

AN ETHOS FOR AN IDENTITY: RACHEL DOLEZAL AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A
PUBLIC SELF

by

NATHAN ROTHENBAUM

(Under the Direction of Celeste Condit)

ABSTRACT

Rachel Dolezal's claim to a black identity, and therefore a transracial identity, ignited a controversy which continues into the present day. Whereas past scholarship has examined the ethical and political implications of such her transracial identification, this thesis reveals the rhetorical means by which Dolezal advanced her claim to blackness, and how audiences called into question that identification. I argue that Rachel Dolezal's ethos was the preeminent question for audiences grappling with the concept of a transracial identity. Reading the "Dolezal controversy" through ethos appeals reveals the shifting grounds of racial identity in the 21st century.

INDEX WORDS: Rachel Dolezal, transracial, race, ethos, rhetoric, identity

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NATHAN ROTHENBAUM

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NATHAN ROTHENBAUM

Major Professor:	Celeste Condit
Committee:	Barbara Biesecker
	Peter A. O'Connell

Electronic Version Approved:

Suzanne Barbour
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2018

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On June 11th, 2015 reporter Jeff Humphrey from KXLY, a news/talk radio outlet from Spokane, Washington interviewed Rachel Dolezal, the then-President of the NAACP's Spokane Chapter, about the long list of hate crimes she had experienced.¹ Near the end of the interview, Humphrey removed a picture from his pocket and asks Dolezal, "Is that your dad?" Dolezal looked confused and Humphrey continued, "Are you African-American?" In a recorded video of the interview, Dolezal can be seen walking away from the reporter as the interview cuts to black.

What was at first a story confined to Spokane, Washington quickly exploded to the national media scene. Reporters and news outlets were filled with curiosity: who was this Rachel Dolezal, and why did she claim to be black² when she "really" wasn't? All the more interesting, reporters found, was that Dolezal did not admit that she "pretended" to be black. She continued to claim the identity fit her. Just ten days earlier, Caitlyn Jenner's photo on *Vanity Fair* had sparked a national conversation about transgender identity.³ In this way, the analogy between Rachel Dolezal and a transgender identity was already in place long before Dolezal officially announced her identity as "transracial."⁴

¹ Jim Dalrymple II, "How 'Black' NAACP Leader Rachel Dolezal Was Outed As A White Woman," *Buzzfeed*, June 13, 2015, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/jimdalyrpleii/heres-how-black-naacp-leader-rachel-dolezal-was-outed-as-a>

² There exists a wide controversy as to whether racial designators should be capitalized, and an equally wide one that questions if there should be a parallelism between their capitalization (i.e. white and black vs white and Black). In this thesis, I leave both white and black lower case as a performative gesture to demonstrate that both racial identities are produced, and cohered, through the ethos of a rhetor.

³ Rogers Brubaker, *Trans: Gender and Race in an Age of Unsettled Identities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016, 3.

⁴ Mitchell Sunderland, "In Rachel Dolezal's Skin," *Vice*, December 7, 2015, https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/gvz79j/rachel-dolezal-profile-interview.

As media outlets started digging for answers, the story got more complicated. Dolezal seemed to be a walking paradox. On the one hand, Dolezal seemed to demonstrate a genuine tie to blackness: she attended Howard University as a graduate student,⁵ as a teacher she was nominated by her students to be the black student union faculty advisor,⁶ and had been an active voice for reform in Spokane, Washington—serving as the head of the NAACP’s chapter, a police ombudsman, and a community activist.⁷ Above all, Dolezal claimed that she had long identified as a black woman, and felt no connection with whiteness.⁸ On the other hand, her story was conflicted and strange: Dolezal creatively lied about the identity of her children (really her adopted brother and sister),⁹ and had even sued Howard University for discriminating against her as a white woman.¹⁰

After her forced outing, Dolezal would run a gauntlet of radio and television interviews where she would be made to justify her purported transracial identity. Although at times she would vanish from the media’s spotlight, it seemed destined that she would return. In the past year alone, Dolezal has entered the spotlight numerous times: she changed her name to Nkechi Amare Diallo,¹¹ started selling gourmet lollipops,¹² and recently attracted a host of controversy by responding to an insensitive H&M hoodie with, arguably, an even more insensitive one.¹³ Each time Rachel Dolezal returns to the media’s gaze, she comes back inciting more disapproval

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Meghan Keneally, “Rachel Dolezal: A Timeline of the Ex-NAACP Leader’s Transition From White to ‘Black,’” *ABC News*, June 16, 2015, <http://abcnews.go.com/US/racheldolezal-timeline-naacp-leaders-transition-white-black/story?id=31801772>

⁸ Sunderland, “In Rachel Dolezal’s Skin.”

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Keneally, “Rachel Dolezal: A Timeline of the Ex-NAACP Leader’s Transition From White to ‘Black.’”

¹¹ Chris Perez, “Rachel Dolezal Changes Her Name to West African Moniker,” *The New York Post*, March 1, 2017, <https://nypost.com/2017/03/01/rachel-dolezal-changes-her-name-to-west-african-moniker/>

¹² Hannah Sparks, “Rachel Dolezal Is Now an Artisanal Lollipop Saleswoman,” *The New York Post*, November 15, 2017, <https://nypost.com/2017/11/15/rachel-dolezal-is-now-an-artisanal-lollipop-saleswoman/>

¹³ TheGrio, “GIRL, BYE: Rachel Dolezal Tries to Profit from H&M Hoodie Scandal,” *TheGrio*, January 10, 2018, <https://thegrio.com/2018/01/10/rachel-dolezal-launches-hoodie-for-hm-backlash/>.

and frustration in audiences. Although audiences might proclaim they want nothing to do with Dolezal, they can't seem to get enough of hating her.

While no poll exists documenting societal acceptance of the idea of a transracial identity, the reception Dolezal received did not place her on anything like equal footing with the struggles of transgender people. If arguing for the extension of rights to transgender people was an uphill battle, then Dolezal's appeal to a transracial identity was a Sisyphean task. In place of a long and difficult conversation about Dolezal's identity and its relationship to our culture's complex system of racialization, Dolezal was near unanimously dismissed as a racist appropriator. Such a designation turned her into, as Marquis Bey and Theodora Sakellarides note, "an easy lob to swing at, making [commentators] homerun hitters of racist fastballs."¹⁴

This thesis does not try to be a homerun hitter. In place of a grand slam, it chooses to take a walk and meditate on the Dolezal controversy. One of the main questions that motivate this thesis is: why was it so easy to dismiss Dolezal's claim to a transracial identity, and why did her appeals for audiences to accept that identity fall so flat? The answer to this question, I will show, lies in a renewed focus and a return to Aristotle's concept of ethos.

There are three immediate benefits from such an investigation. The first benefits those interested in Aristotelian ethos. Bringing ethos into conversation with Dolezal will reveal a number of circumstances for successful ethos appeals as well as important challenges that face rhetors in the 21st century. Second, such an investigation would contribute to an incredibly scarce but increasingly important scholarship on reverse passing and transracial identification.

Rhetorical critics have examined cases of passing, but very little has been written on the rhetorical techniques utilized by those passing in the other direction. Third, and finally, such an

¹⁴ Marquis Bey and Theodora Sakellarides, "When We Enter: The Blackness of Rachel Dolezal," *The Black Scholar* 46, no. 4 (October 2016), 35.

investigation will contribute to the rhetorical analysis of identity categories writ large. These identities are inherently grounded in rhetoric, because as Tey Meadow notes, as “categorical systems, [they] invoke cultural tensions between biology and psyche, choice and essence.”¹⁵ One of the wagers of this thesis lies in the claim that membership into identity requires, among other things, that the rhetor demonstrate proper ethos.

Phronêsis, Aretê, And Eunoia in the Study of Ethos

Although not the first to use the term, Aristotle’s *On Rhetoric* was the first text to theorize ethos programmatically. Aristotle argued that in attempting to persuade an audience, rhetors could make three sorts of appeals, which he termed the *pisteis*.¹⁶ Appeals to *logos*, or logical arguments; appeals to *pathos*, or emotional appeals, and, finally, appeals to *ethos*, or appeals to character. Ethos concerns the ethical valence of a rhetor’s persona, the construction, Michael Hyde notes, of a rhetor’s “moral character, communal existence, and oratorical skill.”¹⁷ Aristotle argued that ethos has an important function in dictating the persuasive effect of rhetoric primarily because it acts as a sort of argument amplifier—making the speaker more trustworthy, making her conclusions more palatable, and making her argumentative leaps more acceptable. There exists ethos, Aristotle argued, “whenever the speech is spoken . . . for we believe fair-minded people to a greater extent and more quickly [than we do others], on all subjects in general and completely so in cases where there is not exact knowledge but room for doubt.”¹⁸ In constructing an appeal to ethos, the rhetor crafts an image of themselves as an ethical and moral

¹⁵ Tey Meadow, “Whose Chosenness Counts? The Always-Already Racialized Discourse of Trans – Response to Rogers Brubaker,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 8 (June 21, 2017), 1309.

¹⁶ Roger D. Cherry, “Ethos Versus Persona: Self-Representation in Written Discourse,” *Written Communication* 15, no. 3 (July 1998), 386.

¹⁷ Michael J. Hyde, ed., *The Ethos of Rhetoric*, Studies in Rhetoric/Communication (Columbia, S.C: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), xvii.

¹⁸ Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, trans. George Alexander Kennedy, 2nd ed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1.2.4.

speaker. For Aristotle, ethos has three components as noted by Carolyn R. Miller, “good sense (phronêsis), good moral values (aretê), and goodwill toward us (eunoia).”¹⁹

Ethos’ translation as character reveals an important fact about ethos. Not only does ethos signify the rhetor’s own character, their moral fiber, but for the rhetor ethos functions as a *certain* character. A character the rhetor chooses to play, a mask the rhetor dons. Reading Aristotle in this fashion echoes Plato’s commentary, as noted by Dawkins, that “all who engage in rhetoric will turn out to be passers or ‘eironikoi mimetai—literally, ‘dissembling imitators.’”²⁰ Aristotle makes this connection between one’s ethos and performance explicit in Book 3 when he discusses how one ought to construct their Judicial Narrative in the Court of Law. Aristotle writes that the narration ought to reflect a character, and that such a reflection can be done only if the rhetor knows “what makes for character . . . One way [to do this] is to make deliberate choice . . . what the character is on the basis of what sort of choice [has been made]. And choice is what it is because of the end aimed at.”²¹ Aristotle clarifies that these choices made by the rhetor establish the rhetor’s ethos, and that such a frame determines how an audience hears and interprets what the rhetor says. Rhetors who wish to make these sorts of ethos appeals must know about the constitution of their audience, “for the character distinctive of each is necessarily most persuasive to each.”²² To this end, throughout Book 2 Aristotle explores various audience archetypes and the certain character appeals most fitting for them: from the character of the young,²³ to the old,²⁴ and those in the prime of their lives.²⁵

¹⁹ Carolyn R. Miller, “The Presumptions of Expertise: The Role of Ethos in Risk,” *Configurations* 11, no. 2 (2003), 167.

²⁰ Marcia Alesan Dawkins, *Clearly Invisible: Racial Passing and the Color of Cultural Identity* (Waco, Tex: Baylor University Press, 2012), 11.

²¹ Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 3.16.8.

²² *Ibid.*, 1.8.6.

²³ *Ibid.*, 2.12.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.13.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.14.

As already stated, in order to establish the ethical character of the speaker, a rhetor must shore up three pillars of their ethos: *phronêsis*, *aretê*, and *eunoia*. Why these three pillars? Aristotle does not explicitly explain why or justify his decision to restrict ethos to these three, nor does he devote much time to explain how each of these three pillars functions generally. The problem, put plainly by James L. Kinneavy and Susan C. Warshauer is this: “[Aristotle] devotes only one chapter to *ethos*, whereas he devotes nine to *logos*, sixteen to *pathos*, and eleven to style.”²⁶ Ethos itself is generally underexplained, so it follows that so too are the functions of *phronêsis*, *aretê*, and *eunoia*.²⁷ However, lack of an explanation from Aristotle for the necessity of *phronêsis*, *aretê*, and *eunoia* does not necessarily render their connection to ethos warrantless, but it does mean that rhetorical critics must be willing to challenge or revise Aristotle rather limiting themselves to his word.²⁸

One way scholars have attempted to explain how *phronêsis*, *aretê*, and *eunoia* work is by referencing them to the *pisteis*. Miller seems to suggest such a modification by arguing that these three pillars reflect the three *pisteis* as opposed to three dimensions of ethos. According to her, “*phronêsis* is a reflection of *logos* . . . *eunoia* is a reflection of *pathos* . . . and *aretê* is a reflection of ethos itself.”²⁹ In this line of reasoning, perhaps *phronêsis*, *aretê*, and *eunoia* all, respectively, establish the rhetor’s character as one attuned with persuasion itself (and therefore the *pisteis*).

Miller does not clarify if the three pillars *also* reflect the three *pisteis*, or if they *instead* reflect the three *pisteis*. On the other hand, scholars such as Arash Abizadeh would argue this is a

²⁶ James L. Kinneavy and Susan C. Warshauer, “From Aristotle to Madison Avenue: Ethos and the Ethics of Argument,” in *Ethos: New Essays in Rhetorical and Critical Theory*, ed. James S. Baumlin and Tita French Baumlin, 1st ed, SMU Studies in Composition and Rhetoric (Dallas, Tex: Southern Methodist University Press, 1994), 172.

²⁷ Another explanation is that *phronêsis*, *aretê*, and *eunoia* are not technical terms of art, but rather Aristotle’s way of communicating to audience the significance of ethos.

²⁸ See Alan G. Gross and Arthur E. Walzer, *Rereading Aristotle’s Rhetoric* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 20.

²⁹ Miller, “The Presumption of Expertise,” 194.

false distinction. According to Abizadeh, the *pisteis* themselves are intertwined, and that “Aristotle understands the role of the three *pisteis* conjunctively.”³⁰ For a rhetor to show a proper ethos, Abizadeh argues, they would also require showing a proper pathos (e.g. one must show outrage, pathos, at evil, ethos).³¹ And, one’s ethos therefore modifies what types of logos appeals are persuasive (e.g. whether one can make the argument for war, logos, against a nation’s allies, ethos).³²

There exists, however, a certain tendency in Abizadeh and other authors³³ I will discuss at length later in this chapter to read ethos as if it were merely shorthand for the ethical valence of the speech. Such a reading obscures that the *pisteis* are not attributes that a real rhetor does or does not possess, but instead imagined attributes housed in the audiences’ perceptions; ethos, as Kinneavy and Warshauer argue, is “a mere mask that convinces, separable from the person who dons the mask.”³⁴ Near the conclusion of his article, Abizadeh discusses just this illusory aspect of the rhetor’s ethos when he writes that there is a danger that a rhetor can gain the audience’s trust “by simply creating an appearance of phronêsis and virtue [aretê].”³⁵ We might take his analysis further to argue that *logos* does not rest in the rhetor’s words, but in the audiences’ reception of the rhetoric; *pathos* not in the rhetor, but in the audience’s emotional perception of the rhetoric; *ethos* not in the rhetor, but in the audiences’ perception of that rhetor’s character.

If one considers the *pisteis* in this light, then although the *pisteis* may intersect at times, their function, particularly ethos’s function, is fundamentally different from the other *pisteis*.

Christof Rapp argues that ethos works, persuasively, as “a sort of second-order judgement [that

³⁰ Arash Abizadeh, “The Passions of the Wise: ‘Phronêsis’, Rhetoric, and Aristotle’s Passionate Practical Deliberation,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 56, no. 2 (2002), 274.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 275.

³² *Ibid.*, 285.

³³ These authors exemplify what I would term the interpellative and/or ontological turn in the study of ethos.

³⁴ Kinneavy & Warshauer, “From Aristotle to Madison Avenue,” 183.

³⁵ Abizadeh, “The Passions of the Wise,” 291.

determines whether] the propositions put forward by the credible speaker are true or acceptable.”³⁶ Thus, even if other *pisteis* might play an indirect role in shoring up the rhetor’s ethos,³⁷ ethos’s function is unique. In this reading, the function of the three pillars of ethos (phronêsis, aretê, and eunoia) shore up different elements of the speaker’s credibility: their credibility as a result of their practical wisdom, their credibility as a result of their knowledge of right and wrong, and their credibility as a result of their good will for the audience, respectively. Read together, the ethical character of a speaker can be interpreted as framing the rhetor’s ethical persona thusly: not only does the speaker know right from wrong (aretê) and has experience in making these sorts of ethical judgements (phronêsis), but they also fundamentally wish nothing but the best for their audience (eunoia).

This second-order judgement function of ethos, and the three pillars’ positive contribution to ethos, has been confirmed by social scientific literature. In their article on the construction and measurement of ethos, James C. McCroskey and Jason J. Treven note that while the three pillars of ethos³⁸ all account for some level of variance in dictating persuasive appeals, “far and away the most predictable variance was colinear variance involving all three ethos/credibility dimensions.”³⁹ The consequence of their research suggests that while the three

³⁶ Christof Rapp, “Aristotle on the Moral Psychology of Persuasion,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Aristotle*, ed. Christopher Shields (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 604.

³⁷ Kinneavy & Warshauer, “From Aristotle to Madison Avenue,” 180-1.

³⁸ This study reads phronêsis, aretê, and eunoia as competence, trustworthiness, and good will respectively. However, even if Aristotle’s three pillars of ethos are translated differently, their operationalization in the social scientific study still reflects, I contend, Aristotle’s original meaning. For example, phronêsis/competence was measured with questions asking if the speaker was informed, trained, an expert in the subject matter, etc., aretê/trustworthiness was measured by asking if the speaker was moral, ethical, genuine, etc., and eunoia/goodwill was measured by asking if the speaker had the audience’s best interests at heart, was concerned with them, how non-self-centered they were, and so on. See James C. McCroskey and Jason J. Treven, “Goodwill: A Reexamination of the Construct and Its Measurement,” *Communication Monographs* 66, no. 1 (1999): 90–103.

³⁹ McCroskey & Treven, “Goodwill,” 101.

pillars all have important rhetorical functions on their own, the most effective ethos appeals would attempt to encapsulate all three.

In shoring up the three pillars of their ethos, Aristotle urges his students to craft themselves “and [their] opponent—as a person of a certain character so that they will see you as such, but do it inconspicuously.”⁴⁰ The great gambit of a rhetor’s ethos, then, lies in making what emerges as a result of certain strategic rhetorical choices by the rhetor appear ontologically constitutive. One must become the character the audience wishes them to be but act as if no performance was underway—as if one was always-already-and-only that character.

Ethos as Character and Ethos as Ethical Practice

Because ethos is a character the rhetor takes on, Aristotle argues that ethos “should result from the speech, not from a previous opinion that the speaker is a certain kind of person.”⁴¹ Such a conclusion might strike us as odd. Certainly, for rhetors before Aristotle such as Isocrates ethos pre-existed a rhetor’s speech as the moral character of the rhetor and the audiences’ perceived standing of the rhetor in the community⁴² (what Isocrates called the *doxan hōs epieikestatēn*⁴³, or “as honorable a reputation as possible”). Further, for rhetors after Aristotle such as Cicero the concept of ethos was broadened to include not just the rhetor’s positive traits, but also the positive traits of his client.⁴⁴

Aristotle, however, likely knew full well that a speaker’s reputation influenced not only their persuasive appeal, but also their audience’s perception of their ethical character. A simple

⁴⁰ Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 3.16.10.

⁴¹ Ibid., 1.2.4.

⁴² See Janja Žmavc, “The Ethos of Classical Rhetoric: From Epieikeia to Auctoritas.” In *Topical Themes in Argumentation Theory*, (Springer, Dordrecht, 2012): 181-191.

⁴³ Isocrates, “Antidosis,” in *Isocrates with an English Translation in Three Volumes*, trans. George Norlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 15.278.

⁴⁴ Jakob Wisse, “De Oratore: Rhetoric, Philosophy, and the Making of the Ideal Orator,” in *Brill’s Companion to Cicero: Oratory and Rhetoric*, ed. James M. May (Leiden ;Boston: Brill, 2002), 386.

reason why Aristotle chose not to include reputation in his definition of ethos was that he confined his account of ethos to artistic proofs—that is, what a rhetor could do through the composition and performance of their speech. Prior reputation, for Aristotle, was beyond the speaker's control, and thus was considered *atechnic*, not ethos.⁴⁵ Aristotle placed extra emphasis on highlighting the artistic proofs in speech because, as George Kennedy explained, “speakers in the law courts and political assemblies were often not well-known individuals. What counted was not who they were but what they said.”⁴⁶ Although for Aristotle, previous opinion about a speaker surely had important rhetorical effect, it is for these reasons he likely chose not to include those external elements, categorically, in his definition of ethos.

In contrast, in recent years scholarship on ethos has taken a quasi-Isocrotean turn by reconsidering broader society and the speaker's place in it. This quasi-Isocrotean turn is not, however, a critique of Aristotle *per se*. Instead, these critiques target an interpretation of Aristotle's texts and therefore comment on quasi-Aristotelian thought rather than critiquing Aristotle. To put the matter plainly: even as these scholars proposit to challenge Aristotle, they end up avoiding Aristotle's thought and settle instead on an interpretation of his work. As Beth Daniell and Letizia Guglielmo write, “with the rise of science, ethos began to include expertise.”⁴⁷ In this sense, the previous opinion and standing of the rhetor has taken on new significance. One's litany of qualifications, which ground one as an expert, have become a resource only certain rhetors could draw on to shore up their ethos.

⁴⁵ See Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 1.1.2.

⁴⁶ Kennedy in Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 22.

⁴⁷ Beth Daniell and Letizia Guglielmo, “Changing Audience, Changing Ethos,” in *Rethinking Ethos: A Feminist Ecological Approach to Rhetoric*, ed. Kathleen J. Ryan, Rebecca Jones, and Nancy Myers, Studies in Rhetorics and Feminisms (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2016), 90.

Miller describes this modification of ethos in terms of a transformation in the public sphere where ethos and logos begin to be conflated because of the public's predisposition to scientific norms.⁴⁸ The label of an expert, far from being just a title, signifies a badge of ethos.⁴⁹ This badge has persuasive rhetorical effect on an audience, which grants "a presumption to expertise assigning a smaller burden of proof to those with knowledge, those whose evidence and arguments are understood to be more authoritative and thus should be more persuasive."⁵⁰ In the modern scientific era, expertise has become an "argument from authority,"⁵¹ which powerfully shapes ethos.

An implicit (sometimes explicit) side effect of this broadening of ethos to include elements outside of the speech is in the reduction of the rhetor's ability to construct ethos *from* their speech. Rhetors are either limited, or advantaged, by extra-rhetorical elements in their immediate context.⁵² Other scholars have taken this a step further, by critiquing the assumption that ethos could even be something a rhetor instills in an audience. For these authors, ethos has become less a technique of persuasion to move audiences, and more-so a term that describes certain ethical practices enjoined by speeches. According to this line of reasoning, ethos is not a mere tool in the rhetor's toolbox because the rhetor cannot, according to Johanna Schmertz,

⁴⁸ Miller, "The Presumptions of Expertise," 169.

⁴⁹ Ancient Greeks would likely not deny that one's expertise plays an important role in one's persuasive ability. After all, Plato in the *Gorgias* makes the case that people ought to listen to experts, and in the dialogue, Gorgias makes the case that rhetoricians can make themselves look like experts to enhance their persuasive appeal. In both cases, being perceived as an expert increased one's credibility. While the power of the expert, no doubt, is of a vastly different caliber in the present day (today it takes on a surrogate moral dimension, Miller argues, that likely did not hold true for the Greeks), expertise no doubt played an important role for the Greeks. For more on the Gorgias, and Plato's discussion of expertise, see Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. Walter Hamilton and C. J. Emlyn-Jones, Rev. ed, Penguin Classics (London, England; New York, N.Y: Penguin Books, 2004), 455b-457c.

⁵⁰ Miller, "The Presumptions of Expertise," 188.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁵² An Isocratean reading of ethos would argue that the speaker's past actions and speeches establish the ethos of the speaker. In this sense, although the speaking situation constrains the rhetor, the rhetor partially constructed their own constraints through their previous choices. See Michael Leff, "Perelman, Ad Hominem Argument, and Rhetorical Ethos," *Argumentation* 23, no. 3 (August 2009): 301-11.

“exercise complete control of his ethos. He can no longer be described in terms of cutting out his character to fit it to the character of his audience.”⁵³

In place of being a tool in a toolbox, ethos’ appeal as a type of ethical practice leads rhetorical critics operating from some philosophical orientations to use the term to describe the ethical valence of a speech. Under this paradigm, the act of criticism becomes less about assessing the effectiveness of a speech in moving minds or audiences to action,⁵⁴ and instead examines speeches and levies judgement on speakers. Thus, Craig Smith, writing from a Heideggerian tradition, suggests ethos becomes “an ontological structure that leaves a trail that reveals moral fiber and standing.”⁵⁵ One way in which critics have operationalized this “trail of moral fiber,” called by Michael J. Hyde “ethos as dwelling,” is in the celebration of speeches that point toward a communal and democratic form of belonging. For example, Nedra Reynolds applauds those ethē⁵⁶ championing “a negotiated space where authority is established within and between communities,”⁵⁷ and Robert Wade Kenny argues for imagining ethos as a “quality of personhood that calls humanity to care for its self, its world, and its others . . . the manner one takes on responsibility for life.”⁵⁸ Taken together, these perspectives imagine ethos as the ethical

⁵³ Johanna Schmertz, “Constructing Essences: Ethos and the Postmodern Subject of Feminism,” *Rhetoric Review* 18, no. 1 (1999), 84.

⁵⁴ This is, paraphrased, Kenneth Burke’s definition of rhetoric. See Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1969), 41.

⁵⁵ Craig R. Smith, “Ethos Dwells Pervasively: A Hermeneutic Reading of Aristotle on Credibility,” in *The Ethos of Rhetoric*, ed. Michael J. Hyde, Studies in Rhetoric/Communication (Columbia, S.C: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 15.

⁵⁶ The plural of ethos. That ethos can be taken up in the plural here refers not to various forms of ethos that respond to the expectations and desires of unique audiences, but rather different ethical orientations emanating from a speech.

⁵⁷ Nedra Reynolds, “Ethos as Location: New Sites for Understanding Discursive Authority,” *Rhetoric Review* 11, no. 2 (1993), 334.

⁵⁸ Robert Wade Kenny, “Truth as Metaphor: Imaginative Vision and the Ethos of Rhetoric,” in *The Ethos of Rhetoric*, ed. Michael J. Hyde, Studies in Rhetoric/Communication (Columbia, S.C: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 36.

or ideological element of a speech that an increasing number of rhetorical critics have argued must be foregrounded in rhetorical criticism.⁵⁹

Another way that this reimagining of ethos has taken place concerns the celebration of speeches that challenge regimes of ideological interpellation,⁶⁰ or speeches that renegotiate the ethical scripts assigned to certain bodies. In Johanna Schmertz's feminist politics, ethos becomes redefined as "the stopping points at which the subject (re)negotiates her own essence to call upon whatever agency that essence enables."⁶¹ In this redefinition ethos becomes abstracted away from being an assistive technique in the formation of attitude or the urging of action in other human beings and instead becomes a means by which a subordinated subject interpellates themselves away from, or into, a certain politics of location. As Schmertz notes, in attending to "our own ethos . . . we are both constructing a subjectivity for ourselves and retroactively reconstructing or recuperating that subjectivity in a process that is never finished . . . shifting to a new position or location."⁶² Through speech one changes who one is—the core of one's being; it is speech that allows the rhetor to craft an oppositional ethos.⁶³

In making a turn toward theorizing ethos interpellatively, various scholars have situated ethos appeals within the coordinates of oppressive and restrictive Identitarian regimes. As Kennedy already noted in Aristotle's omission of one's standing in the community from ethos appeals, Aristotle (and Isocrates too) was writing and theorizing about a very specific speaking circumstance for a very specific audience of citizens who were racially, ethnically, and sexually homogenous. For these reasons, scholars have argued that the typical definition of ethos did not

⁵⁹ See Judy Holiday, "In[Ter]Vention: Locating Rhetoric's Ethos," *Rhetoric Review* 28, no. 4 (2009): 388–405.

⁶⁰ See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, 2nd ed (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2004).

⁶¹ Schmertz, "Constructing Essences," 86.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 89.

⁶³ See Maegan Parker Brooks, "Oppositional Ethos: Fannie Lou Hamer and the Vernacular Persona," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 14, no. 3 (2011): 511–48.

account for difference.⁶⁴ Ethos, they contend, rests upon an unstated hegemonic subject inaccessible to marginal identities.⁶⁵ As Coretta Pittman provocatively puts it: “[t]he problem with ethos exists because Western culture has appropriated a classical model of ethos to judge the behavior of all of its citizens. However, not all of its citizens can be judged by the same standard.”⁶⁶ Whereas most of these authors write from a rhetorical tradition, recent social science research has confirmed that identity categories, such as the race of a rhetor, influence audiences’ perception of that rhetor’s credibility.⁶⁷

Marginal identities are thus caught in a dilemma. If Aristotle was correct in identifying ethos as a powerful available means of persuasion, how might a rhetor problematize those norms of decorum that structure ethos without reifying what they critique? To put it another way, in societies where certain bodies/identities establish their ethos through silence,⁶⁸ how can one speak without forfeiting their ethos? Does a rhetor leave ethos behind and focus instead on logos or pathos? And, if ethos cannot be appealed to, should rhetorical critics cease participating in its circulation lest they themselves propagate oppressive hegemonic norms? We might read, then, the interpellative and/or ontological turn above as a partial answer to this dilemma.

⁶⁴ That Aristotle was deaf to difference is, most likely, a strawman of his thought. Although Athenians did not have a system of “race” comparable to our own, they were still highly concerned about in-group and out-group identity. Still, there remains a question as to how accessible Aristotle’s ethos is for out-groups. After all, when Aristotle was writing ethos remained an appeal to be utilized by Athenian citizens in court. Aristotle, to my knowledge, does not discuss its application outside of legal forms, or its use by non-citizens. Lack of theorization, however, should not be confused with a theoretical dead end. Quite the contrary, the entire scholastic enterprise benefits by building off, and on, where Aristotle finished.

⁶⁵ Kathleen J. Ryan, Nancy Myers, and Rebecca Jones, “Introduction: Identifying Feminist Ecological Ethe,” in *Rethinking Ethos: A Feminist Ecological Approach to Rhetoric*, eds. Kathleen J. Ryan, Nancy Myers, and Rebecca Jones, Studies in Rhetorics and Feminisms (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2016), 5.

⁶⁶ Coretta Pittman, “Black Women Writers and the Trouble with Ethos: Harriet Jacobs, Billie Holiday, and Sister Souljah,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2007), 44-5.

⁶⁷ Mariko Morimoto and Carrie La Ferle, “Examining the Influence of Culture on Perceived Source Credibility of Asian Americans & the Mediating Role of Similarity,” *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising* 30, no. 1 (March 2008): 49–60.

⁶⁸ Ryan et al., *Rethinking Ethos*, 2.

Another answer, offered by Pittman, targets ethos itself as inherently exclusionary toward black women. Pittman critiques Aristotelian ethos and applauds black women writers such as Jacobs, Holiday, and Souljah for remaking an alternative to Aristotelian ethos through their slave narratives and autobiographies. In so doing, Pittman hopes to distance these black women rhetors from what she considers to be an exploitative tradition.

I am concerned, however, that rather than offering a liberatory case study about whole cloth alternatives to Aristotelian ethos, Pittman's essay serves as a warning. At least in the case of Sister Souljah, if the public misunderstood "Souljah, her work, and black women in general"⁶⁹ as Pittman argues, perhaps her case may give us more cause for concern than hope for efficacious rhetorical appeals outside of ethos.

Making the Case for An Aristotelian Ethos

All of this is to say that another answer to this dilemma (i.e. how can marginal identities challenge norms if ethos requires them to comport to those norms?) might begin from problematizing the claim that there exists any society with an absolute prohibition on deviating from its norms. Even in the most authoritarian cultures that presume certain bodies/identities should be seen and not heard, or neither seen nor heard, there exist rhetorical situations where those bodies/identities' ethos are intimately tied to the act of speech. Consider, for example, a child who speaks up and interrupts a family gathering to announce they had witnessed a crime. Or, for example, a woman escaping the silence of domesticity to appeal for the good of her family and her community.⁷⁰ And, if a rhetorical situation exists not only as an objective non-

⁶⁹ Pittman, "Black Women Writers and the Trouble with Ethos," 65.

⁷⁰ One essay in Ryan et al.'s volume stands apart from the rest by making this point explicitly. In her essay "Powerlessness Repurposed," Mary Beth Pennington explores the rhetorical techniques utilized by Appalachian environmentalist and mother Judy Bonds. Pennington notes that "in central Appalachia, a woman's interest in her home and family is not just understood, it is expected," and by framing her interest in politics outside of her home as a reflection of her motherly instincts "Bonds claims a right that few would question" (155). In this way, "Bonds finds power in a seemingly powerless situation by relying on analogies of motherhood" (158). Pennington expands

discursive fact rhetors respond to, but also as a state of affairs constructed through discourse by a rhetor⁷¹ then it follows that even marginalized bodies/identities can establish their ethos through speech because they can construct a situation where their rhetoric will challenge broader societal norms.

Perhaps we ought recognize that the cultivation of one's ethos does not describe all speaking situations. Some rhetors aren't interested in persuading—instead, they are interested in provoking their audiences.⁷² Other rhetors are interested in fearless speech, what Michel Foucault connects to the Ancient Greek concept of *parrhesia* “the courage to speak the truth in spite of some danger.”⁷³ This wide range of rhetorical goals would not require us to seriously shift or dismantle Aristotle's conception of ethos because those rhetors remain interested in moving audiences to adopt certain perspectives or enact certain ends, albeit not conventional ones (provoking, speaking a “truth,” etc.). Therefore, ethos remains a fruitful and exploitable concept. It is, indeed, a tool in both the rhetor's and the critic's toolbox.

This space for the concept of a “tool” is inerasable, because even if a speaker *wants* to be provocative, or fearless, or inspiring, or anything else, that is distinct from *being* provocative, or fearless, or inspiring, and so on. Absent *some* audience's appreciation of a rhetor's character, *their* perception of that rhetor's ethos, a rhetor will not meet their rhetorical goals. For this audience, a rhetor may be interpreted as irrelevant, not provocative; cowardly, not fearless; depressing, not inspiring. A renewed and reinvigorated return to an Aristotelian understanding of

rhetorical understanding of ethos by highlighting that the way out for rhetors who feel constrained by the restrictive ethos requirements paired with certain bodies/identities comes from a keen “rhetorical awareness of location and relationality” (168). See Mary Beth Pennington, “Powerlessness Repurposed: The Feminist Ethos of Judy Bonds,” in *Rethinking Ethos: A Feminist Ecological Approach to Rhetoric*, ed. Kathleen J. Ryan, Nancy Myers, and Rebecca Jones, Studies in Rhetorics and Feminisms (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2016), 150–72.

⁷¹ See Richard E. Vatz, “The myth of the rhetorical situation,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* (1973): 154–161.

⁷² See Samuel McCormick, “Arguments from Analogy and Beyond: The Persuasive Artistry of Local American Civic Life,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 100, no. 2 (2014): 186–212.

⁷³ See Michel Foucault and Joseph Pearson. *Fearless Speech*. (Los Angeles: Semiotext (e), 2001), 16.

ethos does not mean a celebration of manipulation or deception. In this sense, I share Judy Holiday's concern that "[a]ny teaching of rhetoric . . . that divorces rhetoric from ethics . . . is not only impoverished pedagogy but may also constitute unethical practice."⁷⁴ However, to collapse rhetoric *into* ethics would also, I argue, constitute unethical practice by confining our studies only to how one expresses a cleaner conscience, rather than how one crafts a softer world.

One of the central challenges for those authors who wish to abandon ethos, or to reformulate it away from being a technique of persuasion/identification, lies in the fact that such a reformulation risks rendering the concept vacuous. While, on the one hand, Ryan et al.'s newest volume on *Rethinking Ethos* contends that "ethos is neither solitary nor fixed . . . [and] is negotiated and renegotiated, embodied and communal, co-constructed and thoroughly implicated in shifting power dynamics,"⁷⁵ at other moments the essays included in their volume end up defining ethos synonymously, and restrictively, as persona or politics. In these instances, ethos is not about establishing some audiences' perception of the speaker's goodwill; instead it is taken to be merely the representation of a collection of attitudes or assumptions the speaker embodies: a speaker can have a "confrontational ethos by rejecting social convention,"⁷⁶ or a queer ethos less concerned with speaking well and more concerned with "those possibilities that seem impossible,"⁷⁷ or an ethos that "is, rather, unapologetic and forceful,"⁷⁸ or positing ethos "in

⁷⁴ Holiday, "In[Ter]vention," 404.

⁷⁵ Ryan et al., *Rethinking Ethos*, 11.

⁷⁶ Valerie Palmer-Mehta, "Andrea Dworkin's Radical Ethos," in *Rethinking Ethos: A Feminist Ecological Approach to Rhetoric*, ed. Kathleen J. Ryan, Rebecca Jones, and Nancy Myers, Studies in Rhetorics and Feminisms (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2016), 66.

⁷⁷ Stacey Waite, "The Unavailable Means of Persuasion: A Queer Ethos for Feminist Writers and Teachers," in *Rethinking Ethos: A Feminist Ecological Approach to Rhetoric*, ed. Kathleen J. Ryan, Rebecca Jones, and Nancy Myers, Studies in Rhetorics and Feminisms (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2016), 76.

⁷⁸ Daniell & Guglielmo, "Changing Audience, Changing Ethos," 106.

epistemological terms as a mode of inquiry,”⁷⁹ or thinking of “ethos as presence . . . located [in] interactions or ‘dwelling with’ other material and social bodies.”⁸⁰

While I fully support and encourage scholarly interest in expanding and exploring all of what ethos may do, I worry that contemporary scholarship has engaged in an unintended concept creep that threatens to transpose ethos into a rhetorical stand-in for another term (culture, epistemology, ethics, ideology, politics etc.) at the expense of its specific meaning—a meaning that is valuable because it forefronts the effect of a rhetor’s speech on different groups (“audiences”), and therein points to a technique that enables a rhetor to move specific audiences to thought or action. For example, if we were to say that a monument “promotes an image of the national *ethos* that is anything but virtuous,”⁸¹ what do we mean? Do we mean to imply that the monument acts as a form of constitutive rhetoric⁸² that structures what national culture prefigures as “the Good”? Or do we mean that, through *prosopopoeia*, the nation becomes personified as a speaking subject—and, that as a formal element the monument denigrates that nation’s *ethos*? And, should we imply the latter, for what audience would this monument have this rhetorical effect? For what audience might the effect be *reversed*? Does the inclusion of the term ethos end up telling us anything about rhetorical appeals if we use it to talk about one’s “ethos as survivor-activist,”⁸³ or one’s “ethos as narrator,”⁸⁴ or one’s “ethos as compassionate cosmopolitan,”⁸⁵ or

⁷⁹ Wendy S. Hesford, “Ethos Righted: Transnational Feminist Analytics,” in *Rethinking Ethos: A Feminist Ecological Approach to Rhetoric*, ed. Kathleen J. Ryan, Rebecca Jones, and Nancy Myers, Studies in Rhetorics and Feminisms (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2016), 211.

⁸⁰ Christy I. Wenger, “Creating Contemplative Spaces: Ethos as Presence and the Rhetorics of Yoga,” in *Rethinking Ethos: A Feminist Ecological Approach to Rhetoric*, ed. Kathleen J. Ryan, Rebecca Jones, and Nancy Myers, Studies in Rhetorics and Feminisms (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2016), 238-9.

⁸¹ Carole Blair and Neil Michel, “The Rushmore Effect: Ethos and National Collective Identity,” in *The Ethos of Rhetoric*, ed. Michael J. Hyde, Studies in Rhetoric/Communication (Columbia, S.C: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 183.

⁸² See Maurice Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the *Peuple Québécois*,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73, no. 2 (May 1987): 133–50.

⁸³ Hesford, “Ethos Righted,” 205.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 209.

one's "ethos as an ethnographer,"⁸⁶ or any other variation? I contend that a term like "identity" or "position" or "persona" will serve the same purpose.

Too often scholars have used ethos to describe the sets of expectations that govern a rhetor's good character, instead of analyzing the techniques in the rhetoric that shore up and/or satisfy those expectations. As already explained, Aristotle argues that ethos emerges from the contents of a speech, not just from previous opinions about that speaker, or, as pointed out by contemporary scholars, opinions about that speaker's cultural position. I do not want to imply that the presence of these previous opinions isn't an important element at play in constructing a rhetorical appeal, only that they are not the end-all-be-all of ethos. These opinions, the expectations of the audience, are part of the rhetorical situation—they are concerns a rhetor must address. At the same time, this thesis seeks to illustrate that the audiences' perception of the ethical character of the rhetor has important consequences not just for persuasion, but for racial identity itself.

Methodology and Chapter Preview

This thesis will mark a return to an Aristotelian conception of ethos as a construction of the rhetor's character produced through speech, albeit with a twist. In this sense, I will draw from Eugene Garver's observation that "the ethos which the audience trusts . . . is the artificial ethos identified with argument. It is not some real ethos the speaker may or may not possess."⁸⁷ What I am advocating for here is a new understanding and appreciation for ethos that simultaneously attends to the societal constraints on a rhetor's ethos (sometimes over-simply identified as a societal "ethos," but more accurately described as the range of persona, relations, and values already ascribed within a society), and also the means by which that rhetor tries, fails, or

⁸⁶ Ibid., 211.

⁸⁷ Eugene Garver, *Aristotle's Rhetoric: An art of character*, (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 196.

succeeds in constructing her ethos. To clarify, I am not arguing for a reductive return to theorizing ethos only as a construction in the rhetor's speech, nor am I arguing that we ought to only consider the societal constraints placed on rhetors (as per Ryan et al., Pittman, etc.). In this sense, like the authors in the interpellative and/or ontological turn, my writing is not Aristotle's, but rather Aristotelian.⁸⁸

Instead, I hope to build on, and with, both the older, strategy-focused literature and the newer contextually focused literatures. A rhetor's ethos exists always in flux, and if we want to know how that ethos becomes negotiated and re-negotiated we must attend not only to contextual constraints on a rhetor's ethos, but also to the *techne* of ethos appeals. To these ends, in this thesis, I offer a broader understanding of what ethos can mean, how rhetors may enact it, and its effects.

Turning to Dolezal's rhetoric and key rhetorics from television interviews that shaped and responded to her ethos will be a productive encounter between the scholarship on racial identity and ethos for two reasons. First, a turn to ethos critically establishes the important rhetorical leap from Dolezal's presentation as a reverse passer to her intended presentation as a transracial subject. And second, a return to ethos helps explain how this leap, more often than not, failed. What Dolezal troubles, I hope to show, is the unidirectional lines rhetorical scholars have drawn between identity and ethos. Whereas recent scholars have asked: how does one's identity constrain one's access to ethos, I want to ask the more dynamic question: what are the mechanisms of rhetorical invention at work in laying claim to an identity? Not identity's restrictive capacity on a rhetor's ethos, but instead ethos' constructive function on identity.

⁸⁸ I write that my analysis is Aristotelian because while I return to Aristotle for an appreciation of ethos as an appeal in the rhetor's speech, in Chapters Three, Four, and Five I expand ethos to include appeals to a racialized identity and theorize its function, in the context of race, as doing more than just fulfilling a second-order judgement.

Toward these ends, in this thesis I search for how ethos manifests itself in speech. In this regard, I will analyze how Dolezal uses good sense (*phronêsis*), good moral values (*aretê*), and goodwill (*eunoia*) in her appeals for a transracial identity. And, I will focus on how key figures in her audiences respond to, and re-characterize, those elements of Dolezal's ethos. Drawing upon the insights from the interpellative and/or ontological turn in ethos scholarship I situate my case studies in relation to pivotal audiences and read those audiences' responses to Dolezal's ethos appeals as symptomatic of broader ethos constraints on rhetors.

In the next chapter, Chapter Two, I explore the racialized context that precedes and codes how audiences responded to "the Dolezal Affair."⁸⁹ There, I trace the history of racial bipolarity in the United States and discuss how, as a legal and social regime, it encouraged racial passing. From there, I discuss how changes in that legal regime have created the conditions for what legal scholars term "reverse passing" wherein dominant identities present themselves as marginal identities for financial and cultural gain. I then explain that the central stake over Dolezal's claim to a black identity is in how audiences make sense of Dolezal—is she simply reverse passing, or is there really such a thing as a transracial identity?

In Chapter Three, I examine how Dolezal makes the case for her transracial identity. Throughout Dolezal's autobiography, *In Full Color: Finding My Place in a Black and White World*, Dolezal structures her claim to a black identity through ethos. This identification takes the form of Dolezal's constant allusion to her privileged access to a form of knowledge supposedly accessible only to black individuals (*phronêsis*), her acknowledgement of a racist history and championing of black values (*aretê*), and her professed sincerities to the black struggle (*eunoia*). I argue that Dolezal's ethos appeal inverts the classic paradigm of standpoint

⁸⁹ See Brubaker, *Trans*.

epistemology by reading Dolezal through the writings of Patricia Hill Collins,⁹⁰ Sandra Harding,⁹¹ and Julia T. Wood.⁹²

In Chapter Four, I examine moments of success and failure in Dolezal's ethos appeal to a transracial identity. Specifically, I analyze Dolezal's ethos appeals in the context of two audiences marked by two competing racial paradigms: racial authenticity and racial sincerity. The distinction between these two paradigms, I argue, is the fault line that determines when Dolezal's ethos appeals fail and when those ethos appeals have some moderate success. In interviews operating through a paradigm of racial authenticity (Matt Lauer's⁹³ and Savanah Guthrie's interviews⁹⁴) I locate a narrative of deception and a narrative of racial opportunism. These two narratives, I argue, are assaults on Dolezal's ethos. In the interview operating through a paradigm of racial sincerity (Melissa Harris-Perry's interview⁹⁵) I find an audience more sympathetic to Dolezal's claims. I conclude this chapter by discussing counterfactual techniques Dolezal might have used to generate more support for her transracial identity.

Finally, in Chapter Five, I connect the changing racial landscape discussed in Chapter Two with the over-proliferation of ethos appeals in the Dolezal controversy as discussed in Chapters Three and Four. I argue that the use of ethos by all parties (from Dolezal, to Guthrie, to Lauer, to Harris-Perry) as a metric for judging Dolezal's identity stems from the lack of a public

⁹⁰ See Patricia Hill Collins, 1990. *Black feminist thought. Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics*.

⁹¹ See Sandra Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What is 'Strong Objectivity?,'" *The Centennial Review* 36, no. 3 (1992), 437-470.

⁹² See Julia T Wood, "Feminist standpoint theory and muted group theory: Commonalities and divergences." *Women and Language* 28, no. 2 (2005): 61-64.

⁹³ Matt Lauer and Rachel Dolezal, "Rachel Dolezal Breaks Her Silence: 'I Identify As Black' | TODAY," *YouTube*, uploaded by TODAY, 16 June 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IG9Q2_Hv83k.

⁹⁴ Savanah Guthrie and Rachel Dolezal, "Rachel Dolezal: Being White Doesn't Describe Who I Am (Full Interview) | NBC Nightly News," *YouTube*, uploaded by NBC News, 18 June 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vS5fpDTZrc4>.

⁹⁵ Melissa Harris-Perry and Rachel Dolezal, "Exclusive Full Interview: Rachel Dolezal breaks her silence," *MSNBC*, 17 June 2015, <https://www.msnbc.com/melissa-harris-perry/watch/rachel-dolezal-breaks-her-silence-465691715976>.

vocabulary to make sense of racial identity. With both black and white becoming defined through negation by the twin features of a paradigm of racial authenticity (hypodescent whiteness and, what I term, hypoascent blackness), ethos becomes a proxy for audiences struggling to make sense of the idea of a transracial identity. In denigrating Dolezal's ethos, audiences synecdochally come to a conclusion about the potentiality of a transracial identity. In this way, I argue that Dolezal's case demonstrates that although identity categories such as race may constrain a rhetor's ethos, a rhetor's ethos simultaneously constructs and gives race coherence.

CHAPTER 2

RACE, PASSING, AND REVERSE PASSING

Near the end of her interview with Rachel Dolezal Melissa Harris-Perry asks: “Would you describe what you are doing as passing?”¹ In the interview, Dolezal responds, “You know... I think it’s different than that.” A year and a half later, midway through her autobiography, Dolezal writes that she “wasn’t pretending to be something I wasn’t but expressing something I already was. I wasn’t passing as Black; I was Black, and there was no going back.”² These comments on passing by Dolezal and Harris-Perry get to the heart of the Dolezal controversy: what does it mean to be a racial subject, what does it mean to be seen as another race, and can one’s racial identity change?

Before one can even begin to write about Dolezal or the use of ethos appeals by Dolezal and her interviewers one must attend to the racialized context that Dolezal responds to which frames Dolezal’s identification with blackness as a controversy worthy of the public’s attention. To jump straight into rhetorical analysis without considering racialized contexts risks omitting one of the most important lessons from the interpellative and/or ontological turn in the study of ethos: that the range of persona, relations, and values already ascribed within a society create serious obstacles for a rhetor’s demonstration of ethos. Race is one such constellation of personas, relations, and values.

¹ Melissa Harris-Perry and Rachel Dolezal, “Exclusive Full Interview: Rachel Dolezal breaks her silence,” *MSNBC*, 17 June 2015, <https://www.msnbc.com/melissa-harris-perry/watch/rachel-dolezal-breaks-her-silence-465691715976>.

² Rachel Dolezal and Storms Reback, *In Full Color: Finding My Place in a Black and White World* (BenBella Books, 2017), 148.

Race has been a part of the American legacy since before the nation's inception, and it continues to shape public discourse and popular culture.³ But, race has not been static—its meanings and operationalizations have changed over time. And, even more importantly, individuals who have been racialized have not always been content to accept their designated racial identity. While most racial subjects sit still, there have been many documented cases of individuals moving across the color line and assuming an alternative racial identity. To fully understand the significance of Dolezal's ethos appeals one must first attend to these moments of racial mobility (or racial fluidity) to understand the existing racial landscape.

To that end, in this chapter I analyze the history of racialization and the historical legacy of racial passing. I then trace that legacy through the present day into what legal scholars are increasingly referring to as “reverse passing.” Finally, I situate Dolezal, as a controversy, within this broader legacy of passing and racial passing, and explain how Dolezal's claim to a transracial identity challenges the existing logics used to make sense of racial identity.

Passing and the Legal and Social Construction of Race

Simply defined, racial passing refers to the (mis)identification of one's racial identity with that of another. Werner Sollors notes that in public imagination “[p]assing” is used most frequently, however, as if it were short for ‘passing for white.’⁴ Racial bipolarity incentivized the self-presentation of people who would be otherwise understood as being racialized minorities for that of dominant racialized identities (e.g. in the United States, the “passing” of black as white) in order to accrue the benefits of that identification, or to distance oneself from the disadvantages

³ That race plays a pivotal role in American public culture is so banal a statement it almost doesn't need stating. However, its pivotal role should not be confused with a founding or exclusive function. Reductive philosophies often declare that the United States or the “West” invented race. For an excellent critique of this perspective, see Loïc Wacquant, “For an Analytic of Racial Domination,” *Political Power and Social Theory* 11, (1997): 221-234.

⁴ Werner Sollors, *Neither Black nor White yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 247.

of inhabiting a subordinated racial identity. Whereas the (mis)representation of oneself “is probably a human universal, racial passing is particularly a phenomenon of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century,”⁵ made possible by the legal codification of cultural cues that established the criteria for entry and exit into racialized identities.⁶ Because passing threatens the stable identities of black and white (one can be either/or depending on their fancy), throughout the history of the United States racial passing has been protected against to safeguard the color line and the established racial order.⁷

One way codified law in the United States guarded against racial passing was through the invocation of a hypodescent model of whiteness. In the hypodescent model of whiteness mixed-race individuals were legally classified as black by what has come to be called the “one-drop rule.”⁸ According to this logic individuals “descended” (hence the “descent” of hypodescent) into a lower racial caste if they possessed any degree of ancestral lineage from the stigmatized group (i.e. a person could not be “white” even if they were “predominately” white). Therefore, a prominent ingredient in racial passing, although not the only one, concerned an interracial lineage. For interracial individuals, the hypodescent model of whiteness ruled out their racial ambiguity by statutorily defining their racial identity in relationship to their “black” blood. At the same time, the hypodescent model of whiteness shifted the *stasis* of where racial identity took place. Racial identity was not an individual’s choice, nor was it the gut-feeling of the crowd. Rather, racial identity emerged through a ruling carried out by a state.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ I feel the need to state, that I am referring to race as we have used the term in the United States and the West. There were certainly other national contexts in which racial passing has taken place, but I situate my analysis within the United States and the West. At least in the United States and the West, racial passing is a phenomenon (and might I add, technology) of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century.

⁷ Ramona Liera-Schwichtenberg, “Passing or Whiteness on the Edge of Town,” *REVIEW AND CRITICISM*, September 2000, 372-3.

⁸ Vincent John Cheng, *Inauthentic: The Anxiety over Culture and Identity* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 130.

The hypodescent model of whiteness would be supported, and also challenged, at times throughout U.S. history. Most people know that the Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* upheld the doctrine of separate but equal, but many are unaware that at stake in the case was also, more salient for this chapter, a controversy over passing and shifting racial identity. In *Plessy v. Ferguson*, Homer Plessy was a mixed-race individual who appeared white but was also an "octoroon," a now archaic phrase to describe someone whose ancestry was 7/8th European and 1/8th African. In moving across states on a train, Plessy's legal classification shifted according to laws of hypodescent from white to black once he entered Louisiana. Plessy's entire challenge to a system of racial segregation rested on racial passing; the goal was, as Marcia Dawkins put it, to "[p]ass as white. Purchase the ticket. Board the train. Pass as black. Ensure arrest. Get political."⁹ In fact, one of the arguments made in Plessy's defense in the trial was to describe whiteness as property—a golden ticket to opportunity.¹⁰ According to the defense, in ruling against Plessy, the Supreme Court not only upheld a doctrine of segregation but also "stole" Plessy's property interest by taking his whiteness from him.¹¹ The court was ultimately unpersuaded, and ruled in favor of depriving Plessy of his "whiteness."

Other legal work safeguarding the stability of the color line followed. For example, in 1924 Virginia's Act to Preserve Racial Integrity punished a "false" racial identification with up to a year in prison.¹² In Louisiana, these laws of hypodescent were still on the books governing cases as late as 1977. That year, Susie Phipps, who had grown up her entire life as a white woman, sued the state of Louisiana when the state refused to acknowledge her purported racial

⁹ Marcia Alesan Dawkins, *Clearly Invisible: Racial Passing and the Color of Cultural Identity* (Waco, Tex: Baylor University Press, 2012), 55.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹² Rogers Brubaker, *Trans: Gender and Race in an Age of Unsettled Identities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 59.

identity as white (the state maintained that, according to their records, she was black).¹³ Despite her challenge, Ms. Phipps lost her case, and as Maraouf A. Hasian and Thomas K. Nakayama write: “[i]n the eyes of the state of Louisiana, she remained black. Blood will tell.”¹⁴

Broadly, however, the state’s ability to determine who was an authentic white subject and who was merely passing for one was not so clear cut. Agents of the state safeguarded the color line by acting in a bureaucratic capacity to handle disputes between citizens, and by officially codifying a citizen’s racial identification in legal documents. Forced to intervene from a distance, the state’s bureaucratic function was removed from the day-to-day practices of racialization—one needn’t verify their state identification to enter a nightclub that catered only to white audiences, nor did one need official state documentation to drink from a whites-only water fountain, among other examples. In the place of overseeing state agents, it was the participants of civil society who fulfilled this surveillance function and safeguarded the color line.

In the place of legal documents, ancestry and heritage were reduced to word-of-mouth and historically situated knowledge. In situations where heritage could not be verified, racial identity was verified through the senses—sight, touch, sound, and smell. Dawkins explains that the most obvious sense, sight, allowed “skin color [to function as a] biometric tracking [device] that provided proof of a person’s identity.”¹⁵ Although sight would function as a disqualifying mechanism for many who might attempt to (mis)identify themselves and pass as white, those with an ambiguous skin color could sometimes slip by undetected by the racializing surveillance conducted by participants of civil society. The resulting collective anxiety directed toward these

¹³ Maraouf A. Hasian and Thomas K. Nakayama, “The Fictions of Racialized Identities,” in *Judgment Calls: Rhetoric, Politics, and Indeterminacy*, ed. John M. Sloop and James P. McDaniel, Polemics Series (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1998), 187.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 190.

¹⁵ Dawkins, *Clearly Invisible*, 69.

passers was acute. Passing was so common in the 1920's that, according to A. Cheree Carlson, the National Theater in Washington, D.C. hired black bouncers out of a belief that these black bouncers might be able to detect racial characteristics that white bouncers could not.¹⁶

A host of other visual cues were imagined that could catch the passer in the act from the color of one's eyes, to the complexion of one's children.¹⁷ Many of these visual cues are anachronistic today. One noteworthy one included a belief that one's fingernail hue was an "accurate" depicter of one's racial identity. In this racial landscape, faint, blue hues within one's finger nail signified proof of slave (black) blood coursing through their veins.¹⁸ Try as one might to (mis)identify themselves, to pass as another race, the passer's black blood was imagined by those invested in the color line as giving the passer away and revealing their pass to be fraudulent.¹⁹

Such visual markers could never stand as proof of one's white identity, only proof of racial fraud. In the rush to safeguard the color line, the hypodescent model of whiteness ended up depriving white identity of much of its substance. Because white racial identity was imagined as ontological and originary,²⁰ not a social construct, paradoxically most of the anxiety surrounding racial passing documented the ways blacks would "fake" their whiteness, instead of what it meant to be a "real" white subject. This anxious pattern of thinking made it impossible to prove one was white—one was forced, instead, to prove one wasn't black. This distinction is important. Visual cues, as well as ancestral ones, were never qualifying marks for being white. Instead, the marks worked only as a disqualifying element for entering whiteness. As Sollors

¹⁶ A. Cheree Carlson, "'You Know It When You See It': The Rhetorical Hierarchy of Race and Gender in *Rhineland v. Rhineland*," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 85, no. 2 (1999), 115.

¹⁷ Sollors, *Neither Black nor White yet Both*, 250.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁹ Marquis Bey and Theodora Sakellarides. "When We Enter: The Blackness of Rachel Dolezal." *The Black Scholar* 46, no. 4 (October 2016), 40.

²⁰ Liera-Schwichtenberg, "Passing or Whiteness on the Edge of Town," 371.

observed, the mark was “viewed as evidence of ‘blackness,’ its absence . . . no proof of ‘whiteness.’”²¹ The disqualifying mark for blackness was sometimes sought after with a frenzy, and citizens were expected to maintain some level of vigilance in safeguarding the color line.

What constituted a reasonable amount of suspicion toward another’s purported racial identity was, in a sense, put on trial in 1925. In *Rhineland v. Rhineland* a man seeking divorce from his wife claimed his spouse fabricated her racial identity. Racial passing itself was on trial. In a dramatic moment in the trial, the defense declared that the husband knew his wife was black because he had pressured and seduced her into pre-marital sex, and that below the waist “anyone would recognize Alice [the wife] as black.”²² Led to the jury room, Mrs. Rhineland was disrobed for the entire jury to see. Her pass was exposed by directing the audiences’ eyes to proof of her “concealed” racial identity. This episode ultimately led the jury to conclude unanimously in Alice’s favor that Mr. Rhineland had known full-well of his wife’s fraudulent racial identification.

In *Rhineland v. Rhineland* the facticity of Alice Rhineland’s racial identity was not the question for the trial. Legally considered black according to state documents, the question for the jury concerned only the effectiveness of her “pass” to Mr. Rhineland. The prosecution declared her racial passing insidious and adept; the defense declared her racial passing flawed from the start. In both cases, Carlson indicates, lawyers “drew upon rhetorical stereotypes,” as well as fantasies about female sexuality “to alter the jury’s perception of where she belonged.”²³ What the *Rhineland v. Rhineland* case demonstrates is that passing is not reducible to phenotype. In the case, Mrs. Rhineland’s observable phenotype permitted her pass, and

²¹ Sollors, *Neither Black nor White yet Both*, 148.

²² Carlson, “You Know It When You See It,” 121.

²³ *Ibid.*, 125.

concealed physical features revealed that pass, but those concealed physical features were only made intelligible to the audience through racialized fantasies of female sexuality. Thus, although Mrs. Rhinelanders' "true" racial identity was not on trial, the trial revealed that for audiences an inventory of narrative elements at play, from stereotypes about femininity to racially saturated caricatures, dictated the success or failure of passing.

These high-profile cases of passing are likely just the tip of the iceberg of racial (mis)identification. Producing an accurate total count of instances of passing in the United States poses severe methodological problems. While some passers may do so only sparingly, other passers embark on a life-long quest for (mis)identification. Even still, some may be passing and not even know it. One of the highest estimates from *Ebony* magazine declared that there have been five million cases of passing, and other estimates ranged from hundreds to millions.²⁴ These numbers demonstrate that in spite of a relatively large and intricate apparatus established to detect "racial fraud" many were able to choose their own racial identity.

Passing the 20th Century and the Crisis of Reverse Passing

Ultimately, however, this intricate apparatus of detecting "racial fraud" was not built to last. By 1960, census-takers deferred to individual racial identification,²⁵ and as Khaled A. Beydoun and Erika K. Wilson note "the Naturalization Act of 1952 signaled the end of judges adjudicating an individual's race."²⁶ A top-down system of racial classification was superseded, for the most part, by what legal scholars call "elective race,"²⁷ a racial classification system that allowed each individual was to choose for themselves what racial designation best fit what that individual knew to be true about themselves. Despite this, the one-drop rule and a hypodescent

²⁴ Sollors, *Neither Black nor White yet Both*, 281.

²⁵ As already explained above, Louisiana was a hold out until the late 1970's.

²⁶ Khaled A. Beydoun and Erika K. Wilson. "Reverse Passing." *UCLA L. Rev.* 64 (2017), 306.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 308.

model of whiteness continues to have important rhetorical dimensions even if its legal foundations had long last sway, as “most of those with biracial black and white identities still choose black”²⁸ on official or non-official census forms, revealing that with the advent of elective race, racial identification’s affiliative features became more salient. Although one might think that this change in legal paradigm for assigning race might be thought of as bringing an end to various forms of legal passing because the state would no longer be interested in bureaucratically verifying one’s race, it made possible a new form of passing which scholars have referred to as “reverse passing.”

Writings and theorizations on passing are relegated almost exclusively in terms of a binary narrative wherein the oppressed passes for the oppressor. As such, Roger Brubaker observes that scholarly interest in “racial passing in the other direction—from white to nonwhite—has garnered little to no attention.”²⁹ Scholars writings on this type of passing, referred to here as reverse passing, have documented two of its dimensions. The first, identified by Beydoun and Wilson as “legal reverse passing,” refers to the claiming of non-white identity by whites on legal documents.³⁰ Although there is generally significant legal benefit from identifying and being identified as a white, there are and were legal circumstances that encouraged reverse passing. For example, historians have noted cases where white women identified as black to circumvent laws against miscegenation.³¹ Although these women may have benefited substantially from their placement on the white side of the color line, they benefited by reverse passing as black in being with their loved ones.

²⁸ Brubaker, *Trans*, 55

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 284.

³⁰ Beydoun and Wilson, “Reverse Passing,” 310.

³¹ Brubaker, *Trans*, 86.

In the case of laws against miscegenation, reverse passing allowed people to circumvent oppressive legal restrictions. The 20th century, however, saw the creation of legal regimes that allocated resources earmarked to provide restitution for legacies of racial discrimination. In this context reverse passing provided what Sébastien Chauvin has described as “access to protected subordinate categories,” thereby allowing the reverse passer to steal “hard-fought civil rights protections.”³² One of the most controversial of these protections is universities’ affirmative action admission policies that prioritize or incentivize admission and fellowships for ethnic and/or racial minorities.

Elective racial identification invalidated regimes of racial identification according to the one-drop rule by providing a new legal definition of racial identity. Beydoun and Wilson note that according to decisions by the United States Supreme Court, our present legal understanding of race is not reducible to phenotype but also crucially includes a history of lived experiences related to how the “state and society broadly perceive and treat an individual based on the racial identity into which they were born.”³³ This grounding of race within lived experience is far from trivial. It was the basis for the Supreme Court’s decision in *Regents of the Univ. of Cal. v. Bakke* that upheld the legality of affirmative action programs in public universities on grounds that racial and ethnic identity were important proxies for diversity of experiences. This legal discourse officially accepts the idea that one’s identity both undergirds their experience with the world, and profoundly shapes how one interprets and is interpreted. Because standpoint undergirds epistemology broadly construed, the legal reasoning goes, affirmative action

³² Sébastien Chauvin, “Possibility, Legitimacy, and the New Ontologies of Choice: A Comment on Brubaker,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 8 (June 21, 2017), 1324.

³³ Beydoun and Wilson, “Reverse Passing,” 286.

programs are crucial to learning environments that embraces a plurality of views.³⁴ At the same time, by using phenotype as a proxy for measuring that lived experience legal discourse produced the grounds for reverse passing (and identity fraud) by transforming nonwhiteness into what Beydoun and Wilson describe as “an identity that some whites can easily perform and present for purposes of capitalizing on racial identities coveted by diversity-driven programming.”³⁵

By simply checking a box, reverse passers gain privileged access to scarce resources earmarked for subordinated racial and/or ethnic identities. Although no hard numbers exist to verify how prevalent this form of reverse passing is, one survey found that “73 percent [of white students questioned] said that they would lie about their ethnicity on college applications if there was no way for colleges to refute their claims.”³⁶ Paradoxically this is how, in the future, one can imagine the functioning of a system of race and racism detached from a top down model of racial identification. Such an example took place in 1975 when two brothers applied, unsuccessfully, to positions in the Boston Fire Department.

³⁴ To be clear, Beydoun and Wilson are explicit when they state that *Regents of the Univ. of Cal. v. Bakke* minimized the role of lived experience in determining affirmative action. Upon review of the case and their own article, I think this is a misreading of the Court’s rationale. For example, Beydoun and Wilson devote a significant amount of ink noting that the court was not ultimately persuaded that affirmative action programs were appropriate remedies to discrimination, that is to say courts are not convinced of the legality of discrimination for the purpose of reducing discrimination. However, Beydoun and Wilson argue that the removal of this rationale for affirmative action thereby means that the Supreme Court refuses to acknowledge the difference in lived experience between whites and blacks. Quite the contrary, I think the courts explicitly recognize the difference in lived experience (hence their approval of using race as a proxy for campus diversity), they just are not persuaded of the legality of using discrimination *solely* for the purpose of combating discrimination. Discrimination, however, for the purposes of producing a compelling and rich learning environment the Court finds acceptable. This is why the Court ultimately decides against a quota-based system for affirmative action and argues instead in favor of theorizing race as a potential plus in an applicant’s profile. Race is one example of a diversity of perspectives in a student body, alongside others such as “exceptional personal talents, unique work or service experience, leadership potential, maturity, demonstrated compassion, a history of overcoming disadvantage, ability to communicate with the poor, or other qualifications deemed important.” See *Regents of Univ. of California v. Bakke*, 438 U.S. 265 (1978).

³⁵ Beydoun and Wilson, “Reverse Passing,” 291.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 329.

After failing to get the job they sought the Malone Twins applied again in 1977, this time changing their racial designation from white to black.³⁷ They got the job. More than a decade later the brothers were fired for falsely claiming minority status, with the hearing officer ruling, as Brubaker notes, that they “were not ‘objectively’ black by any of three criteria: phenotype, documentary evidence, or evidence of self-presentation and perception of others in their community.”³⁸ High profile cases such as this one has served as an impetus for legal scholars to consider the potential risks of reverse passing in an era of elective racial identification. With an expansive list of benefits tailored to combating legacies of discrimination ranging from preferential placement for racial and/or ethnic minorities, material resources for indigenous groups,³⁹ scholarships for women or other sexual minorities, among others, legal scholars have come to consider reverse passing as a coming crisis and an opportunity to discuss various techniques for identifying and preventing racial fraud.⁴⁰

The second form of reverse passing Beydoun and Wilson term “cultural reverse passing,” which refers to “the process by which whites disavow their white identity and present themselves as nonwhite in cultural spaces.”⁴¹ In cultural reverse passing, whites tap into a cultural capital bestowed in certain circumstances to the victims of a pernicious legacy of discrimination. By presenting themselves as nonwhite, whites thereby gain an assumed authority to speak on issues that their identification as white would preclude them from speaking on; or, in other situations would incur strong social sanctions for holding certain views.

³⁷ Brubaker, *Trans*, 59.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

³⁹ Anthony Moran, “Is Trans-Race Possible in an Era of Unsettled Identities?,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 8 (June 21, 2017), 1304.

⁴⁰ Brubaker, *Trans*, 62.

⁴¹ Beydoun and Wilson, “Reverse Passing,” 310.

The extant scholarship on cultural reverse passing is incredibly scarce. If racial passing was a phenomenon of the 19th and early 20th century, then reverse passing is a phenomenon of the 21st and so scholarship has not quite caught up to describing it. As Brubaker puts it, “the policing of access to blackness . . . is a relatively new development.”⁴² In the coming years, one might expect an emerging and expansive scholarship written on cultural reverse passing, but for the time being we must work with what we have.

In cultural reverse passing, whites are placed in a privileged encounter with racial difference whereby they benefit from their (fraudulent) racial presentation. Although not explicitly written in the context of cultural reverse passing, scholars have considered homologous encounters with racial difference as embedded within racist power structures. This scholarship considers, among other things: white sexual desire for persons of color,⁴³ white consumption of black clothing styles,⁴⁴ and white rappers,⁴⁵ just to name a few. This perspective on white subjects encountering racial difference is best summarized by bell hooks who writes that there is a danger that “racial differences will be continually commodified and offered up as new dishes to enhance the white palate—that the Other will be eaten, consumed, and forgotten.”⁴⁶ In this perspective, cultural reverse passing would represent yet another manifestation of whites *eating* the Other by wearing another’s skin and culture as a costume, what Lisa Nakamura refers to as “identity tourism.”⁴⁷

⁴² Brubaker, *Trans*, 59.

⁴³ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992), 21-41.

⁴⁴ Greg Tate, ed., *Everything but the Burden: What White People Are Taking from Black Culture*, 1st ed (New York: Broadway Books, 2003).

⁴⁵ Eric King Watts, “Border Patrolling and “Passing” in Eminem’s 8 Mile,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 22, no. 3 (2005): 187–206.

⁴⁶ hooks, *Black Looks*, 39.

⁴⁷ See Lisa Nakamura, “Race in/for cyberspace: Identity tourism and racial passing on the Internet,” *Works and Days* 13, no. 26 (1995): 181-193.

At the same time, one should heed the cautions offered by scholars such as Kimberley Chabot Davis to guard “against a too-hasty dismissal of white consumption of black cultural texts as a potential conduit for social change.”⁴⁸ Davis argues that to experience the perspectives of racial difference in its various forms (from cuisine, to clothing, to music) need not always reduce the racialized Other into an object for consumption. Rather, Davis contends that there is the possibility to “experience a perspective shift by being exposed to [alternative] ways of seeing and interpreting the world, including racist structures of power.”⁴⁹

Davis notes further that there is a danger in reductively representing objects of racial difference and racial difference itself in a narrative wherein white stands for bad, and black stands for good. In critiques of whites’ consumption of racial texts there is a trend in which “white identity often gets reduced to a singular, stereotyped essence, little more than a caricature of racist reading practices.”⁵⁰ As a result, the histories that complicate this narrative become screened out including those identity categories that exist on the fringes of whiteness such as the Jews and the Irish.⁵¹

At the same time, blackness and black identity become pigeonholed into another stereotyped image and any deviation from that image becomes labeled as inauthentic. The invocation of titles like “Oreo,” “house negro,” and “sellout” serve as mechanisms of control that chastise blacks who depart from proper and “authentic” racial scripts.⁵² Such titles reinforce the belief, Peggy Phelan comments, that “all people with the same skin color believe the same thing, and that there is, for example, such a thing as a coherent African-American community.”⁵³

⁴⁸ Kimberly Chabot Davis, *Beyond the White Negro: Empathy and Anti-Racist Reading* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 3.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 5.

⁵¹ Cheng, *Inauthentic*, 129.

⁵² John L. Jackson, *Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 213-4.

⁵³ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1993), 8.

Vincent John Cheng argues that these “rhetoric[s] and mechanics of authenticity . . . repeatedly leads to ethnocentric practices of excluding others who don’t fit the constructed criteria and whom one can thus label as ‘inauthentic.’”⁵⁴

Contra “authentic” black people, the cultural reverse passer is imagined only as “inauthentic.” Although this distinction might appear workable, upon closer examination scholars attending to the cultural and symbolic construction of categories such as race have argued that “the search for the authentic . . . is an intrinsically hopeless quest to ‘catch’ and pin down something already defined as ungraspable.”⁵⁵ Any attempt to find the central kernel of blackness to distinguish the authentic from the inauthentic would be a Quixotic task.⁵⁶

The emerging scholarship on reverse passing shares with the scholarship on passing a belief in the fraudulent nature of the presented identity for both the passer and reverse passer. By fraudulent, I mean that the passer and reverse passer are *really* one thing, and that their presented identity isn’t that. When the passer or reverse passer are revealed for what they really are, *passing*, they are distinguished from the authentic and pedestrian logics of racialization. The above scholarship on passing and reverse passing demonstrate that in being found out, both passer and reverse passer regain their “original” and “true” racial designation.

There exists a certain similarity between how the scholarship on passing and reverse passing imagine the act of passing, and how the legal construction of race in an American context relied on a hypodescent model of whiteness. In both situations, a certain mixture of blood (or in the case of passing, a certain mixture of history or performances) overcodes and determines what one really is. In the hypodescent model of whiteness, one may look, speak, and

⁵⁴ Cheng, *Inauthentic*, 172.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵⁶ In Chapter Five of this thesis, I contextualize the controversy over Dolezal’s ethos as both a response, and an inability to, the hopeless quest of conceptualizing an “authentic” black identity.”

act white (whatever that means), but one's blood disqualifies one from ever being white.

Analogously, what the scholarship on passing and reverse passing assumes is that one may look, speak, and act white/black (whatever that means), but that one has to "pass" disqualifies one from ever being "really" white/black.

However, if Davis is right that an encounter with racial difference need not reduce a racialized Other to an object of consumption, then not all acts of passing are the same. In this regard, passing need not always been reduced to a mask that one wears, but perhaps instead may represent a transitory period in the refashioning of the self. Read in this light, Brubaker comments that in some situations "the line between identifying with and identifying as may be blurred,"⁵⁷ and in its place the pass becomes a transition. Enter Dolezal.

Not Passing at All—A Transracial Identity

As discussed in Chapter One, Dolezal was "revealed" as reverse passing. But what makes her case rhetorically significant is that upon discovery of her reverse pass, Dolezal did not "drop the act." Instead, she asserted that what she was doing was not passing—she was reflecting her authentic, and sincere self. Although she was supposedly born white, Dolezal asserted that through a combination of life experiences and an innate feeling within her deepest sense of self she was black. She was not passing, nor pretending. She was, she asserted, black.

Although Dolezal later declared herself to be transracial, the term itself has a rather unique history. Before its usage to denote a sincere transition, or an internal feeling about one's identity, transracial most commonly referred to situations where a child of one race/ethnicity was adopted and/or raised by parents of another race/ethnicity.⁵⁸ Transracial adoption relied on parents using familiar racial tropes, especially in situations where the adopted child was foreign

⁵⁷ Brubaker, *Trans*, 56.

⁵⁸ Cheng, *Inauthentic*, 74.

born because, in Cheng's words, it "is easier to want things simple, to think that we each have one, definable authentic identity and cultural heritage; it is much harder to think through the implications of cultural hybridity and mixedness."⁵⁹ Transracial then, denoted a sort of forced ethnic passing for the adoptee—authentically one culture, but raised within another.

The other history of the term transracial more closely correlates with Dolezal's usage. In framing her racial identity as transracial, Dolezal taps into, or imagines herself tapping into, a broader emerging sympathy for those who identify as transgender. Such was the argument made by Rebecca Tuvel who wrote a quasi-analytic argument about accepting Dolezal as black precisely because transgender people are accepted as the gender they choose.⁶⁰ One of the first, if not the first uses of the term transracial in this context comes from a 1994 book entitled *The Transsexual Empire* that proposed the concept of a transracial identity as a theoretical boogeyman against the inclusion of trans-women into the category of women.⁶¹ According to its line of reasoning, the audience cannot accept the validity of transgender identities or else they would be forced to accept the validity of transracial identities. Despite the asserted connection between transgender and transracial identities ("if you accept one you must accept the other!"), most commentators have found a way to avoid such cognitive dissonance—to have their cake and eat it too. Virtually the only ones (save for Tuvel and a few others) who make a connection between transgender and transracial do so, according to Brubaker, as a provocation "designed to embarrass the cultural left."⁶²

⁵⁹ Ibid., 81.

⁶⁰ Tuvel's article argues for an extension of rights, sympathy, and support to both transgender and transracial people. Despite this, her article would face immense backlash, including a petition urging the journal *Hypatia* to redact the publication. The article would be end up being defended by self-proclaimed radical feminists who did not accept transgender women. Quizzically, those arguing on behalf of the rights of transgender people viewed Tuvel's article as a stain and demanded it be taken down, while those who argued against the rights of transgender people defended the article. See Rebecca Tuvel, "In Defense of Transracialism," *Hypatia* 32, no. 2 (May 2017): 263–78.

⁶¹ Brubaker, *Trans*, 16.

⁶² Ibid., 4.

Published writing on Dolezal almost unanimously takes the non-existence of a transracial identity as a given. Instead of seeing her reverse passing as revealing some authentic inner identity, Bey and Sakellarides note that many critics see “Dolezal’s decision to enact blackness [as] eerily similar to a blackface performance.”⁶³ Published academic work defending Dolezal is so scarce as to be almost non-existent. However, not all scholarship on Dolezal is restricted to making these sorts of judgements. Rather than joining this public critique of Dolezal, various academic authors have considered other circulating elements of the Dolezal affair only tangentially related to the true or falseness of her purported identity.

In their article, Bey and Sakellarides have argued that Dolezal reveals that blackness is not merely an identity, but a position, and as such it also includes “a lived experience [Dolezal] attained through her unique set of personal and professional circumstances.”⁶⁴ Rather than asking if Dolezal is black, Bey and Sakellarides ask: “when was/is she black?”⁶⁵ From there, Bey and Sakellarides explore the various ways blackness has been produced and policed throughout time, and argue that attending to Dolezal could perhaps productively tell scholars more on these important issues. Ultimately however, Bey and Sakellarides conclude that Dolezal invites more questions than answers.⁶⁶

Whether or not one accepts the validity of a transracial identity, grouping Dolezal whole cloth into reverse passing does a disservice to the complexity of her case. As Chauvin writes, “racial and gender shifts remain symbolic operations whose full epistemological success rest on their own erasure or . . . the universal knowledge and agreement typical of collective secrets.”⁶⁷

⁶³ Bey and Sakellarides, “When We Enter,” 34.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶⁶ Their paper concludes with five questions for future scholars to take up.

⁶⁷ Chauvin, “Possibility, Legitimacy, and the New Ontologies of Choice,” 1326.

It is one thing to declare that one is successful in passing; it is quite another to accept the deployment of technologies of passing (the augmentation of one's physical features, the careful curation of one's wardrobe, the regulation of one's vocalics, etc.) as grounds for a shifting sense of self, producing a new expression of one's identity. Taking for granted that "transracial is not a thing"⁶⁸ therefore ignores that its thingness and non-thingness is not *a priori*. As I show in the chapters that follow, how audiences came to feel about the possibility of a transracial identity was in part an effect of the circulating rhetoric about Dolezal's ethical character.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that practices to maintain and secure the color line have, at least partially, secured resources earmarked for one side of that line over the other. Whether that maintenance was done in the service of racist and discriminatory ideologies or as a remedy to past injustice the maintenance of the color line has supported a racially bipolar world. This racially bipolar world, in turn, has provided social, material, and economic incentives for "racial fraud." Whether or not this narrative of passing or reverse passing explains the case of Rachel Dolezal, I have argued, has been the fulcrum of the controversy from the beginning.

On the one side, a vast number of critics connect Dolezal with reverse passing and thereby accuse her of sequestering resources from minority communities. On the other side, Dolezal and her meager band of allies characterize Dolezal's identity as more than an opportunist power grab. For them, Dolezal is expressing something "real" and "authentic" about herself that is inaccessible to passers. This realness, for them, is the trans- of transracial.

⁶⁸ Such a claim, included here, is often the short quip used to end debate on the subject. Other versions include: "there is no such thing as being transracial," or "transracial identity doesn't exist," and others. Rarely is this quip followed by justification—its utterance acts as both claim and warrant all wrapped into one.

The racial context I have provided in this chapter demonstrates that in the move from a top-down system of racial classification to an era of elective racial identity, the threat of passing continued in a new form—reverse passing. In defending the color line, I have argued, a hypodescent model of whiteness defined white identity by negation. As a result, white identity could never be proven, it could only ever be disproven by various marks of blackness. In the following chapters, particularly in Chapter Five, I will demonstrate that the racial logic at play in hypodescent whiteness (where whiteness takes on a negative identity) has important implications for the successes and failures of Dolezal's ethos appeals.

CHAPTER 3

AN ETHOS IN *FULL COLOR*

After an explosive media tour met with ridicule and outrage, Rachel Dolezal's entry and exit into the public spotlight was beginning to die down. As the clocks ticked closer to Halloween of 2016, the public was in for a trick, or a treat. On October 27th, Dolezal posted an update to her Instagram account that she had secured a book deal with an independent publisher known as BenBella Books.¹ By October 30th, news outlets were kicked once again into a frenzy, and the public was filled once again with near unanimous shock and anger.

One writer on Black Entertainment Television's website could not help but laugh at the title of the book: *In Full Color: Finding My Place in a Black and White World*.² Included in the article was a host of screenshots of tweets taken from Twitter users "dragging Dolezal, and pointing out the egregious white privilege that landed a white woman a book deal talking about black issues."³ As may have been expected, audiences did not take kindly to Dolezal's book deal. In fact, many of them resolved not even to read it—there was no need to hear Dolezal out. The public had, for the most part, made up their mind.

That the public had already made up their mind about Dolezal might suggest that a close rhetorical analysis of *In Full Color* would be a fruitless endeavor. After all, three years later and nothing has really changed for Dolezal. From this reading, Dolezal's autobiography comes much

¹ Rachel Dolezal, "Preorders for my book are up online! Link posted on my IG page. Get yours," *Instagram*, October 27, 2016. Accessed March 30, 2018. <https://www.instagram.com/p/BMFtlOeDm78>.

² Evelyn Diaz, "You Won't Believe the Title of Rachel Dolezal's Upcoming Memoir," *BET*, October 30, 2016, <https://www.bet.com/celebrities/news/2016/10/30/rachel-dolezal-new-memoir.html>.

³ Ibid.

too late, she missed the *Kairotic* moment⁴ of her rhetorical situation a year and a half ago. On the other hand, closely examining *In Full Color* has three potential attractions. First, if Dolezal's arguments in *In Full Color* are not significantly different from those made in her first round of media interviews (and they aren't) then an analysis of *In Full Color* would give us the opportunity to identify and assess the rhetorical strategies at play in Dolezal's appeal for a black identity. Second, the types of appeals Dolezal makes in *In Full Color* shows us something important about the changing state of debate about racialization and racial identity as public discourse becomes increasingly concerned with a rhetor's ethos. Third, analyzing *In Full Color* shows us what happens to Aristotle's concept of ethos when its construction is the means, and the ends, of a text.

In this chapter, I attend to the particular ways Dolezal constructs her ethos in *In Full Color*. In particular, I examine how she builds her *phronêsis* (practical wisdom), *aretê* (moral virtue), and *eunoia* (goodwill), and I explore what form *phronêsis*, *aretê*, and *eunoia* take in the context of appeals to a racialized identity. In addition to building her black ethos, I argue that Dolezal's repeated references to caring for her adopted black siblings/children congeals Dolezal into a black subject by fusing her *phronêsis*, *aretê*, and *eunoia* together. I then read this ethotic fusing as an inversion of the paradigm of standpoint epistemology.⁵ While the successes and failures of this fusing/appeal for different audiences will be more fully explored in Chapter Four, and why this fusing/appeal often fails is the focus of Chapter Five, this chapter lays the necessary groundwork for this thesis's conclusion that Dolezal's appeal to a black identity shares a great deal with those most critical of her.

⁴ See Roger Thompson, "Kairos Revisited: An Interview with James Kinneavy," *Rhetoric Review* 19, no. 1/2 (Autumn 2000): 73-88.

⁵ In Chapter Four, I articulate this inversion of the paradigm of standpoint epistemology with an audience steeped in a paradigm of racial authenticity.

Phronêsis, Aretê, and Eunoia in Racial Identity

In Chapter One, I conducted a careful exploration of ethos as the ethical valence of a rhetor's character. But in the context of Dolezal we must ask what role ethos plays in rhetoric that doesn't simply have a persona, but attempts to persuade the audience to read the rhetor *as* a persona? What role does ethos have in the appeal for inclusion into an identity?⁶ These are precisely the difficult questions at play in the case of Dolezal, who wishes to convince her audience to accept her racial designation as a black woman. One answer might argue that there is no ethos appeal in her rhetoric. In this interpretation, Dolezal's *In Full Color* would be read solely through appeals to logos and pathos. Those supporting this line of thinking may contend that because ethos references the ethical valence of a rhetor's persona, and because the acceptance of Dolezal's persona as black is an intended *effect* of her rhetoric, then Dolezal's ethos can only be read as an *effect* of her rhetorical appeals, rather than a persuasive element *in* that appeal. To conduct this sort of analysis would restrict the rhetorical critic by positioning them as a sort of Roman Emperor judging the "ethics" of a speech—thumbs up or thumbs down? Although valuable in its own way, this interpellative and/or ontological understanding of ethos⁷ is precisely what I want to avoid.

Instead of this answer, I want to provocatively suggest that our culture places a premium on ethos when it comes to one's racial identification. In laying claim to an identity, a rhetor must satisfy certain *ethotic requirements* in that identification. Although the consequences of this connection between a rhetor's ethos and their identity will be explored later in this chapter (in the form of Dolezal's inversion of the paradigm of standpoint epistemology), I reference the ethotic

⁶ Although outside of this thesis, consider, analogously: the appeal by immigrants to be considered a citizen, or, more closely to the argument of this thesis, the appeals by trans* individuals to be included in the category of man/woman.

⁷ I discuss this interpellative and/or ontological turn in the study of ethos at length in Chapter One.

requirements of identity here to suggest that in making her case that she is black, Dolezal attempts to demonstrate that she possesses a black practical wisdom (phronêsis), black virtues (aretê), and goodwill toward black people (eunoia).

A close reading of *In Full Color* reveals, I argue, that all three pillars of ethos are at play. In the process of telling her “autobiography,” Dolezal establishes her phronêsis, aretê, and eunoia with her reading audience. And, in an attempt to demonstrate her blackened phronêsis, aretê, and eunoia, Dolezal utilizes narrative and stylistic elements to present herself as a coherent and congealed black subject.

Phronêsis and Black Cultural Knowledge

Although Aristotle declared ethos the most important element in persuasion, his explanation of its effects and elements left much to be desired. Thankfully, scholars since Aristotle have expanded on his thought to explain the rhetorical function of phronêsis. According to Arild Wæraas and Øyvind Ihlen phronêsis represents a practical wisdom, “good sense, sagacity, expertise, and attempt to come across as intelligent and knowledgeable.”⁸ While I agree with Wæraas and Ihlen’s definition of phronêsis, a too hasty reading of it might obscure the *practical* nature of practical wisdom. Such a confusion, for the reader, may stem from associating phronêsis purely with intelligence.

The trouble with interpreting phronêsis as “intelligence” lies in potentially misleading readers about what exactly such an intelligence includes or concerns. As Craig Smith clarifies, for Aristotle, in law courts this intelligence lies in understanding “the facts of the case and

⁸ Arild Wæraas and Øyvind Ihlen, “Green Legitimation: The Construction of an Environmental Ethos,” *International Journal of Organizational Analysis* 17, no. 2 (May 20, 2009), 89.

demonstrating the ability to form a judgement.”⁹ The last line of Smith’s clarification, “the ability to form a judgement,” crucially highlights that the value of such an intelligence, when it comes to developing the rhetor’s ethos, lies in leading the rhetor to a certain sort of action. Intelligence here is not an abstracted intelligence, it isn’t merely knowledge qua knowledge.¹⁰ The intelligence *phronêsis* refers to is not intelligence in a vacuum, but intelligence *to form a judgement*. In this way, *phronêsis* can be best understood as a practical wisdom associated with acting and doing.¹¹

Because the intelligence associated with *phronêsis* connects most closely with a directed/practical intelligence, we can distinguish *phronêsis*’s ethotic effects from the syllogism or enthymeme of logos. Although the application of logical argument might sometimes enhance a rhetor’s demonstration of practical knowledge,¹² Lois Self argues that *phronêsis* cannot be reduced to merely “a matter of certainty or logical validity.”¹³ Contra to grounding *phronêsis* in logos, grounding *phronêsis* in ethos allows the rhetorical critic to understand that what makes knowledge practical concerns the presentation of the rhetor’s life experiences as a form of embodied wisdom.¹⁴ A rhetor, therefore, does not merely speak about things they believe (knowledge/intelligence), they speak on what they have experienced (wisdom) and impart that

⁹ Craig R. Smith, “Ethos Dwells Pervasively: A Hermeneutic Reading of Aristotle on Credibility,” in *The Ethos of Rhetoric*, ed. Michael J. Hyde, Studies in Rhetoric/Communication (Columbia, S.C: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 10.

¹⁰ The distinction I am establishing here between abstract knowledge and embodied knowledge may be problematized by my reader. Such critiques of the concept of a disembodied knowledge are readily available in the ontological and/or interpellative turn in the study of ethos described above. Should a reader contend this distinction to be spurious, my point that *phronêsis* concerns an embodied knowledge enacted as practical wisdom would still stand. I merely draw attention to this abstract form of knowing in an attempt to clarify what exactly *phronêsis* entails, and to reference the rhetorical means by which a rhetor might shore up an example of that practical wisdom in their rhetoric.

¹¹ Lois S. Self, “Rhetoric and Phronesis: The Aristotelian Ideal,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 12, no. 2 (1979), 133.

¹² Wæraas & Ihlen, “Green Legitimation,” 89.

¹³ Lois, “Rhetoric and Phronesis,” 139.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 140.

wisdom to their audiences. As Smith argues, *phronêsis* “is knowledge based on the speaker’s experience that guides good practice (*eupraxis*) in a contingent, diverse world.”¹⁵

If *phronêsis* represents a type of embodied knowledge, and a practical wisdom, then how might we understand its effect in the case of Dolezal? If, as Smith writes, practical wisdom rests in the rhetor’s “capacity for discerning in the sphere of action the intermediate point where right conduct lies in any given situation,”¹⁶ how might we understand what “right conduct” means in the context of having an identity? To put the question more plainly: what form does *phronêsis* take when a speaker wishes to demonstrate a practical wisdom concurrent with blackness? What is the “right” way to be black, and how does one demonstrate a general aptitude, a practical wisdom, in various “spheres of action” that black bodies might inhabit?

In the paragraphs that follow, I want to suggest that in her appeal to a black identity Dolezal attempts to demonstrate a black *phronêsis* through referencing and reinforcing her attachment to an embodied black cultural knowledge, and therefore a black practical wisdom. When *phronêsis* encounters racial identity, it takes on the form of embedded and situated cultural practices and knowledge. By using various thematic elements including her knowledge of and experience with black hair, aesthetics, music, and familial ties, Dolezal situates herself within the identity coordinates of blackness by appealing to her lived practical wisdom as a black woman.

Phronêsis as Black Hair

One of the central ways Dolezal demonstrates her black *phronêsis* is through her discussions of black hair. In these paragraphs, Dolezal reflects not just on the broader cultural backdrop that privileges white hair over black hair, but also comments on her own experiences sporting that black hair. To these ends, Dolezal deploys a wide-ranging vernacular to discuss not

¹⁵ Smith, “Ethos Dwells Pervasively,” 11.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 10-1.

only the circumstances of wearing black hair, but also showcases an adept knowledge of the various means by which a black woman cares for her hair.

To begin with, Dolezal situates her decision to wear black hair within a broader cultural backdrop that denigrates black hair while simultaneously championing white hair. Dolezal argues throughout *In Full Color* that the denigration of black hair has been a persistent theme in white supremacist and colonizing societies. Commenting on movies, Dolezal writes that: “Nearly all the classically beautiful women portrayed in Western children’s lore—in Walt Disney movies . . . have long, flowing hair.”¹⁷ Dolezal does not situate Disney films as exceptions, but rather evidence of a long-standing norm. She comments that throughout history, European colonial powers have sought to denigrate and cut off the hair of the people they have conquered.¹⁸

From here, Dolezal connects her decision to wear black hair with a broader movement that opposes the denigration of black hair, and simultaneously attempts to demonstrate her black phronêsis by drawing attention to embodied cultural knowledge she has accrued through her years as a black woman. Dolezal sympathizes with black women who have attempted to don their natural hair by writing that: “White people often approached me and said that my hair looked like rope or yarn. They asked if I could wash it, if it hurts, if it was ‘real.’ It was annoying and frustrating, and encouraged me to avoid interacting with them as much as I possibly could.”¹⁹ The larger cultural backdrop of denigrating black hair does not just happen to black women, but rather, Dolezal claims, also happens to her. She has felt the annoyance and frustration of encountering white people who just “don’t get” black hair—her hair. The same

¹⁷ Rachel Dolezal and Storms Reback, *In Full Color: Finding My Place in a Black and White World* (BenBella Books, 2017), 67.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

white people who denigrate her hair, and then have the audacity to touch it without her permission.²⁰

That white people “don’t get” black hair (or black people, for that matter) is a recurring theme in *In Full Color*, and it extends to all aspects of black hair. Later in the book Dolezal explains that when she sought to get a bikini wax, her esthetician complained to her how difficult it was to remove her “African American hair,” and a stylist described her eyebrows as “nappy.”²¹ Contra to those white people who don’t understand black hair, Dolezal presents herself as a black woman who does. Throughout *In Full Color* Dolezal attempts to attest to the fact that not only does she understand the cultural significance of black hair, but that she also demonstrates, through her lived experience, a practical wisdom that lets her care for her, and others’, black hair.

Dolezal attests to a keen familiarity with caring for black hair, and a savvy consumer conscience in doing so. She explains that black hair can often suffer from shrinkage, where hair can shrink 3x in size.²² She also explains that for those black women who want to look after their hair, they need to do more than simply use products designed for white consumers. As Dolezal writes, “most of the shampoos found on grocery store shelves do far more harm to black hair than good, stripping it of its natural oils and drying it out so badly it causes ‘breakage.’”²³ Here, Dolezal attempts to speak as a black woman who has tried to care for her own hair.

Caring for black hair, Dolezal explains, takes a special amount of work. And, she demonstrates more than just a passing familiarity with this care. In a lengthy explanation, Dolezal describes one of her favorite finds in her neighborhood of West Jackson. As she writes:

²⁰ Ibid., 149.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 67.

²³ Ibid., 65.

There was a beauty store in West Jackson dedicated to Black hair care products and in it I found everything I needed to keep my braids looking good. Goldstar Beauty Supply was like Wonderland to me. Bobbles, beads, ribbons, clips, moisturizers, detangling products, gels, relaxers, waxes, hair mayonnaise, wigs, braid hair, wefted hair, weaving caps, weaving needles, weaving thread, and lighters for burning the ends of braids—Goldstar had it all.²⁴

There exist two noteworthy rhetorical maneuvers in this passage that denote attempts by Dolezal to establish her black phronêsis. First, Dolezal clarifies that her interest in Goldstar Beauty Supply stems not from curiosity in black hair, but instead reflects her own wishes and desires to care for her own black hair. Dolezal's persistent claim to an "I" that benefits from the presence of that shop demonstrates that the shop—essential for the maintenance of black hair—let her care for her own hair.

Second, Dolezal reveals an adept understanding of the specific technical know-how of caring for black hair. In explaining the various products Goldstar sells, Dolezal reveals her own indexed inventory of black cultural knowledge. Goldstar doesn't abstractly help black women care for their hair, it does so by selling bobbles, moisturizers, relaxers, waxes, hair mayonnaise, wigs, weaving caps, weaving needles, weaving thread, and lighters for burning the ends of braids. Such an inventory of items exceeds a general understanding of black hair for mere passers, and instead heralds the type of technical knowledge reserved for black women with the practical wisdom for caring for black hair. In this way, Dolezal enacts a form of code-switching, using the language black women would use to care for their own hair, as a means of

²⁴ Ibid., 93.

demonstrating her black phronêsis.²⁵ Here, Dolezal utilizes the same vocalic techniques²⁶ which allowed her to “reverse pass,” and puts those techniques to work in demonstrating her own black practical wisdom.²⁷

Although hair is one of the more salient and explicit examples of Dolezal’s demonstration of black phronêsis, it is not the only one. Peppered throughout *In Full Color* are a litany of other examples of Dolezal displaying an acute awareness of the cultural differences between blacks and whites and aligning herself with the type of practical wisdom reserved for blacks.

Phronêsis as Rhythm and Familial Ties

One avenue Dolezal uses to express her black phronêsis stems from her communal experience in West Jackson, particularly as a Church goer. Dolezal notes that she attended a mixed-racial church and comments on the inherent rhythmic prowess of whites and blacks. As Dolezal explains:

Black people and white people in the South tend to clap a little differently. Whereas Black people are inclined to clap on the second and fourth beats of every note, producing a sound that aligns with the music, white people have a habit of clapping on one and three, which sounds at best sluggish and at worst jarring.²⁸

²⁵ Leanne Dawson, “Passing and Policing: Controlling Compassion, Bodies and Boundaries in Boys Don’t Cry and Unveiled/Fremde Haut,” *Studies in European Cinema* 12, no. 3 (2015), 210.

²⁶ Khaled A. Beydoun and Erika K. Wilson, “Reverse Passing,” *UCLA L. Rev.* 64 (2017), 346.

²⁷ Dolezal completes the cultural knowledge circuit by highlighting that she not only gained her practical wisdom from other black women, but she also put it to work herself. Dolezal references meeting a very skilled hair-stylist named Donna at her Church who offered to style her hair. Gushing, Dolezal exclaims that “[n]ot letting [Donna] braid my hair would have been like passing up an opportunity to discuss politics with Barack Obama” (Dolezal & Reback 93). Here, Dolezal demonstrates not only her experience with caring for black hair (i.e. knowing a particularly skilled hair stylist), but also demonstrates an acute understanding of the role and importance of black hair for black women. Just as Donna braided black hair, Dolezal stresses throughout *In Full Color* that she braided the hair of other black women. Even after her “outing” Dolezal declares, in not so many words, that her expertise in caring for and understanding black hair, one of the sources and manifestations of her black phronêsis, caused other black women to continue to seek her out for her skills as a “kitchen stylist.” (Dolezal & Reback 256).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

Here, Dolezal associates rhythmic ability with a type of practical wisdom gained from, or housed in, blackness (the distinction is not clear).²⁹ Whereas white people might clap on beats one and three, Dolezal found herself “instinctively clapping on two and four.”³⁰ This statement represents an instance of Dolezal attempting to establish her black phronêsis. Dolezal melds a wisdom of music theory (i.e. knowledge of syncopation in music she associates with blackness) with practice (i.e. her own adherence and lived experience of this knowledge). She demonstrates this wisdom not only in terms of witnessing whites clapping differently, but with her, in practice, clapping with the other black church goers. That Dolezal describes her musicality as an *instinct* implies, too, that her black phronêsis develops out of some essentialist kernel at the core of her being.

Another way that Dolezal attempts to demonstrate her black phronêsis emerges from her references to black familial life, and black familial vernacular. As a self-described black mother,³¹ Dolezal draws attention to her practical wisdom in variously culturally significant ways. She explains how she knows her black siblings needed moisturizers that were thicker like cocoa butter or shea butter for their unique skin,³² and draws attention to her styling her sibling’s hair when her parents wouldn’t.³³ In both instances, Dolezal portrays a black familial bond at odds with mainstream (white) American society. Because whites won’t look out for blacks, blacks must look out for each other. Dolezal perfects her presentation of this familial bond as black phronêsis when she discusses the idea of the “the talk” that many black parents have with

²⁹ The lack of distinction between knowledge gained *through* living life as a black woman, and knowledge imminent to *being* a black woman is an important one. The oscillation between the two are often at play in both writings about the standpoint epistemology of black women by various authors (as will be discussed later in this chapter), as well as Dolezal’s own discussion of simultaneously having some innate kernel of blackness in her, and her deepening black identity expressed through time.

³⁰ Ibid., 88.

³¹ Ibid., 172-3.

³² Ibid., 65.

³³ Ibid., 67.

their black parents, one that most whites are completely unaware even takes place.³⁴ In “the talk,” Dolezal explains, black parents reveal to their children very unsatisfactory facts about how they will be viewed by authority figures such as police officers. Dolezal doesn’t just *know* about “the talk,” she puts it into action when she gives it to her “son” Izaiah.³⁵

Just as black parents relate to their children differently than white families, they also utilize a different vernacular. For example, although Dolezal describes her relationship to Izaiah as her “son,” white society would point out that he is, in fact, her adopted brother. As Dolezal explains in the context of her relationship with Spencer Perkins, a civil rights activist whom she would call her dad, “In many Black communities . . . it’s not unusual for people to refer to each other using familial titles, even though they don’t have an actual biological connection.”³⁶ At the same time, Dolezal doesn’t present herself as only knowing abstractly *about* these cultural norms, she also presents herself as one adept in utilizing them. In a footnote, she explains that she didn’t “call Spencer’s wife Nancy ‘Mom.’ That [Nancy] was white may explain why neither one of us was comfortable adopting that level of familiarity with each other.”³⁷ Here Dolezal articulates the black vernacular of “Dad,” “Mom,” “Son,” and “Daughter” with a sort of ineffable knowledge emanating from her blackness. That Dolezal is named “daughter” by Spencer confirms her understanding of the cultural knowledge embedded in the black family. By claiming that she has the wherewithal to know *not* to use such terms when referring to a white woman (Nancy), Dolezal demonstrates a practical wisdom obtainable only through her life experiences as a participant in a black family. With these anecdotes, Dolezal transforms abstract knowledge into embodied and practical black phronêsis.

³⁴ Ibid., 60.

³⁵ Ibid., 177.

³⁶ Ibid., 100.

³⁷ Ibid.

Whether Dolezal writes on black hair, black communal living, or black familial ties, in all cases she attempts to demonstrate a deep familiarity with black cultural knowledge. As a result, Dolezal demonstrates a familiarity with knowledge that is not only read about in books, but also becomes embodied and embedded in her own lived experiences. In this way, Dolezal presents her cultural knowledge, through her rhetoric, as a type of practical wisdom accessible only to black women. Her attempt to frame herself as possessing and enacting that practical wisdom, her black *phronêsis*, is one important pillar of Dolezal's ethos in *In Full Color*.

Aretê, History, and the Struggle

Another way a speaker may establish their ethos, Aristotle argues, concerns the presentation of a speaker's aretê. As already explained, according to Carolyn R. Miller, aretê signifies the speaker's good moral values. But, what exactly is a speaker's "moral values," and how does a rhetor demonstrate their aretê through rhetoric?

According to Wæraas & Ihlen, aretê might also be thought of as referencing a speaker's virtues,³⁸ and Smith argues that in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, virtues are "moving targets established by the audience."³⁹ Although philosophers might ponder about virtues in the abstract, for Aristotle in the *Rhetoric* there are not *a priori* virtues. To be effective, speakers must be willing to adapt their virtues to fit their audiences. If a rhetor's aretê is not some timeless construct, and instead is housed in the audience, then to even talk about a rhetor's aretê may already be a step too abstracted. What we are really talking about, then, is not the rhetor's virtues, but the audience's.

Once a rhetor has deduced what moral values and virtues their audience deems significant, they must find a way for the audience to see their own moral values *reflected* in the

³⁸ Wæraas & Ihlen, "Green Legitimation," 89.

³⁹ Smith, "Ethos Dwells Pervasively," 7.

rhetor. In this sense, the construction of the rhetor's aretê mirrors Kenneth Burke's observations about identification and consubstantiality.⁴⁰ That is, an audience must come to believe that the rhetor holds moral values and virtues, an aretê, that overlaps and/or encompasses the audience's own.⁴¹ How might a rhetor do this?

Rhetorical critics have outlined a number of rhetorical techniques rhetors may utilize in the service of constructing an aretê consubstantial with their audience. Smith argues that word selection, i.e. using language with proper positive and negative connotation, can establish insights into the rhetor's aretê.⁴² Another option comes from the introduction of narrative in the rhetor's speech. Telling narratives where the rhetor explicitly praises some actors and blames others provides case studies for the rhetor to demonstrate their aretê.⁴³ Connecting the two, James L. Kinneavy and Susan C. Warshauer write, "the way one describes virtuous people or acts . . . reflects on one's own character."⁴⁴ What shape, though, does aretê take on in the context of a racialized identity?

If, as Smith argues, aretê emerges in the rhetor as an intended reflection of the audience's own moral values and virtues, then it follows that the established connection between any

⁴⁰ See Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1969), particularly his section on identification, pages 19-23.

⁴¹ Another explanation of this "mirroring" function of aretê (the speaker's virtues are really a reflection of the audience's own) can be found in psychoanalytic theory. According to James S. Baumlin and Tita French Baumlin, "Psychoanalytic theory suggests that ethos can never be more than appearance because it involves superego projection, that is, the audiences' projection of its own internalized images of authority on the speaker . . . [t]he speaker, triggering mechanisms of projection and identification, can gain an audience's almost 'filial' sense of trust." See James S. Baumlin and Tita French Baumlin, "On the Psychology of the Pisteis: Mapping the Terrains of Mind and Rhetoric," in *Ethos: New Essays in Rhetorical and Critical Theory*, ed. James S. Baumlin and Tita French Baumlin, 1st ed, SMU Studies in Composition and Rhetoric (Dallas, Tex: Southern Methodist University Press, 1994), 99-100.

⁴² Smith, "Ethos Dwells Pervasively," 9.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ James L. Kinneavy and Susan C. Warshauer, "From Aristotle to Madison Avenue: Ethos and the Ethics of Argument," in *Ethos: New Essays in Rhetorical and Critical Theory*, ed. James S. Baumlin and Tita French Baumlin, 1st ed, SMU Studies in Composition and Rhetoric (Dallas, Tex: Southern Methodist University Press, 1994), 175.

identity and the presumed virtuous traits embedded in that identity depends upon the audience. The presumed virtues of a white identity (or a black one) would likely differ wildly according to a litany of audiences: black power separatists, white nationalists, liberal cosmopolitans, intersectional feminists, etc.

The presence of aretê in Dolezal's rhetoric provides an interesting problem for rhetorical critics. Insofar as Dolezal attempts to make a case that she *is* black, then what she hopes for is not merely for her audience to see their virtues as consubstantial with Dolezal, but also more provocatively to see the consubstantiality of those virtues as supporting evidence for Dolezal's entry into a black identity.⁴⁵ In this way, analyzing *In Full Color* for Dolezal's aretê might be thought of as revealing a sort of imagined second-persona⁴⁶ of a black audience's moral values/virtues, as opposed to corresponding necessarily to some "real" or "actual" black audience that can be located in the world. Viewed this way when aretê comes in contact with racial identity, the form it takes becomes a series of imagined virtues *tied* to the histories and lived experiences of that identity. In the case of Dolezal's appeals, aretê takes two forms:

⁴⁵ An important question worth asking here is who is the "their" that Dolezal's speech aims to align her aretê with? That is to say, what audience does Dolezal's text appeal to? Given Dolezal's professed antagonistic relationship with white society (explored in-depth at the conclusion of this chapter and, at parts, in Chapter 4), I believe that the "their" being referenced here is Dolezal's imagined, and unified, black community. I state this for two reasons. First, because Dolezal's politics of authenticity denigrates and devalues the opinions of white people. In Dolezal's politics, the preferences and values of white people are associated with only partial distorted truth. Thus, it would be odd if Dolezal's aimed goal was to be recognized by the very identity that she frames as antagonistic to her own. Perhaps we might conclude this is some master-trick of an expert rhetor but given Dolezal's inability to succeed in persuading close to any audiences about the potentiality of a transracial identity (see Chapter Four), I think this reading of Dolezal's motives not only is empirically disproven, but also verges on being conspiratorial. Second, I think Dolezal's appeals to black phronêsis above demonstrate that the aretê she draws attention to is consubstantial with an imagined black community. If her audience was an imagined white community, she would not go to such lengths to demonstrate her specialized, embodied, practical wisdom. Once again, although not impossible, it would be quite odd and cumbersome to construct part of one's ethos for imagined black audiences and part of one's ethos for imagined white audiences (especially in a paradigm which understands those audiences as antagonistic to one another).

⁴⁶ See Edwin Black, "The second persona." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 56, no. 2 (1970): 109-119.

Dolezal's acknowledgement of a racist history in past and present, and her championing of a broader unified black struggle against that history.

Black Aretê as Form

Before analyzing these dual aspects of Dolezal's attempted construction of her aretê, a note on form. Dolezal references the racist history of the United States and celebrates moments of black resistance to that history throughout *In Full Color*, sometimes in ways that feel oddly placed. As the reader progresses through a linear autobiography of Dolezal's life (beginning first with her childhood, into her adult years, and concluding with her "forced outing" as a white woman), a racist history and a resilient black struggle against that history emerges almost incoherently, and non-linearly, next to it. At one moment, Dolezal discusses how her parents considered her to be a burden on her family, and in the next she begins to educate her audiences about the Biblical story of Ham and its connection to religious discourse that justified slavery.⁴⁷ In another moment, Dolezal describes how her family considered her adopted brother Ezra the "best" of her black siblings. Immediately following this, Dolezal explains that Ezra would have passed the "brown paper bag test," a mythologized method used to determine if a black person was allowed entry into various institutions of civil society.⁴⁸

This rapid oscillation between Dolezal's own life story and a protracted racist history and/or instances of black struggle against that history occurs throughout *In Full Color*. These momentary diversions from Dolezal's life story to moments of education about black history and/or black resistance are not simply moments for Dolezal to build a general aretê as a speaker, but also crucially, at the level of form, serve to construct her black aretê in two ways. First, this temporal dissonance (skipping from a linear narrative of Dolezal's life into Biblical times, back

⁴⁷ Dolezal & Reback, *In Full Color*, 6.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

again, then jumping to the Civil Rights era, then back again, etc.) confirms Dolezal as an agent within a broader history of black resistance. Michael Leff describes this rhetorical maneuver as a blending of the present into the sacred present,⁴⁹ and Dolezal does just that: each moment of her life becomes endowed with the significance of hundreds of years of black resistance. A historical continuity of a unified black spirit of resistance becomes infused with her own life, and therefore demonstrates the significance of her black *aretê*. As Dolezal explains, for her, blackness means “fighting for freedom, equality, and justice for people of African heritage around the world.”⁵⁰

Second, the temporal dissonance in Dolezal’s display of black *aretê* creates an illusory stasis in Dolezal’s claim to blackness. Dolezal, like the rest of us, was not a fully-formed ethical subject at the moment of her birth. The framework of temporal dissonance, in which Dolezal traces her autobiography within the contours of a “more-of-the-same” narrative arc of racist history, presents her moral values and virtues as shockingly durable across time. As a result, audiences don’t get much sense of moral movement. By intersplicing her childhood with these temporal diversions Dolezal allows her present day moral values stand in for, say, 4-year old Dolezal. As a result, these diversions from her life story into anecdotes for her black *aretê* has the rhetorical effect of establishing that Dolezal possesses a stable and unified black psyche.

Various manifestations of this repressed “authentic” black identity are present in *In Full Color*: Dolezal’s claim that, as a child, she painted herself in brown rather than peach crayons,⁵¹ that she had an instinct to hide her artwork celebrating blackness from the critical gaze of her family,⁵² and that she was fascinated from an early age with black athletes,⁵³ just to name a few.

⁴⁹ Michael Leff, “Dimensions of Temporality in Lincoln’s Second Inaugural,” *Communication Reports* 1, no 1 (1988): 26-31.

⁵⁰ Dolezal & Reback, *In Full Color*, 271.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 23.

The intended rhetorical effect is not that Dolezal is trying to “show off” (though as we will discuss in the coming chapters how it does just that), but rather that each example of Dolezal’s aretê emerges from a persistent, stable, and blackened stream of consciousness. From the very beginning, the reasoning goes, Dolezal had a black aretê—these diversions into black morals and virtues are simply the way she thinks.

In addition to form, Dolezal builds her black aretê at the level of content by drawing attention to a history of racism and by discussing examples of black struggle against that racist history. When it comes to historical examples about racism, Dolezal’s anecdotes abound.

Black Aretê as a Racist History and Righteous Resistance

First, Dolezal showcases an impressive understanding of the history of race and the implementation of schemas of racialization. As already explained above, Dolezal draws attention to the Biblical tradition that was used to justify slavery. Additionally, Dolezal in the very beginning of her book writes that: “race has never been so easily defined . . . in 1815, Thomas Jefferson struggled to determine ‘what constituted a mulaatto,’ . . . In the 1896 case of Plessy v. Ferguson the U.S. Supreme Court . . . established the ‘one drop rule.’”⁵⁴ She goes on to discuss how this system of racialization was put into practice in the form of racial slurs like “blue black,” in which the blueness of one’s gums were imagined as a pure-African bloodline.⁵⁵ These examples serve as the backdrop to demonstrate Dolezal’s virtuous expertise. Whereas later examples of citing her fidelity to resistance to anti-black racism are the proper means that Dolezal uses to establish her black aretê, these anecdotes on the logic of racialization demonstrate Dolezal’s understanding of the broader backdrop that determines one’s racial identity.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 2-3.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 55.

In addition to a history of racialization, Dolezal draws attention to the history of racism broadly in the United States. Sometimes Dolezal writes about racism in broad brushstrokes. For example, in addition to her discussion of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, Dolezal situates prominent Supreme Court cases within the racist after-life of slavery including Jim Crow,⁵⁶ the school to prison pipeline,⁵⁷ and contemporary instances of indiscriminate racism conducted by the police against black people including the murders of Amadou Diallo and Trayvon Martin.⁵⁸ These examples allow Dolezal to argue on behalf of a powerful continuity of anti-black racism across American society.

At other times, Dolezal's knowledge of the racist history of the United States verges on esoteric and abstract. For example, Dolezal notes that although Lincoln enacted the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1st, 1863, "the news didn't arrive in the Lone Star State, where there were more than 250,000 slaves, until June 19th, 1865."⁵⁹ In another instance, Dolezal points out that Mississippi dragged its feet after the Federal invocation of MLK Jr. Day, and instead celebrated it dually with the birthday of Robert E. Lee.⁶⁰ I note these examples as esoteric because their presence has little bearing on Dolezal's overall autobiography (at no point in her story does she discuss living in either Texas or Mississippi). Her invocation of them, rather than serving as an interesting "fact" for her audience to know, serves to shore up her black *aretê* as someone deeply invested in understanding the depths of racism across American society.

In addition to outright condemning a legacy of racism, Dolezal draws attention to moments of black resistance. In these cases, Dolezal highlights the names of famous black

⁵⁶ Ibid., 57.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 175.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 177.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 152.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 81.

leaders and discusses academic research that highlights both the prevalence of racism, and also how to combat it. By naming a large number of famous black revolutionaries, activists, leaders, philosophers, artists, and writers, Dolezal attempts to build her black *aretê*. At least as Dolezal perceives it, the moral values and virtues these individuals hold and represent are beyond reproach. Therefore, we ought to read her wholesale embrace of their political project as a type of *aretê* by proxy comparable to Smith's insights about narrative's effect on *aretê* above: because their virtues are unquestionable, and I endorse them, I therefore endorse and represent those same virtues.

To these ends, Dolezal draws attention to various famous black intellectuals. Dolezal proudly declares that in her studies, she learned all about the lives of "Harriet Tubman, Nat Turner, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcom X."⁶¹ Her interest in these black public intellectuals and black activists is not relegated to the times of the Civil Rights Era but extend far after. Commenting on the racially charged climate after the O.J. Simpson Murder trial, and Louis Farrakhan's Million Man March on Washington, Dolezal gushes over other speakers that day including "Maya Angelou, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King III, Cornel West, Jesse Jackson, Stevie Wonder, and Marion Barry."⁶² For Dolezal, these prolific black activists represent a keen awareness of racial injustice, and a model for Dolezal to emulate in her own quest for black liberation.⁶³

Dolezal's interest in black liberation is not restricted to those black activists who put their bodies on the line, but also includes academic intrigue in the depths and pervasiveness of racism in the United States. To these ends, she cites a variety of research by scholars who discuss

⁶¹ Ibid., 63.

⁶² Ibid., 73.

⁶³ Ibid., 271.

various theories of how racism takes shape at an interpersonal level.⁶⁴ She also draws attention various academic books and articles she has read that deal with America's racist history.⁶⁵

In almost all cases, Dolezal diverges from the central theme of her book (her own autobiography) when she lists this expansive knowledge of racism and resistance to it. Crucially these diversions are not present to convince her audience to accept and/or adopt black values. Dolezal does not list all these examples to make the case for a lay audience or a reluctant reader to appreciate and/or applaud black history, resistance, or cultural excellence. For any audience that might be willing to entertain or sympathize with Dolezal's desire to enter into a black identity, they most likely would already have known about the vast majority of Dolezal's anecdotes of either racist history or black liberation. And, the one's they didn't know likely didn't change what they already thought about racist history or black liberation broadly.

If we accept this claim, then it must follow that these diversions serve an alternative rhetorical purpose. I want to suggest that the function of these moments of pseudo-consciousness raising are, instead, moments of *conscience display*. The point, as expressed above, is not for Dolezal to educate her audiences to acknowledge the pervasiveness of racism or the resilience of black resistance. In fact, Dolezal's imagined audience is likely already in-the-know. Instead, the point is to demonstrate Dolezal's black *aretê*.

⁶⁴ Dolezal discusses the history of microaggressions and credits the invention of the concept to in 1970 to Chester M Pierce. After this, she discusses the effects of these microaggressions, including further scholarship by clinical psychologist Na'im Akbar in 1991 and the cumulative impact of these microaggressions on the mental health of black people (Dolezal & Reback 61-2).

⁶⁵ She notes how she read books such as Dr. John Perkin's *Beyond Charity* and *More than Equals* (Dolezal & Reback, 73-5). She cites the scholarship of Kimberlé Crenshaw and her theory of intersectionality (Dolezal & Reback, 150). She references a 2014 Study by Philip Atiba Goff about how black children are thought of as less innocent and viewed as adults significantly sooner than their same-aged white counterparts, and discusses research by Andrew Todd at the University of Iowa who revealed that people associate violence significantly more often with images of Black boys as young as five than their same-aged white counterparts (Dolezal & Reback, 140). Such a listing attempts to demonstrate that Dolezal has critically thought about the stakes of racism in the United States and that defers to that intellectual tradition dedicated to expunging it. In this way, each of these references ought to be read as an attempt by Dolezal to develop her own black *aretê*.

Eunoia and Putting One's Body on the Line

Eunoia, as argued by Miller above, reference's the speaker's goodwill for their audience. That a speaker possesses a knowledge of virtues (*aretê*), and a practical wisdom in applying those virtues (*phronêsis*), means next to nothing if a speaker does not demonstrate that they are ethical *for this audience* (eunoia). Although none of these three pillars are necessarily more important than the others, eunoia most closely relates to the immediacy of the rhetor's intent. In this sense, whereas the other elements in ethos denote the ethical prowess of a rhetor, eunoia alone points to the ethical *intent* of the rhetor. In attempting to display their eunoia a rhetor must not merely show that they know what their audience wants, but rather must show that they will *try* to satisfy their audience's needs. In this sense, in demonstrating eunoia a rhetor shows that they want nothing but the best for their audience.⁶⁶

Understood this way, eunoia might be thought of as a sort of benevolence the speaker has for her audience. As Smith writes, a rhetor showing eunoia must take on the appearance that they wish "good for others for their sake."⁶⁷ Similarly, Roger D. Cherry writes that in doing so the rhetor must showcase their "approval, sympathy, and readiness to help" that audience.⁶⁸ In short, goodwill. Rhetor's who successfully demonstrate their eunoia through speech might be described thusly: sincere, well-meaning, compassionate, or magnanimous. Regardless of whether they succeed or fail, they are imagined having tried—their heart was in the right place.

When eunoia encounters racialized identity, the racialized audience in question becomes the one identified with. Speaking before an audience of, say, Nepalese people, a rhetor would demonstrate and develop their eunoia when they construct themselves as the type of speaker who

⁶⁶ Wæraas & Ihlen, "Green Legitimation," 89.

⁶⁷ Smith, "Ethos Dwells Pervasively," 9.

⁶⁸ Roger D. Cherry, "Ethos Versus Persona: Self-Representation in Written Discourse," *Written Communication* 15, no. 3 (July 1998), 388.

wishes nothing but goodwill for Nepalese people. Where Dolezal complicates things, however, is the implied connection between identifying *as* and goodwill *toward* a racialized identity. In making the case that she is a black woman, Dolezal attempts to demonstrate her goodwill toward black people. Although never fully explained why such a demonstration of black eunoia would render Dolezal a black person, such a connection is heavily implied when Dolezal devotes large sections of *In Full Color* to do precisely this. If we accept that the audience's identification of Dolezal as black is Dolezal's intended aim, then each time Dolezal lauds her own accomplishments, or examples of her trying to fight for the rights of black people, then we can read into the text an imagined connection between fighting for black people and *being* black. In casting black and white as polarities whose interests are inherently opposed, then by presenting herself as "for black people," Dolezal's rhetoric implies that she must therefore BE black. In the next section, I explore this this line of thinking in what I term as Dolezal's inversion of standpoint epistemology. For now, in this section I demonstrate *how* Dolezal builds her black eunoia.

To these ends, Dolezal demonstrates her black eunoia in two ways. First, by drawing attention to an impressive and lengthy list of her own struggles against racism including: her experience as an educator, her time spent organizing for the rights of black people, and quotidian moments where she challenged racism. In these cases, Dolezal attempts to demonstrate her black eunoia by demonstrating that she is "down with the struggle." Dolezal puts her body on the line, she devotes every waking moment of her free time to fighting racism, and she puts the well-being of black people as her life's mission. Second, by drawing on the testimony of other black people to attest for Dolezal's goodwill, Dolezal presents various other black people to "vouch" for her sincere attachment to blackness, and for her benevolence toward black people.

Eunoia as Organizing Against Racism

Dolezal's own attempts to demonstrate her black eunoia begin with her education and her description of her life as a student.⁶⁹ From there, Dolezal builds her eunoia through discussing her activism as a teacher. After receiving her graduate education from Howard University, Dolezal took on two teaching positions as an adjunct professor: one at North Idaho College (NIC), another at Eastern Washington University (EWU). At EWU Dolezal taught African and African American Art, a course that had been on hiatus for five years until her arrival.⁷⁰

In Dolezal's retelling of her history, her passion for righting the historical legacy of racism and her love for black people attracted the attention of EWU's few black students. Motivated by her teaching, those students worked with Dolezal to establish the university's first Black Student Union (BSU).⁷¹ However, because Dolezal was not a full-time professor she was prohibited from being the newly established BSU's faculty sponsor. Despite this bureaucratic technicality, BSU students found Dolezal so impressive that they had a "student-run coup" that ousted the official faculty sponsor and named Dolezal the new faculty advisor.⁷² The rhetorical effect of this anecdote serves to establish Dolezal's ethos as one not only committed to doing

⁶⁹ Commenting on her time at Belhaven University, Dolezal recalls being elected as the Black Student Association's (BSA) historian. Dolezal recalls how she took the role more seriously than any of the BSA's historians in the past. Every club meeting Dolezal would educate her club members about pivotal moments in black history on the days they would meet. In addition to educating her fellow club members, Dolezal took her role as an educator seriously outside of BSA meetings. Motivated by her membership in the BSA, Dolezal tells her audience that she worked to increase campus recruitment and retention of black students and organized a campus conference on racial reconciliation for neighboring black and white communities. In her own words, "at Belhaven, I also developed a radar for anything that seemed inequitable to or dismissive of the college's Black students and committed myself to changing it," including, she proudly shared, pushing for the college to make Martin Luther King Jr. Day a school holiday. These examples serve to demonstrate Dolezal's eunoia by showing her benevolence towards black people. As Dolezal puts it, her decision to join the BSA was not an attempt to merely pad her resume—she went above and beyond what was expected of her because she was deeply invested in helping black students, black people, and fighting racial inequality writ large. (Dolezal & Reback 80-1).

⁷⁰ Dolezal & Reback, *In Full Color*, 146.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 192.

whatever is within her own power to help others, but more importantly one committed to raising another generation of activists, and empowering black youths to name and resist racism.

As an instructor, Dolezal writes that “the most enjoyable aspect of working at NIC and EWU was getting to interact with students. I . . . [was] always looking forward to the ‘Aha!’ moments they had when discovering African history’s impact on humanity’s broader story, the contemporary realities of racism, and that science that proves race to be a social construct with no basis in biology.”⁷³ To reach these “Aha!” moments, Dolezal went above and beyond what was expected of her in teaching her lesson plans. In this way, she worked to demonstrate her black eunoia by portraying herself as someone deeply concerned with the wellbeing of black people.

To do this, Dolezal portrays herself as a rhetor who takes a “hands-on” approach to education. For example, when her class discussed *Brown v. Board of Education*, Dolezal proudly declares that she “didn’t just make them read about [it] in a textbook,”⁷⁴ she took her students to a local high school to tutor students of color and help them graduate. In Dolezal’s own words, her goal was “not just to educate [her] students but also to change their lives.”⁷⁵ As Dolezal proudly notes in an encounter she had with a black student who was shocked by the sheer amount of time she spends fighting for black people, when responding to the question “What do you do for fun?” Dolezal declared, “My work is fun.”⁷⁶

Toward these ends, throughout *In Full Color* Dolezal lists an impressive resume of activist accomplishments and personalized anecdotes to detail the depths of her goodwill to black people, and how she has put her own body on the line. While teaching and living in Coeur

⁷³ Ibid., 147.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 165.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 198.

d'Alene, Idaho, Dolezal worked with the Human Rights Education Institute curating their art exhibits and educating children about the importance of social justice.⁷⁷ While her institutional responsibilities were modest, Dolezal proudly notes that she took her position more seriously than they had intended and went above and beyond what was expected of her. For example, during Black History Month she conducted various outreach programs to spread awareness about racial injustices against black people.⁷⁸ In Dolezal's reflections, the organization pushed back against her outreach because it attracted the attention of an unsavory caste of Neo-Nazis, the KKK, and other racists. To Dolezal's shock, the Board of Directors informed her that "[she] was too focused on Black rights."⁷⁹ Despite this pushback from her boss, Dolezal continued to protest and agitate racists. She recalls one time when she encountered eight members of the White Knights branch of the KKK, including a Grand Wizard. Incensed, Dolezal recounts how she rushed home, grabbed her art work, and wrote over it to make a make-shift picket-sign as a counter-protester.⁸⁰ These anecdotes help to construct Dolezal's black eunoia by portraying her as someone deeply invested in the wellbeing of the black community. In putting her own bodily safety on the line Dolezal situates herself as a rhetor whose black eunoia knows few bounds.

In addition to putting her own safety on the line, Dolezal portrays herself as an activist for black people in their most trying times. In particular, Dolezal portrays herself as someone organizing not simply to raise awareness about racism, but also to seek material redress for black people, and to deliver justice to victims of police brutality. Moving from Coeur d'Alene, Idaho to Spokane, Washington, Dolezal quickly took up an activist role to help black people. She recalls how one of the first things she did in Spokane, inspired by the growing Black Lives Matter

⁷⁷ Ibid., 147.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 159.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 163.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 167.

movement, was to seek an open seat on Spokane's Office of Police Ombudsman Commission⁸¹ where she would serve as part of a civilian-watchdog group. From there, Dolezal was urged by other activists to run and become the organizing head of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's (NAACP) Spokane Chapter.⁸² Once again, Dolezal frames her black eunoia as pushing beyond what is expected of her.⁸³ To those ends, Dolezal notes that she organized Black Lives Matter Marches.⁸⁴

In putting her body on the line (as exemplified by her clashes with KKK in Idaho) and in seeking to protect other black bodies (as exemplified by her participation in Spokane's NAACP Chapter), Dolezal connects her black eunoia explicitly with her claims to black identity. As she writes, she "didn't work for the cause from the outside as a white ally, but from the inside as a Black leader."⁸⁵ Whereas whites might work for "the cause," Dolezal's anecdotes of black eunoia attempt to demonstrate that the depths of her work for "the cause" could only come from someone who had an unflinching love for black people, and therefore, an unflinching love for herself.

Dolezal also demonstrates her black eunoia using examples from her personal life. In one anecdote, Dolezal recalls a time she was working at Capital Street Ministries and observed an interaction between a young black girl and a white volunteer. Dolezal writes that she remembers that the young black girl was enchanted with the white intern's hair and told the intern that she wished she had beautiful hair like hers. The white intern thanked her and left. Infuriated about

⁸¹ Ibid., 189.

⁸² Ibid., 193.

⁸³ Dolezal recalls how she aimed to breathe new life into the chapter when she writes that she "had a grand vision. I wanted to return the focus of the Spokane chapter to the five NAACP Game Changers, the most urgent issues facing Black America: economic sustainability, education, health, public safety and criminal justice, and voting rights and political representation" (Dolezal & Reback, 193).

⁸⁴ Ibid., 192-5.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 148.

the damaging effect this encounter could have on the young black girl's self-esteem, Dolezal writes that she walked over to her and said: "Jessica, your hair is so beautiful. I wish I had *your* [her emphasis] hair."⁸⁶ Not only does the anecdote serve to demonstrate that Dolezal was observant enough to see something problematic about the verbal exchange between the intern and the child, but the anecdote also demonstrates the depths of Dolezal's goodwill to black people. Rather than just being an observer of a racist world, Dolezal intervened as an actor to change it.

Dolezal's desire to intervene and actively work against a racist world manifested itself in other everyday acts of resistance. In Dolezal's own words, her desire to resist a racist world (and a racist worldview) was one of the primary reasons she began to take steps to present herself as black, and to distance herself from the phenotypical or cultural markers of whiteness. For example, commenting on her decision to adopt black hair, Dolezal writes that, "[a]t a certain point, I began to feel that if I didn't wear my hair in braids I was reinforcing European beauty standards among the young girls in the community I lived in, and that was not something I wanted to support."⁸⁷ As a sort of parallel example to her Jessica anecdote above, Dolezal frames her decision to wear black hair as an everyday moment of resistance, and therefore a demonstration of her black eunoia.

By collapsing appearance into an act of defiance, Dolezal closely weds mere survival, being seen as black and living, as a form of resistance against a racist world that wishes to harm black people. Dolezal recalls that she would often be asked what her race was, and when black people asked the question they would often be much more comfortable with Dolezal if she told

⁸⁶ Ibid., 96.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

them she was black.⁸⁸ This was, according to Dolezal, the very beginning of her journey away from self-designating as a white woman. By framing her decision to be seen *as* black as an example of her own care for black audiences, as a way she could support black people and personally rebel against a racist world, Dolezal situates her very identification as black as the basis of her black eunoia. In her own words, “why would a white person ever want to pass for black . . . One reason: love.”⁸⁹

This love and concern for black people extends to her identification with blackness itself. As Dolezal explains in the conclusion to her autobiography, she believes that in accelerating the breakdown of stable racial categories (either in terms of a biracial identity or her own crossing of the color line) racism will be challenged, rather than reinforced.⁹⁰ According to this logic, not only is Dolezal’s black eunoia proof of her black identity, her black identity also becomes proof of her black eunoia.

In addition to Dolezal’s own attempts at demonstrating her black eunoia, *In Full Color* also includes instances of other black people vouching for Dolezal’s credentials and goodwill towards black people. The testimony of black people becomes a conduit through which Dolezal’s own black eunoia is not only enhanced, but also shielded from criticism. As members of the black community, the testimonial of these black people completes the circuit and serves as the functional proof of Dolezal’s black eunoia. In this way, Dolezal takes Kinneavy & Warschauer’s observation on eunoia, that the speaker must “identify with the audience . . . sharing and affirming their prejudices”⁹¹ a step further, by including that same audience affirming (and therefore sanctioning) that speaker’s identification.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 84.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 148.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 276.

⁹¹ Kinneavy & Warshauer, “From Aristotle to Madison Avenue,” 176.

Eunoia as Testimony

Black testimony in *In Full Color* takes on two forms. The first happens in the very beginning of the book in a preface written by civil rights activist Albert Wilkerson, Jr. and the second occurs whenever Dolezal mentions how impressed black people were with her art. In the first instance, *In Full Color* opens with an extended preface written by Albert Wilkerson Jr., Dolezal's black "father." Although Wilkerson's own identity is not up for debate in the same way that Dolezal's is, he never-the-less begins the preface by demonstrating his own black ethos by drawing attention to his experience with white supremacy growing up in Birmingham, Alabama.⁹² In this opening, Wilkerson draws attention to his first-hand-knowledge of racism's brutal sting by describing how he had to navigate police encounters (phronêsis), his connection with the black struggle broadly (aretê), and a number of his activist accomplishments (eunoia). As a result, Wilkerson builds his own ethos to testify on Dolezal's behalf.

And testify he does. One particularly shocking line begins mid-way through the preface when Wilkerson writes that as a result of his own reading and activism he "came to appreciate others—Frederick Douglas, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcom X . . . to name a few—who, by their example and by the power of their convictions fought racial bias and prejudice."⁹³ A sentence later, and Wilkerson declares that "Rachel Dolezal is also such a person."⁹⁴ Wilkerson's praise for Rachel continues when he writes that: "If this country had more people like Rachel who were concerned with doing good things for people and achieve equity for all, it would be a much better place to live and raise children."⁹⁵ In equating Dolezal's black eunoia with the likes of Frederick Douglas, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcom X, a cast whose respective black eunoia

⁹² Dolezal & Reback, *In Full Color*, xiii.

⁹³ Ibid., xiv.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., xv.

is beyond question, Wilkerson's testimony serves to portray Dolezal's goodwill as exemplary. In drawing attention, in particular, to the work that Dolezal does (an important element of her black eunoia described above), Wilkerson primes the reader to be more accepting of Dolezal's appeal later in *In Full Color*.

It is well known that should a rhetor speak too highly of their own accomplishments that they risk being perceived as a braggart.⁹⁶ To remedy this, Aristotle recommended that "since there are sometimes things to be said about oneself that are invidious or prolix . . . it is best to attribute them to another person,"⁹⁷ hence why rhetors are often introduced by another who lists their accomplishments rather than the rhetor listing those accomplishments themselves. In this way, Wilkerson's testimonial on Dolezal's ethical character is important chronologically. By being the first thing readers encounter, Wilkerson's preface prepares the audience to be more receptive to Dolezal's own ethos appeals later in the autobiography. As Wilkerson writes, "[Dolezal] looked Black, and her vibe felt Black, but that's not what drew me to her. It was her work."⁹⁸ This statement completes the rhetorical purpose of Wilkerson's testimony by creating the exigence for Dolezal's intervention. According to Wilkerson, Dolezal looked black and her work was good for black people. The otherwise disparate nature of these two descriptions of Dolezal are drawn together in her own ethos appeals above whereby her work (eunoia) becomes an ethotic proof of her entry into blackness.

Another way that Dolezal utilizes the testimony of black people to establish her black eunoia comes from anecdotes surrounding her art. In these anecdotes, Dolezal encounters curators and artists initially skeptical of Dolezal's motives who, upon seeing her artwork, warm

⁹⁶ Smith, "Ethos Dwells Pervasively," 6.

⁹⁷ Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, trans. George Alexander Kennedy, 2nd ed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3.17.16.

⁹⁸ Dolezal & Reback, *In Full Color*, xv.

up to her and defend her. The effect of these anecdotes become a proxy to Dolezal's own imagined audience. In one example, Dolezal recalls how she tried to display her artwork at the Smith Robertson Museum and Cultural Center in West Jackson. The confused curator told her it was a black art museum, "What could you possibly show me that I would be interested in?" In Dolezal's account, after showing him her signature pieces, "AFRIKA," the curator "leaned back in his chair and said, 'Wow.' When I got to the end of my ten-slide presentation, he surprised me with his enthusiasm. 'So,' he said, 'we're going to need at least fifteen mid-to-large-sized pieces for the show.'"⁹⁹ The reaction of the art curator rhetorically stands in for Dolezal's reading audience. Just as the curator was initially skeptical, but ultimately persuaded by Dolezal's artwork, so too does Dolezal imagine her reading audience's reaction to her display of black eunoia.¹⁰⁰

Siblings, Fusion, and Standpoint Epistemology

Hitherto, I have written about how Dolezal has attempted to construct each of the three pillars of ethos in isolation from one another. However there have been instances where Dolezal's appeals at each of the pillars of ethos (*phronêsis*, *aretê*, and *eunoia*) have blended into one another. Consider for example, the case of black hair. As I explained above, Dolezal relays to her audience the intricate and specialized practical wisdom she has developed by wearing and caring for black hair (*phronêsis*). At the same time, Dolezal connects her practical wisdom in caring for black hair with a knowledge of the broader cultural denigration of blackness, and therefore situates her anecdotes about black hair as evidence of her good moral values (*aretê*).

⁹⁹ Ibid., 83.

¹⁰⁰ In another instance, Dolezal notes that she would often spend time with Spencer Perkins, a leader in the racial-reconciliation movement. In the middle of one of their conversations, Perkins pointed to a tragic picture of a black mother and her baby, "I bet your art doesn't look like that," Spencer exclaimed, "Actually, that's exactly the kind of art I do" Dolezal retorted. Dolezal recalls that Perkins was absolutely blown away by her painting, and encouraged her to continue her art even in the face of white students in her art classes who mocked her for painting black subjects (Dolezal & Reback 78).

Further still, Dolezal articulates her decision to wear black hair with a performative resistance against racism, and therefore presents her black hair as an example of her goodwill to black people (eunoia).

That the three pillars of ethos intersect with each other shouldn't surprise us. Theoretically, such an intersection would mirror the insights of Carolyn Miller and Arash Abizadeh who declare (Chapter One) that the pisteis (ethos, logos, pathos) reflect one another. More practically, any anecdote a rhetor might use in establishing their ethos might contribute to her ethos in more way than one; examples of *pure* eunoia totally detached from aretê or phronêsis, or examples of *pure* phronêsis totally detached from aretê or eunoia, etc. are more likely the exception than the rule.

Upon closer inspection, however, I want to contend that there is something more going on here. In this section, I argue that Dolezal fuses the three pillars of ethos together in her construction of her claim to black identity. While Dolezal's discussion of black hair is one means by which this fusing happens, a more prominent one stems from how Dolezal uses her adopted black siblings as a cohering point in *In Full Color's* narrative structure to subtend her claim to a black identity. Dolezal's relationship to her siblings becomes a rhetorical anchor that organizes and explains Dolezal's entry into a black identity, and her possession of a black phronêsis, a black aretê, and a black eunoia. This fusing shows two things. First, Dolezal imagines her viewing audience as one that implicitly or explicitly supports the paradigm of standpoint epistemology and the wedding of identity and ethos. And second, Dolezal's appeal to ethos *through* her narrative frame of her siblings reveals that Dolezal inverts the paradigm of standpoint epistemology even as her rhetoric gives it coherence.

Smith argues that, when it comes to the rhetorical construction of ethos, “Narration . . . can reveal character depending on how the story is told.”¹⁰¹ Viewed this way, Dolezal’s decision to highlight her relationship with her adopted black siblings not only enhances her ethos at the level of *eunoia* (such a connection is almost banal: her love for siblings becomes a proxy for her love for black communities generally, and in an attempt to protect the former the more she cares for the latter) but also, crucially, intertwines her display of *eunoia* as the *genesis* of her black *phronêsis* and black *aretê*. Specifically, Dolezal’s love of her adopted black siblings not only becomes a mechanism by which Dolezal shores up her black *eunoia*, but also becomes the bridge between that black *eunoia* and the construction of herself as a black woman (singularized and possessing a black *phronêsis* and a black *aretê*).

From the very beginning when her parents adopted her black siblings, Dolezal narratively frames herself as their guardian. Neglected by their parents, Dolezal notes that the responsibilities for caring for these young black babes was left squarely on her shoulders.¹⁰² Left to care for them, Dolezal refused to let her parents’ antiquated beliefs about black people be Dolezal’s own guide. Whereas her parents would mercilessly cut her siblings hair, Dolezal went to the library to learn how to care for black hair, so she could braid her sibling’s hair.¹⁰³ In this way, Dolezal connects her care for her black siblings (black *eunoia*) with her adopting a black *phronêsis* explained at length above. Dolezal substantiates her care for her siblings as the *bridge* to the type of practical wisdom that concerns a proper care for black hair. In caring for her siblings, Dolezal writes that she took it upon herself to educate her siblings about how to manage that hair in a white world that devalues it. She writes that she “made it clear to [her siblings] that

¹⁰¹ Smith, “Ethos Dwells Pervasively,” 15.

¹⁰² Dolezal & Reback, *In Full Color*, 59.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 66.

strangers had no right to touch their bodies or their hair unless they gave them permission.”¹⁰⁴

Her love of her siblings, then, becomes the narrative connection to Dolezal herself embodying a black phronêsis with black hair (one she would later internalize in her own experiences, as I have already written about at length above, when she reflected on the discomfort she felt when white people would talk to her about her black hair). This, in turn, led her to claim she began to learn more about black cultural history so she might educate her siblings about it.¹⁰⁵

While at the library, Dolezal learned more about stereotypes surrounding black people and also about racism in society writ-large, all in an attempt to care more for her black siblings.¹⁰⁶ As her siblings’ guardian Dolezal explored the history of race relations to better care for them. As she writes, “[w]hen I was a teenager, I was scared that the subtle racism and abuse directed at my younger siblings might [negatively] affect [their internal perceptions of themselves].”¹⁰⁷ In this instance, Dolezal makes her black eunoia consubstantial with her black aretê—the former drives her development of the latter.

In particular, Dolezal recalls an instance where two of her black siblings were fighting and her parents called the police to end the fight. Appalled, Dolezal declares that this would be “something almost no Black parent would ever do, thanks to a well-reasoned distrust of the police.”¹⁰⁸ The implicit logic here is twofold. First, by expressing outrage at her own parents’ actions, Dolezal shores up her own black aretê. Later in *In Full Color*, Dolezal would note she gained custody of one of her siblings (Izaiah), and her outrage earlier implies that when she acted as his “mother,” she would not do what her own parents did. Second, by connecting “black

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 60.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 70.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 48.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 58.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 141.

parenthood” to black *aretê*, Dolezal fuses together three disparate character traits. Eunoia (her concern for her siblings), becomes bound with *aretê* (her knowledge of histories of exploitation), which in turn become bound with identity itself (her purported identification as a black woman).

In fusing *phronêsis*, *aretê*, and *eunoia* together through the narrative of her black siblings. Dolezal also implies a connection to black identity itself. Throughout *In Full Color*, Dolezal makes reference to some intangible, undefinable, but never-the-less present essence within her from which both her ethos stems, also that Dolezal becomes aware of *through* her ethical relationship to black people. In this sense, operating behind the scenes of Dolezal’s appeal to a black ethos is a chain of equivalences that connect the obtainment of that black ethos *with* the prior-presence of a black identity.

Dolezal makes reference to this floating prior-presence of a black identity throughout *In Full Color*, and what’s more she connects this black identity to some aspect of black ethos. For example, when commenting on how she managed to have awareness about microaggressions while her parents did not, she credits it with “a combination of intuitive awareness, protective instincts that emerged from caring about my siblings, and the knowledge I’d gleaned from reading about black history. I certainly didn’t have a ‘white’ perspective. I was starting to think more from a Black one.”¹⁰⁹

Dolezal frames her interaction with her siblings as her entry into a blackened world, and simultaneously as the beginning of her own process of blackening as she discovered her own identity as a black woman.¹¹⁰ As Dolezal writes, in caring for her siblings she lived in “a home that was Blacker than it was white,”¹¹¹ and that as she advocated on behalf of her siblings and

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 62.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 47.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 54.

learned more about both racism and black culture, she found herself “drawing closer to something that felt oddly familiar.”¹¹² Although Dolezal at times describes her relationship to blackness as one that she developed over time (e.g. in her references to how her love of her siblings became a vehicle through which she discovered her own black *phronêsis*, *aretê*, and *eunoia*), at other times Dolezal stresses a more ephemeral, immaterial, and intuitive account of her black identity. That Dolezal can’t make up her mind about how she obtained her black ethos—was it obtained over time or discovered within herself—illustrates that Dolezal conceptualizes a relation between a black identity and a black ethos as intimately bound up with one another. I argue that Dolezal’s implicit connection between a black identity and a black ethos demonstrates that her rhetorical appeal shores up the idea of standpoint epistemology.

From Identity to Standpoint and Back Again

By standpoint epistemology, I am referring to a broad theory of an implied connection between the identity of someone and the types of knowledge they gain access to. At its most basic level, theorists that stress the importance of a standpoint epistemology argue that knowledge does not emerge from nowhere, but rather reflects the intents and interests of those groups that produce it.¹¹³ In a pedestrian fashion, the concept of standpoint epistemology resonates with most audiences as it signifies a certain amount of truth we might be willing to give to others based on their life experiences and our experiences with them. As Linda Alcoff explains:

¹¹² Ibid., 59.

¹¹³ Standpoint Theory is one of the more popular versions of standpoint epistemology. But, various tenants of standpoint epistemology have been taken up and deployed in other critical literatures. For example, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche famously argued for a symptomatology which imagined ideas as symptoms of sickness/strength in various bodies. We might think of Nietzsche’s thesis here as a version of standpoint epistemology wherein the ideas one holds implies one has a certain sort of identity. See Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe, Rev. student ed, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[W]e make “ball-park” estimates of our source’s trustworthiness: my uncle tells me the family can be traced directly back to Charlemagne, but given the fact that he previously claimed that we were related to Jimmy Carter based on a single name in common—“Smith”—I take this new claim with a grain of salt. My neighbor gives me pruning advice and based on her rosebushes, I take it.¹¹⁴

To put the matter bluntly, “identities mark the background for one’s outlook.”¹¹⁵ In more archaic times, those embracing standpoint epistemology did so for authoritarian and oppressive ends—the viewpoints of white, landowning, European, men were considered more objective and correct than other perspectives. Jews were imagined as liars, women as irrational, and slaves as docile.¹¹⁶ Standpoint epistemology, as an academic concept, emerges precisely to challenge this older paradigm.

In the academy, as Sandra Harding argues, those who adopt the concept of standpoint epistemology argue that grounding knowledge from the perspective of “marginalized peoples . . . will generate less partial and distorted accounts . . . of the whole social order.”¹¹⁷ Flipping the objective paradigm on its head, those theorists who embrace standpoint epistemology declare the perspective of the dominant group necessarily biased and partial, and herald space for alternative accounts of truth from disenfranchised bodies.

Julia Wood establishes a distinction between standpoint and social location by noting that a “standpoint grows out of (that is, it is shaped by, rather than essentially given) [a] social

¹¹⁴ Linda Martin Alcoff, “On Judging Epistemic Credibility: Is Social Identity Relevant?,” *Philosophical Exchange* 29, no. 1 (1999), 76.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹¹⁷ Sandra Harding, “Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What is ‘Strong Objectivity?’,” *The Centennial Review* 36, no. 3 (1992), 445.

location.”¹¹⁸ Such a distinction for Wood explains how subordinated groups can, sometimes, hold perspectives significantly more in-line with the interests of dominant groups. However, if standpoint grows out of social location, then does that imply standpoint can *only* be grown from social location? Wood argues that being black does not guarantee a black standpoint, but does being white preclude one? Is a black standpoint inaccessible to whites?

Far from being settled, such a question lies at the heart of standpoint epistemology without a definitive answer. On the one hand, Wood contends that one’s identity need not restrict them from accessing certain knowledge,¹¹⁹ on the other, Wood continues to stress the importance of social location in developing a standpoint (and does not argue that, say, men can experience women’s social location). Harding argues that “one’s social situation enables and sets limits on what one can know,”¹²⁰ and thus implies by extension that the social location of whites renders a black standpoint inaccessible. Thus, Harding concludes that women must take the lead as “active directors of [feminist] movements.”¹²¹ At the same time, however, Harding applauds and encourages male thinkers “in those movements to be able to generate original feminist knowledge from the perspective of women’s lives.”¹²² Although these authors might feel conflicted about whether or not dominant groups can obtain/access the standpoint of marginal groups, there is agreement on something approximating a unitary marginal standpoint.

This unitary marginal standpoint persists in a liminal form even in authors who aim to disrupt it. Patricia Hill Collins challenges those theorists who posit an “essential or archetypal

¹¹⁸ Julia T. Wood, “Feminist Standpoint Theory and Muted Group Theory: Commonalities and Divergences,” *Women and Language* 28, no. 2 (2005), 61.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹²⁰ Harding, “Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology,” 443.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 456.

¹²² *Ibid.*

Black woman whose experiences stand as normal, normative, and thereby authentic”¹²³ and instead embraces the diversity of black women’s experiences as a form of democracy. While Collins’s critique of an identity essentialism is correct, we ought recognize that the call for a democracy of experiences carries its own trace of essentialism. Even in the attempt to dismiss essentialism surrounding black identity, Hill Collins never-the-less posits a broad divide between those subjects who are white, and those who are black. While we might be willing to entertain a diversity between black perspectives, such a diversity is never imagined as wide as the gulf between whites and blacks.¹²⁴ As a result, Kimberly Chabot-Davis argues that “white identity often gets reduced to a singular, stereotyped essence, little more than a caricature of racist reading practices.”¹²⁵

For the purposes of this thesis, the truth or falseness of standpoint epistemology is an irrelevant question. Rather, the point is that the tenants of standpoint epistemology helps explain *why* Dolezal’s appeal for her black identity takes the form of an appeal to her black ethos. Throughout *In Full Color* Dolezal imagines and frames white people as always lacking an element of a black ethos and therefore lack a black standpoint. As already explained above, when it came to black hair Dolezal claimed that she found whites “annoying and frustrating,” and that

¹²³ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, Perspectives on Gender* 2nd Edition, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991), 28.

¹²⁴ There is an interesting tension here between what we now know about the biology of race and what these authors believe about the epistemological gap between races. In the case of biology, for a long time mainstream Western society believed that the biological differences between the races was so broad as to excuse and necessitate a host of racist and discriminatory practices. Today, we now know that there exists more genetic diversity *within* a race than *between* races. Which is to say, a randomly selected white person is more likely to share a greater genetic similarity with a random non-white person than they are with another white person. In the case of epistemology, the gulf between white and black perspectives continue to be imagined as broad and beyond reproach. That is to say, we currently believe that there exists more epistemological diversity *between*, rather than *within*, the races. For more reading on the genetics of race, see David J. Witherspoon, Stephen Wooding, Alan R. Rogers, Elizabeth E. Marchani, W. Scott Watkins, Mark A. Batzer, and Lynn B. Jorde. “Genetic Similarities Within and Between Human Populations,” *Genetics* 176, no. 1 (May 2007): 351–59.

¹²⁵ Kimberly Chabot Davis, *Beyond the White Negro: Empathy and Anti-Racist Reading* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 5.

she avoided “interacting with them as much as I possibly could.”¹²⁶ That is, on the whole, Dolezal avoided white people because they simply did not “get” black people in the way that she did. This is, perhaps too, how we might explain Dolezal’s objection to white anti-racist Tim Wise speaking at EWU while she lectured there. Because, in Dolezal’s mind, white people could not truthfully speak about racism affecting black people.¹²⁷ If a black standpoint can only come from a black identity—as standpoint theory suggests—then if Dolezal has a black standpoint, she must have a black identity.

The world, Dolezal tells us, wants nothing but the destruction of black people. But I don’t, I care, since I care, I must be black—black *eunoia*. White society is fundamentally disconnected from the black experience, they know nothing about the depths of our racist culture. But I do, I know about it—black *aretê*. Black women have privileged access to a lived experience, and through that lived experience a practical wisdom. But I have such a wisdom, so what does that say about me? —black *phronêsis*. Once we accept the notion of a privileged connection between identity and knowledge, or identity and ethics, and more specifically identity and ethos, then what do we say about people whose ethos are in conflict with their identity? This is what I mean by “inverting” standpoint epistemology. Whereas standpoint epistemology begins from a social location, and from the lived experience of that social location infers a standpoint, Dolezal begins from her standpoint—her constructed ethical character, her black *phronêsis*, *aretê*, and *eunoia*—and from that, infers an identity.

This inference into a black identity emerges out of, and through, an inversion of standpoint epistemology. Robert Con Davis and David S. Gross levy a criticism of “benevolent”

¹²⁶ Dolezal & Reback, *In Full Color*, 97.

¹²⁷ Marquis Bey and Theodora Sakellarides, “When We Enter: The Blackness of Rachel Dolezal,” *The Black Scholar* 46, no. 4 (October 2016), 34.

whites who attempt to altruistically help black people. As they explain, “Whites . . . can legitimately address African-American oppression, but only those whites who identify their own interests in African-American concerns and certainly *not* [their emphasis] those who are benevolent or altruistic to a fantasized and reified ‘other.’”¹²⁸ For Davis and Gross, the only way for whites to truly help blacks is by acknowledging their own interest in helping them, rather than approaching them from a position of a savior. And yet, we must ask, for those who have endorsed a rigid conception of a black standpoint in which dominant identities develop knowledge specifically to shore up their power and privilege, what sort of interest could whites possibly have in addressing African-American oppression? Interest here, no doubt, must be defined in some narrow sense, as being viewed as benevolent and/or altruistic does not count as being in one’s own interests.¹²⁹

What would it mean for a white person to help a black person from a position of self-interest? Harding provides another answer: “Such a project requires listening attentively to marginalized people; it requires educating oneself about their histories, achievements, preferred social relations, hopes for the future; it requires putting one’s body on the line for ‘their’ cause until they feel like ‘our cause.’”¹³⁰ Although Harding’s quote here is drawing attention to a struggle grounded in the common humanity between white and black people, we can understand

¹²⁸ Robert Con Davis and David S. Gross, “Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and the Ethos of the Subaltern,” in *Ethos: New Essays in Rhetorical and Critical Theory*, ed. James S. Baumlin and Tita French Baumlin, 1st ed, SMU Studies in Composition and Rhetoric (Dallas, Tex: Southern Methodist University Press, 1994), 81.

¹²⁹ One answer to this quandary might be to argue that reducing racial discrimination reduces the risk of social unrest, and therefore benefits white people. While persuasive on its own terms, this answer is not available for many of the authors referenced in this section as its logic would entail serious costs for their broader political project. Domination, these theorists posits, entails powerful social and material benefits to the dominator. Hence why the “standpoint” of whites/males/subjugators/etc. cannot be used for liberatory ends. To concede that the dominant perspective, properly reasoned, can include a call for broad redistributive justice would be to deny the essential claim of standpoint epistemology that the oppressed perspective is an essential ingredient for justice.

¹³⁰ Harding, “Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology,” 458.

her point as being able to be (reductively) interpreted¹³¹ by Dolezal as the basis for her inversion of standpoint epistemology and therefore a transracial identity. If one were to read Harding's quote here while stressing that there is no "common humanity" between blacks and whites, which is to say with a great deal of skepticism that whites would ever really care for black people,¹³² then Dolezal's transracial identity becomes the only way whites could ever be trusted to care for black people.

Read this way, Harding can be (reductively) interpreted as laying the seeds for Dolezal's inversion of standpoint epistemology thusly: to truly endorse a black standpoint, whites must listen to marginalized people and endorse their preferred social relations (black *aretê*) and put one's body on the line (black *eunoia*) until black causes feel like white causes (entry into a black identity). This, unstated, is precisely the reasoning Dolezal provides in explaining why she chose to move to West Jackson. As Dolezal writes:

I chose to live on the poor Black side of that line . . . I didn't move there because I was a white missionary. I wasn't trying to be a 'white ally' or a 'white savior.' I wasn't trying to make some sort of contrived social statement. Quite the opposite. My decision to live there felt natural and organic. I was simply moving to where I felt most comfortable, a place where I could be myself.¹³³

As Dolezal explains, her decision to help black people was not a journey of self-discovery, but instead reflective of some ephemeral element within her that belonged. Rather than developing a

¹³¹ I write "can be interpreted," because Dolezal does not explicitly cite or reference Harding. The point, however, is not that Dolezal read Harding, but rather that there is a certain homology in each of their paradigms of standpoint epistemology.

¹³² Another way of reaching this conclusion would be to argue that there exists something approximating a unified "white interest." If we assume that white people "benefit" from the maintenance of a racial hierarchy, then there is no vehicle of self-interest to motivate them to fight for the "common humanity" of black folk. For more on this reading, see footnote 129.

¹³³ Dolezal & Reback, *In Full Color*, 89.

black ethos as a means to *obtain* a black identity,¹³⁴ Dolezal's development of a black ethos becomes the evidence Dolezal uses to hypothesize and imagine her always-already-present black identity. Echoing Davis, Gross, and Harding's sentiments above: Dolezal's presentation of a black phronêsis, aretê, and eunoia emerge, in part, out of pure self-interest. She wasn't benevolently helping black people, she wasn't a white savior, she was helping herself. She was, and is, black.

As Dolezal explains, she didn't just move to West Jackson because she felt she belonged, she moved there because she felt safer there than on the white side of town.¹³⁵ From the very beginning, Dolezal describes the "white world" she grew up in as a painful one she relished to escape.¹³⁶ And, the more in touch Dolezal felt with this ephemeral trace of blackness in her, "the more distant and isolated [she] felt from white people."¹³⁷ In two instances in school, Dolezal describes feeling out of touch and shunned by white society. In the first instance, Dolezal describes entering her elementary school's cafeteria and being "met by a sea of white faces . . . it didn't take long before I felt just as out of place there as I did at home."¹³⁸ Even at a young age, Dolezal does not recognize *her* face in that sea of white faces, and finds her black standpoint shunned by white society. Later, Dolezal recalls entering her college cafeteria "[s]earching for a reassuring face and not finding one, I carried my tray through the gauntlet of white faces until I arrived at the Black table in the corner."¹³⁹

In both cases, Dolezal situates something deep within her (outside of her skin color) that renders her an outcast, and therefore alien to whites and white society. As Dolezal's attempts to

¹³⁴ Dolezal's backlash to Tim Wise discussed above suggests that she does not think that white people can obtain a black ethos or a black standpoint.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 1.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 148.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 13.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 79.

build her black ethos throughout *In Full Color* demonstrate, that “something” referred to a black standpoint that, in turn, signified for Dolezal her black identity. As Marshall Alcorn Jr. writes, “different cultures ‘complete’ selves in different ways and provide different structures for rhetorical interaction,”¹⁴⁰ and Dolezal’s case illustrates this principle. Understanding Dolezal’s appeal to, and inversion of, standpoint epistemology reveals the hidden structures at play that undergird Dolezal’s attempt to demonstrate her black identity. That Dolezal spends the majority of *In Full Color* demonstrating all three pillars of her black ethos is no accident—in doing so, she draws attention to a black standpoint she imagines, and hopes her audiences also imagine, as being inaccessible to white subjects. Once one accepts Dolezal’s black ethos, this reasoning goes, it would be impossible for them to believe her to have a white identity.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have made three focal arguments. First, the attempt to persuade audiences that a rhetor has a certain identity requires the satisfaction of certain ethotic requirements, and those requirements take on the shape of the identity the rhetor aims at displaying. Second, Aristotle’s three pillars of ethos (phronêsis, aretê, and eunoia) can be mutually-reinforcing in appeals to an identity. And finally, in the context of Dolezal, this fusing of the three pillars of ethos reinforces a coherent subject that inverts the paradigm of standpoint epistemology.

That Dolezal spent so much time in *In Full Color* focusing on her ethos might strike readers as odd, but as we shall see in Chapter Four, such a move was well warranted—her ethos was the central question in the debate over her identity. For reasons that will be explained more

¹⁴⁰ Marshall W. Alcorn Jr., “Self-Structure as a Rhetorical Device: Modern Ethos and the Divisiveness of the Self,” in *Ethos: New Essays in Rhetorical and Critical Theory*, ed. James S. Baumlin and Tita French Baumlin, 1st ed, SMU Studies in Composition and Rhetoric (Dallas, Tex: Southern Methodist University Press, 1994), 17.

fully in Chapter Five, one of the most important pivot points for audiences accepting or not accepting Dolezal's claim to a black identity concerned how they *felt* about her ethical character. Here, I note that the recourse to center the debate about Dolezal's identity on the question of her ethos demonstrates an important shift in how race is conceptualized in an age of unsettled identities. To this end, in the next chapter, I demonstrate that Dolezal's inversion of the paradigm of standpoint epistemology demonstrates a close affinity and commonality between Dolezal and her most vocal critics.

CHAPTER 4

TOUGH QUESTIONS, TOUGH ANSWERS

While Dolezal devoted a significant amount of time, effort, and attention developing and showcasing her black ethos through *In Full Color*, the book was not her only attempt at addressing the public's pressing questions about her identity. Prior to publishing the book, Dolezal went on an interview tour across television networks. A close rhetorical analysis of these interviews reveals they, just like Dolezal's autobiography, are intimately concerned with Dolezal's ethos.

Although there exist a number of articles and artifacts that critically engage Dolezal's claim to a black identity, and therefore also Dolezal's ethos, in this chapter I examine three artifacts: a television interview by Matt Lauer,¹ one by Savannah Guthrie,² and one by Melissa Harris-Perry.³ Lauer, Guthrie, and Harris-Perry's interviews were selected because they all took place at the beginning of the "Dolezal Affair,"⁴ and were aired within a day of one another. Although articles and opinion columns on Dolezal were widespread, these three interviews provided spaces where relatively large audiences could hear Dolezal explain herself. Because of this, they became some of the most widely shared artifacts that American audiences used to make sense of the idea of a transracial identity.

¹ Matt Lauer and Rachel Dolezal, "Rachel Dolezal Breaks Her Silence: 'I Identify As Black' | TODAY," *YouTube*, uploaded by TODAY, 16 June 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IG9Q2_Hv83k.

² Savannah Guthrie and Rachel Dolezal, "Rachel Dolezal: Being White Doesn't Describe Who I Am (Full Interview) | NBC Nightly News," *YouTube*, uploaded by NBC News, 18 June 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vS5fpDTZrc4>.

³ Melissa Harris-Perry and Rachel Dolezal, "Exclusive Full Interview: Rachel Dolezal breaks her silence," *MSNBC*, 17 June 2015, <https://www.msnbc.com/melissa-harris-perry/watch/rachel-dolezal-breaks-her-silence-465691715976>.

⁴ See Rogers Brubaker, *Trans: Gender and Race in an Age of Unsettled Identities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

In this chapter, I analyze these interviews as sites of negotiation over Dolezal's ethos. In particular, this chapter asks how interviewers received, and responded to, Dolezal's attempted ethos appeals. Just as Dolezal's autobiography troubles an easy separation between black/white and ethos/identity, so too do these artifacts trouble an easy separation between rhetor and audience. On the one hand interviewers are audiences who receive Dolezal's identity claims. At the same time, interviewers are rhetors themselves. In particular, I argue the conduct of the interviewers—how they carried themselves in the interview, how they asked Dolezal questions, and what questions they asked—primed audiences to read Dolezal's claim to blackness in a certain way.

I build five coordinated arguments in this chapter. First, that the structure and genre of the interview granted more power to the interviewer than to Dolezal. Second, that there exists a sharp divide between interviews that denigrated Dolezal's ethos and interviews that affirmed Dolezal's ethos, and that this divide stems from two mutually incompatible paradigms dealing with racial difference: racial authenticity and racial sincerity. Third, Lauer's and Guthrie's interviews denigrate Dolezal's ethos by propagating a narrative of deception and a narrative of racial opportunism, while Harris-Perry's interview rebuts these narratives and provides rhetorical space to affirm Dolezal's potential identity as a black woman. Fourth, because the paradigm of racial authenticity is a dominant way of framing identity, Dolezal's ethos appeal faced significant constraints even as her own political project accepted and affirmed the logic of racial authenticity. Fifth, that Dolezal, counterfactually, could have maneuvered through the paradigm of racial authenticity better had she had spoken less about herself and more about her cause. The structure of this chapter will proceed linearly through these arguments.

Asking and Answering: Television Interviews as a Genre

To understand the rhetorical consequences of Dolezal's television interviews with Lauer, Guthrie, and Harris-Perry requires, first, an understanding of their formal elements. Martin Montgomery notes that as a genre television interviews are characterized by:

[a] pre-allocation of roles: one speaker asks questions and the other answers them. The speaker who asks questions does so from an institutionally defined position—one in which they hold some responsibility for setting the agenda, the terms or the topic of the discourse. Nor is it a case of simply asking questions; the media interviewer also controls the length, shape and even the style of the encounter.⁵

Although there exists no rhetorical (or social) situation wherein one party has complete or total control,⁶ as a genre television interviews concentrate a larger share of power with the interviewer because they dictate the flow of communication.⁷ While a particularly skilled rhetor may be able to find room to move and sway audiences within the restricted confines of question and answer, or may violate generic constraints and flip the script on the interviewer, Dolezal does neither.

By following the lead of the interviewer, Dolezal relegates herself to a mere participant in, rather than a counter-weight to, the interviewer's rhetoric. Understanding the generic constraints of the interview therefore affords a rhetorical critic the ability to recognize that the interview has the potential to act as a counter-discourse to Dolezal's rhetoric, rather than merely

⁵ Martin Montgomery, "The Discourse of the Broadcast News Interview: A Typology," *Journalism Studies* 9, no. 2 (April 2008), 260.

⁶ Or, as Michel Foucault has argued, "[w]here there is power, there is resistance." See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 95.

⁷ Because power is never absolute, a particularly unskilled interviewer may also fumble the power the genre provides her. Consider, for example, relatively fresh interviewers only beginning to grow accustomed to the power their station as interviewer provides. Additionally, as we will also see later in this chapter, a particularly skilled interviewer may also willingly share their power with interviewee instead of lording it over them. What is important is that the genre *provides* the interviewer with the power—whether they decide to take advantage of that, or can, is another matter altogether.

a platform for her to speak (again). To tarry with the rhetorical effect of the interviews, then, means recognizing that the interviews are less about Dolezal producing her own rhetoric to convince audiences, and more about the rhetoric of the interviewers themselves.

To those ends, rhetorical analysis of interviews must understand to what extent interviewers comport to or challenge these generic expectations and constraints. Mats Ekström and Richard Fitzgerald note that interviews on television can be divided into two meta-categories: non-live, and live interviews. The non-live interview refers to the compression of longer interviews into digestible sound-bites or segments used in broader news stories. For example, in a broader story about environmental waste an interviewer may interview a politician, an environmentalist, and an energy company CEO. When the story is eventually broadcasted, these interviews are distilled into sound-bites that are then spliced together in the service of framing a broader narrative. For Dolezal, her initial interview with Jeff Humphrey of KXLV (the interview where Dolezal was “outed” as a white woman) was often used, and referenced, as a non-live interview.⁸

In contrast, the live-interviews can be characterized in two different ways. First, as the name implies, live interview can refer to interviews that are broadcast real-time to viewing audiences. Second, the term can refer to entire interviews presented whole cloth and broadcast to viewing audiences at a later date.⁹ The interview conducted by Lauer, Guthrie, and Harris-Perry fit the second characteristic of live interviews.

⁸ The broader interview between Humphrey and Dolezal is rarely shown. Before her outing, Humphrey and Dolezal were discussing pressing cases including threats of racial harassment Dolezal had experienced, and instances of police brutality Dolezal was organizing against.

⁹ Mats Ekström and Richard Fitzgerald, “Groundhog Day: Extended Repetitions in Political News Interviews,” *Journalism Studies* 15, no. 1 (January 2, 2014), 85.

In live interviews, interviewers must be conscience of their style and adequately prepare their questions because there will be no splicing or cutting. This, in turn, means that interviewers must comport stylistically to the rhetorical situation that is their interview. In addition to being a live interview, these interviews with Rachel Dolezal can be typologized further into what Montgomery calls “accountability interviews.” As a sub-genre the accountability interview calls upon “a public figure to account in relation to an issue or event of the moment either for their own deeds or words or for the actions/statements of the institution with which they are associated.”¹⁰ Because the accountability interview, as its name suggests, centers around aims to hold a public figure accountable for what they have done, it stages a certain relationship between the interviewer and interviewee as potentially adversarial. The interviewer asks questions they *know* the interviewee might not feel comfortable being asked. Or, as Montgomery puts it, these interviews are “built upon questions designed to seek justifications from the recipient for their statements or lines of action and to challenge them.”¹¹

The nature and intensity of this potentially adversarial relationship changes across time, as well as (I argue in the next section) according to the paradigms utilized by the interviewer. Driven by increased market competition, in an effort to gain better ratings and attract audiences Anglo-American interviews have (generally) grown more adversarial over time; interviewers give less and less deference to interviewees and ask more difficult questions.¹² This, in turn, has transformed the norm of interviews from pure neutrality mixed with moments of adversariality to one steeped in an adversarial relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee.¹³ The

¹⁰ Montgomery, “The Discourse of the Broadcast News Interview”, 262.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 270.

¹² Augusto Gnisci, Arjen Van Dalen, and Angiola Di Conza, “Interviews in a Polarized Television Market: The Anglo-American Watchdog Model Put to the Test,” *Political Communication* 31, no. 1 (January 2, 2014), 114.

¹³ Pilar Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, “A Genre Approach to the Study of Im-Politeness,” *International Review of Pragmatics* 2, no. 1 (April 1, 2010), 64.

widespread nature of the shift to the adversarial format also explains other types of interviews where the interviewer, as Pilar Garcés-Conejos Blitvich explains, “monopolizes the floor, often providing more information than the interviewee.”¹⁴ Consider, for example, conservative pundits who bring liberals onto their show to be interviewed. As interviewer, the pundit dominates the conversation allowing little room for the interviewee to answer the pundit’s arguments disguised as questions.

While none of the interviewers analyzed in this chapter reach an adversarial level equivalent to something like the *O’Reilly Factor*,¹⁵ they never-the-less vary sharply in terms of how they relate to Dolezal. In particular, Lauer’s and Guthrie’s interviews are significantly more adversarial than Harris-Perry’s. I attribute the differential in adversariality between Lauer’s and Guthrie’s interviews and Harris-Perry’s interview to their distinct paradigms for understanding racial identity.

Investigating or Adjudicating: Paradigms for Racial Identity

Although there exists significant pressure for interviewers to take on an adversarial relationship with their interviewee, the extent to which an interviewer does so in any particular interview is ultimately their prerogative. The interviewer asks the questions, and they decide what type of role they take on. For this chapter, I consider two distinct interviewer roles: the “journalist as inquisitor” and the “journalist as investigator.” Understanding the distinctions between Lauer’s and Guthrie’s interviews and Harris-Perry’s interview requires, in part, an appreciation for these competing interview styles. Whereas the journalist as investigator aims to ask probing, respectful, questions to get to the truth, the journalist as inquisitor, as Abdulrahman

¹⁴ Ibid., 74.

¹⁵ Bill O’Reilly’s television show is often cited as the gold-standard in Journalism Studies of the shift from a neutral interviewer to an adversarial one.

Alfahad writes, “reveal their own opinions, pass judgment on guests’ answers, and engage in behavior towards them that [is] aggressive, mocking, or even insulting.”¹⁶ The journalist as inquisitor is a hybrid role—they ask probing questions to get to the “truth,” but they also are expected to levy judgement.¹⁷

One factor that affects whether an interviewer chooses to take on an investigative or inquisitorial style is how that interviewer interprets the issues covered in the interview. That is to say, an interviewer’s existing paradigms help them understand their role in relation to the topics raised by the interview. In Dolezal’s case, the distinction between asking questions to understand and asking questions in the service of rendering a judgement is paralleled by the distinction between two competing paradigms for understanding and relating to another’s racial identity. In *Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity*, John L. Jackson articulates a distinction between what he refers to as “racial authenticity” and “racial sincerity.” Jackson remarks that whereas a paradigm of racial authenticity treats another’s racial identity as something to be verified, analyzed, and tested, “questions of sincerity imply social interlocutors who presume one another’s humanity, interiority, and subjectivity . . . a subject-subject interaction, not the subject-object model that authenticity presumes.”¹⁸ This distinction between authenticity and sincerity, I argue, is in part what separates Lauer’s and Guthrie’s interviews from Harris-Perry’s interview.

Roger Brubaker, commenting on Dolezal’s troubled encounters with media outlets, argues that the problem with interviews is that their format is often more “oriented to adjudication rather than understanding.”¹⁹ We can understand Brubaker’s insight here as

¹⁶ Abdulrahman Alfahad, “Professionalism vs. Popularity: The Shift in Ethics of Interviewing in Arab Media,” *Global Media Journal* 9, no. 2 (2016), 101.

¹⁷ Ian Hutchby, “Non-neutrality and argument in the hybrid political interview,” *Discourse Studies* 13, no. 3 (June 2011), 349-50.

¹⁸ John L. Jackson, *Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 15.

¹⁹ Brubaker, *Trans*, x.

connecting the paradigm of racial authenticity to the power imbalance between interviewer and interviewee. When a paradigm of racial authenticity encounters a case such as Dolezal's, the interviewer takes on the role of journalist as inquisitor, and the interview reproduces what Loïc Wacquant terms the logic of the trial—a framework that “impels investigators to seek out victims and culprits rather than identify mechanisms.”²⁰ As opposed to acting as a space for honest reflection and discussion, the logic of the trial aims to convict or exonerate and to blame or spare this or that institution or person.²¹

In deploying the logic of the trial, Lauer and Guthrie use their position as interviewer to authenticate the racial identity of their interviewee. The effect is not a back and forth discussion. The effect, according to the paradigm of racial authenticity, is judgement. For Lauer and Guthrie their interview is one only in name. The goal is not to hear Dolezal's side of the story, but rather to extract a particular confession. The paradigm of racial authenticity produces a framework where, as journalistic inquisitor, Lauer and Guthrie hammer Dolezal with questions about her racial identification, waiting for Dolezal to crack—to come clean about her racial fraudulence and admit once and for all, in front of the studio cameras, that she is a white woman, not black.

In contrast, Harris-Perry's interview operates from a paradigm of racial sincerity. As such, the effect of Harris-Perry's rhetoric in taking on the mantle of journalist as investigator is not to condemn Dolezal but instead to understand her. Instead of levying judgement, Harris-Perry builds a compassionate and non-adversarial relationship between herself and Dolezal. She doesn't just ask Dolezal questions, she actively builds a climate of sympathy. Harris-Perry reflects that she has, in her own personal life, gotten in fights with her friends defending

²⁰ Loïc Wacquant, “For an Analytic of Racial Domination,” *Political Power and Social Theory* 11, (1997), 222.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 225.

Dolezal.²² Commenting on Dolezal's children, Harris-Perry remarks that her son Izaiah is "just an extraordinary young man."²³ One of her closing questions in her interview inquires as to how Dolezal's children are holding up being thrust into the media spotlight. And, her last sentence to Dolezal in the interview is a heartfelt thank you: "I can't tell you how much I appreciate you taking the time to sit down and talk with me."²⁴ If there is something striking about Harris-Perry's interview, it is in the humanity she extends to Dolezal even as she might disagree with some of Dolezal's conclusions.

Whereas Lauer's and Guthrie's interviews are framed around whether or not Dolezal is or is not black, Harris-Perry's interview frame assumes Dolezal's sincere racial identification. From there, she proceeds the interview by illuminating how they both (interviewer and interviewee) think about, and through, racial identity. Harris-Perry considers her own racial identity and uses that as a resource for conversation with Dolezal instead of as authoritative evidence to invalidate Dolezal's own lived-truth.

Sincerity, as opposed to authenticity, Jackson argues, recognizes that "people are not simply racial objects (to be verified from without) but racial subjects with an interiority that is never completely and unquestionably clear."²⁵ While the paradigm of racial authenticity (Lauer's and Guthrie's interviews) demands external verification of racial identity (did Dolezal *actualize* a black identity?), the paradigm of racial sincerity (Harris-Perry's interview) asks only for internal verification of racial identity (did Dolezal *intend* to have a black identity?). Whereas Lauer and Guthrie use their interview to judge and verify Dolezal's supposed black identity, Harris-Perry treats Dolezal's claim to black identity as something to be explored in open conversation.

²² Harris-Perry & Dolezal, "Exclusive Full Interview."

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Jackson, *Real Black*, 18.

These distinctive journalistic styles and racial paradigms frame Dolezal's ethos differently. In the case of Lauer's and Guthrie's interviews, the logic of the trial finds Dolezal guilty. In particular, two meta-narratives propagate through the interview at the level of form and content: a narrative of deception, and a narrative of racial opportunism. These two complimentary narratives assault Dolezal's ethos in different ways. The narrative of deception denigrates Dolezal's *aretê* and *phronêsis*, and the narrative of racial opportunism assaults Dolezal's *eunoia*. In contrast, Harris-Perry's interview provides space not just for Dolezal to resist these narratives but also performatively affirms the potentiality of Dolezal's black identity. In the next three sections, I explore how the paradigm of racial authenticity and the paradigm of racial sincerity become enacted through a close reading of Lauer, Guthrie, and Harris-Perry's interviews.

Deception as an Assault on *Aretê* and *Phronêsis*

The narrative of deception occurs throughout Lauer's and Guthrie's interviews. The general thrust of the narrative for viewing audiences is simple: Dolezal portrayed herself one way but she was something else entirely. However, the different ways in which Lauer and Guthrie invoke this narrative has distinct rhetorical effects. In some instances, the narrative denigrates Dolezal's *aretê*; in some instances, it denigrates Dolezal's *phronêsis*.

When the narrative of deception denigrates Dolezal's *aretê* it does so through direct reference, stripped repetition, and visual evidence of her deception. In all three of these cases Dolezal is framed as a deceiver and such a designation, in turn, targets her black *aretê*. Implicit in the charge of deception is the claim Dolezal knew that what she was doing was a violation of trust in all those she encountered (including black people). Broadly, deception signifies a lack of moral fiber; more specifically, to lie to black people demonstrates a dissonance between

Dolezal's moral code and that of her black audience. This dissonance, in turn, frames Dolezal's virtues as out-of-synch with the community she claims to represent and as a result portrays Dolezal as lacking black *aretê*.

When it appears as direct reference, the narrative of deception appears in the content of the interviewers' questions. At various moments throughout Dolezal's interviews, Lauer and Guthrie ask questions that insinuate the focus of the interview rests on Dolezal's act of deception. Lauer begins his interview by asking: "When did you start—and I'll use the word, you can correct me if you don't like it—when did you start deceiving people?"²⁶ Similarly, the first question asked by Guthrie in her interview with Dolezal concerns this deception. She asks: "Have you ever lied about your race?"²⁷ In bluntly asking the question, Lauer and Guthrie prime their audiences to read Dolezal as a deceiver and, therefore, lacking black *aretê*.

In addition, the narrative of deception takes on the form of what Ekström and Fitzgerald refer to as "stripped repetition." In stripped repetition, an interviewer repeats several questions with minimal variations. For example, consider the myriad of ways Lauer asks Dolezal to explain her identity: "are you an African-American woman?," "were you identifying yourself as African-American?," "is this an African-American woman, or is that a Caucasian woman?,"²⁸ and "if I were to ask [your two sons] are you a Black woman or a Caucasian woman, how do you think they would answer?"²⁹ Or, Guthrie's repetition of questions about Dolezal's physical appearance: "have you changed your physical appearance?," "have you changed your skin color?," "have you done anything?," "have you taken steps to make your appearance appear

²⁶ Lauer & Dolezal, "Rachel Dolezal Breaks Her Silence."

²⁷ Guthrie & Dolezal, "Rachel Dolezal."

²⁸ In this quote, Lauer refers to a photo of Dolezal in her early teens. This particular photo and its service in the narrative of deception is analyzed later in this section.

²⁹ Lauer & Dolezal, "Rachel Dolezal Breaks Her Silence."

more like that of an African-American or Black person?”³⁰ Or, Guthrie’s repetition of questions about Dolezal’s honesty: “Have you ever lied about your race?,” “Do you feel you’ve been deceptive at all?,” “For you to say yes, is that an honest answer?,” “Do you understand why . . . that is, at best, a misleading answer?”³¹

The effect of stripped repetition, Ekström and Fitzgerald argue, is to reprimand the interviewee. Dolezal’s answers to these questions, in the interviewing frame, are treated not as a misunderstanding of the original question posed, but instead as a form of “strategic evasion.”³² To put it another way, the interviewer asks the question again (in an almost identical way) because Dolezal has presumably refused to answer truthfully. Through stripped repetition it “is not only the answer, and the activity of answering, that is being ignored,” but also the interviewee herself.³³ By insinuating that the interviewee has not answered the question “correctly,” the rhetorical effect of stripped repetition frames Dolezal’s answers as non-answers and, therefore, deceptive. The repeated questions frame the interviewer as possessing privileged access to truth, and frame Dolezal as knowing that the interviewer “really knows.” Stripped repetition thereby codes Dolezal’s persistent refusal to “really” answer the question as indicative of her general deceitfulness. At the level of form, such repetition throws into question Dolezal’s *aretê* by insinuating that her refusal stems from her guilt/wrong-doing, and therefore portrays Dolezal as lacking moral fiber.

The narrative that Dolezal deceived her audiences is also further supported by the use of visual images in the interviews. One such image, what John Lucaites and James McDaniel term the then-now chronotope, concerns a picture that showcases the “before” of a white Dolezal with

³⁰ Guthrie & Dolezal, “Rachel Dolezal.”

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ekström & Fitzgerald, “Groundhog Day,” 88.

³³ Ibid., 90.

the “after” of a black Dolezal.³⁴ In her interview with Lauer, the chronotope is mobilized in a “gotcha” moment after Dolezal declares her identity as black. At this moment, Lauer strikes: “You identify as black, let me put a picture up of you in your early twenties though; and when you see this picture: is this an African-American woman, or is that a Caucasian woman?”³⁵

After Lauer utters these words, the audience immediately encounters two pictures of Dolezal. First, the “now” picture. In it, Dolezal is dressed in a professional suit, dark blue. Her curly brown hair adorns her head. A piercing with some clear precious stone sits on her left nostril. A bronze earring hangs from her ear. Her skin is light-brown and consistent in tone across her face. In the “then” picture, Dolezal is surrounded by a halo of sunlight reflecting off the colorful leaves of a tree. Her mouth is cracked open in a hearty laugh and/or smile, with her pearly white teeth contrasting with her red lips. She is wearing a white long-sleeve sweater, and her golden blonde hair flows down across that sweater. On her left ear, a modestly sized silver hoop earring. Her skin tone is a pale white. Read together, the chronotope demonstrates for viewing audiences the depths of Dolezal’s deception because of the discrepancy between the two images. The “self-evident” image of Dolezal’s transformation (read: already coded through the interviewer’s question as deception) targets Dolezal’s *aretê* by framing her as someone who has something to hide.

At other times, the invocation of the deception narrative assaults Dolezal’s black phronêsis. In these cases, the narrative portrays Dolezal as prone to making bad and/or foolish judgements, and frames her as lacking, primarily, good sense. In Lauer’s and Guthrie’s

³⁴ John Louis Lucaites and James P. McDaniel, “Telescopic Mourning/Warring in the Global Village: Decomposing (Japanese) Authority Figures,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 1, no. 1 (March 2004), 13.

³⁵ Lauer & Dolezal, “Rachel Dolezal Breaks Her Silence.”

interviews, when the narrative of deception denigrates Dolezal's phronêsis it takes on two forms: drawing attention to Dolezal's logomachy, and the interviewers' use of sarcastic rejoinders.

In drawing attention to Dolezal's attempted "logomachy," the interviewers frame Dolezal as out of touch with everyday black experience and, therefore, lacking phronêsis. Embedded in the question, "Are you Black?" are a host of assumptions about the criteria for being that identity. One important criteria include one's genetic ancestry because of the afterlife of racial ideologies (as discussed in Chapter Two), and how widespread the paradigm of racial authenticity is. Dolezal's purported identification as black despite not meeting the genetic criteria (see Chapter Three) exemplifies what Kenneth Burke describes as logomachy—the battle over definition (what a word means and what symbols it represents).³⁶ In presenting an alternative definition over what "black" means, Dolezal's racial identification is itself an act of logomachy.

In the interviews, Lauer and Guthrie draw attention to Dolezal's logomachy as an example of her deception. For example, Lauer links Dolezal's logomachy with deception when he declares that she "knew their questions were pointed in a different direction . . . you'd say 'I'm black,' you didn't say 'I identify as black.'"³⁷ Throughout the interview Lauer keeps asking Dolezal to clarify and reclarify her racial identity because Dolezal has "sent mixed signals over the years."³⁸

In Guthrie's interview, her questions accent the "out of touchness" of Dolezal's answers to questions about her racial identity. As Guthrie explains:

³⁶ Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*. 3rd ed. with a new afterword. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, 141.

³⁷ Lauer & Dolezal, "Rachel Dolezal Breaks Her Silence."

³⁸ Ibid.

It's one thing to embrace the questions as an academic matter, it's another thing to just actually be honest and transparent about who you are . . . that's where people are having trouble with you, Rachel . . . acting like you are something that you are not.³⁹

Guthrie's question supports a distinction between an everyday understanding of race—black phronêsis—and academic inquiry. By framing Dolezal's identification with the black identity as an academic exercise, Guthrie presents Dolezal as aloof and disconnected from both the black experience and the day-to-day reality of racialization. Later in the interview, Guthrie furthers this point when she asks: "but, just as a human being, you know when someone asks you, 'Are you Black,' 'Are you African-American,' you know exactly what they are asking you." In recognizing Dolezal's identification as an act of logomachy, Lauer's and Guthrie's questions frame her identification as fraudulent.⁴⁰ We, their questions reason, know what we mean when we ask, "Are you black?" That Dolezal doesn't, or that she chooses to ignore what we mean demonstrates that she lacks good sense, and therefore the type of practical wisdom concurrent with phronêsis.

Another way that the deception narrative assaults Dolezal's phronêsis emerges from what Ian Hutchby refers to as a "sarcastic rejoinder." For Hutchby, the sarcastic rejoinder refers to a question designed to ridicule or mock the statements made by the interviewee.⁴¹ Early in the Guthrie interview, Dolezal makes an off-hand remark that although she knows who raised her, she hasn't seen any proof that they are her biological parents. Guthrie displays a tone of incredulous shock when she asks/states: "You doubt whether those—Ruth Anne and Larry say

³⁹ Guthrie & Dolezal, "Rachel Dolezal."

⁴⁰ The lesson here is twofold. First, that the deployment of logomachy can carry with it an impingement on a rhetor's ethos. And second, for logomachy to function rhetors should generally make sure that their audiences do not recognize that they are deploying it.

⁴¹ Hutchby, "Non-neutrality and argument in the hybrid political interview," 352-3.

they are your parents, you doubt whether they are your parents?” Dolezal goes on to explain that she simply can’t say with certainty whether that is true, and Guthrie retorts: “There’s a birth certificate that has your name and their names on it, why would you doubt something so fundamental?” What makes Guthrie’s response a skeptical rejoinder is its declarative form (“You doubt whether they are your parents?” as opposed to, “*Do* you doubt whether they are your parents?”). The declarative form, in this instance, treats Dolezal’s answer as ridiculous.⁴²

In Lauer’s interview, while discussing Dolezal’s relationship to Albert Wilkerson Jr., Lauer states: “you told friends of yours that he was your father. He is an African-American man, who is clearly not your father.”⁴³ Although Lauer’s statement here might not be read as sarcastic, as Hutchby notes “merely reading the transcript is not the same as hearing the tape.”⁴⁴ In this case, when Lauer states “who is clearly not your father,” his intonation shifts: his voice becomes louder and his pitch increases. The effect of this intonation signifies disbelief at Dolezal. Read together, Guthrie and Lauer’s sarcastic rejoinders assault Dolezal’s phronêsis by demonstrating her lack of good sense. In both cases, they frame Dolezal’s appeals to a black identity as, on face, ridiculous and desperate. Not only does the invocation of the deception narrative frame Dolezal as a liar, she’s framed as a bad one.

Racial Opportunism as an Assault on Eunoia

In addition to a narrative of deception, Lauer’s and Guthrie’s interviews also reinforce a narrative of racial opportunism. The motivation in deceiving audiences, this narrative alleges, stems from the material benefit Dolezal gains from identifying as black. As a result, the narrative of racial opportunism targets Dolezal’s black eunoia by framing her as not having the interests of

⁴² Ibid., 354.

⁴³ Lauer & Dolezal, “Rachel Dolezal Breaks Her Silence.”

⁴⁴ Hutchby, “Non-neutrality and argument in the hybrid political interview,” 353.

black people at heart—rather, her duplicity demonstrates that she only cares about herself. In Lauer’s and Guthrie’s interviews, the narrative of racial opportunism emerges in the form of direct questions alleging that Dolezal lied for her own material gain.

Whenever Lauer and Guthrie invoke the narrative of racial opportunism, they pair their questions with non-verbal hand gestures. Zohar Kampf and Efrat Daaskal argue that the use of slighting hand gestures can make an interview tenser and more adversarial, and Dolezal’s interviews with Lauer and Guthrie are no different.⁴⁵ The interviewers’ hand gestures may vary but all of them involve the interviewers pointing at Dolezal. For Guthrie, she uses her index finger and a clenched fist, repeatedly gesturing in Dolezal’s direction as she explains how other people would say that Dolezal uses race for her own benefit. For Lauer, the threatening gesture takes three forms: removing his glasses and using the arm as an extended pointer finger, pointing directly at Dolezal as Guthrie does, and when Lauer leans in, his palm flat, tapping against his leg as he asks/accuses Dolezal of acting black merely to enhance her resume.⁴⁶ Although not an assault on Dolezal’s ethos *per se*, the use of these slighting hand gestures help establish an adversarial relationship between interviewer and interviewee. Because the use of these nonverbal cues stem from the paradigm of racial authenticity and the interviewer’s position as journalistic inquisitor they, in tandem, create the grounds for a broader assault on Dolezal’s ethos.

In addition to using nonverbal hand gestures to create a more tense and adversarial interview, Lauer and Guthrie explicitly invoke a narrative of racial opportunism. In the Lauer interview, the two discuss a series of newspaper articles in Idaho that identified Dolezal as

⁴⁵ Zohar Kampf and Efrat Daaskal, “When the Watchdog Bites: Insulting Politicians on Air,” in *Talking Politics in Broadcast Media: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Political Interviewing, Journalism and Accountability*, ed. Mats Ekström and Marianna Patrona, Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture, v. 42 (Amsterdam ; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Pub. Co, 2011), 187-8.

⁴⁶ For example, “Was that done (((tap))) to enhance (((tap))) your resume (((tap))) as an African-American woman?”

transracial, biracial, and black. After questioning Dolezal why she didn't correct the news reports, Lauer offers a hypothesis as to why Dolezal was content to let the public misidentify her: "the cynics and skeptics would say you didn't correct those reports because it worked for you, because it helped you meet your goals."⁴⁷ Lauer invokes a narrative of racial opportunism as something other "cynics and skeptics would say," and yet Lauer himself ultimately levies the criticism. Montgomery names this technique an act of "opinionated ventriloquism"⁴⁸ where the interviewer attributes a criticism to another and, thereby, maintains a guise of neutrality.⁴⁹ As a result, Lauer's opinionated ventriloquism provides him cover to assault Dolezal's ethos without himself appearing to conduct the assault.

Lauer forwards this narrative of racial opportunism when he questions Dolezal's decision to claim Albert Wilkerson Jr. as her father: "Was that done to enhance your resume as an African-American woman?"⁵⁰ This narrative of racial opportunism assaults Dolezal's black eunoia by suggesting that her racial identification stems from self-interest, not goodwill towards black people.

Guthrie's interview, too, forwards this narrative of racial opportunism. After drawing attention to Dolezal's decision to file a lawsuit against Howard University, Guthrie contrasts the past lawsuit with her current racial identity as proof of this narrative of racial opportunism. As Guthrie states:

Here's somebody who's telling people she's black, but when it suits her she's going to say, "I'm white and I've been the victim of discrimination." And so they see this thread

⁴⁷ Lauer & Dolezal, "Rachel Dolezal Breaks Her Silence."

⁴⁸ Martin Montgomery, "The Accountability Interview, Politics and Change in UK Public Service Broadcasting," in *Talking Politics in Broadcast Media: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Political Interviewing, Journalism and Accountability*, ed. Mats Ekström and Marianna Patrona, Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture, v. 42 (Amsterdam ; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Pub. Co, 2011), 51.

⁴⁹ Alfahad, "Professionalism vs. Popularity," 100.

⁵⁰ Lauer & Dolezal, "Rachel Dolezal Breaks Her Silence."

where you're using race to your benefit when it suits you to either get a job at the NAACP, or to file a lawsuit against Howard University.⁵¹

By selectively choosing her identity according to when it was most convenient for her, Guthrie throws into question Dolezal's black eunoia. While *now* Dolezal might stand up for black people and their struggles, the narrative of racial opportunism subordinates Dolezal's black eunoia as secondary to her own self-interest.

An Interview from Racial Sincerity

Whereas the interviews above propagated narratives that assaulted Dolezal's ethos, Harris-Perry's style as a journalistic investigator was much more sympathetic to both Dolezal's ethos and her claim to a black identity. At the level of both form and content in the interview, Harris-Perry and Dolezal challenge the narratives of deception and racial opportunism, and performatively affirm the potentiality of Dolezal's black identity.

It is not that Harris-Perry's questions in the interview provide a glowing endorsement of Dolezal. Harris-Perry often disagrees with Dolezal and asks probing and difficult questions. However, these instances are distinct from the moments of judgement in the logic of the trial (Lauer's and Guthrie's interviews) for two reasons. First, when Harris-Perry questions Dolezal's logic she explains her reasoning and frames her question as non-threatening—including giving Dolezal an opportunity to reply. Second, because Harris-Perry's interview operates from a paradigm of racial sincerity the metric of adjudication is internal (did Dolezal try?) rather than external (did she actualize a black identity?). In this sense, the stakes of her questions do not deny Dolezal's identity, but rather produce an open investigative dialogue about what race means.

⁵¹ Guthrie & Dolezal, "Rachel Dolezal."

For example, although Harris-Perry presses Dolezal to account for and explain the discrepancy in how she has told her life story (including fictional time spent in South Africa, and the still ambiguously-true claim to being born in a Teepee), that press is qualified and framed as a way for Dolezal to *build up* and *restore* her ethos. While this might, at first glance, appear to be an underhanded comment, context matters. Shortly before discussing discrepancies in Dolezal's life story, Dolezal mentions that her "outing" has come at the most inopportune time because Dolezal was involved in organizing against a police murder in Spokane, Washington, and was set to testify in a family legal case.

To this, Harris-Perry says: "what you've said here, and I think it's an interesting point, is that your racial identity becomes tied up with your credibility, and your credibility becomes tied up with your capacity to be an advocate, so I'm asking these questions [about South Africa/the Teepee] . . . because I want you to be able to help us understand the credibility part."⁵² Thus, while Harris-Perry recognizes that making Dolezal explain these moments of "creative non-fiction"⁵³ will no doubt be uncomfortable for Dolezal, Harris-Perry frames that discussion in the context of Dolezal being an advocate. As a result, the stake of Dolezal's answer to Harris-Perry's question is not in whether Dolezal can be black, but rather whether Dolezal can restore her credibility to be a better advocate. In this way, rather than indicting Dolezal's ethical character, Harris-Perry's uncomfortable questions offer a means for Dolezal to set the record straight and restore it.

In another example, Dolezal draws reference to the fact that she has "gone there" with the black experience and discusses being the mother of two black sons. Nodding in agreement while

⁵² Harris-Perry & Dolezal, "Exclusive Full Interview."

⁵³ The term "creative non-fiction" is how Dolezal explains these partially true, partially untrue accounts she provided of her history.

Dolezal speaks, Harris-Perry waits for Dolezal to finish before relaying part of her own personal experience to Dolezal:

So, let me first start with the idea of being a parent of black children. So my mother is a white woman, who interestingly grew up in Spokane, Washington, who's raised black children, but she doesn't herself feel black . . . help me to understand why you see a distinction between on the one hand, being a white person, raising and varying [sic] black children . . . versus feeling in your own skin, in your own personhood, that you, are yourself black.⁵⁴

Note the commonalities Harris-Perry draws from her own life experience. First, she offers (freely) a geographic connection between the two of them, acknowledging they both have a history in Spokane, Washington. Second, even as Harris-Perry pushes back against Dolezal's claim to blackness, Harris-Perry presents herself as wanting to know more. She declares, "help me understand," revealing that while she does not totally agree with Dolezal's purported racial identification, she isolates the cause of her disagreement not in Dolezal, or Dolezal's supposed deception, but in her own understanding of race. "Help me understand" reflects a modest claim to knowledge. Rather than judge Dolezal, Harris-Perry seeks to understand where Dolezal is coming from and presents herself as open to Dolezal's answer. In refusing quick judgements, and instead meditating on what Dolezal means, Harris-Perry departs from the paradigm of racial authenticity outlined above and replaces it with a paradigm of racial sincerity. This paradigm, in turn, provides Dolezal an opportunity to demonstrate her black *phronêsis*, *aretê*, and *eunoia*.

By letting Dolezal "help her understand," Harris-Perry departs from the interviews above by challenging the narrative of deception. Unlike Lauer's and Guthrie's interviews that begin by

⁵⁴ Ibid.

asking Dolezal hard questions about identity, Harris-Perry begins her interview by asking how Dolezal has been feeling. And, when she finally asks Dolezal about her racial identity Harris-Perry breaks from the formula of the previous interviews: “I’ve heard a lot of people ask you the question are you African-American or Caucasian, I am not going to ask it that way.”⁵⁵ Dolezal laughs at this opening as Harris-Perry continues: “Are you Black?”⁵⁶ Dolezal answers in the affirmative and, rather than using Dolezal’s answer as a means to denigrate Dolezal’s ethos as a deceiver, Harris-Perry asks: “What do you mean when you say that? What does it mean, to you, to assume the mantle, the identity, of blackness?”⁵⁷

By asking Dolezal to explain what *she* means, Harris-Perry conducts her interview in a way that doesn’t seek to trap Dolezal in another’s definition of blackness. Harris-Perry’s question here explicitly recognizes Dolezal’s logomachy, but she does not use this recognition to assault Dolezal’s black phronêsis. Instead, Harris-Perry’s question lets Dolezal articulate her own view of black identity. This is not to say that Harris-Perry necessarily sees eye-to-eye with Dolezal on the meaning of blackness. However, Harris-Perry does not couch that disagreement in terms of Dolezal’s ethos. Rather, their disagreement over what blackness means becomes an opportunity for dialogue and reflection. By letting Dolezal account for and explain her identification with blackness, Harris-Perry’s question allows Dolezal to challenge the deception narrative (and therefore protects, also, her *aretê*) by explaining how her moral values are line with her audiences and how, rather than acting deceptively, she was acting truthfully according to her own definition of blackness.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Additionally, although Dolezal's definition of blackness differs from Harris-Perry's own, she doesn't chastise Dolezal for using an out-of-touch language as Lauer and Guthrie do. In fact, in another example, Harris-Perry exclaims that: "For more people than I ever expected, race is based in some set of biological realities and that it has everything to do with parentage. When you talk about the people who are your parents, who are you talking about?"⁵⁸ Harris-Perry's question here has two functions.

First, the question acknowledges Harris-Perry's own misgivings on pedestrian logics of race and racialization. Whereas the interviewers above acknowledge Dolezal's deviation from everyday understandings of race as evidence of her own deception (i.e. Dolezal knew that her answers to audience questions about her race/ethnicity were, at best, misleading), Harris-Perry expresses frustration at this everyday logic of racial identity as exemplified by her intonation (her exasperated voice) at the wide-spread nature of this belief. Her shock at the "accepted" belief in racial identity's biological tie not only acts as a criticism of that logic, it sanctions Dolezal's logomachy as a form of embodied practical wisdom. In claiming that she herself could not believe how wide-spread the connection between racial identity and biology/parentage was, Harris-Perry implicitly argues that Dolezal too cannot be faulted for being unaware of that connection. As a result, Harris-Perry excuses Dolezal and protects her ethos from the charge of deception by creating space for disagreement within black phronêsis.

Second, Harris-Perry's question acknowledges room for refashioning what "parent" means, and therefore provides space to protect Dolezal from the accusation of deception. Rather than closing the question completely, Harris-Perry's questioning allows what Burke termed casuistic stretching, whereby the meaning of "parent" becomes imagined away from, or outside

⁵⁸ Ibid.

of, norms of biology.⁵⁹ In superseding biological ties with parentage, Harris-Perry's question challenges the narrative of deception by letting Dolezal clarify what she means by her identification with blackness.

In addition to challenging the narrative of deception, Harris-Perry's interview also disputes the narrative of racial opportunism. Harris-Perry asks, "[i]n what ways have you profited directly from blackness? Which is, undoubtedly, the question people are saying."⁶⁰ At first glance Harris-Perry seems to be levying the same critique of racial opportunism outlined against Dolezal above. However, the form of Harris-Perry's question shifts suddenly as she redirects her question to be less about if or how Dolezal "profited directly from blackness," and instead uses that question to let Dolezal answer those assaults on her ethos exemplified by the interviews above. In this sense, rather than use "other people" as opinionated ventriloquists as Lauer does, Harris-Perry acknowledges that Dolezal has other audiences to address, and Harris-Perry uses her role as an interviewer to help Dolezal address them. Instead of forcing Dolezal to answer the initial question, Harris-Perry jumps straight into another one: "How much do you get paid as the head of the NAACP of Spokane?"⁶¹ Dolezal spends some time answering the question, clarifying that the position was volunteer, with no salary. Rather than comment on Dolezal's answer, Harris-Perry asks a follow-up question: "and how much are you paid for your role on the Police Accountability Board?" When Dolezal again answers, "nothing," Harris-Perry, apparently satisfied, shifts the question away from the topic.⁶²

⁵⁹ Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 223.

⁶⁰ Harris-Perry & Dolezal, "Exclusive Full Interview."

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Harris-Perry also draws attention to Dolezal's lawsuit against Howard University, but her question is framed in a comparatively much less threatening way than Lauer's or Guthrie's interview. After mentioning how others claim Dolezal lied about her race to benefit, Harris-Perry simply asks, "Tell me about that." After Dolezal explains, Harris-Perry nods her head and moves on.

Harris-Perry's questions, therefore, create a zone of tolerance for Dolezal's black eunoia and black aretê by confirming Dolezal as an agent with good intentions and righteous values. Rather than accusing Dolezal of profiting unduly from blackness, Harris-Perry's follow-up questions function to intervene in the public frame and enable argument on Dolezal's behalf. The form of her questions challenges the narrative of racial opportunism levied in the inquisitorial interviews: Dolezal did not benefit from blackness, she volunteered her time for black people.

In addition to challenging the broader narratives that denigrate Dolezal's ethos, Harris-Perry breaks from the generic constraints of the interview to affirm the possibility of Dolezal's black identity in a performative mode. As explained above, the occasion and sub-genre of Dolezal's media interviews can be typologized as an accountability interview. Montgomery notes that, traditionally, the accountability interview is marked by an "absence of in-turn vocalisations [sic] by the interviewer such as mmhum, yeh, oh, I see."⁶³ These in-turn vocalizations, referred to as "receipt tokens," are verbal gestures that "signal acknowledgement by the hearer of what the speaker is saying."⁶⁴ By omitting them, the interviewer distances themselves from agreeing or endorsing the answers provided by the interviewee. In their interviews, Guthrie and Lauer follow the generic constraints of accountability interviews and do not provide Dolezal receipt tokens. While Guthrie and Lauer may nod their heads to hurry Dolezal's answers along, the lack of receipt tokens signifies they do not find any of Dolezal's responses satisfactory enough to be worth affirming.⁶⁵

⁶³ Montgomery, "The Discourse of the Broadcast News Interview, 265.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Although Dolezal does not receive receipt tokens by Guthrie and Lauer, she gives them in all of her interviews (including her interview with Harris-Perry). For example, when Lauer asks Dolezal, "you didn't say I identify as Black" Dolezal interjects and says, "Right, mhum" and Lauer continues, "when did you start deceiving people?" In Guthrie's interview, as Guthrie states: "just as a human being, you know exactly what they are asking you," Dolezal interjects with a "mhum." These are countless other examples like these throughout the interviews.

Harris-Perry's interview, on the other hand, includes many receipt tokens.⁶⁶ Sometimes, Harris-Perry goes above and beyond the murmured tacit approval of the receipt token. For example, near the beginning of the interview, she references the claim made by some that Dolezal just wanted to make a scene and soak up the media spotlight, and as she begins to ask the question Harris-Perry stops, breaks off into a laugh, and says, "I-I know, I'm lookin' at the expression on your face."⁶⁷ In another instance, when Harris-Perry begins her question about Dolezal's white parents, Dolezal laughs and exclaims, "Oh Boy," with Harris-Perry replying sympathetically, "I know. But there's no way to do this without doing that," before dropping her voice and looking to the floor mummering, "yeah'm..."⁶⁸

Consider, too, when the two of them discuss Dolezal's hair. Beginning the question, Harris-Perry light-heartedly asks, "Let me ask you the question that every black woman hates to be asked," as this point Harris-Perry raises her pitch as a means to mock the disgust often smuggled in the question as she asks, "what's up with your hair?" The two of them start laughing together, and Dolezal responds, flicking her wrist at Harris-Perry, "Well, I'll talk to you about that."⁶⁹ Harris-Perry throws her head back, letting out a hearty laugh, repeating, "That's right, that's right," as she flips her own hair back. In these examples, and others like them, Harris-Perry goes beyond the use of receipt tokens to invoke what Geneva Smitherman refers to as call-response. Smitherman, whose book analyzes the communication pattern of black communities,

⁶⁶ Like Dolezal's use of receipt tokens within all of her interviews, there are too many instances of Harris-Perry's own receipt tokens to list without becoming cumbersome. In place of this exhaustive footnote, included here are a couple of time stamps in her interview where Harris-Perry employs receipt tokens: 1:15, 3:04, 3:20, 8:50, 17:15, 17:50, 21:40, 29:39 etc. An inquisitive reader is also welcomed to watch the interview to verify that there exists many, many more instances of these. For a few receipt tokens provided by Harris-Perry when Dolezal discusses the complexity of Dolezal's Black identity, see: 4:50, 5:05, 5:20, 5:50, 6:08, etc.

⁶⁷ Harris-Perry & Dolezal, "Exclusive Full Interview."

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

defines call-response as a “spontaneous verbal and non-verbal interaction between speaker and listener.”⁷⁰

One reductive way of reading Harris-Perry’s enactment of call-response would be to credit it, and her use of receipt tokens, solely to her racial identity as a black woman. This reading ignores that call-response does not exist as a generalizable audience response but rather denotes a specific relation between speaker and audience. As Patreece Boone argues, call-response acts as a “reciprocal speech event which serves to unite the speaker and the audience in a collective display emphasizing the community rather than the individual.”⁷¹ Not every call receives a response. That Harris-Perry responds to Dolezal’s call, and vice versa, therefore reflects a potential community.

More than just giving space for Dolezal to affirm her own ethos, Harris-Perry’s interview actively affirms Dolezal’s own identity by performatively embracing Dolezal, at the level of congealed rhetorical reflex, as a member of the black community. In using call-response, Harris-Perry unites both speaker and audience and therefore interpersonally affirms the latent possibility of Dolezal’s identity as black. As a result, Dolezal and Harris-Perry can be described as accommodating their communication to one another—a feat that Travis L. Dixon et. al. has argued is more likely to happen in same-race interactions.⁷² To be clear, I am neither reading Harris-Perry’s use of receipt tokens or call-response as an explicit or an unconscious affirmation of Dolezal’s black identity. Nor am I arguing that Harris-Perry accommodated her

⁷⁰ Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America*, Waynebook 51 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986), 104.

⁷¹ Patreece Boone, “When the ‘Amen Corner’ Comes to Class: An Examination of the Pedagogical and Cultural Impact of Call-Response Communication in the Black College Classroom,” *Communication Education* 52, no. 3 (January 1, 2003). 213.

⁷² Travis L. Dixon et al., “The Influence of Race in Police-Civilian Interactions: A Content Analysis of Videotaped Interactions Taken During Cincinnati Police Traffic Stops,” *Journal of Communication* 58, no. 3 (September 2008), 540.

communication style to Dolezal's because she, in some way, understood Dolezal to be black. Rather, my point is that Harris-Perry's paradigm of racial sincerity provided a space away from the restrictive paradigm of racial authenticity, and therefore the logic of the trial, wherein something like Dolezal's black identity becomes possible. Instead of using the interview format as an opportunity for an adversarial encounter, Harris-Perry engages Dolezal in a dialogue about her racial identity.

Counterfactual Musings

As the above analysis demonstrates, Dolezal's appeal to a black identity resonated most strongly with audiences steeped in the paradigm of racial sincerity. However, for Dolezal's rhetorical appeals to have been more successful she would have needed, also, to resonate with audiences steeped in the paradigm of racial authenticity. I say this for two reasons. First, because the paradigm of racial authenticity is a dominant way of framing identity, if Dolezal's goal was to move the needle of public opinion on the possibility of a transracial identity she would need to have in some way persuaded this audience. Second, because Dolezal's own political project affirmed the logic of racial authenticity.

As explained in Chapter Three, at the core Dolezal's ethos appeal to a black identity rests an inversion of standpoint epistemology. By drawing a tight-knot between identity and ethos, Dolezal implicitly affirms a paradigm of racial authenticity. Even if blackness becomes abstracted away from ancestry or genetics, Dolezal still affirms the paradigm of authenticity by grounding identity in an absolutized ethos; one "is" or "is not" black. In reproducing the logic of the trial, judgement becomes predisposed towards exclusion from a racial identity.

Consider how, for example, Dolezal contrasts herself in *In Full Color* with her black ex-husband Kevin. Dolezal writes that Kevin suffered from "psychological misorientation," and that

he was an “Oreo—Black on the outside and white on the inside.”⁷³ That with Kevin, Dolezal realized that “a Black man could be, culturally, and philosophically, as white as any white man.”⁷⁴ As Jackson notes, rhetorics of authenticity also work to exclude people who might otherwise be considered “black” through the figures of the “sellout,” the “Uncle Tom,” the “House Negro,” and so on.⁷⁵ In a paradigm of authenticity, all it takes is a token to signify one is “not” black. This is why Dolezal’s politics still operate within a paradigm of authenticity: while she might challenge what form a token takes for black identity, she nevertheless affirms the use of such tokens as a means of judging and excluding others from a racial identity.⁷⁶

The irony here is that Dolezal’s ethos appeals worked best for audiences under the paradigm of racial sincerity precisely because that paradigm frustrates the quick-and-easy connection between identity and any absolutized ethos. To be recognized as black under a paradigm of racial sincerity would not require Dolezal to actualize, perfectly, a black *phronêsis*, *aretê*, or *eunoia*. Rather, Dolezal would only have to demonstrate a sincere *attempt* to obtain something that fits within a range recognized within such an ethos. Paradoxically, then, the paradigm of racial sincerity is predisposed to affirm Dolezal’s black identity even as it disavows the particular method of proof she used (showcasing how she *possessed* a black *phronêsis*, *aretê*, and *eunoia*). In this sense, navigating the minoritarian paradigm of racial sincerity was

⁷³ Rachel Dolezal and Storms Reback, *In Full Color: Finding My Place in a Black and White World* (BenBella Books, 2017), 115.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁷⁵ Jackson, *Real Black*, 213-4.

⁷⁶ There is also a sense where Dolezal’s use of tokens are even less sincere than the paradigm that excludes her. For example, if ethos and standpoint are sufficient grounds for identity, then why does Dolezal get to become black but, say, Tim Wise does not? This thesis does not aim to psychoanalyze Dolezal or even critique/defend her, but this is a point surely worth thinking about.

significantly easier than navigating the majoritarian paradigm of racial authenticity—as would be expected.⁷⁷

A more in-depth treatment of what the failure of Dolezal's ethos appeals reveals about race, ethos, and identity will be one of the primary focuses of the next chapter. In what remains in this chapter I discuss some counterfactual strategies Dolezal might have used to better navigate the more widespread paradigm of racial authenticity. In particular, I argue that Dolezal ought to have minimized talking about herself and maximized talking about the movement for black liberation.

Assuming Dolezal possessed only the limited level of rhetorical prowess evident in the interviews,⁷⁸ if Dolezal could have done things over, I argue she ought to have avoided going on her interview tour across the television networks. I make this recommendation as the result of an intersection of three facts. First, the genre of the television interview concentrates a significant amount of power in the hands of the interviewer. As such, the rhetorical effect of the interview would be mostly a product of the interviewer's choices. Second, because of the widespread dominance of the paradigm of racial authenticity, the interviewer's choices would probabilistically not affirm Dolezal's purported black identity. Third, finally, because the interviews became a widely circulated pretext for understanding Dolezal and her appeal to a transracial identity, the interviews primed (most) audiences to consider the ethos appeals in her book (provided they even read it) as too little-too-late. In conjunction, attending the interviews was a leap of faith. The interviewer dictated most of the rhetorical effect of the interview, their dictation would most likely not be kind to Dolezal, and the rhetorical effect of that interview

⁷⁷ This is, I believe, the benefit and appeal of a paradigm of racial sincerity over one of racial authenticity: that it avoids the paranoid and frenzied search for authentic racial identity that characterizes the logic of the trial.

⁷⁸ Although Dolezal is not a particularly terrible rhetor, she doesn't have the type of invention necessary to violate generic constraints in a way that would be necessary to turn the tables on her interviewers.

would be long-lasting and prime audiences to resist Dolezal's future rhetorical appeals. For these reasons, Dolezal ought to have avoided it.

On the other hand, had Dolezal been a more competent rhetor an alternative rhetorical strategy would have minimized the amount of time she spoke about her own identity and maximized the time spent talking about black liberation. David Zarefsky notes that "[i]f a speaker seems too obviously to adapt to an audience, we denounce the behavior as glibness and pandering."⁷⁹ This glibness and pandering, I think, is precisely what went wrong for so many audiences who received Dolezal. As Michel Foucault famously wrote, "Visibility is a trap," and his insights are truer here than ever.⁸⁰ The more Dolezal explicitly sought to connect her ethos to her identity, the more negative her audiences' responses. As Dolezal drew attention to her long record of service to the black community, or adopted their language to describe her own experiences, her references were interpreted by those operating under the paradigm of authenticity as inherently opportunistic. She was, after all, using her experience as an advocate for the black community on behalf of her own interests in those moments of the interview.

Instead of being visible, I argue Dolezal might have done more for opening the space for a "transracial moment" by staying out of the spotlight. Counterfactually, imagine if when being bombarded by interviews, Dolezal had minimally declared, "I understand people are upset. Those that know me, know me, and I have important work to do fighting for the rights of black people *today* and will continue to do so." Imagine that such a comment was all Dolezal had to say, publicly, and that instead she continued her activist work. By refusing to engage the

⁷⁹ David Zarefsky, "George W. Bush Discovers Rhetoric: September 20, 2001, and the U.S. Response to Terrorism," in *The Ethos of Rhetoric*, ed. Michael J. Hyde, Studies in Rhetoric/Communication (Columbia, S.C: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 136.

⁸⁰ See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

controversy over her identity, Dolezal no doubt would have attracted critics, but might, crucially, have attracted a larger group of allies willing to speak on her behalf. By being “invisible,” Dolezal’s ethos might have spoken for itself, and emanated from her work, as opposed to being weaponized against her. The point therefore, would be not to say nothing, but to speak through what Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson term *enactment*, a strategy “in which the speaker incarnates the argument [and] is the proof of the truth of what is said.”⁸¹ By enacting, and therefore embodying her ethos, Dolezal would resist both the narratives of deception and racial opportunism through her activist organizing.

Such a strategy would, of course, carry its own psychic risk. As Dolezal recalls in her interview with Harris-Perry:

It’s been hard for me to actually have the courage to be there for myself (((Dolezal’s voice begins to quiver here, fighting back tears))) because my life, and kind of my path, my journey, has been to be so heavily aware of the needs of other people, and trying to organize, strategize, and advocate for and protect those interests. And so, at this point I’m kind of thrust into, you know, are you going to be there for yourself? Are you going to back down?⁸²

To say much less about herself and more about the cause might have created momentum down the road for a broader societal embrace of a transracial identity, but in the present for Dolezal—facing the ire of media, bloggers, and the internet alike—to say nothing may have been too painful to bear. Then again, when Dolezal did speak about herself her appeals were like nails on a chalkboard—totally discordant with existing frames for racial identity, and hence perhaps

⁸¹ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, “Form and Genre in Rhetorical Criticism: An Introduction,” in *Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action*, ed. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, (Falls Church, Va. : The Speech Communication Association, 1978), 5.

⁸² Harris-Perry & Dolezal, “Exclusive Full Interview.”

impossible to hear in a harmonious fashion. While harder to swallow in the moment, to have said nothing about the “truth” of her own identity might have made her claim to a black identity easier to swallow in the end.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I analyzed the way that Matt Lauer and Savannah Guthrie’s inquisitorial television interviews denigrated Dolezal’s ethos through a narrative of deception and a narrative of racial opportunism. Additionally, I explained how Melissa Harris-Perry’s investigative interview challenged these narratives and provided space for Dolezal to affirm the potential of her black identity. The fulcrum that determined acceptance or opposition to Dolezal’s transracial identification rested in, I argued, whether or not audiences operated from a paradigm of racial sincerity versus a paradigm of racial authenticity. While Dolezal’s appeals were modestly successful for a paradigm of racial sincerity, her rhetorical strategy was a disaster for a paradigm of racial authenticity. Finally, I provided an alternative rhetorical strategy Dolezal might have used to avoid the charges of deception and racial opportunism by downplaying her identity and up-playing her role as an activist.

While there exists disagreement between these various audiences about the validity of Dolezal’s claim to blackness, there exists a broad agreement between them (and between Dolezal herself as illustrated in Chapter Two) about what constitutes the potential grounds *in* that identification. Even as Lauer and Guthrie quarreled with Harris-Perry over Dolezal’s identity, there was widespread agreement over the grounds of that quarrel: Dolezal’s ethos. In the next chapter, I theorize not only why all these participants focus on Dolezal’s ethos, but also explain why Dolezal’s ethos appeals in navigating the paradigm of racial authenticity were ultimately so unsuccessful.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Mention Rachel Dolezal's name to a crowd and you'll be sure to get a host of responses. Most of them are negative. One of the more common comments I've heard as I've worked on this thesis is a question about Dolezal's mental health: "Have you ever thought that maybe she is just crazy?" On the one hand it is a fair question. For most of us, at least some of Dolezal's behavior seems strange beyond comprehension.¹ On the other hand calling Dolezal "crazy" or "sick" or "deranged" very quickly ends any discussion about racial identity. To put it another way, I've rarely seen these adjectives, or adjectives like them, begin a sentence; almost always they end one.

I've found also that once Dolezal's mindset becomes properly labeled, what we say she represents—transracial identity, the blurring (or crossing) of the color line, (reverse) passing—gets labeled by proxy. As if once we've made a determination about Dolezal, we have settled, synecdochally, the questions her claimed identity raises. In making a judgement about Dolezal's mental health (read: her ethos), we have somehow also made a judgement about a competing logic of racial identification.² This thesis, in part, aimed to explain how, and why, this happens.

In Chapter One, I made the case that Aristotle's concept of ethos is not an outdated tool of a bygone era, but rather continues to offer rhetorical critics a way to appreciate enduring

¹ Although beyond the scope of this thesis, close attention to the ebbs and flows of this pathologizing discourse and its proposed explanatory effect for Dolezal, I imagine, would be an incredibly productive project

² The logic here reminds me of that of parents confiscating the sticks from children at a park after one of them hits another. The one child "ruined" sticks for everyone. A similar sort of synecdochal logic is at play between Dolezal's ethos and the ideology of a transracial identity.

persuasive appeals. I explored what Aristotle meant by ethos and introduced its three pillars: practical wisdom (*phronêsis*), moral values (*aretê*), and goodwill (*eunoia*). I then articulated these pillars in relationship to ethos to explain their rhetorical functions and concurred with Christof Rapp that they permitted a second-order judgement.³ Then, I examined what I termed the interpellative and/or ontological turn in the study of ethos. In this turn, authors berated Aristotle for not attending to racial, sexual, national, etc. differences. According to these authors, Aristotle's deafness on questions of difference rendered ethos an exploitative concept that was either only accessible to dominant identities, or only serviced the ends of those in power. Because marginal identities are barred from obtaining ethos, the interpellative and/or ontological turn argues, rhetorical critics must refashion ethos away from a technique used by a rhetor and instead embrace ethos as a judgement levied by a critic.

I had two responses. First, that in some sense this criticism was much less about Aristotle and much more about a particular interpretation of Aristotle, what I called Aristotelian. That Aristotle did not include difference within his definition of ethos did not mean he was unaware of its effects, it just meant that he did not include those effects (categorically) within ethos. As an Athenian, Aristotle was no doubt aware of in-group and out-group distinctions. Second, while I agreed with these authors that any analysis of a rhetor's enactment of ethos must, also, take into account "societal" ethos, I argued that there was still value in theorizing ethos as a type of appeal deployed by a rhetor. This thesis has been my attempt at demonstrating that point.

In Chapter Two, I explored the history of racialization in the United States as well as the state of our existing racial landscape. I explained how the racial bipolarity of the United States incentivized racial passing, the crossing of the color line, in order for marginal identities to gain

³ Christof Rapp, "Aristotle on the Moral Psychology of Persuasion," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aristotle*, ed. Christopher Shields (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 604.

access to resources, opportunities, and social capital legally and culturally reserved for white bodies. I revealed how because passing threatened the established racial order, a host of cultural and legal practices were imagined and enacted to police the border between black and white. In this hypodescent model of whiteness, any evidence of blackness automatically assigned the individual in question to a marginalized identity. This evidence took the form of various marks which could cause one to descend in the racial hierarchy (hence the *descent* of hypodescent). Werner Sollors noted that, in the frenzied desire to safeguard the color line, white identity became defined by negation. In this way, racial markers were “viewed as evidence of ‘blackness,’ [their] absence . . . no proof of ‘whiteness.’”⁴ The result was an interesting paradox: one could not prove they were white; one could only prove that they were *not* black.

Although this hypodescent racial order arguably did not vanish entirely, it lost much of its cultural sway and nearly all of its legal architecture in the 1960s when the state no longer tasked itself with preventing the “racial fraud” of those who passed as white. In an era of elective racial identification, individuals could decide for themselves (instead of being verified by state records) what their identity was. At the same time, the loosening of repressive state control over race emerged in tandem with progressive legal regimes aimed at providing resources and restitution to marginalized identities after centuries of discrimination. These benefits, including but not limited to affirmative action and scholarships directly earmarked for minorities, created the conditions for what scholars have begun to term “reverse passing.” Whereas passing has almost always been shorthand for “passing as white,” reverse passing refers to the undertheorized act of passing in the “other” direction—passing as black. This racial context became a dominant frame for understanding Dolezal’s purported identity (what I termed in

⁴ Werner Sollors, *Neither Black nor White yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 148.

Chapter Four the narrative of racial opportunism). To distance herself from being read as a reverse passer, and therefore one who sequestered resources from minority communities, Dolezal needed to be read *as* black.

Chapter Three of this thesis charted how Dolezal tried to convince audiences of the legitimacy and authenticity of her racial identity. In this chapter, I conducted a rhetorical analysis of Dolezal's book *In Full Color: Finding My Place in a Black and White World* to explore how Dolezal tried to demonstrate to audiences that she possessed a transracial identity. What I found was an overflowing of ethos appeals. I argued that while ethos generally functions as a second-order judgement to enhance one's argument, when the argument the rhetor wishes the audience to accept is to read the rhetor as possessing this or that identity, ethos's form changes. In these situations, a rhetor must demonstrate through their speech that they satisfy certain ethotic requirements befitting an identity, and those requirements take on the shape of the identity the rhetor aims at displaying. In the context of Dolezal's book, this led Dolezal to demonstrate how she possessed black *phronêsis*, black *aretê*, and black *eunoia*. When racialized, *phronêsis*, *aretê*, and *eunoia* take on new forms: practical wisdom turns into embodied cultural knowledge (*phronêsis*), moral values become audience specific (*aretê*), and good will becomes good will for the identity category one aims at (*eunoia*).

Additionally, I explored how although Dolezal appealed to each of these three separate pillars of a black ethos, she also fused all three of them together. Using her adopted black siblings as an anchoring point, Dolezal constructed her ethos as a set of necessary "if-then" relationships between the three pillars of ethos: because I care for my siblings, I must also care for black people, which means I must also have black moral values, which means I must also learn about embedded black cultural practices, which helps me care for my siblings, which

means, etc. etc. This fusion of ethos's pillars supports, in Dolezal's rhetoric, a unitary conception of Dolezal's subject. This unitary subject, with its close tie between identity and ethos, I connected to a broader theory of standpoint epistemology. My argument, at the chapter's closing, was that Dolezal's rhetoric works to invert the paradigm of standpoint epistemology even as she gives it coherence. Because I possess a black ethos that is inaccessible to whites, Dolezal reasoned, I must be black.

Finally, in Chapter Four I evaluated the relative successes and failures of this ethos appeal. In this chapter, I analyzed Dolezal's television interviews with Savannah Guthrie, Matt Lauer, and Melissa Harris-Perry as forms of hybrid rhetorics where interviewers acted as both audiences responding to Dolezal's proposed transracial identity, and also as rhetors speaking about Dolezal to wider viewing publics. In attending to the form and genre of the television interview, I typologized these interviews into two journalistic styles: an investigative style (Harris-Perry) and an inquisitorial style (Savannah Guthrie and Matt Lauer). These styles were marked by sharp differences between levels of adversariality between interviewer and interviewee as exemplified by how the interviews propagated, or challenged, two narratives: a narrative of deception and one of racial opportunism.

In addition to typologizing the style of the interviews, I typologized the interviews (and therefore, the interviewers) as stemming from two distinct paradigms for understanding racial difference: racial authenticity and racial sincerity. The former treats racial identity as something to be verified and judged, what Loïc Wacquant terms the "logic of the trial,"⁵ whereas the latter grants a certain presumption to racialized others by foregrounding their own interiority and humanity. Racial authenticity assumes an absolute link between identity and ethos (to be black,

⁵ See Loïc Wacquant, "For an Analytic of Racial Domination," *Political Power and Social Theory* 11, (1997): 221-234.

one must demonstrate that one perfectly *has* a black ethos) whereas racial sincerity assumes a more relative link between the two (to be black, one need only demonstrate that they *intend* to have something within a *range* recognized as black ethos).

In the end, I concluded that the types of ethos appeals made by Dolezal (her ethos appeals in the interview are less developed, but are essentially the same as the ethos appeals I analyzed in Chapter Three) were moderately successful in navigating audiences steeped in a paradigm of racial sincerity, but an absolute disaster for audiences steeped in a paradigm of racial authenticity. This was in a sense ironic since Dolezal's appeal and own politics reproduce a paradigm of authenticity (discussed in terms of Dolezal's inversion of standpoint epistemology in Chapter Three, and also in terms of how she discusses her ex-husband Kevin in Chapter Four). Even as a paradigm of sincerity affirmed Dolezal's identity, it did so by negating the particular method by which she had sought that affirmation.

I concluded the chapter by proposing an alternative method Dolezal might have used to navigate this widespread paradigm of racial authenticity. Because, for this audience, Dolezal's ethos appeals came off as glibness and pandering, I recommended that Dolezal would have been better served by not explicitly making the case that her black ethos demonstrated a black identity, and instead should have made the argument implicitly by continuing to enact a black ethos as an activist.

Pressing Questions on the State of Racial Identity

The central question that motivated this thesis was: why was it so easy to dismiss Dolezal's claim to a transracial identity, and why did her appeals for audiences to accept that identity fall so flat? While the previous chapters have occasionally verged into answering this question, I believe that now, at the conclusion, we finally have the resources necessary to answer

this question head on. To do so, we should first rephrase it into another question. Connecting our insights between Chapter Three and Chapter Four: why doesn't Dolezal's inversion of the paradigm of standpoint epistemology work in the paradigm of racial authenticity? Dolezal provides an alternative schema for being black, this schema even allows the type of judgement that comports to the paradigm of racial authenticity. So why does the inversion fail?

Prior to completing this thesis, my answer to this question was a reductive one. It doesn't work, my reasoning went, because Dolezal lacked the identity. In my own way, I was replaying the insights of the interpellative and/or ontological turn in ethos: Dolezal can't demonstrate the proper ethos for a black identity because she was white. I have come to realize that while this answer isn't necessarily wrong, it is misleading in two ways.

First, it is misleading because this answer is tautological. Why isn't Dolezal black? Because she lacks the proper ethos. Why does she lack the proper ethos? Because she is white. Etc. etc. Second, this answer is misleading because it cannot explain how the discourse on Dolezal became marked on all sides with an over-proliferation of ethos appeals: from Guthrie, to Harris-Perry, to Lauer, to Dolezal herself. At the minimum, something must be happening if a supposedly self-evident appeal to the durable "facts" of racial identity becomes represented and enacted in the discourse as ethos.

The reason audiences chose to understand Dolezal's racial identity as a question of ethos is because they lacked a vocabulary outside of ethos to operationalize race. In Chapter Two, I discussed how the model of hypodescent whiteness rendered white identity a negative identity category. By this, I mean that in the desire to safeguard and defend the color line through various marks of difference (the color of one's skin, the hue of one's fingernail, the coarseness of one's hair, etc.), white identity became defined from without. That is, what it meant to be white was

defined in terms of a not. There was no evidence one could point to that could guarantee one's identity as white. Instead, one could only dismiss evidence that proved one's identity as black. Whiteness could not be proven, blackness had to be disproven.

What the analysis of reverse passing in Chapter Two and the narrative of racial opportunism in Chapter Four suggests, is that the era of "elective racial identification" has brought with it a caveat. While we have spoken, at length, about hypodescent whiteness, there exists in tandem a model of *hypo-ascent* blackness. The logics and rationalities in hypodescent whiteness (the idea that a single mark of blackness invalidated a white identity, that whiteness was defined by negation, and that a white identity could never be proven, among others) are inverted but also furthered in hypoascent blackness (that a single mark of whiteness invalidates a black identity, that blackness is defined by negation, and that a black identity could never be proven, etc.). In hypodescent whiteness, the mark of blackness causes one to descend in the racial hierarchy; in hypoascent blackness, the mark of whiteness causes one to ascend in the racial hierarchy.

To return to Dolezal briefly, consider the analysis of Leslie Stevens and Nicole Maurantonio who examined the way black people have responded to, and critiqued, what they consider to be the fraudulence of Dolezal's reverse passing.⁶ In their article, Stevens and Maurantonio examine a series of tweets called #AskRachel that highlighted the lived experience of blackness as knowledge beyond the bounds of Dolezal's purported racial identification. Which is to say, they rely on a duality of standpoint epistemology and a paradigm of racial authenticity. To do this, twitter users produced and shared tweets that played on distinctions between black and white vernacular. For example, one tweet asked "Which one is a Kitchen? #AskRachel,"

⁶ See Leslie Stevens and Nicole Maurantonio, "Black Twitter Asks Rachel: Racial Identity Theft in 'Post-Racial' America," *Howard Journal of Communications*, August 18, 2017, 1–17.

accompanied by two photographs stitched side-by-side: “The image at left features a home kitchen . . . At right is featured the hair at the nape of a young woman’s neck.”⁷ The tweets functioned as an authenticity test by suggesting that “the cultural referent is inaccessible to the appropriator of black culture.”⁸ Other examples of #AskRachel fell along similar lines—referencing a cultural experience presumed to be shared among “true” black people, but inaccessible or incomprehensible to the inauthentic consumers of blackness.

Ultimately, Stevens and Maurantonio concede that what matters is not so much the questions themselves so much as the asking. As they write:

Given the length of time Dolezal . . . passed as a black woman, she likely could answer the questions posed by Black Twitter users correctly. Thus, rather than consider the answer to the questions key to understanding the significance of #AskRachel, we consider the authority resting with the question asker’s ability to construct the question—and in so doing deploy their own cultural capital.⁹

In a sense then, although not explicitly argued by Stevens and Maurantonio, we ought to recognize these questions as a trap homologous to Sollor’s insights about the disqualifying mark of blackness. In the hypodescent model of whiteness, one could not prove they were white—there were only various marks that served as proof that one was black. With #AskRachel, in the hypoascent model of blackness, we have the inverse. Lack of knowledge about the cultural trope disqualifies one from blackness, but possession of that knowledge does not demonstrate one’s identity as black. There can always be another question and therefore another hoop to jump

⁷ Ibid., 8-9.

⁸ Ibid., 9.

⁹ Ibid., 14.

through. Because blackness becomes defined by negation, there is no answer that settles one's identity as black (only answers that disqualify one from being black).

Hypodescent whiteness and hypoascent blackness are twin features in a paradigm of racial authenticity, and so they do not replace or battle one another so much as supplement each other. The problem, however, is that their conjunctive effects destabilize the grounding of the racial structure. At least if one side is anchored, race maintains some coherent level of intelligibility. But, now that both sides of the dialectic are unanchored (both sides are defined in negation), the grounding of race gets much murkier because what constitutes a "mark" of blackness or a "mark" of whiteness becomes deferred.

This destabilization explains why the discourse becomes so transfixed on Dolezal's ethos. The public¹⁰ lacks a vocabulary to explain why Dolezal *is* or *isn't* white, just as they lack a vocabulary to explain why Dolezal *is* or *isn't* black *outside of referencing Dolezal*. Ethos appeals, then, serve as the synecdochal proxy for judging Dolezal's "arguments" (also ethos appeals) for the existence of a transracial identity. Rapp noted that ethos's function in persuasion is to act as a second-order judgement. In the case of Dolezal and racial identity, that second-order has also become the first-order argument. Is there such a thing as a transracial identity? Once audiences decided that Dolezal was bad, unethical, exploitative, dishonest, etc., then by proxy they could decide there was no ground in Dolezal's appeal for a transracial identity.¹¹

¹⁰ I tend to avoid speaking in over generalizing language, but I do so here because while there are enclaves which *do* continue to ground race in, say, something concrete like scientific discourse, these are marginal publics. The widespread proliferation of ethos appeals as a way of making sense of Dolezal demonstrates, at least in this instance, widespread groundlessness of race on the part of various disparate audiences that make up "the public."

¹¹ Part of the irony, or the genius of this debate, is that by centering the discourse around Dolezal's ethos audiences were able to avoid coming to terms with the destabilized structure of racial identity supported by the twin-logics of hypodescent whiteness and hypoascent blackness. In levying a judgement against Dolezal, they didn't have to justify or support their racial worldview.

These twin features of the paradigm of authenticity (hypodescent whiteness and hypoascent blackness) also explain why Dolezal's ethos appeals to a black identity were met with such skepticism and disgust. The problem, ultimately, stemmed from the fact that Dolezal was trying to "PROVE" her black identity. By appealing to how she had a black identity, Dolezal assumed that blackness had a positive characteristic, a mark, that if she nestled in herself would prove her black identity. But as explained above, in hypoascent blackness one cannot prove a black identity, one can only *disprove* a white one. This structure of negation, like the martial art jiu-jitsu, used the weight of Dolezal's appeals against her. In drawing attention to what she considered to be her qualifying marks of blackness, audiences received Dolezal's ethos appeals in their inverted form—disqualifying marks of whiteness.

Dolezal's appeals to her black identity in a positive capacity (using ethos to establish identity) failed precisely because there is no positive grounding to racial identity (or at least not one that can be affirmed).¹² In the context of a paradigm of authenticity, ethos only works in an appeal to racial identity through negativity. Ethos can only dismiss a racial identity, it cannot build one. In explaining *why* Dolezal was black, she fell for a trap, because there were no marks that qualified one as black (only marks that disqualified).

This is why, as I argued in Chapter Four, the best strategy for Dolezal in navigating the widespread paradigm of authenticity would have been to *enact* her inversion of standpoint epistemology, instead of drawing attention to it. By continuing her activist organizing, and speaking only as an advocate for black communities Dolezal would have enacted a powerful argument against the marks of whiteness Dolezal's critics tried to raise.¹³ One could even have

¹² If race does operate outside of this groundless structure, its grounding must continually be disavowed 'less one is seen by others or sees oneself as a racist.

¹³ I do not mean to suggest that if Dolezal had simply said nothing and followed this strategy that all audiences, everywhere, would have been persuaded. I believe rhetoric powerfully shapes audiences, but I am not naïve enough

imagined that this modesty might have attracted a significant number of allies to argue on Dolezal's behalf. But in drawing explicit reference to her black identity, Dolezal was immediately met with skepticism as each attempt to draw attention to a qualifying "itness" of blackness was received either as pandering, or as out of touch white racism.

Ethos—Once More, This Time with Feeling

One of the most persuasive critiques raised by those in the interpellative and/or ontological turn in ethos was that criticism becomes irresponsible if ethos appeals are theorized in separation from the broader societal forces that constrain them. To speak about ethical character in the abstract, without considering how marginal identities are restricted from accessing or deploying that ethos, is a failure of theorizing. Top down judgement on these marginal speakers, therefore, at times betray the theorist's lack of sympathy with the oppressed. In the end, I find this point a valuable one: to truly understand ethos, and its enactment, requires an understanding and appreciation of racial dynamics.¹⁴

But, the interpellative and/or ontological turn in ethos misstepped by abstracting ethos away from the ethical appeals deployed by rhetors. This thesis demonstrates that there is value in a renewed Aristotelian focus on ethos *precisely* because of the role of racial difference as both context and constraint. While the above authors are right that race affects ethos, in effect, this thesis also powerfully makes the case for the inverse: that a full account of race, racialization, and our current racial order is impossible absent a discussion of ethos. Yes, racial difference constrains a rhetor's enactment of ethos. However, this thesis shows us that ethos doesn't just

to think one speech act, or sets of speech acts, could totally undo an over three-hundred-year paradigm of authenticity. In this sense, I agree with Barbara Biesecker when she writes that: "It hardly need be said that one speech a collective disposition or political imaginary does not even begin to make." Even so, I believe that had Dolezal changed her rhetorical strategy *something-more-approaching* a "transracial moment" may have been possible. See Barbara Biesecker, "No Time for Mourning: The Rhetorical Production of the Melancholic Citizen-Subject in the War on Terror," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 40, no. 1 (2007), 156.

¹⁴ And gender, and class, and disability, etc.

exist as a way for rhetors to navigate society, of course it does that too, but that ethos also *actively* constructs and *subtends* identity. Race does not just constrain ethos. Ethos, I have argued, is also an important way that race becomes intelligible, enacted, and itself constrained.

Ethos's constructive capabilities are likely not restricted to race, especially because race is not the only identity category that has grown increasingly destabilized. At the same time as anxiety over racial identity expands in a new direction, anxiety at the human condition grows. Lines everywhere are being transgressed over race, gender, sexuality, nationality, and class. Even the boundaries of the human are being challenged, and not just in terms of cyborgs in a narrow sense,¹⁵ but also in terms of genetic modification and human augmentation. As these lines are transgressed and boundaries fall, new borders are redrawn. Rhetorical critics need concepts to explain *how* those borders get drawn, and how those lines can be made malleable. To effectively be able to attend to how these forces shape us, we must also be prepared to attend to how rhetors shape back. This thesis demonstrates that ethos, the construction of the rhetor's ethical character, remains an important technique in that shaping.

Through a combination of our own personal beliefs, colleagues, peers, and even our consumption of media, we have been shaped by rhetoric that has built up, and torn down, Dolezal's ethos. At the time of this writing, it appears that Dolezal's ethos has been solidly demolished and her ethical character all but torn to shreds in the public eye. As a result, it seems that for our present moment—which is dominated by the paradigm of racial authenticity—the concept of a transracial identity remains just that. A transracial identity, however, is not a destination permanently deferred, even if it requires greater sympathy for a perspective based in

¹⁵ See Donna Haraway, "Situated knowledges," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, (London: Free Association Books, 1991).

racial sincerity. It is a destination that remains on the horizon. A rhetor with the appropriate ethos might yet take us there.

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