

THE INTERSECTION OF VOICE AND POLICY: HOW COLLABORATIVE
WRITING IN A CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE GENERATES A PUBLIC VOICE

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my husband, Jason, who has made far more than his share of meals over the past four years.

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I would like to thank my colleagues not only for participating in my study and allowing me to observe their work, but for helping me become a better writer during the years we have worked together. I find it such a pleasure to go to work each day with a team of talented, dedicated people. I also want to express appreciation to Congressman Adamson, for whom I count it a privilege to work. I would like to thank Dr. Lawrence for providing guidance and encouragement throughout graduate school and for her invaluable advice and feedback on this project. Thanks also to the other members of my thesis committee, Dr. Eyman and Professor Goodwin, who offered constructive feedback and thoughtful suggestions. Finally, I want to acknowledge my friends and family who offered so much support while I worked to complete this paper—and, of course, to express gratitude to my husband, Jason, who knows I can write even when I am not sure and throughout this process somehow always managed to unlock my mind when I thought I had reached a dead end.

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ABSTRACT

THE INTERSECTION OF VOICE AND POLICY: HOW COLLABORATIVE WRITING IN A CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE GENERATES A PUBLIC VOICE

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This paper examines the role congressional staffers play in orchestrating the voice of the Member of Congress through the crafting of press releases, letters, speeches, and other texts on his behalf. The author conducted an ethnographic study of the congressional office where she has worked for four years, examining how the staff writing team works collaboratively to generate the Congressman's public voice. The study explores the sources of authority in the writing process, particularly in a culture where writing on behalf of the Congressman has the power to determine and communicate public policy. It examines how staff writers orient first to the Congressman himself, then to various audiences and to each other. It argues that the writing process is significantly impacted by the power structures in the office, but that it also plays an important role in shaping power relationships among writers and between the Congressman and his staff. Finally, this study argues that the congressional voice has a significant impact on crafting and

implementing public policy and that staffers, as orchestrators of this voice, have authority to shape policy decisions.

1. Introduction

On any given day on Capitol Hill, it seems, most people are writing. From the seasoned Chief of Staff to the entry-level Staff Assistant, one of the primary tasks of congressional staffers is to write. As Legislative Director for a Member of Congress (to whom I refer as my boss), I spend a good part of each day communicating my Member's views on the public policy issues of the day in writing. I respond to letters sent to the Congressman by constituents on myriad concerns--from missing Social Security checks to forest fire management. I write letters to executive branch agencies to express his opinions about regulations they have recently published. I compose Dear Colleague letters that encourage other Members to cosponsor legislation my boss has introduced. I craft editorials in my boss's name for newspapers throughout the congressional district to publish. I even write memos to my boss to go over his position on certain issues before meetings.

I also write speeches. Of all the writing I do each day, speechwriting is my favorite. I get a rush when I hear the words I wrote spoken from the floor of the House of Representatives. When I write a speech, I get to shape the argument, determine which points to emphasize, and decide which examples make complex policy accessible to the average American. Like most writing on Capitol Hill, writing speeches is done in a pressure cooker. Words are most valuable when they are timely. I rarely have time for

multiple drafts of a speech, making it more challenging to get the facts straight and the argument right and make it sound like something the boss would have written himself. When I hand over the speech and hear a Member of Congress read the words I wrote, it is instantly clear to me whether I succeeded in capturing his voice.

But what if the Member *had* written the speech? What would he have said differently, or what arguments would he have used to make his point? I had not given this idea a lot of thought, apart from trying to recreate his phrases and tone in the pieces I write, until one morning he came up to my desk and handed me a stack of papers.

“This,” he said, “is my floor speech for today.” I looked at the pile of lined paper, block letters in pencil, drafted the night before while he watched baseball at home. “Will you read it and make sure it makes sense? Make any changes that you need to. Then will you type it up?” I tried to accept my demotion from speechwriter to typist gracefully as he headed back to his desk.

I read the speech with what I will now admit was trepidation. What if this speech didn’t sound like him? What if it needed to be rewritten so that it made sense? More importantly, what if it didn’t sound like the voice *I* had created for him? But as I flipped the pages, reading his boxy scrawl, it was clear that he knew what he was doing. His speech was nearly flawless. It was compelling and coherent, and it completely reflected his personality. This shouldn’t have surprised me—after all, who better to capture the Congressman’s voice than the Congressman himself? But it did make me very aware of the fact that most of the time the voice the public hears is the one my colleagues and I

create, not his alone, and it certainly made me scrutinize whether our facsimile can stand up next to the real thing.

In one sense, it is easy to assume that the Congressman's actual voice is accurately reflected by his staff because, like most congressional staff, we identify with our boss, referring in the plural as we talk about the votes "we" have taken, "our" positions on a specific issue, and the constituents "we" represent. This is not surprising, considering that we spend every day writing on his behalf. Behind each press statement, editorial, or response to a constituent letter from Congressman Frank Adamson, as I call him in this study, stands a staffer who has shaped his or her writing skills to communicate in the Congressman's voice.

In another sense, however, this consistent voice is the result of a complex collaborative process involving a number of individuals. Members of the U.S. House of Representatives generally depend on a staff of five to ten people to write speeches, letters, press quotes, and other communications on their behalf. Given the disparity in staff personalities, writing styles, and political opinions, the fact that staffers regularly succeed in speaking in a consistent voice in a variety of genres on behalf of one individual is an amazing feat.

Finding and emulating this voice is extremely important. For writers, discovering one's voice involves a process of self-discovery, of examining the words and views of others in order to determine one's own values, opinions, and way of speaking. Voice allows writers to share their authentic selves with readers. The voice found in the writing done on Congressman Adamson's behalf makes his values, opinions, and information

that are communicated in that writing authentic, creating and reinforcing the *ethos* that he works to develop with those whom he represents in Congress. When constituents hear Congressman Adamson's voice in the letters they receive, editorials they read, and speeches they hear, they believe that they are being represented by the same person they elected to office.

Deborah Brandt (2007) points out that in a culture like ours that highly values the written word, writing has significant power to influence social structures, including politics (Brandt "Who is the President?" 551). In such a culture, the Congressman's voice is valued as a means of providing those who elected him authentic representation in their national government. It develops an *ethos* for Congressman Adamson not only with those who elected him but also among his colleagues, state and local leaders, and other high-level federal officials, facilitating relationships that increase his ability to work on behalf of his constituents. Not only does this voice shape the way colleagues, constituents, and the media perceive the Congressman, but it ultimately shapes public policy. Public policy is changed and reinforced through the writing process.

The idea of voice as self-representation gets complicated as ghostwriters generate the voice of a Member of Congress through collaboratively writing his letters, speeches, and press statements. In this process, staffers play the dual role of reflecting the Congressman's existing voice and shaping his public persona. On one hand, they are tasked with capturing the speaking voice of another individual in order to make their writing appear as much as possible as if that individual wrote the document himself. On the other hand, staffers make rhetorical and representational choices to craft an argument,

essentially creating a voice that defines the Member and places him in a position to influence public opinion. Their goal is to capture the actual style, tone, and character of the Member so completely that they remain invisible in the process while still shaping the message, providing policy direction, and making rhetorical decisions that amount to invention rather than simply representation.

The creation of this voice depends on a collaborative writing process that provides staffers with the authority structure to authentically represent the Congressman and articulate on his behalf. It does this by allowing staffers to bring their own expertise to a piece while maintaining a consistent and authentic voice. M. M. Bakhtin talks about the process of finding one's voice as appropriating words from a cacophonous background of other voices on the same theme, saying that "the word in language is half someone else's" and that one must take that word from the mouths, contexts, and intentions of others to appropriate it for oneself (Bakhtin 293-4). In a study that looks at two collaborative writing processes through Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia, the "struggle between social-linguistic points of view," Geoffery Cross points out that a successful collaborative process should move a document from cacophony to symphony, a place where multiple voices speak harmoniously and with a focused effort (Cross 6). As a social process, the collaborative writing process in the congressional office where I have worked for the past four years attempts to create a similar symphonic voice, but rather than finding a voice of one's own from among other utterances, as Bakhtin describes, staffers strive to create and use the Congressman's authentic voice.

The collaborative generation of the Congressman's voice raises questions of authorship and authorial presence. It adds depth to theories about a writer's authority to shape meaning. It also provides insight into power relationships among staffers and between staffers and the Member for whom they work. In this congressional office, neither the Congressman's voice nor the power of authorship belongs to one staffer-writer. Instead, staffer-writers negotiate both the power of the Member of Congress in whose voice they speak and their own power as individual staffers to create documents that belong to the Congressman-author. Jennifer Daryl Slack, David James Miller, and Jeffrey Doak use articulation theory to describe the power of meaning-making, suggesting that writers make meaning when they make choices that make one interpretive outcome more likely and others impossible (Slack et al., 27-28). What happens when someone in a position of power gives his staff this power to make meaning on his behalf? What if that staff is made up not of one individual but of a team of writers and the power to make meaning is dispersed among them?

My study focuses broadly on the following research questions:

- How does a team of staff writers collaboratively generate the Congressman's voice on his behalf?
- In a culture where writing on behalf of the Congressman has the power to determine and communicate public policy, where does authority lie in the process of generating the Congressman's voice? How does that authority circulate among writers?

In order to answer these questions I also look at a number of narrower questions, including:

- How do staffers talk about generating the Congressman's voice? To what attributes do they orient as they compose on his behalf?
- How does the collaborative writing process in the office ensure that the voice is a symphonic one rather than a monotone one in which the voice of only one dominant contributor is heard? What does it mean to create a symphonic voice for one person?
- How do decisions about voice impact public policy, and what role do staffers play in influencing that policy?
- How are the power relationships among staffers and between the Member and staffers represented in and impacted by the writing process?

The fact that staffers write on behalf of the Congressman has implications for how public policy is shaped. For each of these staffers, writing makes up only a part, albeit a significant one, of their jobs as policy advisors, so it seems clear that when they write they play at least some part in influencing policy decisions made by the Congressman. As writers, staffers are complicit in the generation of the congressional voice that represents the Congressman and his policy views to his constituents, his colleagues, and the press. Does this task give them a significant role in shaping policy, or does it mean they must simply translate the Congressman's personal views to the public? Are the really significant decisions in this country made by unelected staffers who pull the strings of the puppet-representatives, as some people assert, or do staffers play at most a minor

role in policy making, focusing primarily on interpreting the elected official for public consumption? I want to look at whether what actually happens on a day-to-day basis in a congressional office justifies either of these perspectives, or if the reality is something entirely different. What role does the ghostwriter actually play in the policy making process, and what role does the Congressman play? I think these are significant questions that have implications on theories about ghostwriting, voice, and the social impacts of writing, in addition to impacting our understanding of how public policy is shaped and shifted. My study gives us an opportunity to look at how staffers participate in the collaborative generation of the Congressman's public voice, what influences that voice, and in turn how that voice shapes office power structures and enables the Congressman to represent his constituents.

In order to address these questions, I have examined the collaborative writing process in the congressional office where I have worked for four years. This office is ideal for this study because the Congressman and office management place a premium on writing ability and have put together a staff team of highly qualified writers. The writing team consists of some staffers who focus on legislative work and others who are oriented to public relations, and it incorporates collaboration on both a face to face level and over long distance, since two members of the team work thousands of miles away in the district office. My study provides important insight into the authority that staffers have to shape policy and how that power is negotiated through the collaborative writing process that generates the public voice of the Congressman.

2. Literature Review

Literature in voice, ghostwriting, collaborative writing, and audience provides a background for examining the collaborative generation of Congressman Adamson's voice by his staff. The literature on voice provides a definition of voice that I use to examine the collaboratively-created voice of the Congressman. A working definition of voice allows me to look at what textual features make up the congressional voice and how it is influenced by audience and other factors. Ghostwriting and collaborative writing both complicate traditional ideas of authorship, and the literature on each of these topics provides a basis for looking at how collaborative ghostwriting validates or complicates existing views of authorship and self-representation.

Voice

In the context of writing, the literature often speaks about voice as a metaphor, but a metaphor for what? Is voice simply a literary or rhetorical device, a collection of stylistic choices an author makes each time she writes, or does it reflect a process of self-discovery, a declaration of identity?

Given that the literature on voice focuses primarily on how students discover and develop their own unique voices as they become writers, a number of experts recognize that in some aspects these choices are made unconsciously by the writer. Together these choices in style, diction, and tone make up the voice that identifies a text as having been

written by a specific author. In this sense, voice is the fingerprint of the author on a piece of writing. Donald Stewart states that, “very simply, authorial voice is that manner of telling a story which differentiates one writer from another” (Stewart 2). According to his definition, voice is one writer’s “way of speaking or of perceiving the world,” and it is made up of all the particular experiences of an individual that, compiled together, give her a unique and distinguishing personality or identity. Walker Gibson (1962) views voice similarly, defining it as “the limit imposed on the writer by his choice of a voice, the particular man, image, personality, or artificial tone that he chooses to present himself with, with the understanding that when he writes his next paper it may be a different choice, and that he is changing selves all day long” (Gibson “The Voice of the Writer” 12).

Toby Fulwiler also views voice as a composite of characteristics that identify an author. He describes these characteristics as “some identifying tone or timbre that makes us conscious of the author’s presence, that lets us *hear* the person behind the sentences” (Fulwiler 241). Voice, he says, makes one writer distinct from the discourse community of which he is a part. He describes voice with words like tone, style, rhythm, and even the “skillful use of particular verbal constructions” (215).

But while he uses literary and grammatical terms to describe how one writer’s voice may be distinct from the voices around it, Fulwiler recognizes that this “fingerprint” is more than a collection of literary devices or stylistic choices. About his own voice he says, “I could no more identify all the determiners of my voice than I could

all the beliefs and emotions that create my self” (215). Voice, then, allows the author to represent himself so that readers can identify him.

For Fulwiler and others, voice is a metaphor representing the author’s actual speaking voice and presence. Darsie Bowden quotes Peter Elbow, who describes voice as “what most people have in their speech but lack in their writing—namely, a sound or texture—the sound of ‘them’” (Bowden 300). It is made up of the written cues that carry out the same role as the features in someone’s speaking voice—gravely or high-pitched or nasally—allowing readers to distinguish the speaking of one person on paper. Elbow points out that speech has power to communicate that writing lacks, namely that “when we speak, listeners don’t just see our words, they see us—how we hold and move ourselves” (Elbow 286). Voice, then, provides a method for communicating the author’s personality, those characteristics that would be easier to ascertain if she was physically present with the reader.

For Fulwiler and Elbow, while voice may be a composite of unconscious decisions intended to represent the author’s speaking voice or physical presence, it is also a method for the author to consciously represent himself. In trying to describe his own voice, Fulwiler says that while “I do not remember sitting down and deliberately deciding to find a certain rhythm or tone or timbre or concreteness—yet I know that as I write and revise I am continually reading back to myself my sentences to see if they sound right, to see if they are clear *to me*, and to see if they sound *like me*—the me I would like to have heard” (Fulwiler 217). Similarly, Elbow describes speaking as indelible, pointing out that “if we speak in the hearing of others—and we seldom speak otherwise—our words

are heard by listeners who can remember them even (especially) if we say something we wish they would forget” (285). Writing allows us to make permanent those utterances which we want others to remember and erase those we don’t, giving us the opportunity to represent ourselves as we want to be seen and heard.

Ira Cohen and Mary Rogers agree. They describe voice as a rhetorical device, a specific narrative technique used by an author to frame and communicate an argument. Voice “ultimately involves both how an author plays the role of narrator and how readers experience the narrator’s demeanor and message” (Cohen and Rogers 306). Voice, they say, is how the author builds credibility with his audience by identifying the writer as part of the established discourse community or setting him apart from it. Discourse that departs from the normal conventions of discourse for that community frees a writer to espouse original ideas and show authority on a subject, while, on the other hand, it helps build credibility with the reader. Voice allows writers to represent themselves to their readers, hopefully building trust and developing rapport with them.

Roger Cherry also sees voice as a method for self-representation. In his article “*Ethos Versus Persona*,” Cherry describes two types of self-representation through voice. The first, *ethos*, allows the author to speak his own voice to the audience, portraying his actual self as having characteristics that enhance his credibility. The second, *persona*, enables the writer to mask himself in a created voice in order to generate a character for himself—made up of real or imagined characteristics—that can speak directly to the audience. “When we approach self-representation starting with *ethos*,” he says, “we assume a real author and look for the transformations the author will undergo as a result

of appearing in print. When we begin with persona, we assume a degree of artifice or transformation and search for the real author” (Cherry 402).

While for many voice is about how the writer reveals her identity to the reader, for others voice is about how she develops that identity in relation to others and the words of others. Bakhtin proposes that we do not create language in isolation, but that individual voices emerge from a noisy background filled with voices, whether they be voices of authority, of the experiences we have had, or of those to whom and with whom we write. According to Bakhtin, “The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention” (Bakhtin 293). Elaborating on Bakhtin’s ideas, Nancy Welch describes how students who are trying to develop their own voices work their way through the “polyphony of other viewpoints, nuances, contexts, and intentions” to orchestrate their own meanings and voices (Welch 2-3). Similarly, Darsie Bowden describes Kenneth Burke’s view that finding one’s own voice is a social process of negotiation with the other voices around one, including the reader. “That there may not be a single voice uttering a phrase but several in conjunction (author, character, narrator, reader) allows not for misreading, misunderstanding, and misinterpretations but for multiple readings, understandings, and interpretations” (Bowden 10).

Audience considerations play a key role in the creation of voice. Even though the literature often describes voice as the mark of an individual, the process of developing or inventing one’s own voice is a social process. Therefore, how an author represents

herself depends on to whom the author is writing. As Gibson Walker (1962) points out, writers don't always speak in the same voice but are "changing selves all day long" (Walker "The Voice of the Writer" 12). Fulwiler agrees, warning that "if there is such a thing as an authentic voice, it is protean and shifty. Even the most authentic voice—if it is mature—clearly changes so much, according to who is listening and why, that 'authenticity' is hard to establish" (Fulwiler 218). Because the process of appropriating one's voice in a sea of other voices requires what Bakhtin describes as a negotiation, in some sense voice is a dialog between writer and reader. Joy Ritchie notes that as students work to appropriate language as their own, "they grapple simultaneously with multiple responses to writing, and at the same time attempt to reconcile the implications for identity created by those potential, real, and imagined audiences" (Ritchie 157). While fiction writers often consider that authors invoke audience (Robert Roth, Walter Ong, Russell Long), for writers composing from a rhetorical perspective, recognizing and writing to one's actual audience is crucial. In these cases, one of the writer's primary tasks is that of analyzing the 'real life' audience and adapting discourse to it (Ede and Lundsford, "Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked," 164).

In order to understand the role that the collaborative writing process plays in the generation of the Congressman's voice, we need a working definition of voice. These different perspectives offer us complex, sometimes conflicting views of voice and the role it plays in creating a dialog between writers and readers. For some, voice is the culmination of a writer's journey of self-discovery and a way that she can reveal her authentic self. For others, it is a rhetorical device used to shape a message for a particular

audience, which means that a voice may shift depending on who is listening but also, paradoxically, puts a writer's fingerprints on a text. In the context of this study, voice must address both the need for authenticity and the need for rhetorical invention, further complicated by the fact that this voice is generated through a collaborative process. What implications does rhetorical invention have on the authenticity of the voice? What impact does the theory of voice as a process of self-discovery have on a ghostwriter's authority? Through my study, I use these varying definitions of voice as different lenses through which to view the process through which a team of writers generates on voice and portrays one identity.

Ghostwriting

In the world of leadership, ghostwriting is a widely used practice. Business and political leaders regularly employ speech writers and communications staff to write letters and press quotes on their behalf. Our culture increasingly depends on writing for social, political, and economic purposes, and, as Deborah Brandt (2007) points out, in cultures where writing has such power, that power can work oddly in cases where “subordinates write not *for* higher-ups but *as if they are* higher-ups and deliberately for the aggrandizement of higher-ups” (Brandt “Who is the President” 511).

Why is ghostwriting so prolific in today's culture? Many recognize ghostwriting as a practical solution to a very real problem: in many cases, leaders lack the time needed to write these pieces themselves (Brandt, Haiman, Seeger, Brown and Riley). In many leadership positions, writing is not the primary task, so hiring a ghostwriter allows

business and political leaders to communicate effectively while focusing on other tasks to which their talents may be more suited.

Some attribute the abundance of ghostwriting to the fact that it is the only practical way for leaders to meet the expectations of today's audience. Audiences expect individuals in leadership positions to possess certain leadership characteristics, but they also expect them to give good speeches, and it does not always follow that someone who has one talent has the other as well. Franklyn Haiman claims that modern audiences willingly perpetuate the mythic "cult of leadership" wherein leaders are all things to all people and the ideas of teamwork or shared leadership are conveniently ignored (Haiman 302). In many cases, audiences find the presence of the right official at an event as meaningful as what that official says. The audience, then, bears much of the responsibility for the proliferation of ghostwriting in corporations and government. In the same vein, research conducted by Stuart Brown and Linda Riley suggests that audiences expect the speeches they hear or the letters they receive from leaders to be written by someone else but continue to hold the leader accountable for what is written or said (Brown and Riley 718).

Others claim that, while time and energy are the initial drivers of ghostwriting, the proliferation of ghostwriting ultimately results from the high value our culture places on writing. The idea that audience expectations have created a culture in which ghostwriting is prevalent points to this fact. According to Deborah Brandt (2007), ghostwriting illuminates two perspectives on writing: personal power versus writing power. On the one hand, someone with personal power delegates writing to another person who has less

power; on the other hand writing denotes power. In a culture that values writing and confers power to the writer, ghostwriting turns normal assumptions on their heads, opening “a window on the ways that social institutions and organizations rely on a normative literacy to run smoothly” (Brandt “Who’s the President” 551). Ghostwriting employs a system of “borrowing and lending status,” both personal status and the status of writing itself, as powerful leaders borrow the abilities of the writer and the writer herself takes on the role of the leader (551). In ghostwriting, both leader and writer are complicit: each person buys into the idea that the leader, not the writer, authors a piece, even while the writer creates as well as reflects the author. As Brandt points out, “The prestige of authorship, especially expert authorship, is exactly what must be given away in the ghostwriting exchange and yet it seems inseparable from the experience of writing” (558). The ghostwriter lends or sells her writing abilities in exchange for the ability to both take on the authority of the leader and also free herself from the leader’s responsibility.

This idea that ghostwriting displaces power has implications on a writer’s authority to make meaning. Slack, Doak, and Miller take up this idea when they describe technical writers, as makers of meaning who make choices throughout the composition process that communicate one thing to readers rather than another (Slack et al., 28). They reject the idea that professional writers simply transmit or interpret meaning when they write on behalf of an organization. Instead, they say, professional writers make choices about meaning, which gives them power in a text even when this authorship is transparent. Slack et al., use the articulation view of communication to describe the

professional writer's authority. According to this theory, meaning is articulated in and through specific relationships among entities, practices, and institutions that may include writers, colleagues, office hierarchies, and official procedures, among other things. To the extent that writers articulate and rearticulate these entities in their writing, they also articulate meaning. This view complicates traditional views of one author transmitting or translating information to one reader by recognizing that each writer and reader bring their own power to the negotiation of meaning. In this role, they say, the "technical communicator is complicit in an ongoing articulation and rearticulation of relations of power" (14).

In their discussion of technical writing, Slack, Doak, and Miller recognize that in today's workforce, many of the writers who significantly contribute to making meaning are invisible. In the same way, Brandt, Haiman, and Brown and Stuart recognize ghostwriting as a widespread and culturally accepted practice. However, some insist that, socially acceptable or not, ghostwriting is unethical not only because it involves audience deception (even if the audience is willing to be deceived), but because it undermines the concept of cultivating *ethos* through public speaking. In other words, according to Ernest Bormann, as quoted by Haiman, "ghostwriting demeans the role of speech in human affairs by viewing it as so peripheral to one's most important concerns that it can be fairly delegated to subordinates" (Haiman 301). Bormann argues that if speechmaking is so trivial, perhaps giving the speech should also be delegated to the one who wrote it, and ironically asks, "How much borrowing is ethical?...Somewhere along the continuum an

ethical line should be drawn between dishonest and honest collaboration” (Bormann 266).

Recognizing but not fully agreeing with Bormann’s concerns, Martin Medhurst suggests that the discussion about ghostwriting offers more to explore than just questions about ethics. Examining ghostwriting as a practice can provide insight into how culture, power structures, and organizations work, as well as how public policy is created and communicated. According to Medhurst, in a culture where ghostwriting is a practice that enjoys wide use and broad acceptance, the most significant decisions that leaders make are more about personnel than about policy (Medhurst 243). In many ways, this idea drives my study. As staffers take on the role of the Congressman to communicate on his behalf, they shape policy. My study aims to look more closely at how Brandt’s borrowing and lending of status and Medhurst’s personnel decisions are reflected in the collaborative writing process in this congressional office.

Collaborative Writing

While academic writing is primarily a solitary process, writing in the workplace is largely a collaborative process. When texts are created in the workplace, they are often the result of multiple points of view interacting with one another, different levels of composition and editing, and cooperation among colleagues and departments.

Why is it that, although students learn to write in an individual fashion in academics, when they move into the workplace they write collaboratively, calling into question the traditional views of authorship under which they were educated? Deborah Brandt (2005) claims that in today’s culture, writing is not only a sought-after skill, but

also a highly demanded product. In her study on writing in a knowledge-based economy, she points out that in a culture that views writing as “a manufacturing process in knowledge work,” writing processes are highly collaborative and involve significant oversight (Brandt “Writing for a Living,” 176). In a culture where companies and government agencies are producing ideas and texts, the concern about individual authorship fades beneath the need to produce texts that address a range of issues and audiences and include the expertise of a number of contributors. Charles Stratton agrees, pointing out, “perhaps the model of the solitary writer never had any validity in business, industry, and government agencies” (Stratton 178).

If writing is a social process, collaborative writing is even more intensely social in nature. As such, collaborative writing influences not only the composition process and the final text, but it also impacts and is impacted by the organizational and power structures in the workplace. Do the benefits of collaborative writing outweigh the challenges created by its complexities? Stratton would say yes, a successful collaborative writing process produces a better text than might be written by one individual. He points out that “research supports the notion that collaborative writing is both more effective and more efficient than individual efforts. That is, it produces better documents with less time spent” (181). A successful process can work to the strengths of each writer while minimizing any weakness.

Geoffrey Cross, however, holds reservations about whether collaboration is always worth the challenges that writers working collaboratively face. In his study on how differences in message, process, and audience affect the collaborative creation of

documents in two organizations and how writers consolidate power through the writing process, Cross found that in both cases the writing process reinforced existing power structures and collaboration resulted in a flat, monotone text that represented only the most powerful point of view.

Not only does collaborative writing challenge traditional views of authorship (Ede and Lundsford, Brandt), but it involves negotiating workplace relationships and office power structures. In Cross's study, in spite of the collaborative effort, only the most powerful voice spoke through the final text because the power structures in the offices undermined any attempts at authentic collaboration. Stephen Doheny-Farina also notes that writing is a social process that influences and is influenced by power structures in the office (Doheny-Farina 167). In his study on writing in an emerging organization, Doheny-Farina discusses how the collaborative writing process "serves an organizing function" in the workplace (161). While Cross's study shows the impact of office power structures on the writing process, Doheny-Farina's study highlights the influence that the writing process has on social structures in an office, and specifically how that process shaped the power structure in an emerging organization. In this instance, the collaborative writing process led to a lasting change in the corporate structure, playing "a significant role in the reapportionment of authority among the participants" (177). Through such a study, we can recognize the power of the writing process to form community and reinforce certain organizational structures.

Doheny-Farina and Cross reveal how the collaborative process complicates both writing and workplace culture by pointing out that when people write collaboratively,

rhetorical choices become complex social issues (166). However, neither Cross nor Doheny-Farina sound the death knell for the collaborative writing process. Cross points out that in the office he observed the collaborative process failed to recognize that language is inherently social, ignoring not only important information but the ideas and perspectives brought to the table by various writers (Cross 4). He contrasts this with what he would view to be a successful collaborative process, one that moves a document from what Bakhtin describes as cacophony to symphony and allows multiple voices speak harmoniously, yielding a synergetic and focused effort, not a monotone voice, as happens when only the positionally powerful are allowed to speak (Cross 5).

With reservation, Ede and Lundsford (2001), too, recognize the value of a closer examination of the current academic system of single authorship. They are careful to point out the dangers in the way some industries view authorship, which they describe as the “corporate appropriation of author construct” (Ede and Lundsford, “Collaboration and Concepts of Authorship,” 358). However, they note that in practice there is a high level of successful collaboration in both arts and sciences and cautiously suggest that perhaps academic writing should follow suit.

Collaborative writing creates the possibility of a better text that takes into account multiple viewpoints and audiences, but it also can break down the writing process or shift power within an office culture. If the collaborative writing process both absorbs and influences the social and power structures of an office, I should find that the writing process in my study will significantly impact the writing team in terms of their roles as writers and as policy advisors. In particular, collaborative writing has clear implications

on the idea of authorship, and in this office, where staff-writers work on behalf of a Congressman-author, the writing process can influence the relationships that staffers have with the Member, each other, and their own jobs.

3. Study and Methods

In order to examine the collaborative production of voice in a congressional office, I conducted an ethnographic study in which I carried out daily observations of the Washington, DC, office where I work from October 2009 through September 2010. As the Legislative Director (LD), I am an integral part of the writing team, so my observations are inextricably linked with my own involvement in the legislative and writing processes. As such, my professional interaction with my colleagues impacted my observations of them as they created and discussed documents to communicate on behalf of the Congressman. Because staffers have little privacy, it wasn't difficult to observe the writing process in the office. The atmosphere gave me the opportunity to ask my coworkers questions about documents as I observed them being created.

In addition, because I am one of the main writers and, as Legislative Director, see, edit, or approve nearly every piece of writing before it is published, I am integrally involved in the writing process. This role gave me the opportunity to participate in the creation of the vast majority of the documents generated during my study. As a participant in the writing process, I also paid attention to my own role, especially to the way I made decisions about my own documents and interacted with my colleagues as they suggested changes to them.

Because much of the writing process takes place through email, my observations also included examining the emails sent back and forth between staffers during the writing process. Participating in these email “conversations” allowed me to observe the changes made to documents and the way in which staffers communicate with each other about their writing. In addition, the fast pace of writing in the office allowed me to follow documents from inception to publication on numerous occasions, thus allowing me to collect a wide range of artifacts.

My role in the writing process clearly colored my observations, and as I reviewed my notes I saw that I tended to focus on my own experience rather than that of my colleagues. To counter that tendency, I also conducted structured interviews with my colleagues. I interviewed two DC-based legislative staffers and two staffers in the district office. I conducted a self-interview with the same questions that my participants answered during their interviews in order to flush out my implicit perspectives and contrast them with those of my other participants.

During the interviews, I asked my colleagues about their experience in learning to write in the Congressman’s voice and inquired about their views of the collaborative writing process in the office. All of the staffers I interviewed agreed that the collaborative process is central to the creation of this voice, allowing each writer to bring his or her unique experience to the table. Each of these staffers holds a different position of seniority in the office: one reports to me, another is my positional equal, the third is my superior and had a role in hiring me, and the fourth has a position in a different hierarchy than I do.

In some cases, interviewing my coworkers about the work we do together was a rehash of things that we often talk about, since the writing process is a topic of continual conversation. In other cases, the interviews brought to light things I had never thought about. I had intended the interviews to last about thirty minutes and had chosen questions accordingly. However, because my colleagues had a lot to say about the collaborative writing process, in most cases the interviews lasted much longer than the allotted time. As part of the interview, my colleagues inevitably talked at length about my involvement in the writing process. While this certainly resulted in a few awkward moments, our staff feels comfortable with frank talk given our tight knit group and adeptness at working through personality issues.

My study was approved by the Human Standards Research Board at George Mason University and conforms to the institution's standards for ethical research. Each of my participants voluntarily signed an informed consent form, and their involvement in the study in no way impacts their salary or job security. Throughout this study I have used pseudonyms for each staffer and for the Congressman.

The Participants

Jay Grayson

Jay Grayson is the “newcomer” to the writing team, if you can say that about someone who has been part of the team for over two years. His position is the only one that has turned over since I began working for Congressman Adamson four years ago, and when his predecessor left to attend graduate school, I personally recruited him to

work in the office as a Legislative Assistant. Jay had worked for me briefly in my previous office, and in the intervening year and a half had worked as a Legislative Correspondent in a Senator's office, where his primary responsibility was responding to constituent mail. I recruited Jay because of his work ethic and his charismatic personality, which makes him well liked by his colleagues. When he started, however, he impressed me with how his skills as a writer and legislative staffer had improved during his time in the Senate.

Jay is the youngest member of the legislative team and the one with the least experience. He has a degree in political science and interned in a Senate office for a member of the state's congressional delegation before being hired as staff assistant in the House office where we both previously worked. As the staffer with the least seniority, he has responsibility for the legislative issues that require the most constituent correspondence, and writing constituent mail consumes most of his day. Jay is upbeat and enthusiastic, and talking to him you would never know that his legislative portfolio is less interesting than he might like. He wants to learn as much as he can about the issues assigned to him, and he has a wonderful rapport with constituents with whom he speaks over the phone or during meetings.

Jay attended a university that emphasized writing skills, requiring students to pass writing assessments each year and prior to graduation. As a result, Jay is an adept communicator, even if his mechanics are occasionally imperfect. He writes slowly, which can be a challenge in the fast-paced office environment, so editorials are Jay's specialty. Because we usually write editorials at our leisure instead of in response to an

urgent press inquiry or request, Jay has time to perfect his writing. His editorials are a great blend of companionable style, good policy, and a touch of good-natured satire that captures Congressman Adamson's sense of humor.

I am Jay's direct supervisor, so when he and I sat down for the interview he jokingly said that he was nervous and concerned that I might dock his pay if he answered incorrectly. In reality, I have no say whatsoever in what he gets paid and he knows that I would go to great lengths to keep him on staff. In spite of his jesting, he approached the interview somewhat formally. Jay's initial sense of formality relaxed a bit once he had a sense of the questions I would be asking and the information I was looking for. We sat in the cafeteria of our office building during our lunch break, drinking warm beverages from the coffee shop across the hall, and I took notes while he talked about learning to write in different congressional voices. Even though he is the youngest and most inexperienced staffer, Jay has worked for more Members than anyone else on the legislative staff, so he had a lot to say about navigating those different voices. Because Jay and I worked together for a different Member, we could discuss the differences in voices and writing processes in each office.

Andrea Rosenthal

Andrea has a long history with Congressman Adamson's office. Having grown up in the Congressman's district, she interned in his local office during high school and in the DC office during college. Upon graduating, the Congressman offered her a job in the office as his scheduler, which she did along with some legislative work for two years before leaving to go to graduate school. She earned a one-year graduate degree in

international relations and returned to the office to take the position of Committee Associate, and she has been in this position for the past four years. In that position, she focuses on interacting with a congressional committee on which the Congressman serves and overseeing the committee work done by other legislative staffers.

Andrea has an Ivy-league education, is an extremely effective networker, and adeptly promotes Congressman Adamson's priority legislative issues. Her work with the Committee limits her legislative portfolio compared to those of other staffers. As a result, while other staffers tend to specialize in one genre and use it to communicate on a broad range of issues they cover, she usually writes on a small handful of issues but does so using a greater variety of genres, including editorials and Dear Colleagues, which allow congressional offices to communicate with one another.

Andrea and I occupy an interesting space in the office hierarchy. Office management considers us equals in seniority, with the same pay scale and benefits. When Ted Brackett moved to the district and took on the title Deputy Chief of Staff, the Chief of Staff decided to split his role into two new positions—I became the Legislative Director, and Andrea took on Committee responsibilities.

When we started these positions, our job descriptions often overlapped. While we had shared a good working relationship when I worked for a different Member of Congress and handled similar issues, the lack of clarity regarding our responsibilities in our current positions caused some tension, especially during our first year on the job together. We have found that regular private consultations at the copier in the back of the office between our cubicles—and establishing clear legislative boundaries—have solved

many of these issues. However, we have not completely defined our roles in the larger power structure of the office. We each do half of the job that Ted did when he worked in DC, but, as he is still on the staff and involved in policy making, neither of us rank quite as high in seniority as he did when he occupied our positions. We recognize that this is the way the office works, but we occasionally grumble when policy decisions are made over our heads.

Mechanically, Andrea is one of the best writers in the office, and she and I depend almost wholly on each other for proofreading. While the rest of the staff offers comments on style and substance, the last person to look at a piece I have written before it goes out the door to make sure the commas and prepositions are correct is Andrea, and vice versa. Andrea has a more academic style than other staffers, lacking some of the personality that comes through in other people's writing, and she is quick to point out that she has difficulty writing at the seventh-grade level required in most congressional writing. She tends to give the facts, clearly and succinctly, without very much personality, and she makes it clear that she is not a "folksy" writer.

For our interview, Andrea and I sat at the conference table in our back office with a pot of tea. It was late afternoon, and both the Chief of Staff and Congressman Adamson had left for the day, so the office was quiet. Andrea responded to my questions eagerly, elaborating on her answers almost without prompting. This didn't surprise me, as we have discussed the office writing process a number of times over the years, something she noted throughout our conversation. We both enjoyed pointing out tell-tale quirks in pieces of writing that reveal the original author.

Andrea quickly embraced the chance to share her perspective on the collaborative writing process. She often used the example of seniority in the office, pointing out that there were different expectations of lower level staffers—both in terms of what they could be asked to do and how much revision could be made to their writing—and made sure to take the opportunity to reinforce her own role in the office and the writing process. Because we conducted the interview at the conference table, other staffers and interns could hear the entire conversation, so she whispered somewhat conspicuously, nodding toward certain staffers’ desks in reference to them, when she made these comments.

My interview with Andrea lasted nearly an hour, due primarily to her interest in the subject and willingness to discuss the questions thoroughly. It was evening by the time we finished, and although most of our colleagues had gone home for the night, we both had work to finish before we logged off our computers for the day.

Ted Brackett

For six years, Ted was the Legislative Director for Congressman Adamson. During that time, I worked with him regularly in my previous job. He knew a lot about policy and procedure and seemed to have an endless amount of energy and passion for his job. On numerous occasions I found myself very grateful to have him on my side during a policy debate, since he often had innovative ideas for getting things done and threw himself into the battle with such gusto that he usually accomplished his goals. Four and a half years ago, while I still worked for another Member of Congress, he moved to the district and became Congressman Adamson’s Deputy Chief of Staff in

charge of overseeing the work throughout the four district offices. When the position of Legislative Director came open, he recommended me for the job.

Ted does not supervise me, but I regularly solicit his advice or approval on policy issues. I think we both find this arrangement to our liking—Ted, who really enjoys policy work, gets to keep his foot in the policy game, and I get to bounce ideas and decisions off of someone whose opinion I trust. In an environment where people are quick to take credit for anyone else's success, Ted possesses the remarkable ability to make his coworkers, including those with less seniority, look good. Over the past four years, I have benefitted from this unselfish attitude a number of times.

Ted often tells me that he believes in hiring good writers. A person who can write well, he says, possesses critical and analytical thinking skills that are crucial to success in this job. He himself is an excellent and prolific writer, having been raised by a teacher and influenced by a junior high grammar teacher to learn good verbal communication skills. We often joke in the office that when Ted gets fired up about an issue, he writes a press release or an editorial—sometimes the beginning of a legitimate piece, other times as a joke intended for his coworkers only—as a way of blowing off steam. He often channels his endless energy into documents that provide other staffers with a starting point for editorials or press releases. In these instances, Ted rarely exhibits any pride of authorship. Even when he does not write to vent his frustrations, he writes forcefully and he doesn't hesitate to take a strong position and express it clearly. He usually peppers his writing with descriptive adjectives, and he often emphasizes his point by capitalizing words, making his style easy to pick out.

It comes as no surprise, then, that Ted is often the first person to write press policy statements on the key political issues. In many cases, the rest of the staff works from his draft when deciding the direction to take on an issue. After working for him for almost a decade, Ted is also very familiar with Congressman Adamson's policy positions, so he usually takes on the task of responding to lists of questions put together by interest groups, the press, or constituents. In many ways, Congressman Adamson's voice is Ted's voice.

Ted and I talk on the phone nearly every morning, usually while he drives to work early in the morning and I sit at my desk with breakfast. I interviewed Ted during one of these conversations. His answers to my questions reflected his position as someone who supervises others and hires staff. Unless I asked pointed questions about his own experience, he spoke primarily in the second person, describing the way that a congressional office should work or the qualities that a staffer should have as a writer, using experience in our office as well as other examples to make his point.

Because I know how strongly Ted feels about hiring good writers, I wasn't surprised by his passion on the subject, and his interview, like Andrea's, went longer than I expected. I suspect that he would have elaborated further if the interview had been conducted face to face instead of over the phone—a number of times he began answering a question, then felt uncertain that he was addressing the issues that I had hoped. He focused his comments largely on constituent letter writing, speaking only briefly about other types of documents. Having discussed the writing habits of our colleagues a number of times previously, I already knew his biases about the writing process and the

writing styles of our colleagues. Knowing we had discussed these things previously, he tried to keep the conversation on a professional—and perhaps even more hypothetical—level.

Neda Johnstone

As Communications Director, Neda is not only responsible for crafting written documents like press releases, but she also serves as the liaison between the Congressman and the media. Neda excels at this role. She is bubbly, chatty, and outgoing, and her tendency to mix the personal with the professional has enabled her to build relationships with reporters that are built on professional respect and personal regard. These relationships allow her to protect the Congressman's reputation more successfully than other press secretaries in the delegation, who tend to have more adversarial relationships with the press. In contrast, Neda's is friendly and even borders on trusting.

Neda's tendency to blur the line between the personal and the professional is evident everywhere in her professional life, from her off-hours dedication to the Congressman's reelection campaign to her status as work-from-home mom, driving her kids to preschool while she staffs the Congressman during radio calls. Most significantly, Neda is devoted to Congressman Adamson. Ted once said that Neda would literally throw herself in front of a train for Congressman Adamson, accurately describing her whole-hearted dedication to not only her job but the person for whom she works. Neda worked for Congressman Adamson's wife during and after college and through that position became integrally involved with the Congressman's first congressional

campaign. She and her husband continue to have a close personal relationship with the Congressman and his wife.

As either campaign manager or press secretary, Neda has worked for the Congressman for twelve years, giving her insight into his development as a congressman from the beginning. She studied public relations and communications in college, where she says she learned communications format and technique but did not take a lot of hands-on writing classes. As a result, she has had to learn writing on the job, and she feels most comfortable sending her documents to other staffers for proofreading before she sends them out. Neda has a simple writing style. She often directly transcribes ideas expressed verbally, and her documents usually need some editing. Since she feels more comfortable with public relationship than with writing, she prefers for policy staffers to supply her with information for press releases or draft the releases themselves.

Given her chaotic schedule as full-time Communications Director and mother to three small children, I wasn't surprised that finding time to interview Neda proved difficult. As one of my responsibilities as Legislative Director, I work with Neda to set a press agenda for each week, and I often spend at least an hour a day on the phone with her. However, it was not until she came to DC for a press event that I had the chance to describe my project and set a time to do an over-the-phone interview when she returned to the district. Our interview lasted around 35 minutes, which was one of the shortest interviews I conducted. This surprised me, as Neda is generally chatty and likes to tell a lot of stories. During our interview, she often answered questions as though she was being interviewed by someone who was not familiar with Congressman Adamson or our

office. Instead of referring to my colleagues and me directly, she often used phrases like “some staffers,” and throughout the interview she referred to Congressman Adamson by his title instead of his first name, which staffers regularly use within the office.

Background

The Man behind the Voice

I have been on the staff of Representative Frank Adamson for four of the past nine years I have worked on Capitol Hill. His laid back and funny nature makes him the kind of boss for whom everyone wants work. His easygoing style is deceptive—if you were in a room with twenty people and asked to guess which one was the Member of Congress, you would probably pick him last. Nevertheless, he is a powerful Member of Congress. After more than a decade in Congress and years in state and local politics, he is a savvy political operator. He feels comfortable in the spotlight, but more often than not he prefers to be by himself than in a crowd. He reads vast histories of the United States and calls himself a Civil War history buff, and he regularly stocks the office with Folgers coffee (which no one else drinks) and his favorite “diet” food, biscotti.

Some members are charismatic politicians but need their hands held when it comes to the complex procedures of the House and demanding daily schedule of a Member of Congress, but Congressman Adamson is not one of those members. He knows the rules of the House inside and out and is often caught giving long lectures on the history of floor procedures to staffers who are trying to brief him in his office. Like many men and women who leave their original professions to become full-time

politicians, he has a deep appreciation for the history of Congress and for the U.S. political system, and he advocates eloquently for the institution of the House of Representatives.

Congressman Adamson is well-regarded by his colleagues on both sides of the political aisle. They know him as a pragmatic instead of dogmatic legislator, and he has earned the respect of the vast majority of Members of Congress. It is no surprise, then, that he seems to be on a path that leads to influence, and most people agree that he is the right kind of man for such a position. He plays a prominent role on one of the most powerful committees in the House, and in his position he has established a good rapport with not only his colleagues but with key players in the Administration.

Perhaps the thing that reveals his character is the fact that the most ardent members of the Frank Adamson fan club are his staffers. Congressman Adamson highly values his staff and recognizes their role in his success, often telling people that “good staff can make a mediocre Congressman look good.” While the turnover rate among congressional staff is generally high, his staffers are fiercely loyal. A number of them interned in his office right out of college and then took on permanent positions. In the DC office where I work, only one full-time position has turned over during my four-year tenure. The district offices boast an even lower turnover rate, as many staffers there have worked with him for over a decade.

As a result of staff loyalty, the office structure is unusually top-heavy, with many senior staffers who have years of congressional experience and only a few junior level staffers. In many cases, the legislative staffers who advised Congressman Adamson

when he was first elected still work for him, and the talent and experience in the office runs deep. At least half of the staff has experience in other congressional or gubernatorial offices.

The Writing Team

Because the staff has so much experience—or perhaps it explains why he requires an experienced staff—the Congressman tends to trust his staff to make decisions and communicate on his behalf. He takes a hands-off approach, and while staffers generally find him very accessible, he prefers not to micro-manage either the staff or the policy. As a result, he may dictate broad policy positions, but decisions about the nuts and bolts of those positions and how to communicate them with constituents and the public are left in the hands of staffers.

The makeup of the staff reflects this approach to policy-making. With six full-time employees, the DC office is one of the smallest on the Hill—the legislative staff consists of only three people who are collectively responsible for following every legislative issue that makes its way through Congress. Each legislative staffer has a list of issues on which he or she carries out the Congressman’s policy priorities through a number of means: crafting and pushing legislation, following legislative activity and advising him on committee and floor votes, writing talking points and communicating with other Members, requesting funding for district projects through appropriations and authorization bills, and responding to constituent correspondence. Legislative staff takes meetings, attends briefings, drafts memos, regularly briefs the Congressman on the latest policy developments, and largely educate themselves on the issues for which they are

responsible. In addition, the legislative staff is regularly called on to work with district staff on issues of importance in the district and to respond to policy inquiries from the press, industry, and interest communities.

In many offices, the Communications Director works from the DC office, making it easy for him or her to keep pace with the policy staff on a regular basis. In our office, however, the Communications Director teleworks from her home in the congressional district. The office structure has the added complication of a Deputy Chief of Staff who also lives and works in the district office. In most offices, district work, which usually involves casework and on-the-ground service to constituents, is clearly separate from the policy work conducted mostly in Washington, DC. However, as the former Legislative Director, the Deputy Chief of Staff stays very involved in both policy decision making and communications, despite his physical separation from DC. Because the Chief of Staff prefers a hands-off approach to daily policy decisions, most of these decisions are delegated to the Deputy Chief and the Legislative Director.

This long-distance writing process generally works well, thanks to amiable relationships between district and DC staff (not always a given in a congressional office) and the reliability of communication technology (e.g. blackberry email, cell phone, etc). However, the distance does complicate the working relationship between the policy team and the press team, who must communicate over phone, email, and a two-hour time difference. The time difference is particularly significant, as things happen very quickly on the Hill—it is not unusual for an entire press release to be conceived, written, edited, approved, and sent out in the space of two or three hours. While email enables us to

communicate quickly, it lacks much of the nuance of face-to-face or even phone conversations, occasionally making it difficult to explain why certain changes were suggested or rejected.

The legislative staff, the Communications Director, and the Deputy Chief of Staff make up the main core of the writing team. Although in theory each of these staffers has responsibility for writing the documents in his or her area of expertise, in reality writing on behalf of the Member is largely a collaborative process.

The Office Scene

My observations took place in the Washington, DC, office of Congressman Adamson. House offices are smaller and less elaborate than their more famous Senate counterparts. Each office in our building has the same approximate setup—big doors and high ceilings, white trim and walls painted one of the three or four color choices available through the superintendent’s office. The furniture is the same, too: dark wooden desks, one on each side of the doorway, chairs in blue or red, bookshelves with glass doors. The office does not have a lot of waiting space, and on a busy day staff find it challenging to shuffle people in and out of the Congressman’s office without incident. His office is to the left of the reception room. On the right side of the entryway is the door-less room where the legislative staff sits, commonly known as the “leg (short for legislative) shop.” I did the vast majority of my observations for this study in this space.

Most congressional offices are notoriously low on personal space for staff, and our office is no exception. Most staffers are squeezed into makeshift cubicles and surrounded by visiting constituents, ringing phones, and years of files from the staffers

who came before them. Having only six full-time staffers gives us more elbow room than most offices have, but staffers still work in an environment with very little privacy. Staffers do not have private offices but sit close together, separated only by cubicle walls. They hold meetings at a table in the same room where staffers work at their desks, which means that telephone calls are overheard not only by staffers in the next cubicle, but also by constituents and others in meetings going on at the front of the leg shop.

Activity in the leg shop is constant and distracting. Each staffer has a television at his or her desk, so any combination of various 24-hour news channels or C-SPAN can blare simultaneously. Knowing that everyone can hear them no matter what they do, people rarely keep their voices down on the phone. The leg shop houses the copy machine, the water cooler, and the kitchen, where someone is always offering to make coffee or warming up their lunch in the microwave. On top of all this, as though everyone has given up having any personal space at all, staffers regularly interrupt each other's work to share important news and irrelevant personal frustrations.

This atmosphere is frustrating, but it can foster a collaborative process. It starts with calls over cubicles—"Can I use the word 'asinine' in a constituent letter?" "Which one is it: capitol with an 'o', or capital with an 'a'?" "Have you heard anything about a new state law prohibiting texting while driving?" They continue the process through email, as staffers send each other drafts at varying levels of completion for input. They print off near-final drafts for their colleagues to proofread with a fine-toothed comb.

While the office set-up is conducive to collaboration, it does have its drawbacks. The most prominent is the ease with which staffers can distract one another from other

work. Drawing colleagues into the writing process inevitably interrupts their own tasks, and because staffers must turn around documents quickly, the collaborative writing process often takes precedence over an individual staffer's tasks and priorities.

The layout also requires both staff and the Congressman to intentionally touch base on a regular basis, as the leg shop is separated from the Member's office.

Communication with the Member is key to the success of the collaborative process in the office, and the office space plays an important role in the way this collaborative process works.

4. Discussion: Negotiating an Authentic and Effective Congressional Voice

In this section, I discuss how the collaborative writing process in the office allows staffers to create a voice for Congressman Adamson that is at once authentic and rhetorically successful, creating an *ethos* for the Congressman that effectively communicates his policy positions to constituents, colleagues, and the media. I show how staffers do this by orienting first to the Congressman, trying to capture his speaking voice and personal characteristics as they write, and then to the multiple audiences for whom their writing is intended. I explain how staffers strive to find this balance between authenticity and rhetorical invention by negotiating Congressman Adamson's public voice among themselves, with previously written documents and policy positions, and between staffers and the Congressman. I propose that the Congressman plays a dual role in this process that makes him both the source of this voice and a participant in its generation.

As part of my discussion, I argue that the collaborative writing process in the office reflects and shapes power relationships between staffers and between staff-writers and the Congressman-author. While the advertised power structure in the office is an egalitarian one that provides each writer with significant authority to contribute to the generation of Congressman Adamson's voice, staffers with more positional power can exert that power over the writing of others. I contend that staffers choose to wield their

authority most often when they fear that policy begins to stray from their perception of the congressional voice. As a result of this social interaction, each writer must take into account how her relationship with other staffers can be articulated and rearticulated through the writing process. Through this process, the Congressman appropriates authority to staffers to participate in the shaping of public policy while also reinforcing the limits placed on that authority by office power structures, texts, and audience, and I contend that the relationship between staffers and the Congressman is articulated through the writing process and that this relationship impacts the generation of his public voice.

Finally, I argue that the congressional voice has a significant impact on crafting and implementing public policy and that staffers, as orchestrators of this voice, have authority to shape policy decisions. Staffers use this voice as an important tool in crafting the public image that enables Congressman Adamson to represent his constituents and carry out his political objectives, so I explain how the collaborative writing process generates and maintains that voice in order to strike a balance between representing the views of a plurality of voters and reflecting the Congressman's personal values and political beliefs.

The Life Cycle of a Document

Before I begin my discussion, let me overview the collaborative writing process by tracking one document's path from first draft to publication. While the process differs slightly depending on the type of text and the staffer initiating the document, it generally follows a similar process. For example, when Congressman Adamson cosponsored legislation regarding gun control on public lands, Jay, who is the legislative staffer

responsible for following gun control issues, decided to write a press release on the bill. Knowing that a wide range of constituents would be pleased to learn that the Congressman had cosponsored this particular bill, he called Neda, the Communications Director, to discuss putting out press.

In less than two hours, Jay completed a first draft and forwarded an email copy to me for editing. Knowing that I tend to miss typos when reading on a computer screen, he also left a printed copy of the draft on top of my keyboard. I had a string of meetings that afternoon and wasn't able to get to his draft right away. Still, even though he hoped to get the release out on the street before the end of the day, he appreciated that, like himself, I am often pulled in many directions on days when Congress is in session, and he waited patiently for me to dump my stack of meeting notes onto my desk and scan through my emails before asking me again if I could look at the release. Noting that the window to issue a press release was closing rapidly, I immediately stopped what I was doing and read his draft.

Less than a page long, the draft included two statements that Jay had crafted to be used as direct quotes from the Congressman. While Jay is a talented writer, he is also the first to admit that his mechanics aren't always perfect, and I wasn't surprised to find a few punctuation errors. Next, I scrutinized the language to make sure that it was clear enough for average citizens to understand. One peril faced by legislative staffers is a tendency to get caught up in the unnecessary details of a complex issue, resorting to political or legal jargon that can confuse readers and reduce the impact of the text. In this release, Jay had used the legal term "amicus brief." Since I am not an expert on gun

control or legal issues, I needed clarification on this meant and knew that those reading the release might not understand it either. Together we found a way to explain the legal term more simply.

Finally, I looked at the way that Jay had communicated the Congressman's policy positions to ensure consistency with how we had previously portrayed the Congressman's views on gun control. More importantly, because I am responsible for following public lands issues, I brought to Jay's release a perspective on this angle of the issue with which he was not familiar. Legislative issues don't always fall neatly into one staffer's portfolio, and the collaborative process ensures that staffers account for these policy connections. I scribbled two additions onto the page and then leaned around the partition separating our desks to hand back his draft and explain my changes. By incorporating my two additions into Jay's draft, we were able to provide more balance and depth to the piece than it would have had if it had only been written by one of us.

If this document had been a constituent letter or floor speech, the process would have ended here. However, since it was a press release, Jay took the next step of emailing it to Neda for her approval. She read the document with a different audience in mind—while Jay and I had tried to view the document from a constituent's point of view, she looked at it from the perspective of someone in the media who would decide whether or not to publish the release. In this instance, she emailed us her suggestion that we remove one of the quotes Jay had written. She felt like this particular quote suggested motives for another politician, and she was concerned that it would be interpreted by the press as an attempt by the Congressman to put words into someone else's mouth.

Sending this quote to the media could result not only in a failure to communicate but could create a backlash of negative press. Replying to her email, Jay agreed to take the quote out. Neda then sent the release to the media with this change, and it was picked up by several online news sites in the district. The whole process began and ended within a few hours, which included the time that Jay waited for me to finish my meetings. While some changes were made to the original draft, Jay's piece was published largely intact.

This example provides one brief snapshot of the collaborative process in the Congressman's office. It varies with each document—often someone on the legislative team (Jay, Andrea, or I) initiate a document, but sometimes Ted writes the first draft instead, and sometimes a text goes through multiple hands before it is published, while other times it is only seen by two people—but with this example in mind we can begin to look at how staffers work together to orchestrate the congressional voice.

Orchestrating the Congressional Voice

Congressman Adamson's staff uses his public voice to communicate his views and beliefs to his constituents and to create and preserve the Congressman's *ethos* with voters. Rather than isolated self-expression, this voice gains richness from the utterances around it as staffers bring their own experience, views, expertise, and audiences to the writing process. Bakhtin describes how an individual develops his own voice by listening to the multitude of voices and influences around him and then appropriates his own unique voice from the words of others. The collaborative generation of the congressional voice in Congressman Adamson's office is, in many ways, an external example of this internal process, as staffers negotiate a public voice for the Congressman.

Throughout the process of developing this voice, staffers constantly orient to the Congressman. In order that readers might recognize the Congressman's presence in writing they do on his behalf, staffers pay close attention to the way he speaks, the stories he tells, and the ways he talks about what he believes. They employ the same words and phrases he uses in person when they write on his behalf, working to produce texts that appear to be written by him and accurately reflect his views.

Staffers know, however, that "authenticity" is only part of their goal as they orchestrate the congressional voice. The Congressman's voice is a powerful tool for policy making communicating policies, and they must also orient to various audiences and to each other in order to find the balancing between an authentic voice and a voice that effectively communicates the Congressman's *ethos* and succeeds in persuading audiences that his policy positions are justified. The collaborative process employed by the writing team allows multiple writers to manage multiple audiences, viewpoints, and areas of expertise, preserving each staffer's authority to participating in shaping policy while ensuring that the voice remains consistent no matter who writes the text.

Orienting to the Congressman: Voice as representation

While some literature may assert that voice represents the culmination of a process of self-discovery, for staffers writing on behalf of the Congressman, the voice provides a method of representation—in this case not self-representation, but the representation of another person. In general, staffers aim to create a written version that mirrors Congressman Adamson's speaking voice, which reinforces Peter Elbow's definition of voice. Because staffers base much of their writing, including press

statements, talking points, and even constituent letters, on a speaking voice, what Congressman Adamson says—and how he says it—directly influences the way staffers write on his behalf. Staffers think about what they write in terms of this speaking voice, and during both interviews and observations they often talked about their writing in terms of “something Frank would say” or “has said.” In person, Congressman Adamson has a loud, baritone voice, a raspy smoker’s voice that sometimes sounds older than it is, and it rattles a bit when he lets out his sharp, barkish laugh. Congressman Adamson has a distinct public persona when he meets people for the first time or speaks to an unfamiliar crowd, and part of this persona involves raising his voice to compensate for what almost seems like a feeling of discomfort at meeting new people. Even when he speaks loudly, however, he can be drowned out by someone with a more booming voice. He speaks articulately with only a slightly discernable accent when he pronounces certain words or speaks casually enough that his rural background comes through. He uses a lot of clichés and catchphrases unconsciously, often as a way of filling silence or trying to wrap up a conversation, and he rarely speaks without breaking any perceived tension with a joke—often funny, sometimes awkward.

This is the voice staffers try to capture on paper so that his constituents, colleagues, and others recognize the writing as “authentic Frank.” Staffers know, however, that, as Fulwiler points out, this voice is more than just a tone or a style; it is made up of Congressman Adamson’s history, beliefs, and political philosophies. The voice they generate must recognize that, while the Congressman was born and raised in a rural area, he has an advanced degree in science. It must reflect the fact that when he

votes he considers not only the politics of a decision but also how that vote impacts the integrity of the House of Representatives as an institution. He loves history and reads voraciously, often sleeping for only a couple of hours a night. After decades in state and local politics, he has a keen sense of political intuition that guides many of his decisions, but he also strongly believes that good policy makes good politics, and he insists on making as his highest priority issues that don't always appeal to his political base, to the chagrin of some staffers.

Staffers must take all of this into account when representing the Congressman in texts and in person, and the voice they generate should reflect the complex personality comprised of these characteristics. As a result, in a broad sense, Congressman Adamson's voice is consistent no matter who writes the piece. Staffers try to emulate distinguishing attributes of his speaking voice, and they work to employ similar writing techniques to create a consistent and authentic voice and a persona that is in line with the Congressman himself. Jay describes the voice as straight-forward and honest. "Frank keeps things simple and understandable," he says. When he writes in the Congressman's voice, Jay feels like he is "trying to transcribe information into direct, easy to understand language."

Ted says, "Frank has a really nice hybrid of being intelligent and being able to relate to whatever his audience might be. His voice is an interesting combination of the two—it's neither intellectual nor hillbilly, it's in between." Such a voice allows him to speak to a broad range of people in a diverse district, in addition to high-powered policy makers in Washington.

This job of reflecting Congressman Adamson's views, beliefs, and personality extends to everything staffers do on behalf of their boss. While writing comprises a major part of a staffer's job, it is one task within a larger job description that involves completely representing the Congressman's views and interests. When staffers take meetings, make phone calls, or push policy initiatives, they must also take on his voice, and to accomplish this they constantly orient to him. Their personal interactions with Congressman Adamson directly influence how they communicate on his behalf, both in writing and in person. Therefore, staffers listen carefully to the stories and anecdotes the Congressman tells during meetings, hearings, and other interactions. They pay attention to the tone he employs and words he chooses when he talks about his policy positions. Has his rhetoric on a particular subject changed, and should they reflect that change in the way staffers communicate policy positions? Over the past year, for example, Congressman Adamson has taken a decidedly more antagonistic tone when speaking about an agency over which he has oversight, and in recent months staffers have consequently made different rhetorical decisions when speaking and writing about that agency's actions, shifting their texts according to his words. Staffers also compare what he says in public to the things he says among friends and colleagues. Does his private speech reveal that what appears to be a straightforward policy position is actually more complicated? The staff recognizes, for example, that while he must support his party's economic stimulus proposals in public, privately he does not seem convinced that they offer the right solutions. Knowing this, staff must choose how to communicate on his behalf within this contradiction.

Staffers also learn the stories that he repeats when tries to make certain points—to the point where they know them by heart. For example, the Congressman frequently meets with individuals and groups to talk about issues regarding wildfires, and almost without fail during these meetings he will tell about the time he and the Chief of Staff spent three days with a firefighting crew in the district. The story always starts with him calling up the Chief of Staff, who had only been on staff for a few days, to tell him about this “crazy idea,” includes a joke about how the Forest Service gave him the pup tent with the broken poles, and ends with him switching to talking about another fire he visited a few years later where the local townspeople treated the firefighters like heroes because they had saved the community. Having heard this story nearly once a week for two years, I can almost recite it word for word. Each staffer could tell similar stories—in fact, to entertain themselves during a road trip across the congressional district recently, I listened as Ted, Andrea, and the Chief of Staff challenged each other to tell Congressman Adamson’s signature story on a given issue, whether it was education (an anecdote about how many times children today will change careers during their lifetimes), the Endangered Species Act (a legend he heard about salmon at the lake he visited when he was a child), or energy independence (the story of his wife buying a Toyota Prius and only having to fill up her gas tank once a month).

In person and on paper, staffers do their best to replicate these stories, using the same words and phrases he uses to make the voice they create as authentic as possible. If Congressman Adamson is delayed by votes, staffers often take meetings with constituents in his absence, and Andrea describes feeling like she has been successful in

communicating his views to them when he comes in halfway through the meeting and promptly repeats stories and anecdotes that she has already used in his absence. Because Congressman Adamson does not have a dogmatic political ideology, it can be more difficult for staffers to assume how he will vote on a certain bill than if he always followed a particular political philosophy. To be able to correctly anticipate how he will respond when presented with an issue requires time and interaction with him, and, like Andrea, I feel like I've had a particularly successful day when I have paid such close attention to him that I can predict his response, sometimes right down to the look that will be on his face when I brief him.

Neda describes learning Congressman Adamson's voice as being a fly on the wall. "I traveled with him on his first campaign and attended all of his speeches, and I retained a lot of information that I heard then. He didn't have a congressional staff yet, so he was developing his own message and we all followed. By the time he was in office, I had been listening to him evolve for nine months." As a communications major, she had learned in college how to sell a message, so selling his message became her goal. "It was easy to learn his points and take them on," she says.

The congressional voice is authentically Frank Adamson, but it is more than just a perfect reflection of his speaking voice. Each staffer's larger role as a policy advisor impacts not only how he or she reflects the Congressman's voice in the course of day-to-day work, but also how staffers play a role in creating that voice. To understand the role that staffers play in creating a voice for the Congressman, one must recognize that they do not simply transcribe his views to the public through the texts they create, but that

they are tasked with advising him on policy issues and political strategies. As part of that job, they are called upon to assist him in making policy decisions or crafting his position on issues. Just as they repeat his stories and anecdotes, he, too, repeats the information staffers shared while briefing him or replicates in public the way they framed an argument in a set of talking points. Andrea recalls a time when she briefed Congressman Adamson before a committee mark-up and, in the process of explaining why she thought he should vote against a particular amendment, described the impact that the amendment might have on one company in the state. When the Congressman stood up to speak on the amendment during the mark-up, he repeated the exact example that she had given him during their brief conversation. Her example and rationale for voting against that amendment became part of Congressman Adamson's doctrine. In addition to shaping a message on the front end, staffers also play a role in crafting the voice once Congressman Adamson has taken a position by convincing him to publicly frame a message in a way that is consistent with the voice they have already created for him. Just as they repeat what he says when they write on his behalf, he often repeats the information and cites examples that they provide for him when he speaks extemporaneously. This cycle of borrowing from each other allows staffers to shape what he says in public, thus giving them a creative role in the generation of his voice.

The influence that this cycle of borrowing has on the generation of the Congressman's voice was evident during a committee hearing in which he spoke about the federal deficit. Together the legislative staff and the press staff had worked to craft a press strategy for this particular hearing. Jay prepared a speech for him that he carefully

worked through the collaborative process to ensure that it accurately reflected Congressman Adamson's voice, even employing a number of anecdotes that he often tells. Neda and Jay wrote a press release using quotes pulled from this speech, and they planned to record the Congressman speaking in committee so that a video of the speech could be posted to the website. When the time came for him to speak, however, he chose to speak extemporaneously rather than follow the set of well-prepared talking points. While he included some of the ideas and argument structure laid out by the staff in the prepared speech, he did not read one word from it. His impassioned speech immediately changed the tone of the committee hearing, and the next few speakers made a point of referencing what he had said during their remarks.

As a result of him speaking extemporaneously in this instance, the staff had to scrap the prepared press release and instead use transcripts from the hearing to write a press release that reflected what he had actually said. Not only was the press release then oriented to his extemporaneous speech, but the next time Jay wrote a letter to a constituent about the deficit, he used the Congressman's speech as a starting point. Just as Jay's original talking points influenced how the Congressman shaped his argument, Congressman Adamson's words continue to guide staff writing. This creates a cycle of collaboration that begins and ends with the Congressman as he speaks the words that staffers then write and staffers write the words that he then speaks.

As they write, staffers constantly orient themselves back to the Congressman. While each staffer brings a different audience to the process, all staffers have one common audience—that of the Congressman himself. By focusing on this one audience,

staffers ensure that the voice they generate remains authentic throughout the writing process. Just as the Congressman is the starting point from which they generate the voice, as staffers negotiate the voice with each other, previous documents, and even staffers who no longer work in the office, the negotiation ultimately comes back to him, as well. Fulwiler claims that “my first audience remains the one in my own head—an argument made fifteen years ago by Walter Ong and more recently by Peter Elbow and Don Murray,” which is why throughout the composition process he continues to read back to himself to ensure that what he writes *sounds* like him (Fulwiler 218). For staffers, the first audience is not themselves but the Congressman, whose voice they try to reflect and create. In order to accomplish this, staffers constantly go back to the Congressman himself, whether by repeating his stories, paying attention to how he frames an argument, or recognizing his history or values, to ensure that his public voice is authentic and effective.

Orienting to Audience: Voice as rhetorical invention

An authentic voice orients first and foremost to the Congressman, enabling staff to accurately represent him in public. However, while this “audience of one” is the first and last audience considered by staff writers, it is only one of the audiences that ultimately shape the Congressman’s public voice. The Congressman’s public voice is a rhetorical tool, and it is only effective if it speaks to the intended audience, and, just as Fulwiler and Walker (1962) claim, it must shift based on the audience to whom it speaks. In a broad sense, Congressman Adamson’s voice must be able to speak to a wide range of constituents. Ted says, “When you think about how diverse his district is—[laboratories]

and universities that attract some of the brightest minds in the country, but also a lower income, immensely rural, and agricultural district, with a low rate of people who go on to higher education after high school—and he has to write letters to this diverse population. [He must be able to] speak to the whole district.” In addition, multiple specific audiences exist within this broad constituency, and each new audience influences the way that the Congressman and staffers shape his public voice.

When they consider their audiences, staffers must recognize that audience is not something they create or imagine as they write but is instead very real, and their writing must reflect that. Contrary to the claims of Roth, Ong, and Long, writing from a rhetorical perspective leaves little to the imagination when it comes to envisioning the people to and for whom staffers write. Each legislative staffer spends a significant amount of time responding directly to letters, emails, and phone calls from constituents. With those documents in hand, it is not difficult for the staffer to recognize the very real audience to whom he or she writes. For district-based staffers, the audience is not only represented on paper, but in many cases is physically present. For example, when Neda writes press releases or statements, she targets her writing to the group of local reporters who will decide whether or not to publish an article and how to spin the story—people she knows personally. When Ted prepares talking points for Congressman Adamson to speak at a Farm Bureau meeting, he knows the audience will include a group of people with certain professional and personal interests, many of whom he works with on a regular basis—and whom he will likely see when he attends the meeting with the Congressman.

Because of their close interaction with their audience, staffers also often receive feedback on their texts directly from the audience. When Congress is not in session, Congressman Adamson often visits communities throughout his congressional district and speaks about what is going on in Washington, DC, and how that impacts people in the state. Neda describes listening to Congressman Adamson's first "Washington Update" speech during a recent district work period and hearing immediately from two or three constituents in the audience that the speech was over their heads or that the audience felt it consisted of too much "inside Washington baseball," as she put it, instead of informing listeners about issues relevant to them. It was clear that the intended message did not get through to the audience, and Neda used that input to re-craft the speech, shifting his voice to the intended audience.

Knowing it is not unusual for Congressman Adamson or themselves to meet those who listen to a speech or receive correspondence from the office, staffers cannot stray too far from the very real audience to whom they are trying to speak. To invoke their own audience through their writing or to ask, instead of "who *is* my audience?", "who do I *want* my audience to be?", as Russel Long suggests, would put them in danger of not only failing to effectively communicate the Congressman's message with the media, colleagues, and constituents, but of turning the audience against him (225). In this district, constituents have a fundamental distrust of government and those who would impose their own values and beliefs on them without understanding the way things work at the local or state level. People want to know that their representative in Congress has been to their hometown, shares their life experiences, and understands "how it is back

home”—both on a staff level and by the Member himself. When the Congressman fails to recognize his audience or appears to distance himself from them, they label him “inside the Beltway” and “out of touch,” constituting political disaster. To avert this calamity, staffers must see their texts as an interaction with listeners and readers and orient to their audiences accordingly.

Adding to the complexity of orienting the texts they write to certain audiences is the fact that within the collaborative writing process, different staffers have different audiences, and each staffers’ default audience influences the tone of texts written by that staffer. When they choose a public persona, staffers make decisions about message and representation with their audience in mind, using the Congressman’s voice as a method to communicate specific ideas and influence their audience, just as Cohen and Rogers describe. Neda, for example, writes for the media and chooses a less partisan tone in hopes that the more neutral press will publish the pieces she sends them. On the other hand, Ted spends much of his day working with the political party base, and as a result his pieces tend to be more partisan and opinionated, reflecting the concerns of his audience. This difference in audience changes the voice, and sometimes these shifts are so strong that those outside the office notice. Policy staffers also have their own default audiences. They are often tasked with writing to an audience of colleagues to accurately and clearly describe an issue or policy position. The voice required for this audience sometimes conflicts with the voice they must use for the constituent audience to whose correspondence they reply. The idea that staffers bring multiple audiences to the collaborative process that significantly impact the Congressman’s public voice confirms

Fulwiler's assertion that voice changes depending on who is listening, complicating the collaborative writing process.

Orienting their writing to their audiences allows staffers to communicate effectively and persuasively on the Congressman's behalf. Staffers must take up not only the task of representing the Congressman on paper but also the task of rhetorical invention, which requires them to make a number of choices in how they characterize the Congressman's policy views. They must craft a voice that speaks to a broad constituency but remains flexible enough to effectively communicate with the multiple audiences that each staffer brings to the writing process with him or her. In this sense, staffers play a creative role and exercise their own authority in shaping the Congressman's voice.

Orienting to Other Writers: Voice as collaborative negotiation

Recognizing the multiple roles in the production of the Congressman's voice, the writing process in the office must work to manage the reality that each writer has a different audience—one that may change depending on the piece being written—so that the voice remains authentic and consistent while still effectively communicating the Congressman's policy positions. Through the collaborative writing process, staffers negotiate the Congressman's voice among each other, with previously written documents, and with Congressman Adamson himself. This collaborative process teaches the new staffers how to write in the Congressman's voice. It allows staffers to shape the voice in order to meet policy objectives. It creates the balance that is necessary to address multiple audiences. It also provides authority for each writer to shape meaning through their writing. Staffers depend on each other to provide a balance that maintains an

authentic voice for the Congressman as they learn his voice and policy positions, write on his behalf, and implement public policy. At its best, the collaborative process ensures that the writing team produces an authentic and effective voice.

The collaborative writing process in Congressman Adamson's office employs a sequential collaborative model, where each piece is written primarily by one staffer and then edited and published by other staffers. Most often the legislative staffer to whom the issue at hand has been assigned writes a text. As the subject matter expert, that staffer researches and drafts the text, often without much input from other writers. Only once a text is fully drafted does the author share it with other staffers for editing, proofreading, and publishing. As an example of the way the sequential model is employed by the staff, we can consider the earlier example regarding the press release Jay wrote on gun control. As the legislative staffer responsible for this issue, he used his expertise on the issue and his knowledge of recent legislative proposals to write a draft of the release, which he then shared with me. As Legislative Director, I have the responsibility to edit and proofread most texts that the writing team puts out. For the most part, I left his piece substantially intact—because it was his job to closely follow this issue, he was more familiar with both its legislative history and the concerns that constituents had recently expressed about the newly introduced bill. I did, however, make a number of small mechanical suggestions to his piece, and I suggested two additions to reflect the Congressman's larger policy views.

Once Jay and I felt satisfied with these changes, he emailed the document to Neda, who made suggestions based on her experience with how the media responds to

similar texts. By taking out the additional quote, she believed that the newspapers would be more likely to print the release that Jay had written. While Neda had authority to make these changes, she sought Jay's and my approval, and we all agreed that her suggestions should be incorporated before she moved forward with publishing the document on the website and sending it to the media. As I stated earlier, although revisions were made, Jay's original piece remained largely intact.

Employing a sequential collaborative model rather than the stratification model preferred by Stratton enables the staff to produce texts that employ both the legislative staffer's expertise and the checks and balances necessary to ensure that the Congressman's voice and policies are accurately reflected. While Stratton asserts that this type of model duplicates work and leads to, at best, a mediocre product, I believe giving each staffer the lead role in crafting texts on his or her legislative issues creates a collaborative environment that recognizes each writer's strengths while providing support to minimize any weaknesses. Although a process that enabled one voice to speak louder than others was a weakness in the writing process in Cross's study and ultimately led to its failure, it is a strength of this process. The writing process in this office takes advantage of the fact that each staffer has different areas of expertise and ultimately results in harmony and symphony.

One of the most important functions that the collaborative writing process plays is helping new staffers learn the Congressman's voice and policy positions. Although staffers orient the voice to what the Congressman says, they do not always get the opportunity to hear from him first hand. Even though staffers get more face time with

Congressman Adamson than is common in House and especially Senate offices, that time is still too limited to give them the opportunity to completely capture every facet of his position. As a result, staffers must also depend on each other to learn to write in his voice. The collaborative writing process allows new staffers to consult regularly with those who have worked for Congressman Adamson longer in order to become familiar with his policy positions, his ways of saying things, and the techniques used by other staffers when they write on his behalf. Because newer staffers are less likely to spend a significant amount of time with the Congressman himself, they often depend much more on their colleagues' knowledge of the voice than on Congressman Adamson himself to ensure that they communicate with a consistent voice.

An important part of the collaborative process involves providing feedback on the policy perspectives portrayed in a piece, so the process also plays an important role as staffers learn Congressman Adamson's policy positions, enabling them to write on his behalf. Policy and voice are intertwined, and until a staffer understands the Congressman's political philosophy and positions on specific issues, he or she has a difficult time feeling comfortable writing in his voice. Andrea describes it taking at least six months to feel confident in her ability to communicate Congressman Adamson's policy positions when responding to constituent letters. In many cases, staffers come to the job with little substantive knowledge about their issues. In nearly every case in this office, individuals are hired or promoted not because of their in-depth knowledge on specific legislative issues, but because of their experience with the legislative process— with the exception of the Chief of Staff, for example, the entire DC staff came to

Washington directly after graduating from college and interned in either Congressman Adamson's office or another congressional office. As a result, the learning curve for new staffers is steep, and they depend on their colleagues who have a longer history of working for Congressman Adamson—especially those who worked for him while he was developing his positions on major issues—to help them develop an ability to accurately communicate those positions to the public.

Jay points out that this collaboration even reaches back to staffers who no longer work in the office to ensure that voice and policy positions remain consistent through the years. Like other staffers, he depends heavily on previously written documents to learn style and voice. “So much has already been written or said,” he says, which gives him something to work with as he tries to capture the Congressman's voice. Collaborating with the “ghosts” of staffers plays an important part of his ongoing learning process and ensures that the policies stay consistent, and as the current staff collaborates on written documents, they work to make the voice consistent as well.

In addition to teaching newer staffers how to write in the Congressman's voice, the collaborative writing process in the office also works to shape that voice in order to meet policy objectives. While staffers initially orient to the Congressman when they are writing, he often leaves it to staff to decide what to write about an issue and how to present the argument. Congressman Adamson trusts his staffers to represent him accurately, and this trust gives them responsibility for a number of policy and communication decisions. Through the collaborative process, staffers work together to make these decisions. Voice and policy are often developed simultaneously, and as

staffers bounce policy ideas off each other they also often discuss how those ideas might be communicated to and received by various audiences, collaborating about the document before they even write a word. Ultimately the voice has to make complex policy ideas accessible to a diverse audience, and it has to do so in such a way that it convinces that audience that the Member has taken the right positions on those policies. The voice has to explain and persuade at the same time, which sometimes requires the staff writer to choose to say something in a different way than Congressman Adamson might say it in person or use different arguments to persuade them. Both staffers and the Congressman recognize that an argument is lost if you have to spend five minutes explaining why you voted the way you did or describing archaic House procedures, and it is often up to the staffer to frame an argument in a way that avoids these pitfalls. While staffers ultimately begin and end with the Congressman when generating his voice, they shape the voice to meet policy objectives and audience considerations, to emphasize certain characteristics and draw attention away from others.

This process often requires overcoming conflicts between staffers and their views about the best way to handle a text. For example, when a local blogger who considers himself a self-appointed government watchdog contacted Neda to get the Congressman's response to another Member's claim that an education project funded in the district was wasteful or unnecessary, Neda and Ted vehemently disagreed on the best way to respond. Ted preferred to completely ignore the reporter, knowing that defending the project would incur the wrath of constituents who feel the government spends too much money, regardless of the merits of the program. Neda argued that staying silent only gave the

blogger the opportunity to shape the argument however he saw fit, and if we failed to respond we would not only fail to prevent an attack but would actually give him the weapon. Through collaboration, Ted and Neda devised a statement that managed to defend the project while brilliantly undermining the other Congressman's claims: rather than engaging in a series of earnest arguments in favor of the local university's efforts to improve science and math education, the statement snidely implied that it wasn't surprising that someone who represented a school that had lost a major football game to our local university might still be looking for a little revenge. When they sent me the quote for my input, I honestly thought the Congressman had written it himself. Through their creative generation of his voice, together Neda and Ted had effectively shaped the message in such a way that it helped, rather than hurt, the Congressman's *ethos*.

If we view the generation of the Congressman's voice through the lens of Roger Cherry's differentiation between *ethos* and persona, we can perhaps see more clearly how this voice is a creation of the staffers. If trying to capture and communicate the *ethos* of the Member himself, transparently reflecting the Member's actual voice, is one goal of the voice, another goal is to create a public persona for the Member. This persona responds to audience and tries to capture not only the individual himself but also the roles he plays as a fellow citizen who understands his constituents and as a Member of the U.S. House of Representatives.

For example, one way that staffers create a public persona for Congressman Adamson is by emphasizing certain characteristics of his and diminishing others. Andrea describes invoking certain words and phrases when writing about issues with which

Congressman Adamson has professional experience to convey his expertise. When I write on his behalf, I strive to maintain his pragmatic, common-sense tone. By preserving that style, I can emphasize what I think is one of his best character traits, even in situations where he may personally come across more harshly opinionated. For example, I recently worked with a committee staffer to prepare a statement for Congressman Adamson for a committee hearing. The committee staffer who wrote the first draft of the statement based it on a few frustrated comments made by Congressman Adamson regarding the testifying agency's response to an issue. As a result, the style was very harsh and almost sarcastic. I made a number of changes to the draft to tone down the language and ensure that he would not come across as attacking the witness. Even though the committee staffer had accurately reflected Congressman Adamson's frustration, it was more reflective of his public persona to preserve and emphasize his desire to work with others to solve problems and his tendency to look at issues pragmatically instead of ideologically.

The process also impacts the voice by allowing multiple writers to manage multiple audiences, creating the balance necessary to ensure that each audience is addressed. As mentioned earlier, staffers must orient to the audience as they shape the Congressman's voice, and the fact that staffers bring different audiences to the writing process complicates the negotiations between them as they write. The collaborative process plays an important role in providing a creative balance that allows the piece to speak to the intended audience. When Andrea describes the collaborative process, she says that it "helps pull everything together. As a policy person, [collaboration] can pull

you out of the nitty-gritty to make ‘expert information’ accessible” rather than getting bogged down in unnecessary details that may confuse the intended audience. When different staffers bring their sense of audience awareness to a text, it is more likely to speak to that incredibly wide audience of constituents.

Even when they target texts to specific audiences with which the writer is familiar, the collaborative process is beneficial. Writing in politics is about making complex ideas accessible to the public, but it is also about selling a person or an idea to voters. Andrea compares the office to an advertizing agency. “Politics,” she says, “is all about selling something, in this case a person or an idea, and you have to sell it differently to different audiences.” Finding the proper balance between different audiences often requires the input of multiple staffers. The fact that different staffers have different audiences plays a significant role in how the push and pull of the collaborative process works and ultimately shapes the final piece. “The benefits [of the collaborative process],” Andrea says, “are that everyone balances each other out and Frank’s voice is more well-rounded.” Each staffer has different levels of exposure to real audiences, and when they bring each of these perspectives to the table, they help to ensure that they don’t neglect audience in the final text, as the writer’s in Cross’s study did. Through the collaborative process, someone is always taking care of one of the important aspects of a piece that might otherwise be neglected if only one person was writing a document.

In many ways, the collaborative process works to prevent any one staffer from having too much authority in the writing process and ensures that the congressional voice

is not simply the voice of one overpowering staffer disguised as the legislator. However, at the same time that the collaborative process creates a symphony of many voices, it also works to preserve the authority of each individual writer to shape meaning, both within the writing process and in policy making.

While the goal of the voice is consistency, in reality one voice is made out of many, and, internally, at least, staff writers' fingerprints remain even on polished and edited pieces. "The voice is relatively consistent," says Andrea, "but I can definitely tell who wrote what." Each staffer has his or her own tone and writing style. Ted, for example, likes to capitalize all the letters in certain words for emphasis and tends to lend a more partisan voice to documents. Andrea, on the other hand, writes things in a straight-forward, factual manner without a lot of nuance. Andrea admits that learning to write in Congressman Adamson's voice was a challenge when she first began working for him. Her style is very academic, and she struggled to go from writing college level texts to writing in the Congressman's more casual voice. Jay's pieces often have a hint of sarcasm, while Neda tends to transcribe verbatim what the Congressman says out loud. For the most part, staffers consider these voices to be slight variations on a theme where the message and genre remain consistent no matter who writes the piece, and only the staff-writers themselves can tell who wrote the original draft of a piece. Still, there are moments when those outside of the process note a difference in the voice when documents that are usually written by one staffer are written by another. During her interview, Andrea pointed out that the media noted a significant difference in the strength and tone of texts coming out of the press shop while Neda was out for a few months and

Ted wrote press releases. The distinctions were subtle and the media did not suggest that someone else had written the texts, but the shift was noticeable enough to underscore the idea that individual voices exist within the Congressman's negotiated voice.

The fact that staffers' fingerprints are visible on texts written in the congressional voice reveals the role that they play in making meaning through the writing process. The collaborative process in this office enforces the authority that staffers have in shaping the Congressman's voice. Jay, who has worked for three Members of Congress, can easily describe the differences in these voices, and he maintains that the writing process in the office impacts the voice. Compared to letters written in Congressman Adamson's office, where the process is relatively streamlined, Jay says the cumbersome writing processes in those office produced final pieces that had a markedly more deliberative tone compared to the crisp, straight-forward voice in which staffers for Congressman Adamson write. He also shared his frustration that through those processes, his higher-ups made so many changes to his original text that it was unrecognizable when it was published, and he felt like the process undermined his authority as a writer. In contrast, the collaborative writing process in Congressman Adamson's office recognizes his expertise both on the issues assigned to him and as a writer, and he has a strong influence over texts that are published in the Congressman's name.

This idea that one voice is made up of many discernable voices complicates theories on voice as a method of self-representation or a process of self-identification. As ghostwriters, staffers appropriate authorship to the Congressman, so, for example, when Cherry talks about assuming and searching for a real author, we must consider who the

author we're looking for is—are we looking for the staffer-writer or the Congressman-author? Bakhtin talks about writers developing individual voices that are not only distinct from the voices around them but distinct within themselves, but this becomes somewhat messy when staffers develop a voice for someone else. While each of these staffers professes to share the Congressman's general political philosophy, they don't all personally share his views on specific issues. For example, some staffers have different views on key issues like abortion, and others disagree with the strong stand that the Congressman takes on environmental issues. In these cases, staffers must learn to recognize their own voices and views in order to silence them when necessary because they are writing on the Congressman's behalf. Yet staffers' own views often shift as they write, so when they generate a voice for him by both mirroring back his own speaking voice, thoughts, and values and making their own creative decisions, they also create a voice for themselves as they bring their own views, expertise, and experience to the collaborative creation of the congressional voice. I would argue that these multiple voices, while distinct, are part of the process that creates a single, unified, and ultimately richer voice for the Member. They enable staffers to create a voice that is more symphonic than monotone.

Without the collaborative process, it would be easy for one of these voices to become dominant, as it did in Cross's study, shifting both writing and policy away from the Member's voice and turning it into the voice of one assertive staffer. Because staffers work together with each other and with Congressman Adamson in a cycle of collaboration that also influences his policy positions, the voice retains authenticity even

when they write on his behalf. For example, staffers recently worked collaboratively to write an editorial on the recently passed healthcare reform law. The original piece, drafted by Ted, was approved by Neda and the Chief of Staff, but when they presented it to Andrea, the appropriate policy staffer, she hesitated. She knew that, while the Congressman had strong views on the law as a whole, he had expressed concern about singling out the specific provision of the bill on which Ted had focused his piece. Congressman Adamson believed that this provision was particularly complicated, and it would be extremely difficult to adequately explain his complex views in a few sound bites. With this in mind, Andrea worked to refocus the piece so that it more accurately reflected his views, striking a balance between the goals of Ted's original piece and the reality of the Congressman's views. As they write, staffers must find a balance between appropriating meaning from the mouths of others, as Bakhtin describes, and recognizing when they must prioritize the Congressman's voice over their own views and opinions (Bakhtin 293-94). The collaborative process ensured that the voice remained consistently and authentically Congressman Adamson's.

This example illustrates how, in spite of the fact that Jay talks about "trying to transcribe" the Congressman's spoken words into texts, transmission is not really what is going on here. Instead, each staffer is involved directly in the appropriation and communication of meaning. Rather than simply "channeling" Congressman Adamson, suppressing their own expertise and experience, they bring their own knowledge, opinions, and voices to the collaborative process. Nor do they simply translate or interpret the Congressman so that different audiences can understand him and his policy

positions. Congressman Adamson depends on his staff not only to communicate on his behalf but also to decide what and how to communicate. The process gives each writer power as she or he articulates meaning throughout the composition process. While this reinforces what Slack, Doak, and Miller say about articulation theory, it complicates it as well. Not only does each writer influence the relations of power between writer and reader, but writers themselves are subject to articulation within this process. The writing process creates a web linking each writer and audience to each other, and throughout the process each staffer participates in a “give and take” social interaction as the writing team works to shape meaning through texts.

As we consider this web of social interactions, we cannot forget that the Congressman is also part of this matrix, and while he gives his staff a lot of freedom when they write on his behalf, he, too, is involved in the give and take. On the one hand, he can choose to re-articulate the links between writers and audiences, influencing not only texts but the collaborative process that produces them. On the other hand, he must also recognize the authority of texts that are produced by the staff in order to ensure that those texts have credibility with voters, who are able to distinguish the “real Frank Adamson” from a political creation. Although the Congressman rarely asks to read or proofread a document before publication, he makes a number of other decisions in the communications process that influence the collaborative generation of his voice. One key role he takes is deciding whether or not to use talking points or speeches prepared for him by staff or generate his own extemporaneous speech. Congressman Adamson is a great public speaker, but he does not often choose to speak on the floor of the House or in

situations where prepared speeches or Teleprompters are necessary. Staffers always prepare talking points that could be read word for word for speaking engagements, but his message is almost always stronger when he uses these prepared points as a guideline and speaks extemporaneously instead. Interestingly, he often chooses to read prepared talking points in less significant situations and speak off-the-cuff on more significant issues. Recently he surprised me, for example, by reading word for word the talking points I had written for him when speaking to an industry conference in the state. He speaks to this group at least three times a year, and since their issues seldom change, I had recycled talking points from a previous speech that he had not used. His decisions to simply read aloud from my document signaled to me that in this situation he was not engaged enough in the speech to speak extemporaneously.

In contrast, the same week he chose to completely disregard the talking points prepared for him in the committee hearing described earlier. Even though the prepared speech had been edited by several staffers and accurately reflected his voice, he decided that the moment was important enough to speak extemporaneously. His decision didn't reflect on the quality of the written speech as much as on his desire to take ownership of his own participation in the process by recognizing the value of non-verbal communication in speaking on an important issue. Because he chose to follow the general outline of the speech prepared by staff but communicate extemporaneously instead of reading it from a paper, his speech had more impact. As described earlier, staff changed the way they communicated about the issue at hand as a result of this decision.

He chose to actively participate in the collaborative process to create an *ethos* that convinced his colleagues that he had a message to which they should pay attention.

As a part of the “give and take” of the collaborative process, Congressman Adamson must submit to the collaborative process just as he influences it. Even though Congressman Adamson has ultimate power to veto or change a piece, once it is circulated outside the office he must publicly embrace it. In order to ensure that the words he speaks are truly his, he does not hesitate to correct staff when they miss the mark. “Working for him for twelve years,” says Neda, “You get a sense of things he would say and things he wouldn’t say.”

It’s easy to get outlandish and political, and it would be easy to get caught up in that because we see that in the news and from [the party] and so on, but Frank’s not like that, so it can be a challenge to overcome. There have been times when I’ve gone astray and have to be pulled back. Frank will make little comments—he doesn’t berate you, but you can tell from the comments he makes [that he’s not comfortable with the press release you’ve prepared]. I do a lot of interviews with him, and when reporters ask about that press release, I can tell that he’s struggling to find a balance between what he knows was in the press release and what he really wants to say.

Congressman Adamson recognizes the role that staff play in preserving the *ethos* he has with his constituents and colleagues. While staffers constantly orient to him as they write, they also participate with him in a collaborative process that keeps his rapport with voters intact.

The collaborative process that produces the Congressman’s public voice begins with him, as staffers constantly orient to the Congressman in order to accurately represent him in their day-to-day work. By orienting to him, staffers can produce a voice that creates an *ethos* that allows Congressman Adamson to effectively communicate with his

constituents and provides Congressman Adamson's constituents with authentic representation in Congress. This voice is more than simply a two-way communication between the Congressman and each writer; it is also the product of an ongoing negotiation among a team of staff writers and with previous texts. The collaborative process allows new staffers to learn the Congressman's agreed upon voice, and it pulls that voice back to center when one writer or another strays too far from the Congressman's public persona. When staffers orient to each other, they can take advantage of each staffer's strengths and expertise, preserving her authority to write on the Congressman's behalf, while minimizing any weaknesses. By collaborating on the generation of this voice, they are able to shape the voice to meet policy objectives and audience considerations, creating the balance needed to effectively communicate the Congressman's public persona with constituents, colleagues, and the media.

Writing Collaboratively Reflects and Shapes Relationships

It is telling to say that staff fingerprints remain even on polished pieces. The fact that those in the office can tell who wrote what, and even that some outside the office can discern a different tone when pieces like press releases are written by different staffers, reveals the power that each staffer wields when she or he writes on behalf of Congressman Adamson. Medhurst claims that looking at the culture of ghostwriting in an organization can reveal a lot about the structure of that organization and how individuals operate within it. True to his claims, the collaborative writing process both illuminates the way that staffers wield their power within the office structure and

influences the power structures in the office, including the relationships among staffers and between staffers and the Congressman.

Doheny-Farina's study on writing in an emerging organization shows how writing can give those with less positional power more influence to create meaning, reapportioning authority among writers and changing corporate structure, while Cross's study shows how the writing process reinforces the existing power structures. In many ways, the writing structure in this office acts to reflect and reinforce the existing office culture rather than change it. In Congressman Adamson's office, an examination of the writing process reveals two seemingly contradictory power structures. On the one hand, staffers perceive the writing process as egalitarian, and the process provides each staffer with plenty of autonomy to write creatively on the Congressman's behalf. This process reflects the desire of office leadership to create an office environment where staff is not micro-managed and each staffer has an important role to play in the policy making process. Unlike many congressional offices, where staffers have limited freedom, management in Congressman Adamson's office publicly strives to create as positive a working environment as possible, an attitude that has been absorbed into the writing process. On the other hand, while staffers feel they have freedom to write on their own issues, the writing process gives staffers in positions of power more authority over their colleagues' writing than the egalitarian nature on the surface would have them suppose. While it provides a certain amount of freedom, it also allows for limits to be placed on this freedom, both by higher level staffers and by Congressman Adamson. Beneath a

seemingly egalitarian, autonomous writing process is a defined hierarchy, which can be reinforced by the writing process and which staffers must learn to carefully negotiate.

Writing as an equalizer

The writing process in the office provides each staffer with power to fix meanings, as Slack et al., describe. While the office has a formal structure similar to most congressional offices, from the Chief of Staff, Deputy Chief of Staff, and Legislative Director down through Legislative Correspondents and Staff Assistants, the informal power structure is less defined in Congressman Adamson's office. In part this is because so many of the staffers are senior level staffers with years of experience both in Congressman Adamson's office and with other members of the state's congressional delegation. It is also largely a reflection on Congressman Adamson himself. He generally trusts his staff to do their jobs, whether making and communicating policy decisions or adequately preparing him for hearings, meetings, and votes. While he is aware of what the staff writes on his behalf, he usually chooses not to micromanage the writing process and instead gives his staff authority to communicate for him. His general view, as Neda points out, is that "if he can't trust his staff to put things out in his name, he shouldn't have them on staff."

The rest of the office management follows the Congressman's lead, and as a result staffers are generally given a lot of autonomy. The office has an assumed pecking order to positions when it comes to vacation time and who takes on some menial tasks, but when it comes to job performance, management assumes that everything is running smoothly until a problem emerges, leaving staffers with the freedom and responsibility to

carry out their jobs in the manner they see fit. When they write on the Congressman's behalf, each staffer has authority and autonomy to make decisions about genre and voice that influence the final text. As a result, the workplace feels largely egalitarian, where every staffer is an expert on his or her specific issues and is encouraged to participate in the larger policy shaping process. This egalitarian attitude allows staffers at all levels to claim a significant role in the writing process.

When Jay compares the constituent letter writing process in the Senate office where he worked to that in Congressman Adamson's office, he notes a marked connection between the collaborative writing process and the power structure in the office. In that office, he says, letters went through three separate edits, editors made substantial changes to pieces, sometimes even rewriting the entire letter, and it took a long time to complete a piece of writing. In some cases, editors didn't return pieces in a timely manner, forcing staff to rewrite now outdated texts. He describes his frustration when editors inexplicably deleted key points of a piece, ostensibly dismissing his effort and expertise.

In contrast, the writing process in Congressman Adamson's office is less structured and more streamlined. Routine pieces like constituent response letters are often proofread only by the Legislative Director, and most changes are mechanical rather than substantive. Documents like talking points and press releases are often reviewed by additional staffers, but while they may make suggestions as to tone and policy, the original piece remains largely intact.

On this level, the collaborative process in the office exists not to impose one person's style or opinion onto everything that goes out from the office, but to produce the best piece of writing possible in the time available. The typical editorial in the office starts when Ted gets moved about an issue—"and he gets moved a lot," says Neda—and starts writing. Most recently, he got fired up about the federal deficit, and within fifteen minutes had crafted a 700 word editorial on the issue. Without much self-editing, he then threw the piece out to what he calls "the firing squad," and Jay, the staffer who handles budget issues, began to edit it. He made a few changes to tone down the piece and brought in some ideas that he had heard Congressman Adamson express recently, and then he sent the piece to me. I made no substantive changes but only a few edits to make the message clearer, and then I cut the piece down to 600 words, the limit imposed by the newspaper we had targeted. Together Jay and I worked to achieve consistency with the negotiated voice, while also ensuring that the editorial accurately reflected Congressman Adamson's issue position. Once we were happy with the piece, Jay sent it back to Ted for any last minute changes, and then emailed the final piece to Neda so that she could call the paper to ask about publishing it. Each staffer's fingerprints were on the final piece, but it largely reflected Ted's first draft. "Superiors don't dictate how inferiors write or shut them down, that has never happened to me," says Andrea.

The egalitarian structure of the office impacts the way that staffers write, creating a system where colleagues play the role of consultant much more often than that of editor. For example, when editing a coworker's text, staffers are more likely to make decisions based on how their colleagues will feel about the changes they make than on

whether the original document was written by someone more senior than them. Staffers also have room to advocate for their own texts when their pieces go through the collaborative editing process. As Andrea points out, “People don’t win because of power—a superior can suggest a change, but it isn’t always made. At the end of the day, you still have control over your own writing. I think this is a highly unusual situation for congressional offices. In most offices, a piece of writing goes through three or four people, often with major changes at each level. [For me,] this would be a major disincentive to do any writing—in this office I can decide to, say, do an editorial and just do it, and at the end of the day, most of what I wrote will go to the press. I have a lot of control over the process and over what I write.” Viewed through the articulation theory of communication put forth by Slack et al., the office’s egalitarian structure and writing process recognizes the integral role of the writer in shaping meaning, elevating the writer’s role in the legislative process. She or he does not simply transcribe someone else’s views, but shapes policy. Through the collaborative writing process, staffers are empowered to participate and even control articulations of meaning.

Writing as an enforcer of power

Staffers and office management often laud the egalitarian nature of the office and congratulate each other on a process that recognizes the value of each staffer. As explored above, management works hard to create a positive working environment for staffers, and the writing process reflects that by providing staffers with authority and autonomy. However, in the course of their jobs, staffers—especially those at lower levels—will inevitably bump into limits on their own authority that may be unexpected,

considering the autonomous atmosphere that is praised and encouraged. While the writing process reflects an egalitarian structure, it is also used to enforce a hierarchy in the office that gives some staffers power over the writing of others.

In most of these cases, a staffer's positional power bestows authority over the writing of another staffer. Such is the power of the Legislative Director (LD), who sees every piece of writing that goes out in the Congressman's name. Unlike her role as proofreader of constituent mail, which is part of the LD's job description and explicitly laid out for all staffers, the LD's role as the "keeper of the voice" is rarely talked about and, in some cases, not recognized by all staffers. Ted calls the LD the "traffic cop," saying that she or he is the person who sees everything that goes out the door written on the Congressman's behalf to ensure consistency with the Congressman's voice and views. In practical terms, this means that, in my role as the LD, Neda sends me every press release before it goes out, even if it is an issue outside my immediate portfolio and regardless of whether the legislative staffer who wrote it planned on including me in the editing process. While some staffers accept this as part of the writing process, others would prefer to assert their autonomy, rejecting my claim of positional power. Neda and Ted, however, reinforce the need for a traffic cop to ensure all texts are consistent and reflect the Congressman's positions, character, and voice. They continue to send documents to me for editing, sometimes without telling the staffer who originally wrote it. This is their way of preserving the original writer's claim to autonomy without disturbing sensitive office relationships necessary for a productive collaborative work environment.

The role of traffic cop in this office materialized when Ted was the LD. In general, he took a greater interest than other managers in what was going on in each legislative issue, so it became commonplace for his desk to become a clearinghouse for all types of documents. In describing to me why he thinks having a traffic cop is so important he used as an example a speech given by a senior Member of Congress during a highly public debate on an issue of national importance, during which the Member mispronounced words in his written speech, detracting from his overall message and undermining his credibility. Ted called the event a “breakdown in the writing process, because someone who should be the gatekeeper and know [their boss] will not pronounce that word correctly” did not see the speech before it was given.

The traffic cop’s authority over the writing process is implied and for the most part derived by the concurrence of the other staff. In some cases, however, staffers use the writing process to assert their authority over other staffers. Legislative staffers, for example, know that policy decisions are sometimes—arguably unfairly—made without their input, in spite of the fact that they are considered the experts on the issues they handle. This undermines staffers’ assumed authority and reveals a significant power structure that might have initially been overlooked because the office prides itself on its egalitarian attitude.

The most common way that staffers use the writing process to exert power is by being the first to put the Congressman’s position on a policy down on paper. While the Congressman sets general policy, he often leaves it up to staff to nuance his position by determining how strongly to word a press release or how detailed a response to a

constituent letter to write. Unless the Congressman gives explicit instructions about the direction he wants a document to take, the first person who writes a piece has the most influence over determining the policy. Because staffers rarely make wholesale changes to a text written by another staffer, collaboration may give many people the opportunity to influence the final policy statement, but ultimately the person who writes the first draft of the statement ends up having the most control over the policy.

Not only does the original text—and the policy positions it sets forth—remain largely intact through the collaborative process, but once a particular policy position is made public it has a lasting impact on future documents and policy decisions. The new text becomes a “master document” from which staffers will continue to pull quotes and arguments for all subsequent texts on the issue. Just as Jay described about writing letters, even the “ghosts of staffers” have significant influence over the policies on which they wrote. Ultimately, once a position is made public, it is politically difficult to pull back from it, so the master document retains power for a long time.

The general power structure of the office can be enforced or disrupted through writing when the first person to write on an issue is not the staffer who handles that legislative issue. That staffer should control policy decisions on that issue, but in reality, it is very often the case that the first person to write something on an issue is Ted. Although Ted does not formally hold a position of authority of the legislative staff, as a former LD he is very familiar with the Congressman’s policy positions and voice. Because he works primarily with the congressional base, he often focuses on making sure that Congressman Adamson is in line with those of his general constituency. Because he

no longer works in the DC office, he doesn't get to see and hear the Congressman on a daily basis or participate first hand in the development of his policy positions, and he occasionally gets panicky that the Congressman is straying from the political base. In this situation, he may take on an issue immediately without necessarily consulting the relevant DC staffer. While he is often not conscious of having done so, by creating the first document that lays out a policy position he has exerted significant influence not only over the direction of the piece but also over the policy decisions that staffers make as a result of that piece being published or sent out—taking away the ability of other legislative staffers to shape that policy. The previous examples of the editorials he wrote on healthcare and the budget illustrate the impact that being the first to write has on the policy-making process—for better or worse, it is his writing, not the writing of the relevant policy staffer, which survives to be published or to influence decisions in the future.

Another way that the existing power structure in the office is disrupted and realigned is through the writing of press releases. In many congressional offices, press releases, quotes, and editorials are written almost entirely by the Communications Director, who often works in DC alongside the policy staff. As the main communicator to the media, this person has the opportunity to rearticulate meaning or shape the message for the audience, giving her a role in determining the Congressman's positions on policy issues even though she is not a policy staffer. In a previous office where I worked, for example, the Communications Director often made decisions that significantly nuanced

the Congressman's policy positions in press releases that he wrote—much to the frustration of the policy staff, who was rarely consulted before the release went out.

In Congressman Adamson's office, however, policy staff has exerted a larger role in writing press releases and editorials, reducing the Communications Director's authority to shape policy. This shift in responsibility and power has been more pronounced over the past two years so that today, rather than sending Neda information about a bill or vote, most legislative staffers will send her drafts of press releases, including quotes from Congressman Adamson. Neda rarely makes changes to these drafts, leaving her with the primary role of communicating the message with the press rather than crafting it herself. Happily, shifting the power to make policy decisions from the Communications Director to the policy staff has been a welcome move for Neda, who prefers to work from existing documents, formatting information instead of creating new text. "The things that are really helpful for me are constituent letters," she says. "Letters have a great deal of information, they're in Frank's voice, I'm always impressed with constituent letters. If I have to write press on something that we have a letter on, those are the best place to start." This shift in power facilitated by the writing process has resulted in better texts and more consistent messages, and it has enabled staffers to focus on the tasks they enjoy most.

Once staffers recognize that their autonomy to write on the Congressman's behalf will inevitably be limited by others in the office, it changes the way that they write in the collaborative process. The road to collaboration is not always smooth and the writing process falls prey to personality conflicts. Collaboration becomes difficult when the

intra-office communication process breaks down, and such problems are inevitable in any group of individuals. The writing team is a relatively unchanging cast of characters, and when you write, as Andrea says, you always have “an awareness that you are working with your colleagues.” Staffers see that the writing process influences the power structure in the office, and they start to view decisions about changing text composed by someone else not simply as ways to improve the writing but as a move that carries a weighty message about intra-office politics. As a result they feel less inclined to make certain suggestions or changes to a piece that would improve it because they want to manage sensitivities and value the working relationship over the quality of the document. Neda points out that the writing team generally works as a united front—there are “many of us working on one product, and if somebody makes a change or edit, unless you disagree with that, it becomes part of the product, no matter what the product.” However, each staffer interviewed expressed frustration with the way one or another staffer suggested changes to a document they wrote. Neda, for example, says that she rarely feels offended when someone edits her document because most edits have a purpose. However, she expressed her displeasure for the times when the edits seem frivolous or appear as an attempt by another staffer to seize control of a piece.

Ted says his reaction to suggestions all comes down to motive. Does a change really improve the document, or is it just a way for one writer to create ownership of a piece? Is the edit substantive, or does it just reflect a preferred style? “The process [in this office] works very well,” says Ted, “if people can set aside egos and their own personal preferences on style...what are people’s motivations for wanting to change?”

Recognizing that personalities and power structures are at play, staffers are often forced to consider intra-office politics when editing, even if the piece ends up less perfect as a result.

Staff-writers and the Congressman-author

While staffers may use the writing process to make subtle power plays that reinforce the office structure and impact the policy-making process, the process underscores the power relationship between staffers and the Member. There is no undercurrent of hidden hierarchy here—the Congressman has final authority on any piece of writing going out of the office, and while he may not use this authority often, staffers accept their roles as staffer-writers in relation to a Congressman-author.

The research conducted by Brown and Stuart shows that the public generally expects that texts authored by leaders are written by someone else. It has been my experience, however, that just because constituents don't expect their elected officials to personally respond to the letters they send, it does not mean that they are happy about the idea that the responses they receive are written by staffers instead. Constituents often use derogatory language to refer to “the intern who writes the response” or, prefacing an angry tirade, claim that “they know Congressman Adamson will never see the letter they sent him.” The truth is that it is not possible, or reasonable, for the Congressman to read each of the 500 or 600 letters that come into the office each week. He does read a representative selection of them, and his senior policy staffers, not his interns, craft responses on his behalf.

In spite of the fact that staffers write and shape policy on their boss's behalf, the perception that staffers have too much power and are somehow running the country behind the backs of elected officials does not accurately describe this office. Staffers have a lot of authority to make decisions on behalf of the Member, but when staffers carry out the task of writing and use their own skill to craft responses, they only have as much power to shape meaning as the Congressman gives them. Members use their judgment when determining how much autonomy to give their staffers, and if staffers overstep or act in contradiction to the Member's views or wishes, that power can be snatched back in an instant.

As Brandt points out, both the staffer-writer and the Congressman-author are complicit in the act of ghostwriting. Even a hands-off boss like Congressman Adamson, who has intentionally surrounded himself with a team of experienced, loyal employees, will impose limits on his staffers' authority when they have pushed it further than he would like. In one instance, when other local leaders threatened to undermine one of his long-term legislative priorities, staffers shared his anger and frustration and, in response, drafted a strongly-worded and highly emotive press statement. When they gave the editorial to him for his approval, he responded by sending the entire staff an email sharing his appreciation for all their work and then telling them to stand down on going public with their mutual frustration. In asserting his authority, staffers immediately responded by changing course and completely shifting the tone of the editorial, which became less an opportunity to attack enemies and more a chance to educate readers about his priorities. Each staffer had a different idea about how best to move forward on

accomplishing his legislative goal, but their internal negotiations were cut short when he made it clear that their authority was too limited to carry out these ideas without his approval.

When Congressman Adamson sets out the limits of each staffer's power to make meaning, it reveals that within a workplace environment where each staffer has authority and autonomy, there is one overruling voice—the one of the elected official. He can choose to disrupt the power structures in place by determining that one staffer will write the first draft of a piece even if that issue falls within another staffer's legislative portfolio. He can choose to characterize his views during press interviews in a way that shape policy differently than staffers would wish, forcing them to rethink legislative priorities. His authority to do these things is never questioned. Congressman Adamson is the ultimate traffic cop, and the writing process reflects this by imposing the clear lines of authority between the Congressman and the staff.

The writing process in this office reinforces Brandt's findings in her study on ghostwriting that the practice of ghostwriting employs an intentional borrowing and lending of status. In this case, just as staffers lend their status as writers to Congressman Adamson, he lends to them his status as a policy maker. Unlike many of Brandt's participants, staffers don't see themselves as creating an "improved version" of the Congressman for public consumption. Ted and Jay, who have both worked for other Members of Congress, contrasted writing for a Member who needs to be "interpreted" to his audience or made more articulate or thoughtful on paper than he appears in person to writing for Congressman Adamson, whose actual voice they strive to capture. What

staffers do see themselves doing, however, is participating in the process of shaping policy. Representing their boss accurately is more than simply a method of good job performance; it is necessary to ensure that the larger process of policy making, of which writing is a part, is successful. While staffers willingly give the Congressman credit for their writing and adhere to the public persona of “Congressman as author,” they see themselves not as invisible writers but as part of a team of meaning-makers. Each writer participates in the process of articulating and rearticulating meanings, so that the writing process becomes not simply a relationship between a sender and a receiver, but a more complex web of relationships between writers at different levels of positional power who bring different audiences and perspectives to the task of generating the Congressman’s voice.

Within this web or matrix, to use Bakhtin’s word choice, power is generated and shifted not just between readers and writers but among a team of writers. If, as Slack et al., contend, each sender or medium “contributes to the ongoing process of articulating and rearticulating meaning,” then not only does the policy about which they communicate potentially change with each new staffer who touches the document, but the connections between the staffers are articulated and rearticulated throughout the process of writing (28). In this situation, it is not simply that one writer execute her authority to make meaning in isolation; it is more complicated than that, because just as she uses her power within the writing process, someone else may execute his own authority to shift her power or rearticulate meaning as she sees it.

This complex process of pulling and pushing within an interconnected matrix is further complicated by the presence of the Congressman. Staffers recognize that the Congressman has the final authority on any policy decision made in the office. In many offices this authority puts the Congressman outside of that web that is the writing process. For example, in the office where I previously worked, as the legislative staff we considered ourselves the support team providing information and insight for the Congressman, but we did not play a role in decision-making—that role was left to Congressman, who wanted sole ownership of those decisions. In this office, however, Congressman Adamson considers himself a member of the legislative team. He doesn't simply take the package of meaning put together by the staff and decide whether or not to implement it, but he participates in the articulation and rearticulation of meaning alongside the writing team—albeit with significantly more authority and the ever-present option of “pulling rank.”

The perception of staffers as being part of the team with the Congressman is demonstrated by the way they strongly identify with him. When they subconsciously refer to his work as “ours,” their words reflect a “we are he” way of operating, rather than a “he is we” way of thinking. Staffers also feel intensely responsible for what they write, how it is received, and how it impacts Congressman Adamson. Their own identities become a complicated combination of themselves and Congressman Adamson. They feel a complex sense of mortification or pleasure both for themselves and for him when something they write is criticized or praised, as if the reaction reflects on their own

abilities as writers, their job performance, and their role as representatives of the Congressman.

Surprisingly, the Congressman shares this plural mindset. Like staffers, he often uses plural pronouns when talking about his actions and accomplishments in representing his constituents. He wants his staff to tell him what they think about legislative proposals and why they may disagree with him so that once a decision is made they can move forward on it together. He also publicly recognizes the role that his staff plays in shaping and communicating policy on his behalf. In a culture where it is common for staffers to write and Members to take credit, Congressman Adamson—in what appears to be an unusual move for a Member of Congress—actually tells constituents and colleagues which staffer wrote a speech or letter. Near the end of my study, I attended a breakfast with Congressman Adamson and a group of business leaders from the state. The Congressman spoke to the group for about fifteen minutes, giving an update on what had been happening in Congress, and during the speech he mentioned that he had voted against a bill the night before that might appear to be a good bill on the surface. When he said this, he turned to me and laughingly said, “You should be prepared to respond to some angry letters on that one,” and then he turned back to the audience and introduced me as his Legislative Director, the person who has to respond to letters from people who are upset when he does crazy things. He often suggests that constituents speak directly to staffers, who he claims are “the brains of the operation,” and because he recognizes the value that staffers bring to the table, he participates *with* them in the policy shaping process.

The relationship between staffer-writer and Congressman-author reinforces but also complicates the idea that professional writers have power to shape meaning or shift power relationships. In this writing process, staffers experience freedom and authority to shape policy through writing, and they also constantly bump up against limits on that freedom, whether those limits are placed on them by other writers, by the constraints of the text, or by their role in relation to the Congressman. On one hand, in making decisions about representing the Member or how to communicate on his behalf, staffers have a lot of power to make meaning. The fact that their writing directly influences public policy underscores this power. On the other hand, because the voice is a negotiation among colleagues and between staffers and the Member, there are clear limits on their authority to make meaning. Added to all of this is the fact that even in a process that provides staffers with a share of the power, the writing process in the office clearly recognizes that this power ultimately belongs to the Congressman. While staffers may shift power or rearticulate their own and each other's roles through the writing process, between staff-writers and the Congressman-author power is not displaced but instead shared by him with staffers at his discretion.

In most cases, staffers feel comfortable with the fact that their work will not be publicly attributed to them. They believe that Congressman Adamson, the Chief of Staff, and their colleagues give them the appropriate recognition for the work they do, and they often receive recognition in the outside circles in which they regularly work as well. This is important, because in an environment where traditional ideas of authorship are muddled and staffers must cede authorship of their writing to someone else, the writing

process directly influences their relationships with their own jobs. As Brandt points out in her study, in addition to working hard to authentically represent those on whose behalf they wrote, “most ghostwriters also said they feel an authorial stake in and intellectual ownership over the words that they write and at times derive pleasure, status, and growth from this writing even as their role remains hidden from the public” (Brandt “Who is the President?” 555). In this office, while staffers have a keen understanding that the job is about representing someone else, they appreciate the opportunities that it provides them within that framework. Rather than be frustrated by it, most staffers enjoy secretly knowing that the work for which Congressman Adamson receives praise is really their own. While they readily recognize him as the author of their writing, privately they also view him as something akin to their publisher. Jay says that pieces that he writes get published, which would never happen if they were not written under Congressman Adamson’s name. He knows that when he writes, Congressman Adamson’s reputation is at stake, and he appreciates the opportunity that working for him provides.

Andrea agrees. “I get a lot of pride and pleasure when something I’ve worked on gets published or is successful, both in writing and policy work.” When she writes Congressman Adamson’s opinions, even when she doesn’t share them personally, she knows her job is to communicate his views, not her own. She takes this in stride, recognizing the advantages of returning authority—and responsibility for what she writes—to him. “I don’t write what I think,” she says. “Do you really want his latest opinion about [an unpopular] vote to have your name on it? You don’t work in this job to push for yourself,” she says. “On Capitol Hill, people work for personalities. The

question isn't 'Where do you work?' it's 'Who do you work for?' The 'who' is a pretty defining factor."

Ted dismisses the idea that staffers feel dissatisfied when their bosses take credit for the writing they do. He points out that many staffers on Capitol Hill have worked in Congress since college, and writing on behalf of their bosses is the only type of professional writing they have done. "Most of us enter these jobs at 22 or 23, and we don't know any better. It's just how it is—you grow up and become a senior staffer, and you've never really thought about it before," he says. "I can see people having the perspective [that it is unfair that someone else gets credit for your work], but I don't think the typical staffer sits around and think, 'This sucks, I do all the work and he gets the credit for it.'"

Neda makes an interesting observation about how staffers must reflect their boss not only in their writing, but also in their actions.

You give up a little bit of freedom when you work for a Member of Congress, because once you work for a Member, when you are out there, whether you are providing your opinion of something and it has nothing to do with your boss, it really doesn't matter because people will associate what you say with Frank's opinion. On issues that he is supporting, you need to either support it or be silent, knowing that is the deal you made when you went to work for him. [When staffers say negative things about Congressman Adamson's legislative initiatives,] that sends mixed messages to the public and weakens the bill. It's almost military-like. You do have to know that when you enter that world...I truly believe we have one of the best run congressional offices because we don't have turf wars. When we all have this unbelievable respect for our boss, appreciate where he comes from, his convictions, and the positions he takes, we strive to do the very best for him. While we want to serve the constituents, we also want to serve our boss. I don't think that occurs in a lot of situations, whether it is congressional or something else. There always seems to be turf wars, and when those things happen you end up with a weaker product.

Staffers often identify so closely with their boss professionally that they take his successes and failures personally, and this is only intensified when they participated in the writing process during those moments.

Ted also emphasizes that it is important for the staff to keep the writing they do in perspective: “We’re not speech writers for a President. We are trying to put out factual letters that convey Frank’s position that are grammatically correct, but we’re not trying to write something that is going to be published some day. We’re kind of a factory putting out letters. [We] can’t get hung up on these things. [It’s] interesting to get the input on issues from other people, but we’re not creating the next *War and Peace*.”

Through the collaborative writing process, staffers have significant authority over the pieces they write and the policies they shape. However, their sense of authorship is complicated by the fact that nothing they write belongs just to them, but to a team of writers and ultimately to the Congressman. For the collaborative writing process to work effectively, they must always remain mindful of the impact that writing has on the office power structure. They have to recognize that they are writing with their colleagues, and often with their superiors, and they must find a balance between striving for a perfect product and straining a working relationship by offending their coworker’s pride of ownership in a piece. Just as each staffer has authority to shape meaning, her capacity to do so is also reined in by the office hierarchy. Therefore, the collaborative writing process creates a complex web of relationships between staffers and their texts so that staffers shift power as they articulate and rearticulate connections that create meaning. The Congressman plays a dual role in this process, both as part of the policy team and as

the final authority in the process. As a result, the collaborative process recognizes the real power structure in the office, wherein everything points back to the Congressman and staffers must cede both authorship and authority to him.

Voice and Policy Intertwined

When staffers write on behalf of the Congressman they exercise one of the primary tools of a legislator to shape public policy. The fact that staffers have responsibility for communicating policy and providing policy advice fortifies this power over policy making. Just as staffers bring their own voices, audiences, and perspectives to the collaborative process, they also bring their own policy objectives, values, and political outlook to the writing process so that policy, like text, is negotiated. In Congressman Adamson's office, the writing process is not only the means by which staffers communicate policy decisions are, but also the process through which they make and develop those decisions. In the process of determining how to communicate a policy position, that position is further refined or even changed, and for this reason, the writing process cannot be examined without an understanding that it is inextricably tied to policy outcomes.

In general, the legislative staff decides how policy positions will be communicated to constituents, giving staffers a significant role in determining not only how strong the position is but also how much influence this position will play on other policy decisions. The authorial power that staffers have to create meaning through the writing process directly influences public policy. Legislative staffers take on roles as both technical communicators and subject matter experts, and blurring that line pulls

policy-making and writing closer together. Voice becomes an important method that staffers use as writers to shape policy as well as argument. Slack, Doak, and Miller describe the technical communicator as capable of using discourse to “facilitate, sustain, generate, and disrupt the relations of power” (Slack et al.,15). This power is particularly discernable when the process of writing connects closely with the practice of policy making and the technical writer is unmistakably called on to shape the direction for public policy.

That this process of policy making through writing happens collaboratively emphasizes the importance of the task. Writing is not viewed as so insignificant that it can just be relegated to the second-tiered staffers. Instead, policy making is so important that it requires a team of writers exercising their own policy expertise and composition skills in a collaborative manner to create an authentic message that communicates and shapes the policy. This expands what Slack et al., say about the power of making meaning, that “this is no longer simply the power of the sender over receiver but the differential power of each to bring their own contest to bear in the making of meaning” (Slack et al., 22). In this collaborative process, there are multiple senders negotiating power as they communicate with audiences. When each staffer brings his or her own input to the process of meaning making and creates a dialogue instead of simply a monologue from Congressman to staffer or senior staffer to junior staffer, the result is, hopefully, a stronger document and better public policy.

When Medhurst claims that many of the most important decisions a president makes are not about policy but about people, he underscores the important connection

between writing and policy: “The men and women entrusted with the production of presidential discourse can greatly affect the perceived leadership and knowledgeability of the chief of state” (Medhurst 242). He rightly contends that significant presidential speeches—and the resulting policy shifts—are the product of collaboration as policy and communications staffers work through competing agendas to shape a final document. Relationships forge a connection between writing and policy. “By knowing the writers, their specialties, their relationship with the president, and their individual stylistic preferences, we can learn much more than merely who wrote the speech,” he states. “We can gain insights into why the speech was written and what its likely purpose may be” (247).

While the writing process in a House office may lack the grand scale of presidential speechwriting, the same lessons about relationships and the connection between writing and policy-making apply. Each staffer brings his or her own perspective to a speech, letter, or editorial—a voice that, like the Congressman’s, includes his or her own values, experiences, knowledge, and, most importantly, perception of Congressman Adamson’s views on the issue. This is why it is so significant that the person who writes the first document outlining his positions on a policy issue controls the policy position. That policy position, shaped by the text originally authored by one staffer, might have been different if someone else had written about it. A major goal of the collaborative process is to infuse that one document with other voices, perspectives, and audiences in order to minimize the significant impact that one staffer can have on policy decisions, but

even at its best, staffers' fingerprints remain on the texts they write and the policies those texts influence.

Staffers make a number of decisions through the composition process that influence Congressman Adamson's public policy positions. Although the Congressman sets the overall policy direction, the legislative staff provides the substance, defining the nuances by the way the positions are communicated. Genre decisions have an enormous impact on the strength of a position. When determining how to communicate policies, staffers have to take into account how genre impacts the ability to get a policy decision in front of constituents. A press release, for example, includes factual information as well as one or two direct quotes from Congressman Adamson. Because it is a proactive way to share his position with constituents, a press release communicates a certain level of strength in a policy position. An editorial, which is 500-600 words of direct quote, provides the opportunity to draw on other policy positions or philosophies and can further strengthen the position. On the other hand, a response to a constituent letter is often very factual and is only sent in response to an inquiry on an issue, therefore it communicates to a much more targeted audience. During my study, for example, the staff was eager to put out a press release regarding a letter on environmental issues which the Congressman had signed. We had received a large number of constituent letters regarding this issue, but when the press release went out and reporters began to ask the Congressman about it, it turned out that he didn't feel very strongly about the issue and kept trying to avoid talking about it to the press. The better decision would have been to let those people who wrote in about the issue know that he had signed the letter rather than to have been

proactive about doing a press release and put the Congressman in a position where he had to defend a decision about which he didn't feel strongly.

The tone in which staffers communicate policy positions influences those positions. For example, discussing a vote in factual, nonpartisan terms dramatically changes the way the audience perceives the Congressman and his position on the issue from what it would be if the same vote was discussed in inflammatory, partisan terms. If staff uses strong language to express Congressman Adamson's views, the audience may have expectations about the policy decisions he will make in the future that they would not have if a less expressive tone is used. Staff has a lot of power to determine the tone of texts, and decisions about tone have a lasting effect on his political legacy. For example, during my study, a district staffer prepared a press statement strongly opposing new regulations announced by an agency that would directly impact Congressman Adamson's constituents and discovered just before sending it to the media that the Congressman had wanted to take a more conciliatory tone rather than attack the agency's decision. Had the piece gone out, it would have resulted not only in major inconsistencies in his voice but in an inflexible position on the issue. The decisions staffers make on the tone to take in a text can constrict the Congressman's latitude on an issue.

The previous example shows the impact that tone can have on a policy position, but it also provides a clear example of how a breakdown in the collaborative process affects policy. The pace on Capitol Hill often limits the collaborative process to those who are immediately available, and if a relevant staffer is not accessible at the time a

piece is written, she likely loses an opportunity to influence policy decisions. This is especially problematic when the policy expert in the office is not available, forcing staffers who may not be as in tune with the Congressman's position to use their own judgment when writing a position statement. In this case, I had primary responsibility for the issue at hand, and I had spoken with the Congressman earlier in the day about this issue and knew his wish to take a softer tone. However, because I was in class when the request for the press quote came in, I did not get an opportunity to share his instructions with Ted and Neda. Staffers are often able to make accurate educated guesses about his positions based on their experience with his political philosophies or statements on similar issues, but when there is a lapse in the collaborative writing system, major inconsistencies in voice and policy can result.

Staffers weigh communications strategies throughout the process of determining the Congressman's positions on various policies, and they further define those positions throughout the composition process, underscoring the claim of Brandt and others of the social value and power of writing. As demonstrated previously, staffers write on behalf of Congressman Adamson not because he is incapable or considers it a menial task that is beneath him—on the contrary, he has hired a team of talented writers because he recognizes the value of writing. Instead, staffers write on his behalf because, in the process of determining public policy, a team of educated, intelligent staffers can provide better insight, audience consideration, and needed checks and balances than can one individual alone, including the Congressman. In response to claims by Bormann and others that ghostwriting undermines the value of rhetorical communication, one could

instead say that, in this congressional office, the responsibility of policy making is too important to be tasked to one individual and that the collaborative writing process that staffers employ results in better writing and better policy than if it was the responsibility of the Congressman alone.

5. Conclusion

I began my discussion with a number of different definitions of voice, and although all of these talk about voice in terms of self-representation, they see self-representation in different and occasionally contradictory lights. Some of those definitions speak about voice in terms of writers developing their own identities and then sharing those authentic selves with readers. From this perspective, an authentic voice is the ultimate goal of the writer, who tries to develop her own identity unique from the voices around her. Other definitions talk about voice as a technique that writers use to choose how they want to represent themselves to readers, taking on some qualities rather than others. In this case, voice is a persona that the writer takes on in order to make the audience view the writer or her message in a certain light, and this voice changes depending on what the writer wants to say and to whom she is speaking. These views evoke opposite ideas of self-representation, one seeing voice as a method for revealing a writer's actual self, the other for creating the best persona out of innumerable options in order to persuade the reader to see things her way.

Although these views may appear paradoxical, they are both relevant to the collaborative generation of Frank Adamson's public voice. As staffers work to generate Frank Adamson's congressional voice, they must view their task as at once a quest for authenticity and a creative means to an end. The ultimate purpose of the congressional

voice is to persuade the public that the Congressman's political views are correct and represent him as an effective political leader so that he can implement his policy objectives. This undertaking must reflect the Congressman's actual voice and personality in order to be successful. No matter how effective the congressional voice is at creating an *ethos* for the Congressman, he is not simply a puppet whose strings are pulled by staffers. Instead, they are tasked with creating a rhetorically successful voice that always points back to the Congressman himself.

The collaborative writing process allows staffers to honor Congressman Adamson's authentic speaking voice and reflect his values and beliefs while using the voice as a rhetorical device to communicate with his constituents and colleagues. They do this by orienting first to the Congressman, by listening to and repeating his stories, the way he speaks in public, and his views on policy issues. Because they begin with the Congressman's speaking voice and continually check themselves and each other with it throughout the writing process, those who read texts or hear speeches written by staff on his behalf can recognize the Congressman's presence in those documents.

Capturing the Congressman's speaking voice on paper is only the beginning of the task set before the writing team, however. Crafting a voice that effectively communicates the desired message to the intended audience requires invention as well, and staffers play an important role in shaping this voice. They do so by orienting the voice to the multiple audiences that each staffer brings to the table. They consider how audiences will respond to the message and accordingly choose when to emphasize one of the Congressman's characteristics over the others, when to incorporate his own self-edits,

and when to disregard his personal view on an issue in favor of his more acceptable public view. More significantly, perhaps, staffers play a role in shaping his public views on issues as they participate in a cycle of borrowing through which they respond to what the Congressman says and he, in turn, responds to what they say and write. As a result, this negotiated voice is not simply a mirror image of his unedited speaking voice, but rather a flexible rhetorical tool that uses authenticity to more effectively persuade readers.

My examination of this collaborative process reveals something important about the process of generating the Congressman's public voice: the voice staffers are working to create is not the voice of an individual; it is the voice of a political entity. When Frank Adamson was elected to Congress, he became more than simply one American with certain political views, but also almost a brand-name that represents the collective political perspective of those who elected him. As a Member of Congress, he must constantly weigh his own political views against those of his constituency. For the most part, these views coincide, which is one reason he continues to be elected to Congress every two years. But just as no one individual agrees with someone else all of the time, his own values and opinions on certain issues don't always match up with the commonly-held views of his constituents—in fact, his position in Congress sometimes provides him with a very different perspective on issues than he might have had if he was not an elected official. In each decision he makes, he must strive for a balance—and occasionally a compromise—between representing the views of his constituents and implementing what he thinks is the best possible public policy.

This tension is what drives the staff's collaboration of the Congressman's public voice. As they write on his behalf, staffers respond to the concerns, values, and political desires of constituents, shaping the Congressman's voice so that they see that he is working at their behest and on their behalf. But staffers must also generate a voice that is authentic to the Congressman's personal beliefs and characteristics. If they create a public persona for him that does not fit who he is personally, it will fall apart sooner or later. Staffers represent the congressional entity, even though they are also extremely loyal to the individual Frank Adamson. As they make decisions about policy and communicating that policy through the writing process, they help to create that entity. They shape what he says in public through talking points and speeches, and when something they write is published and is incorporated into the congressional voice, he, like they, must operate within the limits of that voice.

This has particularly interesting implications on theories about ghostwriting. It turns out that the Congressman, too, is a ghostwriter in some sense. He is the final authority in the process of writing and policy making, but he also participates in creating the voice of the congressional entity—a voice that is not simply his own but a collaboration with staffers, previous utterances, and various audiences. The collaborative writing process in the office allows the congressional voice to grow richer from the utterances around it, as each staffer brings to the process his or her own views, preferred style, and audiences and is in turn impacted by the perspectives of other writers. In this office, Bakhtin's assertion that individuals appropriate their own voices from the voice of others plays out externally as staffers articulate and rearticulate both meaning and their

own connections to each other and to the Congressman. As a result, the writing process looks and acts like a complex matrix of multiple relationships between writers and readers, between a team of writers, and between staff-writers and the Congressman-author. Through this process, staffers participate in making policy, working alongside the Congressman and, at his discretion, sharing his authority. Outside of this process, staffers would not have the same opportunity to impact public policy, but without them the congressional voice—and, arguably, the policies it produces and influences—would be one-dimensional and risk failing to recognize the multiple perspectives needed to create effective public policy. This web of collaboration and negotiation provides a richer view of ghostwriting than simply putting words into someone else’s mouth or taking credit for what someone else has written. Instead, staffers and the Congressman recognize that policy-making is a task too important to be relegated to one person, and through this process of team writing they are able to produce a better product.

Medhurst claims relationships among staffers and between staffers and political leaders significantly influence policy and the way it is communicated. By examining the ghostwriting process, he concludes, we can understand not only just who wrote a speech but why it was written and how it influenced policy. In light of this claim, what does this study show us about the role that staffers play in crafting and implementing the Congressman’s legislative agenda? I think it is clear that each staffers’ role is significant. What I find particularly interesting is the role that each staffer—and the Congressman—plays in trying to resolve that tension between representing the views of a plurality of constituents and acting in accordance with the Congressman’s own political views. Just

as the Congressman's public voice is significantly influenced by his personal perspective, staffer's individual perspectives of how that voice should reflect both the constituency and the Congressman personally influence their generation of that voice. Their contributions to the voice, in turn, influence the way policy is shaped. If one staffer is more concerned about ensuring that voters see the Congressman acting in accordance with their collective wishes, he will make different rhetorical decisions and suggest different policy directions than another staffer who is more interested in accurately representing the Congressman's personal views.

The collaborative writing process provides a crucial balance that keeps one staffer from pulling the congressional voice so far in one direction that it either is no longer authentic or fails to speak to the intended audience. This struggle is most often played out between staffers as they work through their own competing perspectives on how to balance audience and authenticity. In certain cases, the Congressman makes it clear how he wants to be represented, sometimes in spite of staffers' concerns about how constituents will react. In most cases, however, they bring their own stylistic preferences, concern about audience consideration, and experience to a collaborative process that draws each of them back to the original voice, weaving new insight and rhetorical power into texts while staying authentic to Congressman Adamson's speaking voice.

While the writing process provides each staffer with authority, it is not intended to protect each staffer's sense of authorship but to produce an authentic, rhetorically powerful voice. Because the writing process is subject to the deeper power structures in the office, these structures also impact the authority staffers have as writers, influencing

how staffers write and edit each other's work. They also shape relationships within the office and redefine each staffer's authority to shape meaning within the collaborative process. Traditional views of authorship are secondary to the practice of policy making, and staffers will use the writing process to seize additional authority when they think that it is necessary to shape how the Congressman is perceived by the public. He, too, will exert his authority over staff or rearticulate the connections among them in order to exercise his influence over the congressional voice. Still, while the collaborative writing process ultimately reinforces the Congressman's role as final authority over policy, staff writing, and office power structures, through his participation in the writing process he chooses to share his authority with staffers and takes on with them the role of ghostwriter for the congressional entity. Because he appropriates authority to them, he is also subject to what they write, so that staffers consider themselves part of a policy shaping team that articulates meaning rather than simply a set of translators that make the Congressman's views fit for public consumption.

My study reinforces assertions by Brandt, Doheny-Farina, and others that writing is a powerful social force that both impacts relationships and power structures and is influenced by them. It reveals that, contrary to Bormann's assertions that ghostwriting undermines the value of writing, collaborative ghostwriting can make better public policy by bringing multiple perspectives to the task of resolving the tension between representing constituents' views and one's own beliefs. It is not that writing and rhetoric are so unimportant that they should be relegated to inferiors, but that policy making is so significant that it requires a team of knowledgeable, skilled, and trusted writers who are

given authority to make important decisions through their writing. The collaborative process allows staffers to appropriate from their own experience and expertise, from audience considerations, and from the Congressman himself an authentic public voice that ultimately creates a richer, more rhetorically successful text through which they can represent Congressman Adamson as an effective, thoughtful leader who embodies the best values of himself and those whom he represents.

APPENDIX

Interview Questions:

Learning to Write for the Congressman:

- What training did you have in writing before you began this job? Did you feel like that training was adequate? How much did you
- Can you describe to me what characteristics your writing takes on when you are writing something on the Congressman's behalf?
- When you began working for the Congressman, how did you determine what his "voice" is when you wrote documents on his behalf? What was difficult for you in that process?
- Did you work for a previous Member? If so, was it difficult to switch to this Congressman's voice? Describe the challenges you faced.

Collaborative Writing Process:

- What do you think about the collaborative writing process in this office?
- Do you feel like the documents produced by different staffers have a consistent voice? If not, why not?
- How do you feel when changes are made to your writing? Are there certain types of documents/situations where you feel differently than others?
- Do you feel differently about changes that are made to your writing when you are writing on the Congressman's behalf instead of your own?
- What is the process you go through when making changes to a document written by someone else? During this process, how much do you take into consideration which person in the office wrote the document? Are there some people whose documents you are more comfortable making changes to? Some less?
- How do you prefer to participate in the collaborative writing process? Email, print, etc.?

- At what point in a document do you present it to someone else for their input? Draft stage, final stage, etc.?
- Do you respond differently to suggestions made by different staffers? Are there people that you are less or more comfortable receiving input from? Why?
- How long do you generally work on documents? How do you feel the usual quick turnaround time changes the way you create documents?

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