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**From Small Beginnings to Large-Scale Harm: On Demagoguery and Misogyny in the
Classroom and Writing Center**

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
Virginia Commonwealth University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English

by
Shannon A. S. Roberson
Spring 2020

Virginia Commonwealth University

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Thesis of Shannon A. S. Roberson:
From Small Beginnings to Large-Scale Harm: On Demagoguery and Misogyny in the Classroom
and Writing Center

By Thesis Committee

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ABSTRACT

Shannon A. S. Roberson (Master of Arts in English Language and Literature)

From Small Beginnings to Large-Scale Harm: On Demagoguery and Misogyny in the Classroom and Writing Center

Directed by Caddie Alford

My project is grounded in the rhetorical concept of *aretê*—excellence or virtue—as it relates to education and educational spaces within demagogic and misogynist cultural forces. The problems of demagoguery and misogyny stem from small-scale perpetuation of agonistic norms that go unaddressed in U.S. culture, a culture that is deeply identity-driven. These forces persist on social media platforms and within patriarchal systems of education.

For my project, I suggest rhetorical media literacy education of small-scale demagoguery moments on social media as a way to bring awareness to larger-scale events. On a micro-scale, social media influencers cultivate behaviors that mimic demagogic norms: charismatic leadership, propagation of in-group/out-group binaries, and personalized echo chambers. Bringing awareness to *how* influencers function and use social media to their benefit empowers consumers to understand when or if someone is acting demagogically. Empowerment is a way to support students as they achieve pedagogical *aretê*.

To address misogyny, I turn to the university writing center space to demonstrate how feminist rhetorical pedagogy can and do inhabit patriarchal academic systems. Writing centers act as peripheral academic spaces on university campuses while still supporting a student's quest for *aretê*. Writing consultants use rhetorical listening practices to bring the invisible steps of the writing process to light during consultations. In a writing center, rhetorical listening is an act of feminist pedagogy that promotes socially engaged collaboration. Arming students with an understanding of their personal writing style, voice, and process fosters ownership of their ideas, combating misogynist and patriarchal constraints and paving the way for pedagogical *aretê*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was born out of my personal experience as a high school English teacher in Virginia. While teaching, I did not know how to convey media literacy to students, but felt it was an important component of the English curriculum. Many of my colleagues do/did not include media literacy in their scope and sequence for the year because the strand is not directly tested on the Virginia standards of learning tests, thus does not affect yearly performance or raises. I entered graduate school unsure of what rhetoric studies was, but it became clear my interest in theory and pedagogy could find a home in rhetoric.

I am grateful to my advisor, Caddie Alford, for working with me on my independent study project in Spring 2019. It was there that I started my foundational understanding of rhetorical studies. Our weekly meetings were inspiring and encouraging. I especially appreciate her patience during the thesis process. Rhetorical studies pushed me to learn a new vocabulary and at times was very challenging to internalize. Through her mentorship I was empowered to apply to rhetoric conferences, present at my first conference, and collaborate on an article. I am indebted to the knowledge, insight, and advice she provided me at every step of the way.

After acceptance into the VCU English program, I was granted a graduate teaching assistantship with the writing center. I had no idea how closely tied rhetorical studies was to writing center work. Being able to think about writing, the writing process, how the space functions on a university campus, and interact with students on a daily basis changed the way I think about writing pedagogy. My thesis project gave me time to research and learn about both rhetorical studies and writing studies—time I would never have been given while teaching full time. My teaching practice will forever be influenced by what I learned.

Throughout the graduate school process, my husband, Chris, has been a steady source of encouragement and support. He's read every part of my thesis, endured ramblings about rhetoric, and shown incredible patience as I worked to flesh out chapter ideas on our long road trips. Most importantly he supported my decision to go to graduate school, something I had put off for years.

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INTRODUCTION

“It is important to see that we don’t just *talk* about arguments in terms of war. We can actually win or lose arguments. We see the person we are arguing with as an opponent. We attack his positions and we defend our own. We gain and lose ground. We plan and use strategies. If we find a position indefensible, we can abandon it and take a new line of attack. Many of the things we *do* in arguing are partially structured by the concept of war. Though there is no physical battle, there is a verbal battle, and the structure of an argument— attack, defense, counterattack, etc. — reflects this. It is in this sense that the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor is one that we live by in this culture; it structures the actions we perform in arguing.”

— George Lakoff and Mark Johnson *Metaphors We Live By* 4

How we talk about argument is how we understand the concept of argument. In the quote above, Lakoff and Johnson reveal the framework in which argument lives—a metaphor of war (4). In argument we attack or defend, we have strong or weak points, we win or lose. Over time, the refrain “argument is war” has become ingrained in the way we think about verbal debate. More than that, it simply *is* how we argue in most contexts, whether the arguments are done publicly or privately. Lakoff and Johnson ask us to imagine a culture in which argumentative encounters were done not verbally, but performed as a dance, a physical performance wherein aesthetics determined a successful outcome (5). We would not see this event as an argument; rather, we would see it as something completely different because it lacks the aspect of verbal battle that we expect from argumentation. The roots of how we talk about and perceive argument originate in ancient Greece, from a time when public, physical agonism determined the moral virtue of the young men who sought to achieve *aretê*.

The ancient Greek concept of *aretê* is associated with the “goodness, courage, and prowess of a warrior” (Hawhee 187). The warrior—the person who is brave, strong, godlike, honorable, and possibly destined to die in battle—was the epitome of virtuosity. *Aretê*, known as virtue or “excellence in moral conduct,” gained its original expression in Homer’s poetic legend, the *Iliad* (Coogan 74). Achilles, trained under the wise centaur Chiron and counseled further by Phoenix, achieves *aretê* by learning virtuous rules of combat and social conduct. Becoming

virtuous required being dedicated and loyal through service to the state. Counseling, tutelage, and training are a form of pedagogy from which young noblemen could achieve *aretê* by committing to the quest under the guidance of an elder exemplar. Performing heroic acts for the good of the state was grounded in Sparta's militaristic society, in contrast to Athenian scribal culture where ancient Greek philosophy and rhetoric were evolving with a preference toward intellectual character. By emphasizing intellect and mentorship, rhetorical pedagogy formally began to take root in Athenian culture through Socratic teachings and dialogues, as documented and represented by Plato. Both scribal and militaristic cultures, however, understood *aretê* as a goal: to be successful both in war for the state and in debate for the self were achievements of the highest moral virtue and excellence.

Aretê occurs by dedicating oneself to the quest—that is, *aretê* is achieved through a journey, not as an end alone. Questing is a “continual pursuit of virtuosity” (Hawhee 192). What matters for *aretê* “is not the victory per se but rather the hunt for the victory” (192). *Aretê* is not something that someone can just stumble upon or luck into. *Aretê* takes dedication and training from a mentor or tutor. Once a student is able to imitate or reproduce the skill/work of their exemplar, the moment is marked as the achievement of *aretê*. The concept and practice of *Aretê* has persisted through the ages and exists even today in modern American athletic and rhetorical pursuits. While these two broad disciplines take different routes to achieve excellence, both value the quest/training.

Though the idea of the contest is commonly associated with combative athleticism, rhetoric and athletics share similar methodologies when it comes to agonistic and competitive encounters. Athletic *aretê* and rhetorical *aretê* share a common metaphor and vocabulary, much like Lakoff and Johnson describe above. During the Olympic Games of ancient Greece,

wrestling garnered attention so much so that rhetors like Gorgias started to use the language of wrestling to display the risk and cleverness of oratory (Hawhee 201). In his speech at the Olympic Games, Gorgias explained that

a contest (*agônisma*) such as we have requires double excellence (*dittôn areiôn*): daring (*tolmês*) and skill (*sophia*), daring is needed to withstand danger, and skill to understand how to trip the opponent (*pligma*). For surely speech, like the summons at the Olympic Games, calls the willing but crowns the capable (DK 82.B.8 in O'Regan 13).

An opponent can be *tripped up* in both athletics and speech; likewise, both require skill, cunning, and flexibility to achieve excellence. Skill at speaking makes one strong in verbal struggle or contest, but skill doesn't form or manifest in an asocial vacuum—it affects other people. To achieve excellence, *aretê* has an implied ability to “help friends and harm enemies” (O'Regan 12). In athletic *aretê*, this implication is clear—physical valor of a knight was glorified for the good of the state (friends) in opposition to those who wish to harm the state (enemies). But in rhetorical *aretê*, values of persuasion point to similar agonistic technologies: “the tongue replaces the hand; the word, the sword; powerful speaking, physical might” (13). The metaphor of argument thus comes to life.

The legacy of agonist verbal encounters persists today—perhaps nowhere so urgently as with demagogic and patriarchal dynamics. With demagoguery, the rhetorical verbal violence is for the good of the individual—discourse informed by demagogic conditions enact harm against those who disagree. Similarly, misogyny works in favor of the individual by subordinating and punishing an Other. And, of course, these two strains of agonism are both amplified and sustained by digital forms of communication. As an educator, I am interested in exploring how pedagogical practices can support questing for *aretê* within the modern agonistic encounters dictated by demagogic and patriarchal systems. How can educators enable 21st century students to achieve personal excellence in a divisive digital era? How can educators or tutors bridge the

gap between feminist pedagogies and a misogynist, patriarchal academy? Agonistic communication is weaponized in the political reports circulating on social media platforms, in the identity policing on Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit feeds, and even in campus spaces where Others are further marginalized. My project interrogates these micro-aggressions and routine communicative habits to demonstrate that these small-scale manifestations of agonism can feed into dominant cultural norms (demagoguery, misogyny). I aim to support disrupting these norms by reframing contemporary educational practices as quests for *aretê*, all of which, I argue, must be responsive to our networked age.

In Chapter One, I begin with an example of large-scale demagoguery by turning to tweets Donald Trump posted during his 2016 election campaign. Trump uses Twitter to incite his prolific, and often violent, base of supporters for personal gain—notably, at the expense of someone else. Trump’s large-scale demagoguery, that is, his national and international platform as president of the United States, lends credence to Lakoff and Johnson’s suggestion that the “argument is war” metaphor structures actual argumentation. His posts resulted in physical threats and verbal attacks on a private citizen, with no remorse or acknowledgment from Trump himself. His lack of mediation between an offensive, threatening base and a private American citizen conveyed implicit support for those who choose to act on his behalf. Trump’s public (mis)behavior reinspired a call to action from advocates for more civic-minded media literacy education.

I take up that call for media literacy and extend it by suggesting that while the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs) lay out a pathway for media literacy pedagogy, what is really needed is a *rhetorical* media literacy pedagogy. The harm that can lead to large-scale forms of demagoguery stem from smaller interactions that normalize such behavior. What we consider

normal behavior on social media may actually be more insidious, inciting the same large-scale forms of demagoguery that worked to elect Trump in 2016. Therefore, in this chapter I turn to the dynamic between social media influencers and the networks they cultivate. Our students navigate this dynamic every day. Every day they maneuver through small-scale forms of demagoguery on social media: influencers utilize demagoguery's rule of "identity as logic" to create an "us" versus a "them" (Roberts-Miller *Democracy* 7). To illustrate this dynamic, I analyze the Fyre Festival's social media campaign, which demonstrates the extent to which social group membership has become a persuasive and alluring appeal at the cost of all else. Of course, social media influence is an issue that extends beyond the Instagram platform to all social networking media. To advocate for a rhetorical media literacy pedagogy, I use examples of small-scale demagoguery to instruct and scaffold understanding of larger-form persuasive forces, all of which impede a student's journey toward excellence.

In Chapter Two, I continue interrogating agonism's legacy by addressing the ongoing exigencies of patriarchal and misogynistic forms of violence that work to ignore and stifle Other and feminine acts of rhetorical discourse. I begin the chapter with a look into Hillary Clinton's style of campaigning during the 2016 election. Her approach was noticeably different from that of her opponent because she employed feminine rhetorical listening during her town hall meetings and other interactions with constituents. The public saw Clinton's approach as dramatically different than the normalized masculine approach to which they were accustomed. The perception of her campaign was wrought with misogyny and misogynist expectations because she was steadfast in her feminist approach.

From Clinton's campaign, I delve into a smaller-scale patriarchal hierarchical system. One such system of patriarchal control is the academy wherein standard language ideology (SLI)

has persisted as the normal expectation for academic writing and student voice. SLI prevents successful journeys towards *aretê* for students who are marginalized by patriarchal systems within higher education. While SLI may support one type of student's journey towards *aretê*, marginalized Othered students are left in the wake of a patriarchal system that suggests their voice is a problem that must be fixed. Misogyny and racism operate as ways of policing Others in a patriarchal system that relies on maintaining the status quo. To address this legacy of agonism, I claim that the writing center can teach us forms of rhetorical listening and mentoring that are feminist in nature. My analysis suggests that writing center pedagogy invites a disruption of the confines of a patriarchal system by fostering a contact zone of mutual learning between consultant and student.

The severe problems of demagoguery and misogyny stem from small-scale perpetuations of agonistic norms that go unaddressed. I extend the work of rhetorical scholar Patricia Roberts-Miller's work on political demagoguery to that of social media influencers and their cultivation of micro-scale demagogic norms. I continue Cheryl Glenn's feminist scholarship about feminine pedagogical practices to examine how peripheral academic spaces (writing centers) enable student voices. By using this scholarship, my project argues that educators and tutors can address the spread of cultural norms that cause large-scale harm by thinking of pedagogy in terms of *aretê* for the digital age. Classrooms and writing centers are sites for rhetorical *aretê*—moral virtue and excellence in the form of social virtuosity for an agonist, digital age.

CHAPTER 1

Demagoguery and Rhetorical Media Literacy Pedagogy

On October 12, 2015, before Donald Trump was the official Republican candidate for the 2016 United States Presidential election, he attended a political forum in New Hampshire where 18-year-old college student, Lauren Batchelder, told him that she didn't think he was "a friend to women" (Johnson). From what we know of Trump's online behavior during his tenure as president, it's not surprising that the morning following the forum he responded to Batchelder on his Twitter account. By January 2016, the *New York Times* found that one in eight posts on Twitter from Trump "was a personal insult of some kind" (Lee & Quealy). His tweet at 7:39am on October 13 referred to Batchelder as an "arrogant young woman" and, later at 11:52am, a second post accused her of being "a 'plant' [for Jeb Bush's campaign] during [his] speech" (@realDonaldTrump). During the interaction between



Figure 1. Donald Trump tweets

Batchelder and Trump, she said, "So, maybe I'm wrong, maybe you can prove me wrong, but I don't think you're a friend to women" (Johnson). Trump responded, saying he loves, respects, and cherishes women, to which Batchelder explained what she meant: "If you become president, will a woman make the same as a man, and do I get to choose what I do with my body?" (Johnson). "You're going to make the same if you do as good of a job," Trump replied, "and I happen to be pro-life, okay?" (Johnson). This exchange generated media coverage online, which

lead to Trump’s combative tweets the next morning. Insulting private citizens functions as weaponized communication—a type of communication that does “not seek to persuade, which requires consent and mutual openness to persuasion, but to force compliance, which is acquiescence” (Mercieca 270). Rhetorician Jennifer Mercieca calls this form of communication “weaponized” because it is a form of violence; in this case, Trump’s tweets directly led to personal threats of violence.

Mercieca suggests we think of weaponized communication as the widespread use of *ad baculum*: a fallacious appeal to threats of force or intimidation that is especially dangerous when used by a national political leader (271). Trump used his frustration with Republican primary candidate Jeb Bush as a red herring for Batchelder’s questions, inciting his fan base to go after Batchelder personally because of her differing political views. What followed were vicious, salacious messages from Trump supporters to Batchelder’s personal social media accounts. Trolls commented on her physical appearance, called her names, and threatened rape and other physical violence via written direct messages, public posts on her Twitter and Facebook pages, and the creation of memes in her likeness. People stalked her online, found out what university she was attending, and even her university and home addresses. Her physical and mental safety were threatened for months after Trump’s tweets were posted. She did not comment publicly about the incident until over a year later in a Washington Post interview on December 8, 2016 after Trump’s presidential victory.

In the aftermath of the shocking 2016 Presidential election, those who opposed Trump’s election called for more civic engagement and education as a reaction to Trump’s demagogic behavior. Rhetorician Patricia Roberts-Miller defines a demagogue as usually a “political leader who seeks support by appealing to the desires and prejudices of ordinary people rather than by

using rational argument” (2). Trump’s insulting tweets about Batchelder appealed to a base of his supporters who routinely gaslight and scapegoat women online as a form of anonymous trolling. These trolls amp Trump’s message and add to his visibility and salience. When online trolls attack a woman based on her physical appearance and threaten violence, they are succumbing to identity-driven discourse that in turn exacerbates a demagogue’s message.

The large-scale demagoguery Trump exhibits—and that which we collectively associate with notorious modern demagogues like Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini who similarly incited passion from their political base—are big, loud examples of how demagoguery works in an identity-driven culture. But large-scale demagoguery is only possible when smaller-scale identity biases become baked into national and even political discourse. Demagoguery does not have to be political, just as weaponized communication does not always have to mean threats of physical violence—both can be local, nuanced, and even banal. Rather than thinking of demagoguery in terms of the traditional demagogue figure, Roberts-Miller underscores that demagoguery should “be thought of as a way of participating in public discourse and decision making—a way that can become the norm in a culture that is profoundly identity-driven” (2). The small-scale demagoguery that occurs on a daily basis can normalize identity allegiance to a degree that makes large-scale, grievously consequential demagoguery possible. Rhetorician Collin Gifford Brooke confirms that “it should therefore serve as no surprise that a wide-spread call for education has been a persistent theme” since the 2016 election, but this call is not unique in a time of desperation and upset (123). Demagoguery is not a new concept—it’s ancient.¹ Thanks to the modern digital revolution, however, it is easier than ever to track the increasing appeal of identity through social media content and interactive behaviors.

¹ Athenian general during the Peloponnesian war, Cleon from the 430s B.C. was documented by historian Thucydides and playwright Aristophanes as a warmongering demagogue.

This chapter argues that the increasing appeal of demagoguery necessitates a specifically rhetorical media literacy education in order to expose high school and college students to small-scale demagoguery. The studies of persuasion, media influence, demagoguery, and opinions in terms of habitual, identity-driven social media practices are vital for thriving in an ever-expanding, more aware digital citizenry.

Media Influence and Demagoguery on Social Media

In late 2016, rumblings of a music festival began circulating on social media platforms that brought influencer culture to the forefront of media literacy conversations. On December 12, 2016, at 5pm., sixty-three influencers posted an orange square to their social media accounts to endorse the Fyre Music Festival. For people who followed many of these influencers, their Instagram feeds were peppered with strange orange tiles, with minimal insight into what they meant. One of the most followed influencers, socialite and model Bella

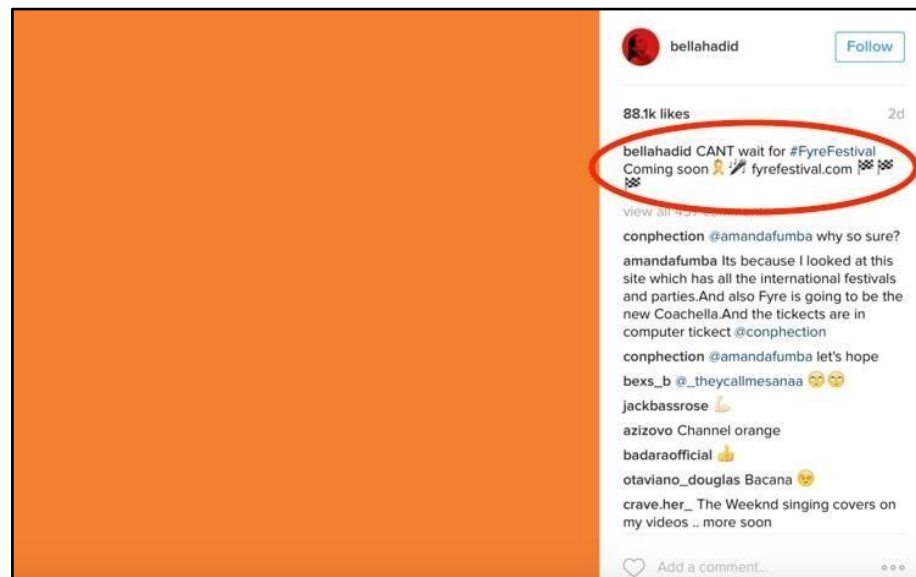


Figure 2. Bella Hadid Instagram post

Hadid, wrote, “CANT wait for #FyreFestival Coming soon www.fyrefestival.com” alongside the orange tile (Hadid). This was a paid advertisement from Fyre promoters through Hadid, a popular Instagram influencer with millions of followers. My project is not interested in Fyre Festival because it failed as a music event (the people who attended the event were stranded in the Bahamas without food, lodging, or transportation, and the organizers of the event exploited Bahamians for unpaid labor and service, etc). Rather, my project is interested in Fyre Festival’s media advertising campaign as an example of small-scale demagoguery to anchor pedagogical rhetorical media literacy. Demagoguery stems from beliefs and perceptions rooted in identity, and social media platforms provide the ideal space to cultivate an identity-driven echo chamber. Fyre Festival’s social media campaign leveraged influencers’ charismatic leadership on Instagram, in effect making them small-scale demagogues.

Social media influencers are therefore purveyors of persuasion. Close reading of the failed Fyre Festival demonstrates how influencers, no matter how innocuous the product, operate politically as small-scale demagogues. We traditionally think of demagoguery in terms of the classic political figurehead persuading the masses—one person standing before thousands to enact an agenda—but this is not typical of the kind of modern, small-scale demagoguery our students negotiate every day. Social media platforms are the primary source for how people consume both entertainment and news, how people interact, influence, and share with others. I bring social media into the political conversation of demagoguery because social media use and activity has entered the realm of the political. Social media use, predominantly, *is* political. The Pew Research Center published data in 2018 showing two-thirds (68%) of Americans get their news from social media platforms. The center cited “convenience” as the most commonly mentioned benefit for social media use (“News Use” Shearer). When 68% of us get our news

from social media, these social media platforms and influencers with millions of followers are complicit in politics through forms of demagoguery.

To understand the impact of social media demagoguery, one must understand the numbers because likes, followers, and impressions online are the currency of social membership. Fyre Festival garnered over 300 million impressions online within 24 hours and 8,000 tickets were sold by the date of the event thanks to the high-profile influencers who posted the orange tile to their Instagram accounts (Bilton). The tickets, which did not include airfare, sold from \$500 to \$1500, with VIP packages promising airfare and luxury tent accommodations for \$12,000 (Bilton). But none of the grand plans that Fyre promised were delivered: no luxury accommodations, not enough food, no musicians were in attendance, and the infrastructure for the event (toilets, lodgings) was incomplete. At the time of sale, in fact, there were no photographs of the promised luxury accommodations on the website, just vague sketches—literal blueprints—with lists of potential amenities. Influencers, however, were paid no less than \$20,000 each for one orange tile post. Their following simply did not ask questions about the logistics before buying tickets.² The promoters for the event relied on the cultivated relationship between influencer and audience to produce actual consumptive revenue for the event.

Suspicion that is usually associated with someone who sells a product is bypassed in an influencer-follower relationship, shirking the traditional roles between rhetor and audience. Rhetorician Carolyn Miller explains how traditionally, the relationship between rhetor and audience is adversarial—that is, trust is not implicit (22). A rhetor succeeds when an audience is persuaded, but audiences are not easily won over in the traditional context of rhetor speaking

² Kendall Jenner, the most followed influencer of the group, collected a \$250,000 fee for making her post about a month after the original sea of orange tiles.

before an audience. In *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle explains, “authors should compose without being noticed” in order to temper suspicion from the audience (3.2.4). By keeping an agenda or need from an audience concealed, the rhetor hides their true intention in order to appear authentic and sincere to their audience. This concealment, ironically, builds trust between the rhetor and audience. When an audience feels like someone wants something from them, they are less likely to trust what is being said, giving way to suspicion. Suspicion causes an audience to question the motives and character of the rhetor, sparking a refusal to trust—leaving the rhetor unconcealed. When we watch someone give a speech, the dynamic of the relationship positions an audience member as an observer. This relationship is different on social media platforms because the platforms can give an illusion of participation. Liking a post, reposting a post, and following people feels active, participatory. This is where students—and most social media consumers—may begin to feel confused about the types of relationships they cultivate on platforms where users cultivate followings.

Think of the Insta-influencer as the rhetor, the persuasive force trying to win over an audience. Just like political rhetors, influencers have to build trust in order to retain their following and ultimately their ability to commodify their following. To avoid audience-follower suspicion, the influencer shares personal stories, glimpses of their life, invites the audience *in* to what would otherwise be a concealed world. The idea of inviting someone *in* invokes Roberts-Miller’s dissection of public disagreement, which she says, “concerns three stases: group identity..., need..., and what level of punishment to enact against the out group” (“Democracy” 33). The “group identity” stasis concerns “who is in the in-group, what signifies out-group membership, and how loyal rhetors are to the in-group” (33). By inviting followers *in* to their in-group, the influencer seems to give access to their world. Different types of images can make up

an influencer’s world-building, giving an allusion of access: old family photos and selfies alongside sponsored advertising and political promotion (see Figure 3). These images and captions create an appearance of sincerity and openness. Such posts, however, are signifiers of an in-group identity where the influencer is the charismatic leader of a picture-perfect echo chamber.

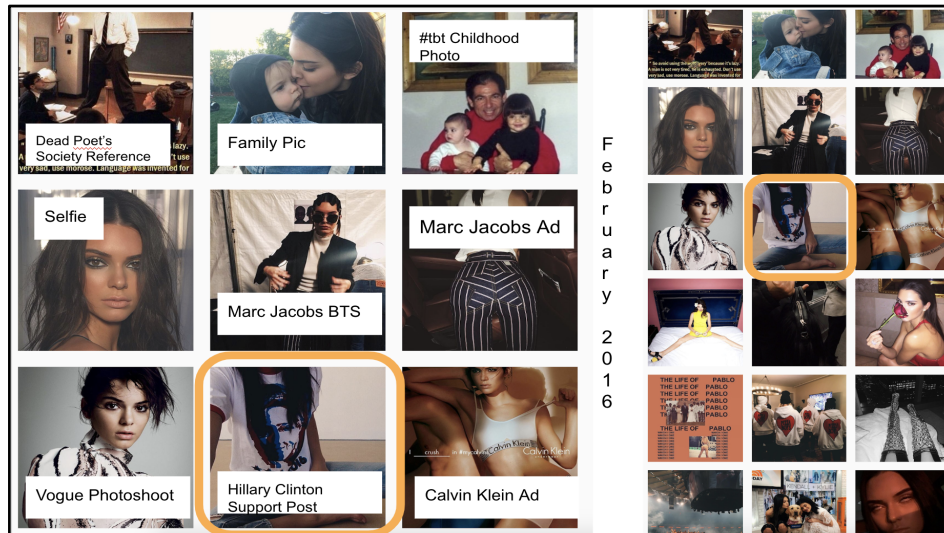


Figure 3. Kendall Jenner Instagram screen capture from Feb. 2016

A charismatic leader, a being perceived as almost magical, becomes a proxy for the follower’s self—that is, followers of a charismatic leader see *themselves* in the leader. In extreme situations of demagoguery, criticism of a charismatic leader is taken personally by the followers. Just as it’s nearly impossible to see oneself as a bad person, it can become inconceivable for a follower to see the leader as bad. Patricia Roberts-Miller identifies charismatic leaders as having four unique characteristics: they are perceived as superhuman; followers blindly believe leader’s statements; followers unconditionally comply with leaders’ directives for action (whether explicit or implied); and followers give the leader an unqualified emotional commitment (“Rhetoric” 60). As an influencer, Kendall Jenner documents an ideal reality that her followers aspire to inhabit. Her leadership is defined by consumerism—that is, by owning the things Jenner

owns, the follower can be like her, can have some of her charisma, can attain some of her magic. Audiences turn to influencers like Kendall Jenner (see Figure 4), for advice on everything from over-the-knee boots, “one of my favorites,” she writes, to facial cleansing routines, “because every once in a while you have to slow down” (“One;” “Because”). *I’m your friend*, these posts imply, *you can be like me by buying these shoes or imitating my hygiene routine*. Follower loyalty is demonstrated through likes, reposts, and purchases.

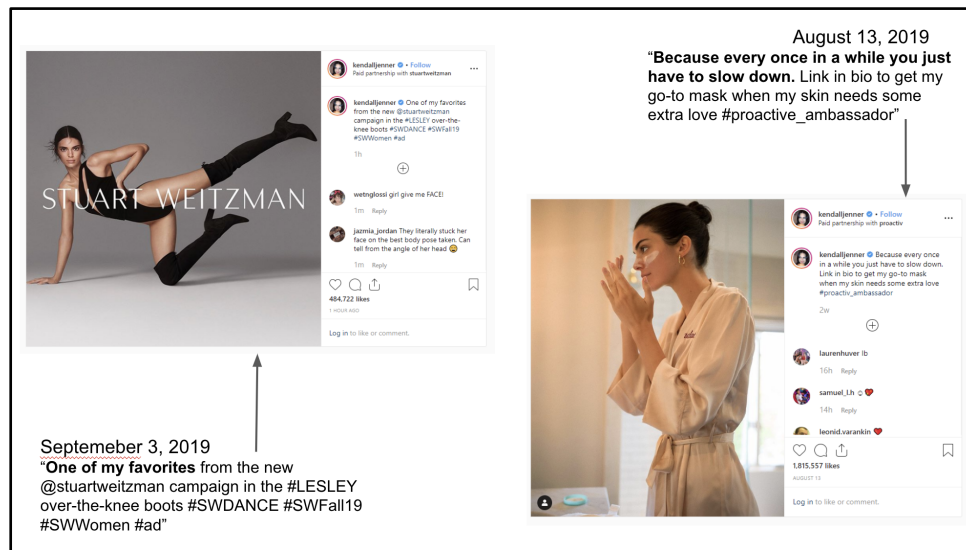


Figure 4. Kendall Jenner Instagram screen captures from 2019

Follower loyalty is such a normalized part of social media infrastructure that the act of liking, reposting, and clicking links to people’s websites may not even be thought about in the moment. The urge to click the like button is as innate as any other real-life reaction. When my friend makes a corny joke, it’s impossible for me to do anything other than roll my eyes. This reaction is not something I think about, but something that happens instantaneously. As someone scrolls through Instagram or Twitter feeds, clicking the like or reposts buttons are just as spontaneous. These examples contribute to the persuasive power of the rhetor. Gut-reactions, that is liking a post without really considering it, is reactionary rather than actively participatory. Usually this is innocuous, but think about when a politician like Donald Trump retweeted three

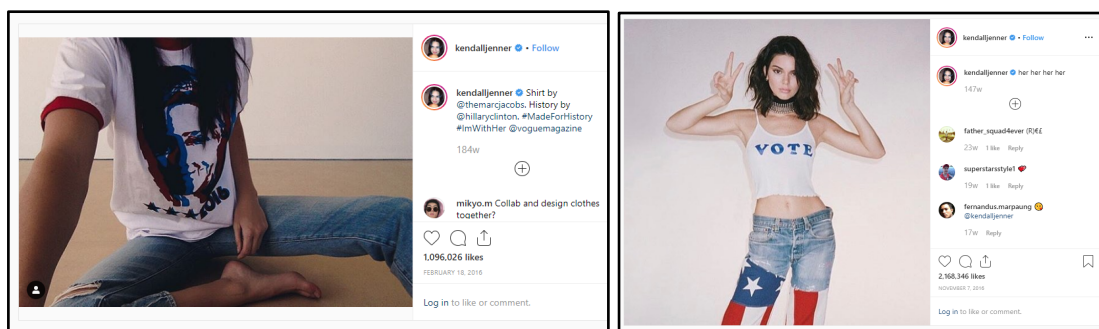
inflammatory and unverified anti-Muslim videos from Britain First, a far-right British organization. His retweets increased Islamophobic commentary on social media and elevated the profile of the previously fringe group of anti-Muslim activists. When asked about the retweets in January 2018 in an interview with Piers Morgan for *Good Morning Britain*, Trump said he knew “nothing about [Britain First] today other than I read a little bit” and if Morgan would like Trump to apologize he “would certainly apologize if you’d like [him] to do that” (Sharman). Though an extreme example of reacting on social media, public reactions on Twitter can give voice and legitimacy to groups or people even if you know nothing about them beyond their social media presence.

Persuasion that incites in-group, out-group binaries positions demagoguery as “a savvy rhetorical strategy” (Roberts-Miller “Democracy” 4). Pitting one group against another—scapegoating one group as the problems of another—becomes normal within demagogic discourse. Demagoguery is viral, spreading conditions of binaries and identity logics that are harmful to constructive conversation. There is little room for open-minded dialogue when identity matters more than anything else, as we can see with social media followings. The average Instagram user selects the accounts they choose to follow based on characteristics related to identity—whether it is an accurate reflection of one’s identity or aspirational. By following a certain account, users invite the ethos of that person into their life, *allowing* influence.

Demagoguery frequently occurs on this kind of small scale, but small-scale demagoguery can lead to larger, more insidious effects that cause harm. Small-scale demagoguery is what our students interact with the most, causing demagoguery to feel normal in these micro-moments. For example, choosing who to follow and who not to follow results in a curated echo chamber of

identity reinforcement. Inciting in-group favoritism is a form of the genetic fallacy appeal where people of an in-group are considered trustworthy without merit. As Roberts-Miller explains, “social group membership suffices as proof” of authenticity (“Democracy” 37). Rather than trying to convince people to attend their festival through traditional means, Fyre sought to reach their audience by leveraging in-group bias and the fear of missing out (FoMO), “a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent” (Przybylski et. al 1844). Because the marketing campaign for Fyre relied on the clout of dozens of influencers, deemed “Fyre Starters,” the festival did not have to earn the trust of the people they hoped to sell tickets to—they bypassed this part of sales to leverage the trust of the influencer’s network.

Influencers become intimately known by their following and their interests bleed through the photos and captions. Kendall Jenner’s influencer posts are a mix of sponsorship and supposed insight into their real life. In 2016, Jenner even used her platform to endorse Hillary Clinton, first in February 2016 while also promoting both Marc Jacobs and Vogue



Jenner post February 18, 2016

Jenner post November 7, 2016

Figure 5. Kendall Jenner Instagram posts from 2016

Magazine, and then a second time on November 7th, 2016, with the caption “her her her her” (Jenner “Her”). This post was not only the day before the election, but just two months before

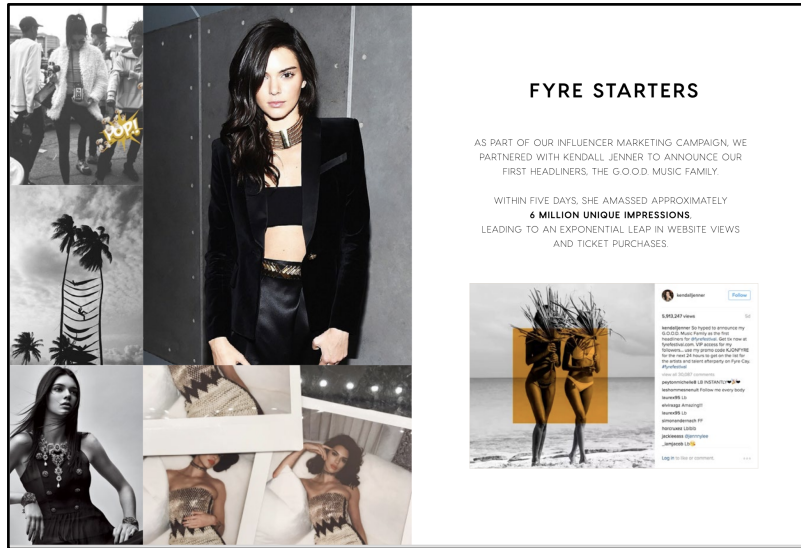


Figure 6. Page from Fyre Festival Promotion deck

her Fyre Festival Instagram post on January 5, 2017. These posts collectively demonstrate how social media influence operates via demagogic logics—when a sponsored post for clothing or a music festival solidifies in-group membership just as much as a post of political support. This strategy is not dissimilar to how political influence propagates on social media platforms, as evidenced in the rhetoric of Jenner’s Hillary Clinton posts: if you trust Kendall Jenner, if you are in her in-group, then vote for Hillary Clinton. It’s a demagogic enthymeme for our digital age.

Influencers bypass suspicion, not through classical means of seemingly spontaneous speeches, but through cultivated sincerity. Regarding persuasion, rhetorician Bryan Garsten articulates that “when we persuade, we want to change our listeners’ minds by linking our position to their existing opinions and emotions”—in short, we want to show our audience that we are on the same side, that we are a part of the same in-group (2). The easiest way to do this is to build friendship. Even Aristotle lauded the significant bonds of friendship, claiming that “when people are friends, they have no need of justice” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 8.1.1155a). That is to say, trust exists within friendship, implicitly. A dialogue between friends does not involve

suspicion because trust has been formed over time. Politically speaking, friends do not need to win each other over or reinforce their in-group status since these are inherent to the friendship. Illusory friendship conceals the mechanisms of all forms of persuasion.

Teachers of rhetoric can use the concealment of persuasion as an educational tool.

Rhetorical media literacy pedagogy amplifies the unconcealment of demagogic conditions.

Miller suggests a

solution requires the unconcealment of rhetoric, the naming of the tools. Indeed, rhetorical education, *rhetorica docens* in the scholastic tradition, makes visible our rhetorical practice, *rhetorica utens*, by naming, analysis, imitation... this knowledge will make for citizens who can both listen critically and speak and write effectively... If citizens become more critical judges of rhetorical practice, they should also become more cunning practitioners themselves. (31-2).

We “must name the tools” to enable audience awareness—students’ awareness—of persuasive practices in media and digital media (32). By calling for an unconcealment of rhetorical strategies in the classroom, Miller rightly says student-citizens will become more “cunning practitioners themselves,” and by illuminating the practice, a more critically attuned citizen-audience will emerge (31). When persuading, rhetoric functions best concealed—it is easier to persuade someone who trusts without suspicion, as we saw with the Fyre promotions.

Pedagogically, however, rhetoric is an analytic tool of unconcealment—by teaching students and citizens how to engage with media from a place of rhetorical understanding, the audience can make more concrete *choices* to trust or refuse anyone who seeks to commodify their relationship. A refusal to trust, through influencer or demagogue, denies both influence and power, leveling the dynamic between audience and rhetor or follower and influencer.

Media influence is a part of the Communication strand of Virginia’s eleventh grade English standards of learning: students will “examine how values and points of view are included or excluded and how media influences beliefs and behaviors” (“SOL 11.2” 271). Since the small-

scale moments like influencer advertisements are what students most frequently interact with on social media, the Fyre Festival as a cultural moment can be used in the classroom to help students recognize how media messages influence audience behaviors. Presented as a case study to evaluate source materials, the small-scale demagoguery of social media persuasion helps to determine authorial purpose and intended effects on an audience. With the concepts covered in this section, there is room to look closely at media literacy education in Virginia secondary English education.

Oral Language to Communications in the Virginia Standards of Learning³

In June 1995, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) approved the Standards of Learning in four core content areas: mathematics, science, English, and history & social sciences. The SOLs are unique in that the state of Virginia is one of only nine states in the US that does not use the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative. In 2010, when CCSS was dispersed nationwide, Virginia had already been using the SOL system for fifteen years. After reviewing and comparing both systems, the VDOE found the considerable time and money invested in developing the SOLs did not warrant a switch to a comparable system of state education standards.

In general, the state of Virginia believes their SOLs are more comprehensive than the CCSS wherein students will “have been exposed to the same content [as CCSS] through different learning progressions, although there is some content in the SOL that is not covered in the CCSS” (“Comparison” 4). For the English SOLs there are different strands, or categories, that teachers focus on throughout the year. For kindergarten through 3rd grade there are three English

³ I received my teaching licensure in Virginia and have taught in Virginia public schools using the SOLs, so my focus is on Virginia’s SOLs for the purposes of this project.

SOL strands: 1) Oral Language, 2) Reading, 3) Writing. For fourth grade through twelfth grade there are four English SOL strands: 1) Communication: Speaking, Listening, Media Literacy, 2) Reading, 3) Writing, 4) Research (“English Standards”). Beginning in fourth grade for the SOLs, the Oral Language strand changes to Communication: Speaking, Listening, and Media Literacy, giving communication skills its own focus through the remainder of a student’s public education. This is a notable distinction between the SOLs and CCSS because CCSS addresses media literacy as an application within the standards and does not give the subject its own emphasis.

The VDOE does not state exactly why the shift from Oral Language in kindergarten through third grade to Communication in fourth grade occurs, though it may have to do with developmental psychologist Jean Piaget’s stages of cognitive development. From ages seven to nine, depending on personal development, children move from Piaget’s preoperational stage (generally marked as ages 2-7/8) to the concrete operational stage (generally marked as ages 8/9-11) of cognitive development. In the preoperational stage, ending sometime during third grade, Piaget suggests children are limited by egocentrism, the tendency to “perceive, understand, and interpret the world in terms of the self,” meaning they are not yet able to understand the perspective of others (Miller 53 qtd in Meece & Daniels). Further, children in the preoperational stage begin to develop an understanding of their own mind, but have limited understanding of thinking processes (Meece & Daniels 142). Looking closely at the SOL standard for third grade, there are five standards that designate success: attentive listening, ask and respond to questions, explain what has been learned, use contextual language, and increase vocabulary to talk about listening and speaking.⁴ These Oral Language communication skills all fall within Piaget’s preoperational stage in which students are not yet expected to think beyond themselves or

⁴ For a detailed look at the third (3.1) and fourth (4.1) grade SOLs that I discuss in this section, see Figure 1 in the appendix.

consider different perspectives from their own. Piaget’s theories combine well with the hierarchical model used to classify cognitive educational learning objectives developed by Benjamin Bloom, published in 1956 (Meece & Daniels 214). The hierarchy has six distinct stages that become progressively more cognitively demanding: remember→ understand→ apply→ analyze→ evaluate→ create. The *understand* stage asks students to explain ideas or concepts through description, discussion, explanation, and identification. The third grade SOLs for Oral Language fall within this *understand* stage of Bloom’s Taxonomy in that students’ primary cognitive role is to explain, summarize, and identify what has been said.

In fourth grade, educators in Virginia public schools are tasked with introducing a new strand of learning: Communication: Speaking, Listening, Media Literacy—the beginning of rhetorical education. The difference between what they do in this strand in fourth grade compared with the Oral Language strand done in kindergarten through third grade falls in line with what is known as metacognitive development in child psychology. Metacognition is thinking about thinking, or awareness of one’s own theories and opinions (Meece & Daniels 144). This type of language is reflected in the fourth grade communication SOL, showing vastly different language than the previous grade’s Oral Language strand: “seek ideas and opinions of others, use evidence to support opinions” (“English Standards” 74).⁵ Expanding the oral language strand to a more detailed understanding of communication by including media literacy challenges students to grow from the preoperational stage of cognitive development to Piaget’s concrete operational stage.

The fourth grade standards ask students to present information, contribute to discussions, seek the opinions of others, use evidence to support opinions, communicate new ideas, and

⁵ Refer to Figure 1 with special attention to the language of the 4.1 standards

demonstrate abilities to work both collaboratively and independently, all of which coincide with moving through Bloom’s Taxonomy. In the communication strand, students enter new stages of cognitive development and begin honing skills that will help them form opinions and perspectives on their way to adulthood. Not just asked to *understand* what is being said, students must *apply* information they learn to new situations by interpreting opinions and ideas of other people. Students *analyze* by drawing connections among new ideas through questioning, and they *evaluate* by justifying a stance in support of an opinion by using evidence. Students then *create* new or original work through synthesizing their opinions and evidence to develop into presentations and contributions to discussions (Meece & Daniels 224). The addition of the communications strand moves students from basic cognitive development to more advanced critical thinking skills for the rest of their education.

As students progress to middle school (grades 6-8), the Communication strand is divided into three parts: communication and collaboration with others (6.1, 7.1, 8.1), present, listen critically, and express opinions in oral presentations (6.2, 7.2, 8.2), and understanding elements of media literacy (6.3,7.3, 8.3) (“English Standards” 141, 142, 143, 166, 167, 168, 193, 194, 195). The three divisions progressively building upon the skills honed from the year before, spanning from sixth to seventh to eighth grades. In high school, though, the strand focuses on two areas per grade: 9th grade—oral presentations and media messages, 10th grade—collaboration and media messages, 11th grade—oral presentations and media influence, 12th grade—oral presentations (group or individual) and media influence (“English Standards” 220, 223, 247, 248, 268, 271). Common to all grade levels from fourth grade onward is the critical role opinions, influence, and media play in daily life. Despite the scope of the Communication strand, the actual teaching and implementing of media literacy in the curriculum is up to each

teacher. The English SOL tests do not occur every year and only explicitly cover the Reading and Writing strands, leaving the Communication strand out completely. Students take the reading SOL exam in grades 3-8 and grade 11, and they take the writing SOL in grades 8 and 11. The choice to include the Communications strand as a part of the yearly curriculum falls on individual teachers within individual departments of individual schools, but I argue it is an ethical choice that teachers and department administrators must make. In an ever-increasing digital world, media literacy can no longer be seen as separate from reading and writing literacy.

Pedagogical Ethics and Knowing Students

As teachers, the ethical obligation to our students is not to tell them *what* to think or believe, but to help “students develop an ethical approach for making decisions about *how* to believe” (Glenn 137). This reminder from rhetorician Cheryl Glenn is especially important as the communications strand in Virginia’s English standards of learning (SOLs) evolves from fourth grade through middle and high school. In sixth grade, the SOL states that students “will express personal opinions and come to understand not only differing points of view but also the differences between facts and opinions” (“English Standards” 140). The distinction between facts and opinions is one that we see debated ad nauseum on news channels or through political Twitter posts. These types of communication skills are a part of daily life in a technological world for people who are learning to not only discern between the two, but also develop their own opinions.

Within the formulation of opinions and perspectives, an educator’s ethical obligation takes root. As English teachers of communication and writing, “we are *always already* engaged in the teaching of rhetorical ethics and that the teaching of writing necessarily and inevitably

moves us into ethical reflections and decision-making” (Duffy 230, emphasis Duffy’s). In the fourth grade, when students start learning to identify their own opinions and the opinions of other people, bias begins to form. These opinions shape who our students are and how they perceive the world. As students learn to put their opinions together for the act of writing they are actively parsing their own ethical orientations. Developing an ethical attunement is a part of a student’s path to *aretê*.

The path to *aretê*, known as excellence or virtue, is done with help from a teacher or tutor, though the relationship today between teacher and student differs from the original intentions of *aretê* in Ancient Greece. Socrates tutored Plato, and Plato tutored Aristotle, but in modern society one teacher is charged with anywhere from fifteen to thirty students in a single classroom. Class-size, along with people’s varying experiences with technology, do not always guarantee that enough time is appropriately allocated to the communication strand of the English SOL, let alone media literacies. In high school, where students “develop media literacy by examining how media messages influence people’s beliefs and behaviors,” the way media influence is taught and the amount of time that is given to the subject is ultimately determined by the teacher (“English Standards” 294). This is true of any SOL strand in any classroom. Teachers must feel it as an important literacy component of the curriculum to dedicate time to its study.

Media literacy is listed as the first strand of the English SOLs for a reason: nearly all interactions with friends, family, news, consumption, and even education involve elements of digital media. That is to say, digital media use feels completely normal in 2020. Despite this normalcy, in some contexts digital media use is seen as a mere distraction—particularly in the classroom where teachers are fighting for their student’s attention. However, the English SOLs in particular allow for digital media use to be at the forefront of classroom dialogue. By

embracing and centering changes in textual consumption in an English classroom, educators are making an ethical commitment to *include* media literacy frameworks as integral pieces of a curriculum. Educational theorist Lee Shulman elaborates on the professional responsibility teachers have for what their students learn:

My point is that excellent teaching... entails an ethical and moral commitment— what I might call the “pedagogical imperative.” Teachers with this kind of integrity feel an obligation to . . . inquire into the consequences of their work with students. (Shulman).

There are ethical implications for excluding media literacy. Take online bullying as an example—in 2017, Harvard admissions revoked ten offers of acceptance for students who participated in sending each other offensive and explicit memes (Natanson). Memes are not just “for fun,” but can expose the ethos of the person sending the images—the meme is a proxy for how the sender feels and thinks about a subject. The people held accountable for the racist and sexually explicit memes were not the creators, but the propagators. Memes are a new form of text that carry weight and real-life consequences for pedagogical *aretê*. For the journey toward excellence in English education to be successful, teachers must understand how and with what forms of digital media students are interfacing.

Getting to know students is therefore an integral part of media education. While going to university tends to be a choice, attending K-12 schooling is compulsory for most students—they have to be there. Knowledge about students’ cultural background and digital literacy is a necessary condition for achieving *aretê* in terms of rhetorical media literacy. We don’t know, for example, who is getting enough food each day, who has a place to sleep at night, who wrote a #MeToo post, and the list goes on. To think intersectionally about students is to reveal “the multiplicity of positions that coexist in any classroom” (Glenn 131).

Conclusion

Duffy asks English educators to define teaching argument “as the teaching of claims, proofs, and counterarguments, [where] we are necessarily and inevitably engaged . . . in practices of ethical deliberation” (238). Claims, he suggests, are invitations to make sense of something: proofs ask students to hold themselves accountable to providing evidence. Additionally, when we teach students to include counterarguments they are “considering seriously opinions, facts or values that contradict their own, . . . we are asking students to inhabit the perspective of The Other and to open themselves to the doubts and contradictions that attach to any worthwhile question” (238). Argument and research papers essentially ask students to persuade within a set of evolving ethical parameters. Facilitating situations where students are asked to focus on the validity of claims, the accountability of proofs, while demonstrating empathy and open-mindedness in counterarguments guides students to consider the ethics of their persuasion. By giving them the tools to understand how ethics are a part of good, sound argumentation, students will be able to notice when others are not following the same guidelines or even if they themselves are being misled.

At the beginning of this chapter I recounted the story of Lauren Batchelder, Donald Trump, and the harm that can come from weaponized communication. Since his medium of choice is Twitter, Trump weaponizes the affordances of social media platforms to enact his verbal violence. The adage “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me,” contrasts the harm children would experience with physical violence with the effects of verbal violence, in hopes to minimize the effects of language (Gerdes 14). Rhetorician Kendall Gerdes underscores that “words—and images, and symbols—can and do hurt;” indeed, weaponized communication can lead to real life threats and harm (14). An implied benefit of teaching towards *aretê* and ethical rhetoric is that students will become used to being held

accountable for the things they say while encouraged to consider differing points of view. Naming the tools, as Miller suggests, involves knowing the types of fallacious appeals that weaponized communication rely upon. Naming the tools can make it easier to hold these types of leaders, dynamics, and systems accountable. Encouraging students to seriously consider counterarguments and points of view from which they are not familiar creates at best impartial and observant citizens, and at worst it teaches students to be receptive and amenable to ideas other than their own.

A call to action for more media education as a response to demagoguery or prevailing politics is not new, but there is an urgency to understand how demagoguery functions differently as we get deeper into the twenty-first century than it did even thirty years ago. The small-scale demagoguery that has come to characterize digital landscapes is new territory in the US because digital citizenship on social media networks are relatively new territory considering Myspace, LinkedIn, Friendster (now defunct) began in 2003, Facebook in 2004, Twitter in 2006, Instagram in 2010, Snapchat in 2011, TikTok in 2016, with more on the horizon. A rhetorical media literacy pedagogy responds to the social media enclaves of identity-driven discourse that occur naturally within such online platforms. Preparing younger generations of students to think about digital spaces in critical and rhetorically sensitive ways is necessary for achieving *areté* in 2020.

CHAPTER 2

Misogyny and Rhetorical Listening in Writing Center Pedagogy

In an online article for *Vox* during the 2016 presidential election campaign, journalist Ezra Klein sought to uncover what he calls “the Gap” in Hillary Clinton’s campaign. “The Gap,” he explains, is the disconnect between: 1) the people who work or have worked for Clinton, 2) their absolute trust, admiration, and loyalty to her, 3) the people who have to vote her into office, their distrust, uncertainty, and dislike of her. Klein interviewed dozens of current and former Clinton “staffers, colleagues, friends, and foes” by beginning each discussion with roughly the same question: “What is true about the Hillary Clinton you’ve worked with that doesn’t come through on the campaign trail?” (Klein). Outwardly, this seems like a difficult question to respond to—if the answer was clear, then wouldn’t there be a way to overcome this invisible disconnect? But the answers Klein received were consistent and simple: “she really listens to you” (Klein). She listens.

As a line of inquiry or subfield within rhetoric and composition studies, listening is rarely explicitly taught or even theorized. English exams and standardized tests focus on reading and writing, described by rhetorician Krista Ratcliffe as “the dominant tropes for interpretive invention,” with speaking placing “a respectable third” and listening running “a poor, poor fourth” (*Rhetorical Listening* 18). Treating reading and writing as dominant tropes disregards the importance of listening in rhetoric and composition classrooms. Rhetorical listening is, in fact, “a trope for interpretive invention” because it initiates a stance of openness to listen for potential identification movement among any cultural category (age, class, nationality, history, religion, politics) or any cultural position (parent/child, patient/doctor, clergy/parishioner, teacher/student) (17). However, Clinton’s penchant for listening, for being known by her peers, allies, and even

enemies as an adept listener, did not garner accolades from the public. Her openness, characterized by her listening, was neither seen nor heard when the time came to vote her into presidential office in 2016.

Clinton's loss to Donald Trump in 2016 was in part due to a majority 47% of white women who voted for Trump instead of Clinton (43%) despite his "long history of misogyny, sexual assault, and harassment" (Pew Research Center; Manne 15).¹ Philosopher Kate Manne suggests white women actually prop up the misogyny of the most powerful white men, which does "disproportionate damage of one kind: moral damage" (15). Manne's explanation of misogyny begins with white men and women because it feeds directly into the moral problems of misogyny faced by more vulnerable women—those of other races, trans, and otherwise less privileged (15). To understand the function of misogyny that does moral damage, Manne gives an apt distinction between two definitions of misogyny. The first, what she calls the "naïve conception," is a dictionary-definition-style understanding of the concept wherein "misogyny is primarily a property of individual misogynists who are prone to hate women qua women... either universally or generally" (18). In this definition, misogynists fit a specific psychological profile of bigotry. For the second, Manne explains that misogyny should be understood as the "system that operates within a patriarchal social order to police and enforce women's subordination and to uphold male dominance" (33). Misogyny is not isolated to any one person, but is rather a "political phenomenon" of a culture that remains ideologically patriarchal (33). In other words, Clinton's loss in 2016 points to the deep-rooted patriarchy of the U.S. electorate.

Clinton's approach to political candidacy has been noticeably different from that of any

¹ Immediately following the 2016 election, many exit polls (NYTimes, CNN) cited the white woman vote for Trump as 52-53%, an overwhelming majority. This was the narrative at the time of Manne's writing published in December 2017. The Pew Research Center released a more comprehensive analysis in August 2018, clarifying the numbers to reflect a more accurate validated voter profile post-2016 election.

other in the national spotlight. In 1999, during her campaign for the New York state senate, she went on what she called a listening tour. She did this again during the 2016 campaign. These tours were not the Town Hall political showcases we typically see from male presidential candidates because Clinton took notes and listened to the concerns of the people she hoped to represent. By listening, she was able to take action—invention occurred because she listened and, by association, was silent, allowing for others to take up space. Listening and silence work in tandem, and as such both have “long been gendered ‘feminine,’ as a lamentable essence of weakness because speaking out has long been the gendered signal of masculinity” (Glenn *Silence and Listening* 4). Clinton’s behavior did not fit into the presidential mold because of her distinctly feminine approach to the presidential race, which was sharply different from her male opponent.

The responsibility to listen or be silent is an expectation for women, but when the expectation is performed on a national scale for a job of prestige and power (the presidency), the expectation is questioned. The Gap that Klein refers to, where one side sees Clinton’s listening as a positive and the other perceives it as if Clinton has something to hide, exposes a cultural and gendered double standard, which rhetorician Cheryl Glenn troubles by claiming that silence can actually “be a deliberative, positive choice” (Glenn *Rhetorical Feminism* 172). Silence can create space for others to join a conversation, just as rhetorical listening can lead to action. But listening and silence are weighted with cultural gender norms, particularly feminine norms of attentiveness where women are *expected* to listen or be silent as decorum. According to Manne, there are norms of feminine attentiveness: “when women are supposed to give everyone around them personal care and attention, or else they risk seeming nasty, mean, unfair, and callus” (266). These norms are rampant in public discourse perceptions—men and women are perceived

fundamentally differently according to associations of responsibilities. Essentially, a woman's responsibility is to be attentive, otherwise there are social consequences. The paradox with Clinton occurs because she both listens and acts—her rhetorical listening approach leads to action in the male-centered patriarchal stratum of government. This paradox, in turn, causes suspicion.

If a male candidate is seen listening in a position of openness, “*his* behavior seems normal, unremarkable, business as usual,” but the same does not hold true for female candidates—“her doing the same thing makes us wonder: what is she hiding?” (Manne 270). Manne points out that the gendered split perception of behavior works on a national scale. When reading about Clinton's approach to campaigning, it is hard not to scoff at the idea of listening as something unique to a female candidate. Don't all candidates listen to their constituency? In U.S. culture, however, “speaking is gendered as masculine and valued positively in a public forum while listening is gendered as feminine and valued negatively” (Ratcliffe 18). The type of listening used in political spaces is the style of listening Ratcliff characterizes as masculine: a listening “by challenging speakers to a verbal duel to determine who knows more and who is quicker on his feet” (21). Women, however, are conditioned to listen differently “by smiling nodding, asking questions, and providing encouraging verbal cues (*yes, uh huh, is that right?, hmmm*)” (Ratcliffe 21). Thus, a woman's *style* of listening, particularly on a national level, is considered suspicious because it is not directly antagonistic. Clinton engaged in the verbal sparring performance during debates, but she took a different approach of rhetorical listening during her individual tours.

For Hillary Clinton, the exigence for her listening tours was to create new, helpful policies by listening with intentional openness to her constituents. Laurie Rubiner, Clinton's

legislative director from 2005 to 2008, told Klein of a time she was asked to block out two hours on the calendar for “card-table time.” Alongside two card tables, two huge suitcases were opened to reveal newspaper clippings, position papers, and random scraps. On her tours and travels, Clinton stuffed notes from her conversations and readings into the suitcases to be organized and picked through with her staff every few months. According to Rubiner, these notes “really did lead to legislation” because she took these conversations seriously and made her team follow up (Klein). Clinton’s campaign to fight opiate addiction, for example, the first and most comprehensive of the candidates in the 2016 presidential campaign, was the direct result of hearing about the issue on her tour (Klein). By listening rhetorically with openness to Other identities, Clinton enacted interpretive invention through legislative moves.

Rhetorical listening is a feminist approach to leadership and mentoring, one that combats misogyny head on by denying force, prioritizing other points of view, and demonstrating care. Rhetorical listening rebuffs the persistence of misogynist interactions and hierarchy. Like demagoguery, misogyny functions on an everyday level that is impactful on a global scale. Through the ongoing threat of various types of punishment, misogyny operates implicitly through gendered perceptions and expectations for feminine performances. Such implicit preservations of misogyny normalize the internalization of misogyny, leading to serious damage. In the sections that follow, I craft the arete necessary to address the insidious and widespread nature of contemporary misogyny. I craft this arete by drawing from what writing centers can teach us about feminist spaces, mentoring, and feminine styles of rhetorical listening.

Feminist *Aretê*

In the introduction, I discussed the concept of *aretê* in Homer’s *Iliad* where Achilles was trained by Chiron and Phoenix—here, through Homer, the mythos of mentoring began. He

continues his exposition of mentoring in his second epic, *Odyssey*, where a woman, the Greek goddess Athena, serves as the original model for mentoring as we know it in practice today. Athena, goddess of both wisdom and warfare, transforms herself into Mentor, a close and trusted friend to Odysseus. During her transformation, she advises Odysseus' son, Telemachus, to set out on a quest to find his long-missing father. Athena-as-Mentor instructs Telemachus on whom to meet, where to go, what to say, and how to behave during his quest. Through Athena-as-Mentor, the concept of mentorship and mentoring took root. This feminine version of the origins of mentorship differs from the long tradition of the master-apprentice model that was used for ages by men. Patriarchal mentoring was rooted in the service of the state for warfare and later in service of the self through philosophical and rhetorical education. But the concept of mentorship has its origins in Athena-as-Mentor, a woman.

In other words, the quest and journey towards *aretê* was shaped by a feminine mythos. I want to posit, then, that using a specifically feminist rhetorical pedagogy can reclaim mentorship towards arete as a feminine style of practice. Feminist rhetorician Cheryl Glenn itemizes three specific ways to enact feminist mentoring as a tactic of rhetorical feminism. The first is for the mentor to actively “diverge from masculinist forms of mentoring,” the second is for the mentor to acknowledge that she resides in the center, the mentee in the margins, and the third is for the mentor to create the basis for a “mutually trusting relationship” with the mentee (150). These three feminist mentoring tenants can produce arete in pedagogical contexts that continue to be limited by a white, masculinist hegemony—one that we can actively witness during national campaigns.

Nowhere is it more clear that misogyny and patriarchal expectations reign than during election seasons. To return to the example of Hillary Clinton, just why exactly was Ezra Klein's

article for Vox needed in the first place? Why did the public, or at least *Vox*'s readership, need to be told about Clinton's practice of listening and the benefits of listening? The 'question' of her likability was all news headlines seemed to be interested in leading up to the election. A quick Google search showed headlines from *The Hill*, December 2015, "Is Hillary Clinton Likable Enough," from *The Washington Post*, May 2016, "Hillary Clinton has a likability problem. Donald Trump has a likability epidemic;" and from *Time*, May 2016, "Is Hillary Clinton Likable Enough?" (Parnes; Cillizza; Newton-Small). The same types of headlines followed Elizabeth Warren during her primary campaign: from *Politico*, December 2018, "Warren Battles the Ghosts of Hillary" and from *Vox*, January 2019, referencing both Warren and Kamala Harris, "'Likability' Ratings in a Recent New Hampshire Poll Show Just How Tough Female Candidates Have It" (Korecki, Nilsen).

Female candidates are always already a threat to misogynistic systems. By choosing to approach campaigning from a stance of rhetorical listening, for instance, Hillary Clinton defied the masculinist forms of campaign structure. If we look at Clinton as a mentor, she fulfilled all three methods of Glenn's rhetorical feminist approach by actively "diverg[ing] from masculinist forms of mentoring" and carving her own, lateral approach to campaigning. By centering rhetorical listening practices, she acknowledged that her influence and power place her in the center with her constituency at the margins. Listening creates an openness that equalizes. That is, by showing interest and concern towards her constituency, she did not create a hierarchical structure that placed her at the top, but rather created a level, equal means of communication. Finally, by implementing rhetorical listening practices, Clinton was able to amplify the voices of her constituency. Card-table time allowed Clinton to move through her notes and create a plan of

action that would lead to tangible outcomes. In these ways, Clinton's feminine style of leadership actively combats large-scale misogynist influence.

Just as Hillary Clinton's use of rhetorical listening is her way of combating misogynist norms, so, too, can a rhetorical feminist pedagogy empower educators to combat the patriarchal and misogynist norms that might otherwise impede a student's quests for *aretê*. In a digital age where media perpetuates stereotypes, a feminist mentoring methodology can work in the service of individual student *aretê*. Indeed, addressing micro forms of misogyny and patriarchal control leads to bigger, large-scale effects in a digital consciousness.

In Chapter 1, I used large-scale forms of demagoguery to demonstrate an extreme, but the chapter essentially focused on how smaller forms of demagoguery normalize the structures that make large-scale demagoguery possible. Here in Chapter 2, I follow a similar structure. I identify the extreme of misogyny by beginning with the example of Hillary Clinton's use of rhetorical listening to combat political misogyny on a large-scale. What follows is a foray into how feminist rhetorical practices can combat more innocuous forms of patriarchal and misogynist control. I extend Cheryl Glenn's work on rhetorical feminism and mentorship to claim the writing center as a feminist space on a university campus, up against small-scale misogynist standard language ideology within the academy. As an outlier space, the writing center combats forms of restraint within academic language, and subsequently writing, that students are up against in university settings. Through feminist practices of mentorship and rhetorical listening the writing center becomes a refuge during a student's quest for arete.

Standard Language Ideology

Status quo bias is a preference for normalcy, the way things are, the current state of

activity. For someone with a status quo bias, the baseline of status quo is their reference point and difference from that baseline is a loss. This bias can affect small and large-scale decision making because it relies on a preference for things to stay the same or for standing by previously made choices that have worked in the past. Largely, the status quo feels safe and comfortable because it is popular, safe, and known, whereas deterrents to the status quo are considered disruptive outliers. In education, teachers often teach towards the status quo because past experiences shape teachers' views of what constitutes good teaching. A fixture in educational status quo bias is standard language ideology (SLI):

a bias toward an abstracted, idealized, homogenous spoken language which is imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions and which names as its model the written language but which is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class (Lippi-Green 67).

Language ideologies in education are formed and influenced by positioning the language of high-level education as a more advanced, complex version of English. For teachers of language, relying on the status quo for consistency is the safe, comfortable choice because SLI is an inherent part of the American mainstream—it is what is spoken on the news, radio, and television, within political, educational, professional settings. Standard language ideology has become the default status quo for how to speak as an American.

Standardized English and the idea of a standard language ideology represent a very specific and exclusive sector of the population. For my purposes, SLI is the language of the academy and associated with certain types of success. Not only is SLI the norm, but academic institutions also maintain the notion that a standard the *only* acceptable norm for writing in an academic setting. In academic settings that claim to welcome diversity in student population, there is a noticeable disconnect when considering standard language ideology in the academy and expectations for academic writing.

The patriarchal approach to academic writing within university and academic settings aligns with Manne’s definition of misogyny as a function of patriarchal social order: misogyny polices social participants in order to uphold and reinforce basic and extreme forms of dominance over women (33). The logic of this dominance similarly affects academic writing in that academic language often marginalizes Others—the perpetuation of academic language as a static, standardized set of rules furthers biases against race, socioeconomic status, and educational backgrounds. In an opinion piece published in *The New York Times*, literary theorist, scholar, and proponent of SLI, Stanley Fish claims standard English is “an instrument of power and a device for protecting the status quo” (Fish *part 3*). It is important to note, though, that Fish has made his living off of standard language ideology as a member of the status quo (a white, heterosexual male with both an elite education and an elite position of power at an array of top tier universities).

When scholars, academics, and those with power in academic settings act as though SLI is the only option for academic writing, they ignore the diverse forms students’ *areté* can take. Some thinkers seem to realize SLI might not support every student, and yet they cling to it as a dominant paradigm anyway. Stanley Fish, for example, advocates perpetuating SLI as a form of empowerment for Others:

you’re not going to be able to change the world if you are not equipped with the tools that speak to its present condition. You don’t strike a blow against a power structure by making yourself vulnerable to its prejudices (Fish).

However, this sort of reasoning is a logical fallacy, circular reasoning, in which the proposition looks like an argument, but is really just an assertion of the conclusion (Roberts-Miller 109). The evidence—*one cannot change the world*—is only valid if Fish’s conclusion is true—*one must be equipped with the standardized language tools to enact change*. Fish assumes standard English is

the *only* “tool” that can enact change upon the world, marginalizing all other dialects. This assumption “nullifies a vernacular, a personal experience, an emotion” of Fish’s audience—mentees, students—limiting productivity of the relationship between educator/mentor and student/mentee, and ultimately threatening a student’s *aretê* (Glenn 153).

In order to progress in higher education, especially through graduate school and working towards tenure, there is an assumed white, middle-class knowledge implicitly understood by enfranchised students and professors (Glenn 160). The patriarchal system of the academy does not cater well to those outside of this perceived norm. Lippi-Green elaborates that “when histories are written, they focus on the dominant class” (8).² History is written in the voice of those in power, of those with power and resources to control and distribute information. Language prejudice happens “when folks dont get no jobs or get fired or whatever cuz they talk and write Asian or black or with an Appalachian accent or sound like whatever aint the status quo” (Young 110). Language and racial difference are intertwined, according to rhetorician and language studies scholar Vershawn Ashanti Young, and both are reinforced by patriarchal ideologies that allow for only one outcome to dominate.

Standard language ideology is a problem for disrupters and outliers of the academic status quo. In particular, SLI is a problem for the feminist writing center space on university campuses. While writing centers aim to serve all students of their university campus, the students who are most likely to visit are those who do not align with the status quo. As such, the writing center, an outlier space, does not support SLI because it actively works to promote individual student voice in writing assignments through feminist mentorship and rhetorical listening.

² Lippi-Green attributes this statement to Kwame Nkrumah, former president of Ghana and father of the pan-national African movement. She says the phrase is widely paraphrased as “histories are written by the victors” (24).

Feminist Mentoring at the Writing Center

The writing center at VCU operates under the principle that students learn and think best through direct social interaction with other people. When discussing writing center operations in workshops, we explain that the consultations are collaborative: students do not come to a consultation, hand over their paper to a consultant, and wait for feedback. Rather, consultants actively engage and listen to the student. Conversation, Kenneth Bruffee claims, is “the origin of thought” because conversation stimulates reflective and critical thought. People learn in “direct social exchange with other people” (208). Learning to write and develop writing skills is optimized when it becomes part of a social thinking and learning process.

Social interaction helps writing centers define and distinguish their spaces in relation to the classroom experience. In this distinction, the writing center reflects Glenn’s feminist mentoring by actively “diverging from masculinist forms of mentoring” (150). The writing center rebuffs the hierarchical order of the classroom and the masculinist form of traditional top-down mentoring “between like-minded men of different ages” (Glenn 151). To support a student’s quest for *aretê*, feminist mentorship centers collaboration, reciprocity, and connection—all vital components that set a writing center space noticeably apart from other academic spaces on campus.

Furthering this divergence, writing centers disavow the idea of a solitary author. Where the typical classroom assignment imagines the student as a singular, solitary author, in the writing center, the student is not isolated with his or her own ideas. Rhetorician Marilyn Cooper presents the idea of “the solitary author” as someone who “sees his writing as a goal-directed piece of work, the process of producing a text” (*Ecology* 366). Educators often frame their students in these terms; even authors of composition textbooks approach their student audiences

in this way. But Cooper suggests that classes can escape the “tyranny” of the solitary author paradigm by developing an ecology of writing in “which students engage in group work, activities such as collaborative brainstorming on a topic, discussions and debates of topics or readings, writers reading their texts aloud to others, writers editing other writers’ texts” (*Ecology* 366). In fact, writing consultations demonstrate Cooper’s ecological approach because students manage their writing by talking through their writing process, their ideas, and their approach to writing. At the writing center, writing is not seen in terms of an end product, but as an active reflection, deliberation, and dialogue that precedes and coincides with the formal writing process.

By engaging with writing as a social process, the writing center consultant learns the student’s perspective about their own writing voice. Personal, authorial voice is a challenge for students to take ownership of, especially when people like Stanley Fish promote an idea that some ways of writing make students “vulnerable to prejudice” (Fish). Young enacts performance to demonstrate how standard language ideology removes all understanding of the mentee’s personal identity: “dont nobody’s language, dialect, or style make them ‘vulnerable to prejudice’... It be the way folks with some power perceive other people’s language . . . Black English dont make it own-self oppressed” (110). When it comes to standard language ideology, the people in positions of power have developed a standard to which they expect everyone to conform. But this standard is the default dialect for the people with the power—that is, those whose voice is defaulted as the norm do not experience the persecution and prejudice felt by those whose voice is othered. Marginalized students who are unfamiliar with writing in the standardized, default voice of the academy come to the writing center worried their papers do not sound good enough, smart enough, or academic enough. Through the social process of writing

consultations, writing consultant-mentors help students navigate the power dynamics of control over one's own writing voice.

Stanley Fish's opinion piece exemplifies the power of the center in that it was published by *The New York Times*, giving him an enormous audience. His articles have mainstream distribution, which in itself is powerful. When someone like Stanley Fish, who is coming from an academically privileged point of view, tells a large audience that language dialect or style is a problem, he both creates and affirms language bias' stronghold in and outside of academia, bolstering a dominant and standardized language ideology. The academy, and professors, hold similar, though smaller-scale forms power over the type of language use a student can employ. The writing center consultant-as-mentor works against these patriarchal controls.

The consultant-as-mentor holds a unique position as both being a student-peer, but also someone who understands the controls of the academy due to the nature of their position. That is, the writing consultant is privy to the controls of both worlds, navigating both the academic status quo and the outlier nature of writing centers. Thus, the consultant, as mentor, does as Glenn suggests when employing feminist mentoring. The consultant acknowledges their position as "residing in the center, the mentee in the margins," and brings the student-mentee in to the center by empowering and amplifying their voice (and control) over their own writing (Glenn *Rhetorical Feminism* 150).

When the policing of language dictates how students convey their writing, students feel disenfranchised, as if they do not have ownership over their own work. Cooper suggests writing consultants can best help students achieve agency as writers

by helping them understand how and the extent to which they are *not* owners of their texts; by helping them understand, in short, how various institutional forces impinge on how and what they write and how they can negotiate a place for their own goals and needs when faced with these forces. (*Useful Knowledge* 101)

Here, Cooper makes clear that agency in writing does not depend on ownership of the writing, but on constructing a point of view or position within the writing. This method correlates with Glenn's enhanced rhetorical feminist practice of bringing the mentee into the center on their quest for *aretê*. To achieve agency and, by default, excellence in writing, consultants help students find and negotiate the space between institutional demands and individual needs for an assignment—thus bridging the gap between center and margin. Consultants by “virtue of their constant contact with institutional constraints and with students' lived experiences,” are best positioned to empower students as agents of their own writing (*Really Useful Knowledge* 102).

The unique position of writing center consultants converges as the means for mutual learning, aligning with feminist pedagogy in an inventive way that traditional classroom interactions do not allow. Feminist mentor-consultants demonstrate their commitment to “equality of underrepresented groups and to reciprocity of engagement” as a disruption to the status quo (Glenn *Rhetorical Feminism* 150). The consultant is not a traditional authority within the patriarchal academic structure; their authority and expertise derive from other interactions with students in consultations, personal interactions with professors as a student (the consultant is an undergraduate or graduate student herself), and an engagement with the institution's function as a patriarchal system. In this way, consultants are supports for the *aretê* quest by empowering the students they meet.

Rhetorical Listening

Tutoring methods that promote mutual learning and collaboration enable invention and engagement. The student arrives with the exigence for their meeting, but despite being student-centered, the consultant's role is to provide a focus for the session based on the stage of the

writing process the student inhabits. To support students as agents of their own writing, consultants engage in the feminist practice of rhetorical listening. Just as Hillary Clinton was able to enact change by listening to her constituency, so are writing consultants better able to support the needs of their student-mentees by using rhetorical listening. Feminist pedagogical practices like rhetorical listening are well suited for writing center spaces. A rhetorical listening approach alleviates the agonistic interactions that can occur with someone on the margins of a hierarchical, patriarchal institution. The writing center, invariably, is a contact zone on the university campus where two strangers meet and engage in a way that is both amiable and generative. We can learn from this model in continuing to address agonism's legacy in both demagoguery and misogyny.

To engage with strangers productively, the goal of rhetorical listening is to enter situations with “a stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to any person, text, or culture” (Ratcliffe 17). But that “stance of openness” cannot occur without negotiating and critically interrogating “the existing (mis)perceptions about [race and gender] and their intersections” (135). That is, writing consultants must avoid exacerbating or promoting gender-blindness and color-blindness during meetings with students because these styles of engagement reinforce the status quo. For men, gender-blindness means denying the privilege that is associated with being male in U.S. culture, while for women it means accepting male privilege as normal or natural. Acceptance of misogyny makes women feel as if their existence as female is a problem that needs to be solved. In U.S. culture the same goes for white people—color-blindness means denying the privilege that comes with whiteness and also denying the differences of other races. For anyone who is not white, color-blindness means being made to feel race is a problem for she or he alone to solve (134). Had Stanley Fish acknowledged the

privilege associated with his gender and race, his *New York Times* opinion piece would have been read and received quite differently. He would have been unable to assert a dominant language ideology without recognizing and complicating the patriarchal system from which he benefits.

Within a patriarchal system, listening has both gender and racial bias. Modern gendered listening bias stems from its origins in Socratic dialogues. The rise of rhetoric in ancient Greece coincided with the already thriving agonistic culture of warfare. *Areté* was associated with physicality for the good of the state before it was associated with intellectual sparring and verbal debates. Masculine listening occurs through “verbal duels” and waiting to speak while feminine listening does not originate from the same agonism (Ratcliffe 21). A feminist approach to rhetorical listening, as we see with Clinton’s listening tours, is nurturing and generative. Racial bias in listening has a similar history to its gendered counterpart. bell hooks explains racial bias harms progress within feminist movements because white women are often unwilling “to listen to black women” (102):

Most white women dismissed us as “too angry,” refusing to reflect critically on the issues raised. By the time, white women active in the feminist movement were willing to acknowledge racism, accountability, and its impact on the relationships between white women and women of color, many black women were devastated and worn out. We felt betrayed . . . white women no show interest in racial issues. It seems at times as though white feminists working in the academy have appropriated discussions of race and racism while abandoning the effort to construct a space for sisterhood, a space where they could examine and change attitudes and behaviors toward black women and all women of color. (102-3)

An openness through listening can lead to closing divisions, healing feelings of betrayal, or opening up dialogue for change and progress. When listening is dismissed, it becomes undervalued and can be countered with aggression. The white women to whom hooks refers became accusatory and dismissive when faced with the reality of racial bias within the feminist

movement. The reinforcement of racial bias in feminism is not a problem for Black feminists to solve. The white women who were closed off to understanding the Black perspective engaged in a misogynist shut-down of rhetorical listening and intervention, leaving the issue of racial bias unacknowledged and ignored.

Understanding the implications of these blindness biases are integral to the writing center's continued role as a feminist contact zone on campus. Glenn's method of enhanced feminist mentoring explains mentors are "fluent in the use of rhetorical concepts, practices, and deliveries, especially in the power of dialogue, silence, and listening to enhance any rhetorical transaction" (150). Mentors must make mutually trusting relationships with mentees, connections that inform mentor and mentee of each other's views and experiences. A shared commitment to understanding each other's point of view stems from rhetorical listening—it is really the only way to effectively support a student's quest to *aretê*. Too often the academy will assume a certain level of comfort in an academic space, even assuming an investment in the patriarchal status quo. But students gain agency through expression of their own identity (their gender, their race, their voice, their cultural capital) in their own way— at the writing center, student empowerment occurs when modes of writing and speaking beyond standard language ideology are not diminished. Gender and race are parts of a student's identity, carried with them at all times. Writing center scholar Harry Denny refers to these pieces of identity as "cultural capital" that doesn't "translate easily for us in the academy" (103). Rhetorical listening practices support bringing awareness to gender and racial bias and difference. In consultations, it is possible to actually hear difference and promote productive communication cross-culturally.

Conclusion

Trust is not easily cultivated. In the first chapter, I explored how social media influencers cultivate trust with their following to supplant the personal relationships that are built through friendship. In our current digital age, students engage in mentorship through networks, whether face to face mentorship, like at the writing center, or online in digital spaces, or a combination of the two. In a 2014 study, social scientists studied traditional adult-youth mentoring programs and their use of social media in developing relationships. The study showed “media use does not seem to detract from the closeness and quality of face-to-face mentoring relationships, but may actually supplement and strengthen them” (Schwartz 212). That is, in rhetorical feminist mentoring practice, social media can enhance the collaboration and connection between mentor and mentee. In a social digital network, students achieve *aretê* by finding exemplars to serve as mentors.

One path to *aretê* does not look the same for everyone, but achieving *aretê* hinges on finding a mentor or exemplar as a part of the journey. Rhetorician John Gallagher explains “certain kinds of people, namely exemplars, illustrate” qualities that lead to happiness in classical virtue ethics (380). In order to enact virtue ethics, especially within academia, a student must find someone who exemplifies virtues that foster their *aretê*. Using Twitter, for example, a mentor acts as an exemplar for how academics should write, behave, and interact on a widespread, public social media platform. Ethics philosopher Linda Zagzebski characterizes exemplars as “those persons who are most imitable, and they are most imitable because they are most admirable” (52). Using social media platforms for professional exposure and connection can be extremely intimidating to new scholars, particularly if their social media use in the past has been mostly between family and friends. Navigating the online world with a professional

lens is quite different, but a digitally-versed rhetorical feminist mentor can model a healthy social media presence that can lead to fruitful benefits.

Academic Twitter, a hashtag (#AcademicTwitter) that scholars use on Twitter's platform to signify an in-group of those involved in higher-education, encourages collaboration and discussion between academics and scholars. Twitter is no longer an optional service for most academics, but a means to furthering scholarship, announcing employment opportunities, sharing work (and in-turn finding collaborators for work), and joining in on conversations beyond the norm at one's own institution. For mentor-mentee relationships, Twitter can act as a way to practice feminist mentoring. To bring mentees *in* to the center that the mentor occupies, the mentor can tag or post accomplishments of the mentee. For example, if a mentee gives a conference presentation, the mentor can celebrate the mentee's success online, while also promoting the mentee to a new group of academics who might take interest in her scholarship. Further, the mentee might write a tweet about a cause she is interested in, alerting the mentor to an aspect of the mentee that had been previously unknown. In this way Twitter can act as a mediated form of rhetorical listening in a mentoring relationship.

The Academic Twitter network functions as an exemplar for achieving *aretê*. The hashtag #AcademicTwitter brings scholars together to inform the community at large about their research—a tool for networking in academia that is hard to match face-to-face. Increasingly, Twitter usage has become a must-have for those on the job market with one's Twitter handle as important to a CV as an email address. The Academic Twitter network enables users to share content that fits within an intellectual and personal brand, positioning oneself as an exemplar of their field. In this way, Academic Twitter-as-exemplar facilitates the quest for *aretê*, leading

mentees to configure the professional and personal in a public forum by learning from the collective network.

CODA

Post-Truth and Social Media

The need for rhetorical media literacy is more urgent than ever as reliance on social media networking and connections becomes intertwined with everyday life in the U.S. While there was much to be learned from the 2016 election, as digital citizens we can consider the ways we use social media as part of our daily lives. It's important for young people to think critically about how they choose to use social media, but it's also important for those of us who did not grow up with social media platforms at our fingertips to become more educated and sensitive about what we consume online, particularly when considering political use of social media. For online-based political marketing, campaigns cull thousands of pieces of data on just one individual. This data tells a campaign marketer an individual's demographics and interests that enables a political campaign to mimic the type of concerns that would be discussed by friends in targeted advertising. Trust built between friends is a commodity that political campaigns hope to emulate because a friend's endorsement of a political candidate represents more than just an affinity for the candidate. Endorsing a candidate on the Facebook platform aligns the friend (or family member) with the candidate's views and opinions, and serves as a signal of the friend's personal set of virtues. Often one friend's set of virtues impact those of another friend. How people use and navigate social media speaks directly to how personal virtues are formed, how one pursues *aretê*, and how one might influence the *aretê* quest of others.

There are forces along the quest to *aretê* that can mislead and persuade under the guise of being an exemplar. Political advertising campaigns are one such force. Like social media influencers, political campaigns hope to sell an ideal that ultimately does not benefit a person's pursuit of *aretê*, despite acting as a trusted exemplar. Political campaigns fuel constituencies'

allegiance to an in-group for the benefit of the political candidate the campaign represents. Online political marketing campaigns in particular are created to bring in members (or solidify membership) to the political in-group while ostracizing others to an out-group. On social media platforms like Facebook, campaign advertisements can home in on target audiences. This attention to specific, targeted groups of people is called micro-targeting. By compiling data points with the types of people who comprise their constituency, campaign advertising targets specific sub-groups of the larger in-group following. Republican National Committee officials say they have “invested over \$300 million into their data operation since [the 2012 election] and have collected roughly 3,000 data points on every voter in the country in a system jointly owned by the Trump campaign and the RNC” (Broderick). Three thousand data points on each individual person is an enormous amount of information and enables campaigns to micro-target specific types of voters.

The large amount of data tells campaign marketers how to tweak their messages based on more than location and gender—with three thousand data points marketers speak directly to specific people to enact an agenda. Micro-targeted advertising allows candidates to cater to smaller demographics of people with personalized messaging as if they were a friend, mentor, or exemplar. In an article for *The Atlantic*, McKay Coppins explains the advantages of micro-targeted ads:

An ad that calls for defunding Planned Parenthood might get a mixed response from a large national audience, but serve it directly via Facebook to 800 Roman Catholic women in Dubuque, Iowa, and its reception will be much more positive.

A specific ad created for a specific group of people feels small at first. How do 800 people make or break an election? The strategy, though, is to reach small groups of people hundreds and thousands of times over. The small forms of persuasion, coaxing, whispering from a candidate

who speaks directly to an in-group are not isolated events. From June to November 2016, Trump’s campaign dominated the Facebook advertising market, running 5.9 million ads compared to Hillary Clinton’s 66,000 (Frier). The onslaught of advertising does more than validate in-group supporters—it also seeks to ostracize those in the out-group.

Micro-targeted advertising in this way is partially responsible for voter suppression—a tactic used to shrink an opposing electorate rather than expand a constituency base. This is a part of the ploy to solidify in-group membership rather than trying to create more in-group members. It is easier to reinforce beliefs than it is to convert someone’s beliefs. During Trump’s 2016 campaign, strategists created ads using clips from 1996 when Hillary Clinton called some African American males “super predators” during a speech delivered at Keene State University (CSPAN). These ads were created specifically to discourage black voters from showing up to the polls (Green). Persuasion in the noise of millions of advertisements becomes less about concentrating on new ideas and more about motivation through confirmation bias. If Trump’s campaign can convince an African American population in Florida that Hillary Clinton is/was/has always been a racist, then the motivation to vote for her or Trump (who has also said racist things) eliminates the need or desire to vote in the first place. The feeling of hopelessness when comparing candidates is disorienting for voters and obstructs an *aretê* quest. Sowing confusion is more likely to benefit political campaigns than taking the time to negotiate with dissenting voices from an out-group.

An abundance of information and advertising—advertising that is meant to satisfy and confirm one’s in-group membership and identity—can be disorienting. Trump’s social media coordinator Brad Parscale is responsible for Trump’s campaign tactics to shut down “dissenting voices . . . to harness the democratizing power of social media . . . [by] using a megaphone to

drown [them] out” (Coppins). Journalist Peter Pomerantsev calls this “censorship through noise” (27). The “noise” is mass amounts of information that cause people to question what they consider to be true, or to just not care anymore about whether information is true in the first place. A candidate's political narrative can be one of fact or fiction. According to a political science study, exposure to fact-checking may reduce misperceptions among supporters of political candidates, but it will not necessarily change a voter’s mind about whom to support (Nyhan 4). Matters of fact, therefore, are less important than in-group identity confirmation.

While the creators of the advertisements are one part of the information overload that exists on personal social media news feeds and dashboards, the second part is those who share the information. The reason why three thousand data points are needed to target one small group of people is because cultivating trust is hard. Advertising on Facebook works because the platform is set up as a network of friends and family members where trust is implicit. A friend or family member who shares a political advertisement post for Trump, for example, is acknowledging their support for Trump, sharing with their followers a badge of in-group membership to the ideology of Trump’s persona. It is easier to unfollow or hide posts of said family member if you disagree—just as it is easier to like or share the post if you agree—than it is to express disgust with the advertisement’s narrative in the comments. Unfollowing and hiding posts from people with opposing opinions is a way to manage the chaos of information. But this also signifies one’s personal virtues. What does it mean to *not* engage with differing opinions? What does it mean if I confront? What does it mean for my *areté* quest to hide or unfollow those with whom I disagree? What does it mean for me to keep the people I disagree with visible on my newsfeed? Journalist Sean Illing suggests that by leaning more into the “narratives that strip the world of its complexity” we reinforce our biases, creating a narrower and more isolated echo

chamber (“Post-truth Prophets”). Social media use, in the beginning of what will be a long history of online political campaigning, asks users to confront their personal virtues head on. Do I want to live in a bubble of my own making on social media? Do I want to create an isolated echo chamber or is part of my *aretê* journey opening myself up to differing views? *Aretê* is not a simple, straight line, and the challenges presented by digital media persuasion complicate the quest.

Rhetorical media literacy education is a step towards building an awareness of *how* we are using social media. Our social media platform of choice reflects a personalized narrative of our identity. Both who one follows and who one does not follow reflect who a person is and who a person wants to be—we’re “authors of our own universes” (Illing). There is value in acknowledging one’s own confirmation bias in constructing a social media echo chamber. When a writer creates a universe, she knows the confines of that world—she knows what will make that world prosper and she knows what types of villains would disrupt the peace of her created universe. Political campaign advertisements that micro-target seek to undermine individuals personal, created universes. Armed with millions of dollars and thousands of data points, political demagogues want to creep in and disrupt personalized digital ecosystems. The existence of personalized social media echo chambers is not going anywhere—with each new iteration of social networking applications, the reality of their longevity becomes more clear. Rhetorical media literacy is a defense against the intruders of our created universes. By arming ourselves with awareness of the noise and of bias, it becomes more possible to fortify an attack or a barrier against the interlopers on the quest to *aretê*.

APPENDIX

Third Grade: “Oral Language”	Fourth Grade: “Communication: Speaking Listening, Media Literacy”
<p>Standard 3.1: The student will use effective communication skills in group activities.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Listen attentively by making eye contact, facing the speaker, asking questions, and summarizing what is said. Ask and respond to questions from teachers and other group members. Explain what has been learned. Use language appropriate for context. Increase listening and speaking vocabularies. 	<p>Standard 4.1: The student will use effective oral communication skills in a variety of settings.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Present accurate directions to individuals and small groups. Contribute to group discussions across content areas. Seek ideas and opinions of others. Use evidence to support opinions. Use grammatically correct language and specific vocabulary to communicate ideas. Communicate new ideas to others. Demonstrate the ability to collaborate with diverse teams. Demonstrate the ability to work independently.
<p>Understanding the Standard (Teacher Notes):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The intent of this standard is that students will communicate effectively during discussions in group settings. Students will interact with group members by asking and responding to questions and explaining what has been said or learned. Teacher should provide opportunities for students to develop skills for both speaking (expressive) and listening (receptive) vocabulary (e.g., have one student read a paragraph that is rich in descriptive detail aloud to a partner or group of students. Those students then draw the scene as they listen.). 	<p>Understanding the Standard (Teacher Notes):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The intent of this standard is that students will continue to develop the skills needed to communicate in a variety of settings. Students will strengthen their communication skills by contributing to individual and small-group discussions, seeking the ideas and opinions of others and beginning to use evidence to support their own personal opinions. Students will also refine the skill of conveying accurate directions to individuals or small groups in such a way that others can follow the directions. Emphasis will be on directions for doing things that have a natural sequence or organization.
<p>Essential Understandings:</p> <p>All students should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participate effectively in group activities by using language appropriate for the context and by taking turns in conversations and moving group discussions forward. Increase listening and speaking vocabularies. 	<p>Essential Understandings:</p> <p>All students should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participate effectively in discussions by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asking clarifying questions; Providing explanations when necessary; Reflecting on the ideas and opinions of others; Supporting opinions with examples and details Demonstrate an ability to work independently and in small groups.

Figure 7. Virginia SOLs Comparison of 3.1 and 4.1

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