Guest Editor's Introduction: Reimagining Disability and Accessibility in Technical and Professional Communication

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SPECIAL ISSUE

Reimagining Accessibility and Disability in Technical and Professional Communication

Guest Editor

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INTRODUCTION

This special issue asks us to reflect on the transformative potential of disability studies to reimagine technical and professional communication (TPC). Informing this special issue is the notion that disability "enables insight—critical, experiential, cognitive, sensory, and pedagogical insight" (Brueggemann, 2002, p. 795). Rather than consider questions of access from the margins—e.g. after we receive a letter of accommodation from a student, when we need to satisfy a legal mandate, or when we turn to our organization's web accessibility checklist—disability studies places disability and difference at the center of our practices and pedagogies (p. 814).

The contributors to this special issue build on the groundbreaking work at the intersection of technical communication and disability studies (e.g. Bayer & Pappas, 2006; Kain, 2005; Meloncon, 2013; O'Hara, 2004; Oswal, 2013; Oswal & Meloncon, 2014; Palmeri, 2006; Walters, 2010; Wilson, 2000; Theofanos & Redish, 2003, 2005). They recognize the importance of coalitional, intersectional research (Jones, Moore, & Walton, 2016; Walters, 2010). They ground ideas and methods in rhetorical theory and writing studies (Brueggemann, 1999; Lewiecki-Wilson & Brueggemann, 2007; Dolmage, 2014; Duffy & Yergeau, 2011; Oswal & Meloncon, 2017; Yergeau, 2018). They understand that TPC has much to offer disability studies in the areas of universal design, user interface design, cross cultural communication, workplace practices, web design and access, pedagogy and e-learning, usability, and more. Indeed, TPC can serve as a needed bridge between disability theory and the practice of making texts and technologies accessible.

The "field of disability studies is thriving" (Minich, 2016, para. 2), yet we must continue to challenge "objective, apolitical, acultural practices, theories, and pedagogies" (Jones, Moore, & Walton, 2016, p. 211) that reduce web accessibility to a checklist, add-on, afterthought, or mere legal obligation. Does disability enable critical insight for technical and professional communication? Can disability fundamentally transform our practices and theories (Palmeri, 2006, p. 52)? What does it mean to put accessibility, disability, and universal design at the center of what we do? How can we think through the implications for TPC that disability "pervades all aspects of culture" (Garland-Thomson, 2010, p. 355)?

CHALLENGING THE DEFAULT USER

Disability studies in technical and professional communication starts with, and seeks to include at every phase and level, the voices, perspectives, and values of people with disabilities. The disability rights slogan, "Nothing about us without us" (Charlton, 2000), is a reminder to technical and professional communicators that 1) access is a civil right and 2) true diversity must include people with disabilities as researchers, users, participants, students, and colleagues. Usability researchers, for example, have studied how people with disabilities use the web and how designers can build more accessible websites, but also, more importantly, why the perspectives of users with disabilities matter to our field. In their landmark usability studies of blind and low vision web users, Mary Frances Theofanos and Ginny Redish (2003, 2005) offer an important intervention in scholarly conversations about technology users:

> We need a paradigm shift in the way we think about accessibility. We may be approaching accessibility from the wrong direction. Today, we are putting assistive technology on top of existing Web sites. We are changing Web sites after we build them. Accessibility is an afterthought. Instead of our current approach, we should think about accessibility from the bottom up, not as something put on top afterwards. (Theofanos & Redish, 2005, pp. 17-18)

What Theofanos and Redish (2005) identified as a problem over a decade ago—i.e. that accessibility is treated as an add on or afterthought—persists today because users with disabilities are still often treated as afterthoughts or accommodations in our practices.

Theofanos and Redish's (2005) proposed solution grows directly out of their usability studies with an impressively diverse group of participants: low vision users. Because their participants couldn't be categorized easily and accessed the web in countless different ways, a simple set of guidelines, or single website design, did not make sense. Instead, Theofanos and Redish (2005) offer a radically user-centered vision of the future, one that is grounded in and made possible by their study of low vision users, that begins with the access needs of each user rather than a default, able-bodied user. They imagine "serving up Web sites in individualized versions from the same source through technology that understands each user's specific needs and adjusts the Web site to meet those needs" (p. 19). Their study reminds us that people with disabilities are not homogeneous. Visual acuity is not a binary of present/absent but a "spectrum of variation" (Kleege, 2017, 448). The low-vision user is not a checkbox, persona, or bulleted list of guidelines for designers about color contrast, white space, responsive design, and navigation. Instead, a paradigm based on the portability and variability of individual preferences can potentially benefit everyone regardless of ability, which is the promise of universal design and a more robust paradigm than one based on assumptions about a narrower population of nondisabled or "default users."

The default user is implicitly able-bodied. When research articles refer to "our students" or "the users," they usually assume—and expect readers, who are themselves inscribed in the text as able-bodied, to assume—that these subjects are able-bodied. Normalcy is typically inscribed, ingrained, unchallenged. It goes without saying. Default, able-bodied users are unmarked: they are simply "users." Users with disabilities, by contrast, are typically marked. They are marked in language—consider the ongoing debate over people-first vs. identity-first language—but also marked as special journal topics or issues. Lennard Davis (2017) describes recurring references to disability in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as "tics" that patrol normalcy (p. 11)—an apt metaphor, perhaps, for thinking about where (and how often) disability or the critique of compulsory able-bodiedness appears in our journals. What passes for "normal science" in our field? Which bodies are, by default and through privilege, unmarked? If access barriers are "often unnoticed by those whose bodies, minds, abilities, and resources allow them to occupy the role of default user" (Yergeau et al., 2013), then how can we help these users to notice barriers and do something about them? In short, how can we disable technical and professional communication (cf. Vidali, 2015; Yergeau, 2011)?

Even as accessible design becomes indistinguishable from good web design ("one site for all"), significant access barriers remain unnoticed today. For example, very few images uploaded to social media are fully accessible to blind, low vision, and other users who rely on text descriptions of those images. This especially includes "images of text," which are images with writing on them, usually short quotations. On Twitter, the practice of sharing images of text has been called screenshorting (Honan, 2014), "in which users post photos or screen captures of blocks of text as images embedded in a tweet" (Ringel Morris et al. 2016, p. 5507). Because the words in a screenshort can't be easily tracked or indexed by search engines, they can support subversive motives, such as "making it more difficult for government regimes to track who is supporting various ideologies" (p. 5507). I suspect the popularity of images of text also has to do with the ease with which sighted users can capture a pithy quote with a screenshot, and then copy or drag it into Facebook or Twitter. An image of text doesn't count against character limits on Twitter either.

But what makes screenshorts attractive to presumably sighted users also makes them inaccessible, because screen reader programs, which provide nonvisual access to the web for some blind and low vision users, cannot process writing that is part of an image. The visual styling of text in an image also can't be changed to meet the needs of some low vision users for specific color, size and typeface combinations. According to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (World Wide Web Consortium, 2018a), images of text should be avoided unless the image is a logo. They can be made accessible to screen reader users, however, if the contents are transcribed in writing. On Facebook and Twitter, screenshorts and memes (with meme text) are popular, at least from my perspective as a sighted user who monitors the alternative text (or alt text) in my social media feeds. It's unclear whether social media users are aware that images of text are not screen reader friendly (in the absence of a text transcription), or that every image uploaded to social media needs to be described. (Alt is an attribute of the image tag in HTML. Screen reader users can listen to the alt text descriptions associated with each image, when alt text is present.)

Social media are dominated by images and video, so it may surprise some sighted users that nonvisual access is needed or desired on a platform built around seeing. After all, Facebook originated as a web service to allow Harvard students to rate what they see—i.e. the visual attractiveness of other students (Hall, 2018). But Facebook is a global company today. The best reason, I think, for being mindful of social media accessibility—and for reimagining notions of audience with our students and colleagues—is that people want to participate and don't always feel like they can. In a study of social network users who are blind, researchers at Cornell University, with

support from Facebook, noted that the participants were quite savvy, adopting "creative strategies" in the absence of text descriptions. They were also "frustrated" by "accessibility challenges…that left them feeling excluded or incapable of participating in what they considered cultural mainstream" (Voykinska, Azenkot, Wu, & Leshed, 2016, p. 1588):

> I feel that I am missing some of the fun stuff on social media, but I don't want to waste too much time. (p. 1588)
>
> I cannot see the photo, and people rarely ever describe it. They assume everyone on planet Earth has working eyes. If your eyes happen not to work, too darned bad. (p. 1590)
>
> I have found it useless to ask family and friends to make sure their photos include description, because they usually ignore this request. (p. 1590)
>
> When people include descriptions, it makes it so much easier for somebody who's blind to know what's going on and more fully participate in the posting of that picture or responding to that picture or video. (p. 1590)
>
> I have practiced taking selfies and now I am quite good about it, but I am afraid to share except [with] my close friends, as even though I can take good selfie, it might not be perfect as others would take, and if I do something wrong I don't want to be a joke. (p. 1589)

Access should not be predicated on a user's sensory abilities, cognitive abilities, or access to resources such as high-speed internet or a specific device. "The power of the Web," as Tim Berners-Lee famously said, "is in its universality. Access by everyone regardless of disability is an essential aspect" (World Wide Web Consortium, 1997). Today, the problem of inaccessible images on social media—that is, images with no descriptive alt text—is not a technical one. There is no technical barrier to image description on Facebook or Twitter; user interface support for alt text was integrated into both platforms in 2016 (García, Paluri, & Wu, 2016; Yeung, 2016; see also Sethuraman, 2014). The barriers to image description on social media are cultural and social. To remove these barriers, we need a different image of the user.

If the image of the default user is a byproduct of ableist—and especially "sightest" (Kleege 2017, p. 445)—assumptions, then a reimagined user in technical and professional communication begins not with normalcy but difference, diversity, and disability. Lennard Davis's (2006) "dismodernist" critique of postmodern identity politics dismantles and reimagines identity at "the end of normal" (Davis, 2013). "Difference is what all of us have in common," Davis suggests (2006, p. 239). Difference is rooted in one of the "universal[s] in life": "the experience of the limitations of the body" (p. 241). Under dismodernism, "all humans are seen as wounded" (p. 241); "[i]mpairment is the rule, and normalcy is the fantasy" (p. 241). If the "dismodernist subject is in fact disabled, only completed by technology and by interventions" (p. 241), then the appropriate response is an ethic of care "about the body" that, according to Davis (2006), values human rights and civil rights for people with disabilities, care for the poor, prison reform, and a commitment to helping vulnerable populations impacted by globalization and war (p. 241). Davis also emphasizes the goals of barrier-free access and universal design, referring to the latter as a "template for social and political designs" (p. 241). These goals are likely to resonate with technical communicators who practice and teach universal design, web standards, plain language, social justice, and more. What Davis offers is a way of centering difference and disability by challenging the fantasies of normalcy, independence, and autonomy that reinforce false binaries. Breaking down these divisions in the technical communication classroom is key: "Although teaching about assistive technology and Web standards is an essential step in increasing access, we must begin to trouble the binary between normal and assistive technologies. Challenging the naturalization of conventional ableist technologies, we should teach students to view all technologies as assistive" (Palmeri, 2006, p. 58).

When we de-naturalize technologies, critique practices (such as screenshorting) as ableist, and disable the default user, we generate new insights that have the potential to transform the knowledge and practices of our field. To be clear, Davis's critique of postmodern identity politics does not mean that everyone should claim disability now. Rather, as Davis (2006) puts it:

> dismodernism argues for a commonality of bodies within the notion of difference. It is too easy to say, "We're all disabled." But it is possible to say that we are all disabled by injustice and oppression of various kinds. We are all nonstandard, and it is under that standard that we should be able to found the dismodernist ethic. (p. 241)

A nonstandard user needs a nonstandard discipline. It is no longer enough for scholarly journals to produce open access PDFs that are closed to every basic accessibility feature save optical character recognition. (Accessible PDFs also need alternative text descriptions for images, semantic tagging, correctly marked up reading order, and other features that the Adobe accessibility wizard can check and help fix if necessary.) It is no longer enough for researchers to study accessibility (or social justice) professionally while implicitly supporting a culture of inaccessibility on social media by posting or commenting on non-described personal photos, memes, videos, and images of text. It is no longer enough, put simply, to write for and about a standard default user. Access is our collective responsibility.

COMPOSING DIGITAL ACCESS

Disability is usually defined in terms of limitations and impairments. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines "an individual with a disability" as "a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment" (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009). In the United States, nearly one in five people (20%) has a disability (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Globally, more than one billion people are disabled (World Health Organization, 2011). The disability rhetorics of impairment—which are predicated on a language of loss, lack, and less than—are deeply ingrained in our unexamined attitudes and approaches towards people with disabilities. Disability as impairment is closely aligned with rhetorics of cure that define disabled bodies as broken and in need of fixing at any cost. For example, one of the major myths of disability in popular culture, according to Jay Dolmage (2014), is "kill-or-cure," in which "a disabled character will either have to be 'killed or cured' by the end of any movie or novel in which they appear" (p. 39). Closely related is what Dolmage calls "disability as pathology," which reduces disability to a medical problem that can "never be understood as something positive" (p. 37).

This special issue has its origins and futures elsewhere. Instead of rhetorics of pathology and impairment, instead of the objectification that fuels "inspiration porn" (Young, 2014), instead of unconsciously centering default users, this special issue asks us to reimagine disability in our practices, pedagogies, and theories. Consider how recent research on *Deaf Gain* challenges the belief that deafness can only be a tragic absence, a hearing loss. What does it mean for our teaching and practice to reimagine Deafness 1) as an identity within Deaf Culture, and 2) as a positive expression of biocultural diversity? In their edited collection on Deaf Gain, H-Dirksen L. Bauman and Joseph Murray (2014) summarize some of the key attributes of Deaf Gain: "enhanced and prolonged eye contact, intersubjective engagement, collectivist social patterns, transnational bonds, less auditory distraction, and acute visuospatial aptitudes" that "contribute to a new perspective on what it means to be deaf" (p. xxvii).

This new perspective can be generative for technical and professional communicators. As an expression of biocultural diversity and a critique of normalcy, Deaf Gain can help disrupt fundamental assumptions and dichotomies that support institutional cultures of accommodation and remediation. In multimodal composition, a Deaf perspective can challenge certain conceptions and constructions of time and space as ableist. How readers experience closed captions as timed-based reading events, for example, can form the basis of new theories of reading speed (see Zdenek, 2015, pp. 141-182). Surprisingly, reading speed has received little attention in our field outside of primary school contexts. Driven by the preferences and abilities of caption viewers, especially viewers who are deaf and hard of hearing, new theories of reading speed can be integrated into research studies on how audio, video, and text (on-screen titles, text annotations, captions) intersect and overlap for diverse users. Moreover, studies of film space from Deaf perspectives can inform film design. Janine Butler (2017) has explored how the concept of "DeafSpace"—made popular in Gallaudet University's philosophy of designing the built environment specifically for students and faculty who communicate in sign language—can reshape how film space is allocated and designed. With their expertise in usability, including user studies and eye tracking, and new theories of DeafSpace and crip time (Samuels, 2017), technical communicators can be at the forefront of studies of reading, timing, placement, and design in multimodal composition.

When we approach accessibility from the bottom up, when digital access is integrated and baked-in, we establish new directions and futures for the field. In caption studies, for example, we usually take for granted that words are good enough substitutes for sounds. As I wrote in *Reading Sounds* (2015): "It usually goes without saying in captioning discussions and style guides that every film soundscape—no matter how complex, transcendent, or immersive—can always be translated into words. Is it problematic to assume that language is always up to the task? Is captioning really just a simple matter of translating across modes? Does every sonic event communicate semiotically?" (p. 139). More recently, I've been reflecting on a new question: What would audiovisual accessibility look and feel like if captioners were unconstrained by the medium of writing and the act of transcription? This question, though admittedly idealistic, grows out of my increasing awareness of the limitations of traditional captions to adequately address several hard problems: 1) Distinguishing multiple speakers in the same scene, 2) Signaling sonic dimensionality (near/far sounds, loud/quiet sounds), 3) Clarifying sustained or continuous sounds, and 4) Reinforcing the meaning of sound effects, ambience, and music (see Zdenek, 2018).

To address these problems, I have experimented with novel forms of captioning: typefaces, color, icons, loops, screen placement, avatars, and special effects (Zdenek, 2018). My goal was not simply to create more aesthetic captions but to express meaning—to embody it—through the power of form. For example, the captioned lullaby sung by ghostly children in a horror movie might literally materialize out of the smoky ether. The sustained heartbeat sounds in a training video or tense movie scene might be visualized as an electrocardiogram readout in the corner of the screen. The speech captions of a fictional character who is based on a real politician might be rendered in the typeface or visual style of the politician's campaign rhetoric. Repetitive "cross now" announcements emanating from a futuristic crosswalk sign in a science fiction movie might be visualized as a flashing icon in the creative style of the sign itself. Put simply, embodied captions compel us to reimagine digital access for every sighted viewer. Too often, accommodations made in the name of users with disabilities, such as closed captioning, are 1) defined narrowly, technically, and objectively, and 2) positioned as add-ons for a presumedly finished product. Even as captioning is held up as one cornerstone of universal design, it hasn't been well integrated into our processes of production (Udo & Fels, 2010). When we experiment with alternative and disruptive forms of digital access, we question narrow definitions of captioning as mere transcription and, more importantly, start to imagine different disability and accessibility futures (see Kafer, 2013, pp. 3, 16) that put captioning in closer contact with our field's interests in visual rhetoric, multimodal composition, data visualization, and sound studies.

Experimental captions offer new possibilities, but they aren't intended to supplant the power and efficiency of words to create accessible content. Writing will continue to remain foundational to the practice (and art) of designing accessible texts. That's because the web is increasingly powered by images and video, which are made accessible when transformed into writing. According to Cisco's projections, Global "IP video traffic will be 82 percent of all IP traffic (both business and consumer) by 2022, up from 75 percent in 2017" (Cisco, 2018). Netflix alone is responsible for more than one-third of all internet traffic in North America (Luckerson, 2015). On social media platforms, images reign, with "more than 2 billion photos uploaded" each day to Facebook, Messenger, Instagram, and WhatsApp (Wu, Wieland, Farivar, & Schiller, 2017). Even Twitter, with its origins in text-only communication and strict character limits, "is quickly morphing from a primarily text-based medium to a primarily multimedia one" (Ringel Morris et al. 2016, p. 5515).

To make multimedia accessible, we need writing. We need professional writers who are trained in the art and rhetoric of accessible description. Accessible texts are composed with and transformed into words: image descriptions, captions, large print and magnified texts, transcripts, audio descriptions, and more. In the technical and legalistic language of web accessibility guidelines, captions and other forms of access are considered "text alternatives" for "non-text content" (World Wide Web Consortium, 2018b). Electronic texts possess immense power. They make media perceivable for a wide range of users. They are "presentation neutral," which means that they can be rendered according to the sensory needs of the user: "visually, auditorily, tactilely, or any combination" (World Wide Web Consortium, 2016). Texts can be enlarged (large print versions), synced with time-based media

(captions), spoken by a screen reader or speech output program, transformed into tactile signals (refreshable braille displays), and more. Images, audio, and video do not possess the same versatility.

The future of an accessible web will continue to depend on artful forms of writing even as internet traffic is consumed by non-text content. We should teach students to approach digital accessibility as a literate practice and not simply a technical exercise in coding, transcribing, or tagging content. Web accessibility guidelines focus on the finished product: "text," "text alternatives," and "non-text content." Technical and professional communicators can approach accessibility with a writer's sensibility and through the principles of style, rhetoric, art, design, and audience analysis. Web accessibility experts—and the students we teach in our classes—must learn to think like writers who are sensitive to the needs of their audiences, the affordances of language, and the contexts and constraints of space and time in which they are working. We don't usually discuss digital accessibility in these terms: literacy, writing, rhetoric, style. By putting writing and literacy at the center of an accessible web, we challenge dominant narratives about the web itself (that it is mostly driven by images and video) and make visible how writing fashions accessible user experiences. So much emphasis has been placed on the technical aspects of web accessibility, but we need to keep in mind that the web becomes legible for everyone principally through humanistic and rhetorical acts of reading and writing texts.

Automation has revolutionized and simplified the practice of making the web accessible. Advances in machine learning, image recognition, speech recognition, and web standards have produced powerful tools for captioning sounds (Google's autocaptioning on YouTube), describing images (Facebook's automatic alt text), creating accessible PDFs (Adobe's accessibility wizard), writing and designing inclusive documents (Microsoft's accessibility checkers for Office), serving content with learning management platforms (Ally for Canvas and Blackboard), and automatically checking websites against a set of accessibility standards (WebAIM's WAVE, the Siteimprove Accessibility Checker, and many more). Tools, checkers, wizards, and automated processes raise the profile of web accessibility and, perhaps more importantly for writers and designers, simplify what can sometimes seem like a daunting, time-consuming, and complex process. But automated tools also give the false impression that accessibility is so easy a machine can do it.

Since 2016, Facebook has been generating "automatic alt text" by applying object recognition technology to the photos uploaded by users (Wu et al., 2017). Facebook's algorithm generates alt text based on three categories: "people, objects, and scenes" (García, Paluri, & Wu, 2016). A fourth category, actions, was added in 2017 (Candela, 2017). An example of auto alt text for a photo in my Facebook feed is: "Image may contain: grass, tree, sky, outdoor and nature." An example of auto alt text for a screenshort quote (image of text) in my Facebook feed is: "Image may contain: text." The Facebook software produces a partial inventory of objects in each image but lacks a deeper rhetorical awareness of the image's purpose and how it works with the surrounding contexts to make meaning. Alt text is not a list of objects, just as closed captioning is not a list of sounds. A complete description of a photo for the purposes of accessibility would not include a list of all the objects in that photo, if that were even possible, or even a list of all the actions performed by all the objects. Rather, alt text, like captioning, is a rhetorical judgment made within a specific context and for a specific purpose. Image accessibility in the face of AI and automation needs, at the very least, to be evaluated by humans who can more effectively place images in their rhetorical contexts.

Image recognition technology is improving, but TPC practitioners and scholars should not cede control of rhetorical description to the machines or to the technicians. It isn't yet clear how Facebook's approach, which is based on recognizing and listing "all salient objects in the image" (Wu et al., 2017, p. 3) will be reconciled with the advice from web accessibility experts that "context is everything" (WebAIM, 2018).

IMAGINING DIFFERENT DISABILITY FUTURES

The three articles in this special issue offer new perspectives, collaborations, and avenues of research. In "Cultivating Virtuous Course Designers: Using Technical Communication to Reimagine Accessibility in Higher Education," Sherena Huntsman, Jared Colton, and Christopher Phillips draw on virtue ethics to reconceive accessibility as a "habitual practice, part of one's character." Reporting on the results of an instructor survey, they explore the contours of an ethics of courage and justice for accessible course design. They also discuss the origins and goals of their "university partnership," an exciting research collaboration between academics (Huntsman, Colton) and their campus's IT accessibility coordinator (Phillips). Their partnership offers a new model for and a challenge to other higher education stakeholders to pursue collaborations between faculty and disability support staff.

In "Theorizing Lip Reading as Interface Design: The Gadfly of the Gaps," Kevin Garrison develops a theory of lip reading that challenges fundamental concepts and binaries. Lip reading, Garrison argues, is not reading at all. A literacy of lip reading is predicated on rhetorically filling in gaps, not decoding information. Lip reading is contextual, synthetic, and dialectical. Garrison contrasts lip reading literacy with orality and print literacy, and briefly applies lip reading concepts to interface design. Lip reading is a new avenue of research for technical communication that offers a more nuanced and complex picture of communication and interface design.

In "Designing for Intersectional, Interdependent Accessibility: A Case Study of Multilingual Technical Content Creation," Laura Gonzales links the topic of multimodal access to language diversity, offering new challenges for accessibility in TPC. Gonzales explores how the creative, embodied, intersectional work of translators can be effectively subtitled as they converse about their work in multiple languages. How multilingual speech can be made accessible to viewers (some of whom may be monolingual) is a complex challenge that requires new, creative solutions.

Disability studies offers ways of moving and thinking differently in the world for practitioners and scholars. By defining disability studies as a critical methodology "rather than a subject," Julie A. Minich (2016) shifts the frame to include "not bodily or mental impairments but the social norms that define particular attributes as impairments, as well as the social conditions that concentrate stigmatized attributes in particular populations" (para. 6). Minich (2016) provides a few examples of "topics for disability scholarship…that have been inconsistently or only recently recognized in the field":

> fatness, STDs, mood disorders, addictions, non-normative family structures, intimate partner violence, police brutality, neurological differences, pregnancy, cancer, aging, asthma, and diabetes, to name just a few. And I must emphasize that this scrutiny of normative ideologies should occur not for its own sake but *with the goal of producing knowledge in support of justice* for people with stigmatized bodies and minds. (para. 6)

TPC scholars, especially rhetoricians of health and medicine, are already actively engaged with many of these topics, even if they are not all drawing on a disability framework. But the specific topics matter less than what disability studies offers as a methodology—that is, grounding practice and theory in a critical orientation towards social justice. Jina Kim (2017) explains that Minich's (2016) disability methodology is "not attuned to the same questions of representation and legibility—what can currently be recognized as disability—but rather to the systemic de-valuation (and oftentimes, subsequent disablement) of non-normative bodies and minds" (Kim, 2017, para. 1). For the field of technical and professional communication, a disability methodology can help reframe digital access as a civil right instead of a mere legal obligation. Through the "scrutiny of normative ideologies," disability studies in technical and professional communication can explain how ableist practices are normalized but also how we can work together for a more accessible future.

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A NOTE ON ACCESSIBILITY

The issue's contributors carefully prepared their Word documents to be accessible when converted to PDFs by including alt text for figures and semantic tagging for headings. Access to these features was lost when the Word files were formatted to the journal's specifications. As a workaround, I integrated authors' alt text into their figure captions. If any reader would like to receive versions of the articles from this special issue that have been optimized for screen reader accessibility, please contact Sean Zdenek (zdenek@udel.edu).

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