] Um, if y'all don't mind me building on as well, Natasha and Donnie, one thing that I've— I been realizing as people decide to move through you know with Black technical and professional communication, and use the resource guide as Natasha has pointed out, you have to be uncomfortable with not being the expert as well. And the actual student may be the expert here in this space.

And I know for some people that may be a little uncomfortable there. But, um, if you're going to ask students to do Black technical professional communication work, which is a lot of times centered around their lived experience, you're going to have to be willing to amplify and center their life experiences.

**Luana Shafer:**

[1:21:10] So we do have some other questions in the chat and I just wanted to pull one out that I thought was really interesting. Dr. Heidi Lawrence asked a question for Dr. Shelton. The notion of techné of marginality, if you could possibly give an example of how that techné works, in the workplace or for practitioners or in the classroom for students of technical communication.

**Cecilia Shelton:**

[1:21:39] Sure, that's a good question. So of course, the most ready example are the activists I was trying to talk about, thinking about the sort of everyday Black people and the ways that the hashtags that we saw mobilized, #IfTheyGunnedMeDown, they mobilize and organize people into activism, right? These are everyday people juxtaposing two images of themselves to make an argument about how Black people are represented in the media when they're killed.

But if I could offer another sort of example outside the activists contexts. So to think about how a techné marginality might, might be helpful for sort of seeing a kind of expertise that otherwise would not be recognized. You may have seen this in the news. I don't know. It obviously caught my attention. There was a— I think it was over the summer.

There was a Black doctor, like a neurosurgeon of some kind. There was a woman who was having like brain surgery. And to prepare for the brain surgery, she went to the hospital with her hair braided up into like four braids, I think it was. And so, she has the surgery, she is recovering maybe a day or two later. She's sort of paying attention to her hair and she notices that her hair is now in six braids like different braids than when she started and she was like I thought, I coulda sworn that my hair was this particular way.

[1:22:59] So she, whatever, she figures that she misremembered, she goes to her follow-up appointment and learns that her doctor, a Black doctor, knowing where he was going to make his incisions with her surgery, and knowing how particularly important her hair is a Black woman, as a dad of Black daughters, and also knowing how to handle kinky Black hair, re-parted and braided her hair so that the scars, when she was recovering, would heal in her part, so it wouldn't mess up her hair.

This is not a skill, right, that he learned in medical school. It's not a skill that would be necessarily valued as part of his technical expertise, but I would argue that it is. He provided something for that woman that was an important part of

her medical experience. A part of her being seen and recognized as a valuable and— person and her values being important, not just to her but to him. And it mattered in his technical medical expertise. So what I'm arguing for is that we can only see particular kinds of skills as valuable, as technical, as expert. You don't think of Black daddies braiding hair as any kind of expertise, but it's grounded in the lived experience that he had with his daughters knowing that it was important, right?

So my goal is to open up what we can see as expert, as technical and start to articulate the kinds of competencies and expertise that Black folks bring to their work, both in organizations and systems that we would recognize and workplaces, as workplaces and outside of those contexts as well. I hope that helps.

**Chloe Robertson:** [1:24:57] Thank you for answering that, Dr. Shelton.

We do have a few questions sort of revolving, again around sort of focal topic here in the Q&A section. And that's the idea of taking all of your wonderful work on technical and professional communication as it's seen in the academy, and how are we sort of working towards that going into communities as we speak about them.

So, sort of speaking about how this, we have this bubble in academia where we talk to each other, how are we making sure that those voices are being brought in and there's sort of a loop going between as opposed to one filtering down into the other. And this is— none of these questions are really asked to anyone so again, the floor is open.

**Ja'La Wourman:** [1:25:47] I'll speak to that.

So and the work I've been doing with Black entrepreneurs, this is the question I thought about over the years about how do we make our research transferrable but also applicable to industry practices because if we're going to be teaching students who might want to go into different industries and trade jobs. We want to make sure that we're giving them the language and the skill sets that's actually being used on the job.

So as I am, you know, I conducted interviews with different Black women entrepreneurs asking them questions about their own lived experiences, their journey, I am thinking about ways, how can I make this work benefit, not only scholarship in TPC, but also them? So I think about ways that I can help them out and that is through also my own branding and marketing and promoting their services, promoting their brands, you know, making sure as if I was in the classroom, I will be talking about these women as well and also the, their journey. But making sure that when I go back into these spaces, that's not

academic, I also am incorporating what are some of the trends that might be beneficial to them, that they have not had access to.

[1:27:11] Which is why it's very important when we're doing this work in TPC, that we're working with community partners, we're working with the people that are doing the work because they are educating us just as much as we are educating them. So I see it as transferable, I see it as we need to work together, I know that there's been a lot of community service learning partnerships. That is great if you're having your students do that in the classroom. But the danger with that, which we just need to be mindful is if you're going to be sending students for a semester to go work at a business or a small non-profit, an intern or an assistantship being mindful that to them, they see this as help being brought in free of charge that is needed.

So what is your plan as a technical communicator and as a scholar to make sure that that business still can thrive when your student leaves, that's at the end of the semester. So there's different ways that we can help one another out, but we just have to be mindful of the follow-up. And what is the longevity of this? And these are some of the things that I think about as well.

**Temptuous Mckoy:**

[1:28:25] Can I back, uh, come off you, Ja'La?

I'm thinking for myself, and this is like a shameless plug, but my dissertation video chapter does this very work. For those of you who have not seen it, I'll make sure I post the link as well. But it's on TRAP karaoke. And it's discussing how technical and professional communication take shape in that space. And anyone who watches the video, you can, you can see clearly that it's not for an academic audience, right?

So I think the first step in that, and I see Ja'La was definitely getting to this is understanding audience awareness, right?

So we're asked the questions about, oh, well, how do I take this outside of the academy? Well, I don't know when you go to your church, your church ain't like my church. My church, they be hootin and hollerin and maybe your church they sit down and saying the whole time, right. So that changes and shifts the way that you take Black technical and professional communication or any TPC into any space.

[1:29:20] I believe that the main thing that's the center in this idea of stepping outside of it is to ensure that you're amplifying another voice. Remember, you're not giving anybody a mic. That, that's something I always tell people like people already got a voice. The voices there is been, hey, you ain't given nobody nothin. Your job is to amplify that voice. Your job is to speak to it, all the while making sure you're careful to not send in yourself as a savior.

Because as I'm seeing some of the comments and the questions that come in, we have to be careful. And I believe Cecilia— actually almost a lot of the panelists spoke on this, you're— you don't want to risk looking at it from a deficit model like oh, this Black tech comm thing, this is a backhanded thang but I think a critical part of it that some people may not realize, I think understanding and maneuvering through Black technical and professional communication practices is something that is very esteemed that a lot of people really cannot do or they don't know how to do. Because I can maneuver between an academic space in the Black space, but other people can only maneuver through one specific space.

[1:30:27] So instead of looking at a deficit model, I think is really time that we take, we take a moment to reflect on the way that communities of color, specifically Black communities, able to maneuver through predominately white spaces and Black spaces effortlessly. And how it's not a trip up, it's not a issue, and reconsider how do you see that move? Or some people will— Well if we say codeswitching, how do you see codeswitching or that rhetorical move as a defecit? Ask yourself, can you do it, cause if you can't do it, then maybe the deficit is on of the end of the table instead of looking at it the other way.

So I think just as critical that you center the community that you're trying to go out into and use Black TPC practices with, especially with the question regarding the high school and things of that nature. Some of them kids probably can two-step, y'all all see the TikTok dances nowadays, I can't do none of those moves to save my life, but if you ask any of those kids to do it, I betcha they could communicate out to you how to do it. That's a form of technical and professional communication that is rooted in Blackness. So it's time that we actually really accept and acknowledge and amplify how these practices are taking place and shape.

**Ja'La Wourman:**

[1:31:35] And just yeah, just really quickly and then Donnie, I'm sorry, I just, when you were speaking, I just thought about how what this panel addressed was this question, because we are sharing what is typically not centered in scholarship.

And that is the move that you're gonna have to do if you're thinking about how can I make this applicable to non-academic spaces, where you're going to have to rethink what counts as knowledge, and the feel when am I counting as TC, and what am I counting as researchable? What am I counting as methods? What am I counting as theory?

I mean, you gonna have to take some time, this is not a, after this panel I got it all together. It might take you a whole year to really rethink your pedagogical practices and how you situate technical communication. And that's fine.

Like that is ok, that is what this work is supposed to challenge you to rethink how you have understood the field, and if you have marginalized voices through your own practices and research, this is that time, they said 2020, really taught us about ourselves and had us reflect them, well, let 2020 and 2021 be the time where you have rethought some of your practices, cause this is what it's all about.

**Donnie Johnson Sackey:** [1:32:58] And I was going to add to this really quickly.

I think one of the things that we have to fundamentally sort of reassess or rethink is this idea of bringing things to the community, particularly with respect to our research or going into the community with respect to our research.

I think what we really should be doing is rethinking the research model in terms of how does a research project begin, and one of the things that I've had the fortunate opportunity to be a part of with D-VERSE in Detroit is the fact that all of the research projects that we do weren't necessarily ideas that we drum up as university researchers. These were ideas that, that became research projects because community members were experiencing problems, and they came to the university and they asked like, is there a way that we can sort of figure out what this problem is and develop a solution around it?

So I think one of the things that we have to get out of the habit of is this idea of like sort of translating to the community or going into the community to share what we're doing, and to start thinking about the community as being a part of the research process from the beginning, seeing community members as researchers who have value, who have knowledge, to contribute to the process as a whole.

## Closing Remarks

**Jennifer Sano-Franchini:** [1:34:21] I just want to thank all of the panelists.

There's so much enthusiasm in the chat for all of your work, and I think we have so much that we'll be thinking about. I really appreciate how just like this is like really ground shifting kinds of things you were saying in terms of we're having to shift our entire epistemologies and how we think about questions that we have and problems that we see within our field, so, thank you so much for the time and for your words and your wisdom, and thank you for everyone who attended and to the moderators as well.

**Ja'La Wourman:** [1:34:55] Thank you, all.

**Natasha Jones:** Thank y'all for having us.

**Temptaous Mckoy:** Thank y'all!

**Cecilia Shelton:** Thank you!

**Temptaous Mckoy:** Tweet us, ooh!

**Donnie Johnson Sackey:** Thank you.

**Temptaous Mckoy:** Go 'head put your book up there, put the mask back up if you got a mask. Got my shirt. Buy a shirt. Get your mask. Buy Kim— Dr. Harper, show us your book one more time for people to order your book. Drop the link. Get your stuff. Plugging it all. Boom. I'm a drop all the links.

Thank y'all so much, Virginia Tech, we appreciate y'all, thank y'all.

**Constance Haywood:** Thank you.

*Total runtime: 1:35:30*