RHETORICAL PRIVILEGE: ENTITLEMENT, CONTROL, AND THE DISRUPTION OF SHARED DISCOURSE

Marc Grandillo

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RHETORICAL PRIVILEGE:
ENTITLEMENT, CONTROL, AND THE DISRUPTION OF SHARED DISCOURSE

A Dissertation
Submitted to the McAnulty Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Marc A. Grandillo

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Marc A. Grandillo

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Approved March 17, 2023

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ABSTRACT

RHETORICAL PRIVILEGE:
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By
Marc A. Grandillo
May 2023

Dissertation supervised by Janie Harden Fritz, Ph.D.

This project seeks to explore a concept that I call rhetorical privilege, an occurrence that develops within a particular population of individuals who exhibit an elevated sense of self, demanding exclusive accommodation or recognition for unearned accomplishment. Commonly known as entitlement, this mentality is often associated with younger generations that have been raised in an environment that engenders an attitude of control. Equipped with the misguided notion that all aspects of their lives may be personally determined, individuals carry this same assumption into communicative encounters. My contention is that the contemporary rhetorical speaker-audience relationship, understood to be built upon “a community of minds” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1971), falls victim to this phenomenon. Rhetorical privilege becomes another system of control, propagating inequity between participants of a discourse. While instances of entitlement can be witnessed in a variety of settings, from daily interactions to the
professional workplace, the most acknowledged illustration rests in the classrooms of colleges and universities across the country. Grounded in the work of Morrow (1994), and Lippman, Bulanda, and Wagenaar (2009), entitlement in an educational setting provides an appropriate example of how attitudes of deservingness disrupt shared discourse between a speaker and audience, leading to instances of rhetorical privilege.
DEDICATION

To my family.
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Chapter 1: Academic Entitlement and the Introduction of Rhetorical Privilege

We live in an age of self-fulfillment, in which “individuals are increasingly subscribing to the belief that they should get exactly what they want, when they want it – oftentimes without regard for the well-being of others” (Fisk 102) or the social consequences of arguing obstinate convictions. This perception, known as psychological entitlement, has become commonplace throughout society, imposing limits on our relationships, and engendering a blatant disregard for established rules and accepted communal values. Examples can be noticed in many facets of society, including: leaders that place personal accomplishment above the collective good of the company; employees that observe high salary expectations and display little willingness to perform simple or “demeaning” tasks; parents and student athletes pursuing legal action against coaches “over being cut from a team or not getting enough playing time” (Edds A3); or students that expect high grades and prominent leadership roles without exerting the appropriate effort.

From welfare to college enrollment, “entitlement is at the heart of many questions concerning the distribution of resources in [our] society” (Campbell et al. 29), highlighting that more people contemplate issues of deservingness, and even support the misguided understanding of reward without effort. Due to the vast nature of this phenomenon, academic study across a variety of disciplines continues to increase. Individuals showcasing entitlement-related behavior typically propagate negative responses in social encounters, presenting themselves as indifferent, abrasive, or disrespectful. Recognizing the characteristics of entitlement, as well as the causes for rising occurrences across society, helps us to mitigate the unfortunate communicative experiences that we may confront.

Rhetoric concerns making linguistic choices, not merely with the intent of persuasion, but as an attempt to engender understanding and encourage agreement. Central to this thought, is the
establishment of a bilateral relationship between the speaker and the audience. Twentieth century scholars Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca suggest in *The New Rhetoric* (1969) that this interaction creates an opportunity for an “effective community of minds to be realized at a given moment” (14). However, when a person expects favorable treatment, treats the other as an object of utility, or demands that unreasonable expectations should be conceded, the speaker-audience connection is no longer built on trust and community, but upon manipulation and inequity. This chapter focuses on establishing the basis of entitlement, and the contemporary societal impacts that have contributed to the growing sense of deservingness exhibited by students in institutions of higher education. The resultant outcome of their behavior may best be described as rhetorical privilege.

The research question that guides this project is as follows: How does entitlement, particularly in a collegiate environment, disrupt discursive spaces and interpersonal relationships subsequently engendering occurrences of rhetorical privilege? The purpose of this chapter is to identify student entitlement and the contemporary causes that influence the phenomenon, and next, to introduce the concept of rhetorical privilege. The first section summarizes entitlement and its academic derivation, attending to recognized perspectives and scholarly debate. The second section discusses the societal changes that have emerged in media culture, education, parenting, technology, and consumerism. Each of these factors have contributed to perceived increases of entitlement-related behavior and younger generations with a greater sense of control. The third section reviews the speaker-audience relationship, observing how scholarly perceptions have progressed over the centuries from a rhetor-centered model to one built on cooperation. The final section introduces the concept of rhetorical privilege, in which an individual impulsively assumes a position of superiority or special right within a communicative encounter.
Understanding Entitlement

Entitlement is characterized as a conviction that an individual, with an elevated sense of self, deserves special privileges or preferential treatment not offered to others; specifically, “its expression is simple, represented by the assertion: ‘I deserve special treatment’ . . . this personal thesis obliges others to show partiality, to acknowledge the special person’s self-appointed roles, or grant extraordinary latitude in conduct” (Barrett 43). Such a mindset is not a recent development. Even the millennia old Greek myth of Narcissus, a contemptuous hunter who became preoccupied by his own reflection, speaks to the longevity of the concept (Bulfinch 80). As feelings of self-interest become paramount in one’s life, the pursuit for admiration imposes significant limits on social relationships. For instance, entitled individuals are more likely to respond with aggression or conflict when faced with criticism (Baumeister et al. 1996; Bushman & Baumeister 1998; Campbell et al. 2004; Moeller et al. 2009; Strong & Martin 2014), rarely express empathy or apologize for their mistakes (Howell et al. 2011), are less likely to provide assistance to others (Zitek et al. 2010), and feel closer to those who embrace similar perspectives (Strong and Martin 2014). These traits highlight a troubling trend that has seemingly become more prevalent in recent years, often observed in daily personal interactions, institutions of higher education, the workplace, consumer behavior, and even social movements.

Although an awareness of entitlement has existed for numerous generations, Sigmund Freud may be considered the first to discuss the concept in “Some Character-Types Met with in Psycho-Analytic Work” (1916). When patients were asked to accept the instance of momentary distress to ensure an advantageous and pleasurable outcome, Freud observed that individuals rejected this request based upon special circumstances. “They say they have renounced enough and suffered enough, and have a claim to be spared any further demands; they will submit no
longer to any disagreeable necessity, for they are exceptions and, moreover, intend to remain so” (Freud et al. 312). Further scholarly research began to emerge in the later twentieth century, describing entitlement as a “core component” of Narcissistic Personality Disorder, as noted in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Campbell et al. 2004; Tomlinson 2013; O’Leary-Kelly et al. 2017). In subsequent years the concept would garner particular attention from academics across a variety of fields—anthropology, business, education, law, philosophy, and political science—each advancing a similar perspective of entitlement as perceived deservingness (Naumann et al. 2002; Tomlinson 2013). Similarly, Glenda Fisk focused on “excessive entitlement,” the idea that individuals believe “they deserve to receive a disproportionately greater amount or kind of outcome than what would be predicted on the basis of their performance-related contributions” (Fisk 103). Other contributions, such as A Theory of Justice (1971) by John Rawls and Capitalism and Freedom (1962) by Milton Friedman, view entitlement as the result of an exchange, “focusing on the degree of reciprocity in relationships” (Naumann et al. 149). In accordance with capitalistic ideology, entitlement is linked to what a person contributes or achieves, or that one should receive what one earns (Naumann et al. 2002; Tomlinson 2013). These varying perspectives underscore two prominent dimensions in entitlement research. The first concerns what an individual believes he or she “deserves,” and the second attends to the degree of “reciprocity” one expects in a relationship.

More recently, psychological entitlement has been described as a concept distinct from narcissism with unique social consequences (Campbell et al. 2004). While both narcissism and entitlement concern inflated interpretations of the self, the role that relationships play appear to differ:
“The narcissist experiences self-importance, superiority, and grandiosity, and it is the self who is the star, with other people playing a peripheral role. However, the very definition of entitlement includes other people in that one ‘deserves more and is entitled to more than others.’ Thus, others are not merely implied, but are necessary” (Rose and Anastasio 50).

Building upon the central role of relationships, new research suggests entitlement is socially determined, arguing that “individuals compare themselves to similar others when determining what they are owed,” so “deservingness perceptions derive from existing group norms rather than universal standards” (O’Leary-Kelly et al. 421). Moreover, as individuals and groups adhere to different perceptions of deservingness, entitlement-related attitudes are largely subjective and may have both positive and negative associations. The role of the observer plays an important part in shaping the valence of these judgments, influencing “beliefs about what an individual feels he or she has a right to receive” (Fisk 103). Since an observer’s judgement is often predicated upon the connection between a behavior and the consequences, entitlement attitudes may be considered both “normal” and “consistent with the intentions behind it” (Fisk 103). In “Victim Entitlement to Behave Selfishly” (2010), Emily Zitek and Lynne Vincent further this thought, proposing that because “entitled individuals place importance on being different from others, they may be more advantageous in situations when motivation to be unique is important to success,” primarily at times when creative solutions are required (243). Although instances of entitlement are generally recognized as counterproductive, if an increased likelihood of success exists, such conduct may not be deemed inappropriate.

Contemporary views of entitlement emphasize a deeper connection between an individual and environmental conditions, suggesting that one’s behavior may change depending “upon the
ability of the situation to elicit a perceived outcome” (Fisk 105). Even someone with typically low levels of entitlement may begin to think or behave in a self-deserving way when responding to a specific condition or social practice. The premise that entitlement-related behaviors may be deemed situationally responsive, “reflecting state-like characteristics,” challenges the prevailing “trait” understanding of the concept (Fisk 2010; Naumann et al. 2002). Entitlement is typically viewed as an enduring personality trait, signaling a pervasive sense of expected privileges that is consistent across time and circumstance since young adulthood (Tomlinson 2013; Wiggins and Pincus 1992). However, researchers propose it is possible that entitlement exhibits state-like properties as well. Entitlement as a psychological state reflects the notion “that behavioral markers may actually change over time and in response to environmental cues” (Fisk 105). For instance, an individual may feel more deserving in a public setting such as the workplace, a classroom, or a social encounter, but does not display that behavior privately at home or with family and close friends. Likewise, entitlement as a state also illustrates why this attitude appears to diminish with age, when “individuals are repeatedly exposed to the unfortunate realization that life does not give you what you want all the time” (Campbell et al. 42). Continued research now emphasizes a compromise between state and trait constructs, suggesting trait tendencies, like entitlement, are generally stable characteristics of an individual, but may fluctuate with different situational cues (Fleeson 1023). Although we expect others to demonstrate consistent behavior, individuals may respond unexpectedly in adverse or uncontrollable situations. Thus, it remains important to examine instances of deservingness where they are likely to occur.

Formally introduced in 1994, entitlement in an academic setting, particularly institutions of higher education, has received growing scholarly attention. Academic entitlement may be defined as “the tendency to possess an expectation of academic success without taking personal
responsibility for achieving that success” (Chowning & Campbell 982). More specifically, an individual believes that high grades or other academic rewards are deserved regardless of study habits, preparation, or ability (Miller 2013; Wasieleski et al. 2014). The frequency with which faculty and student-facing administrators have observed instances of unreasonable entitlement “[raises] the question as to whether such issues are anomalies or pervasive” (Schaefer et al. 80).

Preceding generations “often complained about the attitudes and behaviors of the generations that followed them” (B. Miller 656), so it is unsurprising that current college-aged students are perceived to be “more entitled” than their predecessors (Miller 2013; Twenge 2006). Commonly recognized as Generation Z, today’s college students “grow up in a dramatically different world than those from as little as a decade ago” (Lippmann et al. 198), demonstrating uncompromising attitudes, heightened expectations of success, and different orientations to work and interpersonal relationships (Lippmann et al. 2009; Mazur and Hess 2016). Although much scholarship and general public opinion associate Generation Z with high self-centeredness, research stresses that individual student behavior varies. Entitlement may not be “a fixed generational attitude so much as a conditional sentiment” that circumstances can either “disarm or inflame” (Lewis et al. 3006). Whether entitlement is indicative of an entire generation or limited to a particular population, these students “require a far greater proportion of our time and energy” (Lippmann et al. 198), and it is likely that educators will contend with attitudes of deservingness at some time in their career.

Transitioning to a collegiate setting can be a problematic endeavor for many students. After years of classroom appeasement, entitled students consider “academic achievement as the diploma,” a right owed to them, while “faculty observe academic achievement as the practices of education” (Jackson et al. 54). Students exhibiting academic entitlement have been accustomed
to placing responsibility for their learning solely upon instructors rather than themselves, leading to a “deduction that if a student fails, the fault cannot lie in the student—it must lie in the teachers, the curriculum, the institution, or more vaguely, the ‘system’” (Morrow 35). However, in college academic success is influenced by a student’s own capabilities and mistakes. No longer rewarded “just for showing up” (C. Espinoza 34), students must demonstrate their skill and achievement through performance; grades are earned rather than given. As a result, misguided perceptions of classroom roles and responsibilities have emerged. Blame is quickly diverted for perceived failures or poor performance, illustrating “a self-centered disposition characterized by a general disregard for traditional faculty relationship boundaries and authority” (Lippmann et al. 198).

When expectations are not met, respect diminishes, giving “students the idea that they have permission to challenge professors on any and all issues, regardless of intent, content, or supporting validation” (Schaefer et al. 82). Equipped with unrealistic expectations of collegiate academics, entitled students maintain a general disregard for established power structures and traditional relationships with faculty, creating more antagonistic learning environments.

Contemporary Factors of Entitlement Cultivating a Sense of Control

As institutions of higher education confront rising occurrences of disruptive behavior and self-interested attitudes, scholars continue to search for the cause. A number of suggestions have been proposed; however, as academic entitlement is not limited to gender, exclusive to a culture, or confined to a locality, identifying a source remains difficult. Considering the scope, assigning responsibility to one particular factor is unrealistic. A more pragmatic explanation may involve a combination of several influences. Although consumerism and parenting are common targets of research, media culture, education, and technology must not be overlooked for their contribution to increases in entitlement-related behavior (Lippmann et al. 2009; Opree and Kühne 2016; Sohr-
Preston and Boswell 2015; Woods and Scott 2016). Underlying each of these influences a shared theme emerges, that of control. Today’s students have been largely raised in an environment that engenders a sense that they can determine all aspects of their lives, “an outlook that makes self-fulfillment the major value in life and that seems to recognize few external moral demands or serious commitments to others” (Taylor, “Ethics" 55). Therefore, current students often observe misguided perceptions of role behavior, perceiving themselves continually in the driver’s seat.

**Consumerism**

Higher education has become an increasingly competitive environment, as both private and public institutions clamor to attract a declining student population. Shifting demographics due to lower birth rates, anxiety over the rising cost of higher education, and economic hardships caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and global recession, have presented significant challenges for college recruiters. According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, “postsecondary enrollments declined 2.5 percent in fall 2020, nearly twice the rate of enrollment decline reported in fall 2019 . . . undergraduate enrollment drove the decline decreasing 3.6 percent or over 560,200 students from 2019” (Sedmak). To improve numbers, perspective students are enticed with technology, gourmet dining, spacious residence halls, on-campus writing and learning centers, recreational and cultural opportunities, and student unions built to resemble shopping malls (Podolsky 2014; Lippmann et al. 2009). It is unsurprising that colleges and universities have invested heavily in providing such incentives; however, these expenses are merely passed on to students, a significant burden since “[t]he cost of attending a traditional four-year university has been rising more than twice as fast as inflation, and two-year community colleges a third faster” (Sherman). Even as an unprecedented global pandemic disrupted higher education, prices at institutions continued to climb, coping with a “significant financial shortfall
from declining public funds and decreased enrollment” (Dickler). Considering the growing cost of a college degree for public and private institutions (Ma et al. 2020), students and parents now expect a high return on a sizeable investment (Hunt 2008), engendering an unrealistic demand on educators, threatening collegial relationships and the larger learning climate.

A pervasive belief exists among many in the higher education community, alleging that students are consumers and “entitled to considerations and concessions that would be expected within the traditional retail business model” (Schaefer et al. 80). The centuries-old phrase, “the customer is always right” highlights an invasive mentality that alters student perceptions about both collegiate and classroom involvement (Lippmann et al. 2009), likening education to a commodity. When a “student believes they are a customer paying for the delivery of a given service or product” (Schaefer et al. 80), all the associated elements of higher education become nothing more than an exchange. The “student as consumer” relates college to a retail transaction and develops a staunch belief that they are in control of the college experience. Too often this sentiment is further encouraged by institutions who accommodate indiscriminate student wants to increase enrollment. College marketers know that providing students with an appealing experience is essential for differentiating their product in a highly competitive marketplace (Schmitt 2011), placing the “student as consumer” in firm command of which college to attend, how their money is spent, acceptable accommodations, and what quality service should resemble.

Media Culture

Since the late twentieth century, media culture has furthered the message that everyone is special. Popular genres such as reality television, sporting events, and social media prominently advance notions of individual uniqueness, even endorsing narcissistic behaviors. Impressionable
adolescent minds observe farcical depictions of normal life, inculcating a belief that rewards are guaranteed for mere effort (Opree and Kühne 2016). This is a dangerous prospect for a younger audience more vulnerable to a milieu that attempts to “intensify narcissistic dreams of fame and glory, [and] encourage the common man to identify himself with the stars and to hate the ‘herd’” (Lasch, “Culture” 32). Repeated exposure to these messages of ego-boosting not only increases familiarity but strengthens trust in the concept. Research supports that “repetition of a plausible statement increases a person’s belief in the referential validity of truth of that statement” (Hasher et al. 111). Regardless of the veracity, the mere frequency of a message produces an illusion of truth, making imagery or information easier to process and more persuasive. Repetition is a powerful rhetorical device whose “purpose is to provide memorability and emphasis,” and ensure that “ideas are highlighted, clarified, nurtured and given power” (Davidson 799). When people hear or see something enough, they begin to believe it. Unfortunately, since adolescents are unaware that media is often scripted or susceptible to unwarranted influence, they’re unable to scrutinize content appropriately and understand questionable messaging (Opree and Kühne 2016; Leone et al., 2006). Contemporary television programs, advertisements, and social media venerate individuality and deservingness, making ostentatious claims that status and fortune can be achieved by anyone. Viewers regularly watch “normal” people presented with unprecedented opportunities and expect similar accommodations should be provided to them. Blind acceptance that one can control their own life is assumed because the media tells us so.

**Parenting**

Another potential source for the development of academic entitlement may be attributed to parenting. Previous generations often struggle to connect with young adults, failing to “master their incomprehensible jargon,” or preserve an appearance of youth and vitality. These perceived
limitations “have made it more difficult for children to form strong psychological identifications with their parents” (Lasch, “Culture” 202), who desire to retain a high degree of admiration. To establish a deep emotional connection with their child(ren), more akin to a friendship, many parents do not enforce conventional limits in the relationship. A by-product of the self-esteem movement in the late twentieth century, this style is characterized by indulgence, leniency, and reduced guidance, “allowing children to control their own behavior with few maturity demands” (Barton and Hirsch 2016; Baumrind 1989). Not only have young people grown accustomed to more freedom, but to having a prominent voice in major decisions as well. As parental relationships relax, students increasingly see formal authority figures as “inauthentic” and treat faculty in a similar manner (Espinoza 2012), rarely hesitating to confront an instructor about unfair grading or when special exemptions are not met (Jackson et al. 2011). Contemporary parenting techniques often deem authority similar to an expendable resource and insist that children not “conform to external standards” (Barton and Hirsch 1) or sacrifice their individuality regardless of the consequences. Parenting by enablement may have been successful for increasing perceptions of self-esteem, however this style has led “children to become selfish, demanding, and inconsiderate” (Barton and Hirsch 2), viewing achievement alone as a hallmark of success. Raised with little respect for authority, high expectations for self-expression, and a willingness to challenge assigned tasks, students enter college with an underlying mindset of control, pushing the limits of personal interactions.

Education

As college educators contend with instances of academic entitlement, quick to “blame parents for encouraging overly inflated self-esteem” (Sohr-Preston and Boswell 184), student expectations of reward without responsibility may also be attributed to the educational system
itself. Enabled since elementary school, many students have been ushered through a learning environment where teachers have attempted to make the experience “as painless as possible” (Lasch 2018). Besides tolerating low behavioral standards, “no one is paying attention to critical thinking and writing skills, [students] just want to know what they have to do to make their teachers check the box that says ‘pass’” (Clift). Contributing to this learning vacuum, publishers have also been chided for minimizing important historical facts, providing biased information, or simplifying content, in an effort to appease a “new generation of students” that believe existing textbooks are uninteresting or unintelligible (Lasch 2018). While a primary goal of education is to cultivate intellectual growth, a student’s ability to use their own language, reasoning powers, and recollection of historical information has witnessed a continual decline (Lasch 2018). After years of ego-boosting and instructor compliance, college students “feel that they should have more control over their educational experience” (Jackson et al. 54), demanding unreasonable accommodations, challenging “unfair” grade assignments or course requirements, and indulging in unwarranted classroom expression. Unfortunately, this scenario requires instructors to devote more time and effort building relationships instead of building knowledge, inherently shifting the balance of classroom power.

Technology

Modern collegians are considered to be the most technologically empowered generation in history, and “believe they can do several things at once due to their proficiency” (C. Espinoza 38). While this technological aptitude has enabled students to remain largely untethered to static ideals and conditions, they still desire to retain “real-time access” (Espinoza 2012), to school, work, family, and social relationships. Technology offers constant access to information, prompt service, and an open forum for expression, further strengthening a student’s dependence on
convenience and encouraging “unrealistic expectations” (Wasieleski et al. 442) of timeliness and responsiveness. Students commonly view each area of their life as being seamlessly connected, in which everyone is expected to “work the way they do” (Espinoza 2012), think as they do, and acquiesce to demands in a manner conducive to their intentions. Unfortunately, this mentality has conditioned students to anticipate immediate replies to late night or weekend e-mails, project grades within hours instead of days, and professor availability whenever requested. The speed of technology-enabled communication has not only engendered this generation with a sense of now, but with a feeling of control as well. Video on demand, Instagram, online shopping, and other virtual applications provide users with around-the-clock service and quick satisfaction.

Considering this point, students “see professors less as intellectual leaders” (Lippmann et al. 199), and more as service providers who should meet similar expectations of accessibility and demand fulfillment. The traditional relationship that once existed between a student and professor, has been slowly “replaced with a negative student/professor dynamic, which, diminishes the quality of education and compromises the integrity of student learning” (Schafer et al. 81). Regardless of how good an educator may be, any departure from how a student deems an instructor should perform their duties, may be met with a great deal of frustration.

Speaker-Audience Relationship

Throughout the 2,500-year history of rhetoric, the speaker-audience relationship has remained a principal concern, noting that “the rhetorical occasion always includes an audience, and the speaker must consider the motives that are likely to influence audiences” (Bizzell & Herzberg 3). As individuals react to instances that make an impression upon them, speaking to the concerns and values of an audience helps to predict their response to a particular message. “How speakers should attend to audience is a matter of debate, but theorists generally agree that
rhetors should be receptive to audience differences,” careful not to simply ignore an audience or consider them a “generic entity” (Enos 41) like-minded and easily influenced. In recent decades, we have witnessed the rise of distinct voices that do not subscribe to traditional perspectives or boundaries, significantly impacting the rhetorical relationship. Educational environments are no exception. After years of appeasement, students with high levels of entitlement that have become accustomed to individualized attention and special accommodations, adopt irrational perceptions of roles and relationships (Schaefer et al. 2013). The rhetorical connection established between a speaker and an audience intends to “open inventionial spaces . . . where ideas, relationships, emotional bonds, and courses of action can be experienced in novel, sometimes transformative ways” (Hauser, “Vernacular” 33). Interruptions to this association highlights how entitlement “leads to rhetorical indisposition” (Barrett 34). The following will explore the speaker-audience relationship, its progression, and the scholars that have made significant contributions to our understanding of the concept.

Millenia ago, traditional Greek interpretations acknowledged that proficient rhetors are attentive to various emotional states and character types present in assemblies. A speech must be prepared according to the situation and type of audience a speaker is hoping to influence. Most notably, Aristotle examined the means of persuasion that a speaker must rely upon to appeal to an audience. Understood as ethos, pathos, and logos; “the first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience in a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof provided by the words of the speech itself” (Aristotle, “Rhetoric” 24). Aristotle recognized the importance of audience, maintaining that the hearer “determines the speech’s end and object” (Aristotle, “Rhetoric” 32), however his concept of the speaker-audience relationship largely favored the credibility and command of a speaker, an impression that would endure for
millennia. “The rhetor might need to learn *about* the audience in order to persuade them, but the rhetor does not need to learn *from* the audience” (Enos 45). For Aristotle, and later generations, the rhetor is regarded as the authority that must impart wisdom to a passive audience.

Centuries later, Marcus Tullius Cicero furthered Aristotelian thought placing importance on speaker authority. However, Cicero maintained a “more expansive” interpretation of ethos that includes “generosity, mildness, dutifulness, gratitude, and of not being desirous or greedy,” moral and non-rational qualities not addressed by Aristotle (May and Wisse 171). In *De Oratore*, Cicero contends that the quality and standing of a rhetor tempers argument, claiming a crucial factor in success “is for the characters, principles, conduct and course of life . . . be approved” (327). Speaker-audience relationships still favor rhetor authority, but “Cicero’s ideal orator is a good man, in the sense that he will use his eloquence for good purposes.” High moral qualities are fundamental to being known as an orator (Kapust 2011), and one who possesses eloquence must bring a wealth of knowledge to a rhetorical occasion to properly direct the mood. As Cicero notes, “without a mastery of ordinances, customs, and general law, without a knowledge of human nature and character . . . excellence in speaking cannot be made manifest unless the speaker fully comprehends the matter he speaks about” (Cicero, “De Oratore” 37). Lacking such knowledge, “oratory is but an empty and ridiculous swirl of verbiage” (Cicero, “De Oratore” 15). While Cicero’s concept of the speaker-audience relationship continues to rely upon a rhetor’s “superior position to his audience” (Kapust 96), oratory cannot be effective without attending to audience opinion and gaining goodwill.

Well-versed in Ciceronian thought, Augustine of Hippo understood the role of a speaker “as one who distributes food, not one who stirs up emotion” (Sypert 21). Referring to the Holy Scripture as sustenance, Augustine held that a preacher was responsible for being knowledgeable
and prepared for a sermon, thus the “more solid and more delicious will be the bread he can proffer to the faithful” (Pelligrino 73). Perhaps more important to Augustine’s teaching was how he connected with his audience. During the late 4th Century/early 5th Century, Augustine became renowned for his preaching, preferring to address followers using informal language accessible to the uneducated average person. “In the pulpit (Augustine) never used language that was above his hearers’ heads, but always chose his words in such a fashion that everyone would understand him” (Van der Meer 417). Even when sermonizing, his concern was “to place himself in the midst of his congregation, to appeal to their feelings for him, to react with immense sensitivity to their emotions . . . to provoke them to identify themselves completely with himself” (P. Brown 248). Feeling as part of the group was of great importance for Augustine. He recognized that using plain style speech, typified by “clarity, brevity, and sincerity” (Lanham 2003), allowed him to identify with the broader congregation. “What advantage is there in purity of speech which does not lead to understanding in the hearer?” (Augustine, “Christian” 137) While Cicero professed that the high moral qualities of a speaker were imperative to achieving rhetorical success with audiences, Augustine of Hippo furthers this notion highlighting the importance of identifying with others to realize effective persuasion.

By the eighteenth century, rhetoricians commonly professed of the “uniformity of human nature,” and one “only had to grasp the workings of ‘certain principles in our nature’ in order to ‘promote belief’ in any reasonable person” (Crowley 29). True to the period, George Campbell, an 18th Century philosopher of the Scottish Enlightenment, believed that as individuals shared similar mental faculties – understanding, imagination, passion, and will – it was unnecessary for speakers to consider particular audiences to develop an argument. Campbell maintained that “the uniformity of human nature certified that a rhetor’s introspective review of their own probable
response sufficed as a prediction of the response of other ‘thinking beings’” (Crowley 29). Even though “the characters of audiences may be infinitely diversified,” any “person of discernment” should be able to recognize the influence of that diversity upon the speaker (G. Campbell 96). The basic qualities of humanity allow a skilled speaker to find a connection between his or her intention and that of the audience, as everyone would come to think and feel in the same way. Since one cannot hope to attend to audience diversity, the concerns of a particular audience need not be scrutinized.

It was not until the twentieth century that rhetoricians began to reevaluate the speaker-audience relationship, placing emphasis on community and cooperation, as opposed to a speaker-centered approach that minimized the role of audience as generic listeners. Two scholars of note, Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, are significant to this discussion, acknowledging the audience as a counterpart of the rhetor. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, authors of The New Rhetoric, proposed a rhetorical relationship based on argumentation. Argumentation “allows us to induce or increase the mind’s adherence to the theses presented for its assent” (4), and differs from formal logic, or demonstration. While demonstration permits the construction of a specific conclusion “by reasoning from a premise, argumentation attempts to gain audience adherence to a claim” (Foss et al. 84). Thus, demonstration is thought to correspond to logic and rationality, and argumentation, as a more person-oriented approach, is tied to the concept of reasonableness. Demonstration begins with statements that are “assumed to be true regardless of the audience’s agreement with them,” whereas the notion of “argumentation begins with a premise that the audience accepts” (Foss et al. 85). An audience is necessary for argumentation to occur, as this interaction creates opportunity for a “community of minds to exist at a given moment” and share a frame of reference. “Thus, the audience is not simply an empirical fact that the rhetor must take
into account and use in the single-minded pursuit of his or her goals; it is a community that the rhetor seeks to persuade as an engaged and committed participant” (Mootz 23). Failure to establish this community, results in ineffective or non-existent argumentation. Through the work of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, a noticeable shift emerges in how the speaker-audience relationship may be understood. No longer centered merely on the motivations of a speaker, the audience is an equal and necessary participant of rhetorical encounter.

Contemporary audiences adhere to standards different from those accepted by previous generations, highlighted by multiple narratives and “a recognition that individuals live according to different ways of life that are constantly changing in response to additional information and reflection” (Arneson 2). As a multitude of perspectives now inform and shape communication, rhetors must take greater interest in who may be identified as an audience. Race, gender, and cultural differences have made a significant impression on the speaker-audience relationship, challenging conceptions of identity largely inherited from the “western tradition . . . of white, European and North American males” (Benhabib 242). Audiences may now be conceptualized “without any fixed identity,” a notion that “does not reify audience in terms of prescriptive characteristics or some observed regularities” (Chang 659). To consider otherwise, “would place the rhetor at the center of rhetoric and would treat the audience as if it were passively molded by a rhetorical engagement” (Hauser, “Introduction” 49). Human behavior is unpredictable and the meaning that arises in interpersonal exchanges is in constant flux, thus we cannot assume the possibility of an audience with definite qualities. “Rhetoric is the process by which we attempt to overcome the apparent ‘given’ status of an objective situation and the multiplicity of individual perspectives to constitute a shared meaning and a sense of shared power to do something about it” (Hauser, “Introduction” 49). This notion advances an important concept in the perception of
the contemporary speaker-audience relationship, collective power. Authentic communication “grows from a spirit of community, and finds the speaker addressing the audience on a basis of equality stemming from shared humanity” (Johannesen 97). The construction of a communal relationship is essential for effective rhetoric to occur. When audience identities or opposing viewpoints are taken for granted or intentionally disregarded, the foundation for rhetorical privilege emerges.

Identifying Rhetorical Privilege

The term *privilege* has gained a great deal of notoriety in recent years. Defined as “a special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group” (“Privilege”), privilege has become commonly associated with the benefits inherently secured by such factors as an individual’s race, gender, socio-economic status, religion, intellectual ability, or sexual orientation. Mutual to these factors is the notion of unearned power. Individuals of privilege are perceived to enjoy benefits or access to resources, not offered to others, that increase their chances to achieve success. Similarly, entitled college students expect to receive more from their educational pursuits and to get more from their academic experience then they contribute (Miller 2013). As earlier noted, entitlement endures as a “sense that one deserves more and is entitled to more than others” (Campbell et al. 31), an attitude that has increasingly infiltrated educational institutions. A student’s proclivity for unearned advantage over others underscores the idea of privilege, compromising equity, learning fundamentals, and the value of accomplishment. Younger generations have been raised in an environment that inculcates them with a sense of control and the belief that nearly all aspects of their lives may be regulated. The rhetorical relationship would be no different for these individuals, who assume the legitimacy of their own fixed viewpoints regardless of substantiation, erasing a “meaningful social encounter
outside its terms, outside the boundaries of the single self” (Sennett 8). Confident that they may dictate the direction of communicative encounters and unwilling to listen to alternative voices, an entitled individual that engages in rhetorical privilege disrupts the balance of the contemporary speaker-audience relationship built on cooperation.

Rhetorical privilege concerns how an entitled individual believes others should attend to their discourse. Should invokes obligation (“Should”), an expectation of accommodation to one’s declaration or request. For instance, a student may exclaim “‘if I explained to my professor that I am trying hard, he/she should give me consideration with respect to my course grade’” (Jackson et al. 55). In such a scenario, an entitled student engages in discourse with a preconceived notion of what a desired response entails, namely promptness and satisfaction. Receiving an answer that does not meet such expectations elicits an obstinate and confrontational demeanor that quickly dissolves the prospect of a collaborative communicative experience. At issue is the perception of obligation. Entitled students dwell on how one should reply, suggestive of a stubborn demand, not how one could respond, which is more akin to a civil entreaty. Hence, they believe professors have a responsibility to fulfill their appeals, even if doing so conflicts with ethical standards. This scenario is suggestive of the philosophical principle “Ought Implies Can” proposed by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), which refers to how “a person is morally obliged to do something only if it is in his power to do it or not to do it” (Kekes 459). To insist that a professor has a moral obligation to amend course grades may seem irrational. However, considering that younger generations are instilled with a sense of control – both of their own conduct and that of others - this mindset becomes more plausible. Morality is highly subjective. If someone thinks or feels that a request is just, and is reasonably in another’s power accommodate, the request ought to be and can be fulfilled.
Along with an anticipated obligation to indulge one’s discourse, rhetorical privilege is associated with rapidity. In policy debate, the concept of fiat, the Latin word for “let it be done,” involves “the power to declare or assume the existence of something, to make something happen immediately” (Trefethen 27). A debater presumes an entitlement that his/her argument will find quick approval, regardless of its popularity. It is not necessary to argue the merits of a proposal, only that it would be advantageous for it to be realized. Academically entitled students maintain the “belief that they have the right to coerce” or challenge professors on any issue (Schaefer et al. 81) or instance of disagreement, creating an environment in which negative confrontations are more likely to occur. As students engage in argument, they have no true interest in deliberating values, an underlying tenet of argumentation, only that their viewpoint finds acceptance. For example, an entitled student may argue that faculty have an obligation as service providers to accommodate their demands. Such an invocation is unlikely to be well-received, but fiat allows the student to evade the practicality of their argument. Based upon the substance of the idea, no matter how erroneous, the proposal may be swiftly enacted. Guided by a belief of deservingness, students exhibiting rhetorical privilege would consider an instructor’s perception of their own obligation as irrelevant. The presumption of fiat is akin to control and seeks prompt resolution. To avoid eliciting conflict, instructors, especially younger faculty, may reluctantly acquiesce to student demands, altering how intended messages are delivered.

Contemporary conceptions of rhetoric emphasize a speaker-audience relationship built on community. In *The New Rhetoric* (1969), Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca proposed a notion of argumentation that “aims at securing the adherence of those to whom it is addressed” (19). For argumentation to exist a rhetor and audience must begin with agreement, either through fact or truths, universally held ideas, or presumptions, each grounded on expectations rather than
reality (67). Rhetorical privilege is based upon presumption, placing the burden of proof upon one who opposes the proposal. “Presumptions yield statements whose likelihood is not derived from a calculation based on factual data and could not be so derived even if the calculation were perfected” (70). Entitled students advocate for preferential treatment because they believe in the veracity of their own thought, and consequently structure their argument around this notion. Not only is there is no rational data to support this reasoning, the likelihood of establishing agreement is doubtful. More important for argumentation is that an interlocutor must show concern for the other “and be interested in his state of mind” (16). Individuals desire to be regarded as an equal partner in a communicative experience, and “by listening to someone we display a willingness to eventually accept his point of view” (17). This idea creates a problematic situation, as students exhibiting rhetorical privilege have little interest in listening, observing no respect for the other’s position, nor a willingness to acknowledge alternate perspectives. Their biased arguments exist with the sole purpose of inducing agreement. Failure to establish a “community of minds” results in ineffective or non-existent argumentation.

While the purpose of argumentation is to encourage consensus, demonstration begins with principles that a speaker considers to be factual regardless of audience agreement. Since demonstration is based on logic, which is susceptible to error or coercion, one may argue that the calculated set of rules an individual maintains is akin to flawed reasoning. The speaker maintains freedom “to elaborate as he pleases . . . fix the symbols and combinations of symbols that may be used” and decide which particular expressions should be considered without applicable proof (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 13). Those exhibiting rhetorical privilege are confident in the veracity of their own claims, manipulating information to circumvent doubt and construct a discourse where “no attention is paid to the meaning of expressions” (Perelman and Olbrechts-
Entitled individuals seek to transform the nature of an interaction, establishing a communicative environment that is inhospitable to discussion and inquiry. Anything that does not align with their predetermined facts is considered irrelevant or antagonistic. Facts, “as long as they are recognized as such,” are thought to “impose universal recognition . . . outside the range of argumentation” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 312). Rhetorical privilege relies on the belief that a speaker can present incontestable facts, creating a condition in which agreement is unnecessary because no other option exists. In such instances argument has been incapacitated, not only characterizing a lack of interaction, but a system of control as well.

In the absence of communication built on cooperation, known as dialogue, monologue remains. While dialogue aims to establish accord, “monologue is a self-centered conversation” in which a speaker merely attends to his or her own perspectives and standards, irrevocably closed to the prospect of “new thoughts, attitudes, opinions, or values” (Earle and Kruse 78). Rhetorical privilege maintains a monologic character. We may determine our own opinions (Taylor 1991) through monologue, but “our identities are formed in dialogue with others, in agreement or struggle with their recognition of us” (Taylor, “Ethics” 46). This thought is an important feature of rhetorical privilege. When exercising monologue, an individual fails to acknowledge the participants of a rhetorical occasion, impeding the formation of identity and denying humanity’s inherent “dialogical character” (Taylor 1991). Preventing others from engaging in this discovery process is perhaps an indication of one’s own feelings of insecurity. “If a belief has become so deeply and intensely personal, if what a person believes had come to define his or her identity,” then any alteration to that entrenched belief, no matter how minor, may involve a significant “upheaval of the self” (Sennett 252). An entitled individual’s stubborn fixation on monologue is not surprising, as dialogue poses a challenge to both their beliefs and identity. However,
devaluation of others only diminishes one’s personal life and increases a “feeling of emptiness” (Lasch 2018). Indicative of isolation, monologue inhibits the mental activities that contribute to an individual’s well-being, highlighting how those with an inclination toward entitlement find themselves displaying “apathy, low motivation, weak self-discipline, enervation, disinterest in learning” (Barrett 39), or in many cases aggression and incivility.

Project Overview

For the purpose of this project, I deem rhetorical privilege as an occurrence that develops within a particular population of individuals who exhibit an elevated sense of self, demanding exclusive accommodation or recognition for unearned accomplishment. Commonly known as entitlement, this mentality is often associated with younger generations that have been raised in an environment that engenders an attitude of control. Equipped with the misguided notion that all aspects of their lives may be personally determined, individuals carry this same assumption into communicative encounters. My contention is that the contemporary rhetorical speaker-audience relationship, understood to be built upon “a community of minds” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1971), falls victim to this phenomenon. Rhetorical privilege becomes another system of control, propagating inequity between participants of a discourse. While instances of entitlement can be witnessed in a variety of settings, from daily interactions to the professional workplace, perhaps the most acknowledged illustration rests in the classrooms of colleges and universities across the country. Grounded in the work of Wally Morrow (1994), Stephen Lippman, Ronald Bulanda, and Theodore Wagenaar (2009), entitlement in an educational setting provides an appropriate example of how attitudes of deservingness disrupt shared discourse between a speaker and audience, leading to instances of rhetorical privilege.
In *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1969), Kenneth Burke argued that rhetoric is a “symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols” (43). Rhetoric, comprised of linguistic or visual symbols that represent another “thing, thought, or action,” encourages us “to work together to make decisions about matters of common concern and to construct social reality” (Palczewski et al. 5). Despite intention, all communication is an action. Through analysis of symbolic action, communication scholars may use rhetoric to understand the significance of human relations and motives (Burke 1968). Thus, rhetoric may also be employed to examine the divisive interpersonal effects of entitlement upon the speaker-audience relationship. Burke offers a fitting explanation in *A Rhetoric of Motives* for how this project may benefit from investigating an attitude of deservingness rhetorically:

Insofar as the individual is involved in conflict with other individuals or groups, the study of this same individual would fall under the head of *Rhetoric*. . . . The *Rhetoric* must lead us through the Scramble, the Wrangle of the Market Place, the flurries and flare-ups of the Human Barnyard, the Give and Take, the wavering line of pressure and counterpressure, the Logomachy, the onus of ownership, the War of Nerves, the War. (23)

Rising from an atmosphere of division, rhetoric considers both how individuals remain distinct or “become identified” with each other. It is only by identifying our ways with another, talking their language through “speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, [and] idea” that we have the ability to persuade or communicate (Burke, “Rhetoric” 55). By nature, human beings are accustomed to discord. Each of us “approaches the universe with a different ‘point of view’” (Burke, “Permanence” 256) and understanding of morality, thus rhetoric becomes necessary to finding common ground. Being identified is to be “substantially one,” but concurrently different from the other (Burke 1969). Obviously, a student and professor are not identical, however, as
their interests in educational value are linked, the student is identified with the professor. Even when these interests diverge, and an entitled student considers the resultant letter grade more significant than the learning process, should that student presume them to be related, he/she may still identify himself/herself with the professor.

Rhetorical privilege emerges when instances arise in which identification appears to breakdown. Anytime an individual connects with others that share similar interests, “he or she is at once removing opposite associations” (Llano 69). Those associations may be inherently fixed into one’s personality, much like an entitled student’s uncompromising attitude of deservingness. In “pure identification,” just as in “absolute separateness”, there would be no concern of conflict. However, when “identification and division” are indistinctly entangled together, “so that you cannot know for certain where one ends and the other begins, [then] you have the invitation to rhetoric” (Burke, “Rhetoric” 25). Identification does not occur instantly, but is created through discourse. Thus, identification pertains less to how an individual “can identify himself with the character of a surrounding situation,” and is more akin to shifting one’s thoughts away from personal ends and toward a universal end (Burke, “Rhetoric” 16). Recognizing the value of alternative perspectives may be difficult to overcome, as this entails potentially abandoning established beliefs that have become emmeshed in one’s identity. Typically, it is simply out of insecurity that an individual remains reluctant “to assume community responsibilities” (Barrett 51), however it is in acting together that we recognize “common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, [and] attitudes” that make us consubstantial (Burke, “Rhetoric” 21). Rhetoric focuses our attention on how symbolic actions create a sense of identification between the speaker and the audience.
This aspect of control over participants of a rhetorical occasion, is an important attribute of rhetorical privilege. In “Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis” (1989), Raymie McKerrow examines the discourse of power that “creates and sustains the social practices which control the dominated” (92). Domination occurs through “the construction and maintenance of a particular order of discourse” (Therborn 82), by the social structures that attempt to impose “restrictions on who may speak, how much may be said, what may be talked about, and on what occasion” (Therborn 83). These limitations are socially determined and employed by an alleged dominant class to “control discursive actions of the dominated” (McKerrow 93). Similar to a ruling class mentality, entitled individuals maintain a belief of “symbolic power to map or classify the world of others” (Hall 44). Rhetoric is often associated with the concept of domination, and considered to be a means of exerting power over others. While this thought is not entirely inaccurate, we must not overlook freedom from domination as well. “The task of rhetoric is to undermine and expose the discourse of power in order to thwart its effects in a social relation” (McKerrow 98). McKerrow furthers that rhetoric serves as an instrument of revelation as much as a concealment of the truth (92), a postulation earlier presented by Kenneth Burke, who suggested “the use of rhetoric is ontological; that is, it is essential to existence and it reveals how we operate” (Smith 340). Engaging in rhetoric allows scholars to reveal how power is communicated and employed in social structures.

Chapter 1 establishes the research question that guides this project, investigating how attitudes of entitlement engender rhetorical privilege by disrupting the discursive spaces and interpersonal relationships that exist, particularly in collegiate environments. Entitlement is characterized as a conviction that an individual, with an elevated sense of self, deserves special privileges or preferential treatment. While not a recent occurrence, this mentality is increasingly
transforming the way we communicate, grounded in a contemporary culture that encourages self-interested pursuits and a sense of control. As institutions of higher education are not immune to these effects, I examine the concept of student entitlement and the societal influences that have contributed to its pervasiveness. Fundamental to instances of entitlement is privilege, when audience identities or opposing viewpoints are knowingly discarded by a speaker that considers personal beliefs and expressions to merit inherent authority. Confident that they may dictate the direction of communicative encounters and unwilling to listen to other voices, an entitled student that engages in rhetorical privilege disrupts the balance of the contemporary speaker-audience relationship built on community. This chapter provides the groundwork for the manifestation of rhetorical privilege as it arises within a population of individuals who exhibit entitlement. From daily interactions to the professional workplace, rhetorical privilege can emerge in a variety of settings and across cultures, however my focus is primarily on those occasions in colleges and universities where entitlement is prevalent.

In Chapter 2, I will explore rhetorical privilege as it relates to a progressive shift in individual morality. Entitlement has not merely emerged as a contemporary occurrence, but has been silently and steadily developing for centuries. Human beings have always been selfish, however the growing sense of deservingness that many now observe originates from specific changes in our culture (Lasch 2018). Philosophers Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre each offer views on how our current considerations of morality have been influenced by modernity, creating an environment susceptible to unwavering disagreement. Taylor suggests a “fading of moral horizons,” in which people have become more directed toward self-fulfillment, believing that they have “a right to develop their own form of life, grounded on their own sense of what is really important or of value” (Taylor, “Ethics” 14). This understanding of self-regulated morality
is akin to MacIntyre’s perception that “anyone and everyone can thus be a moral agent, since it is
in the self and not in social roles or practices that moral agency has to be located” (MacIntyre,
“After Virtue” 32). Entitlement is not a recent phenomenon, nor can we truly associate it with a
specific culture, locality, or generation. The principles we use to determine what is right and
wrong, or what communicative practices may be deemed acceptable and objectionable, is central
to understanding the foundation of entitlement. My intent for this chapter is to examine how
humanity’s concept of morality has transformed over time and the factors most significant to this
change, as this remains essential in understanding rhetorical privilege.

In Chapter 3, I will focus on the notion of equity, and how rhetorical privilege disrupts
the “discursive spaces that emphasize freedom of participation rather than personal virtuosity”
(Hauser, “Vernacular” 74). Rhetorical privilege is characterized by a lack of recognition for the
utterances of others, accompanied by inflated expectations about how personal interests should
be received. In educational settings, it is generally accepted that speaker-audience relationships
are meant to have an inherent connection with respect and community. The purpose of education
is to increase opportunities for an individual to expand their knowledge-base, while not limiting
those chances by imposing arbitrary limitations. However, the existence of excessive self-interest
has the power to relegate expectations of mutual fairness to subjective instances of oppression.
Aristotle held that only those deemed to be equals should be treated equally, but contemporary
standards attest that one should not assume the righteousness of any individual or group. “If
people are abused in the process of learning, discussion will be stilted and curbed. Respecting
persons . . . is a practical way of assuring willingness to enter conversation” (Arnett, “Dialogic”
124). With this thought in mind, I will explore the work of philosophers Martin Buber and
Emmanuel Levinas, who emphasize the significance of interpersonal relations and dialogue.
Dialogue does not require consenting to an opposing viewpoint, only that we engage in honest communication with the Other. My goal for Chapter 3 is to understand how responsibility to the Other and allowing dialogue to develop through social relations, may exist in an environment built upon inequity.

Control over participants of a communicative encounter is a central feature of rhetorical privilege. When confronted with opposition to preconceived perceptions, entitled students may employ a common but effective method of regaining control of a communicative encounter, emotional manipulation. In Chapter 4, I will examine emotion, and how disruptive displays are meant to induce powerful reactions of sympathy, apathy, or fear should personal judgement be questioned. Emotions are closely linked to an individual’s beliefs, and “essential for establishing the relationship between an audience and their particular circumstances” (Hauser, “Vernacular" 51). Both Aristotle and Cicero understood the power of emotion to incite a desired response in an audience, and will provide context in understanding the correlation of emotion to rhetorical privilege. Grounded in work of these philosophers, a fundamental debate has endured regarding the close association of emotion with reason. Considering the negative effects of entitlement on communication, this relationship is important to my project. During instances of disagreement, using emotions to further individual achievement when tied to rational thought implies malicious intent. When a person “has been exposed to a message intended to alter their views in a way they would not accept on the basis of good conditions” (Fishkin 32), we no longer recognize openings to engage in persuasion that inculcate community, but manipulative acts that attempt to exert power over another.

In Chapter 5, I will explore the relationship between rhetorical privilege and control. Entitled students commonly maintain an attitude of superiority, believing themselves to be “in
command of all situations,” and to “have power over self and others” (Barrett 59). Power, “a pervasive and ubiquitous characteristic of all institutional life” (Deetz and Mumby 32), has a profound association with social relations, shaping how individuals develop a sense of identity and structure their interpersonal relationships. Central to this thought is discourse, the “primary vehicle” through which “competing interests” contend for a “privileged status . . . in the struggle over meaning” (Deetz and Mumby 32). When an individual can “frame discursive practices” commensurate to their own interests, power is “successfully exercised” (Deetz and Mumby 1990; R. Brown 1978). However, as French theorist Michel Foucault suggests in The History of Sexuality (1978), power should not be conceived merely as a “general system of domination exerted by one group over another,” but rather as “the multiplicity of force relations” (92). My intent for Chapter 5 is to engage the work of Michel Foucault, German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, and contemporary scholars such as Stanley Deetz and Dennis Mumby, to examine the affiliation between discourse and power. Rhetorical privilege is the product of the power relations that have been maintained and developed through the discourse of particular social structures, which have inculcated an environment susceptible to student entitlement.

My objective for this project is to fill a particular space in student entitlement studies from the perspective of rhetoric. Most research pertaining to entitlement focuses on the recent cultural, sociological, or psychological causes and effects of attitudes of deservingness, mainly in academic settings and the professional workplace. Although these scholars certainly contribute to our understanding of entitlement, few have examined the concept within a rhetorical framework. Furthermore, investigation into the relationship of entitlement and control, aside from limited studies discussing a “locus of control” (Barton and Jameson 2016; Sohr-Preston and Boswell 2015; Chowning and Campbell 2009; Twenge et al. 2004), appears to be largely absent from the
conversation. Entitlement is associated with controlling one’s life, relations, and surroundings, an attitude that I propose carries into dialogic encounters. Rhetoric concerns making purposeful choices to communicate, guiding us towards an understanding of academic entitlement and how we encounter rhetorical privilege. As occurrences of entitlement continue to increase throughout society, discourse about its negative effects on interpersonal communication seems especially relevant during this historical moment.
Chapter 2: Shifting Morality. The Foundation of Entitlement

The following chapter will explore the association of rhetorical privilege and morality, illustrating that increasing instances of entitlement have been steadily developing for centuries. Attitudes of deservingness are not a recent phenomenon, having been documented for millennia through the actions of political leaders, business authorities, personalities, and social influencers. However, societal and cultural shifts have greatly altered our considerations of morality, creating an environment susceptible to obstinance and discursive repression. Philosophers Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre contribute to this discussion, noting that individuals have become more disposed to attitudes of self-fulfillment, furthering a modern belief that supports the ascendency of personal bias. The principles we use to determine our valuations of right and wrong are central to understanding rhetorical privilege and the communication practices one considers acceptable and objectionable. This chapter focuses on morality and how humanity’s changing perception of the concept has contributed to the rise of entitlement in academic settings.

When most people think about an audience, the concept commonly evokes depictions of individuals gathered together to partake in some type of an experience - as a listener, as a reader, or as a contributor. Mass societies often view audiences as “an economic variable of spectators who are expected to applaud and purchase” (Hauser, “Vernacular” 44) when prompted, largely relying upon a speaker’s direction to stimulate their action and make decisions (Clayton 2004). Guided by this perception, audiences seemingly allow themselves to be manipulated (Barrett 1991), altering their appearance or beliefs to gain another’s approval and feel better about themselves (Sennett 1992). Whether attributed to insecurity, conflict avoidance, or the desire to please others, such compliance may diminish the importance of an audience, which is meant to provide a positive influence in rhetoric. Audiences must remind a speaker of agreed upon social
values and establish a civil interaction without the imposition of any narcissistic tendencies (Barrett 1991) that disrupt an effective exchange. Civility is considered foundational to this practice, and provides associates with an opportunity to develop a more meaningful connection. Unfortunately, “the narrower the scope of a community . . . the more destructive does the experience of fraternal feeling become” (Sennett 265). Rhetorical privilege discards the value of an audience, believing that dialogic participants are merely present to support a speaker’s biased declarations.

Feelings of entitlement are understood to be enabled through social relations. Mindful of the approval of others, entitled persons desire positive interactions. While a deep-seated need for control leaves them unbound to external decisions (Rose and Anastasio 2014), the centrality of cooperation is paramount. When an audience acquiesces to an argument, an entitled speaker’s uncivilized behavior is emboldened, and their perception of superiority engenders a strong sense that special treatment is expected (Wasieleski et al. 2014) of their audience. Previously noted, contemporary conceptions of the speaker-audience relationship are established upon community and cooperation. Not only do “antisocial acts” threaten the wellbeing of a community (Barrett 1991; Gaylin 2003), they also inhibit “the primary function of an audience . . . to pursue its chosen purpose . . . and present conditions in which others may respond and adapt” (Barrett 143). Entitlement inhibits the development of a “good audience,” those individuals whose presence in a rhetorical encounter increases the “chances for [the] realization of effectiveness and civility in others” (Barrett 156). Rhetorical success is dependent upon those who remain separate from us and reject any attempts to placate our impulses (Lasch 2018). Entitlement largely corresponds to a noticeable decrease in respect and civility, creating strained environments in which building accord is hampered by actions that “cripple inquiry” and “challenge discovery” (Barrett 1991).
Rhetorical privilege resists the “good audience.” Regardless of an argument’s veracity, entitled persons seek to impose structures of compliance upon conversational partners, dissuading audiences from upending a speaker’s self-serving discourse.

A “good audience” is central to effective rhetoric, offering control over oppressive voices that seek to advance messages detrimental to the establishment of a community (Barrett 1991). Discursive environments built on cooperation become encumbered by entitlement, as individual opinions and unstable personalities (Sennett 1992) attempt to limit interaction between willing participants. During such instances, entitled persons come to operate “apart and against,” by resorting to unreasonable egocentric behavior which alienates their audience (Barrett 1991). This is the situation instructors and college administrators have become accustomed to, a communal space susceptible to rhetorical privilege. “To engage rhetorically, whether with hundreds or with but one other, is to take part in discovery, merger, give-and-take, and compromise” (Barrett 11). Rhetoric is fundamentally a social act that evokes a dialogical character, yet allows us to develop and define our own unique identities through an acquisition of the “rich human languages of expression” (Taylor 1991). However, rhetorical privilege suppresses an individual’s inherent dignity and right to grow as a human being by denying them the opportunity to appropriately engage in social relations. Dialogue creates a “space in which intersubjectivity may appear. To be in conversation entails acting in ways that can sustain a we separate from an I” (Hauser, “Vernacular” 66). Each participant is granted equal recognition, allowing for the development of personal identity, not just personal opinion. Entitlement undermines this effort, marginalizing the value of alternative personalities in an attempt to advance one’s own status. While a variety of factors may have contributed to the weakening of a “good audience,” entitlement has played a
significant role, steadily developing as the public sphere has witnessed a fundamental shift in individual morality.

Traditional views consider the terms audience and public as mutually opposed. In both popular and scholarly discourses, audiences are associated with the private domain, thought to be rather “trivial, passive, [and] individualized.” Contrarily, “publics are valued as active, critically engaged and politically significant” (Livingstone 18), indicative of larger groups of distinct and respected persons. However, audiences and publics are comprised of the same individuals, each participating in an open forum that recognizes and challenges the “understandings, identities, values, and interests” (Livingstone 9) that arise at a particular moment. As society is “constituted by difference rather than identity, by diversity rather than unity” (Hauser, “Vernacular” 79), we may ascertain that the same multiplicity of perspectives and values that emerge in the public domain undoubtedly impact audiences in the college classroom. Moreover, the speed and spread of technology-mediated communication has given individuals across the globe the capability to project their own opinions and standards “to the widest edges of the culture, permeating the conduct of other cultural affairs” (Corner 5). Thus, the activities of audiences and publics cannot be wholly separated from one another (Livingstone 2005), as “a portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble” (Habermas et al. 49). The audience is a “crucial pivot for the understanding of a whole range of social and cultural processes that bear on the central questions of public communication ... [which are] essentially questions of culture” (Silverstone 173). Although people often think of audiences and publics as distinct associations, they maintain a synergistic relationship.

Since its first recorded use in English during the 15th century, the public was identified “with the common good in society.” This understanding was expanded upon by the close of the
17th century to include that which is open to the general observation of anyone (Sennett 1992), a realm positioned outside of one’s private and sheltered existence of family and friends. Largely consistent with ancient Greek conceptions of the *polis*, this view established that the city-state is to be “common to free citizens” and separate from the *oikos*, a domain restricted to the personal dealings of each individual (Habermas 1991). As Hannah Arendt posits in *The Human Condition* (1958), the public realm of the city and the private realm of the household and family may be recognized as “activities related to a common world and those related to the maintenance of life” (28). Thus, one’s existence perceived by anyone outside of family and close friendships has remained a commonly-held view of the public for centuries. However, this interpretation was established upon a city-centered life “where the crowd could knit together in diverse activities in the same place” (Sennett 54). As populations increased and became more scattered across the countryside, the once venerated city lost its center (Sennett 1992), a place where physical and psychological closeness between persons shaped the essence of their very existence. While this is an abbreviated version of urban history, it proves important to the remainder of this chapter as the relationships between persons is often considered fundamental to the moral good (Sennett 1992) of a society. The character of our social environments has greatly changed over the centuries, shaping both our contemporary culture and the nature of morality.

**Understanding Sociological and Psychological Morality**

According to C.H. Whitley, there are two ways that we may understand morality. First from a sociological perspective, in which the morality of a community manifests in the behavior that each member “is taught, bidden and encouraged to adopt by other members” (Whiteley 141) within a localized region or a more wide-ranging public milieu unbound to physical distance. The public sphere is a dialogic space where “individuals and groups associate to discuss matters
Communities uphold an established set of agreed upon standards through their “relationship with religion, economics, and government” (Whiteley 142), obliging individuals to observe these conventions or risk ostracism. There are always instances when community members disagree on what conduct should be enforced, thus “the distinction between what is morally obligatory and what is morally optional . . . cannot be quite sharp” (Whiteley 142). Understanding morality from a sociological perspective maintains that a cooperative society determines what is right and acceptable. Because people innately try to win respect and achieve a heightened reputation from others by acting out agreed upon values, the position of the community is critically important (Sennett 1992). When public life was centered around a city square, individuals undoubtedly became indoctrinated by the provincial views connected with such a setting and generations of their predecessors. It is our immediate social relations such as family, friends, neighbors and community members that first orient us toward valuations of right and wrong.

Morality is something we inherit from our cultural heritage and community traditions. None of the virtues of character arise in us naturally, rather nature provides us with the “capacity for acquiring them” through training or habit (Aristotle 1893). Based upon this understanding, morality is learned through habituation, a process that commences during one’s formative years and continues throughout our lives in response to the repeated exposure of specific messages. As “the exercise of moral judgement is coextensive with relations of social interaction in the lifeworld” (Benhabib 125), one’s definition of right and wrong arises through the discursive practices of a community. Moral judgement is inherently connected to human relationships in the public sphere. Seyla Benhabib proposes that an individual’s perspective of morality is not “regarded as a psychological attribute of human consciousness,” but rather is discovered in the
discourse of the community (Benhabib 5). Morality is built by “collectives through their public discourse,” continuously created and re-created through reflection of that discourse, and must be viewed “as an open process of crafting in order to continue the process of crafting” (Condit 96). If we accept that interpretations of right and wrong are discovered through discourse with our social interactions, we must also acknowledge that the good “associated with what is right and proper for humans to be and do,” may adhere to a number of perspectives and traditions (Arnett et al. 4). An individual’s understanding of morality may be defined in many ways, dependent upon family, culture, class structure, education, power, or social environment.

As students matriculate to college, not only has their sense of entitlement become an embedded feature of their personality, but their conception of morality is often deep-rooted. Although this may be attributed to a variety of sociological influences, many students “say they base their decisions about what is right and wrong on their life experience . . . crediting family as perhaps the strongest and most enduring influence on their moral outlooks” (Leiterman). Students “are often exceedingly close to their parents, who assume participatory roles in their children’s educational pursuits” (Elam et al. 22). Involvement goes beyond traditional forms of support, as parents intercede in situations when such actions are not necessary or appropriate. Academically, parents have even become accustomed to “reading and proofing their child’s papers,” contacting faculty to contest grades, or “teaching their children it is acceptable to use plagiarism” (Hunt 9). To say that these approaches contradict traditional conceptions of integrity would be an understatement. While over-involved parents are a frequent target of criticism, we cannot overlook the influence of peer-relationships, as students also depend largely upon their peers to resolve the numerous moral issues they encounter (Leiterman 1983). These relationships highlight a sociological morality. When students enter college, they are clearly receptive to the
interpretations of right and wrong which have been communicated by family and friends, who themselves have been inculcated by definitions originating from their own social environments.

Morality may also be defined by an individual’s own point-of-view. For instance, “my morality consists not in what other people insist that I should do, but in what I insist I should do” (Whiteley 142). This psychologically grounded view of morality considers that the content of one’s own consciousness is the motivation for their actions. A person is guided by their own perception of what they ought to do, regardless of any external motivations (Whiteley 1960). Such an assessment of morality arguably evokes an impression of self-interest. “Morality begins with the self, with the individual mind . . . that must make free and reasonable decisions to promote what is good for oneself. The actions that we perform and their consequences . . . are in a sense secondary to the state of character that produces them” (Cronin 674). The thought that morality may be understood as the “solution to a practical problem that arises for self-interested human beings” (Rachels and Rachels 89) is commonly credited to Thomas Hobbes. For Hobbes, individuals are “simply incapable of caring for others for their own sake,” and if we take the time to observe our innermost motivations, we will recognize that self-interested inclinations (Cronin 2009) serve as the central contributor to our actions. This theory arises from Hobbes’ account of “the natural condition of mankind” in Leviathan. Governed by one’s own reason, every person maintains a natural right of self-preservation against conditions that invite conflict, competition, or may be destructive to life. “The right of nature . . . is the liberty each man hath to use his own power as he will himself for the preservation of his own nature; that is to say, of his own life; and consequently, of doing anything which, in his own judgement and reason, he shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto” (97). Contemporary culture often considers those that observe their own moral consciousness as individuals of integrity, even if the decisions cause inconveniences
to others (Cronin 2009). When governed by reason “there is nothing that he can make use of that may not be a help unto him in preserving his life” (Hobbes 97) or personal ambition. Presuming that human beings naturally focus on the self; morality depends upon individual disposition, rather than collective social principles. The crumbling of close-knit communities has led to a “milieu of strangers . . . who have no knowledge of one’s history, and no experience of similar actions, declarations, and professions in one’s past” (Sennett 39). With no one available to explain the critical aspects of traditional moral positions, a disoriented individual is suddenly left to fend for oneself.

Understanding morality as psychologically based, a position conceivably associated with self-interest, has been frequently observed by philosophers throughout history. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle suggested that “every act and purpose, seems to aim at some good,” and since there are numerous potential actions, there exists the presence of many ends as well (1). Thus, the best action an individual may take is something worthy of pursuit.

Happiness seems more than anything else to answer to this description: for we always choose it for itself, and never for the sake of something else; while honour and pleasure and reason, and all virtue or excellence, we choose partly for themselves. . . but partly also for the sake of happiness, supposing that they will help to make us happy. But no one chooses happiness for the sake of these things, or as a means to anything else (14). The notion of grounding morality upon the conscious attainment of those goods that produce happiness was furthered in the 18th century by English philosopher Jeremy Bentham. A man’s happiness depends upon “such parts of his behavior as none but himself are interested in . . . his duty to himself” (Bentham 237). Commonly known as the “greatest happiness theory,” Bentham argued that individuals naturally pursue those moral actions which result in the greatest pleasure.
for oneself. A century later, Henry Sidgwick furthered this analysis, suggesting that “the rational agent regards quantity of consequent pleasure and pain to himself as alone important in choosing between alternatives of action; and seeks always the greatest attainable surplus of pleasure over pain” (Sidgwick 95). This perspective, commonly known as egoism, is contradicted by a moral thinking called utilitarianism that affirms “the conduct which under any given circumstance is objectively right,” will undoubtedly “produce the greatest amount of happiness on the whole; that is, taking into account all whose happiness is affected by the conduct” (Sidgwick 411). Since individuals may have reasonable motivations to act in the best interest of others as well as themselves, Sidgwick contends conscious thought encounters a “dualism of practical reason,” and the moral agent must then make a choice. The dilemma of dualism is whether it truly offers any “practical guidance” (Crisp 1996), as reasoning is arguably grounded in the personal cost of the action. Unfortunately, when presented with a choice between altruism and self-interest, people increasingly appear to select the latter.

In the college classroom, grade determination offers a fitting example of morality guided by the fulfillment of happiness. “Students performing average work, who acknowledge that their work is average, expect a grade of B or A more than 70 percent of the time, even though they realize that the grade for average work is C” (Landrum 126). Grades are commonly considered an end, trivial in comparison to the effort a student exerts. Such a mindset is known to prompt responses like “I should never receive a zero on an assignment that I turned in,” (Jackson et al. 55) or “what else is there really than the effort you put in?” (Schaefer et al. 82). Attending class regularly and completing assignments on time, are not only thought to be enough to guarantee that students pass a course, but should also merit a high grade (Schaefer et al. 2013; Lippmann et al. 2009). Academic standards emphasize that high grades are awarded to students that exceed
required learning objectives by demonstrating knowledge, honesty, and integrity. Entitled students maintain a valuation of right and wrong contrary to conventional beliefs, reasoning that achieving higher grades, regardless of the quality of application, will merit success and produce happiness. “When any pleasurable incident happens to a man, he naturally, in the first moment, thinks of the pleasure it will immediately afford to himself” (Bentham 91). Unfortunately, instructors attempting to “evaluate students according to more rigorous criteria are likely to encounter unhappy students” (Lippmann et al. 199), leading to the likelihood of disrespectful or potentially violent behavior. Rhetorical privilege arises when an individual, driven by personal happiness, exhibits actions or behaviors contrary to accepted communal or institutional values. Adhering to one’s own moral principles demonstrates a stubborn refusal to make any “proper adjustments in thought as reality may dictate” (Barrett 45). Adaptation is a critical component of rhetorical success, illustrating both a willingness to participate in an interaction and the maturity to welcome alternative views. Unfortunately, entitled students generally pursue self-interest and personal achievement over opportunities to engage in meaningful discourse, focusing on “what ought to happen” to produce the greatest amount of pleasure for oneself.

Left with the dilemma of “what ought to happen,” Immanuel Kant aimed to demonstrate that moral reasoning is not contingent upon a particular situation. An individual must act from an interest of duty motivated by an unconditional rule for behavior, not happiness. “Act so that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle establishing universal law” (Kant. “Practical Reason” 30). For Kant, only one maxim may ground morality. “It is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be considered good without limitation except good will” (Kant. “Groundwork” 45). This declaration highlights “the categorical imperative,” an unconditional moral obligation that is binding at all times regardless
of individual desire. “It is the presence of desires that could operate independently of moral
demands that makes goodness in human beings a constraint, an essential element of the idea of
‘duty’” (Johnson and Cureton). Acting out of good will, a sense of moral obligation is essential
to defining a good person. It is not the consequence of an action, or anything publicly visible that
distinguishes morality, but rather that an individual recognizes by reason what is morally right to
do. Morality is more than outward displays of good behavior; it entails proper inner motivations.

“Action from duty is to put aside entirely the influence of inclination” such as the desire for a
particular end or emotional incitement (Kant, “Groundwork” 13). Thus, when individuals act
morally, they are being guided by reason, not sentiment. Emotions maintain a close association
with morality, and may present significant obstacles by disrupting rational thought or hindering
an individual to focus properly. When entitled students experience moments contrary to their
personal evaluations of “what ought to happen,” the likelihood of emotional outbursts increases.
During such instances, inner motivations are overcome by desire.

The apparent progression of morality, from a sociological to a psychological standpoint,
is central to the emergence of rhetorical privilege. Rhetorical privilege thrives in an environment
devoid of collective interpretations of right and wrong, instead opting for morality determined by
a duty to oneself. Such a position suggests the presence of moral subjectivism, “the view that
moral positions are not in any way grounded in reason or the nature of things but are untimely
just adopted by each of us because we find ourselves drawn to them” (Taylor, “Ethics” 18).

However, if moral judgement is based upon individual perception, then one’s decision cannot be
incorrect, leading to a deterioration of rational discourse on issues of right and wrong. Through
personal reflection we are expected to develop and refine our own perspectives. However, this is
not the approach we must take concerning important matters, which can only be truly determined
through dialogue (Taylor 1991). As public closeness continues to surrender to private distance and internal desire, we ignore a fundamental detail about ourselves, that interaction with others is required to gain a common understanding of morality.

Disagreement and Distance: The Erosion of Public Life

Why views of morality have transformed is not an easy question to answer. “We are all of us trained to believe that the moral life is in ceaseless flux and that the values, as we call them, of one epoch are not those of another” (Trilling 1). However, at a certain point in history an increasing percentage of individuals seemingly “sought to find personal meanings in impersonal situations, in objects, and in the objective conditions of society itself” (Sennett 259). Whether recognized as individualism, narcissism, or entitlement, an individual’s focus has largely drifted towards oneself (Sennett 1992), accompanied by a purposeful rejection, or obliviousness, of the “concerns that transcend the self, be they religious, political, [or] historical” (Taylor, “Ethics” 14). A willful ignorance of the languages, customs, values, and religious practices that comprise the public, critically endangers the intimate social relationships (Hauser 1999) that provide an individual with a sense of belonging. Moreover, such a stubborn unawareness of our lifeworld diminishes one’s natural inquisitiveness (Sennett 1992), inciting an unfortunate stagnation in one’s growth and capacity to understand. Rhetoric emerges through disagreement and struggle.

“As an agonistic practice it facilitates transforming and questioning social relations” (Hauser, “Vernacular” 114). By limiting opportunity for dialogue to occur, we lose our ability to navigate competing narratives, and moral judgement becomes more tolerant of multiple perspectives that are hampered by inconsistency. “The general relaxation of moral restriction has had a discernible effect upon the individual psyche, to the extent of having brought about an alteration of its very structure” (Trilling 162). Rhetorical privilege exploits the presence of community disinterest and
uncertainty, as this void presents a communicative partner with less opposition to further their own views. Today, the closeness that once existed between persons and allowed for a collective understanding of the moral good, is confronted by “a profound dislocation” that many scholars believe results from the proliferation of capitalism and secularity of the 20th century (Sennett 1992). It often appears that there is no longer an agreed upon right course to follow, inevitably creating confusion, frustration, and indifference.

*Capitalism: The Loss of Community and Profit as a Virtuous End*

The foundations of our modern capitalist system continue to produce a significant deal of scholarly debate. However, trade and industry controlled by private interests for the purpose of profit have existed for millennia. Capitalistic endeavors have maintained a profound relationship with morality since their inception. These practices were introduced to an unsuspecting world wary of deviation from traditional customs. “Authorities opposed them because they violated the law [and] ordinary people were offended by actions that ran athwart accepted notions of proper behavior” (Appleby 7). Silent and steady, capitalism’s ascendancy infiltrated and transformed all aspects of communities entrenched in tradition, where “ancestral accomplishment outweighed imposed structures” (Hauser, “Vernacular” 129), and moral standards narrated the thoughts and discourse of generations that rarely strayed from a particular location. “Capitalism—a system based on individual investments in the production of marketable goods—slowly replaced the traditional ways of meeting the material needs of a society” (Appleby 3). Over time the spirit of capitalism consumed society, indoctrinating a belief of profit as a virtuous end, largely forcing individuals to conform to this rule or face ostracism. Nineteenth century sociologist, Max Weber, maintained that when economic survival emerges as one’s primary purpose, labor must be performed as if it were a “calling,” implying that fulfilling one’s responsibility in worldly affairs
is the “highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume” (Weber 40). Although this was not a sudden transformation, and one that continues to develop, traditional valuations of right and wrong have been progressively replaced with those governed by the attainment of individualistic desires and the proclivity for profit.

In *The Fall of Public Man*, Richard Sennett contended that community is a manner of stating who ‘we’ are, “born from a union of shared action and a shared sense of collective self (222). This common identity grounds a public’s sense of morality, guiding the discourse and action of its varied constituents “who hold different opinions about a mutual problem and who seek to influence its resolution” (Hauser, “Vernacular” 32) in a constructive and respectful way. In civil society it is neither imperative to accept alternative perspectives nor even like those with whom you interact, however, as long as these exchanges are guided by tolerance and empathy, any significant differences may be overcome through dialogue (Hauser 1999). Unfortunately, communication once trusted to be based upon fostering agreement through a shared interest in the collective good is increasingly absent in contemporary settings, providing fertile ground for instances of rhetorical privilege. A fundamental change has enveloped our ideas of public and private (Sennett 1992), engendering a profit-oriented society firmly controlled by free market sensibilities. Individuals are not only focused on financial gain, but personal advantage of any type. We are experiencing a public sphere both “free from domination” as well as “any kind of coercion” (Habermas 79). This notion underscores the rise of psychologically grounded morality, in which one stubbornly relies upon their own view of moral obligation despite any external motivations. Individuals adhering to distinct perceptions of right and wrong, are no longer willing to participate in civil dialogue, creating an environment where even the mere thought of compromise, or a loss of advantage, is a threatening prospect. Any type of perceived external
pressure, regardless of its veracity, is deemed more akin to a personal condemnation rather than an invitation to conversation. Traditional communal principles that once grounded public dialogue have submitted to an abundancy of interests and values, resulting in a fragmentation that continually undermines our sense of the public (Hauser 1999). This environment of dissociation engenders an instinctive attitude of refusal, especially if personal advantage is in danger, conceivably the most troubling aspect of rhetorical privilege. Rather than attending to societal differences, individuals become entrenched in singular perspectives and personal ideologies. Absent any interest to discover common ground, one assumes continuous superiority in communication, rebuffing overtures to dialogue or cooperation.

Young generations of college students, nurtured by such a pluralistic atmosphere, may find this obstinate mentality further reinforced when confronted with conflicting moral values that exist at institutions of higher learning. In many cases, these alternative perspectives severely challenge one’s deep-rooted interpretation of morality, threatening their sense of identity and provoking troublesome behavior. Academic entitlement is typically associated with “a sense of being owed an assessment of performance” inconsistent with accepted standards, equipping students with “presumptive outlooks” and increased aggression while attempting to attain expected outcomes (Lippmann et al. 198). This behavior is indicative of a contemporary culture that “provides us with daily reminders of our differences . . . spawned by issues that reflect our ideological fragmentation” (Hauser, “Vernacular” 31). Emboldened by societal division and a perceived loss of personal advantage, many students entering college instinctively approach dialogue with a sense of mistrust and a staunch belief that their views are indisputable. This mentality is especially apparent when interacting with authority figures whom they deem to be part of the establishment. Accompanied by the absence of any sincere effort to engage in
meaningful discourse, entitled students are primarily interested in ensuring a favorable reaction. Should instances arise that indicate a potential loss of communicative or moral control, attempts at cultivating discord are often instigated through emotional petition, subjective rationality, or blunt confrontation.

Urban growth, mobility and the desire for personal gain, brought upon by capitalistic influence, have inherently altered the shape of morality. In a globalized society, where the accumulation of profit, a “principle of the inauthentic human existence” (Trilling 124), has been allowed to govern our definition of the good, people are required to separate themselves from traditional support systems to achieve career aspirations or avoid the risk of unemployment (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Ancestral and community associations once relied upon to guide an individual’s sense of right and wrong, often stretching for generations, continue to erode as distance and the complexities of contemporary culture have made it more difficult to maintain these connections. “Each person’s biography is removed from given determinations and placed in his or her own hands, open and dependent on decisions” (Beck, “Risk Society” 135). One must now learn to rely upon personal disposition to make important decisions, placing the self at the center of attention to survive (Beck 2013). As individuals begin to withdraw from established institutions and relationships to explore new “niches of activity” and restructured identities (Beck 1997), familiar traditions and intimate associations splinter. We construct our own impressions of moral obligation based upon narratives that are “subject to constant revision and reinterpretation as the conversational partner changes” (Hauser, “Vernacular” 74), and even demand the right to piece together our own biographies (Beck 1997). In a public sphere under increasing pressure to acquiesce to private interests, an “acclamation-prone” mentality comes to dominate, ushering in an environment based upon personal opinion instead of public opinion.
(Habermas 1991). Social division, considered a destructive effect of capitalism, continues to subvert the moral stability that once existed and supported collective agreement.

For many, the free-market system introduced by capitalism undermines the traditional relationships that emerge through community and family, bonds that both center morality and maintain a support structure when individuals encounter hardship. Such a society was “one in which individual responsibility for actions towards others could be counted on to exceed pure exchange value” (Hauser, “Vernacular” 23). As established connections are broken down by forced mobility and the pursuit of profit, an increasingly competitive environment propagates a state where less fortunate individuals, now distanced from familial relations, seek new forms of patronage. In light of this development, critics contend that government regulation to create equal opportunity only creates a welfare state that “absolves individuals of moral responsibility and treats them as victims of social circumstance” (Lasch, “Culture” 259). This belief often parallels the attitudes possessed by those with high levels of entitlement. “Perceptions of being wronged increases individuals’ sense of entitlement to avoid further suffering and to obtain positive outcomes for themselves” (Zitek et al. 245). Unmet expectations are perceived as another instance of victimization, leading to emotional outbursts of anger or sadness. Entitled persons continue to become more proficient at exploiting social relationships for their own advantage (Lasch 2018), believing that any attempts at cooperation are simply pretenses to building temporary connections that may provide assistance or recognition. Not only have our personal connections become more detached and utilitarian, so too has our moral obligation to others. Rhetorical privilege regards social relations primarily for their perceived exchange value. As long as a communicative advantage endures, one upholds a duty to maintain that relationship.

Secularism: Religious Faith or Intellectual Freedom?
Eighteenth-Century Genevan philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau may be one of the first to illustrate that secularism emerges “out of a particular kind of city – the cosmopolitan capital” (Sennett 115). As capitalism continued its steady advance throughout the public sphere, religious faith, considered by many to be the foundation of morality, became more detached from both our civic and private affairs. In Letter to M. D’Alembert on the Theatre, Rousseau states:

In a big city, full of scheming, idle people without religion or principle, whose imagination, depraved by sloth, inactivity, the love of pleasure, and great needs, engenders only monsters and inspires only crimes; in a big city, where morals [manners] and honor are nothing because each, easily hiding his conduct from the public eye, shows himself only by his reputation and is esteemed only for his riches (58-59)

For Rousseau, morality is corrupted by instances of “abundance.” When an individual yields to one of the natural passions – sloth, gluttony, lust, or greed – they think only of those cravings that “do not contribute to beginning and maintaining life” (Sennett 116). Christian philosophy teaches that abundance is not intended for one’s earthly existence, as it invites spiritual laziness and shifts attention from eternal fulfillment to worldly pleasures. “God chose things the world considered foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important” (New Living Translation, Cor. 1:26-29). The pursuit of worldly pleasures is not God’s priority for us. However, when one’s moral valuation is focused on an “immediate sensation, immediate fact, [or] immediate feeling,” a perceptible and present reality becomes more believable than an indiscernible future built on faith (Sennett 21). While spiritual leaders urge followers to believe in the system – observe a righteous life to achieve fulfilment in the afterlife – these petitions are
continually losing their significance. The propagation of cosmopolitanism into small towns and rural communities devalued the importance of religious belief, resulting in a public that became more susceptible to the challenges affecting inner fortitude and meaning. Rather than depending upon scripture and a Higher Power to model practices for structuring one’s identity, individuals increasingly turned inward to establish their own principles. “Self-preservation has replaced self-improvement as the goal of earthly existence” (Lasch, “Culture” 68), enacting profound changes upon religion’s connection with morality. This shift towards self-reliance and the advancement of personal opinion illustrates a process of self-absorption. Without the guidance of heavenly authority and the obligation to improve our public persona, intimate relationships retain greater significance. Individuals are increasingly incapable of establishing connections with others and communicating in a meaningful way.

Accompanying the relentless spread of modern cosmopolitan values, a growing reliance on progress and mechanization has displaced humanity’s relationship with God (Corrigan 1939). Once considered a foundation of morality, traditional conceptions of religious faith, embedded in “the thoughts and aspirations that moved forbearers in the long past” (Randall 356), have been replaced by the “brilliant material achievements on a low moral and spiritual plane” (Corrigan 49). For many, the contemporary relationships and beliefs that guide our moral actions are so different from conventional ideals, that we risk forgetting much of the spiritual wisdom humanity has learned throughout the centuries (Randall 1929). While people are quick to rest comfortably “in the assurance that religion is inevitable and undying” (Randall 362), our blind dependence on the machine has merely isolated us from time-honored traditions, creating an environment void of context and disconnected from institutions that have historically guided our values. Whereas
we once consulted religious leaders and sacred texts for direction on how to address a moral dilemma, today our first inclination is to check a more temporal digital device.

Engendered to rely upon machines for convenience and improved material conditions, people increasingly trust in the importance of utility, even deeming human relationships as mere matters of usefulness. Unsurprisingly, collective attitudes of morality have been conditioned similarly. “The autonomous machine, in its dual capacity as visible universal instrument and invisible object of collective worship, itself has become utopia . . . a god whose power must be increased, whose prosperity is essential to all existence, and whose operations . . . cannot be challenged” (Mumford 290). With the promise of a more comfortable and sustained life, the introduction of every new mechanical marvel begins to suggest salvation, an ideal once reserved only for our faith in God. We have come to view the world through a lens of utility, promoting laziness, detachment and interpersonal control. Rhetorical privilege shares a deep connection with utility. Entitled persons engaged in dialogue are inclined to judge others solely by their willingness to assent and contribute to advancing a particular conviction. Disagreement is not only unwelcome, but is promptly disregarded as alternate opinions are deemed useless.

Just as the machine was demonstrating its ability to re-shape society, humanity yearned for freedom “outside the City of God,” and the modern mind desired to understand this worldly realm through reason and scientific method, resulting in contempt for the supernatural (Corrigan 1939). Under the guidance of mathematics and science the processes of nature were “reduced to formulae” and any traditional conceptions of intelligent design were promptly undermined. No longer bound to heavenly authority, a new “mechanical universe” could now function without the assistance of a Creator (Corrigan 1939), ushering in a public largely indifferent to the moral principles of traditional Christian philosophy. “The man who thinks in terms of modern
psychology simply does not entertain the notion of an immortal soul. The man who trusts a physical science to describe the world finds no conceivable place into which to fit a deity” (Randall 360). Arising from this secular worldview was more than scientific methodology. Darwin’s theory of evolution, impressions of artistic works, attitudes towards traditional beliefs, and significant changes in psychology (Sennett 1992) greatly impacted humanity’s relationship with a Higher Power.

Amid each mechanical and scientific introduction moral views became more focused on the immediate self (Sennett 1992). This inner focus has even led many to argue that faith demands private reflection, not an association with a particular religious affiliation. In fact, younger generations increasingly distrust faith-based organizations, as institutional philosophies often conflict with personal values or intellectual views (Reeves 1998). However, religious faith establishes a framework that people may use to navigate moral challenges (Dixon 2008), and without an illustration of absolute virtue, individuals would be unable to recognize differences between good and evil. As current college students have grown-up in a culture devoted to reason and the weakening influence of religious belief, it is unsurprising that displays of entitlement continue to rise. Still influenced by cultural shifts that began centuries ago, a pervasive sense of self-fulfillment underscores the indifference exhibited towards all types of external influence. Individuals increasingly rely upon personal values and subjective rationality to make decisions.

Charles Taylor: Morality and the Centrality of Identity

In Ethics of Authenticity (1991), philosopher Charles Taylor examines how our culture has become characterized by self-fulfillment, leading “many people to lose sight of concerns that transcend them” (15). For Taylor, modernity has led to the dominance of subjectivity, an innate desire to express our own opinions and feelings of personal uniqueness, reducing the significance
of collective values built upon tradition and social obligation. “Things have significance not of themselves but because people deem them to have it – as though people could determine what is significant” (36). Such an attitude is indicative of entitled individuals who often view subjective characteristics and experiences as reasonable considerations, believing they deserve preferential treatment simply because of “who they are” or “what they have done” (Fisk 2010; Lerner 1987). As Taylor suggests, a “culture of authenticity” arises from individualistic philosophies that maintain all persons have “the right and capacity to be themselves” with little concern for how their personal beliefs or value systems may be criticized (Taylor, “Ethics” 45). As individuals should have the freedom to determine their own moral judgements, any attempt to oppose their views, no matter how dubious, is deemed unacceptable. Professors often encounter this thinking, observing students that believe they deserve to be “treated as ‘always right’ no matter how wrong, rude, inconsiderate, or otherwise bizarre they behave” (Bell). Unfortunately, when one chooses to define their own identity against only to those truths and instances deemed personally relevant, “history, nature, society, [and] the demands of solidarity” may be eliminated as “candidates for what matters” (Taylor, “Ethics” 40), constructing a fragmented community in constant struggle to achieve agreement on even the most trivial topics.

Taylor’s understanding of authenticity embraces the notion that people feel entitled to determining the course of their own lives, rejecting the advances of any external influences or demands of conformity (Taylor 1991) perceivably impressed upon them by unknowing persons or oppressive institutions. Moreover, entitled individuals are typically unconcerned for what is considered socially acceptable, or even beneficial for others when they make decisions (Zitek and Jordan 2019), asserting that only they may define their morality. Refusing to be beholden to outside standards, such a passion for authenticity demands one to rebel against convention and
those interpretations of morality that involve suppressing much of what a person may consider an “instinctive” characteristic of their being (Taylor 1991). Morality is grounded upon cooperation, “a collection of biological and cultural solutions to the problems and conflicts recurrent in human social life” (Curry 29). Allowing a person to define personal perspectives of right and wrong devalues human interaction, inculcating distance and weakening the communicative bonds that establish a community.

Waning community relationships and the resultant decline of public dialogue suggests the presence of a fragmented public, built on disagreement and “at the mercy of what seems like an ineluctable fate pushing towards the dominance of instrumental reason” (Taylor, “Ethics” 100). Grounded on the concept of utility, instrumental reason establishes rationality as an instrument “for determining the best or most efficient means to achieve a given end,” even if such goals necessitate exploitation or invite negative consequences (Wolin). Motivated by an unhealthy desire for domination, an entitled individual only values usefulness, pursuing whatever action that they deem most advantageous to seize control of a particular situation, pressure an audience, or guarantee personal achievement. In these instances, a discernable separation of humanity occurs, creating an environment in which people become disengaged from their relationships and feel less bound to others (Taylor 1991). No longer connected by shared experiences, loyalties, or local traditions, already weakening community bonds become further encumbered by a general indifference to others. As reciprocal discursive practices yield to more adversarial approaches that promote self-fulfillment and indifference to consequence, people find it more difficult to maintain meaningful interactions with others, believing those associations to be a waste of time (Taylor 1991). Entitled Students maintain a sense of deservingness, and their self-centered pursuits increase the likelihood of conflict and in their relationships, “outcomes contrary to the
admiration and respect they desire” (Moeller et al. 451). The “culture of authenticity,” drives rhetorical privilege, which illustrates a disregard for communal relationships and a speaker’s desire to control interactions. Simply expressing an opinion, regardless of veracity or moral position, is considered sufficient to compel agreement.

Equipped with an unapologetic arrogance and unwavering focus on attainment regardless of effort, entitled persons maintain a belief in self-determination. For these individuals, “there is a certain way of being human that is my way,” an approach to live one’s life unapologetically free from any external pressure. This mindset reinforces the importance of being true to oneself and holding personal convictions above all. To do otherwise is to “miss what being human is for me” (Taylor, “Multiculturalism” 30). In a fragmented public, disconnected and laden with innumerable narratives, people have become indifferent to our collective dialogical heritage, more concerned with instances of personal significance and discovering ways to impress their own perspectives upon others. Refusing to bend to external demands for conformity, entitled individuals believe that the only way to discover standards to live by is to look within (Taylor 1994), relying upon self-reflection to establish their identity. In A Secular Age (2007), Taylor illustrated this concept, positing that “the rise of the buffered identity has been accomplished by an interiorization,” in which one explores “an inner realm” of personal thoughts and emotions (539). No longer bound to a world fearful of external “spirits and forces” that once influenced all aspect of existence, human beings now look inward to decide their own autonomous character. Guided by independent thought and personal choice, we experience life as if a perpetual buffer exists, separating our internal self from the outside world. In fact, we have grown so accustomed to being buffered from external influences, including interpersonal relations, that we can simply disregard them without reservation and disengage ourselves from responsibility. Academic
entitlement is commonly associated with this sentiment, as students absolve themselves from responsibility of achievement, asserting that any failure must be attributed to instructors or the institution. Such instances of “buffering” increase the likelihood of rhetorical privilege. By discounting the views of others, while remaining attentive only to personal convictions, entitled students assume themselves immune from the consequences of misguided opinions or behaviors.

While our contemporary culture of self-fulfillment emphasizes the importance of being true to oneself, reinforcing that inward reflection is sufficient to determine identity, this process does not occur unaided. “Discovering my identity doesn’t mean that I work it out in isolation” (Taylor, “Multiculturalism” 34), but rather that it is revealed by negotiating various social environments. “Identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose” (Taylor, “Sources” 27). People often perceive their identity based partly upon external relationships and experiences; however, should these associations disappear, they are confronted with an unsettling confusion (Taylor 1989) of their place in society. We each have a unique way of being human, and seek to validate our distinct identity through recognition.

For many college students, lived experiences highlight a meaningful part of their identity. Motivated by peer acknowledgment, students hastily distribute photos of themselves on social media, remain engrossed by how many likes an Instagram post receives (Saiidi 2016), or fixate on attaining leadership roles. Deprived of this acceptance, one can be overcome by a fear of missing out, prompting feelings of distance and inauthenticity, or even transferring to another academic institution. Simply stated, human communication is a necessary component of identity. “We define our identity always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things others
want to see in us. Even after we outgrow some of these others – our parents, for instance – and they disappear from our lives, the conversation with them continues within us as long as we live” (Taylor, “Multiculturalism” 33). Dialogue not only pushes us to accept the differences we have with others, but to gain a deeper understanding of ourselves. Absence from such interaction denies us the opportunity to recognize common perspectives, and inhibits the self-reflection that allows us to establish our identity. Disregarding the importance of dialogue and the alternative perceptions that are awakened through communication hinders rhetorical development, inviting an immovable moral philosophy indifferent to human association. As a result, individual identity becomes consumed with achieving a sense of self-fulfillment by whatever means necessary.

Taylor’s conception of morality is closely associated with his assessment of identity, emphasizing the centrality of the human agent and “how deeply flawed any account of human personhood must be which tries to address identity separately from moral subjectivity” (Calhoun 233). Morality should be considered a component of an individual’s search for identity, rather than an externally imposed dictum. In Sources of the Self (1989) Taylor highlights this thought, claiming that although “certain fundamental moral questions are still put in universal terms,” we are now guided by a more substantial desire for self-fulfillment than our ancestors, and don’t recognize questions “as framed in these terms as a matter of course” (28). While we are certainly influenced by universal values and commitments, individual identities are much too complex to define ourselves by just one area of significance.

Since our identities are more profound than traditional understandings advance, we must acknowledge the true nature of the person (Calhoun 1991) that seeks to attain a particular good. “To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for
you and what is trivial and secondary” (Taylor, “Sources” 28). Taylor distances himself from a predominant moral theory that is concerned with “what it is right to do rather than with what it is good to be” (Taylor, “Sources” 79). Morality traditionally seeks to respond to the challenges of “what we ought to do.” However, attaining an answer focuses on one’s obligation, excluding other considerations such as “what it is good to do” and “what it may be good to be or love.” (Taylor, “Sources” 79). This position offers an interesting interpretation of student entitlement. Educational institutions observe conventional understandings of collective responsibility that focus on established standards of learning and achievement. Younger generations recognize “what it is good to do” from the perspective of individual achievement, placing lesser emphasis on effort. Accordingly, it is not uncommon for an entitled student to exclaim, “I should only be required to do a minimal amount of thinking to get an A in class” (Jackson et al. 55). As morality is such an inherent part of an individual’s identity, intentions and commitments must be subject to a process of self-reflection. Unfortunately, when one embraces personal beliefs with such fervor that opposing views may incite confrontation, those actions prevent introspection.

In Western societies, the rise of individualism and self-fulfillment is largely associated with secularism and the questioning of heavenly powers. Now focused on the pursuit of personal gain and how common occurrences may affect their specific lives, people have seemingly lost a broader vision of their own existence, making “them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others in society” (Taylor, “Ethics” 4). Without a sacred structure to guide our moral evaluations, the traditional “social arrangements and modes of action” that people once observed for direction “are no longer grounded in the order of things [but] are in a sense up for grabs” (Taylor, “Ethics” 5). As faith has become just one possibility among a multitude of alternative approaches to frame one’s life, worldly creatures and natural resources command less meaning, unabashedly treated
as instruments for our manipulation (Taylor 1991) and promptly discarded when their usefulness has come to an end.

Modern demands of economic and industrial growth have engendered a mentality that all aspects of a person’s existence may be recognized solely for their instrumental value, inculcating a noticeable detachment from the lived world. Increasingly isolated from others and disorientated by a sense of absence, humanity has become more driven by domination, progressively losing a connection with the earth and forcing us into an ongoing battle against our own motivations and the external forces that surround us (Taylor 1991). Fractured from a sense of community, people maintain little feeling of responsibility towards others. Unfortunately, as morality is commonly “defined purely in terms of respect for others” (Taylor, “Sources” 14), this indifference signals a deeper descent into a society with questionable considerations of moral choice and little regard for accepted standards. Humanity’s growing separation from heavenly intervention and our preoccupation with instrumental reason provides a foundation for rhetorical privilege. No longer bound to traditional conceptions of human fellowship, people have become consumed by control, both of their own thoughts and actions and those of others. Similar to their perceptions regarding other worldly creations, entitled persons value discourse as an occasion for exploitation and to impose their own will.

Alasdair MacIntyre: Morality and Societal Emotivism

In *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (1981), Alasdair MacIntyre explores the modern culture of self-fulfillment, suggesting that our struggles are connected to societal emotivism, in which moral valuations are based on an individual’s opinion and used pragmatically to influence others. “Emotivism informs a great deal of contemporary moral utterance and practice,” affecting central figures in society who accordingly model those emotivist behaviors to others (73). As one
does not simply create their own identity from nothingness, we may consider factors like familial relations, community traditions, and cultural practices to understand how emotivism progresses. Philosopher A.J. Ayer provides what is perhaps the most recognized description of emotivism, focusing on those “propositions that express definitions of ethical terms, or judgements about the legitimacy or possibility of certain definitions” (Ayer 105). Ayer argues that moral judgements uphold neither truth nor falsity, as they add nothing to the “factual content” being communicated. Moral judgements are merely expressions of one’s own emotions intended to incite a feeling in another person and provoke a particular response (Ayer 1946). As moral statements are innately subjective, there is no objective standard by which we may measure personal assertions. “Each of us is taught to see himself or herself as an autonomous moral agent” (MacIntyre, “Virtue” 68), who may essentially determine their own moral obligations based upon fluctuating sentiment.

The understanding that sentiment may guide morality is akin to Aristotle’s suggestion that the highest good human action is driven towards is happiness. For some, this entails a tangible object or accomplishment, for others an “absolute good,” but, “nearly all men are agreed; for the masses and the men of culture alike declare that it is happiness, and hold that to ‘live well’ or to ‘do well’ is the same as to be ‘happy’” (Aristotle, “Nicomachean” 5). Although happiness is commonly acknowledged as a state or transitory feeling, Aristotle likens the concept to a pursuit. Happiness is “complete without qualification” as it is an end we choose to pursue for itself and not because of any other motivations. Moreover, happiness may be achieved in accord with virtue, by living a life of moderation and exercising neither abundance nor absence of any activity. For Aristotle, two types of virtue must be present to be considered complete: the virtue of *thought* and the virtue of *character* (Aristotle 1893). Arising naturally, character allows one to exhibit simple goodness. However, the mere existence of character does not necessarily lead one
to the right action. Without thought, acquired through learning and experience, an individual’s choices may prove to be harmful (Harðarson 2019). Thus, those that lack the virtue of thought, whom Aristotle notes may not have this capacity (MacIntyre 2007), such as young people, are susceptible to moral failings. Individuals are responsible for making intelligent choices and fostering their own behavior to achieve happiness, but as students lack the benefit of experience, their moral judgement may be considered incomplete. Unable to recognize which actions may be truly virtuous in particular situations, entitled students turn their focus inward and rely on instinctive self-fulfilling behaviors, believing those will ensure happiness. Unfortunately, this result may be more akin to acceptance rather than happiness.

The good that a person believes in and chooses to pursue to achieve happiness depends on its purpose (Aristotle 1893). For instance, the goal of academic performance may be the learning process for one student and mere accomplishment for another. However, it is crucial to observe the role one’s own reasoning plays, as what may be considered virtuous in one situation could be deemed shameless in another. “The good life for a man is the life spent in seeking for the good life for man, and the virtues necessary for the seeking are those which will enable us to understand what more and what else the good life for man is” (MacIntyre, “Virtue” 219). For MacIntyre, virtues are considered temperaments or “dispositions” that allow a person to realize “goods internal to practices, but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good” (MacIntyre, “Virtue” 219). Obtained by engaging in a practice, internal goods, or the sense of personal achievement, differ from external goods which parallel social standing. This distinction is important to MacIntyre’s conception of contemporary morality, as institutions often place great emphasis on the attainment of external goods. Focused on competition rather than cooperation, the influence of institutional motivations leaves internal goods vulnerable to
exploitation. As people become consumed by selfish determinations of success, their perception of fairness, honesty, and social relationships fall victim to institutional corruption (MacIntyre 1984). Preoccupation with external goods such as prestige, material recognitions, or financial attainment, can lead to a type of moral debasement that commonly ground entitlement.

Younger generations are increasingly indoctrinated by institutions and societal influences that lead them to a fixation on external goods. Media outlets continually foster misinformed views about society by broadcasting content that emboldens individuality, promotes social status and materialism, and devalues the role of authority. “The media give substance to and thus intensify narcissistic dreams of fame and glory, encourage the common man to identify himself with the stars and to hate the ‘herd,’ and make it more difficult to accept the banality of everyday existence” (Lasch, “Culture” 32). Sadly, since many people are unaware that media content is often scripted, they’re incapable of effectively scrutinizing broadcasted material or identifying questionable teachings (Opree and Kühne 2016; Leone et al. 2006). By the time students matriculate to college, their attitudes regarding self-fulfillment and the attainment of external goods are entrenched features of their character. In fact, people have even started describing current students as the “trophy generation,” suggesting that they have grown accustomed to receiving accolades and awards (Espinoza 2012) just for showing up. By privileging external goods, students no longer realize the significance embedded within a practice, debasing the standards of excellence and personal achievement. For instance, current research demonstrates that entitled students place “elevated emphasis on extrinsic rewards and tangible signs of achievement” (Sohr-Preston and Boswell 184), particularly grade assignments, rather than learning and the execution of knowledge.
This fixation on oneself and the fulfilment of external honor, is indicative of a society that has become disconnected from traditional social structures. The “democratized” self maintains no obligatory connection to accepted social relationships or even one’s own identity, allowing a person to assume any role or take any opinion (MacIntyre 1984) because those association hold little meaning. Ancient Greek and Roman civilizations “grounded identity in citizenship” and believed that a person silent on the proceedings of public life was ignorant (Hauser 1999) for avoiding communal involvement. MacIntyre furthers this notion in After Virtue (1981) stating that “the self has to find its moral identity in and through its membership in communities such as those of the family, the neighborhood, the city and the tribe” (221). Moreover, we cannot ignore the varied traditions, triumphs, or transgressions of our ancestors.

Such individualism is expressed by those modern Americans who deny any responsibility for the effects of slavery upon black Americans, saying ‘I never owned any slaves’ . . . the Englishman who says, ‘I never did any wrong to Ireland; why bring up that old history as though it had something to do with me?’ or the young German who believes that being born after 1945 means what Nazis did to Jews has no moral relevance to his relationship to his Jewish contemporaries (220).

Failure to acknowledge past occurrences and their consequences illustrates a moral failure, as there would never a specific starting point when we seek to understand our own moral identity. As MacIntyre notes, “I am born with a past; and to try to cut myself off from that past, in the individualist mode, is to deform my present relationships” (221). Rhetorical privilege discounts implications of the past, instead opting to aggrandize only those occurrences that support current personal views, or prove beneficial to attaining success. In essence, an individual chooses what history they deem important, moral, or accurate, regardless of substantiation. Understanding
one’s own mistakes, or those of a larger community, provides an individual with the opportunity to develop their own perception of right and wrong. Willful ignorance of the past not only inhibits self-awareness but erects communicative barriers, as one becomes stubbornly entrenched in their own beliefs and inherently opposed to disagreeable perspectives.

The mechanisms of modernity have unquestionably engendered a fractured society “where there is no longer a shared conception of the community’s good [or] any substantial concept of what is it to contribute to the achievement of that good” (232). Without a common understanding of right and wrong, those who continue to adhere to traditional beliefs or singular interpretations carelessly erect impassable obstacles to interpersonal communication. The self, “liberated from all those outmoded forms of social organization which had imprisoned it,” (60), falsely believes in its own autonomous moral authority. Rhetorical privilege rises from such a social environment that observes biased perspectives of morality. Shaped by deeply-rooted principles that embolden an inflexible and cynical defiance, the sovereign self, “now thought of as lacking any necessary social identity” (33), denies the prospect that any opposing positions may be present. Morality exists through the sustainment of communal relationships and “those traditions which provide both practices and individual lives with their necessary historical context” (223). When someone willfully rejects the possibility of dialogue, the ensuing disengagement created in communication may be insurmountable. The absence of human interaction combined with a disregard for internal goods makes morality appear insignificant.

The question of “what is the good?” remains a matter of contention. “Moral concepts have a history,” arising from and shaping the social and communicative life of all human beings. “To understand this is to be liberated from any false absolutist claims” (MacIntyre, “Ethics” 269). As interpretations of right and wrong transform across space and time, we cannot expect agreement
on specific standards or what practices are worthy of pursuit. Contemporary culture increasingly “rejects universal agreement on narrative and virtue direction, not by stating that there is no ground, but by honoring the existence of a sense of multiplicity of grounds” (Roberts and Arnett 72). Valuations of “the good” have always been transitory principles, maintaining a synergistic relationship with societal change. However, as we now face countless incompatible variations of a virtue, the possibility of reaching agreement has become more improbable (MacIntyre 1984), inculcating an environment in which any moral judgement, no matter how reckless, has become sociologically and psychologically shielded from criticism.

Fueled by an unapologetic attitude and convinced of their own moral authority, growing numbers of people even impose personal values upon history, believing individualistic concepts of right and wrong allow them to evaluate events or figures without attempting to understand relevant context. Modernity has created such a pervasive attitude of infallibility that individuals maintain neither humility nor inquisitiveness, focusing instead on particular elements from past occurrences that complement their own interpretation of morality. Grounded in discord, every human life becomes bound to “its own norms and modes of behavior” (MacIntyre, “Virtue” 204), creating an environment in which moral responses are based upon personal choice rather than communal obligations. As conflict emerges, we are forced to choose “with whom to be morally bound and by what ends, rules and virtues we wish to be guided” (MacIntyre, “Ethics” 268) to maintain any social interactions. However, while we may now share a similar “moral vocabulary” as another (MacIntyre 2002), in choosing to be bound to some people we inevitably cease potential relationships with others.

While it is unlikely to find consensus on each issue of discord, adhering to an immovable moral position prevents an individual from recognizing common perspectives, inhibiting the self-
reflection needed for identity formation. “To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one’s own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were” (Gadamer 371). Moral truth is revealed through dialogue, and the willful absence from discussion destroys the potential that relationships have for making collective understanding of the good possible. The emergence of a “defective character” merely makes a person unable to “contribute to the achievement of that good” (MacIntyre, “Virtue” 152). Deliberately rejecting an occasion of discourse not only suggests an undeveloped character, but impedes the discovery of collective morality. Entitled individuals maintain a self-imposed persona that manifests as disinterestedness in others. The disclosure of alternative perspectives, contradictory valuations of right and wrong, or even the presence of dialogue, may be seen as a destructive prospect to entitled persons, especially if their expectations are not fulfilled. During such occasions, an individual may retreat to brooding silence or resort to behavioral outbursts, reactions often exhibited by entitled students throughout institutions of higher education. The focus upon “what something means to me,” produces an environment opposed to consensus, apathetic to expressions of another’s uniqueness, and fixated upon subjective views of morality.

Implications

Rhetorical privilege manifests during instances in which an entitled individual attempts to control a communicative encounter, determined to increase the likelihood of attaining a desired outcome that secures accommodation, recognition, or dialogic agreement. Nurtured by a culture supportive of self-fulfillment, current college students appear more inclined to focus on oneself, emphasizing individual authority and inculcating interpersonal distance. Academic entitlement highlights the emergence of a significant shift in the perception of a college education. Mere
achievement has become the hallmark of success; whether any effort is devoted or knowledge is obtained bears little significance. Perhaps more importantly, intense feelings of personal success create potentially insurmountable barriers as others often become critical of those who remain firm in their convictions (Barrett 1991) and refuse to acknowledge difference. Entitlement noticeably emboldens a student’s commitment to personal achievement. Careless of accepted moral principles or the consequences of their actions, entitled students enter the classroom willing to vehemently contest grading and accommodations perceived to be unreasonable. The result is an academic experience in which instructors merely attempt to create an unproblematic atmosphere. Unfortunately, such dispiritedness leads to the acceptance of lower educational standards to avoid potential confrontation. Central to the increase of student entitlement is the progressive fragmentation of public life and the proliferation of countless distinct voices each claiming acceptance and authority. This change has challenged traditional communal spaces and our collective understanding of right and wrong.

Arising largely from the industrialization of society, urban growth and forced mobility caused the shape of community relationships to change. Small town values and close familial associations, often extending for generations, buckled under the economic, material, and social conditions imposed by a burgeoning capitalistic culture. Whereas people were once “locked into a given place” and devoted to traditional beliefs, the continual discrediting of such lifestyles allowed modern freedom to emerge. (Taylor 1991). The general revolt against our dependence on external powers, along with the rise of capitalism, has increasingly led society to pursue a common end of continually striving to validate the self (Sennett 1992). As individual personality further enters the public realm, a focus on “being true to yourself” has pushed interpretations of moral obligation to embrace a more psychological perspective. Morality, once determined by
cooperative public discourse, built upon community associations and cultural heritage, is now regularly determined by personal sentiment, free from any external influence or interference.

While current beliefs continue to support the ideal of a “sovereign” self, autonomous in its authority to assess matters of right and wrong, the relaxation of moral controls (Trilling 1972) have encouraged individuals to treat others as a means to an end (MacIntyre 1984). Recognizing others for their instrumental value is a common feature of rhetorical privilege. Entitled students approach communicative encounters with professors and peers similarly, valuing exchanges for how they can be used to realize personal achievement. Any individual that rebuffs an instance of consent is promptly deemed to be uncontrollable, resulting in heated confrontations, behavioral outbursts, or acts of intimidation. Instructors that attempt to “evaluate students according to rigorous criteria are likely to encounter unhappy students” (Lippmann et al. 199), who are now confronted by an outcome misaligned with their understanding of “the good” that effort should be sufficient to procure positive results. The state of our contemporary culture has engendered a mentality that all aspects of one’s existence may be valued solely for their utility, disconnecting us both from communication and our own identities.

Charles Taylor offers a concept of morality that is closely connected to identity and emphasizes the importance of the individual agent. Influenced by modernity, people believe morality should not be externally imposed by societal demands, but may be determined by their own moral judgements and the ability to be themselves (Taylor 1991). While we are surely influenced by institutional, communal, or universal values, our identity is much too complex to be defined merely by one area of significance. Thus, it is imperative that a person understand “who they are” to ensure that they are equipped to answer questions about what is right and wrong, a challenging prospect as “both adolescence and emerging adulthood are periods of
identity exploration, in which youth are trying to establish their values, abilities, and hopes for the future” (Opree and Kühne 806). Since it may be uncommon for students to have a firm grasp of their own identity, understanding what constitutes a moral good is problematic. Moreover, as Taylor explains, there is a difference between the communal obligation of “what we ought to do” and the personal responsibility of “what it is good to do.” While institutions of higher education adhere to moral principles that focus on the collective good, entitled students acknowledge those that advance self-fulfillment. This dichotomy of moral obligation establishes fertile ground for rhetorical privilege to emerge. Morality is an inherent part of our character, so it is unsurprising that one embraces their beliefs with such fervor that opposing opinions may incite confrontation. However, when moral principles are immoveable to the extent that communication halts, such actions prevent an individual from fully realizing their identity.

The simple phrasing of a statement regarding moral obligation can incite significant difference, depending upon whether one believes “the good” is determined through public deliberation or by private reflection. Alasdair MacIntyre offers an additional consideration, posing the question, “What is the good?” As interpretations of right and wrong are transitory concepts that shift over time and space alongside societal developments, we cannot expect to reach agreement on what standards and practices are worthy of pursuit, nor can we assume that the principles supported in one locality are accepted elsewhere. “It is not just that different individuals live in different social circumstance; it is also that we all approach our own circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity” (MacIntyre, “Virtue” 220). As there is no shared understanding of “the good,” individuals may consider themselves to be autonomous moral agents, arbitrarily selecting a moral obligation to be guided by depending upon which
provides the greatest personal advantage. Such instances increase the likelihood of employing communicative techniques that erect barriers in human relationships.

Lacking any perceivable consensus, rhetorical privilege feeds off of an atmosphere of self-fulfillment and disassociation, attempting to further individual ambitions with little regard for others. Entitled students often resort to inauthentic discourse in their academic relationships, feigning respect for instructors or interest in course material, as they believe this approach will result in the most beneficial outcome. Even if the discourse proves ineffective, students assume no accountability for their position, nor do they anticipate any consequences. However, we must understand this rationale to be misguided. Individual identity develops through stable interaction between an interlocutor and the audience. While we may expect our interpretations of “the good” to diverge, it is of utmost importance to maintain open dialogue.
Chapter 3: The Conflict Between Entitlement and Equity

In this chapter, I will explore the concept of equity and how rhetorical privilege disrupts balanced discourse. Equitable communication is meant to be grounded in one’s freedom and willingness to participate, rather than being beholden to the personal motivations of a person. Dialogue does not demand blind acceptance of a particular viewpoint, nor does it assume the inherent righteousness of an individual to impose biased perspectives upon another. Through the works of philosophers Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas, who each stress the importance of interpersonal relations, I intend to demonstrate how responsibility to the Other regulates attitudes of deservingness that attempts to provoke subjective instances of oppression.

As established earlier, entitled students have been raised in a culture of self-fulfillment, arising largely from the progressive fragmentation of public life and the spread of distinct voices that each claim personal authority. Urban growth, forced mobility and increasing secularity has challenged our understanding of morality, replacing principles once grounded in familial and community bonds constructed on collective discourse, with private reflection and individually determined influence. Now more inclined to focus on oneself, and seemingly free from external control, a significant shift in the perception of higher education has also been exposed, shaping how many current students communicate. Fundamentally convinced in the merit of their own expressions, and that their beliefs are beyond reproach, entitled students regard dialogue with instructors and peers similarly, valuing exchanges merely for their usefulness. Such instances, characteristic of rhetorical privilege, reject the possibility of dialogue, upending the development of individual identity.

Entitled individuals are characterized by an uncompromising attitude and the expectation that others will comply to their demands for accommodation. This fixation on personal interest
engenders an environment of interpersonal distance and disregard for the views of others. During such encounters, rhetorical privilege is likely to emerge, rejecting the possibility of cooperation unless it conforms to one’s subjective reasoning. The presence of excessive self-fulfillment has the power to relegate a discursive partner’s expectation for kinship in an interaction to feelings of oppression, seeking to reject substance for personality (Booth 1963), and generate what could be described as rhetorical imbalance. Rhetoric seeks to discover meaning in how we communicate, to critically examine ourselves and our relationships, and to make every effort at gaining the involvement of others (Booth 1963). Engagement is an important feature of rhetorical balance, according each person a reasonable opportunity to present their arguments, understand alternate perspectives, and remain receptive to discovery. Rhetoric may be known as a means of altering reality “by bringing into existence a discourse of such a character that the audience, in thought and action, is so engaged that it becomes a mediator of change” (Bitzer 4). However, it is the presence of personal choice that poses such a threat to entitled individuals, as differing views challenge their own conception of the truth, resulting in attempts at shifting the focus of dialogue away from substance. Rhetoric emphasizes fairness and compromise, it “is the art of persuading, not the art seeming to persuade” (Booth 144), so one must enter discourse with a willingness to change their mind for balance to exist. Otherwise, subjectivity assumes control by placing focus on manipulating content to satisfy personal desires and emboldening inequity in communication.

Equity and equality are often used interchangeably, and while the terms share a common etymology in the Latin word *aequus*, which translates to “even,” “fair” or “equal” (“Equity and Equality”), they advance distinct social implications. The notion of equity is normally associated with fairness or justice and remains attentive to individual circumstances, whereas equality infers sameness in treatment, asserting that all persons share a fundamental natural quality (Espinoza
2007; Corson 2001) regardless of external conditions. In an educational setting, equity ensures that students are provided with the proper resources to overcome a particular challenge, such as the need for personalized instruction or special accommodation. As some students contend with learning or physical disabilities, they may require additional assistance to create an environment conducive to education. However, providing appropriate attention to those most disadvantaged faces additional challenges, as many instructors already feel pressured to accommodate student demands, particularly in collegiate settings where students expect to be treated like a customer (Goldman et al. 2017; Lechuga 2016; Jones 2010; Rosenbaum et al. 2010). Conversely, equality ensures that all students are afforded the same classroom privileges, resources and opportunities. Regardless of the population being served, instructors do not acclimate to individualized need, instead, students receive an identical level of instruction, opportunity to interact, and use of classroom facilities.

While equity and equality are both considered important pursuits in education (Espinoza 2007), focusing on equality is often considered an admirable goal but unrealistic and unattainable in practice (Coleman 1990). Treating students with sameness does not negate the struggles of an individual who encounters language barriers, financial difficulties, time constraints due to family or career obligations, health concerns, food insecurities, or limited access to necessary academic materials. Moreover, since educational resources and learning opportunities are typically more accessible for someone from a wealthier socioeconomic background, not all students enter the college classroom with an equal knowledge base. Thus, sameness can inculcate an environment where specific student populations cannot keep pace with rigorous academic work, do not feel integrated on campus, or may be overlooked. While some claim these are inevitable aspects of an educational environment fueled by competition, students most affected by standards of sameness
are those with differences in race, income, and culture. However, when institutions are attentive to these factors, and maintain a supportive environment, they normally witness higher retention rates (Chaney et al. 1998). As equality may present significant obstacles for achieving effective learning outcomes, particularly with disadvantaged student populations, educators instead seek to pursue equity. Efforts at creating an equitable educational setting not only provide personalized consideration to specific student challenges, but benefits the collective classroom community by encouraging alternative voices, fostering dialogue, and combating imbalance.

Academic entitlement seeks to hinder these endeavors, valuing individual achievement and performance above establishing learning environments that support collective engagement. For an entitled student, a pervasive attitude of deservingness reinforces a sense of superiority, which implies an unparalleled uniqueness and the ability to exercise unconditional selectivity (Espinoza 2017; Fantini 1989; Crossland 1976), standards that cannot be attained by everyone. If they believe a particular rule or standard should be bent or outright dismissed, then they have an unrestricted right to receive that privilege (Schaefer et al. 2013). A belief in one’s own authority suggests that personal opinion is more credible or praiseworthy than their peers, an impression that students may actually receive from the institution itself. As current students have grown-up in a highly consumeristic culture, colleges and universities have been pressured to incentivize the educational experience, reinforcing a student’s “belief in the customer-business model” and an “always right mindset” in which particular allowances are fundamentally anticipated (Schaefer et al. 2013). Entitled students believe they are owed special accommodation, not because they dedicate more energy to the learning process or demonstrate advanced content knowledge, but as a result of an exchange – tuition dollars for completion. When instructors attempt to establish an academic environment built upon fairness, this action seems to violate that perceived agreement.
Moreover, the likelihood of realizing both ‘excellence’ and ‘equality’ at the same time may be nothing more than wishful thinking (Espinoza 2017; Fantini 1989; Strike 1985). If exceptional students, or those who perceive themselves as such, are meant to succeed, others cannot be afforded similar opportunities. In fact, institutions of higher education commonly promote themselves with a “reputation for excellence,” and are expected to “restrict access to a highly selective group of students” (Guri 59). While this is traditionally understood to involve providing the most proficient learners with suitable academic challenges, those with an attitude of self-fulfillment believe themselves to be associated with this highly selective group, since being excellent implies superiority over others.

**Clarifying Equality and Equity**

Despite their differences, the “phonetic similarities and philological connections” of equality and equity have created a considerable amount of misunderstanding, to such an extent that the concepts continue to be used erroneously, even when reflecting on the same information. Unfortunately, this confusion has significant consequences. If equality and equity were indeed interchangeable concepts “the major normative issue of distribution theory would be reduced to a matter of definition and would be amenable to an obvious and simple solution” (Bronfrenbrenner 10). As the disparity between equality and equity rests in what is considered to be an appropriate distribution, we must determine if the “allocator” follows an equity norm, rewarding recipients “in accordance with their task inputs,” (Leventhal et al. 1973; Lane and Messé 1971; Leventhal and Lane 1970; Leventhal and Michaels 1969) or an equality norm, in which the differences in task inputs are ignored and rewards are divided equally (Leventhal et al. 1973; Kahn 1972; Lane and Coon 1972; Sampson 1969). Moreover, it may be difficult to discern what norm grounds an allocator’s decision-making, as one’s desire to maximize personal gain may cause them to select
a particular reward “which makes it seem he believes that equality is fairer than equity (or vice versa), when in fact he does not hold this belief” (Leventhal et al. 754). Martin Bronfenbrenner furthers in “Equality and Equity” (1973), that the equality of distribution “is basically a matter of fact and is, therefore, basically objective. The equity of the same distribution is basically a matter of ethical judgement and is, therefore, basically subjective” (9). For many, it is questionable whether we can even achieve equality or equity, as our culture typically prioritizes efficiency, instrumental reason, and individual accomplishment over concerns for egalitarianism (Espinoza 2007). As debate ensues, substantial barriers remain for college educators on how to establish a fair system that allows students to realize their full academic potential. Thus, it is important to explore the concepts of equality and equity to clarify an understanding of fairness which will guide this chapter.

**Equality**

Equality remains a frequent target of debate, demonstrated by the continued failure of scholars and policymakers to reach consensus regarding its definition. Even as people praise it or disparage it, they curiously “disagree about what they are praising or disparaging” (Dworkin, “Sovereign” 2), further perpetuating collective uncertainty. In “The Meaning of Equality” (2002) Nicholas Capaldi suggests that equality may be known as a descriptive concept and a normative concept. As a descriptive concept, equality is considered “the relation between entities” that are identical in quantity or quality, and is “predicated of things, persons, or social entities such as institutions, groups, and so on” (1). Based on this perception, equality is an objective statement of fact that only describes a specific condition. As a normative concept, equality recognizes the existence of a special attribute in which all human beings are truly equal, but “this factual equality requires that we treat them in a special way” (1). Normative models of equality direct
what an evaluator ought to do, by assessing differences and attempting to find an ideal solution for a particular situation. This may require special treatment to ensure identical treatment, or differential treatment to realize a “specific factual state” (1). However, normative perspectives are rather contentious as they are largely subjective and based upon the standards of an evaluator. While the descriptive and normative models each highlight the social nature of equality, by examining actions and their effect on people (Chroust 1942), a fundamental difference remains. On the one hand is “the notion that the same treatment applies to all persons irrespective of their rank or worth,” and on the other, that “everyone should have his due according to his rank or worth” (Chroust 121). Whether individual differences should be ignored or addressed to ensure equal treatment has been a contentious point for centuries. People insist that human beings deserve equal treatment, yet history tells a different narrative, continually illustrating the distribution of special privileges to select individuals. Unsurprisingly, a normative concept of equality had become commonly accepted in our increasingly self-interested culture.

In 4th Century B.C., the ancient Greeks upheld an understanding of a collective good that advocated for the survival of the polis, believing that individuals could only be fulfilled “when they performed their relevant proper function in maintaining the city’s freedom” (Capaldi 2). However, this ambition held little regard for a person’s social status. Aristotle, one of the most esteemed thinkers of the age, advocated for proportional equality, contending that “because of the absence of relevant resemblances and adequate criteria of comparison, it is difficult to establish true equalities between members of different social classes and individuals of diverse character and abilities” (von Leyden vii). Thus, proportional equality entails providing the same level of treatment only to those individuals or groups deemed relevant. This notion suggests that the distribution of equality is not numerically based (that everyone receives the same amount),
but suggests that all relevant persons are accorded their due in relation to their rightful needs. To believe that only “a certain class of persons” maintain fundamental rights is to presuppose the presence of some distinct characteristic that they all have in common (Westen 1990). Aristotle’s view of proportional equality asserts that equals should be treated equally, and unequals treated unequally. However, those individuals considered equals for Aristotle “were male; were sons of a citizen father; [and] born of a woman who was the daughter of a citizen father” (Davies 18). Citizenship in Athens was limited to a privileged few, preventing women, slaves, and foreign-born residents from participating in political life of the city. While most contemporary scholars would attest that equality should not assume the righteousness of any individual or group, the existence of self-fulfillment continues to further these ideals.

Amid the Roman Republic, Cicero stressed that nature is the highest expression of the good, and applied this reasoning to his concept of equality. In On the Commonwealth and On the Laws, he claimed that “if you examine the common bonds among human beings . . . there is no similarity, no likeness of one thing to another, so great as the likeness we all share” (114). Cicero embraced a perspective of natural equality that greatly differed from Aristotle. Whereas Aristotle deemed that equality was limited to citizens, a right not bestowed to all people, Cicero believed that “whatever definition of a human being one adopts is equally valid for all humans” (115). All individuals share equal capacity to experience and learn, even if differences do exist in particular instances or types of knowledge. Cicero is often credited as the first philosopher to view equality in moral perspective, an idea that would become accepted thought in modern Western culture. Moral equality suggests the presences of similarity but not sameness, as “underneath apparent differences there exist certain recognizable entities, which can be said to be ‘equal’ . . . they are distinguishable; even though distinct there is an ultimate quality of oneness about each of them”
(Thompson 4). Ronald Dworkin further developed this idea in *Taking Rights Seriously* (1977), proposing that “fairness rests on the assumption of a natural right of all men and women to equality of concern and respect, a right they possess not by virtue of birth or characteristic or merit or excellence but simply as human beings” (219). Although it may be implausible to treat all individuals equally, a minimum standard may be recognized to treat all individuals with equal respect.

Christian teaching throughout the medieval world brought about a modern conception of equality, that “proclaimed the equal moral worth of all persons in the eyes of God” (Capaldi 3). While this spiritual view of equality considered all human beings as equal, a descriptive concept, this was not entirely the case in practice. It is only through involvement with the Church that one may attain fulfillment, thus non-Christians or those who had been excommunicated were not permitted to receive or administer the sacraments. Arguably, Christian equality affords special privileges to select individuals, leading “not to identical treatment but to differential treatment” (Capaldi 5). This conviction ushered in an interpretation of equality that remained fundamental to contemporary philosophies of modernity. Whether determined by social status, knowledge, or grace, equality was inherently connected to disparity, requiring conformity to standards that could not be attained by everyone. Regardless of religion’s insistence that all human beings are created in the image of God, many were forced into inescapable circumstances of inequality. What granted authority to some was the simple belief that certain people had access to those external standards (Capaldi 2002), and others were inevitably mired in inadequacy. Since all people do not have the same opportunities to advance through life, a common understanding remains that everyone cannot be treated in the same way.
While equality may be considered an attempt to achieve fairness, in practice, we notice that the concept often fails to meet this expectation. The ideal of treating everyone the same is repeatedly supplanted by individual feelings of self-interest, encouraging the belief that special considerations should be provided to oneself. Questions of fairness no longer seem to concern the opportunities available to all people, only the significance of a person. Unfortunately, such an attitude offers a perception of equality that does not necessarily mean equal. In fact, equality for some often implies inequality for others. Perceiving themselves as the victim of unfair polices, entitled students believe that they deserve more favorable academic treatment (Sohr-Preston & Boswell 2015), whether this means unique accommodation, higher grades, or argumentative success. Regardless of the veracity of their claims, for entitled students special treatment ensures identical treatment. Even when lacking the presence of any perceivable inequality in a particular instance, the stubborn belief remains that privileges are deserved to guarantee consistency with others. However, in an academic setting, disadvantaged students are commonly the victims of equality standards. By overlooking this population, we limit the presence of alternate voices and challenging perspectives that serve as a foundation for education. When people are ignored or mistreated in an educational environment, discussion becomes restricted, hindering the learning process for all students. “Respecting persons on a campus of higher learning is a practical way of assuring willingness to enter conversation” (Arnett, “Dialogic” 124). For dialogue to emerge, we must establish a fair environment that provides each participant with appropriate consideration and a reasonable opportunity to articulate their position. Hence, our focus shifts to equity.

**Equity**

Modern understanding of equity shares a foundation with equality but is more commonly associated with legal conceptions of justice as Aristotle describes in *Nicomachean Ethics*. What
is equitable is just, “and better than what is just in one sense of the word – not better that what is absolutely just, but better than that which fails through is lack of qualification” (176). Thus, equity and justice are synonymous, both are “excellent,” though equity is considered superior in some respects. Aristotle’s interpretation illustrates how equity may function outside of justice yet remain a vital part. Moreover, the equitable person is one “who is apt to choose such a course and to follow it, who does not insist on his rights to the damage of others, but is ready to take less than his due, even when he has the law to back him” (176). Equity identifies and attends to conditions in which special treatment may be required. Instances commonly arise that demand concessions and “applying the laws to these exceptional situations would result in injustice” (Haas 17). As a result, equity is a correction to established rules or principles, allowing for the rectification of unjust applications. Aristotle reflected on corrective action in Rhetoric, claiming that equity is “the sort of justice that goes beyond the written law” (80), serving to uphold collective or institutional guidelines, yet remaining responsive to the unexpected needs of an individual. Additionally, “equity bids us to be merciful” to the inescapable weaknesses of human nature, and not to become preoccupied with “this or that detail so much as the whole story” (81). In this respect, equity attempts to achieve what may be recognizes as reasonable or fair (Haas 1997). Attending to students on an individual level, ensures that learning disparities or unique challenges are addressed and an educational environment built on fairness is established.

Marcus Tullius Cicero furthers this notion of equity, claiming that “there are occasions when the duties of justice undergo a change from the normal circumstances [and] may make it one’s duty not to restore a trust or fulfill a promise; doing so would result in harm being done to someone or in the common good being diminished” (Haas 20). For Cicero, equity is grounded in the law of nature and is fundamental to the preservation of human relationships. Laws are merely
part of the greater cosmos, a community shared by both God and man, and the laws that human
beings abide to must correspond to the order of our natural world. As Cicero questions, “who
could rightly call ‘human’ someone who desires no bond of shared law, no link to human nature
with his fellow citizens or indeed with the whole human race?” (Cicero, “Commonwealth” 48).
Equity is critical to the preservation of a functioning society, and the absence of such can invite
devastating consequences on social relationships (Haas 1997). However, unlike Aristotle, Cicero
contends that equity is not meant to be a corrective action upon established rules but is rather an
interpretive principle that condemns abuse and mistreatment. Equity is not meant to “correct the
law,” but serves as a guide for proper treatment by those in positions of authority (Haas 1997).
By adhering to standards of equity, instructors may identify and reduce learning barriers that
prevent disadvantaged students from access or opportunity. Recognizing differences in the
classroom enables educators to rectify imbalance and attend to individual humanity.

Although not recognized as an equity theory scholar, Augustine of Hippo’s indirect
collection would resonate for centuries. In Answer to Faustus, a Manichean, Augustine states
that “the eternal law is the divine reason or the will of God, which ordains the preservation of the
natural order and prohibits its transgressions” (46). Eternal law is understood as the immutable
laws that governs the universe, such as the law of nature and moral laws, which God provided to
humanity for guidance and self-preservation. For Augustine, “eternal law is imprinted on the
rational souls of humans as the natural law,” and it is through humanity’s observation of natural
law that we may grasp the “moral aspects of the eternal law by the use of reason” (Haas 25).
Since God has bestowed moral and natural law upon human beings, which serve as a foundation
of equity, a degree of divine justice is revealed in the functioning of all human laws. Thus, there
cannot be a complete separation “between divine justice and human justice” (Haas 27). By the
early fourteenth century equity retained this spiritual character, calling upon human reason and conscience, directed by the law of God, to determine how injustice may be amended in specific instances when established rules are stricken by noticeable shortcomings (Holdsworth 1915). Augustine encourages us to embrace our neighbors in friendship and heed The Golden Rule, “do to others whatever you would like them to do to you” (New Living Translation, Matt. 7:12). He furthers that one “should wish his friend to have all the good things he wants to have himself, and should not wish the evils to befall his friend which he wishes to avoid himself . . . let us love even our enemies as we are commanded” (Augustine, “True” 270). The basic tenets of equity summons us to express compassion and respect for all others, and to be conscious of the balance between enforcing accepted rules and easing them (Shuger 2001). This Augustinian perspective largely parallels contemporary theories of equity, examining when and how accommodations are allocated to particular people or groups.

Today, we commonly understand equity through its association with fairness and justice. By taking an individual’s circumstances into consideration, we may increase the likelihood that appropriate resources and treatment are distributed according to a particular need, capability, or contribution (Espinoza 2007; Tornblom 1992; Greenberg & Cohen 1982; Deutsch 1973; Adams 1965). Unfortunately, as people often adhere to subjective interpretations of fairness and justice, valuations of deservingness are problematic. For instance, entitled students not only believe that they should receive something they did not achieve (Jackson et al. 2011), but that others seeking similar results deserve less consideration and fewer accolades, regardless of effort or excellence. Fairness is of little consequence if an entitled student deems another person poses a threat to their perception of success or control of an interaction. Entitlement diverges from common beliefs of fairness, indicating how individuals apply valuations “that are not derived from an assessment,”
but are prompted by subjective standards that arise “from trait factors, biased self-assessments, and reward expectations that may or may not be related to how one perceives that similar others have been treated” (O’Leary-Kelly et al. 421). Entitled students adhere to their own evaluations of accomplishment and determine whether those expectations align with the actual treatment they receive, seeking merely to elevate their own perspectives upon discourse with little regard to fairness.

Social psychologist Morton Deutsch suggests that equity is a foundational element of distributive justice, “concerned with the distribution of the conditions and goods which affect individual well-being” (Deutsch 137). As distributive justice focuses on the fair allocation of “benefits and harms” to both individuals and groups, equity is not only a concern for the well-being of a person, but for the preservation of society as well. Equity requires “effective social cooperation to promote individual well-being,” which depends upon the external “circumstances confronting the group and upon specific characteristics of the individuals composing it” (Deutsch 140). Since we live in a social world, we must attend to the basic conditions of individual well-being and human dignity for continued participation to be realized (Deutsch 1975). However, communities are often challenged by limited resources, so how “benefits and harms” should be allocated raises contentious debate. Moreover, multiple principles determine distribution, leaving us with the dilemma of what constitutes fair. Questions about distributive justice arise anytime the allocation of goods that impact individual prosperity are confronted by a perceived injustice targeting: the values supporting the rules of distribution; the rules that are employed; how the rules are applied; or how decisions are made (Deutsch 1975). In an academic setting, each of these observed injustices may have significant implications upon student entitlement.
Disagreement regarding grade determination is typically noted as an important indicator of academic entitlement (Sohr-Preston and Boswell 2015; Schaefer et al. 2013; Jackson et al 2011; Chowning and Campbell 2009; Lippmann et al. 2009). An instructor may use various values when deciding grade assignment, based upon “the final performance level of the student, the improvement in the student’s performance during the year, according to the student’s effort, according to the student’s underlying aptitude, according to the needs of the students for good grades, and so on” (Deutsch 138). Whichever value the instructor chooses to employ may be perceived as an injustice by a student who was deprived of higher marks and desires their grade to be assessed according to another, more personally beneficial, value. This scenario arises frequently with entitled students, who “feel as though their effort, irrespective of their level of achievement, should count for something, such as a grade” (Jackson et al. 55). Even if a student and instructor agree upon a particular value for determining grades, such as effort, they must further resolve how that value is to be judged. Unfortunately, learning is an imperceptible and inherently personal experience. As everyone interprets and processes material differently, measuring effort is an unrealistic endeavor. Additionally, entitled students perceive an injustice when an instructor provides individualized attention to other students. Although noted as an indication of equity, those that expect special treatment solely for themselves consider this to be contrary to agreed-upon rules, especially should this situation endanger personal achievement. Such beliefs instill a sense that “students rather than the teacher should select the principles and rules for assigning grades” (Deutsch 139). Essentially, any outcome that does not comply with one’s understanding of how rewards should be distributed are considered a violation of accepted classroom rules and therefore illegitimate. In this regard, equity cannot exist for an entitled student, as the only fair outcome is one in which they personally succeed. Equity rejects the
presence of sameness that limits achievement to a privileged population and ensures that all students receive individualized attention to overcome potential obstacles. By leveling the playing field, equity engenders balance between individuals in an educational environment, encouraging genuine dialogue and the fair exchange of perspectives that leads to greater self-actualization.

Regaining Rhetorical Balance

It is generally accepted that academic institutions must maintain an inherent relationship with equity (Espinoza 2007). The intent of education is not just providing students with the fundamental resources necessary for learning, but to increase individual opportunities to succeed in an environment free from arbitrary limitations. John Dewey, American philosopher and educational reformer, stated the purpose of education is not the mere the acquisition of pre-determined skills, but to “prepare a student for the future life; it means to give him command of himself; it means so to train him that he will have the full and ready use of all his capacities” (Dewey 6). Dewey recognized great importance of the community to ensure the existence of a stable democratic society, and to accomplish this goal, educated citizens must be able to make well-informed decisions for the collective good. Akin to Dewey’s perspective, “a person who makes a claim in the language of 'equality' invokes something favorably associated with kinship and community” (Westen 261). Rhetorical privilege debases the character of both the speaker and audience, denigrating the sense of community formed in discourse. Entitled students that observe this disposition brazenly advance their own perspectives and achievements, creating an unbalanced atmosphere of privilege which devalues the presence of others. For a student to claim something is deserved, or that they have an inherent right to special treatment, suggests that they believe in fostering an academic environment devoid of fairness. Such attitudes manifest as classroom incivility, and the willful attempt to deny discourse by limiting alternate voices.
Rhetorical privilege engenders imbalance and instability by preventing the emergence of a dialogic community, which is necessary for communication.

As Wayne Booth claims in “The Rhetorical Stance” (1963), we must sustain “a proper balance among the three elements that are at work in any communicative effort: the available arguments about the subject itself, the interests and peculiarities of the audience, and the voice, the implied character, of the speaker” (141). Even distribution between the subject, the speaker, and the audience indicates the presence of balance in rhetorical discourse. Overemphasis of any one element corrupts the interaction, risking disparity, jeopardizing social cooperation, and devaluing the communal experience. For instance, focusing on the “arguments about the subject” minimizes the relationship between the speaker and the audience. Mere knowledge of a subject does not guarantee “an audience that could possibly care one way or the other” (142), nor does it ensure that the speaker is trustworthy. Likewise, discounting content and relying on “pure effect” also risks speaker credibility, and may alienate audiences that feel manipulated or uninterested in one’s opinion. The speaker, the audience, and the subject are connected in such a way that effective communication relies upon their stability and our restraint from either overvaluing or undervaluing any element. As Booth notes, “balance itself is always harder to describe than the clumsy poses that result when it is destroyed. But we all experience the balance whenever . . . [one] succeeds in changing our minds” (145). Rhetorical balance demands invention, the process of reflecting on private ideas and motivations to develop well-founded arguments, while “risking contact with unfamiliar thought and testing it against favored personal thought” (Barrett 40).

Such instances allow an equitable environment to emerge, one that provides each participant with reasonable rules of engagement and attends to the differences of individual perspectives.
Rhetorical success demands balance, a sense of fairness that drives us to interact with others, consider unfamiliar or potentially uncomfortable perspectives, and to evaluate our own views based upon new facts and information (Barrett 1991). However, instead of entering discourse with a willingness to be present, to understand, and to respond (Hauser 1999), entitled students adhere to favored beliefs, demonstrating a rigidity that prevents them from considering the full context that may emerge. Such defiance commonly leads to inappropriate or disinterested statements (Barrett 1991) that engenders distance and frustration between discursive partners. Rhetorical privilege attempts to capitalize on this partiality. Receptive only to what aligns with an immovable opinion and antagonistic to opposing viewpoints, entitled persons seek to create an encounter susceptible to manipulation. By discounting alternate views, they attempt to seize control of another’s thoughts, intent on denying partnership and forcing conformity (Barrett 1991). Inhibiting the reasonable collaboration that is necessary in effective discourse, inculcates an interaction inhospitable to equity. When personal meaning is exclusively communicated, this type of self-interested behavior leads people to perceive only what conforms with their particular worldview, promptly eliminating any observations deemed unsuitable (Barrett 1991; McDougall 1978). Rhetorical balance is grounded upon cooperation and establishing an environment that encourages reasonable exchange, so everyone has an opportunity to “develop their own identity” (Taylor 1991). Through this negotiation, one is encouraged to abandon self-interested impulses and discover those “common sensations, concepts, images, and attitudes” (Burke, “Rhetoric” 21) that establish common ground. Rhetoric concerns breaking through those barriers of antagonism, allowing one to remain a unique voice, yet seek ways to identify with others.

In *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1950), twentieth century philosopher Kenneth Burke examines the notion of identification, in which a speaker attempts to “persuade an audience by the use of
stylistic identifications . . . for the purpose of causing the audience to identify with the speaker’s interests” (46). Identification is meant to establish a rapport between a speaker and an audience and occurs simply because division exists in discourse. As Burke states, “if men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity” (22). While rhetoric is normally coupled with persuasion, it largely involves changing someone’s mind, which suggests the existence of difference (Juergensmeyer 2011). Alternatively, identification is more cooperative than competitive, seeking to establish a community between participants of a discourse through the even exchange of ideas and opinions. Persuasion prospers only so long as you can talk another person’s language “by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, [or] idea, identifying your way” with the other. “The rhetorician may have to change an audience’s opinion in one respect; but he can succeed only insofar as he yields to that audience’s opinions in other respects” (Burke, “Rhetoric” 55). Rhetorical privilege refuses to facilitate such negotiation, as perspectives contrary to personal belief are considered threatening. For Burke, these instances would be unsurprising since human beings continually aim for some type of advantage, whether for themselves, a “partisan group,” or even a universal conviction (Burke 1969). This struggle for control increases the pressure upon rhetorical relationships, as individuals may become enmeshed in an endless cycle of disagreement while trying to persuade immoveable positions.

Entitlement is grounded in opposition, creating a sense of isolation that reveals itself through the actions of individuals that cannot identify with others. While entitled students may not enter dialogue with the intent of confrontation, once disagreement emerges, they become entrenched in their own biased perceptions and hinder communication. Burke’s understanding that rhetoric may be more characteristic of identification, rather than persuasion, is helpful when contending with rhetorical privilege. We must begin by locating any “significant correlations” in
an argument without determining their value, and instead simply try to discover “exactly what they are,” and then to decide the best response (Burke 1955). Identification entails finding similarities among perspectives that are typically divided. Even a single connection may provide an entrance into discourse. “One does not merely want to outwit the opponent, or to study him, one wants to be affected by him, in some degree to incorporate him, to so act that his ways can help perfect one's own - in brief, to learn from him” (Burke, “Linguistic” 284). In this respect, Burke’s conception of identification parallels our understanding of balance. Rhetorical privilege feeds off an individual’s distinctiveness, seeking to erect barriers in communication so subjective pursuits are acted upon without question. While rhetoric considers “the ways in which individuals are at odds with one another, or become identified with groups more or less at odds with one another” (Burke, “Rhetoric” 22), rhetorical privilege forces mere competition to acts of aggression. Contrarily, identification allows participants to engage in fair communication, in which individuals attempt to find similarities through instances of discord. Identification presents us with a condition in which different perspectives are considered so we may uncover likenesses. Each participant has a reasonable opportunity of contributing their own opinions and learning about other interpretations.

While it is a speaker’s goal is to discover commonalities, evoke sympathy, and promote a sense of camaraderie with an audience to communicate a message, “we must not forget that by listening to someone we display a willingness to eventually accept his point of view” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 17). As persuasion can only be successful when it starts from a place of shared agreement between a speaker and the audience (Mootz 2006), equity must be present. Entitled behavior disrupts this connection, preventing the achievement of what Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca identify as the community of minds. Any community requires the presence of
commonalities to achieve solidarity. Whether these interconnections are discovered through culture, language, or shared interests, they provide us with an entrance into argumentation. The simple act of recognizing another person confers value upon their agreement and acknowledges them as “worth persuading” (Tindale 2011; Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1967). Student entitlement espouses a self-centered disposition, making efforts to gain a shared understanding difficult. In many respects, students merely view others as objects. Instructors are only necessary to provide passing grades, and peers solely for attention. However, as rhetoric is dependent upon maintaining an appropriate balance, both speakers and audiences must be interested in the other’s mindset. This suggests that one is not attempting to gain accord through force, but respects “the adherence of one’s interlocutor by means of reasoned persuasion,” and appeals to their “free judgement” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 55). In an atmosphere produced by frustration and apathy, participants of discourse may find it challenging to remain invested in each other’s frame of mind, jeopardizing the community. Matthew Arnold noted in “Equality,” that “a community having humane manners is a community of equals,” and in such a setting, inequalities have no significance, “they are at the same time, a menace and an embarrassment to perfect ease of social intercourse” (486). In an academic setting, engendering a community conveys a sense of balance, in which a speaker and audience can enter a common understanding of dialogue and respect, free from disruptive behavior and unwelcomed oppression.

Emmanuel Levinas: Accepting Difference and Responsibility to the Other

Rhetorical privilege denies the construction of the communal environment necessary for effective discourse, not just by discounting the views of others, but by prohibiting alternative voices from even emerging. Such actions illustrate an entitled person’s fundamental desire to control communication and gain acceptance of personal convictions, either through willful
agreement or weary reluctance. Entitlement is associated with the perception of superiority, in which one maintains unreasonable expectations for special treatment, and assumes that others “will comply without question.” This stubborn attitude leads to increased instances of a person taking advantage of others to get what they want, as another’s reactions are of little concern (Wasieleski et al. 2014; American Psychiatric Association 2013) in comparison to achieving a desired outcome. When an individual attempts to advance subjective viewpoints, knowingly inattentive to the needs or opinions of others, not only are they inhibiting the existence of a fair and balanced discourse, they are denying the very presence of those participants. Silencing one’s voice is not merely a simply act of ignorance but indicates a disregard for another’s humanity.

Emmanuel Levinas, a twentieth century French philosopher, addresses this concern, asserting that the Other demands our recognition and respect. To respond to the Other does not require that we simply consent to opposing viewpoints or even discount our own individuality. In fact, the “failure of communication does not signal the end of the ethical relation, but rather its beginning as openness to alterity. Difference begets relation: what separates is what connects” (Pinchevski 280). The purpose of education is to establish a learning environment where each student receives the appropriate resources and opportunities to succeed, free from control or manipulation. A demand for such an equitable atmosphere, in which we acknowledge alternate views and engage in open-minded communication, is a call for responsiveness to the Other.

In Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority (1961), Levinas emphasizes the concept otherness, arguing that we have a responsibility to the Other from the moment of our encounter. “The Other is not an alter ego, a version of the self; rather, self and Other are separated by an irreducible difference” (Pinchevski 279). Upon beholding the stranger’s face, our responsibility to the Other is both immediate and unconditional, regardless of any personal inclination. These
instances are imperative to Levinas and serve as the foundation of his philosophy. He claims, “the face speaks to me and thereby invites me into a relation incommensurate with a power exercised, be it enjoyment or knowledge” (Levinas, “Totality” 198). In the face of the Other, we perceive a uniqueness that forbids us from reducing that person to Sameness, encouraging the closeness of dialogue instead of the distance of silence. To think of a Stranger is not to consider them an object (Levinas 1979), as the other’s face cannot be possessed (Arnett 2017), instead this encounter calls us into hospitality, to regard the Other as we would ourselves. Conversely, rhetorical privilege reduces the presence of the Stranger, considering that person as a potential obstacle to achieving discursive control. Characterized by a “lack of care” towards others, those with higher levels of entitlement are associated with lower levels of satisfaction in their relations (Candel and Turliuc 2019) and have no reservations endangering those exchanges to ensure a positive personal outcome. In this separation, “where the I identifies itself – the I is ignorant of the Other” (Levinas, “Totality” 62), who is regarded more for their utility, unremarkable and controllable, rather than as a “living presence” that calls us to obligation. When self-fulfillment is mismatched with actual accomplishment, the resultant attitude may manifest as selfishness, contempt for others, or even aggression (Miller 2013; Paulhus and Williams 2002), increasing instances of potential conflict.

The expressions of the Other are meaningful, and to deny “the integrity of another as Other signals the beginning of aggression and violence” (Pinchevski 279). Grounded on attitudes of self-fulfillment, entitlement decreases authentic interaction in academic settings, prompting superficial exchanges, silence, or reluctance to enter interpersonal relationships. Whether by deliberate avoidance or attempts to control discourse, refusal to engage the Other falls into the register of totality, the idea of integrating the Other into sameness, a world comprehended solely
by oneself. Rhetorical privilege thrives in such solipsistic circumstances, reasoning subjective views are unquestionable, rejecting both dialogue and any individual voices that eschew consent. For instance, entitled students maintain an inherent belief that they have the right to advance implausible claims, implying personal preference may be aligned with uncontestable fact. These students believe that they may “challenge professors on any and all issues, regardless of intent, content, or supporting validation” (Schaefer et al. 82), and furthermore that their flawed views have value. Argument is not merely deemed untrue, but unacceptable, leading to instances where respect for educators is no longer existent. However, this interiority ultimately “discovers itself to be insufficient,” revealed by an “exteriority foreign to needs . . . a distance more precious than contact, a non-possession more precious than possession, a hunger that nourishes itself not with bread but with hunger itself” (Levinas, “Totality” 179). By acknowledging the face of the Other, we accept the presence of difference and may enter discourse in which our initial inclinations for “power” and “possession” are diminished, bringing forth a separation from sameness.

Levinas stresses that the face of the Other is the dwelling of difference, an exteriority, “a source from which all meaning appears” (Levinas, “Totality” 297). This separation between the Other and the same, signifies the concept of infinity, in which we permit ourselves to engage in a meaningful relationship and reject the chance of integrating all that is different into sameness. It is the presence of difference that truly initiates relations, for those instances that separates us are also what connect us (Pinchevski 2018). The Other is un-knowable. There will always remain an aspect of another that is beyond our understanding, an alterity that demands our recognition and respect. While it is human nature to instinctively reject views contrary to our own, or be wary of an unfamiliar person, Levinas stresses we should not willfully ignore the presence of the Other, as dialogue reveals how we share a language community. For Levinas, the silence one produces
through rejection of the Other is not simply the absence of speech, “it is the inverse of language: the interlocutor has given a sign, but has declined every interpretation; this is the silence that terrifies.” A silent world void of speech “is insulated in a mockery” (Levinas, “Totality” 91). The Other compels me to communicate responsibly, to reject manipulative acts and provide listening ears that are “grounded in the intersubjectivity of the relation rather than . . . the subjectivity of objectification and domination” (Lipari 234). In “Rhetoric’s Other: Levinas, Listening, and the Ethical Response” (2012), Lisbeth Lipari suggests that it is through listening that one creates a space to receive the Other.

In the listening, I create a space to receive you, letting your speech enter me, flow through me. In contrast, the heard . . . pertains to propositional content, and it arises from taking in your words and making them mine . . . the listening, as opposed to the heard, does not absorb the other into conformity with the self but instead creates a dwelling space to receive the alterity of the other, and let it resonate (237).

The voice of the Other, accompanied by intentional listening, invokes “an encounter with the unknown” awakening something hidden and “bringing something new into the world” (238). However, this does not negate the presence of argument or even entail the absence of personal freedom. We each retain our autonomy, but one “does not merely present me with lifeless signs into which I am free to read meanings of my own” (Wild 14). Through difference, we embrace a separation from sameness and reject a world either conceived by oneself or consumed by one’s conviction of success as a human being (Levinas 1979). Responsibility to the Other allows for an even exchange of ideas, so that we may gain insight into another person and our own identity. Dialogic balance may be discovered only when we have different viewpoints to consider.
Language is integral to equity. While Levinas does not specifically mention this idea, he does associate language with justice, which is akin to fairness. Justice involves “making possible expression, in which in non-reciprocity the person presents himself as unique. Justice is a right to speak” (Levinas, “Totality” 298). Through expression we willingly enter an interaction with another that brings forth difference. It is because of one’s “presence before the face of the Other, [that] man does not permit himself to be deceived by his glorious triumph as a living being” (Levinas, “Totality” 179), and agrees to the exchange of ideas free from obstinate oppression. Contrarily, rhetorical privilege aligns itself with sameness, and the veracity of only those viewpoints that align with one’s own option. Dissenting voices are deemed nothing more than an assemblage of “interchangeable” persons, easily replaced and susceptible to manipulation (Levinas 1979). For Levinas, justice is an answer to violence, especially the “violence of exclusion” (Delhom 2020), an approach commonly used by entitled students when confronted with disagreement or dissatisfaction.

Responsibility is not intended merely for the Other, but for the third party as well, whom “the Other already serves” and demands me to serve, for the “third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other” (Levinas, “Totality” 213). In Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence (1974), Levinas furthers this idea, suggesting that “all the others than the other obsess me, and this obsession cries out for justice, demands measure and knowing” (157). We dwell in a human community, an association of unique individuals that may not be reduced to sameness. My relationship with all others “precedes the auto-affection of certainty, to which one always tries to reduce communication” (119). Communication is not about the biased certainty of self-interest, instead it strives to achieve a wholeness through our responsibility to the Other. “We suppose that there is in the transcendence involved in language a relationship that is not empirical speech,
but responsibility” (120). Establishing a language community through dialogue rejects the imposition of subjective standards that seek to assume discursive control. Instead, obligation to the expression of the Other encourages an exchange built upon equity.

Martin Buber: Rejecting Objectification. Dialogue and the I-Thou Relationship

Rhetorical privilege discounts the meaningful interaction that exists between individuals, often prior to when dialogue even emerges. Armed with a stubborn refusal to engage with others that endorse alternative views, entitled individuals approach dialogic encounters unreceptive to argument and indifferent to responsibility for the Other, who is measured for their instrumental value. Our contemporary culture “urges us to approach the world – and the people in it – in an adversarial frame of mind,” relying on the idea that “opposition is the best ways to get anything done” (Tannen 3). Raised in such an environment, entitled students commonly display signs of antagonism, characterized by immovable perspectives, diminished listening, impatience, heedlessness, and “the expectation that others will supply them and do things for them” (Barrett 39). This contentious attitude is indicative of monologue, in which the opportunity for discourse is substituted by one-way communication and an individual’s focus on oneself. In Between Man and Man (1944), philosopher and educator Martin Buber, comments that “he who is living in the life of monologue is never aware of the other as something that is absolutely not himself” (20). Rhetorical privilege is akin to monologue, isolating an individual from argument by prohibiting any response that may reveal fallacies in their claims or challenge interpretations. Moreover, the self-interested nature of monologue illustrates one primarily concerned with their own existence, where “responsibility has become a phantom” (45). Lacking few meaningful relationships, an entitled person’s strongest desire in attaining satisfaction “rushes in the first instance at objects which lie across his path” (Buber, “Way of Man” 20), or individuals that obstruct achievement.
Answerable largely to oneself, those clinging to a sense of entitlement maintain no claim of external obligation, falling victim to the conflicts they initiate, giving them a sense of power over others by denying opportunities for communicative cooperation and personal development.

Responsibility to the Other may only exist through genuine dialogue, “where each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them” (Buber, “Man and Man” 19). Entitled students dwell in monologic communication, expecting unquestioned agreement with their viewpoint, determined to inculcate an environment devoid of any difference that may threaten control of the interaction. Such occasions illustrate little regard for others. For instance, instructors are perceived “less as intellectual leaders” who are meant to foster student learning by challenging accepted assumptions, “and more as simply gatekeepers” that should acquiesce to individual demands. As a result of this obstinate attitude, faculty are often confronted with situations that are difficult to effectively negotiate (Lippmann et al. 2009). Any attempt at even establishing common ground quickly erodes as the opportunity for dialogue ceases. An entitled individual, convinced of their own uniqueness and consumed with themself, “is the only one who has primary existence; only the man who comes to such a possession and consciousness of himself has primary existence . . . he has no essential relation except to himself” (Buber, “Man and Man” 41). Thus, monologue is akin to turning inward, when one “withdraws from accepting with his essential being another person in his particularity . . . and lets the other exist only as his own experience, only as a ‘part of myself’” (Buber, “Man and Man” 24). Lacking responsibility to the Other, an entitled person perceives no reason to engage in communication, except for the expectation of concurrence, a fundamental quality of rhetorical privilege. Conversely, genuine dialogue concerns creation, arising from individual difference to
bridge separation and establish shared meaning. Each person maintains their own perspective, yet “turns toward the other” with the sincere intent of understanding, going beyond the mere exchange of information. This relationship of mutuality illustrates “true dialectic” for Buber, an exchange between oneself and another.

In *I and Thou* (1923), Buber states that we must not objectify or reduce human relations, as it is only through dialogic relation to another that we may achieve wholeness. There are two basic attitudes in which we may engage the world, known as *I-Thou*, acknowledged as a relation between a subject and subject, and *I-It*, the relation between a subject and object. Dwelling in an *I-It* world, “man rests satisfied with the things that he experiences and uses, he lives in the past, and his moment has no present context. He has nothing but objects” (12). An *I-It* relationship is indicative of objectivity and separateness, viewing others as discrete objects that may be divided by their usefulness. “The mankind of mere *It* . . . has nothing in common with a living mankind . . . ideas are no more enthroned above heads than resident in them; they wander amongst us and accost us” (13). Emerging from an *I-It* relationship, rhetorical privilege places one apart from the other, observing them for specific useful qualities, as an object, helpful in attaining a particular communicative end. If one lets this attitude seize control, “the continually growing world of *It* overruns him and robs him of the quality of the reality of his own *I*” (46). While Buber notes that we must always live with an *It* world, if we let this relationship consume us, our time would be spent experiencing nothing more than objects, divided from human existence. If one “ceases to be centered in the living and continually renewed relational event, then it hardens into the world of *It*” (54). This is the danger of rhetorical privilege arising through student entitlement, not only do we dehumanize others, we dehumanize ourselves, and this attitude can embed us into a world of monologue and constant objectification.
Whereas an *I-It* relationship with existence is one of separation and devoid of dialogue, Buber proposes that true engagement with another person, not as an object but as a human being, suggests an *I-Thou* relationship. When a person enters a subject-to-subject relation, the act affirms a wholeness of being. Our surroundings are not simply an assortment of objects ripe for our manipulation but consist of subjects involved in a reciprocal dialogic association with each other. Participants of genuine dialogue are no longer valued for specific qualities of usefulness, as rhetorical privilege suggests, but now share reality by entering an immediate mutuality. Buber further explains,

If I face a human being as my *Thou*, and say the primary word *I-Thou* to him, he is not a thing among things, and does not consist of things. This human being is not *He* or *She*, bounded from every other *He* and *She*, a specific point in space and time within the net of the world; nor is he a nature able to be experienced and described, a loose bundle of named qualities. But with no neighbour, and whole in himself, he is *Thou* and fills the heavens. This does not mean that nothing exists except himself. But all else lives in his light (8).

*I-Thou* relationships are characterized by cooperative communication situated in the present, “in so far as actual presentness, meeting, and relation exist,” (12) and one commits themselves to the moment with their whole being. Departure from this “presentness” results in an inauthentic and unreliable dialogue. Rhetorical privilege finds its place here, refusing to focus on the existent moment or acknowledge a present *Thou*, instead choosing to objectify the relationship. As Buber maintains, “in so far as a man rests satisfied with the things that he experiences and uses, he lives in the past, and his moment has no present content. He has nothing but objects . . . the object is not duration, but cessation, suspension, a breaking off and cutting clear and hardening, absence
of relation and of present being” (12). Such a relationship is the unfortunate situation that emerges with entitled students. An instructor or a peer is never truly considered a Thou, merely an It, in which agreement is seen as the primary goal. Whether this accord is achieved willfully or not is of little importance. However, I-Thou relationships cannot be established through force or manipulation. It is only through dialogue that a person is aware of and attentive to the Other. Since “my Thou affects me, as I affect it” (15), a wholeness must remain in the relation for both the educator and the student.

Academic entitlement focuses on student wants, “a sense that they deserve what they want because they want it and want it now” (Lippmann et al. 197). However, education is not about what a student wants, but what they need. Placating the wants of a student further embeds them in monologic communication and reinforces their alignment with an I-It relationship to the world, where all others are merely objects of utility. In Between Man and Man (1944), Buber explains that “the relation in education is one of pure dialogue,” and a mutuality must be present between the instructor and student (98). The purpose of education is “essentially education of character,” thus the instructor must focus his or her concern on the “person as a whole,” both the present actuality in which the student lives and the possibilities of what they may become (Buber 2014). Unfortunately, the very nature of entitlement resists this intent, as students consumed by self-fulfillment typically display an independent character and refuse to allow “themselves be educated” simply because they do not like the idea of somebody trying to do so (Buber 2014). Immovable perspectives are a common feature of an entitled person’s personality, and any attempt to introduce alternate assessments are commonly met with combativeness. Credibility is an important element of learning, and “credible instructors tend to elicit a higher level of student motivation” (Goldman et al. 2017; Frymier & Thompson 1992). However, when threatening the
trust that is placed upon an instructor by the classroom community, entitled students are creating further obstacles in communication.

While an *I-Thou* relation is understood as the meeting of two beings in dialogue, failing to enter such an encounter and recognize the Other as an equal, typical of an *I-It* relation, is not a development Buber was unprepared for. The challenge of any educator fundamentally “lies in conflict with his pupil. He has to face this conflict and, whatever turn it may take, he has to find the way through it” (Buber, “Man and Man” 110). Buber grants that human relationships involve a fluctuation between I-Thou and I-It, claiming that an I-Thou relation may regress into an I-It relation, and an I-It relation retains the potential of developing into an I-Thou relation (Morgan & Guilherme 2010). To remain detached from dialogue is the inherent danger for both students and instructors as “through every I-Thou encounter, the I is transformed, and this affects the I’s outlook of the I-It relation and of future I-Thou encounters” (Morgan & Guilherme 4). *I-Thou* relationships may be difficult to establish, but character is not an inborn quality and must mature “before expressing itself” through one’s behavior (Buber 2014). Recognizing that current college students are still developing psychologically, their proclivity for I-It relationships is unsurprising.

The education of character develops through self-awareness, an openness that exists in the *I-Thou* relationship and exposes an individual “to all that can meet you when you are really living” (Buber, “Man and Man” 125). The wholeness of one’s being cannot be realized by remaining captive to immovable positions or by objectifying the Other. For Buber, education grounded on dialogue places proper emphasis on the roles of both the educator and the student (Morgan & Guilherme 2010). Focusing too much on either role inhibits balance and the presence of an *I-Thou* relationship, as each party becomes trapped in a *I-It* relation. Educators would merely deliver information to students and neglect opportunities to encourage their development,
and students, lacking proper guidance, are left to govern their own subject educational pursuits (Morgan & Guilherme 2010). Genuine dialogue, the foundation of an I-Thou relation, is crucial for an effective academic environment, one attentive to student learning and dedicated to equity.

Implications

Armed with a heightened sense of self-worth, rhetorical privilege maintains the stubborn belief that personal judgment merits communicative control. Entitled individuals claim dialogic superiority, seeking to elevate their own position and impose biased standards upon discourse with little regard to fairness. One ignorantly assumes themself to be an authority on any topic of discussion, regardless of prior knowledge, experience, or the veracity of their position. Such an attitude limits the presence of alternate voices, allowing little opportunity for others to propose alternate perspectives or properly engage in communication. Placing barriers upon dialogue and the possibility of cooperation presents a significant problem. Rhetoric accepts that participants must be provided with the opportunity to understand and freely respond to relevant messages (Hauser 1999). Confronting alternative ideas is an inevitable and necessary aspect of this process. A privileged mindset inhibits a balanced environment from emerging and prevents others from a reasonable chance to present their argument. Lacking engagement, subjectivity assumes control of dialogue, placing heavy burdens on the relationship between a speaker and the audience, “challenging discovery . . . crippling inquiry . . . [and] blocking productiveness” (Barrett 39). Remaining fixated with the personal significance of a particular person or event (Sennett 1992), and careless of another’s dialogic needs, inculcates an unhealthy environment indicative of struggle, in which the content of communication loses significance (Watzlawick et al. 1967). One merely attempts to control the direction of discourse to achieve communicative
success. Arising from instances of entitlement, rhetorical privilege discounts the necessary existence of equity in dialogue.

Sharing a common etymology, the terms equality and equity are typically employed as interchangeable concepts. While both are considered an attempt to achieve fairness, each has distinct consequences in an academic setting. Whereas equality (sameness) entails students are provided with identical resources and opportunities, equity (fairness) safeguards that students receive individualized accommodations to overcome specific challenges. In practice, equality raises significant obstacles to achieving effective learning outcomes in the classroom, as treating students with sameness does not negate the difficulties they may encounter. Moreover, standards of equality seemingly target disadvantaged populations, who often matriculate to college from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds that could not provide similar learning opportunities or resources as wealthier neighborhoods. Thus, equality is an unrealistic endeavor. Contrarily, establishing an educational environment built upon equity, in which students are provided with personalized consideration, is a more practical approach. Fairness benefits the collective student community by encouraging distinct perspectives, fostering dialogue, and combating imbalance between participants of dialogue. Rhetorical privilege seeks to discourage these efforts, valuing dialogic control and individual achievement above supporting collective engagement. Entitled students believe that their own views are more credible than those of their peers or instructors and therefore warrant special treatment. The only fair outcome is one in which they personally succeed. Equity rejects the presence of domineering perspectives that limit dialogic achievement to a few privileged individuals, instead pursuing balance and the fair exchange of ideas.

Rhetorical privilege prevents the “inducement of social cooperation” (Hauser 14), by degrading the community established through dialogue. By adhering to an attitude of heightened
self-fulfillment, entitled students create an unbalanced atmosphere of privilege, overestimating their own perspectives while undervaluing the views of others. Restricting alternative voices fosters an academic environment devoid of equity, denying the presence of cooperation which is necessary for effective communication. In “The Rhetorical Stance” (1963), Wayne Booth states that we must sustain “a proper balance” for any communication to be successful (Booth 1963). The existence of fair distribution between the speaker, the audience, and the subject indicates balance in discourse. Overemphasis on any one element corrupts the interaction, jeopardizing social cooperation and devaluing the communal experience. Rhetorical balance demands that we allow for an equitable environment to emerge, one that attends to the differences of individual perspectives and provides each participant with the opportunity to engage with others. Entitled students demonstrate a rigidity that hinders them from communicative involvement. Receptive only to what aligns with an immovable opinion and hostile to opposing viewpoints, they seek to construct an interaction susceptible to manipulation. Rhetorical privilege attempts to capitalize on this disparity, erecting barriers to deny partnership and impede discourse through fixed subjective positions. The ensuing struggle increases pressure on discourse, forcing people into endless disagreement. Entitlement is grounded in this opposition, provoking others to simply forgo their beliefs and relinquish communicative control. In an educational setting, a community of balance is built upon common understanding, fair representation of one’s views, and an openness to dialogue.

Rhetorical privilege denies the presence of cooperation necessary for effective dialogue to exist, not just by discounting the perspectives of others, but by prohibiting the emergence of alternate voices. Such actions illustrate an entitled individual’s desire to control communicative encounters, either by agreement or reluctance, to secure accordance with personal convictions.
Attempting to advance subjective viewpoints, knowingly inattentive to the needs or opinions of others, not only inhibits the occurrence of balanced discourse, but denies the very presence of those participants. Silencing another’s voice is not a simple act of ignorance, but rather indicates a disregard for humanity. French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas asserts that the Other demands both our recognition and respect. The expressions of the Other are meaningful, and “to approach the other in conversation is to welcome his expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry away from it” (Levinas, “Totality” 51). We have a responsibility to acknowledge the Other and to accept the presence of difference. Whether by deliberate evasion or attempts to control discourse, the refusal to engage another represents the idea of integrating that Other into sameness, a world comprehended solely by oneself. Rhetorical privilege thrives in such circumstances, reasoning subjective views to be unquestionable while rejecting both dialogue and any individual perspectives that evade consent. Responsibility to the Other brings forth a separation from sameness, a willingness to enter an interaction with another free from oppression. Dialogue is not about the certainty of self-fulfillment, instead it strives to achieve a wholeness through our responsibility to the Other, an encounter built upon equity that rejects the imposition of subjectivity.

Entitled students approach dialogue unreceptive to potential disagreement and indifferent to responsibility for the Other, who is recognized primarily for their utility. Such an attitude is telling of monologue, in which discourse is replaced by one-way communication and the focus turns towards oneself. Rhetorical privilege dwells in monologue, isolating an individual from argument by prohibiting any response that may challenge one’s subjective claims or biased interpretations. Philosopher Martin Buber notes that the “basic movement” of monologue is a turning inward, and when living in this state one can never truly be aware of the Other (Buber,
Lacking responsibility to the Other, an entitled person perceives no reason to engage in meaningful communication, viewing others only as objects that are helpful in attaining a specific end. Reducing human relations in this way, to an *I-It* relationship, is indicative of separation and the absence of dialogue. This is the inherent danger of rhetorical privilege as it arises through student entitlement, not only do we dehumanize others, but we also dehumanize ourselves, a mindset that can thrust us into a world of monologue and constant objectification. Buber offers that genuine dialogue, engagement with another not as an object but as a human being, suggests an *I-Thou* relationship. On such occasions, participants are no longer valued for specific qualities of usefulness, as rhetorical privilege suggests, but now share reality by entering an immediate mutuality. Rhetorical privilege refuses to acknowledge the present *Thou* in dialogue, instead choosing to objectify that relationship, considering the Other merely as an *It*. The foundation of genuine dialogue in an academic environment is an *I-Thou* relation, in which students and educators remain attentive to learning and dedicated to equity.
Chapter 4: Academic Entitlement and Emotional Manipulation

In this chapter, I will investigate the emotions and how disruptive outbursts are meant to induce immediate reactions should personal judgement be questioned. Control is an important feature of rhetorical privilege, and when an entitled student is confronted with opposition to an established interpretation, they commonly employ emotional manipulative practices to regain command of a communication. Both Aristotle and Cicero understood the power of emotion to elicit a response in an audience, and guided by the work of these two philosophers, I intend to demonstrate how during instances of dialogic disagreement, using emotions to further individual deservingness is characteristic of malicious and emotionally manipulative intent.

Previously, it was determined that current attitudes of entitlement have been motivated largely by our culture of self-fulfillment. The steady fragmentation of public life, accompanied by a proliferation of individual expression, has defied our understanding of morality, replacing collective discourse with finite claims of personal authority. Fundamentally convinced in the significance of their own subjective perspectives, entitled students value dialogue with others merely for its usefulness, placing barriers on the possibility of cooperation and allowing little opportunity for alternative views to emerge. Such a privileged mindset fosters an environment devoid of equity, in which all participants would have a reasonable chance to advance their argument. The existence of fair distribution between the speaker, the audience, and the subject indicates balance in discourse, however, rhetorical privilege disrupts this interaction, not only by risking social cooperation but by denying the very presence of participants. Silencing another’s voice is not a simple act of ignorance, it indicates a disregard for our responsibility to the Other. Indicative of monologue, in which discourse is replaced by one-way communication, entitled students approach discourse unreceptive to disagreement and focused on oneself.
Rhetorical privilege arises when a fixed subjective perspective prevents the furtherance of dialogue, creating an environment in which an individual claims an unquestionable favored position. Common to entitlement, this attitude denies the presence of alternate views, devaluing others and disrupting the necessary balance that must exist for dialogic effectiveness. When confronted with opposition to preconceived perceptions, entitled students are often characterized by negative behaviors such as competitiveness, selfishness, aggression (Fisk 2010; Reidy et al. 2008; Campbell et al. 2004), requests for sympathy, displays of unreasonable intimidation, unrealistic demands, impatience, or chronic displeasure (Morrow 1994; Campbell et al. 2004; Schaefer et al. 2013; Miller 2013). Outbursts like these are intended to provoke a desirable reaction from a respondent, not by appealing to one’s reason, but attempting to exploit one’s emotions.

Student entitlement is commonly known for disregarding social relationships. Focused on personal accomplishment, and “a sense of being owed an assessment of performance inconsistent with actual effort or work” (Lippmann et al. 198), entitled students perceive others, primarily instructors, as potential obstacles to educational achievement and career expectations (Lippmann et al. 2009). Interactions will remain respectful as long as that student’s “self-evaluation” aligns with any external assessments of their performance, opinion, or character. When favorable views of oneself are questioned or contradicted it is common for people to become confrontational. This attitude “is particularly so if unrealistically positive or inflated views of self prevail” (Zapf & Einarsen168), which is undoubtedly the case with student entitlement. Regarding themselves as “superior beings,” those with higher levels of self-fulfillment, respond to other “seemingly lesser beings” without hesitation or remorse (Baumeister et al. 1996), using emotional pressures as a powerful tool to incite a desired response.
In an academic setting, instances of emotionally manipulative behavior generally arise from disagreements about course objectives and grade assignments, inciting erratic attendance, abusive language, misuse of technology, and disruptive conduct. Unfortunately, instructors that refuse to lower established standards are confronted by students who “resort to a new code of conduct that includes acted-out rage, lack of respect, and blame” (Clift). These reactions lead faculty to feel pressured to confer merit upon a student with unsatisfactory performance. In a *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, “When Students Become Class Bullies, Professors Are Among the Victims (2010),” Claudia Lampman, professor of Psychology at the University of Alaska at Anchorage, recounts her own experience. While teaching a class, “a student glared at her the entire semester and would communicate only by handwritten notes in an angry tone. He refused to do his assignments or take exams, and threatened to sue her if she tried to make him do them” (June). Emotional episodes are not limited merely to intimidation tactics like this, as students may induce tears or recount dramatic personal stories in response to inconsistent efforts. Despite the excuse, as students become more accustomed to “getting their own way,” instances of emotional manipulation may be expected to rise. Moreover, disruptive emotional displays meant to provoke fear or sympathy may further create a contagion-like effect in the classroom, prompting other students to employ similar methods if reasonable disciplinary actions are not taken.

Increasing numbers of entitled college students challenge faculty authority and respond with bullying tactics, sympathy, or even hostility when confronted with disagreeable results. Unwarranted displays commonly rouse feelings of apathy, compassion, and exhaustion with faculty, contributing to higher levels of anxiety and the inability to effectively perform their job (Heffernan & Gates 2018). Properly engaging with students requires an instructor to establish an
atmosphere receptive to learning. However, when they become indifferent to appropriately communicating information, or alter intended messages to avoid eliciting potential conflict, the educational environment is inherently affected. Students recognize and mimic this disinterest, sitting “passively in class not really absorbing the material and only half-heartedly attempting to study” (Cavanagh). As Ronald Arnett states in *Dialogic Education: Conversation About Ideas and Between Persons* (1997), “when faculty feel under pressure to conform to particular expectations in order to survive, scholarship and, at some institutions, teaching may be done, not out of commitment, but out of necessity. Scholarship can become a mechanical task” (190).

Research has also revealed that academic entitlement concerns occur more often among lower-level staff or those without long-term appointments (Heffernan & Gates 2018; Tunguz 2016). Younger instructors especially feel pressured to accommodate student demands, worried that negative evaluations will affect their continued employment and opportunities for promotion (Heffernan & Gates 2018) at that institution. Emotions are fundamental to social relationships, and when unfavorably influenced, resultant dialogue can become distant and impersonal. In the classroom, instructors affected by unruly behavior are less responsive to the needs of their students, allowing one person’s sense of entitlement to control the discursive environment for the entire class.

Acting out of emotion may inhibit a person’s ability to effectively communicate with an audience, not only threatening those opportunities to establish meaningful connections, but one’s credibility as well. People commonly “experience psychological discomfort when they encounter information that contradicts their beliefs” (Sentell 6). This may result in one reflecting upon new perspectives and updating accepted views, or as is the case with entitled students, denigrating the source, bluntly dismissing unfamiliar ideas, or simply avoiding further interaction (Sentell 2017;
Festinger 1957). Such behavior is thought to preserve that person’s “psychological comfort,” who primarily seeks to gain accordance with personal beliefs and minimize unwanted attention to their perceived failings (Sentell 2017). However, these strong negative responses cause a separation in communication. Appealing to another’s immediate emotional reaction prevents them from reflecting upon the veracity of presented claims and responding in an informed and objective manner.

Equipped with unassailable beliefs, rhetorical privilege attempts to establish a polarized, emotionally-charged environment, intent on preventing rival perspectives from emerging. When emotion replaces reason, our attention in dialogue temporarily shifts away from the subject and toward the person, creating “the illusion that once one has a feeling, it must be manifest – because ‘inside’ is an absolute reality” (Sennett 335). As objectivity surrenders to subjectivity (Sennett 1992), the function of discourse diminishes. Reason allows us to recognize the faults in both our own and another’s perspectives so we are less vulnerable to fallacious thinking and any biased judgements (Sentell 2017) that may disoriented us in a moment, a fact entitled individuals desire we overlook as they pursue personal accommodation.

Because rhetoric is attentive to the needs and particularities of an audience, attempting to isolate emotion from reason is commonly considered a flawed endeavor as both are required for effective communication. We cannot consider “emotions as instances of irrationality that need to be brought under the control of reason” (Kastely 224), or that emotional urges are “the proper masters of reason and even the very foundation of our being-in-the-world” (Solomon 4) since they serve more primitive qualities of the human condition. While a person must attend to the reasoning found in discourse, their “emotional orientation” plays a crucial role in determining how a specific situation is recognized (Kastely 2006). The practice of rhetoric requires active
engagement between participants of discourse, reducing neither emotion nor reason to the other. However, throughout much of history this methodology was not the accepted belief, as scholars have not been interested in the revelatory nature of emotions (Kastely 2006), often considering them “not only irrational but also nonrational” and outside of the realm of human reasoning (Solomon 2010). Today, most scholars would agree that emotions are not impediments acting against rational thought, but contribute to how we communicate and process information. Commonly misunderstood, and certainly complex, the following section will explore the historic relationship between emotion and reason.

The Interplay of Emotion and Reason

For millennia, philosophers and scholars have debated the rhetorical effects of emotion on an audience’s temperament, particularly the relationship between pathos (emotion) and logos (logic). Emotion and reason share an extensive and complicated history, considered intrinsically linked and in conflict with each other. In the Phaedrus, Plato famously noted this association with the tripartite model of the soul, in which a charioteer attempts to steer two winged horses. “With us men, in the first place, it is a pair of steeds that the charioteer controls; moreover, one of them is noble and good, and of good stock, while the other has the opposite character, and his stock is opposite. Hence the task of our charioteer is difficult and troublesome” (Plato 69). The charioteer of the human soul represents reason, directing the horses that signify our disparate emotions and aiming to control our impulses. Plato respects the influential power of emotions, but maintains that one may use reason to channel impetuous desires, claiming that “time and time again, until the evil steed casts off his wantonness; humbled in the end, he obeys the counsel of his driver” (Plato 104). While it is often alleged that emotions may suppress reason, Plato forwards an understanding that actions are motivated independently of our divided
passions. Emotions may be necessary to help individuals acquire knowledge, but they do so under the direction of cognition. Such a belief in the supremacy of reason is unsurprising, and aligns with Plato’s distrust of rhetoric for its purported power to mislead a soul by using language intended to deceive or support fallacious thought. For Plato, a rhetorician employs emotion as a tool to gain power over an audience. Thus, rather than offering any true knowledge or revelation of the truth, emotions are merely pleasure-seeking irrational impulses.

Throughout the ancient and medieval world, it was common to adhere to Plato’s concept of higher intellectual control over our lower emotional compulsions. In fact, the very antiquity of classical thinking “gave added weight to their own inherent or natural authority” (Murphy 89). Subservient to reason, emotions were fundamentally associated with human desires, particularly those that are characteristic of self-interest (Solomon 2010). Thomas Aquinas supported this interpretation in the Summa Theologica, suggesting that “the sensitive powers have an inborn aptitude to obey the command of reason . . . for in so far as they obey reason, in a certain sense they are said to be rational” (8). According to Aquinas, the “passions,” or what scholars identify as emotions, belong to the sensitive powers of the soul. Any action or reaction performed by the sensitive soul is not a cognitive act, but is provoked by the presence of some type of knowledge (Uffenheimer-Lippens 2003). Indicated as the “six concupiscible passions” of love, hate, desire, aversion, joy, and sorrow; and the “five irascible passions” of hope, despair, confidence, fear, and anger (King 1999), these movements are instinctive human responses to external stimuli, and either considered as “attractive [and] worth striving after, or as repellant and worth fleeing from” (Uffenheimer-Lippens 540). As passions were commonly noted for having an unpredictable and unruly nature that attempts to disrupt harmony and reason, Christian philosophy focused on those desires identified as sins (Solomon 2010). At the time, general thought maintained that the past
should serve the needs of the present (Murphy 1974), thus adapting classical traditions and texts to suit religious aims of the church transitioned the function of rhetoric to preaching and knowledge of interpreting scripture.

Toward the end of the seventeenth century, René Descartes (1596-1690), driven by the psychological age of science and reason, also contributed to this discussion. Descartes, a French philosopher, mathematician, and scientist “disdained the bodily and the bestial,” insisting on the sovereignty of the mind (Solomon 2010). During this time, philosophers devoted their attention to the sources of knowledge – perception, reflection, and communication – seeking to uncover the truth of the physical world. Unsurprisingly, in The Passions of the Soul (1649), Descartes contends that emotions may be influenced by reason, claiming “to arouse boldness and suppress fear in ourselves, it’s not enough to have a volition to do so. We have to set ourselves to think about the reasons, objects, or precedents which argue the danger isn’t great” (13). The sentiments we identify as emotions, correspond to what Descartes understood as passions, the “perceptions, sensations or commotions of the soul” (8), which may be encouraged by those instances and objects that arouse our senses and “disposes the body to move in ways that help to being about those useful things” (17). The main function of our passions is to guide us through conditions that may be deemed as “harmful or beneficial” (Clarke 2005). Our emotions serve as motivations and provide individuals with a choice for appropriate behavior, but must be restrained by reason as those things which stimulate the senses may be misleading.

Centuries later, philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) proposed a different interpretation of the link between emotion and reason. While theorists largely believed in the preeminence of rational thought, in A Treatise of Human Nature (1739), Hume claims that “reason alone can never give rise to any original idea . . . that idea must be deriv’d from experience, and from some
particular instances of this efficacy, which make their passage into the mind by the common
channels of sensation or reflection” (157). Hume’s innovative theory challenged the inferior role
of emotions, forwarding that the “mind, in its perceptions, must begin somewhere” (275), and
that moment is a specific kind of sensation, or what we know as an emotion. Moreover, reason is
merely “the discovery of truth or falsehood,” revealed either by the “agreement or disagreement
to real relations of ideas, or to real existence and matter of fact” (458). For Hume, our emotions
are not susceptible to this agreement or disagreement as they are fully realized “original facts”
that serve to influence our determinations of virtue or vice. Since “reason alone” cannot discern
choice or prompt one’s action, the historical divide between emotion and reason is inaccurate. As
Hume notes, “reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to
any other office than to serve and obey them” (415). Emotions must function as orientations for
reason, guiding an individual towards their interests. Whether determination or reluctance directs
one’s action, their frame of mind arises from the prevalence of calm or chaotic passions (Hume
1965). This thought highlights that reason does not dominate emotion, but relies on alterations of
our temperament to determine resultant decisions.

Regardless of Hume’s contribution to this discussion, Enlightenment scholars remained
faithful to traditional beliefs, favoring the supremacy of reason over emotion. Unsurprisingly,
Immanuel Kant, “reinforced the crucial distinction between reason and what he called ‘the
inclinations,’” dismissing the emotions as both irrelevant and disruptive (Solomon 8). In
*Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), Kant furthers that the passions are
“without exception evil,” and even our most good-natured desires are not only “pragmatically
ruinous but are morally reprehensible” (166). Comparing passions to “cancerous sores for pure
practical reason,” Kant contends that they are simply impulsive reactions that inhibit our ability
to exercise sound judgement. For instance, “the ambition of a human being may always be an inclination whose direction is approved by reason; but the ambitious person nevertheless also wants to be loved by others; he needs pleasant social intercourse with others, the maintenance of his financial position, and the like” (166). For Kant, passions can motivate one to foolishness as they are contingent upon a present mood, triggering a temporary blindness to risk while seeking physical or mental fulfillment. A person must use reason to determine their actions so the maxim of one’s will may “always hold at the same time as a principle establishing universal law” (Kant, “Critique” 30). This idea highlights the categorical imperative, an unconditional moral rule for behavior that obligates one to perform an action applicable at all times. Since emotions are subjective and controlled by a particular circumstance, they may conflict with one’s sense of obligation. People who let emotions control their actions, and consequently behave contrary to rational thought, are considered lacking in character (Borges 2019), a complaint often associated with entitled students that allow emotions to dictate how they communicate. As rhetorical privilege remains obedient to immovable personal perspectives, the presence of contesting viewpoints increases the likelihood of a powerful emotional response. Such instances, although perhaps fleeting, taint the character of that individual and illustrate how emotions may cloud one’s judgement. Thus, only reason can guide an individual to make an appropriate, objective, and moral decision.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, more attention was being placed on emotions, prompted by the work of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), who praised them for their value. In On the Genealogy of Morality (1887), Nietzsche challenged the scientific community for its “coolness and freedom from emotions,” despite continuing to “stand exposed to the seduction of language” imposed by them (26). Moreover, to indiscriminately ignore or isolate our emotions
without exception is tantamount to crippling one’s intellect. However, this does not mean that our passions are incorruptible or more exceptional than reason. As Nietzsche furthers in *Twilight of the Idols* (1889), “all passions have a time when they are nothing but fatal, when they drag their victim down with the heaviness of their stupidity” (25). Rather, emotions compliment reason as they provide people with an understanding of how to situate themselves in their own existence. For an individual to persist disconnected from their emotions is akin to “ripping out life.” Reason alone cannot navigate us through the complexities we encounter in life, much of which can only be understood through the observation, intuition, and experience provided by emotional interactions. Nietzsche condemned the “degradation of passion,” stating that “reason, intellect, and thought” can never serve as the motivation of human action, for what then “arises to consciousness is only the aftershock of an unnoticed inner turbulence” (Thiele 56). While Nietzsche recognized the power of reason, he stressed that emotions must be acknowledged, integrated, and reflected upon. In the absence of such an occurrence, a person cannot attain genuine truth.

Contemporary scholarship continues to investigate the relationship between emotion and reason, however general thought increasingly adopts the notion that “reason may not be as pure as most of us think” and our emotions “may not be intruders in the bastion of reason at all: they may be enmeshed in its networks” (Damasio xvi). While emotions may be disruptive to rational thinking in particular instances, to deny the information we receive from them is no less harmful. Neurologists have even confirmed the importance of emotions with our decision-making process, noting the strong association between emotional abnormalities in patients with bilateral lesions of the ventromedial cortex, and their impairment when exercising judgement (Bechara 2004). Emotions clearly guide us in decision-making, “where we may put the instruments of logic to
good use” (Damasio xvii). David Houghton furthers this argument in “Political Psychology” (2011), maintaining that emotions are not as irrational as philosophers and scholars have insisted for centuries. Nearly every aspect of our existence is overloaded with emotions, so human beings “do not simply process information, we feel things as well.” For instance, “we first have to care about the outcomes” of our potential interactions to reason effectively (58). Once believed to be a destructive influence to rationality, the importance of emotion to human cognition has become more accepted. However, reflecting upon our current culture of self-fulfillment, a disconcerting question arises, has our society shifted to a condition where our emotions now bare more significance than rationality?

As the prominence of emotions gains further attention, it is unsurprising to note the renewed interest in the theory of emotivism, which focuses on how speakers use moral language in a conversational context to convey emotional attitudes and elicit similar sentiment in the hearer (Björnsson 2002; Stevenson 1937). However, as these contentions rely upon achieving agreement through personal expressions of approval or disapproval, they are often criticized for retaining little factual or moral significance. While purely evaluative statements can still possess enough “emotive force,” to merit their usefulness in persuasion, they “cannot be given any kind of rational justification” (Lemos 299). Emotivism has become rooted in contemporary culture, characterized by individual moral agents that consider themselves to be sovereign in authority (MacIntyre 1984), a mindset that continues to fuel entitlement. Recognizing and communicating our feelings, whether positive or negative, is a practice more accepted and encouraged than it was even a generation ago, resulting in people believing that the simple expression of their emotion is both meaningful and irrefutably valid. This perspective, indicative of rhetorical privilege, prompts individuals to deem personal preference – A is right, and B is wrong – an
appropriate means to impose their biased arguments and moral judgements. Although just an expression of emotion, when this statement is grounded in negative feeling, the message is more like manipulation rather than persuasion, resulting in a confrontational interaction. Entitled students that posit an “always right” approach to their academic pursuits often make similar types of arguments with their instructors, resulting in discourse that is incapable of being resolved rationally.

Emotions and Entitlement: An Aristotelian Analysis

Arguably one of the most influential philosophers throughout history, Aristotle’s analysis of emotion has been central to scholarship. Furthering Plato’s interpretation that passions affect judgement, Aristotle considers emotion to be “more primitive, less intelligent, more bestial, less dependable, and more dangerous than reason” (Solomon 3), requiring the constant management of a rational mind. However, Aristotle also understands that emotions are not just “blind animal forces,” but possess wisdom and are responsive to alterations in our cognition (Nussbaum 1996). In “Aristotle: Emotion and Moral Virtue” (1969), William Fortenbaugh advances this argument, suggesting that “emotional responses may be unreasonable, but this does not mean that they lack a cognitive component. It only means that the cognitions involved are erroneous or unjustified” (176). By softening the division, Aristotle recognizes that our emotions can impact our decisions (Schwarz 2000), noting that “our judgements when we are pleased and friendly are not the same as when we are pained and hostile” (Aristotle, “Rhetoric” 25). Thus, we recognize that changes in our emotional state parallel changes in our reasoning. Rational thought does not function opposite to emotion, but is inextricably connected to emotion, inherently influenced by varied responses to make assessments.
Student entitlement highlights instances in which emotions can negatively affect one’s rationality. When confronted with a perspective or action that challenges fixed expectations of personal success, or that one is more deserving than others (Wasieleski et al. 2014; Greenberger et al. 2008), entitled students commonly respond to that perceived “failure feedback with anger and aggression” (Twenge & Campbell 263). Aristotle discussed the concept of anger at length in *Rhetoric*, considering it “an impulse, accompanied by a pain, to a conspicuous revenge for a conspicuous slight directed without justification towards what concerns oneself” (92). Moreover, he suggests that anger is always aimed at a particular person who has performed, or intended to perform, an abuse against one “that must always be attended by a certain pleasure – that which arises from the expectation of revenge” (92). Central to Aristotle’s interpretation of anger, and this discussion of entitlement, is the concept of slight, a voluntary act of contempt, malice, or disrespect. Slight does not entail the same thing for everyone, depending largely on one’s self-conception (Leighton 2002). Entitled students, characterized by an unreasonably inflated sense of self (Wasieleski et al. 2014), consider themselves superior to others and expect preferential treatment because of their status or perceived accomplishments. As a result, these students feel more disposed to an apparent slight. Aristotelian thought on slight parallels this idea, suggesting “a man expects to be specially respected by his inferiors in birth, in capacity, in goodness, and generally in anything in which he is much their superior” (Aristotle, “Rhetoric” 93-94). Instances of disagreement may quickly lead to aggression when an entitled student believes they are the victim of an unwarranted affront, reinforcing the biased notion that they are being afforded less importance than deserved.

Each kind of slight holds significance in provoking anger, however spite is particularly applicable to attitudes of entitlement. Aristotle notes in *Rhetoric* that spite consists of “thwarting
another man’s wishes, not to get something yourself, but to prevent his getting it” (93). Entitled students maintain certain expectations of treatment and accommodation from their instructors, such as higher grades, the opportunity to submit incomplete or late work, and immediate access (Wasieleski et al. 2014). When those wants are not met, students perceive the resultant rejection as an insult to their very worth. In such instances, an instructor is deemed to be guilty of spiteful action, prompting students to outbursts of anger and intimations of using of course evaluations as a means to punish faculty (Schaefer et al. 2013). Spite arises from a feeling of superiority. A person does not believe another “can do you harm . . . nor that he can do you any good worth mentioning” (Aristotle, “Rhetoric” 93). Considered to be service providers being compensated for the delivery of a product (Schaefer et al. 2013), entitled students do not respect instructors enough to believe in the prospect of significant repercussion. As Aristotle notes, “we are not angry with people we fear or respect” (Aristotle, “Rhetoric” 98), a thought that highlights the disregard many students have for authority figures like college faculty. When anger arises from the presence of a slight, that alleged offense is committed against a person without justification and prompts a vengeful response.

According to Michael Stocker and Elizabeth Hegeman in *Valuing Emotions* (1996), the Aristotelian desire for revenge is characteristic of a high degree of self-interest. A person suffers if they are not bestowed the proper degree of admiration, and experience this “lack of respect as a deep wound to himself” (268). Since these injuries occur at a deep personal level, it is not surprising that one would be inclined to respond with anger to those deemed as inferior others. This is a perception commonly held by entitled students, who are known for a “self-centered disposition” and a “general disregard for relationship boundaries and authority” (Lippmann et al. 198). The association of anger and self-interest seems like a plausible concept for Aristotle to
consider, as many scholars presume Athens was an extremely narcissistic society (Alford 1987; Lasch 1984). Athenian Men, believed to have fragile egos and a constant need for validation, were not only predisposed to anger when others held a low opinion of them, but pursued revenge upon those individuals (Scheiter 2022; Stocker & Hegeman 1996) that committed the offense.

Thinking of themselves as the superior beings, self-interested people derive a measure of pleasure from retaliation, placing personal interests above all else (Stocker & Hegeman 1996). Consumed by anger, an individual that believes their concerns and pursuits are the only thing of importance (Leighton 1982), is not only telling of “Aristotle’s angry man” who aspires to be the center of attention (Stocker and Hegeman 1996), but of entitled students that are preoccupied with admiration and special treatment (Miller 2013; Bergman et al. 2010). When faculty are knowingly or unwittingly inattentive to an entitled student’s wants, that action is considered a slight as it denies that pupil of their expected attention, accommodation, or achievement. Anger commonly arises on such occasions with this student population, engendering a desire to seek revenge for the perceived affront. This reaction is often immediate and appears to the receiver as overly aggressive, unreasonable, or “in the wrong place, at the wrong time” (Leighton 1982). As Aristotle notes, all human beings experience anger, and the feeling may even be appropriate in particular circumstances. However, entitled students are seemingly more prone to anger due to inflated interpretations of their self and heightened expectations of deservingness. Clinging to obstinate desires of personal fulfillment and dialogic accommodation, increases the likelihood of rhetorical privilege. Individuals believe so vehemently in their own perspectives, that even minor disagreements are deemed a slight, and quickly lead to outbursts of anger.

In some cases, student anger can manifest with more aggressive conduct, resulting in deliberate attempts at inculcating fear in faculty for a perceived wrong. Aristotle examines fear
in *Rhetoric*, noting that an emotion “may be defined as a pain or disturbance due to a mental picture of some destructive or painful evil in the future” (103). He furthers that fear is rendered by “particular persons” at a “particular time,” and is “caused by whatever we feel has great power of destroying us, or harming us in ways that tend to cause us great pain” (104). Entitled students commonly use the tactic of fear against faculty, most frequently with the threat of poor course evaluations, recognizing that potential pay raises, promotional opportunities, and tenure decisions may be determined by these results (Thomas 2003). Outside of the classroom, students also use social media to intimidate instructors by “spreading malicious gossip,” or suggesting the possibility of physical violence against them or a family member (Asio 2019; Longobardi et al. 2019; Thomas 2003). In “Handling Anger” (2003), Sandra Thomas presents an instructor’s troubling experience after failing a student. Although initially pleasant, this student’s demeanor dramatically changed upon receiving low marks, As the instructor recalled, “he threatened to kill me, stalked me for well over a year, threatened the lives of my children, and vowed to ‘put you down if it’s the last thing I ever do.’ I had to file a restraining order against him, and live in fear for a good year” (23). This example is certainly an extreme instance of student intimidation, but it underscores how fear may compel an individual, such as audience member, to consider “what could be done” when making a decision that defies a speaker’s argument. The speaker can make an audience “feel that they are really in danger of something,” even noting how such instances have “happened to people like themselves” (Aristotle, “Rhetoric” 106) on previous occasions. Should confrontations arise with entitled students, faculty may consider worst-case scenarios as possible outcomes, and fear of the potential repercussions can alter their judgement.

When faced with a condition that one considers to be underserved, another emotional response entitled students often use is pity. Aristotle describes pity in *Rhetoric* as a “feeling of
pain caused by the sight of some evil, destructive or painful, which befalls one who does not
deserve it” (113). He furthers, like anger, the provocation of pity “has nothing to do with the
essential facts, but is merely a personal appeal” (20) that induces a sympathetic reaction to one’s
suffering. In “Pity and Compassion as Social Virtues” (1999), Brian Carr comments on this
thought, claiming that Aristotle’s interpretation of pity “is centered on the needs of the orator in
swaying the response of his audience” (412). While Carr suggests that pity is an “altruistic
emotion,” I would argue that by focusing on the needs of the speaker, we may also understand
pity, like anger, to be a self-interested emotion. Aristotle maintains that since rhetoric concerns
decision-making “the orator must not only try to make the argument of his speech demonstrative
and worthy of belief,” he must also “put his hearers, who are to decide, into the right frame of
mind” (Aristotle, “Rhetoric” 90). However, Aristotle’s implication of “the right frame of mind”
regards putting hearers into a state considered to be the most favorable to “achieving the desired
decision,” which does not mean it is the right decision (Carr 1999). For Aristotle, attending to
the emotions of an audience is an important way of leading them towards a speaker’s preferred
end. By appearing friendly and compassionate, a speaker may appeal to similar positive feelings
in an audience, just as anger and hostility can cause individuals to believe “something totally
different or the same thing with a different intensity” (Aristotle, “Rhetoric” 91). Much like the
emotions of compassion or anger may elicit comparable feelings, the same principle applies to
the inducement of pity.

Entitled students often attempt to recount unfortunate personal circumstances outside of
classroom, anxiety about achievement, or pressures to maintain financial aid obligations, hoping
to rouse a sense of pity in an instructor. As Aristotle suggests, to feel pity we must first trust in
the existence of human goodness, otherwise we would merely wish others nothing but suffering.
However, when we feel pity for another, we remember “that similar misfortunes have happened to us or ours” (Aristotle, “Rhetoric” 113), allowing us to connect with the person facing a hardship. University faculty were once students themselves, and if similar misfortunes were encountered, there is a stronger likelihood for a sympathetic reaction. Emotional appeal is a power tool, often exerting an unspoken pressure upon instructors to meet that student’s request. Keenly aware of today’s competitive academic environment, faculty do not normally aspire to ruin a student’s educational experience, or bare responsibility for hurting a student’s chance to pursue academic and career opportunities (McCabe & Powell 2004). Pity is grounded on the understanding that a person’s suffering was not caused by their own “culpable actions” and must be regarded as a serious concern (Nussbaum 1996) for others to indulge. It is my contention that entitled students are aware of this struggle, and use an instructor’s kindness for personal benefit. Increasing numbers of students are matriculating to college with high expectations for success, and see themselves as “A students” regardless of their actual effort. Curiously, students who get D’s and F’s do not bemoan their failure, or entreat faculty, as much as those that receive B’s and “see themselves as A’s” (McCabe & Powell 2004). While acquiescing to a student’s emotional appeal for pity may not be the right decision, instructors often yield to these petitions seeking to avoid a confrontation.

In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle contends that knowledge of emotions was instrumental to the art of rhetoric, as “persuasion may come through the hearers, when the speech stirs their emotions” (25). Because rhetoric focuses on the attributes of a particular audience, the passions that interest Aristotle are primarily those that construct and direct social relationships in a situation (Kastely 2006). As an emotion’s “appropriateness or inappropriateness” is imperative when engaging an audience (Kastely 2006: Garver 1994), a speaker must endeavor to understand each emotion and
the resultant reactions that may arise. While audience members may harbor conflicting feelings about an opinion, person, or proposed action prior to an interaction, an effective speaker can incite those individuals to adopt a similar feeling by “making the appropriateness” of a particular emotion apparent, even if such sentiment lasts for only a moment (Kastely 2006). For instance, before conversing with a student, an instructor may be adamant about grading criteria. However, this sentiment is vulnerable to outbursts of aggression such as, “I’m not leaving your office until you change my grade” (Kopp & Finney 323), or tearful accounts like, “I spent time on this . . . [and] tried very hard” (McCabe and Powel 204). Emotions can elicit unrestricted impulsive reactions leading a respondent to alter the rigidity of a particular judgement or change it entirely (Leighton 1982) based upon a temporary shift in perception. There is no doubt that sentiment impacts reason at a particular moment. An audience is likely to become critical of a speaker that rouses their anger, just as pity typically elicits feelings of generosity (Leighton 1982). Thus, an immediate but momentary feeling may significantly alter our judgement, leading us to make an unplanned decision.

By appealing to a particular emotion of an instructor, entitled students seek to impose their own beliefs, attempting to reshape the judgement of their target audience to suit personal purposes. “Through this imposition of emotion, the rhetor warps the audience, for the audience is no longer using their values to judge appearance nor assessing the appropriateness of their response; instead, they are moved by those emotions imposed by the rhetor” (Kastely 226). Although perhaps a fleeting feeling, once moved by a given emotion one alters their judgement, rebuffing the presence of any other emotion or corresponding judgement (Leighton 1982). For Aristotle, emotions share an inherent connection with particular decisions. In the Rhetoric he illustrates this point, noting how anger is accompanied by an intent for revenge, calmness with
the acceptance for one’s fault, and shame with disgrace for “ourselves or to those we care about” (107). When a speaker understands the emotions, can “name them, describe them, [and] know their causes” (25), they are able to rouse similar sentiment needed to influence an audience. This connection serves to “reproduce and strengthen the judgement that constituted the original stimulus to the emotion, thus generating a closed or circular cognitive system” (Konstan 37). In such instances, individuals offer reasons why they feel or think as they do, even if only for that brief moment, a concept central to Aristotle’s belief that emotions are grounded in thought.

Aristotle believes in the passivity of an audience, who are susceptible to the emotional influence of the speaker. Rhetorical privilege resides in this belief, attempting to use powerful impulsive feelings to control or shape dialogue at a particular moment. As emotions maintain an inherent association with a corresponding decision, appealing to the proper sentiment can put the audience in a “certain frame of mind,” eliciting the speaker’s desired response. Entitled students exhibiting rhetorical privilege trust in the innate superiority of their own views and perceive any challenges as an underserved slight. Moreover, since they anticipate unconditional respect from all others that owe them proper treatment, resultant reactions can be unexpected and intense. In these instances, students employ specific emotions such as anger, fear, or pity for their own advantage, seeking merely to manipulate the interaction and regain a sense of control.

Cicero: Emotional Manipulation and the Ideal Orator

Centuries later, Marcus Tullius Cicero approached the emotions in rhetoric differently from Aristotle. Instead of contemplating the connection between emotion and reason, he “seems to set emotion against reason,” even applauding the use of emotions to obstruct rational thought (Remer 2013), an idea that ostensibly supports the presence of rhetorical privilege and resultant
entitlement-related intentions. In *De Oratore*, through the character of Crassus, Cicero first notes the importance of emotion:

> who indeed does not know that the orator’s virtue is pre-eminently manifested either in rousing men’s hearts to anger, hatred, or indignation, or in recalling them from these same passions to mildness and mercy? Wherefore the speaker will not be able to achieve what he wants by his words, unless he has gained profound insight into the characters of men, and the whole range of human nature, and those motives whereby our souls are spurred on or turned back (55).

Cicero furthers this thought as the character of Marcus Antonius, proclaiming that nothing in oratory “is more important than to win for the orator the favor of his hearer, and to have the latter [audience] so affected as to be swayed by something resembling a mental impulse or emotion, rather than by judgement or deliberation” (325). Cicero contends that an audience is more inclined to make a decision due to some “inward emotion,” rather than by “reality, authority, any legal standard, judicial precedent, or statute” (325). Roman audiences demanded a speaker’s emotional appeals to excite them and even respected flamboyant displays, allowing one to “get very close to, or even past, the edge of what we would consider plain manipulation, without losing one’s credibility” (Wisse 263-264). Unlike Aristotle, the audience for Cicero are not just passive spectators, but are instead “invited to judge, like trained listeners,” indicating that the orator is willing to accept accountability (Connolly 2007) for their declarations. The ideal orator must be knowledgeable of their own mind and the subject of discourse, but more importantly they must be attentive to the emotions and opinions of the audience (Kapust 2011). Cicero is not concerned with the potential dangers of powerful appeals, for effective oratory cannot transpire without attending to this feature.
Interestingly, Cicero never offers a clear definition of emotion throughout *De Oratore*. While the character of Marcus Antonius debates “emotional appeal at some length,” he questions the necessity of an orator to know the qualities of a particular sentiment (Fortenbaugh 2006). Cicero posits this notion in *De Oratore*, inquiring:

for what grand and impressive speaker, trying to make an arbitrator angry with his opponent, was ever at a loss merely through not knowing whether wrath is a vehement heat of the mind, or a strong desire to avenge pain? Who, in seeking by his word to confound and stir up the other feelings in the minds of a tribunal or popular assembly, has uttered the hackneyed saying of the philosophers? (157)

Feasibly, Cicero’s reluctance to present a particular understanding of emotion is because their true nature is difficult to identify (Fortenbaugh 2006). For instance, anger and fear are grounded on inherently personal motivations, while happiness and sadness are elicited by “a psychological condition or an external stimulus” (Fortenbaugh 2016). As significant variation exists amongst different emotions, Cicero refuses to align himself with a fixed position. Instead, observing the “double-sided nature” of emotions, he identifies their sources rather vaguely, recognizing them as both “irrational and consistent with reason” (Remer 2013). This stance may also be attributed to Cicero’s tendency to waver. “Throughout his life, we see Cicero probing, doubting, arguing with himself and others, and changing his mind on more than one occasion” (Volk 78). In fact, well-known for his skepticism and indecisiveness, Cicero would frequently change his mind “from day to day – and from work to work” (Glucker 1988). This characteristic reinforces our understanding that Cicero does not obligate himself to a particular doctrine, but would follow the most appropriate or successful methods of appealing to an audience.
When confronted with unmet expectations, entitled students seek to reclaim control of dialogue by whatever means that prove successful. As students with high academic entitlement believe aggressive exchanges are an acceptable approach to interact with instructors or university administrators (Jiang et al. 2016: Dubovsky 1986), emotional appeals such as impatience, anger, fear or pity become commonly used reactions. Their goal is simply to induce agreement through discord. An instructor either promptly agrees to a misguided argument, hoping to avoid further conflict, or chances the provocation of an emotional outburst. Cicero discusses the notion of establishing agreement in *De Oratore*, suggesting that an individual must be swayed “by natural inclination, be won over by the arguments . . . or constrained by stirring his feelings” (291).

During such instances, an entitled student’s argument is emblematic of “emotional appeals as rhetorical attempts to overpower the audience’s rational capacities” (Remer, “Rhetoric” 413), focused on gaining approval or arousing feeling, “particularly on the part of the case that is most capable of influencing men’s minds” (Cicero, “De Oratore” 421). At this moment, a student’s intent is not to allow the respondent an opportunity to rely on facts, but to wrest dialogic control and plan for a quick and personally beneficial resolution.

For Cicero, emotional displays often proved to be advantageous for his addresses, and he even openly criticized opposing orators for their lack of emotion, claiming calmness was nothing more than an “inhuman suppression of normal emotions or a disturbing lack of care” (Kenty 86). In *Brutus*, Cicero illustrates this fact, declaring:

> Where was that expression of resentment, which is so natural to the injured? Where that ardour, that eagerness, which extorts the most pathetic language even from men of the dullest capacities? There was no visible disorder in your mind, no emotion in your looks and gesture, no smiting of the thigh or the forehead, nor even a single stamp of the foot.
You was, therefore, so far from interesting our passions in your favour, that we could scarcely keep our eyes open (193-194).

Without the necessary expressiveness that arises through emotional inflection, one’s argument may be considered unconvincing and indifferent. Based on this understanding, entitled students employing emotion to attain their own dialogic objectives does not sound like an action Cicero would discourage. However, the Roman statesman noted in *De Officiis* that we have obligations to each other, and truly honorable individuals cannot reject those commitments. No phase of our life, whether public or private, may survive without the presence of moral duty, and “on the discharge of such duties depends all that is morally right, and on their neglect all that is morally wrong in life” (7). Since “we do not live for ourselves alone,” self-interest cannot be considered a guiding principle in one’s existence. External influences like family, friends, and community associations each invest in our development, thus true moral principles must grant “that no harm be done to anyone,” and that “the common interests be conserved” (33). Moreover, when an individual is motivated by personal profit to gain advantage over another through deception or purposeful injury, then the “bonds of human society” are considered broken (Cicero 1913). To mitigate the exploitation of established rules “through chicanery” as a means to achieve personal goals, Cicero forwards that a speaker must use decorum.

The concept of decorum is more than a speaker’s responsibility, as it is entrenched within the “values of the community” (Remer 2010), and inherently connected to what is considered honorable. In *De Oratore*, Cicero notes that “in oratory the very cardinal sin is to depart from the language of everyday life, and the usage approved by the sense of the community” (11). As such, a speaker must obey “the established customs and conventions of a community,” careful not to act in willful defiance of these rules (Cicero, “De Officiis” 151). Although Cicero advocates for
a speaker’s ability to use emotional appeals to overpower the audience’s reason (Remer 2010), he maintains that the speaker is not absolved from moral responsibility. It is a speaker’s duty to respect established community standards, as conflicting behavior would be deemed shameful. Decorum demands that an orator speak “in a style fitted to convince,” thus for an emotional appeal to be both effective and moral, he or she must adapt to the occasion and audience (Cicero 1967). Conceivably, emotional manipulation may be deemed good, as long as it is utilized for honorable purposes. However, “the desire simply to please one’s audience opens up the room for flattery, pandering or manipulation” (Kastely 100). Cicero’s interpretation of an ideal orator is that of “a good man” who uses “his eloquence for good purposes” and espouses the highest of moral qualities (Kapust 2011; May & Wisse 2001). This is an important element of decorum, as a speaker’s appropriate use of emotions to win approval is illustrative of a person that has the ability and intention to engender goodwill as a means of persuasion. Arising through entitlement behavior, rhetorical privilege noticeably lacks this quality. Individuals advocate solely for self-interested purposes, intent on emotionally compelling others to concur with biased perspectives. During such instances, a speaker is certainly not exhibiting decorum or even attempting to instill goodwill with an audience.

The notion of decorum illustrates Cicero’s further deviation from Aristotelian philosophy by advocating for a more profound association between ethos (credibility) and pathos (emotion). While Aristotle establishes ethos as “the speaker’s trustworthiness without eliciting emotions, Cicero seeks to effect, through ethos, an emotional response in the audience” (Remer, “Rhetoric” 411). In De Oratore, he proposes through the character of Antonius that “feelings are won over by a man’s merit, achievements or reputable life” (327). Moreover, when speaking particularly about the emotion of love, Cicero notes that “love is won if you are thought to be upholding the
interests of your audience, or to be working for good men, or at any rate for such as that audience
deems good and useful” (349). Gary Remer furthers in “Rhetoric, Emotional Manipulation, and
Political Morality” (2013) that Cicero also focuses on proper verb usage when describing the
orator’s appeal to **ethos** and **pathos**. For instance, when supporting those attributes of a person’s
merit an orator employs **ethos**, a “mild tone, a countenance expressive of modesty, [and] gentle
language.” In contrast, the orator uses **pathos**, or more forceful language, that “excites or urges
the feelings” of an audience “towards hatred or love, ill-will, or well-wishing, fear or hope,
desire or aversion, joy or sorrow, compassion or the wish to punish” (327-331). While **ethos**
intends to inculcate goodwill towards a speaker, the goal of **pathos** for Cicero is to incite
powerful or impulsive emotional responses.

Such impetuous reactions are often at odds with reason. Attempting to provide a speaker
the chance to gain quick accord without thoughtful reflection, is an approach often employed by
entitled students amid dispute. However, the inability to speak with an appropriate style that is
attentive to establishing goodwill with an audience “is a sign of deficiency” (Kapust 2011). As
Cicero posits in *The Orator*, a speaker “who can say nothing calmly, nothing gently, nothing
methodically, nothing clearly, distinctly, or humorously . . . proceeds to amplify and exaggerate
without preparing the attention of his audience, will appear to rave before men of understanding”
(304). Lacking the necessary adaptation, using emotion to sway an audience may be temporarily
effective, as receivers may merely placate this style to avoid potential confrontation, but it is a
risky endeavor. If an orator does not convey a righteous character and strive to achieve harmony,
an audience may react with mistrust, and dialogue becomes ineffective. It is a “plain and simple
orator, as speaking acutely and expertly, [that] has the appearance of wisdom and good-sense”
(304). Cicero contends that oratory cannot be effective without exploiting a hearer’s emotions,
an approach that is contingent on both considering an audience’s opinion and “the activity of the orator” (Kapust 2011). Emotional involvement is intrinsically connected to the credibility of a speaker, and whether he or she successfully persuades an audience is evident in their reaction (Kapust 2011). For Cicero, a positive response is characteristic of a speaker who is known as a good person, and stirs pleasing feelings in an audience. However, as entitled students are indifferent to the needs of their audience, seeking only to satisfy self-interested desires, they lack the ability to appropriately interact, making their approaches more reminiscent of manipulation rather than persuasion.

Rhetorical Privilege and Manipulation: The Absence of Persuasion

For millennia, scholars and philosophers have recognized the crucial role emotions play in the art of persuasion. Aristotle argues in Rhetoric that listeners are inherently affected by the emotional appeals of a speaker, noting that “an emotional speaker always makes his audience feel with him, even when there is nothing in his arguments; which is why many speakers try to overwhelm their audience by mere noise” (178). As rhetoric is considered to be “concerned with appearances,” he furthers that we must also be attentive to delivery. While a speaker should, in fairness, argue a case “with no help beyond the bare facts,” the presence of “other things affect the result considerably, owing to the defect of our hearers” (165). Although firmly rooted in the primacy of reason over emotion, Aristotle recognized that the proper delivery of an argument affects an audience in a profound way, exceeding mere cognition (Remer 2013). Emotional appeals are an important means of persuasion, relying on one’s sentiment to establish a bond between a speaker and an audience. Speakers capitalize on stressing the importance of shared values and pursuits, seeking to incite powerful sensory images that are either collectively valued or reviled (Jerit 2004; Jamieson 1992). Since these petitions are meant to convince an audience
to act on an argument – through compassion, anger or fear – without logical evidence or the proper opportunity of reflection, critics often contend that the evocation of an emotion is not persuasion, but manipulation.

In the 4th Century B.C., Aristotle was entangled in such debate, purportedly countering Sophist teachers who provided instruction on philosophy and rhetoric, claiming them to be mere wordsmiths more concerned with monetary reward than the advancement of truth. The Sophists were keenly aware of people’s susceptibility to the usage of language, and taught eloquence to emphasize the various viewpoints that may manifest in a particular occasion and to give further meaning to those perspectives that appear more useful (Poulakos 1983; Hegel 1963). Many scholars observing Platonian thought have described Sophists as those who speak dishonestly and forward false beliefs (Crivelli 2012) to an attentive and vulnerable audience. Seeking not the discovery of knowledge, a Sophist “produces false sentences that imitate true ones [and] tries to deceive his or her hearers into believing that the false sentences produced are true” (Crivelli 25). In some instances, this may be achieved by appealing to the similarities that exist in an audience, while in others attending to something remarkable or unexpected proves effective. The Sophists are accused of purposely deceiving people, and are often “held in contempt for dealing with ‘the non-essentials’ of rhetoric” (Poulakos 37). Their pre-occupation with style to emotionally affect an audience contradicts Aristotle’s insistence on adhering to the “facts and proof” in discourse. While the Sophists were certainly master rhetoricians, “their excellence in the area of style has often been construed as a liability” (Poulakos 38), largely considered a weaponization of emotion to win over an audience. Since ancient Greece, questions have remained whether Sophistic education may be considered manipulation, as Aristotle attests, or effective persuasion. While
both concepts pertain to the notion of influence, understanding the difference between the two is important as it highlights the moral principles that ground rhetoric.

Unlike Aristotle, who relies upon facts and argumentative force to “safeguard hearers from emotional manipulation” (Remer, “Rhetoric” 421), Cicero aims to provoke an emotional response in an audience. Grounded in reason, Aristotle condemns emotional manipulation in Rhetoric, claiming “the arousing of prejudice, pity, anger, and similar emotions has nothing to do with the essential facts, but is merely a personal appeal” (20). Conversely, Cicero urges orators to arouse passionate emotions to prevent listeners from thinking rationally (Remer 2013), even stating in De Oratore, “that some very clever rules may be laid down for playing upon men’s feelings and making prize of their goodwill” (221). This thought not only underscores the clear difference between the two philosophers, but emphasizes Cicero’s intent of exciting an emotion to provoke an audience to set aside reason long enough to attain accord. A major component of this process is Cicero’s treatment of conciliare (Remer 2013), which entails winning over the audience by portraying “one’s sentiments, style, and delivery, [or] the excellence of the speaker’s character” (Fantham 266), illustrating an inherent connection between emotion and the speaker. William Fortenbaugh furthers in “Benevolentiam conciliare and animos permovere” (1988), that Cicero is concerned with “arousing an emotion which will color the perceptions of an audience and in this way contribute to victory” (261). For instance, a speaker can win affection for himself or another person by illustrating their unselfish behavior (Fortenbaugh 1988), making it clear that they never “consulted his [or her] own interests and did nothing at all from personal motives” (Cicero, “De Oratore” 351). An entitled student may attempt to employ this approach, provoking positive sentiment or sympathy by recalling how they managed an unfortunate situation that adversely affected their performance. For Cicero, when a speaker is able to engender goodwill,
an audience is more likely to believe them (Fortenbaugh 1988). Cicero is comfortable using powerful emotional appeals, which may be characterized as manipulation, to produce a certain response. The ultimate goal is to win an audience’s favor for oneself, and whenever possible, to take that sense of goodwill away from an opponent.

Simply understood, the goal of rhetoric is persuasion, “to change the target’s mind, to cause the target to see his or her position as incorrect and the speaker’s position as correct” (Paine 38). While rhetoric is commonly recognized as a method of changing minds, by granting increased credibility and power upon one party, it receives a reputation for having a manipulative nature. The goal of manipulation “is to force the target to choose among alternatives chosen by the manipulator; that choice puts the manipulator in a position of strategic advantage” (Paine 38).

Contrarily, as Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca offer in The New Rhetoric (1969), persuasion accepts “that one has renounced resorting to force alone, that value is attached to gaining the adherence of one’s interlocuter, and perhaps most importantly, “that one is not regarding him as an object, but appealing to his free judgement” (55). Maintaining a sense of psychological freedom, unbound to constraint of another’s will and open to the opportunity of choice, must be present for persuasion to exist. Guido Calogero alludes to this idea in “Why Do We Ask Why?” (1953), stating that we must have “freedom to express our belief and to try and convert others to it, with the obligation to let others do the same with us, and to listen to them with the same willingness to understand their truths” (260). Thus, what distinguishes the practice of persuasion from manipulation is the concept of force. Once entitled individuals become entrenched in immovable perspectives, refusing to acknowledge the presence of alternative views, rhetorical privilege seizes control. Dialogue is no longer built on mutual freedom of
expression, but upon one individual’s commitment to dominance and furthering personal convictions.

When an entitled student uses emotional appeals, they seek to force a response in which their target believes limited choices are available, and the most reasonable alternative is one that results in little or no conflict. In such instances, a speaker that employs emotionally manipulative approaches denies their listeners of the opportunity to act with autonomy (Remer 2013; Klemp 2011), free to present distinctive perspectives without the fear of oppression. Manipulation is distinct from persuasion “in that it is concerned not with changing individual’s beliefs but with maneuvering them into choices that are the ones the manipulator desires” (Paine 37). Deeming the presence of alternative opinions as a threat to one’s own incontestable views, rhetorical privilege relies on emotional manipulation to force an audience into compliance. Rhetoric, as persuasion, is not a means of imposing the speaker’s “proposition or assertions” upon an audience, but is rather a process of “obtaining adherence based upon a reasoned evaluation undertaken by the audience” (Parker 72). Reason poses a great risk to rhetorical privilege, as entitled individuals do not want their target to be granted enough time to reflect on appropriate responses. Persuasion exists when an audience freely and rationally accepts a speaker’s perspective, unfettered by impulsive or unreflective instances emerging from powerful emotional appeals.

Human relationships are often considered to be manipulative by nature, so whether by “trick, force, fraud, appeal to reason, or appeal to emotion, or by other means . . . human beings have acted upon one another with the aim of gaining adherence and adjusting differences” (Parker 73). Certainly, we may recognize that relationships between family members, friends, students and professors, and co-workers are partially manipulative. At times people may even be
complicit in their own manipulation, eagerly inviting controlling efforts to be directed toward them (Parker 1972). As Cicero observed, audience members commonly wished to be stirred by passionate emotional appeals (Remer 2013) and encouraged speakers to engage in such methods. Although listeners may acknowledge being emotionally affected at a particular moment, they still willingly capitulate to that exploitation because of their deep-seated irrational tendencies (Remer 2013; Klemp 2011). In *The Orator*, Cicero states “the taste of the Audience, then, has always governed and directed the Eloquence of the Speaker: for all who wish to be applauded, consult the character, and the inclinations of those who hear them, and carefully form and accommodate themselves to their particular humours and dispositions” (253). However, while an audience may desire this stimulation, and speakers are compelled to attend to those proclivities, they are not free from their moral responsibility to others.

While scholars commonly consider force as the primary difference between persuasion and manipulation, many suggest that the variance should include the notion of intent when trying to alter a listener’s existing behavior or viewpoint (Parker 1972). James Fishkin furthers this idea in *Manipulation and Democratic Theory* (2011), suggesting that “a person has been manipulated when he or she has been exposed to a message intended to alter their views in a way they would not accept on the basis of good conditions” (32). For instance, when faced with an unacceptable response for accommodation, Katherine Almquist, an Associate Professor at Frostburg State University, recounts an incident in which a student “was insistent that he be able to make up a quiz he had missed,” although the syllabus clearly stated that was against the rules. The student “slammed his hands down on his desk repeatedly, while shouting at her . . . ‘you’re going to let me make up this quiz’” (June). Such a reaction, which the instructor deemed could escalate to violence, is indicative of an emotional appeal with obvious intent to change one’s original
position. Entitled students, intent on manipulating listeners, refrain from “presenting factual arguments” for their audience to consider (Remer 2013), instead relying on intense feelings and irrational tendencies to succeed in achieving their goals. Unfortunately, two significant “moral breaches” arise from manipulation: first, listeners are prevented from reflecting upon what is the right or proper response for a particular circumstance; and second, manipulation severely discounts the listener’s ability to act as an autonomous agent (Klemp 2011). Manipulation espouses an objectionable nature, denoting a malicious intent to mislead or victimize another for one’s own benefit.

Contrarily, in accordance with Aristotelian perspectives, persuasion is deemed inherently good, and is an essential means of ascertaining the truth. Persuasion involves moving people to accept a position they currently resist; however, such influence does not entail begging. Instead, persuasion “involves careful preparation, the proper framing of arguments, the presentation of vivid supporting evidence, and the effort to find the correct emotional match with your audience” (Conger 86). Persuasion seeks to establish equity through the development of “good conditions” that are grounded upon “balanced messages” created in a dialogue (Fishkin 2011). Akin to the theories presented by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca in The New Rhetoric (1969), persuasion entails that argumentation is both offered and answered in a meaningful way. Hence, persuasion advances the beliefs of a speaker, not through force or deceitful methods, but by encouraging an audience to express their own views and arrive at their own conclusion. The intent of persuasion is to construct authentic relationships and achieve mutually beneficial results. An individual may realize the “greatest benefits” from the appropriate use of rhetoric, or they may inflict incredible harm through abuse and deceitfulness (Aristotle 1984). Persuasion, as Aristotle claims, is a noble
art that is crucial to effect positive change, however when corrupted, it can become manipulative and dangerous.

Implications

Rhetorical privilege arises in educational environments when entitled students maintain a fixed subjective and unquestionable perspective. This attitude rejects the presence of alternative views, thereby preventing the existence of meaningful dialogue. Confronted with disagreement, entitled students are accustomed to using powerful emotional reactions such as anger, requests for sympathy, or the inducement of fear to attain satisfactory accommodation. Outbursts like these are intended to provoke a desired communicative response from their targeted audience, not by appealing to a respondent’s reason, but rather through the exploitation of their emotion. Armed with higher levels of self-fulfillment, entitled individuals exhibiting rhetorical privilege consider themselves superior to others, and adopt a pervasive me-centric attitude (Schaefer et al. 2013). In the classroom, this mindset certainly applies to faculty who “cease to be educators” and are simply considered “service delivery employees” that may impede a student’s educational or career success (Schaefer et al. 2013; Lippmann et al. 2009). When instructors refuse to lower their academic standards or indulge in misguided requests, entitled students evoke emotional pressure as a means of manipulating a desired response, such as angry outbursts, intimidation tactics, or the inducement of sympathy. As entitled students are becoming more accustomed to “getting their own way,” instances of emotional manipulation may be expected to rise. Thus, higher education professionals must be prepared to manage disruptive displays.

Grounded on the existence of unassailable beliefs, rhetorical privilege seeks to establish a polarized, emotionally-charged environment, intent on preventing opposing perspectives from developing. Emotions are fundamental to interpersonal relationships, recognized both for their
destructive influence as well as their ability to establish meaningful connections. Indifferent to the dialogic needs of others, entitled students are unconcerned with building rapport, demeaning those that fail to satisfy their requests for accommodation, bluntly dismissing views that defy their own, and reacting negatively when confronted with unmet expectations. In such instances, coercing another’s immediate emotional response, allows entitled individuals to capitalize on impaired judgement, preventing their target from reflecting upon the veracity of presented claims and answering in a rational and objective manner. After years of “only gaining praise, approval, or notice” (Sohr-Preston and Boswell 2015), students navigating the collegiate environment have become accustomed to receiving positive appraisals, and know how to pressure compliance for unrealistic demands. When emotions overwhelm reason, one’s attention momentarily shifts away from the purpose of dialogue and toward the person. Rhetorical privilege seeks to engender such an interaction, drawing focus away from the subject matter by using powerful emotional appeals as a distraction. Temporarily consumed by anger, fear, or sympathy, the respondent transfers their focus to the individual, communicating hastily and illogically. This imbalance not only safeguards an entitled individual’s contention, but allows them to retain control of the discourse. As reason identifies the flaws in “fallacious thinking” (Sentell 2017) and biased judgements, it serves as a significant threat to rhetorical privilege. The practice of rhetoric requires active engagement between participants of discourse, employing both emotion and reason to create a meaningful communicative environment.

Emotion and reason share an extensive and complicated history. For millennia, scholars and philosophers regarded the two as opposing forces. Emotions functioned as pleasure-seeking impetuous desires, while reason restrained these misleading motivations to ensure that decisions are not based upon irrational impulses. Contrarily, contemporary scholarship largely accepts the
importance of emotion to human cognition. Although disruptive to reason in particular situations, to deny the information we receive from our emotions is no less harmful. Nearly every aspect of our lives is loaded with emotion, so we “do not simply process information, we feel things as well” (Houghton 2011). Reason alone cannot appropriately navigate us through existence, much of which can only be understood through the observation, intuition, and the experience provided by emotional interactions. However, reflecting our current culture of self-fulfillment, society has seemingly embraced the idea that emotions are more significant than reason. The practice of rhetoric requires the active engagement between partners of discourse, thus neither emotion nor reason should be reduced to the other. Nevertheless, rhetorical privilege seeks this result, believing that the mere expression of emotion is both meaningful and irrefutably valid. For an entitled student that posits an “always right” approach to their academic pursuits, personal sentiment serves as an appropriate means to impose biased arguments and moral judgements. However, when a statement is grounded in powerful negative emotions, the message becomes more suggestive of emotional manipulation rather than persuasion, resulting in a dialogic encounter incapable of being resolved rationally.

Aristotle’s contribution to the investigation of emotion is central to scholarship. While he considers emotions to be under the control of rational thought, “more primitive, less intelligent, [and] more bestial” (Solomon 2010), he also recognizes that they are not merely irrational primal forces, “but discriminating parts of the personality” (Nussbaum 1996). Reason is inherently connected to emotion and greatly affected by varied responses to make assessments, such as “anger, pity, fear and the like” (Aristotle 1984). Instances of entitlement in educational settings demonstrate how sentiment can negatively influence judgement. Rooted in rhetorical privilege, entitled students trust in the innate superiority of their own expressions and maintain high
expectations for unmatched treatment. When those dialogic wants are not met, not only is that rejection deemed an affront to their very worth, but the opposition is perceived as an undeserved slight, resulting in sudden emotional outbursts. Entitled students typically respond in anger, however, this sentiment can manifest more aggressively with threats of physical violence or deliberate attempts at inculcating fear in faculty for a perceived wrong. Fear is a powerful feeling, compelling a listener to consider the genuine and possibly imminent presence of danger, prompting a change in their judgement. Another emotional response that entitled individuals may use is pity. Like anger, the provocation of pity has no correlation with the discernable facts of an observation or interaction, but is more concerned with “a personal appeal” (Aristotle 1984) that induces a sympathetic reaction to one’s suffering. Students may recount unfortunate personal troubles, anxiety about achievement, or the pressures of financial aid obligations, hoping to rouse an instructor’s sense of pity. By appealing to an emotion, entitled students seek to impose their own beliefs, attempting to reshape the judgement of their audience to suit personal purposes. Rhetorical privilege dwells in this conviction, confident that powerful impulsive emotions may be used to control dialogue at a particular moment.

Cicero approached emotions differently from Aristotle, seemingly “praising the use of emotions” to prevent a listener from making rational decisions (Remer 2013). For Cicero, the most important thing in rhetoric is for a speaker to win favor for their argument by exploiting the “inward emotions” of the audience. Unconcerned with the potential dangers of powerful appeals, Cicero believed this feature to be foundational in oratory, even criticizing opposing speakers for not using emotion. When lacking accord, entitled students seek to reclaim prompt control of dialogue through emotional appeals, hoping to overpower an audience’s reason (Remer 2013). While employing emotion to attain their own dialogic objectives does not sound like an action
Cicero would discourage, he acknowledged that we have obligations to each other, and self-interest cannot be considered a guiding principle in one’s life. Cicero’s interpretation of an “ideal” speaker is illustrative of a person that enters discourse intent on creating goodwill as a means of persuasion. Rhetorical privilege noticeably lacks this quality, as entitled individuals advocate solely for self-interested purposes, focused on emotionally compelling others to agree with biased perspectives. Using emotion in this manner may temporarily motivate an audience to concurrence, however, if a speaker does not convey a righteous character and attempt to instill harmony, receivers of a message may merely placate this approach to avoid confrontation. An audience eventually becomes skeptical of that person erecting further obstacles in dialogue. Unfortunately, entitled students exhibiting rhetorical privilege are indifferent to the needs of their target audience, seeking only the satisfaction of verbal authority and achieving self-interested motivations. Lacking the ability to appropriately interact with others, their behavior emphasizes a manipulative approach to communication.

The goal of rhetoric is commonly understood as persuasion. However, as the practice is recognized as a method of changing minds, by providing increased credibility or power upon the argument of one party, it is often considered manipulative. What distinguishes persuasion from manipulation is force. When entitled individuals become entrenched in immovable perspectives, refusing to acknowledge the presence of alternative views, rhetorical privilege arises. Dialogue is no longer built on mutual freedom of expression, but an individual’s commitment to dominance and furthering personal convictions. Rhetorical privilege uses powerful emotional appeals to force an audience into compliance. First by making a respondent believe that limited choices are available, and subsequently compelling them to select the alternative that “puts the manipulator in a position of strategic advantage” (Paine 38). Often the most reasonable choice is one that
results in little or no conflict. Thus, manipulation is concerned not with attempting to change an individual’s beliefs, “but with maneuvering them into choices that are the ones the manipulator desires” (Paine 37). Persuasion exists when an audience freely and rationally accepts a speaker’s perspective, unfettered by impulsive or unreflective instances emerging from powerful emotional appeals. Contrarily, manipulation uses heightened emotions and irrational tendencies to mislead or victimize another for one’s own benefit. As entitled students believe in the superiority of their own views, they perceive danger in persuasion and allowing an audience to arrive at conclusions opposite their own. Rhetorical privilege dwells in manipulation, seeking to prevent listeners from reflecting on factual arguments or the appropriate response for a particular situation. Entitled students have no desire to establish authentic dialogic relationships found through persuasion, their goal is to simply impose their own viewpoint by manipulating an audience’s sentiment to retain communicative control.
Chapter 5: Control, A Fundamental Principle of Rhetorical Privilege

In this final chapter, I will explore the relation between rhetorical privilege and control. Entitled students commonly maintain an attitude of superiority, believing themselves to wield both dialogic power over others and unwarranted influence upon their interactions. Power has profound association with social relations, shaping how individuals develop a sense of identity and structure their interactions. Central to this thought is discourse, the “primary vehicle” by which interactions are produced (Mumby and Stohl 1991). Power is established through the function of discourse as opposing interests vie for a “privileged status . . . in the struggle over meaning” (Deetz and Mumby 1990). My intent for Chapter 5 is to engage the work of French theorist Michel Foucault, German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, and scholars such as Stanley Deetz and Dennis Mumby, to examine the relationship between discourse and control. Rhetorical privilege is the product of the power relations that have been maintained and developed through the discourse of particular social structures which have created an environment susceptible to student entitlement.

Earlier, this investigation determined that our culture of self-fulfillment is grounded in the steady fragmentation of public life, which has motivated the rise of individual expression and personal authority. This belief has shifted communal understandings of morality and normalized the acceptance of entitlement. Individuals have grown accustomed to placing significance on their own biased perspectives while erecting barriers on cooperation. Others are merely valued for their usefulness in dialogue. Allowing little opportunity for alternate views to emerge, and in many cases denying the very presence of others, the necessary balance that must exist in rhetoric is disrupted, prompting the rise of rhetorical privilege. Educational institutions are not immune to this development, witnessing the continual presence of rhetorical privilege as it arises through an
entitled student population, who, when confronted with disagreement, use powerful emotional responses to compel their audience into capitulation. Rhetoric seeks to change minds through persuasion, when an audience freely and rationally accepts a speaker’s argument. Contrarily, rhetorical privilege attempts to change minds through force and manipulation, using emotions and irrational tendencies to mislead an audience for personal benefit.

Rhetorical privilege primarily manifests during instances of entitlement, as self-interested individuals adhering to unyielding personal perspectives refuse to acknowledge the existence of difference. Nurtured by a culture of self-fulfillment, people have become more accustomed to emphasizing their own authority, considering themselves to be knowledgeable on any topic of discussion regardless of prior experience, education, or the veracity of their position. Such an attitude engenders interpersonal distance, limiting the presence of alterity and allowing little opportunity for others to propose alternative perspectives. Armed with a heightened sense of self-worth, an attitude largely credited to a self-esteem movement that rejects offering children negative criticism (Barton and Hirsch 2016; Lessard et al. 2011; Lippmann et al. 2009), entitled students claim dialogic superiority in their interactions, seeking to advance personal opinions and impose biased standards upon discourse. Even when faced with argumentative defeat, students continue to assume no accountability for their position, nor do they believe any repercussion would be justified. Rhetorical privilege furthers the belief that personal judgement or emotional inclinations merits communicative control, discounting the meaningful interaction that must be present between individuals for effective dialogue to exist. Rhetoric rests in choice. By seeking to eliminate the opportunity for difference, entitled individuals are attempting to overpower a target audience, significantly limiting their opportunity to reach an appropriate decision amongst a myriad of options.
Control is an “underlying thread” of entitlement. Not only do students feel empowered to having unrestricted control of their education experience, such as determining course policies, the number and type of assignments, or the nature of evaluations (Jackson et al. 2011; Wasielewski et al. 2014), they also desire communicative dominance over others, intent on forcing listeners into acquiescing to personal demands. To dialogically restrain another by force is a deliberate effort to “repress or overpower” (Barrett 1991) an individual, denying them the freedom and opportunity to willingly submit a response. Those exhibiting narcissistic tendencies, closely linked to attitudes of entitlement, seek to wrest control of a conversation using whichever active or passive strategy that provides them the best chance of success. However, such actions lack the ability to both understand a situation from another point-of-view and to suspend judgement to others (Salazar 2016; Vangelisti et al. 1990; Watson et al. 1984). Rhetorical privilege manifests when entitled persons establish barriers in discourse, unreceptive to the presence of alternative views and indifferent to anyone that challenges a preconceived opinion.

When confronted with disagreement, entitled persons realize that they no longer maintain influence over others, and the likelihood of obtaining a suitable response significantly decreases. This loss of control leads these individuals to employ powerful emotions meant to manipulate, undermine, or provoke another into accord. Accustomed to exploiting others to achieve dialogic success, entitled students are predisposed to act aggressively to maintain a feeling of dominance (Wallace et al. 2012) if control were plausibly threatened. Normally, such behavior is unexpected when one faces difference. However, those with a greater sense of entitlement are more likely to maintain high expectations for the direction of their lives (Zitek and Jordan 2021), believing others should accommodate their arguments no matter how unwarranted. Even those instances
that may seem rather harmless, nothing more than unfortunate luck, may lead entitled students to anger.

While seeking to prove their superiority, entitled students assume no responsibility for their interactions. Current scholarship attributes this feature to an individual’s locus of control. Academic entitlement manifests as a student frequently deflects the blame of poor performance or argumentative losses to another. Equipped with an immovable perspective, and claiming no culpability for their irreverent discourse, this behavior is characteristic of an external locus of control. Individuals possessing an external locus of control believe that external influences determine their life circumstances and are responsible for whether positive rewards or intended outcomes are achieved (Sohr-Preston and Boswell 2015; Rotter 1966; Ney and Fischweicher 2021; Chowning and Campbell 2009), presenting entitled students with a challenging situation. Nurtured by a lifetime of consumerism, permissive parenting, and classrooms where instructors just attempt to create an unproblematic environment, entitled students have grown accustomed to controlling all aspects of their existence. Students now attending college even approach their relationships with professors much like parents or peers, expecting accommodation, constant access, and familiarity (Schaefer et al. 2013; Frey & Tatum 2016). As such, encounters with faculty result in outbursts of aggression when confronted with disagreement. Collegiate learning can present entitled students with their first authentic instance of failure, experiences that they believe to be out of their control, but are attributed solely to their own actions or approaches.

Contrarily, those exhibiting an internal locus of control believe that personal “behaviors, actions, or other factors under their control result in a specific outcome” (Ney and Fischweicher 26). Although many would speculate that entitled individuals would be more disposed to this mindset, individuals with a high internal locus of control actually have lower levels of privilege.
This fact is attributed to a conviction that their own behaviors are solely responsible for the rewards they receive. Lacking any expectation that things will be handed to them, people with an internal locus of control acknowledge the connection between effort and accomplishment (Carnes and Knotts 2018). They do not display a high degree of entitlement because successes and failures may be attributed to their own resolve (Ney and Fischweicher 2021; Carnes and Knotts 2018), making those instances meaningful opportunities for self-improvement.

Entitled students perceive no correlation between effort and accomplishment, refusing to apply the necessary effort to achieve. Fundamentally convinced that they are simply deserving of reward, accomplishment, or dialogic submission, failures must be attributed to “another entity” (Carnes and Knotts 2018), as their own actions are above reproach. In the classroom, while “internals” are more pro-active and motivated to achieve their academic pursuits, highly entitled “externals” are intolerant of obstacles, failing to appropriately confront “any challenges that require unexpected effort” (Anderson et al. 152). This refusal to take responsibility for one’s own actions is revealing of rhetorical privilege, illustrating an entitled person’s inability to exert the energy to both establish and maintain dialogue. As responsibility is directed inward to personal biases and accomplishments, “externals” become increasingly frustrated by the presence of alterity in discourse.

Locus of control is an important element of discourse, as one’s motivation for dominance significantly influences their inclination to communicate (Rubin 1993). Scholarship suggests that entitled persons (with an external locus of control) are more susceptible to discontentment with communication, even avoiding interaction when prompted by disagreement as they fear losing control. Believing that “others aren’t being honest with them,” externals find little motivation attending to another’s input, often entering discourse with a sense of powerlessness and
apprehension (Rubin 1993). Externals do have a need for association; however, this desire is grounded on self-interest and obtaining another’s verbal accommodation. Contrarily, those with an internal locus of control find interaction to be both rewarding and satisfying, confident in their ability to maintain command of discourse. As internals are considered more socially skilled, they welcome opportunities to establish connections with an audience. In fact, driven by the pursuit of “superior performance,” but not superiority over others, internals are comfortable contending with alternative perspectives, even seeking out information (Rubin 1993; Anderson and Schneier 1978), as they depend less upon another’s approval to achieve personal objectives.

While both internals and externals approach discourse with the intent of control, there is an important distinction, willingness. Preoccupied with grades and performance, entitled students contribute little effort to their own academic success, yet still retain a feeling of deservingness. Their behavior is commonly associated with “fewer prosocial motives” to engage with peers or professors, disinterest in classroom cooperation, and a reluctance to seek assistance from faculty or academic advisors (Vallade et al. 2014; Williams and Frymier 2007; Alexitch 1997; Eison 1982). Believing that outside factors regulate their academic successes and failures, specifically professors and university policies, entitled students externalize responsibility and perceive few opportunities for control (Boswell 2012; Chowning and Campbell 2009). After years of consent and seeming command over their prior education, parental influence, and technology, college students experience great difficulty when confronted with obstacles to self-fulfillment, quickly attributing perceived failure to others. Thus, entitlement behavior in the classroom is considered a function of self-preservation as students struggle to meet the rigorous demands of collegiate academics (Boswell 2012; Chowning and Campbell 2009; Greenberger et al. 2008). As such, entitled students are more unwilling to communicate, worried that losing control of an interaction
will endanger accomplishment. Rhetorical privilege is grounded in this belief, tied to an entitled person’s underlying lack of confidence to effectively engage with others. Although seemingly self-assured, this behavior may be an attempt to conceal a deep-seated fear of being ignored.

Michel Foucault: Power through Action, not Possession

Rhetorical privilege in an educational setting arises when an entitled student perceives a decrease in dialogic superiority. Concerned that such conditions entail an unfavorable outcome, they resort to aggressive responses to regain the perceived advantage. Maintaining a sense of communicative power is critically important for those with a sense of entitlement. Vulnerable to the treat of unmet expectations, losing control of an interaction can be detrimental to an entitled person who considers failure as a significant affront to their feelings of self-assurance. Power relations are integrated into all human interactions (Deacon 1998; Foucault 1982), shaping the manner in which individuals develop an identity and structure “fragmented interests into a coherent whole which maintains certain relations of autonomy and dependence” (Mumby and Stohl 315). Modern conceptions of power in communication commonly entail that one asserts a privileged position, capable of influencing another’s decision or diverting their attention away from a preferred perspective. However, twentieth-century French philosopher, Michel Foucault, claims that this is an abstract view of power relations, as “what defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future” (Foucault, “Subject” 789). For Foucault, power is not a capacity that someone possesses, but is rather something acted upon.

Recognizing that power is action, entitled students seeking to control discourse by provoking a favored response from an instructor, does not align with Foucault’s theory. In such
conditions, the student merely has an inclination or purported capacity to exert power over another. As Foucault states in *Society Must be Defended* (1976), power is not meant to be “regarded as a right which can be possessed in the way one possesses a commodity” (13) that may simply be given or received, but rather transpires through action. Moreover, “when put into action” power behaves in a manner which visibly modifies others (Foucault 1982). Thus, a student attempting to elicit an acceptable response from their instructor for a higher grade, is not deemed an exercise of power between communicative partners. On such occasions, to say that a student has power over an instructor is similar to saying “that the room in which they meet is made up of atoms . . . the generality of such claims renders them almost meaningless.” What truly matters is how the student is exercising power and “with what effects” (Gallagher 398). As power only arises through a modification of action, an instructor would have to act on that student’s demand and grant them a higher grade. When faculty adhere to course policies and refuse to acquiesce to entitlement-related outbursts, a student’s perceived sense of power remains unrealized and ultimately irrelevant.

While this understanding establishes that a person cannot merely possess power, it also illustrates the decentralized nature of the concept. Foucault “encourages us to think of powers rather than Power,” suggesting that it is dispersed throughout a particular society or collective of individuals, rather than the popular belief that it is retained by a singular body (Gallagher 2008). As power cannot be maintained by a certain group of people, Foucault posits in *Society Must be Defended* (1976) that “multiple relations of power traverse, characterize, and constitute the social body” (24). Power is not the “domination of one individual over others,” it is a force that moves freely and “functions only when it is part of a chain” (29). For instance, the power that entitled students plausibly exercise operates through a network of relations: between the students and
their classmates, between students and their family, between the instructor and the students, between the instructor and university administration, and so on. Thus, “power cannot be viewed as something which flows from the top of a social hierarchy downwards,” but arises in everyday occurrences (Gallagher 400). Since power maintains a widely-dispersed nature, it is incorrect to consider that an individual may be the focal point of power, instead he or she is a channel that power flows through (Foucault 2003). As human beings are each “part of a chain,” we are both subjected to and emboldened by power. Understood in this way, discourse only becomes influential because it is employed by vast networks of people through their interactions with others. Once embedded in our persona, we become constrained to move within that particular social structure. Entitled students may perceivably gain control of discourse because instructors, and the larger educational system, are disciplined to navigating a structure of compliance to entitled students. Even when relationships change, faculty continue to adhere to that discourse.

While this concept of perceived constraint may lead one to believe we have little choice in our subsequent actions, Foucault asserts that power is the result of consent, not a “renunciation of freedom” or a “transference of rights” (Foucault 1982). Common understandings of power relations imply that an individual is prompted through force to speak or behave in an intended manner. For instance, confronted with an undesirable response that infringes upon their believed perspective, entitled students adhering to rhetorical privilege seek immediate accommodation from an instructor, often achieved by powerful emotional outbursts or intimidation. However, such reactions may be perceived as a relationship of violence, which as Foucault notes, destroys and “closes the door on all possibilities.” Power relations demand that we gain another’s consent and fully recognize them “as a person who acts” (Foucault 1982). The exercise of power is not a relationship of force that simply intends to silence the other, rather it may only be practiced over
“free subjects” who are provided with countless ways to react (Foucault 1982). Rhetorical privilege is a form of aggression which seeks to minimize resistance and compel a person to respond in a particular way. Both the freedom of choice and the freedom of action are conditions for the presence of power (Deacon 1998); thus, an individual must maintain a willingness and the liberty to be influenced. True power requires the absence of repression. While Foucault suggests that instances in which one’s freedom is prohibited are rare, people commonly believe otherwise, falling victim to verbal domination.

In addition to Foucault’s claim that people are constrained to move within a particular social structure, he furthers that the “multiple relations of power” which constitute our social relations cannot be “established nor function unless a true discourse is produced, accumulated, put into circulation, and set to work” (Foucault, “Society” 24). Structures of power are both created and maintained through discourse, “a group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation” (Foucault, “Archaeology” 117), and impressed upon us through environmental and cultural stimuli such as family, authoritative leaders, and societal influencers. As statements may occur at any particular time or place, they are dependent upon the available vernacular at that moment. Thus, discourse is truly a “historical snapshot,” inherently connected to the specific period in which it arises (Jansen 2008) and defined by the rules and accepted knowledge repeated by dominant power structures. Attitudes of entitlement may be produced as a result of contemporary discourse perpetuated by academic institutions, family environments, and social influences laden with perceptible and imperceptible power relations. For Foucault, knowledge is not just inherently connected to power, but arises only in a system of these power relations that allow it to emerge.
When discourse becomes fixated in one’s persona, alternative perspectives that challenge the power structure are discounted. For instance, the discourse of entitlement is grounded in the psyche of our current culture, inadvertently encouraged by the actions of parents and educators, or purposely promoted by consumer-centered business practices and social media influencers. Foucault advances that “in every society the production of discourse is controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality” (Foucault, “Order” 52). Through a process of repetition, the discourse of entitlement has become further embedded in our social structure the more people embrace it, defining and redefining accepted rules and its legitimacy. “The novelty lies no longer in what is said, but in its reappearance” (Foucault, “Archaeology” 221). As such, a dominant discourse of entitlement, once considered distasteful, now seeks to modify the meaning of statements so they are favorable to the power structure. Claiming an undeniable historicity, discourse seeks to “establish a system of homogenous relations” that drive economics, social institutions, customs, and mental attitudes so everyone is now subjected to the “same type of transformation” (Foucault 1972). Those that do not conform to the perceived truth, much like instructors or peers that refuse to consent to entitled student demands, are subsequently marginalized or considered irrelevant.

Rhetorical privilege aligns with Foucault’s contention of power. Thriving in a culture of self-fulfillment, rhetorical privilege is enabled by a power structure that supports a discourse of entitlement. In the classroom, instructors increasingly contend with students that have been inculcated by an environment of compliance and indifference. Since the late twentieth century a combination of media culture, parenting, educational systems, and a consumerist mindset have inundated students with messages promoting self-interest. These influences, perceived to be
persons or establishments of power, progressively spread their perspectives through discourse, constructing a knowledge base that became accepted and legitimized as more people shared it. Over time, individuals have increasingly adapted to the presence of entitlement attitudes, either by espousing that mindset themselves to further their own personal goals, complying to demands for accommodation to avoid confrontation, or simply remaining indifferent. Regardless of the response, this power structure of entitlement has shaped what individuals believe to be true, the meaning of our messaging, and the way people communicate. Moreover, a dominant discourse focused on self-fulfillment has engendered an attitude in which people “do not communicate solely by the logical succession of propositions that they advance,” instead opting to criticize, undermine, and obstinately interject their unique opinions “in a web of which they are not the masters” (Foucault, “Archaeology” 126). Repeated exposure to a dominant discourse has rendered a population of college students susceptible to attitudes of deservingness, convinced of their own dominance and concerned more with personal achievement than learning fundamentals or the recognition of alternative perspectives. Entitled students maintain a position that they can define what others believe to be true, attempting to shape the meaning of communication so it is conducive with their accepted power structure.

Friedrich Nietzsche: A Continued Pursuit of Will to Power

Michel Foucault drew great inspiration from Friedrich Nietzsche, particularly *Untimely Mediations* (1876), declaring his work as both a “philosophical shock” and a “revelation” that deeply affected his own deliberations (J. Miller 1993). Nietzsche’s influence has had a profound impact on scholars since the twentieth century, particularly his interpretation on power relations, which is also important to the investigation of rhetorical privilege and student entitlement. For Nietzsche, the will to power is a natural occurrence of one’s existence, reflecting the notion that
all people are motivated by an inherent desire to achieve control over their lives. He asserts that “only where there is life, is there also will: not, however, Will to Life, but . . . Will to Power!” (Nietzsche, “Zarathustra” 125). Nietzsche furthers this conviction in an unfinished work, later published as *The Will to Power* (1901), maintaining that the will to power is a “primitive form of affect, that all other affects are only developments of” (366). The will to power is an instinctive determination that all humans possess, and the pursuit of “an increase of power” is what all of our actions truly strive for. This thought aligns with our understanding of rhetorical privilege, and the subsequent displays of entitlement that arise through discourse. Entitled students demand agreement, regardless of their intent, another’s content, or “supporting validation” (Schaefer et al. 2013), maintaining a perceived right that any expectation will be immediately accommodated (Lippmann et al. 2009). Through each interaction, a fundamental sense of self-interest persists, a deep-seated need to exercise power over the Other and shift the focus of discourse upon one’s own interests. Each action and response may be understood as an attempt at the seizure of power.

Rhetoric rests in choice, requiring the establishment of a healthy cooperative relationship free from coercion or imbalances in power. Such a desire to claim mastery over others and their responses hinders rhetorical effectiveness. Individuals are no longer considered communicative partners by entitled persons, but as challengers attempting to advance their own perspectives through the exchange, or lesser others whose views are deemed unimportant. Motivated by the desire for power, those displaying rhetorical privilege maintain an obstinacy in their expressions, unable to effectively interact with others, and inclined to favor either coercion or violence over persuasion (Barrett 1991). Even overtures at accord that appear to be altruistically motivated are fundamentally driven by a desire to exercise power over another. As Nietzsche suggests, one distinguishes a “higher utility in a preference of the egoistic viewpoint over the altruistic.” Thus,
when an individual attempts to “reconcile the altruistic mode of action with naturalness,” these actions merely function as a guise (Nietzsche, “Will to Power” 415), as one is convinced that the appearance of selflessness will lead to power. On these occasions, entitled students can appear charismatic to an audience, arising from their self-confidence, expressiveness, persistence, and charm. By establishing familiarity with faculty and maintaining positive interactions, students seek to foster the belief that they are concerned about learning fundamentals, when in fact they expect instructors “to go to exceptional lengths” to accommodate all of their requests (Schaefer et al. 2013; Lippmann et al. 2009), no matter how outlandish. When familiarity expectations are not met and power is not promptly conceded, the likelihood of confrontation significantly rises.

As the will to power is a fundamental impulse that may be found in all human beings, one often presumes that a person takes pleasure from the accumulation of increased power. However, Nietzsche notes that “pleasure is only a symptom of the feeling of power attained . . . pleasure is an accompaniment . . . not the motive” (Nietzsche, “Will to Power” 366). This notion aligns with the reactions displayed by entitled students, whose objective is the realization of power over another whom they perceive as an impediment to their success. The consequential feeling of pleasure that arises is the product of one’s perception of dominance. Conversely, when confronted with resistance feelings of displeasure manifest. For instance, a professor may refuse to consent to a demand, or the emergence of an alternate perspective challenges a fixed belief. If an individual’s “innermost essence” is will to power, and “pleasure is every increase of power, displeasure [is] every feeling of not being able to resist or dominate” (Nietzsche, “Will to Power” 369). Nietzsche contends that for a person to experience displeasure is a natural occurrence, and such instances actually serve as a necessary opportunity for growth. When power is maintained, pleasure can only be lowered to “set its standards” (Nietzsche 1968), whereas the presence of
displeasure presents one with “an abundance of subtle pleasures” that have yet to be realized (Nietzsche 1974). Entitled persons who are accustomed to power and receiving accommodation maintain high expectations, convinced that subsequent interactions will produce similar results. After a time though, memories of past achievements weaken pleasure, as comparison to previous instances now creates a sense of monotony. Thus, one’s drive for power and subsequent pleasure may only persevere with the presence of “unpleasurable” provocations.

A person must be confronted with ongoing challenges to reaffirm their will to power. As such, power is only power as long as it can sustain itself against competing powers and dominate them (Aydin 2007). Those exhibiting rhetorical privilege trust in their own dialogic superiority, discounting the presence and influence of contrasting views. However, as power is relational, the sense of dominance that entitled individuals recognize is “meaningless” if it remains disengaged from an opposing power (Aydin 2007). The tension that exists between powers is crucial, as it provides one with the psychological strength to meet challenges. Absent these connections, power inevitably becomes rigid and unresponsive to change, leading one to embrace stagnation (Himmelmann 2017). It is in this framework that academic entitlement dwells.

Students have been nurtured by social, educational, and cultural environments that have indulged their demands for increased power. Without the presence of restraint or disagreement – the friction provided by an opposing power – they develop an obstinate attitude, isolated and indifferent to the needs of the Other. Whether unwilling or unable, entitled students lack the fortitude to contend with difference, which is perhaps why they resort to emotional outbursts when conflicting powers arise. As Nietzsche attests, the will to power manifests only against resistance, how much pain or displeasure it “endures and knows how to turn to its advantage” (Nietzsche, “Will to Power” 206). Thus, a singular communicative power without a partner to
engage in argumentation “is a non-thing” or much like “swinging at nothingness” (Himmelmann 173). Entitled individuals that desire dominance unknowingly need others to exercise power as well, as the will to power only emerges in conflict. Unfortunately, the presence of heightened expectations of deservingness is indicative of inaction and weakened determination, preventing a person from finding the proper strength to confront difference.

In the classroom entitled students require resistance. Instructors and peers must maintain firm limits and refuse to concede to self-interested pursuits. Through these power relations one will find challenging beliefs and opposing convictions (Himmelmann 2017) that provide an opportunity for personal development. Without such encounters, rhetorical privilege intensifies, feeding off attitudes of self-interest and further embedding biased perspectives. This obstinacy is an “unmistakable sign of weakness and insecurity” (Himmelmann 174) that illustrates an inability to accept the certainty of difference and a reduced fortitude to engage in dialogue. To deny this facet of one’s existence indicates a conviction that meaning may only be determined by personal convictions.

In Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1883), Nietzsche contends that we must seek out those who challenge us for the sake of our own thoughts, and to be proud of those contentious relationships for their successes are also our own successes (Nietzsche 1917). As nothing “has existence and meaning” outside of power relations, and “every power tries to impose its own conditions on the rest” (Aydin 27), we require the presence of opposition to continually overcome. Remaining fixated by the perception of one’s own power, neither recognizes the actuality of resistance nor places oneself in the “game” of power relations, a scenario clearly illustrates a “denial of reality” (Himmelmann 2017). When entitled students display rhetorical privilege and deny the give and take of communication – the striving for more power – they are detaching themselves from an
authentic existence. The will to power must remain flexible to resistance and accept the presence of constant struggle, else a person can become entrenched in isolation and feelings of resentment, identifying others as the cause of their frustration.

In *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), Nietzsche forwards his account of *ressentiment*, a concept similar to our current understanding of resentment, which aligns with this investigation of student entitlement and power relations. Arising from the belief of personal weakness, or an inferiority to another power, ressentiment is the transfer of one’s feelings of anger to an external cause. For entitled students, this “deflection of blame” is frequently directed towards faculty, as they deem poor performance or learning difficulties must be attributed to an instructor’s failure to appropriately explain content or larger issues with the course, rather than their own lack of effort (Sohr-Preston and Boswell 2015; Wasieleski et al. 2014; Kopp et al 2011). To protect an injured self-esteem, this action intends to remove any feelings of culpability, redirecting those sentiments to a secondary source. As Nietzsche contends, “the man of *ressentiment* is neither upright nor naïve, nor honest and straight with himself,” concerned merely with “his world, his security, [and] his comfort” (Nietzsche, “Genealogy” 21). Once an opposing power espouses a firmness in their own convictions, entitled persons typically react with outbursts of frustration or anger as they have been prevented from obtaining dialogic accommodation. Out of this sense of powerlessness, “their hate swells into something huge and uncanny to a most poisonous level” (Nietzsche, “Genealogy” 17). For Nietzsche, this type of involuntary and immediate reaction characterizes an individual’s weakness, whereas “a strong nature manifests itself by waiting and postponing any reaction” (Nietzsche, “Will to Power” 28). Commonly thought to be an act of self-preservation, blindly reacting when one should exercise restraint is more indicative of self-destructive behavior.
Arguably fundamental to this understanding of one’s perceived power and weakness, lies
the dichotomy of master and slave moralities. In *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), Nietzsche claims
that these two types of morality, and their corresponding values, appear in both “higher and more
mixed cultures” and even “within a single soul” (153). A master morality is maintained by a
ruling class of “dominating people” who separate themselves from those deemed to be opposites,
such as the weak or the inferior. While Nietzsche suggests these individuals are the powerful and
wealthy, we may plausibly include entitled persons (who consider themselves superior to others)
in this grouping as well. Irrespective of external approval or the veracity of their perspectives, an
entitled student believes that “he [or she] determines value [and] that what is harmful to me is
harmful in itself” (154). However, what is ultimately defined as the good is based upon self-
advantage and the attainment of personal excellence (Solomon and Higgins 2000). Moreover,
“one might summarize master morality as ‘being myself, and getting what I want’” (Solomon
and Higgins 110), an attitude illustrative of deservingness. Domineering individuals adhering to
a master morality remain largely indifferent to those of “lower rank,” believing their elevated
position provides “the right to exercise power over the powerless without a thought” (Nietzsche,
“Genealogy” 41). Resolute in their feelings of dialogic power and a misguided perception of
self-righteousness, entitled students exhibiting rhetorical privilege favor this master morality.
However, when confronted by the firm opposition of an instructor or authority figure, students
are presented with an uncomfortable and perhaps unfamiliar feeling of powerlessness. True to a
master morality, they may then seek to mistreat someone or determine an “exacting punishment”
upon an inferior other. Yet, these actions are a mere disguise for they now consider themselves to
be oppressed.
According to Nietzsche, a slave morality is grounded on ressentiment, specifically for the values advanced by a master morality. In such instances, slaves see themselves as oppressed and reluctantly abiding to “people with the wrong values, the wrong ideals, the wrong ideas about living” (Solomon and Higgins 111). That which the master morality considers to be good and honorable, is contrarily deemed contemptible for slaves. In educational settings, an instructor’s unwillingness to acquiesce to student demands for dialogic accommodation is a value supported by a master morality, a good which may be considered beneficial to the classroom community, as all students are provided the opportunity to engage in meaningful discourse. Recognizing no flexibility for compromise or attention, yet still upholding the validity of their own expressions, entitled students see themselves as suffering and deprived of power. Their “gaze resents the virtues of the powerful” (Nietzsche, “Beyond” 155) as it has prevented them from achieving an expected and deserved pursuit. Motivated by a fear of failure, and acknowledging little recourse, the slave morality seeks to negatively influence the powerful, similar to how an entitled student utilizes emotionally manipulative behavior to incite an instructor into believing that accepted standards are unfair or evil. Aware that any attempts to exercise power is unreasonable, a slave morality seeks to achieve success by means of subversion.

Perhaps more disconcerting for faculty is the ability of a slave morality to arouse a larger community of minds in the classroom. When all of the powerless students strive to shake off the feeling of weakness, “the formation of a herd is an essential step” (Nietzsche, “Genealogy” 100). On such occasions, entitled students may achieve temporary effectiveness by persuading their peers that course policies and learning fundamentals are collectively unreasonable or even subjective. Group insecurity is a strong motivator, and encouraging others to identify with an entitled individual becomes an effective way to overcome a sense of helplessness or dependency.
(Barrett 1991). Influenced by an entitled peer, students potentially frustrated by an instructor’s communication style, demanding academic expectations, or those merely seizing an opportunity to achieve success themselves, may band together. The slave morality perceives “everything that raises the individual above the herd” to be a danger, and therefore endeavors to create a system of mediocrity (Nietzsche, “Genealogy” 149) so no one person may attain feelings of power over another. Under these conditions an entitled student may accomplish their intent, displacing the power of an instructor and receiving a desired accommodation. However, such actions also create an environment where curriculums are drained of both academic and practical content, depriving the classroom of thought-provoking work (Lasch 2018) as any serious effort to learn diminishes. By bestowing power to an apprehensive collective, this herd mentality essentially disrupts our natural inclination for power. This would mean “robbing existence of its greatest character, castrating man, and reducing humanity” (Nietzsche, “Ecce Homo” 53) who no longer strive to achieve new and different ideas but become lethargic and vulnerable. In essence, without the struggle for power, humanity would be lost.

**Discursive Power and Identity**

Nietzsche and Foucault maintained that the pursuit of power is not an inherently negative thing. As a fundamental instinct that all humans share, power is neither good nor bad, it is merely a natural occurrence of one’s existence (Nietzsche 1968). Moreover, striving for increased power may be considered a positive experience, as “it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth,” and a knowledge about life and relationships (Foucault, “Discipline” 194). From this perspective, power has a profound association with our social relations, shaping how individuals and group members “develop their sense of identity” and structure their “fragmented interests into a coherent whole.” Central to this interpretation is discourse, the “primary vehicle”
through which interactions are “produced and reproduced” (Mumby and Stohl 1991). The continual engagement between communicative partners, as they each attempt impress personal expressions upon the other, creates a discursive relationship. Such encounters are “never given or fixed, but [are] always subject to negotiation through competing meaning formations” (Mumby and Stohl 315), resulting in the acceptance of an argument. Although collective agreement may be reluctantly attained, a prevalent perspective inevitably emerges that engenders the presence of dominant and subordinate positions, which are often psychologically coupled to the winners and losers of an argument. Discourse “structures the identities” of participants, playing an important role in the development of social reality (Mumby and Stohl 1991), as individuals are relegated to power statuses at a particular place and time shaping how they interact and contribute to an interaction.

Rhetorical privilege rejects instances of meaningful discourse, believing that the value of personal convictions greatly outweighs any knowledge found with communicative partners. Such an attitude forwards that discursive power continually rests with one particular argument, leaving no opportunities for engagement or the development of individual identity. Entitled students are accustomed to dialogic power and being the dominant social presence in an interaction, therefore creating an “ideological meaning system” which serves their own interests (Mumby and Stohl 1991). Rhetorically, this behavior is characteristic of immaturity, as a person “reverts to mental structures of infancy for criteria of judgement, material, and argument” (Barrett 41), lacking the fortitude to communicate with others with the necessary degree of constancy. Through discourse “certain kinds of questions and claims to knowledge are generated and placed within systems” that sustain and further distribute those claims (Danisch 294). Rhetorical privilege attempts to impose a firm grasp upon the power systems established by discourse, intent on maintaining a
means of continued control and propagating obstinate personal perspectives regardless of their veracity. As power emerges through discourse, we are subjugated to “the rule of the dominant discipline” which regulates our opportunities for freedom (Danisch 2006) when we interact with others. Believing in the dominance of their own expressions, entitled students force themselves into a position of dialogic superiority. This discursive practice may be viewed as a coercive force that seeks to curtail the freedom of communicative partners by placing them in a submissive role and structuring an environment conducive to personal achievement. In the classroom, peers and instructors may feel prevented from offering alternative views that pose a risk to a dominant and potentially volatile presence.

Adamant in the veracity of their own perspectives, when an individual seeks to establish discourse that serves self-interested purposes, they present themselves to command a position of dominance. Although attempting to argue from a place of authority, if that individual does not possess the appropriate knowledge or expertise, “conventional rhetorical practice would identify this as false authority” (Roberts-Miller 173). In Appeal to Expert Opinion: Arguments from Authority (1997), Douglas Walton discusses this thought, stating that specific criteria must be satisfied for an authority to be accepted: the credibility of the expert as a source; his/her expertise in the field relevant to the argument; the rationality of the argument; the trustworthiness of the expert; whether the argument is consistent with what other experts assert; and whether the argument is based on evidence (258). Obviously, failing to meet these criteria, the likelihood of considering an entitled student as an authority is unrealistic. However, the importance one places on an argument is subjective, and the conviction of that expression can be persuasive, especially if a person agrees with elements of the statement.
Audiences differ in their understanding, and often assign varying levels of meaning to a message based upon similar social conditions or relationships (Mulvey and Medina 2003; Mick and Buhl 1992). Thus, as a disagreement between an entitled student and the instructor arises in the classroom, other students can find truth with the contention and support the argument. On such occasions, an entitled person may be considered appealing to an audience, allowing them to experience “momentary effectiveness” (Barrett 1992). Classmates may not normally display attitudes of deservingness, but if that disruption has a personally beneficial result, or attends to a meaningful aspect of their persona, they may assent to the dispute. Considering that audiences often “pass favorable judgement upon character whose qualities that are identical to their own” (Mulvey and Medina 242), an entitled student does not have to rely on the strength of their argument to be deemed an authority or ultimately assume control of discourse.

While some people may be drawn to entitled influencers, this appeal is often motivated by insecurity or the attainment of personal objectives. Such willing compliance though is based upon “need satisfaction,” which is revealing of inconstancy and a tendency to quickly withdraw allegiance (Barrett 1991). The pursuit of discursive dominance more frequently invokes negative consequences, prompting communicative partners to observe of feelings of oppression or a forced absence from an interaction. Doubtful of holding a central place in the shared “meaning system,” their voice becomes marginalized (Mumby and Stohl 1991), as they are regarded as an irrelevant other within the encounter, one whose argument bears no significance. Rhetorical privilege embraces this understanding, as entitled individuals demonstrate an intent not only to control the direction of discourse but to dictate who is recognized as a valued participant.

In “The Second Persona” (1970), Edwin Black suggests that discourse does not merely craft the persona of the rhetor, but of the ideal auditor as well, creating a second persona for the
intended audience. “Actual auditors look to the discourse they are attending for cues that tell them how they are to view the world, even beyond the expressed concerns, of the discourse” (298). Human beings seek identity, and the search for answers commonly resides in discursive relationships. “In discourse, we can find enticements not simply to believe something, but to be something” (301). Therefore, an audience may be convinced by a speaker to assume another identity throughout discourse, one which they had not previously intended. Black highlights this thought in *The Ultimate Voice of Lincoln* (2000), noting how in his Second Inaugural Address, Abraham Lincoln summoned his auditors to “rehearse the same traits” of understanding and impartiality as they re-build a nation wearied from Civil War. Although his speech lasted no more than 15 minutes, “the audience reciprocates by adhering to that form, at least for the duration of their engagement with the discourse. In that way, a kind of persuasion occurs. Its effects may be enduring or they may be transient” (52). Similarly, through discourse an entitled student does not merely desire others to express agreement with their opinions, but to identify themselves differently as well, particularly as a willing and controllable resource that assists in the attainment of self-interested pursuits. As Black would suggest, a student cannot trust their audience to observe the traits expounded in a discourse for long, however the achievement of their dialogic goals, in this case compliance, does not often require a significant amount of time.

When displaying rhetorical privilege, an individual who claims discursive dominance not only seeks to control the meaning of someone’s absence or presence (Mumby and Stohl 1991) in an interaction, but carelessly disregards another’s sense of actuality when faced with opposition. While Edwin Black proposes the presence of an implied second persona in discourse, Philip Wander furthers in “The Third Persona: An Ideological Turn in Rhetorical Theory” (1984) a concept perhaps more suitable to rhetorical privilege, the existence of a third persona. The third
persona “refers to being negated . . . not only being negated through language . . . but also being negated in history, a being whose presence, though relevant to what is said, is negated through silence” (312). For Wander, the third persona is characteristic of a particular audience that has been excluded from communication or rejected by the speaker. Through rhetorical privilege, entitled persons deny consideration to those that express disagreement, or in some instances, the very recognition of their existence. This behavior is not merely a suppression of another’s voice, but is more akin to willful denial, or a disempowering that imposes silence upon the Other. Thus, the third persona, as acknowledged by an entitled speaker, is objectified as “the ‘it’ that is not present . . . in a way that ‘you’ and ‘I’ are not” (312). The overt negation of another “discloses what is and is not said about them and through actual conditions affecting their ability to speak for themselves” (312). It is only when an instructor or a peer agrees to the discursive demands of an entitled student that their presence is plausibly recognized. Of course, acceptance of entitled person’s biased expressions does not guarantee that a third persona will then be acknowledged as a being of significance, as they are still perceivably relegated to an inferior and controllable role in the interaction.

Fundamentally social creatures, human beings strive to be part of an ingroup. Although many are repelled by those that forward attitudes of deservingness and attempt to seize control of discourse, others seemingly identify with self-interested behaviors and emulate entitled persons, attracted to their perceived ability to get what they want. Whether attributed to insecurity or their own desire for discursive power and subsequent achievement, such people deem entitled persons to be socially meaningful and find importance in association with their ingroup. An ingroup “is an imaginary construct to which we belong, and membership in which is crucial to our sense of identity . . . closely connected to our self-image” (Roberts-Miller 175). In the classroom, peers
may identify as part of an ingroup because they support what an entitled student stated, he or she
“implicitly and explicitly defined that ingroup in ways that they found satisfying” (Roberts-
Miller 176). Regarding academic entitlement, this particular type of ingroup is constructed to
oppose the “outgroup” of university faculty, and adopted by other students who may consider
instructors to be overly bureaucratic and too out-of-touch with contemporary thinking. “This is
how many individuals reach conclusions about policies: on the basis of the kind of person who
seems to endorse it” (Roberts-Miller 178). For instance, students that believe grading criteria is
too rigid will align themselves with an entitled person’s public objection, though not always
vocally. He or she will adopt an attitude “to fit its assigned social meaning, by ascribing it value-
consistent factual qualities rather that value-inconsistent ones” (Cohen 809). These students may
still reflect on an instructor’s response, but will make every effort to ensure that any information
corresponds with the ingroup discourse they now support, believing this power structure will
ensure success.

Once associated with an ingroup, members can display similar communicative behaviors
as those in a principal position of influence or other members of the grouping. Characteristic of
rhetorical privilege, an ingroup relevant to entitlement establishes a discursive structure of
defiance when confronted with perspectives contrary to their own. As an individual becomes
more embedded in such a system, selfish pursuits increasingly shape their knowledge and guide
decision making, framing relationships “within a system of meanings” that corresponds to one’s
own interests (Deetz and Mumby 1990; R. Brown 1978). Research indicates that we even distort
information and rationalize our own fallibilities while condemning similar weaknesses in others
(Roberts-Miller 2009) when part of an ingroup. For instance, students disputing poor grades may
complain of unjust evaluations or course policies, but remain silent during similar occurrences in
which they received higher marks. For ingroup members, “contextual or external factors that excuse” their behavior (Roberts-Miller 179) or communication style always exist, illustrating the lengths an individual will go to preserve their biased understanding of a situation and to maintain a privileged position of power.

Identifying oneself with an ingroup of obstinance and control is a troubling prospect. At times, “the interest we feel and act out of may not be our own or in our best interest” (Deetz and Mumby 30), or even uncharacteristic of our personality, but the sense of interpersonal power one feels may be too enticing. The discourse maintained by entitled persons is often polarizing as they vie for a privileged status within an interaction, leading communicative partners to feelings of absence and objectification. Moreover, such a mindset can situate an individual “within a structured set of social practices” (Mumby and Stohl 327) that one cannot easily escape. This is the environment entitled students have likely become accustomed to. After aligning themselves to an ingroup of deservingness during their formative years and observing successful results from that discursive approach, not only does that mentality remain in a collegiate environment, but it negatively influences the community, both those determined to receive similar benefits and future communicative partners that maintain a resoluteness of their own convictions and refuse to be manipulated.

Power is an integral part of human identity that structures the character of our existence, so it is unsurprising that discourse maintains such a fundamental association with the concept. The danger we encounter though, one which arises through increasing instances of entitlement, is viewing the world divided into dichotomies – powerful ingroups and inferior outgroups. Those displaying rhetorical privilege presume the presence of a privileged ingroup and a subordinate outgroup. Entitled individuals consider themselves members of a dominant ingroup, providing
them with the discursive freedom to forward biased perspectives and determine the level of recognition afforded to communicative partners. Anyone that opposes a viewpoint of perceived superiority, or even seeks to achieve compromise, is promptly assigned to a collective outgroup and expected to assent to dialogic demands. Interestingly, disagreement may actually provide an entitled person with a sense of security (Roberts-Miller 2009), as it gives them psychological permission to negate the other’s identity and promptly force them into an outgroup without the need for discussion. Members of ingroups often share similar communication preferences and personality traits. For entitled individuals, this includes an expectation of receiving reward without exerting the necessary effort. Rhetorical privilege intends to create an environment in which members of an outgroup are assigned an inferior identity simply for having a different opinion. Others are not just incorrect, but exercising inherently flawed reasoning.

Traditionally, discourse dwells in the rivalry between alternative voices, but the practice of rhetorical privilege institutes a sense of superiority for oneself and a marginalization of others. How entitled students engage in discourse discloses a great deal about their identities. They are both products of a system driven by a larger culture of compliance to attitudes of deservingness, and a means to exercise that perceived power to shape the communication of subordinate others. Reflecting on our current society, certain discourses like that of self-fulfillment have become privileged, distributing the effects of that power throughout our entire social system. While this investigation considered student entitlement and rhetorical privilege in a collegiate environment, we may note increasing accounts throughout educational systems, the workplace, politics, social media, and even daily interactions with family and friends. Earlier, it was observed that rhetoric rests in choice. Thus, a tension between opposing powers must be present for argumentation to exist. Rhetorical privilege intends to negate the give-and-take of communication, emphasizing
that the perceived power of one individual or message possesses greater meaning. Lacking the opportunity of choice, we risk stimulating a culture consumed by self-interest and dismissive to the mere presence of others.

Implications

The concept of control is fundamental to academic entitlement, as students inherently feel they should have the power to determine their own educational experience, including course policies, assignments and examinations, instructor evaluations (Jackson et al. 2011; Wasieleski et al. 2014), and even the type of relationship that should exist with faculty. Additionally, entitled students desire communicative dominance over others, committed to forcing an audience into accepting personal demands, or seizing control of discourse when confronted with opposition. Rhetorical privilege arises in these conditions, when entitled persons erect barriers in discourse, unreceptive to anyone or any view that challenges a perceived opinion. Recognizing a loss of control, students may employ emotionally manipulative responses to undermine or provoke the other into accord. Maintaining a stronger sense of deservingness than an average person and believing others should simply accommodate their arguments – no matter how unwarranted or inaccurate they may be – entitled students have become accustomed to exploiting others for the purpose of attaining dialogic success.

Academic entitlement arises when a student deflects the blame for poor performance or argumentative losses to another. Claiming no culpability for divisive exchanges, this behavior is revealing of an external locus of control, which suggests that outside forces are responsible for successes and accomplishments. Nurtured by a lifetime of compliant educational environments, permissive parenting, and consumeristic support, college students have grown accustomed to the perception of control over all aspects of their lives. However, collegiate learning is a challenging
endeavor, presenting many students with their first authentic instances of failure, or competing viewpoints that significantly contest personal beliefs. Confronted with these obstacles, and convinced of their own inculpability, disappointment and dialogic losses must be attributed to an external entity. This refusal to take responsibility for one’s communicative behavior is revealing of rhetorical privilege, illustrating an inability to exert the necessary effort to establish and maintain dialogue.

In an educational setting, rhetorical privilege emerges when alternative interpretations of a perspective, viewed to be unquestionable, threatens to decrease an entitled student’s perception of dialogic superiority. Maintaining a sense of communicative power is critically important, as losing control of an interaction can be considered detrimental to one’s feelings of self-assurance. Power relations are a fundamental part of “all human interactions” (Deacon 113; Foucault 1982), shaping individual identity and the direction of discourse. While modern conceptions of power commonly equate the concept with one holding a privileged position over another, capable of diverting attention away from a preferred perspective, French theorist Michel Foucault notes that power is not a capacity someone possesses, but is something acted upon. Thus, entitled students simply seeking to control discourse by provoking a favored response from a peer or instructor does not align with Foucault’s theory of power. Instead, power can only arise through a change of action, a person would actually have to act upon a demand by granting an accommodation. As power cannot entail domination over others, it must behave as “part of a chain” (Foucault 2003). Understood in this way, discourses become influential because they are applied by vast networks of people through their own interactions. Entitled students perceivably control discourse because instructors, and the larger educational system, are disciplined to embrace a system of compliance to attitudes of deservingness.
According to Foucault, the structures of power that enable entitlement are created and maintained through discourse, continually impressed upon us by environmental and cultural stimuli such as family, authoritative leaders in politics and industry, and social influencers. As each are susceptible to continued fluctuation, discourse must be associated to a particular place and time, and further defined by the knowledge that governs a dominant power structure. Thus, entitlement is resultant of contemporary communication perpetuated by academic institutions, familial relationships, and other social motivations. When discourse becomes embedded in one’s persona, alternative perspectives that challenge a dominant power are dismissed. The discourse of entitlement has become grounded in the psyche of our culture, inadvertently encouraged by the actions of parents and educators, or purposely promoted by consumer-centered business practices and media outlets. Although once considered distasteful, a dominant discourse of self-fulfillment now seeks to modify the meaning of our expressions so they remain faithful to that power structure. Those that do not conform to a perceived truth are subsequently marginalized or considered irrelevant.

Thriving in a contemporary culture of self-fulfillment, rhetorical privilege is enabled by a power structure that supports a discourse of entitlement. Since the late twentieth century a mix of media, parenting, educational systems, and a consumerist mindset have inundated students with messages promoting self-interest. These influences slowly constructed a knowledge base that became accepted and legitimized as more people shared it. Repeated exposure to this dominant discourse engendered a population of college students susceptible to attitudes of deservingness, convinced of their own importance and concerned more with personal achievement than learning fundamentals or the acknowledgment of alternative perspectives.
For Friedrich Nietzsche, an individual’s will to power is a natural part of existence. It is an instinctive desire that all people have, driving us to continually pursue an “increase of power” and achieve control in our lives. Consistent with rhetorical privilege, entitled students demand prompt compliance, and through each interaction a deep-seated need for control over the Other. The focus of dialogue is not the establishment of a meaningful cooperative relationship, but a fundamental desire to advance self-interested perspectives and ensure that the views of lesser others are deemed irrelevant. Even efforts at reaching accord, that seem altruistically motivated, are fundamentally driven by a need to exercise power over the other person. However, Nietzsche argues that a person must be confronted with ongoing challenges to reaffirm their will to power as tension is crucial to the development of one’s psychological strength. Entitled students have been nurtured by social, cultural, and educational environments that indulge their demands, but without the presence of constraint or disagreement, they develop obstinate attitudes indifferent to the needs of others. Unfortunately, they refuse to recognize that a desire for dominance requires others to exercise power as well. The presence of a heightened sense of deservingness indicates a weakened determination, preventing a person from finding the appropriate strength to confront difference.

Arising from a belief of powerlessness, entitled students are conditioned to shifting their feelings of anger to an external source, commonly an instructor or the larger educational system. Once an opposing power espouses a firmness in their own convictions, preventing an entitled person from receiving prompt agreement, they often react with sudden emotional outbursts. For Nietzsche, it is this type of response that is illustrative of weakness. Central to an understanding of perceived power and weakness, lies the dichotomy of master and salve moralities. Entitled students, resolute in their perception of discursive power, consider themselves similar to other
domineering types of personalities and favor the master morality. True to a master morality, they are prone to mistreat others and determine specific punishments when confronted with firm resistance. However, these reactions are merely a front, for they truly consider themselves to be oppressed. More characteristic of a slave morality, entitled students believe that “the powerful,” have prevented them from achieving a deserved pursuit. Now faced with an uncomfortable fear of failure, students seek to negatively influence the powerful, such as attempting to coerce an instructor into compliance. In such instances, a student may achieve temporary effectiveness by persuading their peers that course policies, an instructor’s communication style, or accepted standards are unreasonable. Group insecurity and the continued pursuit of individual power is a strong motivator, inspiring others to identify with an entitled individual. Regrettably, this herd mentality merely establishes a system of mediocrity, disrupting our natural inclination for a will to power and draining the classroom of any serious effort to learn.

Power maintains a profound association with social relations, structuring arguments and shaping individual identity. As a discursive relationship is established between communicative partners, each striving to impress personal statements upon the other, we recognize that power emerges through discourse. Rhetorical privilege rejects the existence of meaningful discourse, convinced that the value of personal convictions greatly outweighs any knowledge found through verbal exchanges. Such an attitude contends that discursive power rests perpetually with a specific argument, ignoring the necessary give-and-take that constitutes the existence of power. Entitled students are accustomed to dialogic power and being the dominant social presence in an interaction, therefore creating a “meaning system” which serves their own interests (Mumby and Stohl 1991). Rhetorical privilege imposes its own biased grasp upon this meaning system, intent on maintaining continued control and propagating obstinate personal perspectives. As this
practice seeks to force others into a submissive role, they may feel prevented from engagement and concerned about contradicting a dominant and potentially volatile presence. Individuals are relegated to a power status at a particular moment in time, shaping how and if they contribute to discourse. In essence, rhetorical privilege attempts to enforce whether an interlocuter is absent or present in a dialogic encounter.

By claiming discursive dominance, an entitled student that desires to control the degree of recognition another receives, especially when faced with opposition, is carelessly disregarding that person’s sense of actuality. While rhetorician Edwin Black notes the presence of a second persona in discourse, or the implied identity a discourse persuades an audience to assume, Philip Wander proposes the occurrence of a third persona, a concept perhaps more relevant to rhetorical privilege. For Wander, the third persona is characteristic of a particular audience that is negated through discourse, either excluded or rejected by the speaker. Through rhetorical privilege, an entitled student maintains a perceived sense of power over others, denying consideration to those that express disagreement or the very recognition of their presence. That communicative partner becomes an objectified other, disempowered and subjected to the silence of irrelevance.

As human beings are fundamentally social creatures, we traditionally strive to be part of an ingroup. While many are repelled by attitudes of deservingness and one’s attempted control of dialogue, others identify with self-interest and emulate entitled individuals, attracted to their perceived ability to get what they want. When confronted with disagreement, entitled students construct a perceived ingroup, opposing an outgroup of university faculty that may adhere to rigid grading policies or learning approaches that are deemed out-of-touch with current students. Characteristic of rhetorical privilege, an ingroup of entitlement establishes a discursive structure of defiance when confronted with perspectives contrary to their own. As a student becomes more
embedded in such a system, they begin to frame relationships to suit self-interested pursuits and rationalize fallibilities while condemning similar weaknesses in others. However, the sense of power that one feels is often too enticing. Unfortunately, such a mindset can leave one viewing the world divided into dichotomies – powerful ingroups and inferior outgroups. Rhetorical privilege creates an environment in which members of an outgroup are assigned an inferior identity simply for having a different stance, negating the give-and-take of communication. Lacking the opportunity of choice, we risk further embedding ourselves in a culture consumed by self-interest and dismissive of the mere presence of others.
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