UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

PROCEDURAL FEMINISM AND SLOW ARGUMENT:

THE VALUE OF LISTENING IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By
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Norman, Oklahoma
2017

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PROCEDURAL FEMINISM AND SLOW ARGUMENT:
THE VALUE OF LISTENING IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION

A THESIS APPROVED FOR
THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

BY

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Abstract

This essay argues that program-wide curriculum planning can benefit from feminist practices that have come from the past decade's feminist rhetorical theory, such as Krista Ratcliffe's work on rhetorical listening and the methods Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch offer in *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizon for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literary Studies*. Because first-year composition is a site in which theory and practice come into contact with thousands of diverse students each year, feminist theory must be embedded within curricula rather than the subject matter students engage, so as to avoid overtly ideological classrooms that may cause strong student resistance. To keep student interest at the center of their writing while maintaining a feminist classroom that takes feminist revisions to rhetoric seriously, the article suggests distilling feminist theory and implementing it through major writing assignments and daily activities. Rather than write about feminist issues, students employ feminist practices to investigate their own lives, beliefs, and interests. Using the University of Oklahoma's 2016 curriculum, the essay explores specific major writing assignments in depth, pulling out the ways that straight-forward assignment prompts can ask students to employ meaty theoretical concepts without any familiarity to the concept itself, to demonstrate what procedural feminism may look like in real-world classrooms.

Introduction

Within classrooms and scholarship alike, feminist compositionists and rhetoricians have found ways to use feminist theory and practices as sites of subversion, seeking out ways to disrupt traditional models of writing and rhetoric that are stifling to both scholarship and students in the classroom. Susan Jarratt explains that "both feminist studies and post-current-traditional composition studies . . . seek to transform styles of thinking, teaching, and learning rather than reproduce stultifying traditions" (*Introduction* 3). Shari Stenberg adds to Jarratt's argument, explaining that "within both Composition and feminist scholarship . . . you are likely to find projects that value revision of classrooms, institutional politics, and knowledge practices" (3). In 2010, Krista Ratcliffe and Rebecca Rickly released their edited volume *Performing Feminism and Administration in Rhetoric and Composition Studies* that moved feminist conversations from the composition classroom to writing program administration more broadly, demonstrating the myriad ways writing program administrators have employed feminist principles throughout the academy to disrupt and replace masculinist practices.[i] I argue that program-wide curriculum planning can benefit from feminist practices as well, but because first-year composition is a site in which theory and practice come into contact with thousands of students each year (rather than the handful of students more specialized English courses do), feminism must be embedded within curricula rather than the subject matter students engage. In her article "Rhetoric on the Edge of Cunning," Karen Kopelson notes the way overt ideological teaching, especially from marked teachers, can create a shield of resistance even the most thoughtful pedagogical approaches cannot penetrate. To avoid this kind of student resistance while maintaining

a feminist classroom that takes feminist revisions to rhetoric seriously, I suggest distilling certain feminist rhetorical practices and implementing them through major writing assignments and daily activities. Rather than write about feminist issues, students employ practices feminist scholars have offered to investigate their own lives, beliefs, and interests. In other words, students do not study feminism; rather, they enact it. In this way, administrators and faculty can 'make theory work' in the classroom while circumventing certain forms of student resistance.

In the following, I lay out moves that take up what I refer to as "procedural feminism." I call this use of feminism "procedural" because feminist practices structure the classroom, and students ultimately employ them in their own thinking and writing, but the moves that both teachers and students make are never called by name, nor are feminisms a topic of classroom discussion. Like Kopelson's performance of neutrality, which acts in service of loftier, disruptive goals that slyly move students into deep analyses of self and Other, procedural feminism keeps feminist goals at the core of the classroom without asking students to engage in feminist theory in direct ways.[ii]. When feminist revisions of rhetorical practices become the lynchpin of curricular development, students come to a deeper understanding of their place in the world, as well as their relation to others within it. The theory guides instructional practices rather than the subject of the class.

Drawing on methods introduced by Krista Ratcliffe and Gesa Kirsch and Jacqueline Jones Royster, I move what I view as some of our most critical theoretical work directly into the composition classroom, which in many cases may be a student's only exposure to rhetorical education. Shirley Rose and Irwin Weiser have noted that

there is indeed "a critical importance of individual WPAs recognizing the extent to which their work is and must be theoretical" (2). But that theory must be distilled to be effective and meaningful to both non-expert instructors teaching first-year composition courses and the students they teach. In procedural feminism, writing program administrators embed feminist practices into learning goals and writing assignments, as teachers use feminist practices that have been built into the course to guide writing instruction. The theoretical remains in the background, guiding *how* we teach rather than *what* we teach, so as to avoid an overtly ideological classroom that may slight student inquiry and writing instruction. The academy has been targeted, after all, as a bastion of extreme liberalism, accused of brainwashing students to think and feel as their liberal professors do, and punishing those students who do not take on the voice of the liberal academy, so to speak.[iii] To make general education courses sites of overt ideology stokes the flames of these erroneous arguments; it also risks driving a wedge between teachers and conservative students, which may create a host of pedagogical problems. We can use theory to be effective teachers of critical, ethical, and inclusive thinking and writing when we strategically employ feminism, weaving it into assignments and taking theory to task as we teach and listen to our students. We can also allow students on any end of the political spectrum to thoughtfully engage with subjects relevant to their lives as we make theory work.

The problem of instructor interest taking precedence over student inquiry is not a new issue in the field. Maxine Hairston has argued vehemently against courses that hold political agendas, claiming that instructors that limit student writing to a predetermined theme (e.g. capitalism, gender, race, etc.) have a tendency to "put dogma

before diversity, politics before craft, ideology before critical thinking, and the social goals of the teacher before the educational needs of the student" (180). In *Professing and Pedagogy,* Stenberg also calls attention to the issue that social visions tend to overshadow instruction in the composition classroom when critical theory becomes the focus of student assignments. For example, a first-year composition course may closely resemble a gender theory course as feminist compositionists ask students to engage feminist issues as major writing assignments, thus intellectually abandoning those students who have no opinion what-so-ever about feminist issues. As an assistant director of first-year composition, I have read student complaints about this very problem in end-of-the-semester student evaluations when the program allowed thematic approaches to writing. These complaints demonstrate to me that bringing feminism directly into general education courses may do more harm than good, for both students and our feminist goals, because the curriculum may sever students from their own interests. Procedural feminism allows students to choose topics relevant to them so their concerns remain the focus of their writing. They use feminist strategies, however, to move them into thinking about those concerns in different ways, which I will explain in depth below. The goals are feminist; the topics about which students write are not, unless students already are interested in gender-based inquiry.

Because I believe strongly that theory is stagnant until it does real work outside of small academic circles, my argument hinges on what feminist theory may look like in real-world classrooms, void of lexis and opaque language that confounds rather than clarifies for students new to the university. Theory, then, must necessarily come second to its practice. The following are some ways I suggest using theory within first-year

writing curriculum that achieves feminist goals without creating a feminist theory course. In each section, I explore a specific major writing assignment in depth, pulling out the ways that a straight-forward assignment prompt can ask students to employ meaty theoretical concepts without any familiarity to the concept itself. To weave feminist theory into writing programs, the author(s) of curricula possess a deep understanding of the theory they employ, and then move that expertise into learning goals, assignments, and activities that draw out certain moves without explicitly addressing complex theories or using a discipline-specific lexis. Distillation in this case calls for critical attention to both theory and student needs simultaneously, as the curriculum moves dense theory into real-world practices and writing instruction. Students will (and must) recognize moves they make, but they may not necessarily recognize them as feminist practices specifically.

What is important is that students learn what motivates their actions so that they may obtain critical distance between themselves and their own thinking and cultural logics. From this critical distance, they may better see themselves (and others) and begin to recognize and unpack their privileges and disadvantages. The way students engage their subjects relies on a feminist hope that people will work to see what is unseen, and in doing so begin to treat all others horizontally rather than vertically. In this instance, feminist rhetorical practices act as a tool to unite people with their audiences, emphasizing within that connection both commonalities and differences as we urge students to think of writing and the world in feminist ways.

The University of Oklahoma's first-year writing curriculum, which consists of back-to-back 1000 level courses titled English 1113 and English 1213, offers a tangible

example of what procedural feminism may look like. I want to note that, to begin with, the very process of writing the curriculum was collaborative, and it also valued student voices. Roxanne Mountford, Director of First-Year Composition at OU, joined her three graduate research assistants (myself and two other assistant directors of First-Year Composition) at a round table in her office for weekly meetings. Together we hammered out a brand-new curriculum that would excite students and also help them become ethical and able participators in public discourses. The co-author of "The Mount Oread Manifesto on Rhetorical Education 2013," Mountford is a rhetorician who works closely with Communications, as she believes speaking is critical to rhetorical education and the first-year composition classroom. We started from a foundation of her vision of the first-year composition sequence molding new college students into responsible public citizens, capable of recognizing rhetorical moves and practicing effective rhetoric for the public good. Week after week, the curriculum changed. After countless hours of brainstorming, writing, and revising, we realized that an effective way to get the curriculum to do the work we wanted was to base it on an analysis of values. By making values a focus of the course sequence, the curriculum had the potential to make the students' and their subjects' cultural logics, or as Ratcliffe explains, a "way of reasoning that is shared within a culture" (10), visible. Suddenly, the way they approached their topics and arguments would have to shift, as argument in this kind of curriculum called for serious engagement in self-reflection before any persuasion could take place. Before taking sides or positing solutions, students would have to consider nuance, and that nuance itself would be the focus of their writing.

As we worked to build a curriculum that positioned students in the public realm, I began to notice something else about the course arcs we were creating and the assignments we penned together. We were also making feminist moves as we broke down the divide between the public and the private and privileged listening over speaking in the rhetorical situation, the latter of which often emphasizes the speaker and her/his ability to persuade. These moves push students to think, research, and write in new, feminist ways—ways that demand slowing down and paying close attention to what is easily missed when we are too hasty. I argued for an approach to one assignment that didn't just ask students to consider another side to their argument and to compromise (the Rogerian argument) but rather to listen for "the way other struggling voices are drown out . . . in specific communication contexts where the dominant discourse is well represented" (Jarratt "Feminism and Composition" 108). Through an analysis of values, we created a curriculum that makes a number of thoughtful moves to get students to consider rhetorical situations in different, more inclusive ways without ever knowing they are indeed applying feminist theory to their work. The very parameters of the assignments push students to think and write about themselves and the world around them in new ways—ways that encourage understanding over conquering.

As we worked, we refused to make theory a topic of study—the curriculum was purposefully crafted to avoid discipline-specific language that may distract students from the writing task at hand. Rather than grappling with vocabulary or dense theoretical concepts, we wanted our students to grapple with critical thinking, research, and writing strategies. We also wanted them to do it in a way that challenged many

assumptions they likely carried into the classroom about how research and writing work. In my view, the third assignment for our first course seemed drawn from Ratcliffe's rhetorical listening and Royster and Kirsch's critical imagination, strategic contemplation, and social circulation, and so I worked to bring these concepts into everyday language so that students could employ them. The following are those assignments and a detailed description of the theory at work behind the learning and writing goals.

Writing Values/Blurring the Public and Private Divide

In their work, Royster and Kirsch explain the power strategic contemplation—a purposeful meditative engagement with research and research subjects—possesses to "call for a greater attention to lived, embodied experiences," which they believe are a "powerful yet often-neglected source of insight, inspiration, and passion" (22). Although this practice is intended to create deeper and more thoughtful engagements with external research subjects, it can be just as powerful a tool when used to investigate personal relationships to others and the world, especially within first-year composition classrooms. Taking the concept outside of the narrow confines of scholarly work, the first two writing assignments of the English 1113 course demonstrate a dedication to material realities combined with critical analysis and introspection so that students are not simply journaling ideas or relying on personal opinion without a critical framework. Because the first step to understanding the world in more nuanced ways necessarily requires an understanding of the terministic screens everyone uses to make value judgments about the world, the course begins by asking students to look inward before moving them into the public realm. Using values as a specific lens to engage

their subject matter—their lived experiences—our first assignment offers students a specific analytical framework to dig deeply into the way they negotiate the world around them.

The first assignment prompt in the English 1113 begins with the questions, "Have you thought about why you believe the things you do? What values lie underneath those beliefs, and where did they come from?" (Mountford et al.).[iv] From the commencement of the course, the curriculum asks students to seek out and analyze their own terministic screens by way of a values analysis, although the assignment prompt does not refer to this concept explicitly. In asking students to investigate the origin of their values, the project recognizes students' personal experiences and beliefs as supporting evidence for personal values claims. Students are able to write about a topic they are comfortable and familiar with, as they simultaneously defamiliarize that topic by looking below the surface to map out the origins of the values they hold. It also creates, as Hairston has urged, a "culturally inclusive curriculum in our writing classes by focusing on the experiences of our students" (190). Where the assignment becomes innovative, however, is in using personal experience as a point of study, the assignment necessitates a dialogic exchange between the self (in this case the student) and the outside world. The prompt notes that "Our personal histories and experiences have a huge effect on how we perceive ourselves and the world around us, because they are the source of the values that define us" and goes on to explain, "Your initial task will be to engage in reflection about the ways in which your personal history and experiences have created and shaped some of your most important values" (Mountford et. al). In concise, everyday language, the assignment leads students into social circulation, which

Royster and Kirsch explain disrupts the dichotomy between public and private domains (98). The assignment subtly exposes the ways our material realities act on the way we see and experience the world, and the way we write about it. It also begins to break down the barrier between public and private, demonstrating that the most personal of experiences impact our public selves.

In the next assignment, students are moved from the personal to the public (and the social) more directly. Moving into the second unit, students are tasked with finding a group that puts a shared value, which must be a value that the student shares as well, into action in a social space. This move, which turns students' perspective outwardly, but keeps their analyses anchored in a specific value, demonstrates connections between private lives and public lives more explicitly. By moving students from a values analysis based on personal, lived experience to an analysis that explores how values lead to action in a public setting, the sequence blurs the public/private divide, demonstrating the codependent nature of home lives and public lives. Using the Filipino American National Historical Society as an example, Royster and Kirsch point to the ways research can work to make more visible the private exchanges and rhetorical activity that form public discourses (48-49). They note the importance of this work, explaining that it recognizes the way memory and personal histories do indeed affect the public sphere. Discussing the powerful implications of using social circulation, or "a leverage for understanding complex rhetorical interactions across spaces and time" (89), Royster and Kirsch explain that, "finding a window for understanding the concept of social circulation might well begin with a disruption of dichotomies associated with rhetoric being defined within what has been considered historically to be the public

domains of men (politics, law , religion, philosophy, science, medicine, and the like), rather than within the private domains of women (the home and family)" (99). When writing courses rooted in rhetorical education keep students focused on public issues and require research to be peer-reviewed or sources found in public circulation, the classes have a tendency to maintain the hierarchy that privileges male-dominated domains. Using procedural feminism within writing curricula, however, can "disrupt the 'seamless narrative'" (Lunsford 6) that devalues counterpublic arenas and creates false binaries. Drawing out the interrelatedness of public and private also helps take up a concern Jarratt voices in "Feminism and Composition: The Case for Conflict" that classrooms driven by expressivist and feminist pedagogies focus so much on student experiences that they fail to help them enter into public discourses or discuss public issues (121). By having students conduct an in-depth analysis of their own values, and then investigate the way that same value is enacted in public places, the assignment sequence demonstrates to students that private lives not only matter, but also shape public discourses. In doing so, the assignment sequence dismantles the binary and hierarchy that separate public and private, prioritizing the former.

While not explicitly stated as the goal of the sequence, a tangential effect these back-to-back analyses may have is to demonstrate the import of non-public arenas. Royster and Kirsch discuss both needlepoint and the letters from rural Virginia women to note the way counterpublic acts can transform into public discourse. Needlepoint was reappropriated as a teaching tool, and the letters Virginia woman wrote in private became government documents as a historically voiceless group demanded their government officials hear them, even if they had little to no experience in public

discourses and were marginalized to the point of invisibility in their daily lives. Asking students to bridge the experiences and beliefs that form a specific value with action in the public domain does the same kind of work, bringing the public into the private and vice versa. This move also puts pressure on the prioritization of the polis in rhetorical situations and those people most visible within public domains, making room for private and counterpublic exchanges and experiences instead of focusing solely on the public. Implicit within the move is that public utterances and actions often begin with private experiences.[v] Often, however, those non-public exchanges and activities are lost in public discourse, unless, of course, we do work to find them. This assignment sequence draws out connections, as well as the possibility of hearing individual voices behind collective public utterances.

The move to use personal experience as evidence for a claim also helps to expose the fallacy of absolute truth that traditional modes of writing and rhetoric depend on. Using standpoint theory, Carrie Leverenez explains that "there can be no universal moral code, that every moral principle reflects a certain set of values and beliefs" (7). When we create assignments that demand a critical inquiry of personal values, students begin to come to their own conclusions about how the terministic screens they use have been constructed by lived experience, and also how these screens must affect the way they view the world. Nomos, then, is taken seriously, as cultural context overrides assumptions of universal values, which ignore the sociohistorical contexts in which all values must be formed.[vi] Making these screens visible to students, we begin to problematize the idea of universality that tends to prioritize certain subject positions and experiences, which can cause deafness toward voices that do not speak to

our own belief systems. By connecting personal beliefs to group beliefs and social/political action, the course sequence goes on to highlight the ways that values (from personal to groups) construct discourses and the world around us. This move demonstrates the way "rhetorical performances are deeply rooted in sociohistorical contexts and cultural traditions" (Royster and Kirsch 86). In other words, the sequence clearly establishes that no public or social activity forms outside of private beliefs or a set of contexts, making personal lives and material realities as important as more visible rhetorical activity, while simultaneously pointing out the need to put pressure on our own assumptions.

As the students work through the processes of researching and writing their essays, they constantly put personal experiences into a larger sociohistorical context, making theory work for them as they ask questions about their own values. From the beginning of the course, students work within a mode of strategic contemplation, connecting personal beliefs to larger social systems. In an act as simple as making personal spaces—their family homes, churches, and the organizations to which they have belonged—sites of knowledge-making worthy of serious consideration in an academic environment, they begin to see what the private can teach all of us about the public, and they articulate those connections through explanations of the way private experiences made them into public selves that express values in a number of different ways. Bringing in stories of family loss, close friendships, and perseverance, students put critical imagination into action, as they participate in "expanding knowledge and -re-forming not only what constitutes knowledge but also how we value and accredit it" (Royster and Kirsch 20). Even students whose essays do not accomplish all the goals of

the assignments have employed feminist practices by engaging with research and thinking about personal experiences in new ways, and they did not need to make feminism a topic to succeed in doing so.

Using Alternative Points of View to Practice Rhetorical Listening

By the third assignment, which I most influenced, the curriculum asks students to consider their own values alongside the values presented in a text that holds a contradictory point of view. This is not an uncommon task in the composition classroom. Where this curriculum deviates, however, is in its resistance to persuasion or finding common ground. Ratcliffe's *Rhetorical Listening* acted as guiding force for me as I imagined this assignment and its requirements and discussed them with my colleagues. The prompt notes that, "This paper should *not* be an argument or try to persuade an audience about whether the conflicting stance is right or wrong" and also emphasizes the point that "Because the focus is on demonstrating an understanding of the conflicting viewpoint, you should avoid a simple compare-and-contrast of the differing viewpoints; instead seek to understand your own values as a means to better understand and approach the perspective presented in the text" (emphasis original, Mountford et al.). The goal of the project is to introduce conflicting points of view while suspending persuasive argument so students may recognize and confront conflict without becoming combative. In doing so, I hope to "bring out and examine contradictions and conflicts . . . [rather] than overlook them or minimize their significance" (Jarratt "Feminism and Composition" 116), as students are tasked to listen closely for others' values before they make claims or find a place of negotiation. This move requires active engagement in rhetorical listening as it recognizes difference; it

also allows those differences to breathe without requiring students to take the stance of the opposition.

Perhaps the most arduous, but also most important, point of departure for a curriculum that offers a radical change to antiquated modes of rhetoric that privilege the white, Western, masculinist perspective is the belief that effective rhetoric is a rhetoric that persuades—one that convinces another to come to the opposite side. In a bold opener, Sally Gearhart begins her essay with the declaration, "My indictment of our discipline of rhetoric springs from my belief that any intent to persuade is an act of violence" (195). She goes on to suggest that persuasion itself is not unethical or intrusive, but the *intent* to persuade is. According to Gearhart, change of opinion can occur without violence if both sides are willing and ready to entertain an alternative point of view. As Stenberg points out, however, this line of reasoning tends to gloss over power differentials that are at play in the act of persuasion. Jarratt also criticizes Gearheart's "Womanization of Rhetoric" for its failure to recognize "the power of institutions to reproduce ideology" ("Feminism and Composition" 108). Both Stenberg and Jarratt find Gearhart's blind spot, that of power dynamics, problematic. I would add to that critique that even as Gearhart imagines a reciprocal rhetorical exchange, changing the other is still at the heart of the interaction. For Gearhart, difference acts as an obstacle to be overcome rather than an asset that may actually bring value to the exchange. The third assignment seeks a corrective to this emphasis on glossing over difference, which ignores power's effect on any exchange, as students listen to a conflicting point of view without feeling pressured to bridge difference necessarily, or

to persuade in the traditional sense of the word. The writing tasks demonstrate that we can listen to others without being persuaded or persuading.

In her work, Ratcliffe stresses recognition of Other rather than the need to bring the Other into the self, thus erasing difference at the cost of finding overlap. Citing Burke specifically, she explains that often traditional brands of rhetoric require identification, not to understand the Other and their subject position, but to speak the other's language to convince.[vii] Rhetorical moves, in this case, are enacted for the sake of persuasion, of winning over the other side by speaking in their tongue. Rather than teaching our students "to see the available means of persuasion" (Aristotle 1355b), or to consider persuasion as an end goal of research and writing, I worked to move away from the narrow understanding of rhetoric as an act that always requires one party to accept another's argument. Instead, I wanted to privilege listening and to use feminist methods that demonstrate the way multiple points of view may coexist, resisting a course that focuses only on agonistic argument and persuasion. Fixing listening as a rhetorical act and as a viable entry into writing, the unit three assignment focuses students on the invitational instead of the persuasive. Rather than finding common ground or dismantling a differing point of view, the assignment asks for an exploration of the cultural logics without coercing student writers to find places of sameness. The assignment does not prohibit finding similarities, but it also does not force the act.

In tasking students to investigate values with no pre-determined trajectory, the third assignment also allows students to make identifications and disidentifications in sincere ways. Ratcliffe offers new ways to approach identifications that move away from the type of identifications that are made, as Burke suggests, to convince. She

modifies Burke's initial argument that identification must precede persuasion to explain that "rhetorical listening may precede *conscious* identification" (19). She goes on to explain the ways that Burke's initial concept of identification fails to acknowledge coercive forces that may act on the finding of common ground, which would allow for identification to take place (47). Burke's concept of identification "makes space for personal agency and commonalities, but not difference" (58) and "mystifies unfair ideological power plays" (58). Finding sameness is the crux of the Burkean identification process, and it ignores what may be lost in the exchange, as well and the way power will always tip the scales toward one party. In the first-year writing course, an assignment with an emphasis on common ground not only masks "unfair ideological plays"; it also requires students to background difference without considering the way power and biases affect their decisions. Most importantly, writing focused on common ground forces identifications where they may not be, which can lead to insincere writing and surface-level analyses from students.

To avoid forcing students to make false identifications, the third assignment is a purposeful rejection of essays such as the Rogerian argument that necessitate the finding of common ground, which may ignore how and why certain aspects of either side are privileged or silenced. Rather, the assignment invites students to evaluate the underlying values, or cultural logics, of a conflicting point of view. This emphasis on cultural logics keeps difference intact while respectfully investigating the logical explanations that underpin diverse value systems. In terms Ratcliffe discusses by way of Fuss, it allows for students to experience both identification and disidentification (I am both like the Other and not like the Other, or I identify by way of non-identification

with external forces), which creates an environment ripe for listening rhetorically for sameness and difference simultaneously (66-67). When a curriculum allows for both identification and disidentification, it may also help make visible our students' and their subjects' terministic screens, defined by Ratcliffe as "a belief system or a way of reasoning that is shared within a culture" (Ratcliffe 10), or our ways of understanding the world. This does not, as Ratcliffe explains, necessitate a "naïve, relativistic empathy"; rather it calls for "an ethical responsibility to argue what we deem fair and just while questioning that which we deem fair and just" (25). Students are not asked to agree with all they find, nor are they asked to change their minds. Instead, they are asked to step back and reflect on their beliefs as they place them alongside others', putting pressure on both.

This assignment also demonstrates to students that, while they may disagree with a point of view, they can also find places in which values intersect. For example, when I recently taught this curriculum, a student wrote a paper exploring Moms Demand Action literature and gun control legislation. As former military and a gun enthusiast, my student had always taken a strong stance against gun control. After research for his paper, however, he realized that he had intersecting values with the group he was researching—public safety. He also realized that he held many goals in common with Moms Demand Action, one of which included keeping guns out of the hands of violent felons. He still disagreed with some of their approaches to ensure public safety, such as prohibiting semi-automatic rifle sales and creating gun-free zones, but he made conscious identifications with the group before he moved into disidenitifcation, and he recognized both.[viii] He also recognized that he could not make

a sweeping assumption that members of all gun control groups simply want to "take our guns." Without realizing it, my student was listening metonymically, or coming to an understanding that a person may be associated with a group without being a representative of that entire group. In this instance, he assumed that all gun control stances carried the belief guns should be illegal. When he stopped to listen carefully, he found that wasn't the case most of the time, although for some it may be. His third essay acknowledged the cultural logics of a group he believed he had little to nothing in common with before he began researching his paper. By the end of the unit, he found that he did share some of the same values, and he appreciated those similarities, but he ultimately felt the same about the topic of gun control. What changed in the process of researching and writing was how he viewed the other side. He could understand their points of view without accepting them fully, which is the goal of the assignment.

This assignment is one that demonstrates the way multiple truths, even ones that may contradict one another in some ways, may exist simultaneously. Although not specifically framed as a feminist practice, Peter Elbow's work on the believing game helps to demonstrate the ways in which traditional academic approaches have created an environment of skepticism and antagonism rather than one of openness and understanding that can entertain the possibility of multiple small "t" truths. Elbow notes that "in listening, you've got to hold up in the air countless possible meanings of parts—and even meanings of the whole—and then find the whole that makes the most sense" (167). In other words, the goal is to listen for places of truth, and to allow for possible truths to co-exist without cancelling one another out. In assignments that resist the urge to move to a solution or to put aside difference to find common ground, students are

invited to listen for truths and contradictions inherent within all belief systems. This kind of listening permits identifications and disidenitifcations at the same time, as students work through the ways disparate points of view intersect and diverge. Assignments that allow students to find both sameness and difference help them better articulate their own positions and the positions of others because the analyses indirectly account for the fluidity of positionalities by acknowledging agreement and disagreement may occur simultaneously. They also set the stage for a more comprehensive understanding of others so that when negotiations are the task at hand, which is the case for our students when they enter English 1213, they are better prepared to enter into a compromise with an ear that listens for unfair power plays that may advantage them or others.

This kind of listening is no easy chore, a fact that became clear to my class as we toiled to pin down what it means to practice rhetorically listening as we wrote. This assignment's goal, as tough as it may be, is to create listeners and writing selves that can acknowledge and appreciate cultural logics, even when they are different from our own, answering the question Royster and Kirsch pose in their work, "how do we study and write about those whose values and worldviews we may not share?" (36) My answer to that was to argue for an assignment that employs rhetorical listening, using values as a point of entry so that we could do feminism without calling it out and so our students could practice theory without studying it.

This particular assignment employs feminist practices by valuing listening over persuasion, but to take the feminist theory it uses seriously, the assignments must also provide enough room for critique when a point of view or argument is violent or

oppressive.[ix] If a stance is not logical, or if it is so oppressive that the value underpinning it ignores or harms others, students should not take up the particular text or point of view. Rhetorically listening is meant for reciprocal exchanges—for two sides willing to listen to the other. This would implicitly exclude figures whose mission is to offend and disregard alternative points of view. This caveat is critical when introducing the practice of rhetorical listening, especially when taking it outside of Ratcliffe's fuller discussion. My main point here is that when we do distill theory, we are also taking on the responsibility of accounting for and teaching the nuances of that theory in commonsense ways. When using rhetorical listening as a pedagogical tool, we must explain to students that they are never required to listen to or attempt to validate hate speak or voices that intentionally silence others.

As tricky as teaching rhetorical listening can be, it is a feminist tool that works to redefine both rhetoric and writing within the first-year composition classroom. Using rhetorical listening as a mode of engagement with the Other, the self is required to listen for moments of identification, disidentification (which can only occur after identification), and value, while recognizing the subject position of all interlocuters. In this assignment, that comes in the form of asking students to listen closely for the values implicit within an argument they do not necessarily agree with, but perhaps finding sameness nonetheless. Ratcliffe explains that "listening within an undivided logos [a logos that both speaks and listens], we do not simply listen for what we can agree with or challenge, as is the habit of academic reading (in its multiple guises). Instead we choose to listen for the exiled excess and contemplate its relation to our selves" (25). These exiled excesses are often accounts that do not fit nicely into our theses. Pertinent

details are disregarded because tidy conclusions suffocate difference. Rather than create a space to easily cast off these excesses, this assignment helps students pick them up, examine them, and see what they have to teach students about the world and their places in it. Through a complex analysis that requires simultaneously assessing sameness and difference, facets of discourse that are often eclipsed by direct argumentation are brought to the forefront. Listening becomes as valuable as speaking in this project, as it constructs a writing subject as one that seeks out the ways in which disparate points of views or ways of knowing can exist simultaneously. Because this is the goal of the writing process, there need not be a coerced "in-between" students must find, as this "in-betweeness" implies the necessity for sameness in order for two differing views to coexist. Instead the assignment asks students to appreciate diverse logics without the need of a common ground.

It is important to note that this assignment was not an essay asking for an argument for an oppositional point of view. Jonathan Alexander wages a critique against James Berlin for his insistence that students take on the opposing point of view, positing the question of whether students may feel coerced to engage in such an act (194). While student resistance is inevitable, especially in first-year writing classrooms, our curricula should work to allow exploration without coercion, as arguing for something that feels morally or ethically unsound is hardly a valuable use of time in the composition classroom. By asking students to explore underlying values without feeling the need to validate or agree with a point of view, the University of Oklahoma's curriculum circumvents possible intellectual violence while tasking students to listen to another perspective. Rather than mapping out an argument or taking a side, this kind of

assignment asks students to let discourses wash over them (Ratcliffe) and to delay judgment as they linger within their research (Royster and Kirsch). OU's students do go on to persuade in the second course of the sequence, as we believe the ability to speak and be heard is critical for members of all communities, and it is particularly important for marginalized subjects. The hope we hold is that when they do begin to dig into a rhetorical situation, they will do so in a more ethical and thoughtful way after having spent an entire semester learning to listen.[x]

As I taught this unit, I did not employ the terms that Ratcliffe offers in her work. Rather than bringing Burkean identification, Fuss's disideintification, or the notion of cultural logics directly into the classroom, I opted to use commonsense words that resonated with my audience. To distill these dense concepts, I incorporated exercises that helped students practice rhetorical listening in ways that (I hope) kept the theoretical bite without confounding them. In one instance, I used speeches from the polarizing 2016 presidential candidates and asked the class to read both, once to argue and once to listen, to help demonstrate to students how difficult listening truly is without asking them to read Ratcliffe's explanation of a divided logos that "speaks but does not listen" (24). This activity highlights the difficulty of feminist approaches to rhetoric that value listening, making an act that is generally devalued (listening) one that requires hard work and patience to accomplish. I also asked them to read the texts they had chosen for their main project (that presented a differing point of view) and to map out all the instances they bristled while reading. Next, they wrote reflections that explored why they believed they had strong reactions. The homework assignment was not easy, but it brought the concept of "eavesdropping" directly into the classroom

without naming it, as it moved them toward drafting their papers. This eavesdropping, which Ratcliffe defines as an "ethical choice" (104) that consists of "purposefully positioning oneself on the edge of one's knowledge so as to overhear and learn from others and . . . from oneself" (105), allowed students to pay attention to their own discourses and the discourses of others as they carefully examined their resistances. After reflecting on the arguments that bothered them most, I asked students to find the values that informed those opinions or stances. I did this so that they could use eavesdropping "for thinking what is commonly unthinkable in [their] own logics" (Ratcliffe 105). Some did this well; others struggled. What was so important was they all began the process.

Students worked to listen closely, to themselves and others, and they began that journey by putting pressure on their own actions and reactions. The magnifying glass in this instance was placed on their rebuttals, not on the arguments they read. In these moments, students move beyond a "relativistic empathy" that would suggest everyone is right and so we all ought keep our opinions silent, and into a realm of inquiry that demands they pay close attention to themselves to better understand their own positions. Throughout all the on-the-ground teaching I did through this theory, I worked to give my students a kind of terminology from which to work, as Ratcliffe suggests, but a terminology that works for them. Using values as a lens, I was able to ask students to find places that made sense to them and places they did not agree with to get them to do theoretical work without feeling they had a pre-determined script to follow as they researched and wrote. This is especially helpful in conservative states such as mine, in

which students come in with warnings from back home of the university's liberal agenda.

What is most innovative about the course is that it maintains inquiry without moving students to traditional persuasive argument. By delaying persuasion for an entire semester of writing, students learn to linger within their research processes and "withhold judgment for a time and resist coming to closure too soon" (Royster and Kirsch 85). [xi] The very structure of the course arc demands a slowing down of the argument process. As much as I have criticized classical persuasion, students do need to know how to craft effective, persuasive arguments, and they depend on their first-year composition course(s) to teach them how to make them. Even so, our goal was to hold students in suspension—to rein them back from employing classical modes of persuasion so that they may, as Kirsch explains, "be mindful, to pause, to reflect, to pay attention to the world around them without rushing to judgment, to be open to chance discoveries, to new ways of seeing the world" (Royster and Kirsch 95) before they choose to engage in calling for a change within that world.

In his Introduction to *Realms of Rhetoric: Prospects for Rhetorical Education*, Wayne Booth stresses that everyone, everywhere is using and being influenced by rhetoric in their daily lives (ix). Moving away from notions of rhetoric as the ability to win or convince, he offers a new definition, calling rhetoric "the art of discovering warrantable beliefs and improving those beliefs in shared discourse—the art of appraising and pursuing reasons for changing beliefs and practices" (vii). "Thinking together," Booth explains, can be the goal of rhetoric, and in a globalized world the need for everyone to master this ability is more important than ever (ix). Although not

feminist in his intent, Booth's definition of rhetoric aligns closely with feminist revisions. His is a form of rhetoric that may be achieved, I believe, by using feminist practices to structure whole writing courses. By using strategic contemplation, or the deliberate resistance to conclusion, OU's curriculum works to create ethical and thoughtful users of language that may "think together" so that when they do begin writing persuasively, they are reflective and mindful of others as they do it. By using feminist practices to guide the foci and momentum of the course, the curriculum weaves feminist revisions to writing and rhetoric into the composition classroom without bogging students down with theory they may resist or blatantly reject.

Conclusion

A hope for this kind of work in the first-year writing classroom is that students may, by engaging in assignments that use feminist rhetorical practices as a guide, find their own ways of "articulating new principles in rhetoric" (Bizzell 9) the way Bizzell imagines women finding their ways into rhetoric. By introducing feminist concepts born of feminist rhetorical scholarship in approachable ways, we have an opportunity to "interrupt the seamless narrative usually told about the rhetorical tradition [and] to open up possibilities of multiple rhetorics, rhetorics that would not name and valorize one traditional, competitive, agnostic, and linear mode of rhetorical discourse, but would rather incorporate other, often dangerous moves" (Lunsford 6). The dangerous moves, in this case, are moves that demand critical reflection and thoughtful consideration of both self and Other before engaging argument; they are daring students to listen as closely as they speak, dismantling the hierarchal, worn out forms of classical rhetoric that prioritize argument over inquiry, which also prioritizes certain bodies and subject

positions over others. Citing Lakoff and Johnson, Nedra Reynolds points out the fact that men often feel more comfortable using the agonistic approach to discourse. Deborah Tannen reiterates this point, suggesting that often women are at a disadvantage in classrooms that adopt agonistic styles because it is a style congenial to men (262). For this reason, and because we have begun more and more to recognize the patriarchal underpinnings of rhetoric as persuasion, our curricula and our classrooms should push against an agonistic bent that privileges few and silences many so that the public citizens we are producing approach rhetoric in new, less combative ways.

As teachers of rhetoric that encounter a diverse student body every semester, we ought to reject violent forms of discourse that seek to conquer rather than to comprehend. Embedding feminist theory in curriculum and the classroom is one way that we may interrupt the master narrative of rhetoric, without, as Jane Hindman warns in "Inviting Trouble," mystifying discourse and creating our own uneven power dynamics by making theory subject material in the classroom (103).[xii] This does not mean that we should not prepare our students to enter into public discourses that require argument or make their own persuasive claims. Rather, this call for procedural feminisms seeks to reimagine rhetoric's purpose, opening up the definition and the moves we judge as rhetorical so that what has been made invisible might stand side-by-side with what will always be most obvious. When we use feminist practices without making feminist issues themselves the focus of the classroom, we allow for an opening up of what we mean by rhetoric and rhetorical education as student pursue topics interesting to them. Unlike Ratcliffe's suggestions, this kind of work does not need to be grounded specifically in whiteness and gender, although either of those may arise

within student work. These assignments need not take up capitalism, feminism, race, class, or sexuality, but many may.

At best, a composition instructor has two semesters with first-year writing students, a total of thirty-two weeks. We have the blink of an eye to make a large impact—to teach how to read metonymically, listen rhetorically, and act ethically in the rhetorical situations they enter. Sometimes our students will walk away with less than we hoped. When we have impressive plans, we cannot expect for all our goals to come to fruition. Some assignments students will struggle with; some they will reject entirely because we are asking them to work hard to see the unseen. We are shaking up the way they think of composing and argument. Even when assignments fail to accomplish all our goals, however, we have succeeded. We have rejected forms of rhetoric that stifle voices and cast off excess. We have introduced our students to a way of being in the world that requires thoughtful reflection, without asking them to engage in critical theory or take up our agendas. We have welcomed the marginal by seeking them out. Our students may not find all the silenced voices, but we have started them down the path of searching, and for a course that was once a "fix-it shop for bad writing" (Stenberg *Professing* 9) that is nothing to take lightly. Regardless of how successful, or not, each assignment is, students will always walk away with a little more than they entered our classrooms with, and that makes the student resistance, the planning, and the misunderstandings worth our time.

End Notes

[i] I consider masculinist practices to be those that depend on single authorship rather than collaborative writing, teacher-centered classrooms that place instructors as transmitters of knowledge and students as passive receptors, and leading and teaching styles that rely on agonistic argument rather than inquiry, to name a few.

[ii] Kopelson points out that students often resist their instructors and their instructors' ideologies more than they resist the dominant discourses we often teach against, which can create obstacles between our students and the goals we have for them when we become too heavy-handed with our ideological goals. Performing neutrality, she suggests, may allow students to come to their own decisions, as it asks them to do the heavy-lifting. While I find the performance of neutrality problematic in its suggestion that certain identities can or should be closeted in the classroom, what is so useful about Kopelson's argument is its insistence that we find ways to circumvent strong resistance while we simultaneously ask students to consider and put pressure on their points-of-view so as to think more deeply about the world around them.

[iii] Responding to recent claims of liberal brainwashing on university campuses waged by the United States Secretary of Education, Betty DeVos, University of Wisconsin professor Kelly Wilz published an article in the *Huffington Post* in February 2017 that unpacks the many myths of the liberal campus. The article highlights a number of accusations the right has made against higher education, including **"**Liberal Faculty Members are Using Classrooms to Promote Their Agenda" and that "Universities Silence Conservative Speech and Ideologies" (Wilz). I include this because it demonstrates the way even mainstream media and publications often circulated on social media discuss the paranoia of college campuses limiting thinking and speaking to liberal viewpoints.

[iv] In my analysis, I use the first iteration of the curriculum. Since assessment and feedback from both students and instructors, the language of the specific prompts has changed for clarity and concision, but the major goals and courses arcs have remained intact.

[v] For Royster and Kirsch, meaningful rhetorical practices do not necessarily need to move into what we imagine as typical public spaces. The two note needlepoint and Women's Clubs as places of significance

for rhetorical scholarship. For my analysis, however, I am more concerned with blurring lines between public and private than staying within the private.

[vi] In *Rereading the Sophists*, Susan Jarratt works to reimagine and revive the sophists. Sophists, Jarratt claims, understood and acknowledged the importance of social mores and probability in the making of truths. In their rejection of absolute Truth, sophists understood nomos as a critical component in shaping morality. This emphasis on nomos also, Jarratt argues, was a more inclusive approach to rhetoric and society.

[vii] In the introduction to the seventh edition of Andrea Lunsford's and John Ruszkiewicz's *Everything's an Argument*, the editors differentiate between convincing (to move an audience to accept an argument as valid) and persuasion (to move an audience to act). While this is helpful in a first-year composition course, I argue that we should go even further to redefine what we mean by "convince" to include the caveat that we may also convince others to acknowledge a claim is valid for another without necessarily accepting the claim as valid for ourselves or in accordance to our own values and beliefs.

[viii] In this instance, not only did my student acknowledge both sameness and difference in his paper, but he also approached his research with a deliberate cognizance about his own biases against certain sources he read. He noted, for example, that when he read articles by authors he assumed had never owned a gun, he had a more difficult time accepting the credibility of the author or the validity of the argument.

[ix]Ratcliffe makes it clear throughout her discussion of rhetorical listening that she does not suggest all points-of-view hold equal weight or are worthy of consideration. Rather she suggests using this exploration of cultural logics as a starting point to hear the Other. She uses conservatives and liberals as an example. This should not be confused with cultural logics tied to racism or hate in any way. In fact, rhetorical listening may be used to expose faulty logics based on oppressive power structures that are for the blatant abuse of one group by another.

[x] In English 1213, rather than writing various essays models such as the Rogerian and the Toulmin, students conduct in-depth analyses on a certain rhetorical situation, writing a research proposal and a stake holder's analysis they begin to develop a persuasive argument near the end of the course. This encourages students to linger within the inquiry stages of argument. The stake holders analysis in

particular helps students to recognize those affected by an issue to prepare them to enter into public discourses effectively.

[xi] At the University of Oklahoma, all students are required to complete a two-course composition sequence (English 1113 and English 1213). Students may receive credit for the first course (English 1113) through AP scores, ACT scores, SAT scores, or a CLEP test, but the university does not offer allow any of these to provide credit for the second course in the sequence, which means all students must take the course, or have taken a course the First-Year Composition Office deems equivalent at an accredited university.

[xii] Jane Hindman points out that the use of theory itself may imply its own power plays. She warns that, even as we may use theory to highlight oppressive forces in the world, we may be turning a blind eye to the way we are mystifying discourse in the classroom (103). Theory itself becomes cultural capital in the classroom.

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