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## A Feeling for the Audience – A Rhetorical Analysis

The effective use of rhetoric differs based on the intended audience and purpose of the text. Lucy Madison's editorial article "Wheels of Misfortune" persuades the reader of the *New York Times* that increasingly cyclists who ignore traffic laws endanger pedestrians and should face serious consequences [1]. In contrast, Peter Tuckel *et al* argue in their academic paper "Pedestrian injuries due to collisions with bicycles in New York" in the *Journal of Safety Research* that injuries to pedestrians from cyclists have decreased in recent years [2]. Not only do these articles offer seemingly opposite arguments, but the rhetorical strategies used to convey the authors' intentions differ significantly. **Each article uses rhetorical strategies tailored to their intended purpose and audience**; while Madison **places greater emphasis** on emotional appeals to make her general audience feel sympathy and anger, Tuckel *et al* appeal to their academic audience by relying almost exclusively logic.

Madison **centres her article** around her personal tragedy of her mother passing away due to a collision with a cyclist disobeying traffic laws [1]. **As Madison's article is an editorial in the New York Times, the audience is the general public.** Thus, Madison's narrative creates a compelling foundation as the personal nature will cause the reader to associate their own loved ones with her tragedy and **evoke an empathetic response**. While Madison uses all three rhetorical appeals, she calls on them in a sequence where she first appeals to the reader's emotion with her tragic memory, followed by appeals to logic and credibility by

presenting statistics from reputable sources, then closing off the text with a final appeal to emotion by reminding the reader of the impacts this event will forever have on her family.

In the first such stage, Madison uses vocabulary with strong imagery to set a pleasant tone, as she recalls that “it was an unseasonably warm and beautiful day, and I like to think that as [my mother] stepped off the curb she was in a cheerful mood, thinking about the weekend ahead” [1]. This happy scene is then shattered by the following paragraph with the stand-alone statement: “Those were among her final conscious moments” [1]. The following paragraph details the horrific scene where Madison’s mother experienced the collision and ultimately passed away [1]. Madison’s strategy of setting an idyllic scene and then destroying it with the tragic outcome evokes a strong emotional response from the reader, and **effectively draws the reader into the issue.**

The article’s second sequence appeals to logic as Madison informs the reader that “bike-commuting rates increased 62 percent on a national average” [1]. Additionally, citing the League of American Bicyclists fortifies Madison’s appeal to credibility [1]. In the final section of the article, Madison appeals to the reader’s emotions a final time by reminding them that her mother loved her granddaughter and now cannot witness her grow up [1], stressing that “[her] family has been robbed of decades with this beloved person in our lives” [1]. This final emotional appeal broadens the impact of the tragedy, as the actions of one careless cyclist now touch an entire family.

**In contrast to Madison’s overt emotional appeals, the article by Tuckel *et al* mainly appeals to logic. Due to the academic nature of this article, its focus on data is to be expected and is the optimal strategy given its intended audience and purpose: scholars in need of material for research.** This article also uses a 3-part structure in which a variety of

appeals are used; however, the appeals vary greatly from those seen in Madison's article. Tuckel *et al* follow a more conventionally scientific, emotionally-detached format, starting with an introduction that provides context in a clear manner before presenting additional findings. The second part of the article contains the Method, Results and Discussion sections. In these paragraphs, Tuckel *et al* present various statistics using numerical data and references to informative graphs *[give quoted examples to prove your claim here, and then cite it after the quotation]* – a consistently and effectively appealing to the readers' logic throughout. In the final part of the article, the authors sum up their findings and suggest further research that can be done. This allows the reader to digest and understand the article's information and the scholarly context. This article also appeals to credibility, as it is published in a peer-reviewed academic journal, with the authors' educational details listed at the top, indicating their expertise [2]. Additionally, the article's credibility is reinforced by citing reliable and authoritative sources for its data: "The data for New York come from the Statewide Planning and Research Cooperative System (SPARCS)" [2]. *[This paragraph could use more textual evidence to support your argument; also, you might consider breaking this into two paragraphs, and developing them both with a bit more evidence and explanation].*

Regardless of the medium, rhetoric is a delicate tool that must consider the best way to convey the author's message to the intended reader. While the articles by Madison and Tuckel *et al* employ strikingly different rhetorical strategies for their respective audiences – Madison through intensely emotional appeals, Tuckel *et al* through primarily logical appeals – they each use rhetoric effectively by catering to the needs and expectations of their specific audience.

(832 words)

## References

- [1] L. Madison, "Wheels of Misfortune," 11 Aug. 2017, *New York Times*, [Online]. Available: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/11/opinion/traffic-bike-laws.html>
- [2] P. Tuckel, W. Milczarski and R. Maisel, "Pedestrian injuries due to collisions with bicycles in New York and California," *Journal of Safety Research*, vol. 51, pp. 7-13, 2014. (DOI: 10.1016/j.jsr.2014.07.003)