Shock Rhetoric

David Robert Nelson

University of Southern Mississippi

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SHOCK RHETORIC

by

David Robert Nelson

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ABSTRACT

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Social movements create a public perception of themselves through rhetorical messages and demonstrations. In order to gain the public’s attention, some radical groups use any rhetorical means necessary, including offensive remarks and conduct. Groups, such as the Westboro Baptist Church and Bash Back!, rhetorically challenge the boundaries of prudence. The purpose of this study is to identify, depict, and provide insight regarding shock rhetoric. This study will compare protest methods, visual imagery, and language choices used by Bash Back! and the Westboro Baptist Church. This dissertation helps illuminate why and how groups or individuals use shock rhetoric.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In an attempt to gain attention, social movements create arguments designed to persuade audiences to their position. Movements then confront institutional sources of power with these specific messages and actions. Confronting the status quo produces an identity for the movement (Cathcart, 1972). The task of a social movement is to create a contrasting political reality that reveals the negative or unjust impacts of the status quo (Stewart, Smith, & Denton, 2001). Social movements, messages attempt to mobilize or gain public support.

Groups that intend to alter public opinion contend that their ideas and actions are superior to those of the status quo (Stewart, Smith, & Denton, 2001). Movements use arguments of quantity and quality. They position themselves on the side of good and cite the status quo as bad (Stewart et al.). Movements also employ arguments of value to justify their message and protest methods (Stewart et al.). This means that a group may use any method possible and can rationalize it to an audience as being in their best interest. Social movements may validate their arguments with hierarchical arguments (Stewart et al.). Hate groups use hierarchy to rationalize their supposed superiority. For example, a religious group may argue that they are following the will of a higher power.

The polarization of issues by a social movement fosters confrontation that challenges the authority of the institution, law, or individual. Confronting the status quo as a strategy can help legitimize the movement’s issues. Conflict helps motivate social movement follower and justifies their rhetoric for receptive audiences. Challenging institutional powers can generate publicity for a movement. Challenging the status quo
can benefit a social movement’s membership. Social movements confront institutional rewards, control, identification, and moralistic persuasion through protests and rhetoric (Stewart et al., 2001). To help garner audience sympathy for a cause, movements need to portray themselves as victims of the status quo (Stewart et al.). The audience’s perception of a movement determines the popularity and success of the message.

Social movements attempt to create a perception of themselves through a variety of messages types. Campaigns can be organized to include peaceful, violent, radical, reformative, or revolutionary messages and actions. Messages used in social movements are extremely varied, and can use appeals of love, accusations of greed, religious imagery, humor, or hate. The use of hate, according to Roderick Hart (1998), includes “feelings of antipathy directed toward some person or group that succeeds in making them pariahs” (p. xxv). Hate rhetoric contributes to racism, anti-Semitism, intolerance, homophobia, and sometimes violence. Two groups that use hate rhetoric include Westboro Baptist Church and Bash Back!.

Westboro Baptist Church is a self-described Primitive Baptist church (http://www.godhatesfags.com/written/wbcinfo/aboutwbc.html) that has taken up a mission to protest homosexual lifestyles through the message “God hates fags.” The Westboro Baptist Church is located in Topeka, Kansas, and is led by Fred Phelps. Phelps is widely known for his slogan “God hates fags.” The church first received nationwide notoriety in 1998 when it protested homosexuality at the funeral of Matthew Shepard, a 21-year-old college student, who had been beaten to death in Wyoming because he was
gay. The church also takes its “God hates fags” message to military funerals and other high profile sites such as the Virginia Tech student massacre memorial service.

In contrast to the message of Westboro Baptist Church, Bash Back! is “a radical activist group that includes transfolk, queers and allies” (“About BB! News,” para. 4). Bash Back! was formed in 2007 as a network of radical, militant, and anarchist individuals who present pro-queer messages to the public (“About BB! News”). Bash Back! models its confrontational approach, slogans, tactics, and name on those from the short-lived 1990s organization Queer Nation. Queer Nation focused on creating highly visible campaigns in order to generate media attention (Stryker, 2004). The rhetorical tactics of Bash Back! have created controversy among mainstream heterosexual communities and even within the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender/transsexual community. In one instance, Bash Back! brandished banners declaring “these faggots kill fascists” at both a Gay Pride March and a church service.

The rhetoric of Bash Back! and Westboro Baptist Church challenges prudent strategies by making protest appearances at funerals, disaster zones, and places of tragedy. The protest tactics of Bash Back! and Westboro Baptist Church have ignited local and national debates about hate speech and what violates community standards of decency.

Researchers have explored hate rhetoric, censorship, perceptions regarding hate speech, and its multiple forms (Adler, 1996; Azriel, 2002; Cornwell & Orbe, 1999; Leets, 2001; Nielson, 2002; & Schwartzman, 2002). Internet technology, for example, has created new ways for individuals and collective movements to dispense hate rhetoric (Adams & Roscigno, 2005; Azriel, 2002; Leets, 2001; Gerstenfeld, Grant, & Chiang,
However, scholars have not examined or defined shock rhetoric the messages of movements designed to garner attention, but not draw followers to the cause. Through the examination of Bash Back! and Westboro Baptist Church rhetoric this study provides an opportunity to identify a new genre of rhetoric.

Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation is to identify a genre of shock rhetoric. The study will compare the groups Bash Back! and Westboro Baptist Church to illuminate the themes used by groups or individuals as shock rhetoric. A method will be used to clarify the themes used by groups or individuals within shock rhetoric. Identifying a genre of shock rhetoric requires an examination of specific discourse that displays similar types of unique characteristics. The classification of shock rhetoric will be defined as the polarization of an issue using startling, inappropriate, or offensive behavior, discourse, images, language, or text that is unsympathetic towards the audience and does not follow social norms of behavior to achieve attention and or gain notoriety. This dissertation is divided into the following sections: (a) Literature Review, (b) Rationale and Research Questions, (c) Method, and (d) Examination of Bash Back! and Westboro Baptist (e) Shock Rhetoric, (f) Discussion, and (g) References.

Literature Review

The research examined and discussed in this section is divided into seven areas: (a) rhetorical foundations, (b) generic criticism, (c) freedom of speech, (d) hate speech, (e) shock rhetoric, (f) prudence, and (g) polarization.
Rhetorical Foundations

Views of rhetoric have changed over time, but many scholars still rely on the earliest definitions. Traditionally, rhetoric is defined as “the faculty of discovering in any particular case all of the available means of persuasion” (Aristotle, *I.i.2*). Cicero defined rhetoric as speech that persuades (Booth, 2004). Two millennia ago, Quintilian considered it the art of good men speaking well (Booth). Cicero and Quintilian wrote that rhetoric required of a speaker high moral character as his responsibility was to present well-reasoned messages to audiences.

According to Aristotle, rhetoric has four functions. First, it allows for the arguing of ideas (Aristotle, *I I*). Reasoning is needed to persuade an audience of the probable truth of an argument. Second, rhetoric must be adapted to an audience. An argument must be framed through an audience’s common knowledge and understanding. Third, both sides of the argument should be understood. The rhetor must be prepared to respond to opposing positions. Lastly, rhetoric is a means of reasoned defense. Arguments need to be well thought out, organized, and concise (Grimaldi, 1978). To maintain the functions of rhetoric, a speaker must be ethical and honest in order to meet the audience’s needs (Self, 1979).

Rhetoric is categorized by three discourse areas: forensic (law), deliberative (persuasive), and epideictic (ceremonial). Each type of rhetoric is intended for a different audience. Forensic rhetoric influences judges in legal disputes. Deliberative rhetoric is designed to persuade an audience with power to settle issues affecting their welfare. Rhetoric of praise or blame is known as epideictic (Poulakos & Poulakos, 1999). The practice of these three types of rhetoric involves “persuasive language [that] will often
have to be intensive, even impassioned, audience based and biased, and stylistically appropriate to a given subculture” (Kinneavy, 1986, p.102).

As an art form, rhetoric calls upon the speaker to use logic, emotion, and appeals to persuade an audience. Overall, rhetoric’s goal is to present ideas in such a manner that it allows an audience to reach a reasonable conclusion (Johnstone, 1980). Tallmon (1995) presented a method of applying reasoning to rhetoric: (a) impart the relevant issues, (b) introduce supporting materials, (c) focus upon issues within the arguments created, and (d) argue the case. Rhetoric’s use of reasoning helps the audience come to a rational decision. The use of logic creates an understanding of the importance of the speaker’s message (Johnstone, 1980).

Other theories of rhetoric include Burke’s (1950), which requires a speaker to find common ground with an audience. “You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his” (Burke, 1950, p. 55). Burke theorizes a rhetoric where the speaker seeks a relationship with the audience based on mutual understanding. Rhetoric creates a shared meaning between audience and speaker. If the speaker does not identify with the audience, then the speaker fails to create a shared meaning.

I. A. Richards expanded the idea of rhetoric with his definition, “the art by which discourse is adapted to its end” (as cited in Hochmuth, 1958, p. 9). Rhetoric is about crafting a message in order to meet an audience’s needs and expectations. Hochmuth (1958) classified Richards’ definition as the “new rhetoric” because one, assumes that if one understands the language functions, appropriate use of language may be chosen for whatever end one may want to advance, be it to state
a view clearly, to establish a right relationship with an audience, a right relationship with a subject. (p. 10)

Richards emphasized the arrangement of discourse and the importance of creating understanding through effective use of reasoning and language. Richards argued that weak rhetoric emerges because it is not adapted to the audience and is not relevant to the listener. Therefore, the speaker needs to analyze the language, symbols, and visuals and modify them to the audience to help meet their needs and wants.

An alternative theory of rhetoric is Foss and Griffin’s (1995) idea of invitational rhetoric. Invitational rhetoric requires the speaker to “invite” an audience to understand the rhetor’s point of view. This rhetoric allows for an audience and speaker to mutually interact in order to create understanding. Traditional theories or definitions are based on models of a speaker and an audience where the audience is passive. The goal is not to create change by exercising power over an audience but through discourse that occurs between the rhetor and the audience (Foss & Griffin). This idea is a departure from traditional rhetoric and how it is defined. Foss and Griffin’s theory requires the audience to be active participants in the process.

Another rhetorical theorist, Lloyd Bitzer (1968), discussed how rhetorical discourse emerges from a rhetorical situation. A rhetorical situation is defined as the context in which rhetoric occurs. “We need to understand that a particular discourse comes into existence because of some specific condition or situation which invites utterance” (Bitzer, p. 4). Allan Brinton (1981) laid out three ways to understand the rhetorical situation as a causal connection that gives rise to the rhetorical act; a connection he calls “meaning dependence” that connects the rhetorical act with the
situation; and a normative connection that creates a response that fits the situation. An understanding is created between the situation and the rhetoric between the speaker and the audience.

What composes the argument within the rhetorical situation? According to Yoos (1987), a rhetorical situation has at least four constituent parts: (a) there is an argument of controversy; (b) it is an argument that has rhetorical appeal; (c) it is an argument of display or demonstration of strict entailments, requiring the use of deductive logic; and (d) it is an argument as a display of evidence to support its claims, which requires the use of inductive logic. These tenets can overlap in presenting an argument and are not exclusive to one another.

These constituent parts are used in what Yoos introduces as a “rhetorical response.” Rhetorical response is defined as “encompass(ing) such modes as narration, description, logical demonstration, definition, telling how something is done, comparison and contrast, clarifying what one is saying, and clarifying what someone else is saying” (Yoos, 1987, pp. 111-112). A response occurs because the audience seeks to answer rhetoric. Consequently, Yoos feels that response rhetoric is audience-centered. In essence, a dialogue is created with the speaker and audience. It forces the rhetor to be accountable, and to defend and justify intent and motives. This requires the rhetor to answer who, what, where, when, and why questions for an audience. Rhetors need to explain their positions and defend their arguments.

**Visual Rhetoric**

Rhetorical messages are not limited to how they are presented to an audience. Rhetoric can be communicated orally, in writing, or visually. In the early part of the
twelfth century, for example, art was referred to as “literature of the lay people” (*litterae laicorum*, Rampley, 2005, p. 134). Art as a means of communication required rhetoric in order to “speak” to an audience (Eco, 1986). “Visual art has long been regarded as a rhetorical practice, concerned with narrative and with persuading and moving its audience, rather than with the simple accurate depiction of the visual world” (Rampley, 2005, p. 134). Grice (1989) agreed that the aim of communication is to create a specific response from the audience. For example, Norman Rockwell’s illustrations visually inspired American values during World War II (Olson, 1983). Visually, the rhetor’s use of symbols creates an image for the audience for the purpose of communication (Foss, 2004a). Visual cues include cultural, personal, religious, political, or regional images the rhetor considers important or significant.

Foss (1986) believes that visual images are forms of rhetoric; a view similar to Burke’s notion of symbolicity. Burke’s (1966) view of symbolicity accounts for math, music, sculpture, painting, dance, and architecture as forms of rhetoric. Foss views visual rhetoric as “the conscious production or arrangement of colors, forms, movements, and other elements in a manner that affects or evokes a response” (1986, p. 328). The use of visual imagery evokes feelings and generates ideas for the audience. Imagery has the ability to create powerful and affective responses from an audience (Nemerov, 1980).

The use of visual images can generate audience involvement (Greenberg & Garfinkle, 1963). Visually, the rhetor creates an image that relies on previous existing images that crafts “the message in anticipation of the audience’s probable response, using shared knowledge of various vocabularies and conventions, as well as common experiences” (Scott, 1996, p. 252). Visual rhetoric helps advance the argument. The
argument that is created allows the audience to make an interpretation and then generate an opinion regarding the rhetor’s ideas. Audiences come to terms with the artifact in three ways: (a) the selection process involves the audience choosing an item that captures their attention; (b) the audience attempts to understand the item and what has drawn them to it; and (c) the audience communicates their feelings and attitudes toward the item of interest (Wander & Jenkins, 1972). The use of visual imagery rhetorically helps the audience achieve closure with the rhetor’s message.

Generic Criticism

Views, ideas, definitions, and concepts of rhetorical genre have changed over time. Aristotle discusses in Rhetoric (I.3, 133558b6) the concept of genre and the idea that there are common characteristics between artifacts. The commonalities within those artifacts help guide, shape, name, and define the genre examined. Genre is used to assess and compare rhetoric and discourse (Conley, 1979). Genre allows for the critical examination of discourse to identify context and relationship to the audience. A straightforward reason for examining and creating genres is the basic human need to classify and define to help understand communication phenomena (Miller, 1984).

By its nature, genre is a category. The traditional definition of genre “identifies distinctive, recurrent situation in which discourse occurs, and analyzes past texts, inductively describing the rhetorical practice inherent in that situation” (Benoit, 2000, p. 179). Genre is usually defined to denote a classification system based upon form, subject, topic, audience, or situation (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). Genres exhibit specific patterns (Fisher, 1980). As a method, genre has been examined and defined by many scholars.

First, that the number of situations which a rhetor can find himself in is limited; second, that particular situations have a limited number of possible rhetorical responses; third, as situations recur over time the various possible responses can be seen; and fourth, that similar kinds of rhetoric will affect similar audiences in similar ways. (pp. 133-134)

Black’s idea was the springboard for several other scholars’ works. In one example, Lloyd Bitzer developed the concept of “rhetorical situation” where rhetoric is a response to a perceived situational. Black (1975) discussed the idea that there is a need to create a method that frames the situation and its rhetoric. It is the goal of the critic to “discover commonalities in the rhetorical patterns across recurring situations” (Foss, 2004a, p. 193). The discovery of patterns and commonalities helps explain a phenomenon that reoccurs.

Over time, several scholars have made attempts to define genre as a precise method that is “a distinctive and recurring pattern of similarly constrained rhetorical practices” (Simons, 1978, p. 42). Harrell and Linkugel (1978) contend “rhetorical genres stem from organizing principles found in recurring situations that generate discourse characterized by a family of common factors” (pp. 263-264). Fisher (1980) refers to genre criticism as a key generalization of how a speech act can create similar responses to a rhetorical situation. Miller (1984) contends that genres are “typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations” (p. 159). Genre helps create identification and context with
respect to the rhetoric examined. Kathleen Jamieson (1973) argues that genres are a result of what the rhetor and the audience expect in a situation. Genre helps clarify the rhetoric. Jamieson (1973) also notes that genres are evolving phenomena that need to be examined. Jamieson argues that genres are not static and always changing, but William Benoit presents another view of genre. Benoit (2000) suggests that genres should be examined through four factors used in the creation of rhetoric: purpose-act, scene-act, agent-act, and agency-act. This theory is based on Burke’s dramatic pentad.

The goal of genre criticism is to classify situations and their rhetoric as well as to shed light on the relationships and the context in which they occur (Measell, 1976). Genre criticism “is an activity which consists of the determination of different kinds of broad categories of rhetorical discourse and situations” (p. 2). Campbell (1972) discussed how the genre critic discovers stylistic and philosophical views that are specific to the genre examined. Isolating specific characteristics of rhetoric creates a general understanding of the situation. Moreover, “when we isolate the strategy and tactics inherent in a given situation, we should be mindful of other similar situations so that the limits and effects of particular strategies can be assessed” (Measell, 1976, p. 3). The goal is to generate a better understanding of the communication methods used by a group or individual within a specific situation.

Even though there are several definitions and interpretations of how to use genre as a method, genre studies essentially examine similarities in discourses, audiences, modes of thinking, and rhetorical situations (Miller, 1984). Genre provides a social and historical perspective that other methods do not (Miller). Genre “assists communities in constituting themselves, their members, and their relationships to other communities”
(Kain, 2005, p. 375). Knowledge emerges from genre criticism about how social, personal, and political realities are created for groups or individuals (Kain). Gustainis (1982) points out three distinct advantages of using generic rhetorical criticism: genre criticism considers the audience, adds to the field by examining, clarifying, and classifying specific artifacts, and aids in the creation of theory. Genre criticism is a helpful tool in the analysis of rhetorical artifacts (Gustainis). The creation of categories helps generate understanding of the patterns that transpire within discourse, people, and events. Similarities within a genre can create generalizations. “The generalization refers to what happens when rhetors respond to similar rhetorical situations; the expectation is that similar situations give rise to similar kinds of rhetoric” (Gustainis, 1982, p. 252). A genre investigation can provide insight regarding social patterns evident in rhetorical messages.

Generic rhetorical criticism can be utilized in three principal ways. First, the descriptions can be used to create a rhetorical theory that illustrates the practices within the genre (Benoit, 2005). The generalized patterns that emerge become the tools used when creating a theory. Justin Gustainis (1982) focused on the genre of social movement rhetoric to help understand and test social movements. Karlyn Campbell (1973) conducted studies of the women’s liberation movement to define substantive and stylistic traits within a wider context of social movement rhetoric. Another Campbell (1986) study examines similarities in the rhetoric of early African American feminists and their rhetorical skills. Political genres have emerged through studies of presidential speeches. Lawrence Rosenfield (1968) examined the apology speeches of Harry Truman and Richard Nixon. The genre of apologia was advanced by B. L. Ware and Wil Linkugel
(1973), and within this genre they explored characteristics of speeches of self-defense. Michael Leff and Gerald Mohrmann (1974) studied and characterized political campaign speeches of Abraham Lincoln. The genre of campaign speeches differs from the genre of presidential debates (Benoit & Harthcock, 1999). Holly Kawakami and Avinash Thombre (2006) developed a unique genre to enable the study of multiple and divergent portrayal of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and the subsequent implications for gender and power relations. Thus, genres facilitate an understanding of recurring situations.

Second, once descriptions have been fashioned about a genre a guideline can be used for analysis (Benoit, 2005). For speakers, the construction of a genre helps build expectations that fall within a specific field. Genre helps understand what to expect and “what ends we may have: we learn that we may eulogize, apologize, recommend one person to another, instruct customers on behalf of a manufacture, take on an official role, account for progress in achieving goals” (Miller, 1984, p. 165). Carl Burgchardt (1980) analyzed the genre of political pamphlets and explains what constitutes an unsuccessful recruiting tool. James Chesebro (1972) categorized the strategies of political action groups and how their rhetoric created sympathy to their cause.

Lastly, critics can use knowledge from one genre to study new or different occurrences of a genre (Benoit, 2005). When a genre is created, it sets a benchmark of comparison for similar rhetoric and artifacts. For example, Sharon Downey (1993) explored the evolution of apologia as a genre from the ancient Greece to the present. Downey examines apologias and all of its styles, appeals, and traditions, and exposes shifts in its rhetorical function over time. In order to fuse rhetorical elements from deliberative, epideictic, or forensic rhetoric, eulogies are explored by Kathleen Jamieson
and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell (1982). Communication is not a static process; genre criticism helps explore and examine the changes that happen within genres over time. Genres help illuminate the context in which speech acts occur. Understanding the nature of a rhetorical occurrence helps create knowledge about the human communication (Campbell & Jamison, 1978). Depending on which genre is being studied or used, genre is a helpful tool not only to academics but to lay audiences as well.

**Freedom of Speech**

The practice of free speech originates with the founding fathers of the United States. During his Newburg Address, George Washington said, “If the freedom of speech is taken away then dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep to the slaughter” (1783, para. 6). Klumpp (1997) notes that freedom of speech is systemic in a true democratic society. It is argued that without freedom of speech, there would be no marketplace of ideas. Oliver Wendell Holmes, in his dissent of *Abrams v. United States*, specifically stated “the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market, and that truth is the only ground upon which their wishes safely can be carried out” (1919, para.15). McGowan and Ragesh (1991) considered the marketplace of ideas consequential. The competition of different ideas allows for individuals, a community, or a state to decide what is in its best interest through public discourse of the issue or idea. Competition of ideas allows for the audience to decide what it believes the truth to be. Furthermore, societies learn through a clash of diverse ideas that force them to confront opinions and ideas.

The marketplace of ideas is one of several reasons for not putting limitations on speech. Emerson (1970) argued three rationales for free speech: (a) advancing knowledge
and discovering truth, (b) assuring full participation in democratic decision making, and (c) assuring a more accepted and stable political structure. Other arguments addressed by proponents of free speech hold that the First Amendment facilitates the sharing of ideas and the development of truths held by the general public. The sharing and developing of new ideas and issues challenges and creates new points of view that shape and alter public perceptions. Free speech provides a platform for all opinions. The opinions and ideas, whether popular or not, require the audience to participate in and decide what is acceptable.

Freedom of speech allows individuals to present and acquire information via speeches, television, books, pamphlets, radio, or the Internet. Freedom of speech is not a right without limitations; restrictions that have been placed upon freedom of speech are enacted by legal courses of action, such as court cases or law. The majority of rules regulating speech are products of lawsuits. Supreme Court decisions have helped set the standard for what is acceptable and what is not with respect to free expression. But laws and sanctions are not the only courses of action that regulate speech. Unspoken community standards or social rules can limit speech.

The United States, in contrast to almost every other country in the world, has a “strong tradition of free speech that protects even the most offensive forms of expression” (Walker, 1994, p. 1). Perhaps it is not surprising that issues of free speech have filled U.S. courts over the years. Free speech cases have established precedent regarding acceptable expression under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. *Schenck v. United States* (1919) created the clear and present danger test; the *Miller v.*
California (1973) ruling defined what could be considered obscene; and R.A.V. v. City of St. Paul (1992) struck down an ordinance that banned hate speech.

Free speech and prudent behavior during times of war were examined with Schenck v. United States (1919). Charles Schenck was charged with interfering with the enlistment process by mailing pamphlets challenging the draft process and the United States involvement in World War I. The original criminal conviction of Schenck was upheld because greater restrictions on speech are allowable during times of war in compared to speech allowable in times of peace. Schenck’s case created the “clear and present danger” test, which determines if the speech or language creates an imminent lawless action.

Abrams v. United States (1919) dealt with provocative leaflets that were produced and distributed. The pamphlets asked factory workers to strike, thereby minimizing munitions production. The case against Abrams argued that the leaflets could create or encourage violence against the United States in a time of war. The dissenting opinions questioned whether the pamphlets could actually hinder the United States’ involvement in World War I. Near v. Minnesota (1931) recognized the freedom of the press and that prior constraints could not be placed upon the press. In United States v. Macintosh (1931), Macintosh a Canadian national wanted to become a naturalized U.S. citizen, but he would not take the oath of citizenship. Macintosh’s reasoning was that he would only take up arms to defend this country if he deemed it morally justified. His argument was that he was willing to give allegiance to the United States but would not put his country before his religious convictions.
Chaplinsky v. New Hampshire (1942) articulated the “fighting words” doctrine where the use of offensive and insulting language in public places is prohibited. This was the only case where a person was convicted for using “fighting words.” West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette (1943) discussed whether or not students have a choice in saluting the American flag and to say the Pledge of the Allegiance in school. It is argued that students should have a choice due to their religious convictions.

Barenblatt v. United States (1959) decided the issue of whether congressional committees could require an individual to answer questions about past political affiliations. The court’s reasoning for its decision on Barenblatt v. United States was that government interests outweigh the individual’s when legislative purposes are involved. New York Times v. Sullivan (1964) created a standard that the press needs to meet when reporting on public officials and figures. The case helps determine defamation or libel by requiring the plaintiff in a case to show that the publisher knew and acted with reckless disregard of truth.

Brandenburg v. Ohio (1969) held that the government cannot punish provocative speech unless it is aimed at inciting and likely to incite imminent lawless action. Street v. New York (1969) overruled a New York state law which made defiling the American flag a crime. The court’s ruled in favor for Brandenburg because it felt the original ruling limited speech. An object does not supersede the ideas and words of an individual.

Although speech regarding violence, hate and political statements has been protected many times obscenity has proven to be not as readily protectable. The case Miller v. California (1973) defined what could be considered obscene, and held that obscenity was not protected by the First Amendment. This case brought about the three-
part Miller test. This test assists with the process to determine what is considered obscene material: does the work being discussed appeal to prurient interests, does the work depict or describe, in an offensive way, sexual conduct or excretory functions as defined by appropriate state laws, and does the work lack serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.

In *R.A.V. v. City of St. Paul* (1992), teenagers were charged with a hate crime because they set a cross on fire in the lawn of a black family. The Supreme Court struck down the ordinance that banned hate speech because the city of St. Paul cannot and should not limit its citizens’ right to free speech no matter how reprehensible.

The case of *Ashcroft v. Free Speech Coalition* (2002) examined the provisions of the Child Pornography Prevention Act of 1996 were challenged because the definition of what is considered child pornography would endanger legitimate activities affecting advocates of nudist lifestyles. The courts sided with the plaintiff stating that it is hard to predict the possible intent of words or images and how they will be used.

Proponents of free speech maintain that such expression allows for a range of ideas; others argue that the unlimited expression of ideas challenge and weaken a nation’s fundamental morals and values. When individuals are presented with speech that challenges their personal value system, they may find themselves confronting a barrier or a threat to themselves and society (Scott & Smith, 1969). Oliver Wendell Holmes stated in *United States v. Macintosh* (1931) that the First Amendment guarantees expression of both the ideas that people value and the beliefs that they hate. Though individuals may find such speech offensive, Justice Robert Jackson affirmed the importance of the First Amendment in *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette* (1943), maintaining
that no office can stipulate what is acceptable when it comes to politics, nationalism, religion or any other matters of opinion. In his opinion *New York Times v. Sullivan* (1964), Justice William Brennan addressed offensive speech in how the First Amendment allows for vigorous and open debate on public issues. On October 28, 2009, President Barack Obama signed the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr Hate Crimes Act which extends the 1969 United States federal hate-crime law to protect those victims due to alleged gender, sexual orientation, gender, identity, or disability (Dunning, 2009). The act allows for the Attorney General to aid in the investigation and prosecution of hate crimes (Dunning). Opponents of the act suggest it will limit free speech due to the language within the bill (Stout, 2007). Only time will tell the impact of the Matthew Shepard Act on hate groups.

Allowing for popular and unpopular speech permits speakers and audiences to express themselves, get to the truth, participate in political and social processes, and to understand a changing society. Free speech, according to Emerson (1966), goes beyond political speech in that it is an individual value that allows for more than the expression of ideas within a democratic society. Free speech gives every person the ability to express opinions and those opinions should not be stifled. Freedom of expression should not be limited to only those who can afford it but to all no matter the message. Ideas should not be suppressed simply because they are not popular with the audience. Speech that is unpopular may be true or false. Opinions and ideas cannot be discussed if they are prevented from being aired to the public. If free speech is muted, it promotes “inflexibility and stultification, preventing the society from adjusting to changing circumstances or developing new ideas” (Emerson, p. 11).
Laws and court cases provide a paradigm for communities to judge acceptable speech. Shock rhetoric can be used within the letter of the law as dictated by the courts, but it challenges the boundaries of free speech. Shock rhetoric can also use tactics that are illegal and test the limits of free speech laws.

Hate Speech

The goal of hate speech is to find words that help groups or individuals justify the dehumanization and suppression of others (Bosmajian, 1983). When trying to define hate speech, one is faced with several characteristics. “There is no universally agreed-on definition of hate speech” (Walker, 1994, p. 8). Definitions generally include a form of expression that is considered offensive to any racial, religious, ethnic, or national group. University campus speech codes have expanded hate speech to include gender, age, sexual preference, marital status, and physical capacity (Doe v. University of Michigan, 1989). The organization Human Rights Watch classified hate speech as any form of expression that is considered offensive to racial, ethnic and religious groups, distinct minorities, and women (Smolla, 1992). A broader definition of hate speech was presented by Smolla, who stated that it is a “generic term that has come to embrace the use of speech attacks based on race, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation or preference” (p. 152). Previously, the meaning of hate speech shifted from “race hate” in the 1920s to “group libel” in the 1940s (Haiman, 1981). The definition that encompasses all of the aspects of hate speech is: “Hate speech puts people down based on their race or ethnic origin, religion, gender, age, physical conduction, disability, or sexual orientation” (Cortese, 2006, p. 1).
Hate speech is communicated through slogans, pamphlets, speeches, actions, and signs. These are traditional forms of communicating a message to an audience. An example of the use of traditional communication forms of hate speech was attempted by neo-Nazis. A rally was attempted by the neo-Nazis in the village of Skokie, Illinois, led by Frank Collins in the late 1970s (Cortese, 2006). A permit was issued to Collins and his group though he chose not to march through the town. In December 2000, a chapter of the Wisconsin Ku Klux Klan rallied in Skokie, Illinois because of its perceived historical significance by hate organizations. Other famous rallies include those of the German-American Bund who staged a massive rally in Madison Square Garden in the late 1930s (Warren, 1996). Although traditional forms of communication like rallies are still used, technology has altered how hate organizations communicate their ideas.

Technology has created a new way to dispense hate speech. The distribution of videos such as *The Gay Agenda* spread hate messages. “Ten thousand copies were distributed to voters in Colorado and Oregon in the fall of 1992 in time to influence voting on anti-gay initiatives that were on the ballots in those states” (Flanders, 1993, para. 4). The Internet has allowed White supremacist groups to spread their message over the past couple of decades. Adams and Roscigno (2005) observe that computer mediated communication facilitates hate speech:

Websites can act as an introduction to a particular group in addition to providing legitimacy and access to extensive resources for those already involved. The Internet itself, along with various chat rooms, bulletin boards and E-mail distribution lists, fosters a sense of community. (pp. 761-62)
The use of the Internet creates an outlet for individuals who feel politically disconnected; it enables such individuals to communicate with one another (Wellman et al., 1996). The Internet is currently the fastest rising form of communication for hate groups (Hilliard & Keith, 1999). Hate websites rely heavily upon the written word though visual communication is just as important in spreading their messages (Bostdorff, 2004). For example, an image such as the Confederate flag is used as a form of rival rhetoric, an emblem identified with its cause (McPherson, 2000). “Hate group websites, then, vary in their level of visual sophistication, but most groups are wise enough to incorporate at least some visual images to augment their persuasive efforts or, at the very least, simply to grab the audience's attention” (Bostdorff, 2004, p. 344).

The Internet is a powerful tool in helping spread a message, but face-to-face interaction recruits more new members to extremist groups (Potok as cited in Levin, 2003). Hate group websites are not only designed to lure in disenfranchised individuals, but are also aimed at attracting children. This is done through crayon style fonts, racist cartoons, and computer games where the targets are ethnic minorities (Cortese, 2006). Within all of these websites, Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazi symbolism, propaganda, and music play for the audience. A computer-mediated context lures individuals to engage hate speech and messages in that it offers opportunities to view them in the comfort and safety of their homes (Southern Poverty Law Center, 1999). A person is at liberty to consume materials that society might find objectionable such as visiting an adult bookstore without public scrutiny (Blazak, 2001). “Klan web sites reinforce such perceptions in numerous ways, such as keeping running counters that show how many visitors have entered the web site” (Bostdorff, 2004, p. 343).
The Internet also allows a person access to links of hundreds of hate groups and their messages (Hilliard & Keith, 1999). This helps the audience member to see that it is not just one group or individual that maintains these specific attitudes or morals. This is because the Internet provides a virtual community where members do not encounter issues that would confront them in real-life physical or social settings (Freie, 1998). The advantages and disadvantages are evident insofar as individuals may choose to leave an organization or group at any time. This accounts for why maintaining membership roles in computer-mediated situations is difficult.

**Shock Rhetoric**

Hate speech language generates a shocking, divisive tone that can unsettle audiences. It is rhetoric that presents a limited number of options for addressing the issue or problem addressed. According to Finlay (2007), the problem or issue presented shocks the public because either physical or cultural survival is at stake. Shock rhetoric is used to challenge the status quo, societal norms and conditions. Using shock as a rhetorical device appears antithetical to reasoned, rational thought.

The medium for extremist rhetoric has evolved. Early uses of technology that practiced hate rhetoric included the radio, such as the addresses of Father Charles Coughlin. His shock rhetoric “railed against Jews, labor unions, immigrants, and racial minorities, stirring and reinforcing resentment and hate against these competitors for jobs and social status in pre-World War II, Depression-ridden America” (Hilliard & Keith, 1999, p. 19). Coughlin set the tone for many hate groups including current day shock rhetoric.
Shock rhetoric is startling, inappropriate, or offensive behavior, discourse, images, language, or text that is unsympathetic towards the audience and does not follow social norms of behavior to achieve attention and or gain notoriety. What is considered shocking changes with time, and across cultures, communities, groups, and individuals. The use of shock rhetoric is not limited to hate groups. It has been used as a tool to generate publicity for both radicals and those wishing to maintain the status quo.

Entertainers like radio hosts and comedians have tried to push the edge when it comes to community standards of acceptable speech. George Carlin shocked audience with the infamous monologue “Seven Words You Can Never Say on Television.” The seven words Carlin listed are: shit, piss, fuck, cunt, cocksucker, motherfucker, and tits. When the routine was performed live in Milwaukee in 1972, Carlin was arrested and subsequently faced obscenity charges. In 1978, the routine was the subject of a Supreme Court case, Federal Communication Commission v. Pacifica Foundation (1978) when a father complained that his son heard the monologue on the radio; the court ruled that the words were indecent but not obscene. A predecessor of George Carlin was comedian Lenny Bruce, and in the 1960s, Bruce was arrested several times for obscenity. The earliest arrest was in 1961 in San Francisco for the use of “cocksucker” and several sexual references during a comedy routine. The Bruce act was questioned in several cities, which led to his arrest in Philadelphia and prosecution in New York. His act and its legal battles blackballed him from many clubs throughout the U.S. Several years later, he was posthumously pardoned for his obscenity conviction by New York Governor George Pataki.
Howard Stern made his name in media by engaging in outrageous stunts. Several stunts have gotten Stern either fired by radio stations or fined by the Federal Communication Commission (TMZ.com, 2005). Stern’s more shocking moments include a bestiality dial-a-date stunt, talking about his experience of masturbating to an Aunt Jemima pancake box, and parodying the murder of Tejano singer Selena “by playing gunshots over [her] music” (para. 4). Stern’s shocking tactics nevertheless helped him gain notoriety and prominence. Like Stern, the career of national radio host Don Imus has been marked with controversy. Imus’s comments during a 2007 show referred to the women’s Rutgers University basketball team as a bunch of “nappy-headed hos” (Johnson, 2007, para. 2). His comments raised the ire of black activists Reverend Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson, as well as the NAACP. Imus’s remarks led to his dismissal from NBC.

Shock is not limited to those in the entertainment industry. In 1987, Pennsylvania State Treasurer Bud Dwyer shocked audiences after his conviction for bribery. At a televised press conference, where he professed his innocence, “he put the barrel of the pistol in his mouth and pulled the trigger” (Stevens, 1987, para. 5). Dwyer’s suicide “profoundly shocked” the then Governor of Pennsylvania Robert Casey (Stevens, para. 14). Before Dwyer killed himself, he asked for a repeal of the death penalty because innocent people have been executed and he understands how it feels. Perhaps surprising, Dwyers on air suicide had precedent. News anchor Christine Chubbuck who in 1974 stated, “in keeping with channel 40s policy of bringing you the latest in…Blood and guts…We bring you another first…An attempted suicide” (Quinn, 1974, paras. 2-3). Shortly after her statement, Chubbuck revealed a handgun and then shot herself on live
television which lead to her death hours later. Though the reasons for her suicide were related to depression, the manner and statements made before her death shocked her co-workers and audience (Quinn). Quang Duc became immortalized on June 11, 1963, in his protest against the treatment of Buddhist monks by the government South Vietnam’s government. The photo of a self-immolated Duc created a shock effect that became a symbol of the Vietnam war (Jones, 2003).

Political pundits use shock rhetoric as well. Writer Ann Coulter claims that “I like to stir up the pot. I don't pretend to be impartial or balanced, as broadcasters do” (Aloi, 2006, para. 30). Over the past several years, she has criticized widows of September 11th as self-obsessed Jersey girls and that Tim McVeigh should have bombed the New York Times building instead of the federal building in Oklahoma, and that Jews need to be converted to Christians. Her statements shocked and offended those affected by the Oklahoma City and World Trade Center tragedies, and led outcry from organizations working against religious bigotry. She is a provocateur who garners attention when she is publicizing her latest book. Like Howard Stern and Ann Coulter, the conservative talk show host Rush Limbaugh has not shied from controversy. Limbaugh’s actions and words have shocked audiences for years, from his comments as an ESPN pundit regarding black quarterbacks to the mocking of Michael J. Fox’s Parkinson disease. Limbaugh has also referred to then presidential candidate Barack Obama as the “magic negro” and played a song titled “Barack the Magic Negro” to the tune of “Puff the Magic Dragon” (“US DJ Criticized,” 2007). This incensed and shocked many, and they accused Limbaugh of inflaming his audience (“US DJ Criticized”).
Shock rhetoric is also used by social movements who wish to alter social policy and the public’s perceptions. Groups such as Earth First!, ACT UP, and Queer Nation use what Michael DeLuca (1999) referred to as unruly arguments, including visual imagery to shock audiences. Individuals in the pro-life movements, for example, used pictures of fetuses to shock audiences (Condit, 1990). The use of shock rhetoric is a popular form of communication used by social movements to bring attention to their cause (DeLuca, 1999). PETA’s anti-fur campaign employs naked women who are quoted as saying: “I would rather be naked than wearing fur” (Pace, 2005, para. 2). A controversial animal rights shock campaign was the infamous “Holocaust on Your Plate” advertisements that compared livestock to prisoners of extermination camps.

Westboro Baptist Church routinely protests homosexuality with the message “God hates fags.” Westboro Baptist Church claims that war deaths in Iraq, AIDS victims, and other tragic circumstances are linked to America’s acceptance of the so-called homosexual agenda. The Westboro Baptist Church shocks audiences by protesting at funerals of homosexuals who have died of AIDS, against celebrities who have an association with the gay community, and tragedies like those of Virginia Tech and Columbine High School (Brouwer & Hess, 2007).

Cultural revolutionaries challenge everyday social values and norms of society (Chesebro, 1972). Shock rhetoric creates a sense of confrontation as it divides the “haves” and “have-nots” (Scott & Smith, 1969). It creates polarization by forcing uncommitted individuals to choose between different sides of an issue (King & Anderson, 1971). Having a confrontational attitude can generate a mood where the movement has nothing to lose (Scott & Smith, 1969). Social movements using this
method of confrontation seek cultural revolution. Shock rhetoric deflates what Scott (1973) referred to as a social norm created when “rhetorical reflection establishes interests in a presumed order” (p. 125). Shock rhetoric challenges cultural norms regarding acceptable behavior within a society.

**Prudence**

Individuals, groups, and communities have different ideas of what constitutes prudence. Prudence has been examined from the perspective of political leaders (Dobel, 1998; Lorenzo, 2003; Moskop, 1996; Parel, 1990). It is argued that prudence should be applied to “popular cultures and ordinary situations” (Hariman, 2003, p. 232). Prudence applies both to high profile individuals, and to persons in common day situations.

Prudence is “the mode of reasoning about contingent matters in order to select the best course of action” (Hariman, 2003, p. 5). Social norms and acceptable behavior are dictated by what is considered logical within a community or a situation.

Audiences judge a speaker’s character by the message and its intention, whether it meets what is acceptable and proper for the situation, or “what is good for both the individual and others” (Hariman, 2003, p. 6). Prudence structures what a speaker should say and do when addressing an audience. In other words, prudence is a set of unspoken rules that the audience has placed upon the speaker’s behavior and actions. If the speaker wishes for a message to be accepted, it must conform to the status quo (Hariman, 1991). Deviating from audience expectations of acceptable social norms limits a speaker’s potential success.

There are five factors that help define what makes a speaker prudent. First, character relates to the standards, values, attitudes and beliefs in comparison to other
individuals of the same stature or standing within a community (Hariman, 2003). Political candidates, for example, are compared to their predecessors. In the 1988 Vice-Presidential debates against Lloyd Bentsen, Dan Quayle compared himself to John F. Kennedy when he stated he had a similar level of experience in the Congress as Jack Kennedy did when he sought the Presidency (Hariman). Quayle’s analogy was imprudent according to Bentsen, who stated he knew Kennedy and that Quayle was no Kennedy. Bentsen felt that Quayle’s character was not equal to that of Kennedy’s. Second, recognizing limits on action demonstrates an understanding of what is rational for a given situation. One presents a message that meets a situation’s demands. At a funeral, speakers are expected to speak kindly and to be respectful of the departed and mourners. The third factor in evaluating a speaker’s prudence is how the speaker finds balance between delivering a message and meeting the audience’s interests. Fourth, discerning mutually advantageous outcomes presents a message that is centered on the greatest good for the greatest number (Hariman, 2003). The outcomes need to be beneficial for the community or group in order for it to achieve its goal. Finally, public performance examines the style and presentation of the message. If the message is presented in a successful manner, it can lend power to the speaker and influence an audience (Hariman, 1991). Prudence, therefore, can be looked at as “both a form of intelligence and the qualities evident in the wise person” (Hariman, 1991, p. 13). Prudence provides a balance of good judgment, tact, and presentation.

Prudence requires knowing how to act in a given situation (Hariman, 1991). The speaker presents a way of thinking about what needs to be done and presents a concept that meets with the audience’s and community’s standards of acceptance. As such, then,
prudence is “the art of making the right gesture in a public space with whatever are the available means for political action” (p. 28). A speaker who applies prudential thought and reasoning, therefore, can meet an audience’s expectations and place the speaker in a position of influence.

Due to the changing nature of society, ideas of prudence vary. Considering what is prudent may sound easy, but debate surrounds its nature (Annas, 1995). Defining prudence as a hardened set of rules is improper because prudent behavior is flexible and considered “rules of thumb” (Hariman, 2003, p. 233). Prudence can be seen as a correct view of what is in the agent’s interest and ethical theory guides the agent from an intuitive, restrictive view of what is in her interests (money, power) to more expanded and elevated view (the virtues) (Annas, 1995, p. 244).

That which is considered prudent depends on an audience’s community standards. It is up to both the speaker and the audience to decide what is prudent or imprudent. There is a possibility that competing ideas of prudence can be derived from a situation. The audience may have conflicting ideas about how best to present a message or solve a problem. Prudence creates an understanding of possibilities, which generate and depend on factors that include the speaker, audience, and situation. Those factors generate opportunities to examine and understand prudence and prudent behavior (Hariman, 2003).

Prudence constitutes guiding principles set by society and individuals, and, therefore, a variable that cannot be viewed through rules of reasoning and logic. Prudence is a set of unspoken rules that differ from context to context. Moreover, communities and
individuals create, define, identify, and evaluate what is wise and just and apply them to their core values when judging performances.

Shock rhetoric does not follow prudent behavior; it follows the behavior of the group or individual. The use of shock rhetoric challenges notions of audience-centered prudence. Groups or individuals who use shock rhetoric, however, consider it prudent communicate to get their message to an audience.

Polarization

The practices of radical groups or activists capture public attention because they polarize complicated issues. Polarization is defined as “the process by which an extremely diversified public is coalesced into two or more highly contrasting, mutually exclusive groups sharing a high degree of internal solidarity in those beliefs which the persuader considers salient” (King & Anderson, 1971, p. 244). Polarization creates cohesion for groups, which help create a “we” feeling (King & Anderson). Also, polarization presupposes opposition to an issue or cause considered an enemy (King & Anderson). Polarization has become a popular theme within American political and social discourse (DiMaggio, Evans, Bryson, 1996). Another way to define polarization is as “both a state and a process. Polarization as state refers to the extent to which opinions on an issue are opposed in relation to some theoretical maximum. Polarization as a process refers to the increase in such opposition over time” (DiMaggio et al., p. 693). Polarization of issues can transpire over time because it requires the agitation to come from a group’s leadership.

To create polarization there needs to be an antagonist. Agitation is a common strategy amongst individuals or groups who promote social change; whereas institutions
within the status quo resist change (Bowers, Ochs, & Jensen, 1993). An additional explanation of agitation is that of emotionally based arguments based around the corruption of morality (Bowers et al.). John Bowers, Donovan Ochs, and Richard Jensen (1993) present a definition of agitation that comprises three components. First, agitation occurs when people outside of the status quo question the decision-making of an institution. Who or what constitutes the status quo is situational. To be considered a part of decision making process within the status quo requires two parts: (a) legislative, the power of dictating policy; and (b) enforcement, the power of administrating sanctions for those who disobey the policies set forth by the legislation (Bowers et al.). Agitation can arise out of discontent with the status quo and the handling or passing of legislation.

The second component of agitation requires that there be an advocate for significant social change. The social change promoted is understood in ways that the public acts on or thinks about. Advocated change can identify or single out for review regulations or substantive issues (Bowers et al.). The agitator wants to generate change that affects the power structure and how it disseminates power within the status quo.

Lastly, agitation encounters opposition within the status quo because it challenges community standards. The group or individual takes persuasion beyond that of just speeches and essays to include as well nonverbal and visual elements. Speeches and pamphlets are familiar means of protest, but radical actions help define the movement even more (Bowers et al.). The radical action of agitators helps create awareness for the movement and its issues.

Types of agitation vary. There are two main types of agitation: vertical deviance, which happens when the value system of the status quo is accepted, but the organization
and distribution of the power is in dispute; and lateral deviance that happens when the agitators question the value system of the status quo (Bowers et al., 1993). Vertical deviance challenges the corruption of the system. Lateral deviance rejects the status quo. “Demands may be difficult for the establishment and the general public to understand because the agitators are likely to display symbols, engineer events, and behave in unusual ways that illustrate their rejection of society” (p. 8). Between the two types of agitation, lateral is the most disruptive to the status quo because of its aggressive stance toward the power structure of the status quo.

Once a social movement agitates an issue, it seeks to polarize the issue. “Polarization assumes that any individual who has not committed to the agitation supports the establishment” (Bowers et al., 1993, p. 34). Polarization of an issue forces an audience to choose sides. Bowers et al. argue that polarization of an issue can be achieved with tactics such as flag burning. This involves attacking individuals or groups vulnerable to attack by the dissenting ideology (Bowers et al.). Such attacks help the agitating group receive media attention.

Richard Lanigan (1970) argues that polarization is motivated by the practice of either isolation or confrontation. Isolation polarization can be positioned from two defensive perspectives: (a) isolation of an in-group that opposes the isolation of the out-group; (b) isolation of elite leadership within the movement (Lanigan). First, individuals leading a social movement may view the status quo as oppressive due to political, social, or economic reasons (Lanigan). The second perspective focuses on the differences between the movement and the establishment (Lanigan). The most common examples of these differences are those of politics, race, religion, national origin, or gender.
Confrontation polarization also maintains two offensive perspectives: (a) out-groups are confronted by in-groups in order make them choose a side; (b) internal rhetoric generated within the movement creates a conflict of elitism (Lanigan). The first perspective of confrontational polarization explains how uncompromising members emerge and find traction within the movement. These individuals can be described as foot soldiers taking action against the establishment. The second perspective outlines a clash of organizational ideologies (Lanigan). For example, a social movement may advance a Marxist or socialist sociopolitical power structure that is in opposition to the status quo.

The polarization tactic of creating derogatory jargon is strategically used by social movements (Bowers et al., 1993). Movements often create expressions to address the specific needs of the agitation. Derogatory jargon is also referred to as vilification or name-calling (Stewart et al., 2001). Language is used to describe and attack the status quo and individuals who have not joined the movement’s cause. The goal is to discredit the opposition by attacking their character as disingenuous or spiteful (Vanderford, 1998). The tactic helps to delegitimize the opposition “through characterizations of intentions, actions, purposes, and identities” (p. 166). For example, “scab” is used for a nonunion replacement worker during a labor strike, or the term “Uncle Toms” is used by African Americans against those whom they perceive as siding with the status quo. Derogatory jargon is used to create a powerful emotional moment that forces audiences to make a decision.

Polarization is not necessarily a violent upheaval. King and Anderson (1971) argue that rhetoric which polarizes also includes approaches that either affirm or subvert. An affirmation strategy “is concerned with a judicious selection of those images that will
promote a strong sense of group identity,” and subversion strategy is “a careful selection of those images that will undermine the ethos of competing groups, ideologies, or institutions” (p. 244). Affirmation strategies persuade the audience to accept the group’s ideas (King & Anderson). A subversion strategy’s purpose is to damage a view or belief (King & Anderson). The tactics used by a movement depend on the goal of the group and the outcomes they wish to achieve.

Lanigan (1970) discussed how polarization generates a point of view that is based on a value system that sees the world as black and white. Polarization, according to Lanigan (1970), helps movements characterize groups or individuals as evil, wrong, or bad. As a tactic, polarization creates divisiveness and attempts to force an audience to make a decision on an issue. Those who stand in opposition to the movement are defined as individuals who do not support the cause. Audience members who do not support the movement are viewed by those challenging the status quo as part of the problem (Stewart et al., 2001). Polarization does not allow for middle ground because indicates a consensus with the status quo. Polarization works to create a “we” mentality with an audience.

In creating an identity and rationale for a movement, there must exist barriers to change. Agitators, therefore, generate polarization within a movement by identifying “devils” or scapegoats (Stewart et al., 2001). Scapegoating helps create meaning for the movement. The creation of meaning gives a sense of order to humans (Burke, 1966). When these senses are disrupted, the social order is challenged and people seek answers. One strategy to create understanding is scapegoating. The process of scapegoating involves agitators reassigning blame to others in order to distance themselves from actions taken (Burke, 1969). Scapegoating helps agitators absolve themselves of any guilt
due to social disturbance created by polarization. Scapegoating is used in reaction to unwanted or unfavorable actions.

Polarization helps create an identifiable situation that supporters of the movement consider hostile. It justifies what they view as a moral struggle (Stewart et al., 2001). Some researchers have discovered that the polarization of an issue pushes the audience away from the movement and towards the status quo (Brown, 1974; Myers, 1982). Steven Alderton’s (1982) study showed that attitudinal predisposition affects audience decisions towards agitator arguments. Polarization of an issue entrenches opinions of individuals on both sides of the movement.

Polarization also helps movements and speakers encapsulate an issue in order to force the audience to make a decision, create publicity for the position, or enforce and justify a cause’s purposes. The audience’s attitudes are embedded within their value system and ideology (Bullock et al., 2002). The polarization of moral issues is popular within the United States (Wuthnow, 1996). Polarized issues include those dealing with gender roles, abortion (DiMaggio et al., 1996; Hoffman & Miller, 1998), and sexuality (Hoffman & Miller). Polarization of issues and causes has historically been a tactic employed by politicians. (King & Anderson, 1971). William Jennings Bryant, for example, polarized the differences between rich and poor at the 1896 Democratic Convention (Harpine, 2001). David Foster (2006) examined George W. Bush’s use of terrorism as a polarizing strategy in the 2004 presidential campaign. Polarization is a useful tactic to help leadership entrench the rhetorical identity of a movement.
Rationale and Research Questions

The purpose of this dissertation is to define and develop shock rhetoric as a genre. The identification of a shock rhetoric genre involves the examination of specific discourse that displays unique characteristics. I hypothesize that shock rhetoric is the polarization of an issue that is startling, inappropriate, or offensive; it consists of behavior, language, images, and texts. It is unsympathetic towards the audience, and imprudently violates social norms of behavior to achieve attention and notoriety. Creating and defining a genre of shock rhetoric is important. When trying to identify a genre it “is not just a pattern of forms or even a method of achieving our own ends,” and “genres can serve both as an index to cultural patterns and as tools for exploring the achievements of particular speakers and writers” (Miller, 1984, p. 165). There are characteristics that are shared by groups or individuals who use shock rhetoric even though the artifacts are not the same. Shock rhetoric creates the possibility for a variety of unique, emotional responses from the audience.

Research has focused on how mainstream media perceive and frame large protests (Watkins, 2001), and how groups deal with hate speech and race issues (Zajicek, 2002). Leets (2001) and Boeckmann and Liew (2002) have examined how hate language is perceived by audiences. Hate language also is an expression of a person’s attitude and psychological make-up. Wall (2007) examined how groups express online identity while Patrick (2006) studied the ethos of social movements. Research has yet to examine polarizing rhetoric used by protest groups who shock individuals, groups, or communities. Previous research has examined how rhetoric persuades or affects identities or opinions. Defining a genre of shock rhetoric will add to the knowledge base of social
movement theory (Krebs & Jackson, 2007; Leff, 2003; Walls, 2004; Watson, 1995). No study to date has specifically examined or defined shock rhetoric. Defining shock rhetoric creates a lens through which this genre can be examined and will clarify how shock rhetoric violates prudence.

The goal of identifying a genre is to help understand specific rhetorical situations (Miller, 1984). Shock rhetoric will be organized into one of the “rhetorical genres [that] stem from organizing principles found in recurring situation that generate discourse characterized by a family of common factors” (Harrell & Linkugel, 1978, pp. 263-264). Common factors within the genre create factors of identification.

To help classify shock rhetoric, it is important to establish an organizational perspective that expands genre research (Harrell & Linkugel, 1978). Using the generic perspective develops an awareness of the rhetoric used, symbolic context, and the nature of the communication act (Campbell & Jamison, 1978). Genre serves as a tool that generates understanding through examining cultural patterns of discourse (Miller, 1984).

Several reasons justify the investigation of shock rhetoric as a genre. Herbert Simons (1978) presented multiple rationales for the study of rhetorical genres. Creating a rhetorical genre distinguishes persistent patterns of a rhetorical practice. A genre establishes that a given set of rhetorical practices has a specific set of traits. The creation of a genre must not only make it memorable, but operational; this defines the convention of the genre so that it can be identified. It must be evident that there are sufficient reasons to justify the genre.

Shock rhetoric challenges traditional speech conventions of rhetoric: it stretches the limits of free speech. The process of defining the genre of shock rhetoric will include
several steps, which are discussed in the method section. To understand shock rhetoric, the following elements will be explored: rhetorical content, style, and substance. This will be accomplished by examining and comparing the rhetoric of two unique groups: Bash Back! and Westboro Baptist Church. They represent unique cases of shock rhetoric. These organizations are rhetorically radical, and maintain opposing viewpoints regarding homosexuality. These groups provide a significant body of data.

The Westboro Baptist Church’s rhetoric confronts normative conduct across the US. They protest at funerals, disaster zones, and places of tragedy. Religious organizations may disagree with homosexuality and may preach against it but rarely at the level of fervor practiced by Westboro Baptist Church. Protests by Westboro Baptist Church create headlines because of their unconventional manner, place, and message. The church’s messages shock and challenge community standards. Westboro Baptist Church members make news headlines by protesting at tragedy sites such as school shootings, natural disasters, and funerals of solders. Church members typically carry signs that state “God Hates Fags” or “Thank God for IEDs,” and shouting anti-gay slurs.

In contrast to Westboro Baptist Church, Bash Back! is a “small group of radical transfolk, queers and allies” (“About BB! News,” 2009, para. 4). Bash Back! was formed in 2007 to be a network of radical, militant, and anarchistic groups that presents pro queer messages to the public (“About BB! News”). Bash Back! has caused controversy even within the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender/transsexual community insofar as they brandish banners asserting “these faggots kill fascists.”

Ironically, even though Bash Back! and Westboro Baptist Church represent different viewpoints on the same subject they use similar rhetorical tactics. This
dissertation will examine commonalties in the rhetorical patterns used by Bash Back! and Westboro Baptist Church, and will identify re-occurring rhetorical patterns. Examining these groups will help develop a genre of shock rhetoric. The following research questions are asked:

RQ 1 – What constitutes shock rhetoric?

RQ 2 – What are the persuasive benefits and potential harms of employing shock rhetoric?
CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this dissertation is to define and identify shock rhetoric as a genre. An examination of the way Bash Back! (hereafter BB!) and Westboro Baptist Church (hereafter WBC) use shock rhetoric will occur. This study will define, explain, and theorize shock rhetoric. Methodologically, this study will employ generic criticism and apply it to data collected from both BB! and WBC. Artifacts will include archival and current materials including blogs and videos. Generic criticism “is based on the idea that observable, explicable, and predictable rhetorical commonalities occur in groups of discourse as well as in groups of people” (Benoit, 2005, p. 85). Generic criticism helps reveal commonalities in rhetorical patterns. It will be used here to uncover and understand the use of shock rhetoric by BB! and WBC. Discourse within a genre provides unique patterns or categories (Benoit, 2005). The genre of shock rhetoric is a unique form of rhetoric because it generally lacks logical framing or arguments. Shock speech forcibly creates an alternative discourse.

The study will assess protests, speeches, signs, and flyers. The features of the artifacts will be used to evaluate the findings against characteristics that are considered prudent protest. I will document the extent to which their rhetoric is consistent with or violates prudential reasoning.

Developing a genre provides insight regarding social issues (Littlejohn, 2002). There are several steps that take place in the development of a genre: (a) an event or observation is described; (b) the event is explained; (c) the original event or observation is generalized; and (d) the knowledge used to improve the community (Lustig, 1986).
The following sequence of steps will be used to develop a rhetorical genre (Simons, 1978). A varied sample of artifacts will be selected that are representative of the rhetorical genre. Artifact selection is important in the discovery of commonalities and patterns within the shock rhetoric genre. The evaluation of the artifacts will include results, reality, ideology, aesthetics, psychology, and culture of individuals or groups. Foss (2004b) labels artifacts as “units of analysis” including “strategies, types of evidence, values, word choice, or metaphors” (p. 12). Artifacts that will be examined from BB! and WBC include signs, posters, and video and textual content from websites.

Artifacts will be examined from both WBC and BB!. The following artifacts from WBC will be examined and systematically examined: the websites www.godhatesfags.com and www.signofthetimes.net. Both WBC websites provide regularly updated materials on protest schedules, press releases, frequently answered questions, news videos, blogs, and weekly sermons. WBC also maintains physical archives of their protest material, much of which is not viewable through their website. The archives provide fliers and posters that have been used since their first protest. Through personal correspondence, WBC provided the researcher with portable document files of fliers employed as press releases.

BB! artifacts include the website www.bashbacknews.wordpress.com, which is regularly updated with news of activities and links to BB! chapters. News reports and clippings on BB! protests will be analyzed. The artifacts examined include: protest locations, comments on message boards, websites, banners, posters, and language. The artifacts provide data that can be generalized to similar rhetorical situations (Benoit, 2005; Foss, 2004b).
The use of BB! and WBC and their rhetorical tactics will serve to illustrate and define the genre of shock rhetoric. There are two principal elements of generic criticism: stylistic and substantive. Substantive elements are fashioned from the stylistic elements of shock rhetoric. These elements help identify and define the genre through context and content.

Genre criticism includes a set of principles that identify it as a genre (Harrell & Linkugel, 1978). Four basic steps that comprise generic criticism will be used as a part of the identification process of shock rhetoric. First, a critical analysis of BB! and WBC rhetoric will be conducted to reveal shock rhetoric characteristics. Second, a comparison of BB! and WBC rhetorical strategies will be undertaken. Third, the researcher will identify the perceived situational requirements that form shock rhetoric. In the development of a genre of shock rhetoric, I will proceed in the following manner: (a) examine the similarities in the rhetoric used, (b) find artifacts that occur in similar situations, (c) discover what characteristics are shared by the artifacts, and (d) formulate and organize principles of shock rhetoric. Thus, a description of substantive and stylistic elements of the shock rhetoric genre should be generated.

The study will assess protests, speeches, signs, and flyers. The features of the artifacts will be used to evaluate the findings against characteristics that are considered prudent protest. I will document the extent to which their rhetoric is consistent with or violates prudential reasoning.

Stylistic elements make up the defining characteristics of shock rhetoric. I argue here that shock rhetoric is compromised of ten stylistic elements. Elements that comprise shock rhetoric include that it: (a) is startling, (b) is inappropriate, (c) is unsympathetic
towards the audience, (d) ignores social norms, (e) gains attention and notoriety for the message, (f) is at an unexpected location, (g) is offensive as the nature of the rhetoric, (h) has course language, (i) uses disgusting visual imagery, and (j) involves outrageous behavior. Though the message may vary depending upon the group or individual, the substantive elements that make up shock rhetoric remain relatively constant.

A genre critique of shock rhetoric should enlighten understanding of offensive speech and its impact on rational beings. In conducting this research, the study will “observe similarities which common sense tells him [or her] are there” (Harrell & Linkugel, 1978, p. 266). Once the genre is identified, a critical analysis of shock rhetoric will be undertaken. This study will conclude by explaining how shock rhetoric contributes to rhetorical theory. The theoretical implications of the genre of shock rhetoric will then be discussed.
CHAPTER III

BASH BACK! AND WESTBORO BAPTIST CHURCH

Movements that advocate changes must have organizational structure and followers (Simons, 1970) to have any level of success. Both BB! and WBC are recognized as organized groups with followers and agendas that seek change within the status quo. The success of their campaign is relative insofar as the group does not know if its goals are achievable (Stewart et al., 2001). BB! and WBC, like many movements, reside outside the status quo (Stewart et al.). They are frequently derided for their imprudence. Because of this, they are viewed as fringe elements by society (Stewart et al.). The history and rhetoric of BB! and WBC is discussed next.

A varied sample of artifacts from BB! and WBC was selected to represent the genre of shock rhetoric. Shock rhetoric characteristics stem from its stylistic elements, which define shock rhetoric.

Bash Back!

BB! is a newly formed, politically motivated, and independently organized group whose protest activities have shocked several communities. Members of BB! describe themselves as a “small group of radical transfolk, queers and allies” (“About BB? News,” 2009, para. 4). The organization formed in 2007 to protest at the 2008 Republican and Democratic National Conventions. “Bash Back” was a slogan used by Queer Nation, who announced that if violence is needed, they will fight back (Cohen-Cruz, 1998). Queer Nation felt mainstream gay and lesbian organizations were not doing enough to agitate for HIV/AIDS awareness. They formed in 1990 when militant AIDS activists at a New York Gay Pride parade handed out a pamphlet titled “I Hate Straights” which described
their organizational goals as a group (Stryker, 2004). As an organization, Queer Nation had no formal structure or leadership and allowed for community-organized protest. Their protests were structured to gain media attention for AIDS awareness (Stryker).

BB! not only got its name from the early radical gay group Queer Nation, but they have modeled themselves as a more radical version of the movement. BB! membership adheres to the following tenets:

POINTS OF UNITY

Members of Bash Back! must agree to:

1. Fight for liberation. Nothing more, nothing less. State recognition in the form of oppressive institutions such as marriage and militarism are not steps toward liberation but rather towards heteronormative assimilation.

2. A rejection of Capitalism, Imperialism, and all forms of State power.

3. Actively oppose oppression both in and out of the “movement.” All oppressive behavior is not to be tolerated.

4. Respect a diversity of tactics in the struggle for liberation. Do not solely condemn an action on the grounds that the State deems it to be illegal. (“About BB! News,” 2008, n.p.)

To start a new BB! chapter, it is only necessary to adhere to the points of unity which asks members to fight against the state and what the state and capitalism stand for. Members must be willing to fight for and support oppressed groups and individuals. While what they are fighting for is not clearly defined, BB! feels that the status quo oppresses homosexuals. Each group creates its own agenda because chapter autonomy permits them to find their own voice on issues.
According to the BB! website, several chapters have been established in the United States: Chicago, San Francisco, Memphis, Philadelphia, Olympia, upstate New York, Washington D.C., Milwaukee, Lansing, and Denver. Each chapter works independently of the others, but follows the founders’ membership tenets. Having independent chapters allows organizations to focus on local issues. BB! Chicago helps maintain its autonomy through a MySpace page that asks the following questions.

What the Fuck is Bash Back! Chicago?!

a) A rowdy queer sex gang.

b) A bunch of hooligans.

c) Really good looking.

d) An anti-assimilation, sex-positive, anti-racist, radical group of queers, transfolk, and anarcha-feministas dedicated to eradicating heteronormativity, subverting binary gender norms, capitalism, and attacking all intersecting oppressions including but not limited to white supremacy, patriarchy, classism, ableism, fatphobia, transphobia, and lookism.

e) All of the above.

If you answered E, then you are correct. We are fierce as fuck radical queers, transfolk, and feminists who are not concerned with gaining access to oppressive, state-run institutions such as marriage, the military, or obtaining upward economic mobility. We want liberation, nothing less. (Bash Back! Chicago, 2009)

BB! strives to separate itself from other gay, lesbian, bisexual, transexual, and queer (GLBTQ) protest groups and organizations by how, when, and where it presents its message. Even though there are several independent chapters, they each work toward
organizing against the state and what they deem as oppressive against GLBTQ individuals.

“It was articulated that the most important reason to organize [is to work] as catalysts to create lasting networks and to escalate social conflict in this country” (Bash Back! Lansing, 2008, para. 9). BB! wants to be an organization that is controversial in how and where it protests. The longer they are around, the more opportunities they will have to spread their message; organizational longevity legitimizes their activities.

To spread its message of revolution and to gain support for its message, BB! uses both computer mediated means and traditional forms of protest. The site www.bashbacknews.wordpress.com is the main site for information, news, links, and also functions as a gathering point for BB! groups around the country. The design of the site is simple and user-friendly. At the top of the site is a picture of several BB! members holding bats, pipes, and sledgehammers. These individuals have their faces covered with scarves with only their eyes exposed. On the left side of the site there are links to general information about BB!, how to find or create a chapter, hate mail from outsiders, and what is expected of its members. There are also links to information about the radical queer convergence, BB! chapters, and like-minded radical queer groups. The site is regularly updated with information about past and future protests and conferences. News items relating to their ideals are also posted. These stories are about individuals challenging the government, the police, or large companies. Each posting maintains a place for people to comment or discuss the posting. The website is a tool that BB! uses to help spread its message and ideals beyond its membership to the public.

BB! protests have created controversy within the gay community. In June 2008, a neo-Nazi group protested at a large-scale community celebration of gay pride in
Milwaukee. The organizers of PrideFest asked people to ignore the Nazi group. Instead BB! marched in the parade with a banner stating “these faggots kill fascists,” a different take on Woody Guthrie who labeled his guitar with “this machine kills fascists.” The actions of BB! were condemned by the PrideFest organizers (“Bash Back! MKE,” 2008). BB! argued that a group such as neo-Nazis have used violence themselves and should be confronted (“Bash Back! MKE”). The threats of physical harm against the homosexual community should not be tolerated.

In March 2009, Lovelle Mixon killed five police officers before dying in a shootout with the police in Oakland, CA. On March 28, 2009, a posting titled “Solidarity with All Cop Killers” on www.bashbacknews.wordpress.com heralds Mixon as a folk hero like Pancho Villa or William Wallace. To BB! members, Mixon is a person who stood up to a repressive system and fought back not with words but with violence.

Supporting a person who kills police officers is not the usual public response to such situations. Individuals who kill police officers are viewed as villains, not heroes. Police are supposed to protect society and hold a high place in the social order within communities. Supporting Mixon in the killing of police officers challenges social norms of social order and respect for the law.

The support of Mixon mentions the celebration that occurred after it was announced that several police officers were killed in the line of duty (“Solidarity,” 2009). The killing of the police officers was proclaimed by BB! as another battle in the war against the oppressive state system (“Solidarity”). Mixon is represented as a fallen soldier in the battle against an oppressive society and as a hero to the movement. The posting ends with “until every queerbasher is beaten to a pulp and the police are but a memory.
Yours for the social war” (para. 5-6). It is signed as an “unknowable cell of BB!.”

Referring to themselves as a “cell” of BB! evokes the idea of a menacing terrorist cell system, perhaps not unlike al-Qaeda. The BB! Milwaukee chapter hung a banner at the student union of University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee that read “We (heart) Lovelle Mixon” as a show of solidarity for Mixon.

Mixon was not gay, but to BB!, he was a symbol of standing up to the state. He symbolized the individual who lives in an oppressive condition. Mixon was a former convict on parole and could not find a job and apparently decided violence was his only response. This fighting back is why Mixon is seen as a martyr and someone to praise as opposed to the police who enforce the “oppressive” values of the state.

The protest that raised the most controversy and media attention occurred November 9, 2008, at Mount Hope Church in Lansing, MI. BB! members from the Lansing, Chicago, Memphis, and Milwaukee chapters interrupted the Sunday morning service at Mount Hope (“Bash Back! Raises Hell,” 2008). The protest was in two stages. In the first stage, twenty protesters gathered outside the church at 11:30 a.m. BB! protesters displayed banners and signs while using megaphones to shout “Jesus was a homo.” Adding to the protest, they made noise by beating buckets and distributing pamphlets stating “we strive for liberation for all people” (Harris, 2008, para 5). Forty minutes later, 30 individuals who had disguised themselves as church members stood up during the service and shouted “Jesus is a homo,” “it is ok to be gay,” and “bash back.” Amidst the noise and chaos, BB! protesters shouted and yelled, a banner was unfurled from a balcony, women kissed in the aisle of the church, and the following flyer was thrown in the air by the hundreds (Harris).
Let’s be honest. Growing up can be an insane journey through emotions you never knew you had. Certain emotions seem harder to contain or control, or new ones randomly “cloud your vision.” We’ve all been there. Whether you’re angry at a friend or sibling or just simply sad for no reason, these feelings seem foreign and hard to understand. A lot of these feelings we deem bad, or immoral. Sometimes we feel guilty or ashamed. Although they may seem awkward at first, these feelings are valid and are important in creating a sustainable identity later in life. Instead of shunning or suppressing these emotions, try exploring and embracing these new feelings your mind and soul have chosen to engage in. Otherwise, we can end up regretting a life that was wasted by repression and riddled with guilt. You are not alone. WE are not alone. Believe it or not there are countless others feeling the same feelings you feel deep inside. Attraction is as just a valid emotion as any other, despite who your attraction is towards. You may be questioning if you are gay, or bisexual. These feelings are not only ok, they are exciting and natural and based in love and passion. And
whats better than that?! As Christ has taught us, love is the greatest of ALL commandments. So now... the real question is, what do I do with these feelings? The first step is to acknowledge and accept them. But then, we find ourselves asking...where can I be accepted to explore these feelings and how can I express them without shame or guilt?
The good news is there are many communities and organizations that you can fit into!! The action that you've seen take place today is a small example of the supportive and diverse community which will support and enable you to be who you truly are! We are a group known as Bash Back! We specialize in confronting homophobia, transphobia and all other forms of oppression. We strive for the liberation of ALL people! And we welcome you. (“Bash Back! Raising Hell,” 2008, para. 1, 2, & 3)
The flyer helped explain the actions of BB! at Mount Hope Church. The use of the pink triangle identifies that the group has links to the homosexual groups and individuals. BB! justifies its action of protesting inside the church. The protest encouraged acceptance of individuals within queer culture, and affirmed that not only is being gay nothing to be afraid of, but that being gay is human. BB! also presents the argument that they can help or provide someone with information and support groups for people wondering about their sexuality. BB! states they will confront all forms of oppression. They ask the audience not to judge others that are different from the members of the church, and that Mount Hope members should accept people of different lifestyles. Also, for those church members who question their sexuality, there is an organization or community for them. The flyer informed the audience that they are not alone.
While kissing and shouting, BB! members threw flyers out to the congregation. Meanwhile, a church member screamed Satan had come to the church and that the end was near (“Bash Back! Raises Hell,” 2008). The pastor was shocked by what occurred (“Bash Back! Raises Hell”). It was reported that when protestors ran out of the building they pulled fire alarms to create more even chaos (Harris, 2008). In order to explain its actions and tactics, the Lansing BB! chapter posted the following as part of its response.

What did Bash Back! hope to accomplish? Why these shocking tactics? There were a few main points and goals of this action: To confront the oppressors that run the church and show them some of us are unafraid and will resist them. Calling them out in front of their congregation was an important part of that. Showing that we are angry with their destructive behavior was also an important part of the message. To provide a space for those who had been mentally tortured by MHC [Mount Hope Church] and other places similar to confront their “demons” and fight back! Their emotional health was a very real concern of this action. To show the youth we are not alone! With an action of great energy and helpful flyers we wanted to send a message of acceptance and understanding. We realize that thinking you might be queer in a church like that is terrifying. And unbearably lonely. By tossing out a thousand flyers we provided a way “out.” Or at least planted the seed. And to generate visibility to Bash Back!! To build momentum and give us energy to our movement. I think we nailed that one. (BB! Lansing, 2008, para. 18).
BB! wants to challenge the status quo. As an organization they want to take the fight to the state. The Mount Hope protest was a vehicle to motivate other BB! chapters as well as to call attention to their cause.

BB! justified both where the protest took place and their protest methods because they followed their “points of unity.” BB! states that Mount Hope Church was chosen for several reasons. The church believes that homosexuality is a sin, and that the sexual expression of homosexuality is a curable addiction. They also felt the church is just another extension of capitalism and not of God (Bash Back!, “BB! Lansing,” 2008).

Mount Hope Church is considered a megachurch, a description that “refers to any Protestant congregation with a sustained average weekly attendance of 2000 persons or more in its worship services” (Hartford Institutive for Religion Research, 2009, para. 1). Selecting a megachurch as a protest site ensured the possibility of getting publicity for BB!.

After the protest Michigan State Representative Dave Agema (R-Grandville) proposed legislation that would increase penalties for disrupting religious services (Cranson, 2009):

“This disruptive behavior is not appropriate or acceptable anywhere, and not in places of worship,” said Agema in a news release. “Religious freedom is a basic American right and it must be protected by increasing the penalty to deter those who would obstruct and endanger other people's rights in a church with their excessive demonstration.” (para. 3)

The legislation is a direct response to the protest at Mount Hope. The goal of the legislation is to provide a deterrent for groups like BB! that might try similar protests.
The protest at Mount Hope did not just lead to legislation. In early May 2009, the Alliance Defense Fund (ADF) filed a lawsuit against BB! on behalf of Mount Hope. The Alliance Defense Fund is a coalition of Christian lawyers whose self-proclaimed goal is to defend individuals’ rights to freely live out their faith, safeguard religious freedom, purity of life, marriage, and the family (ADF, 2009). The lawsuit claims that BB! and its members “intentionally acted and appeared in a threatening manner…and interfered with their exercise of the First Amendment right to religious freedom in a place of worship” (Mount Hope v. Bash Back! et al., 2009, p. 1). Throughout the lawsuit, complaints state that church members felt their safety was at risk because of the “radical nature of the demonstrators and the unabashed nature of their rhetoric” (Mount Hope v. Bash Back! et al., p. 9). The complaint states that the goal of the BB! protest was to disrupt church services. The lawsuit uses examples of previous protests by BB! to show how they are consistent in their approach in protesting and message.

To help create and share methods of dispersing their message, BB! hosted a convergence in May 2009 where workshops, discussions, and protests occurred. To help promote the convergence, the following was posted on the BB! news page:

Anarcha-Queers! Trannies! Fairies! Perverts! Sex-Workers! Sex-Radicals! Allies! Bash Back! is ecstatic to announce a national radical queer convergence to take place in Chicago, May 28th through May 31st of 2009! We’re pleased to invite all radical queers to join us for a weekend of debauchery and mischief. The last weekend of May will prove to be four solid days of workshops, discussions, performances, games, dancing and street action! We’ll handle the food and the housing. Ya’ll bring the orgy, riot, and decadence! We’re looking for folks to
facilitate discussions, put on workshops, organize caucuses, share games, tell stories, get heavy in some theory, or bottom-line a dance party. More specifically we’re looking for workshops themed around queer and trans liberation, anti-racism, confronting patriarchy, sex work, ableism, self defense, DIY mental and sexual health, radical history, pornography, or queer theory. We are also looking for copious amounts of glitter, safer sex products, zines, home-made sex toys, balaclavas, pink and black flags, sequins, bondage gear, rad porn, flowers, strap-ons, and assorted dumpstered goodies. You down? To RSVP, volunteer for a workshop, get more information, or send us dirty pictures:

Lubing up the social war, Bash Back! (Bash Back!, “Announcing,” 2008)

The posting for the convergence helped define the type of people that will participate. The message’s tone and innuendos suggest a playful atmosphere that covered serious topics. The convergence is not looking for mainstream individuals but anarchists and radicals, people who fall outside of mainstream political conventional thought.

Conventionally regarded as the odd man out in a set of political ideologies that have developed out of the Enlightenment in the wake of the French Revolution—liberalism, conservatism, socialism, and utilitarianism—anarchism clearly lacks the support and respect the other ideologies enjoy. Today, one might claim to be a liberal, a conservative, a socialist, or even a utilitarian, but the person who embraces anarchism is likely to be regarded as a crank at best or a terrorist at worst. (Weir, 1997, pp. 12-13)

As a group, they want to challenge community standards, thereby threatening the status quo.
BB! members are nonconformist in how they present their message; they are abrasive and violent. They want others to resist the status quo. BB! seeks individuals living on the fringe of society. They do not create mainstream workshops and discussions for a middleclass heterosexual audience. Their workshops are set up with a do-it-yourself ethos. They ask for volunteers to run specific workshops and discussions. BB! wants a particular ideology and like-mindedness to participate in the convergence. The convergence is an event with a goal to educate, motivate, and entertain. Specifically, the convergence is a place for radical queers to get tools and knowledge regarding how to organize and conduct protests.

Flyers advertise the convergence. The flyer in Appendix A was placed on Craigslist. The flyer is a shorter version of what was posted on BB! news, but includes pictures. The pictures add considerable meaning. They present a menacing look: their faces are covered, and they wield pipes and bats as weapons. The image suggests radicals who are willing to use violence. The image in the top right corner depicts a whip that is used in sadism and masochism (S&M) or bondage sex. The whip represents the sex, kink, and fetish topics at their workshops and discussions. In addition, a person waves a flag while standing by a bonfire. The person’s face is covered. Another image is that of a drag queen, which draws on the outlandish image of flamboyant homosexuality to attract attention. The photo implies who will attend the convergence. It represents that they target specific groups or individuals. The images convey what BB! is about: radical terrorists who are violent and homosexuals who love their sex and fetishes. To outsiders or unlikely candidates for BB! membership, the ad serves as a filter, and as warning of what to expect.
People who might describe themselves as radicals, butches, anarchists, dykes, sluts, and rioters are just a few of the people who are invited to the convergence. The ad is expressed differently from the one posted on BB! news site. The words used are generally considered derogatory or pejorative but supplement the arguments made by the photos. The words are seen as empowering tools because they are used by people inside the GLBTQ community. This ad does not detail the workshops’ content. The Craigslist announcement describes the convergence as one big party. The ad asks the audience to join the sex, street, slumber, and dance parties. It does not ask them to create or take part in workshops, discussions, performances, and street action (Bash Back!, “Announcing,” 2008). The ad in Appendix A portrays a giant party. BB! associates partying with social protest. BB! also associates sexuality with their movement when they say that they are “sexy, queer anarchist” and they are looking for “hot queer radicals.” Although their movement is seen as disruptive, radical, and unwanted, they use characteristics of glamour, attractiveness, and eye-catching fun to describe themselves as a desirable group.

A simple description about the convergence appears on the flyer in Appendix B. The heading of the flyer defines the convergence as a radical queer/trans convergence, its location and date, and topics to be discussed. The lower left corner has a graphic of a fist holding a baseball bat. This indicates a sign of unity and that violence is a way to get their message across.

BB! flyers challenge the audience by asking them to finally undercut the military’s ability to fight. The audience is solicited to aspire to be a hero within the queer community. The graphic used has three military figures, two in black and one in pink, to represent a queer soldier. The pink soldier shows that as LGBT individual, they need to
act and participate with BB!. The flyer uses enthymeme, requiring audience members to fill in the argument of what an individual can do to fight sexual oppression.

The words on Appendix D flyer are laid over a photograph that shows drag queens protesting. Like the other flyers, it is advertising the convergence for activists within the queer community. The flyer is specific in its wording and is the least descriptive in what it is looking for. Of the four flyers, Appendix D relies on enthymeme the most because it provides the least amount of information about the convergence. Also, BB! utilizes the Internet to help organize and spread its message, but they routinely hold convergences and workshops. The panels vary from bondage, queer performance, public sex, to recruitment of radical queers. Convergence is about bringing together like-minded people who will work toward the same goal. BB!, as a new group, is trying to create an organization that shakes up the status quo by any means necessary.

Startling

The BB! protest message is aggressive and radical. The messages put forth by BB! ask members to reject the state. BB! rhetoric is also abrasive in how and where it is presented. BB! rhetoric and actions are “devoted to exposing, confronting, challenging, and smashing our oppressors to itsy bitsy pieces. We're fixing to tear this world of heteronormative control to shreds. We are everywhere and will meet you at every opportunity” (“Bash Back! News Responds,” 2008, para. 10). Also, BB! states, “so you want a real social war? Bring it! We can fuck you up while we're fucking each other. We pack heat in our bedrooms and on the streets. Bet you can't do that, KKK” (“Bash Back! News Responds,” para. 13). BB! uses a rhetorical posture that it is willing to do whatever is necessary advance their agenda.
Inappropriate

The BB! protest that took place at Mount Hope Church included vandalism ("BB! Lansing," 2008; "Bash Back! Olympia," 2008; Martin, 2008). Vandalism does not help win over an audience but, in the estimation of BB!, is in step with a fight for liberation. Physical action is the most effective manner of message distribution, according to BB!. Aggressive actions are justifiable whether they are deemed illegal or not by the status quo.

Unsympathetic toward the Audience

The attitude BB! holds towards the audience creates friction because, "we’re not trying to change people’s minds, we’re trying to bend straight people to give us freedom—we’re fighting back" (France, 2009, para. 10). The BB! mindset towards the status quo is, "we’re going to stop them from preaching hate, stop them from creating an environment that’s unfriendly to gay, queer, and trans people. We’re not going to be nice about it – they’re not being nice about it” (para. 10). BB! rhetoric polarizes LGBT issues and forces the audience to either accept or reject their message. BB! makes it obvious that they are not audience-friendly. Their points of unity state that to accept BB! rules means that one must do whatever is necessary to spread its message. The message is speaker-centered and the audience needs to either accept the message and take the solution or remain part of the problem.

Ignores Social Norms

Vandalism, interruption of church services, and the threat of violence during a parade do not generate sympathy. Sue Hyde, director of the National Lesbian and Gay Task Force, stated in response to BB! actions, “This looks too much like something I
don’t want to be involved with…There’s plenty of hate in the world” (France, 2009, para. 8). In October 2009, the Human Rights Campaign headquarters was defaced in an action BB! refers to as “glamdalizing” with pink and black glitter bombs (Watson, 2009). BB! openly opposes the status quo and will challenge any person or group that they feel upholds the state and what it stands for. BB! refuses to follow the rules of the status quo because they find cultural and social norms oppressive.

**Gaining Attention and Notoriety for the Message**

The rhetoric of BB! polarizes because it forces the audience to make a choice. The protests at Mount Hope Church garnered them nationwide media coverage. But because of their protests BB!, has also been taken to court for their actions. BB! has gained attention through its message and actions within the LGBT community and movement.

**Location**

BB! members picked Mount Hope Church because its membership is large. BB! had also vandalized a Mormon church by spray painting anarchist messages and putting glue in the locks of the church (“Bash Back! Olympia,” 2008). At a PrideFest in 2008, BB! chose rhetoric that was hostile towards the organizers of the event and to the neo-Nazis who were counter-protesting the event.

**Offensive Rhetoric**

BB! puts their message and actions above the audience’s needs because they feel that their ideas supersede others. BB! demands that audiences respect their message no matter how, why, or where it is delivered (“About BB!,” 2008). They ask for respect for lesbian, gay, bi, and transsexual (LGBT) people. BB! uses overt sexual subtexts in the
promotion of their cause. A video of BB! members simulating sexual acts on the grave of anarchist Emma Goldman titled “BB! we’re getting sweaty: What are you doing?” was used to promote the convergence in Chicago. Promotion of the Summer 2009 convergence also used several sexual references. The actions of BB! ignore civic norms. Appendix E shows BB! disregard of gay pride festival organizers’ request to ignore neo-Nazi protesters. BB! uses offensive tactics because they believe their message and ideas represent a marginalized voice that needs to be heard.

The BB! mission is clearly stated in its points of unity. The message and ideas of the movement supersede the desires of the audience. Even the BB! name suggests that its violence offends and scares audiences. By contrast, their detractors within the LGBTQ activist community argue that violence and hate speech pollutes the gay agenda and slows gay rights progress (Watson, 2009, para. 12).

Language Used

BB! uses polarizing language to get the movement’s point across. The BB! Chicago MySpace page states that they are radicals, hooligans, and hypersexual (Bash Back! Chicago, 2009). The flyers used to advertise in Appendixes A, B, C, and D use direct language when advertising for radical queers, people to fight, and people in the sex industry. Language on their main information webpage, www.bashbacknews.wordpress.com, is edgy and aggressive. The posting titled “New York Queers Bash Back Against NYPD” opens with the statement “listen up bitches.” Calling the audience “bitches” is startling and can be seen as offensive and demeaning.

The posting “Bash Back! Raises Hell at Anti-Queer Mega Church” (2008) creates a dialogue that calls the church “deplorable and repressive” while describing the actions
BB! used at the protest as “wildly offensive”. As agitators, the language used separates the movement from the status quo (para. 5).

Visual Imagery

BB! uses visuals to help create identification. Many pictures of BB! members protesting have them wearing pink handkerchiefs or scarves in order to hide their identities. BB! protesters have a distinct physical appearance that allows the audience to associate them with the movement. Their flyers and handouts clearly identify them as a gay rights group. Appendix C shows the militant side of the BB!. Armed forces personnel represent the combative element within BB!. Appendix B uses the image of the hand with a club to signal aggressiveness.

Behavior

The BB! has been described as relying on fear as a protest strategy (France, 2009). They have also self-described their actions as “wildly offensive” (Bash Back! “Raises Hell,” 2008). BB! explicitly states in their points of unity and in posts on the BB! news site that status quo “rules” are to be avoided. BB! is a self-professed anarchist group and does not respect or care to follow social norms or rules. The BB! approach to message presentation is to make as much rhetorical noise as possible.

Westboro Baptist Church

When the first of many protests started in June 1991, WBC was an inconspicuous church in Topeka, KS. The first WBC protest took place at Gage Park in Topeka, KS because it was a known place for homosexuals to converge. “The pickets began after city officials and the news media ignored Fred Phelps when he told them the park was a hotbed of homosexuals and the site of frequent homosexual activity” (Taschler & Fry,
1994a, para. 18). The picketing created a backlash against the church’s intent of cleaning up the park (Taschler & Fry). The slogans used at the initial protest included “Gay Park” (it is Gage Park), “Watch Your Kids, Gays Troll this Park,” “This Park is Unsafe for Children,” and “Gays in Restrooms” (S.P. Roper, personal communication, May 1, 2009).

These modest beginnings, started locally, led to regional, and eventually national protests against homosexuality (Hively, 1994). The congregants of WBC are mainly made up of Phelps family members. Their doctrine closely follows Calvinist teachings, and the family members are firm believers in predestination (Tashchler & Fry, 1994b). To join WBC, potential members must convince the church that they are one of God’s unconditionally elected. WBC members and their pastor have since become one of the most reviled churches in the country, let alone in the world.

The church and Phelps were not always so despised. “[Phelps] remembers when he used to be popular. Medals he received from the American Legion for character, honor and courage as a high school senior hang on the wall of his workroom” (Mann, 2006, para. 29). Phelps even received awards from the NAACP in the 1980s for his work with minorities and their causes (Anti-Defamation League, 2009). Phelps was also appointed to attend West Point but had received the call to preach before he started attending (Mann, 2006). While living in Pasadena, CA, he received a degree in theology from John Muir College and was a contemporary of Billy Graham who held fire and brimstone tent revivals. Phelps moved to Topeka, KS, in 1954, and in 1955, WBC was founded (Mann, 2006). Phelps went on to attain a law degree and, in fact, is recognized as a supporter of civil rights since the 1960s (Lauerman, 1999). During that time, Phelps made his living as
a lawyer and filed over 400 lawsuits (Evans, 2002). He also ran for several offices in Kansas and was a supporter of Al Gore in his 1988 bid for president. WBC was well-known regionally for causing Maya Angelou to cancel a local appearance due the threat of a protest, and the costing of 600 jobs by writing letters to the Santa Fe Railway stating that Topeka was Sodom City, U.S.A. (Evans). It was the picketing of Matthew Shepard’s funeral in 1998 that gained them nationwide notoriety (Evans).

WBC feels that America is doomed, and that most of its citizens are going to hell because the country has fallen into depraved and sinful ways (Tashchler & Fry, 1994b). This sentiment is repeated by Phelps family and church members: “I’m not hyperbolizing. America is doomed” (Hollingsworth, 2006, para. 6). WBC’s view on Calvinism “insists on God’s perfect hatred for the unrighteous, among whom homosexuals are chief” (Tooley, 2006, para. 19). Phelps believes that his virtue is verification that WBC is advocating God’s higher truth to the public (Mann, 2006).

The location of their protests and the rhetoric they use draw attention to their message of “God hates fags.” WBC has protested at disaster areas, celebrity and military funerals, churches, universities, the Republican and Democratic National Conventions, and Gay Pride events. WBC is unique in that its members revel in the attention and hate that they draw to themselves and to their cause. “They make interesting subjects for newspaper stories” (Hively, 1994, para. 11). WBC has been successful in getting its message heard throughout the world. Public protests have become synonymous with Phelps and WBC. Their reasoning for protesting gays is “because they started it” (Taschler & Fry, 1994a, para. 14). According to Phelps, the other reason for protesting against homosexuality is “I’ve preached more and harder against adulterers than I have
fags. It’s just that’s on the front burner now” (Taschler & Fry, para. 15). WBC attaches homosexuality to every cause that it protests, whether or not the person or the event has any attachment to it. To WBC, America has accepted a homosexual agenda and, therefore, is a “fag-loving nation” that is doomed unless it changes its ways.

WBC members accept and enjoy the attention they receive when they protest. “The group counts on people getting angry at their large signs bearing anti-gay slogans. Westboro lawyers have sued numerous organizations and individuals claiming First Amendment violations” (Evans, 2002, para. 20). The protest messages of WBC are identified with the church. When they preach their message, they have accepted that they and their message are not popular. “Popularity is an unworthy goal” (Mann, 2006, para. 35). Their message, they believe, is worth the trouble it creates. Hatred directed at WBC drives the church (Mann). Phelps and his followers are powerfully persuaded that what I’m preaching is the only thing that will save this country. That’s what I’ve got to do, satisfy my marching orders so to speak. And the best chance anybody has of getting to heaven is to listen to this stuff I’m telling them. (Taschler & Fry, 1994b, para. 29)

They believe that they alone can save America’s spiritual, financial, physical, and overall well-being.

WBC takes the negative attention it receives and turns it into a positive. They believe the adage that any publicity is good publicity. When others protest against WBC, members see it as an opportunity to bring attention to their message that “God hates fags.” Shirley Phelps, Fred Phelps daughter, has said:
We love it, she said. Every time one of these chuckleheads comes up with another plan to try to do something about us, all they manage to do is make sure that our message drops like rain all over this nation and all around the world. (Hrechir, 2006, para. 5)

Other Christian groups fear that the WBC’s ability to “freeload media coverage” cast a negative association with Christianity (Braun, 1999). When WBC went to Duke University, officials from the university warned students to avoid confronting the church. Challenging WBC in person attracts media attention to their message (Tracer, 2009). The media attention, whether it is positive or negative keeps WBC in the news.

The primary goal of the 71-member WBC, led by Fred Phelps, appears to be garnering publicity for itself and its message. For this reason, the group directs its efforts at events that have attracted heavy news coverage, like the deaths of soldiers killed in wars or the victims of well-publicized accidents, or at venues, such as high schools, which are likely to generate large counter-protests and community outrage. (Anti-Defamation League, 2009, para. 6)

WBC wants its message in the face of the public at any cost. “Phelps makes a living by seeking publicity and by turning him into a martyr for free speech” (Kirkchick, 2009, para. 9). Media coverage of WBC is typically negative. The only positive coverage WBC gets is self-generated. Churches, towns, and individuals try to separate themselves from WBC.

Religious groups in particular have worked to create a divide between themselves and WBC (Badeaux, 2004). WBC has no connection with any other religious group (Anti-Defamation League, 2009). WBC protests and messages have isolated it from the
community they live in. Topeka residents feel that the attention Phelps receives is the real motivation behind his protest (Braun, 1999). The mayor of Topeka, to disassociate the city from WBC and its actions, “has made it a habit of sending letters to various communities where they show up. He tells other mayors that Westboro Baptist doesn’t represent Topeka” (Hollingsworth, 2006, para. 16). Phelps and his message are considered despicable, insane, loony, and inconsiderate (Mann, 2006; Tracer, 2009).

WBC’s tactics of protesting at military funerals has prompted the creation of legislation. Protesting at military funerals started in 2005 (Anti-Defamation League, 2009). The messages displayed at these funerals include “Thank God for Dead Soldiers” and “Thank God for IEDs.” The legislation that has passed is intended to limit WBC’s ability to disrupt funerals in 41 states. WBC was charged with and found guilty of infringing upon the right to privacy, which rendered an $11 million judgment against them. The church has also been banned from entering the United Kingdom. In February 2009, Fred Phelps and his daughter, Shirley Phelps-Roper, scheduled a trip to the UK to protest a gay youth group’s production of the play, *The Laramie Project* (Leach, 2009). Banning WBC was a decision that Home Secretary Jacqui Smith made because “both these individuals have engaged in unacceptable behavior by inciting hatred against a number of communities” (Leach, para. 8). Smith stated further that “The exclusions policy is targeted at all those who seek to stir up tension and provoke others to violence regardless of their origins and beliefs” (Leach, para. 10). The banning of WBC only fed their cause. “The British government has unwittingly connected him with a cause he only besmirches” (Kirkchick, 2009, para. 9). Actions taken by the status quo against WBC,
whether in the form of lawsuits, state or federal enacted laws, or counter protests, feeds more protests by the church.

WBC members fund their extensive protest travel schedule themselves; the church refuses to take outside contributions. “We do not ask for anything from anyone…And we will not take anything from anyone. We pay our own way” (Mann, 2006, para. 19). The church’s funds are generated by tithing from WBC members, and money it has received from lawsuits they have filed. There are at least ten lawyers who are members of WBC (Tooley, 2006).

The messages and places of protest have changed over time. As illustrated in Appendixes H, I, J, K, L, and M, the earliest slogans were practically banal in comparison to the later ones. The signs had few visual elements and were message-focused. The design of the signs was simple. The skull and crossbones in Appendix M are a crude drawing in comparison to the visual elements used in Appendixes N, O, P, and Q. The early signs had little or no visual elements and were message-centered slogans. The signs were not as divisive in comparison to their current signs. As WBC’s profile has increased, as well as its protest schedule, the signs have become more offensive in message and image. As illustrated in Appendixes N, O, P, and Q, signs now use fluorescent colors to draw attention. There is also greater use of visual imagery. WBC has added male figures suggestive of positions for anal sex to their signs. The sign in Appendix Q combines elements of visual confrontation visually with the drawing of fecal matter and in words the message with “Fags Eat Poop.” In comparison to their earlier example of “shame no pride…and God over threw Sodom” in Appendixes I and L, the current signs are more visually “violent.”
Like signage, WBC’s flyers have changed over time. Early flyers used both text and visual elements to present their message. The layout of the flyers has not changed over time. On the early flyers, WBC’s website, godhatesfags.com, is given, and on current flyers, there is a list of several of their websites. In a larger font with bold letters, there is printed a title of what WBC is currently protesting. There are also several Biblical quotes. Appendix R uses visual elements to emphasize its point with a decrepit soldier with pink triangles, gay pride flag, and a sign giving directions to gay bathhouses and bars. Appendix S is a flyer used in 2009 and has no graphics or pictures. The font is bigger, but it focuses more on why they are protesting. The flyers use direct quotes from the Bible to support its reasoning. The purpose of the flyers is to serve as news releases to local and national media outlets, informing communities that WBC is coming to their town to protest. WBC has been called racist due to the imagery it uses in its flyers (Appendix T). Over the years, the Anti-Defamation League has documented racist statements made by WBC members.

The layout of the site gives the audience six buttons to click at the top of the page: home, news, audio, visual, written, and blogs. The news button takes the audience to links to news stories, which are mostly about WBC protesting around the country. The audio button provides links to songs, sound clips, a debate, sermons, and hymns. Under the visual button is a video link that connects to the WBC website signmovies.net which features news and video clips. The site also provides press releases and flyers, transcripts of sermons, reports they have generated, and open letters to the reader. The blog is a regularly updated journal of how the protests went. There are also pictures of WBC members posing with signs.

The website provides quick access to picket schedules, flyers and press releases, and an online library at the top of the site. The library is where old flyers are posted, an open letter to President Obama, and an interview with Fred Phelps. The website helps provide an overall comprehensive view of the church and its interpretation of the Bible, life, and what makes a good Christian. WBC subscribes to its own manifesto called the “TULIP doctrine.” The tenets that they live by are total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of saints (Westboro Baptist Church, 2009). This is the only way to interpret and worship God; all other forms of worship only lead to Hell. Throughout the website, www.godhateshatesfags.com, are pictures of WBC members protesting and graphics of the signs on every page. WBC websites provide a platform for the message and ideas to an audience that is not bound by time or geographical boundaries.

Just like BB!, WBC maintains the stylistic elements within the rhetorical genre of shock rhetoric. WBC spreads it message over multiple platforms in order to try and reach
as many people as they can. They are persistent in message and method. WBC has no plans to change their methods or message. Appendices H through W will be used to explain how WBC uses stylistic elements of shock rhetoric.

Startling

WBC brings its message of “God hates fags” to not just LGBT-sponsored events but to funerals of high profile celebrities and military personnel, churches, and synagogues. Appendixes M through W represent signs that WBC use when protesting. Not only does WBC protest in unexpected sites, but the message is also unexpected. The visuals and rhetoric in the sign in Appendix Q are unexpected.

The flyers in Appendixes R, S, and T provide examples of startling style because of the harsh language and visuals used. The flyers “Thank God for Swine Flu,” refer to Martin Luther King as a “fag scam” and call the Vietnam Veterans Memorial filthy. The language and visuals are direct and harsh. The visuals used on flyers in Appendixes T and R are not flattering caricatures. The drawing of the military person in Appendix R looks emaciated and depicts the military as pedophiles. The flyer in Appendix T, contains a drawing of an African American female who is holding up a sickly baby. Both figures are represented with stereotypical large lips. Images used in the flyer summon racist stereotypes.

Inappropriate

WBC chooses to protest at the funerals of military personnel, celebrities, high profile individuals, and places of tragedy and worship. Ordinarily, these events are somber and reflective. WBC, however, uses these events to claim America is bowing to a
gay agenda. As such WBC does not follow prudent behavior by rejecting the unwritten rules of acceptable community standards.

Unsympathetic toward the Audience

WBC is inconsiderate of grieving families and traumatized individuals. As agitators, WBC’s rhetoric is unpleasant, polarizing, and unsympathetic to the audience situation. Appendix T, for example, is not sensitive to the struggle for civil rights and the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King. Sexual undertones debase Dr. King with unflattering stereotypical pictures of blacks. The language and images is divisive, and forces audiences to make a decision.

Ignores Social Norms

WBC protests throughout the United States. The rhetoric of WBC states that the United States accepts LGBT lifestyles which undermines Gods laws. Any of the WBC examples in the Appendixes show that they ignore prudent behavior by exhibiting out-group behavior.

Gaining attention and Notoriety for the Message

The WBC message “God Hates Fags” has been constantly used since the mid-1990s. Their message and protests have gained national notoriety, but their message is not viewed as a popular one. WBC’s rhetoric raises the ire of the audience and media. The church is organized around the idea that it should be well-known and even hated for its rhetoric.

Location

WBC protests at funerals because they feel that it is at funerals where the audience may examine their own mortality. Not only are funerals considered an
imprudent protest site, but WBC also interrupts the social norms like protesting at funerals, churches, and sites of tragedy. The rhetoric is unapologetic in its presentation of God’s truth as interpreted by WBC.

**Offensive Nature of the Rhetoric**

As agitators, WBC combines rhetoric with controversial protest sites to create uproar amongst audience members. Appendixes N, O, P, Q, U, W, and V use the word “fag” to relate it to the military, churches, and the court system and state that God hates and is damning the audience. The sign used in Appendix V, with the reference to those who have died in Iraq and Afghanistan, acknowledges that God is the cause of their deaths. WBC signage shows no respect for those who have served in the military.

The rhetoric and attitude of WBC do not adapt to the audience. WBC is concerned with spreading its version of a Bible-based message and as agitators WBC claims to be speaking for God. The rhetoric, like in Appendixes V and T, is viewed as more important than the audience.

**Language Used**

Appendixes H through X have examples of language that polarize issues dealing with religion, sexuality, families, civil rights, and the court system. WBC uses derogatory terms, such as “fag” and uses them to describe a group or organization. This language is divisive due to the situation that it is being used in.

**Visual Imagery**

WBC uses the image of figures such as those seen in Appendixes N, O, P, and U to indicate sexual activity between two men. This is a popular image used by WBC. The image of the skull and crossbones indicates death, and that the LGBT is a lifestyle that
leads one to a quick death, such as the image in Appendix R of a decaying soldier. The graphic in Appendix V illustrates that their rhetoric uses those who have died in Iran or Afghanistan as currency for WBC protests. The imagery reinforces WBC’s language.

**Behavior**

WBC is unapologetic in challenging the social norms of the status quo. They present their message indiscriminately. Using the Bible to justify shock rhetoric, their protests upset audiences more than persuade. Individuals attending a funeral do not expect to see the phrase “U.S. Marines” with the visual image of two men having sex. WBC also sings songs at the protests about soldiers dying due to God’s judgment and how everyone is going to Hell.

The rhetoric of BB! and WBC is nonconventional, abrupt and counterintuitive to logic. The protest methods that both BB! and WBC have adopted challenge societal norms and conventions. BB! and WBC are persistent with their message and tactics. Both groups radicalized their rhetoric in order to grab headlines at that audience’s expense. The groups and the movements that they support are not about recruitment, but publicity. The more publicity a message receives justifies its shocking presentation.
CHAPTER IV
SHOCK RHETORIC

Several steps were undertaken to identify a genre of shock rhetoric. A description of the genre was generated that defined and formulated theoretical paradigms. The process of the description involved four steps: (a) examine the similarities in the rhetoric used; (b) find artifacts that occur in similar situations; (c) discover what characteristics are shared by the artifacts; (d) formulate and organize principles of shock rhetoric. The implementation of the preceding steps will ensure consistency in the genre’s identification. The generic criticism of shock rhetoric should enlighten the understanding of offensive speech and its impact.

Description of Shock Rhetoric

Shock rhetoric is the polarization of an issue that is manifested by startling, inappropriate, or distasteful behavior, discourse, images, offensive language, or text that is unsympathetic towards the audience; it does not follow social norms of behavior to gain attention and achieve notoriety. When presenting their message to audiences BB! and WBC offer two different, shocking views of homosexuality. Exposing the function and theory of shock rhetoric requires several steps. First, I will describe and discuss the substantive elements of the shock rhetoric genre. Next, I will compare the characteristic of BB! and WBC to those of shock rhetoric. Finally, an evaluation of the rhetoric of BB! and WBC will be compared to the characteristics of shock rhetoric.

Stylistic Elements

Startling

Shock rhetoric entails surprising discourse or conduct. It surprises the audience because of the unexpected nature of the rhetoric. The nature of shock rhetoric is
aggressive as it disregards expected norms. An example of a startling expression would be a racial epithet such as “fag.”

*Inappropriate*

Inappropriate rhetoric is ill-suited to an occasion. It is imprudent, for example, even though it is customary for the clergy to ask if there are objections to a couple’s union at a wedding, it is expected that no one will speak out because to do so would be inappropriate. Inappropriate rhetoric is tasteless and unbecoming to a situation.

*Unsympathetic toward the Audience*

Shock rhetoric lacks sensitivity or sympathy because it disregards the audience’s norms of prudent conduct. The message is unpleasant and may add conflict to the situation. The message is objectionable and forces the audience to make one of two choices; to either agree or disagree. The speaker either fails to adapt to the message to the situation, or refuses to accommodate the audience.

*Ignores Social Norms*

The group or individual utilize images and language that ignore social norms. For example, the message ignores what is best or appropriate, and the protesters act outside cultural norms. Protesting at a military funeral defies social norms. Shock rhetoric often violates the community’s mores.

*Gains Attention and Notoriety*

For a group to claim rhetorical success, it needs to acquire the audience’s attention. Groups, therefore, justify shocking rhetoric because it draws attention to their cause. It is about getting a message widely known to the public and not about getting the public to support its message.
Location

Shock rhetoric occurs in unexpected places and times. It would be fair to say that a church congregation does not expect to have people interrupt their service. Location is important because shock rhetoric interrupts standards and social norms.

Offensive Nature of the Rhetoric

Offensive rhetoric does not respect the rhetorical situation. Offensive rhetoric may include obscenity, distastefulness, and ridicule.

Language Used

The language of shock rhetoric is confrontational. The language used does not allow for middle ground. The language is unexpectedly coarse and abrasive.

Visual Imagery

Shock rhetoric uses banners, costumes, pictures, or images as part of its message. Disgusting imagery is also found in handouts and on websites. Shocking imagery is used to forcefully convey the group’s message and mission.

Behavior

Shock rhetoric challenges social norms. Shock rhetoric is behavior that is considered unacceptable and is outside the bounds of well-reasoned arguments. Shocking behavior includes yelling or screaming at bystanders. This can also involve noisy disturbances, obscene, abusive, or profane language, written or oral.

Substantive Elements

The elements that define the essence of shock rhetoric include organizing principles, values and ideals, identification of an enemy, polarization, and notoriety.
Shock rhetoric, as a concept, alters the purpose of rhetoric to include creating awareness by any rhetorical means necessary.

Substantive elements make up the content of shock rhetoric, including organizing principles, polarization, values and ideas, identification of an enemy, and attention-getting notoriety. This core substance of shock rhetoric helps explain and understand how it alarms audiences.

**Organizing Principle**

Shock rhetoric appears in print, verbal, and computer mediated venues. The organizing principles of the genre of shock rhetoric involve a specific type of behavior. Social norms of behavior are ignored and violated. The rhetoric disrupts the social norm of otherwise civil events and situations.

The success of shock rhetoric is not measured by how many people it persuades, but by the media attention it gains. BB! and WBC selectively pick where they are protesting and only choose places that will draw attention to their message. Appendixes F and U present offensive visual and written elements that challenge patriotic notions and social mores of respect for the dead. The artifacts of Appendixes W and T represent startling elements that challenge the audience’s notions of what is acceptable behavior and social norms.

I found that both BB! and WBC have combined unique rhetorical tactics with mainstream methods of persuading an audience. Both organize their message to ensure that they are understood. BB! makes sure that people interested in joining their movement follow “points of unity” (“About BB! News,” 2008). They openly describe themselves as a group seeking liberation (Bash Back! Chicago, 2009). BB! advertises for a specific type
of person. The flyer distributed at the Mount Hope protests with BB! viewpoints.

Appendixes E, F, and G show how BB! presents its rhetoric using traditional means of protest. BB! presents its message in an aggressive fashion. The banners that BB! flaunts in Appendix E state that they will kill “fascists” who stand in their way. The fliers for the Summer 2009 convergence advertise for specific individuals to attend, as illustrated in Appendixes A, B, C, and D. BB!’s pink bandana, black shirt, and pants costume gives their message a pseudo paramilitary feel. BB! spreads their message by any means necessary because they feel that as oppressed people they must adopt the techniques that get results. If that requires the use of violence, then so be it.

WBC organizes their rhetoric around the Bible and God’s word. WBC see themselves as a vessel of God who dictates how, where, and when they protest. Their message is a warning about the consequences of sexual wrongdoing. WBC protests because they fear for the audience’s eternal damnation. It is their duty as God’s servants to protest and share their message. Their belief that WBC was chosen to present God’s word is the reasoning behind their aggressive rhetoric. WBC protests against those who mourn at funerals or memorials because they believe are damned to hell (Martin, 2009).

BB! and WBC use core concepts and principles to help guide their message. Both groups’ ideologies are used to justify their methods and message. Shock rhetoric helps the audience associate the message with the group. I found that the organizational principles shape and define messages. How, where, and the intent of the message informs the audience of the movements intentions and goals. The organizing principles of BB! and WBC are specific in where they protest and rhetoric used. When WBC arrives at a
funeral, the church is looking for a reaction; BB! sought a similar reaction when they interrupted services at Mount Hope Church.

Polarization

Shock rhetoric is divisive because it forces an audience to choose sides. It also reinforces the identity of groups. Polarization is the effect that creates schisms between the speakers and the audience due to the extreme factions that it causes. BB! and WBC use polarization as a dividing line between the message and the audience, giving the audience no middle ground to choose from.

The rhetoric of BB! and WBC lacks middle ground. Both groups confront audiences with imprudent rhetoric and tactics. The language, visuals, and behavior they use are divisive, and polarize issues. Polarization occurs because BB! and WBC challenge LGBT issues of legislation and enforcement and both groups advocate for a significant change in the status quo. The actions of BB! and WBC bypass normative means of persuasion.

Appendices E, F, and G exhibit BB!’s aggressive rhetoric and protest methods. As agitators, BB! takes a hard-line approach regarding hostile language. They threaten audiences who do not agree with their message. Appendixes C, E, F, and G are examples of militant attitudes of BB!.

Their language choices, such as “radical, queer anarchists” and “queer sex gang” help define who BB! are and inform the audience of what their mission is and where they are in relation to the status quo. BB! does not describe itself as part of mainstream and there is no middle ground. Either an audience is in solidarity with BB! or is a part of the state a and component of the problem.
Audiences are confronted with WBC rhetorical acts that challenge a community’s social norms. WBC has become uniquely identified as the church that hates “fags.” The message of damnation is common among religious groups.

WBC shock rhetoric is tied to the ideology of its followers. The rhetoric and the behavior of WBC challenges the audience at emotional times, forcing the audience to face the message of damnation. WBC justifies the invasion of private moments as a freedom of speech issue, thus creating a polarizing conflict with the audience.

Values and Ideals

Values and ideals motivate rhetors. Ideologies are expressed through slogans and manifestos of a movement. For example, WBC are identified by their message that God hates fags. The slogans motivate members within a movement and justify their involvement and protesting. I found that the values and ideals presented illustrate specific in-group behaviors, boundaries, and moral foundations that are used. BB! and WBC offend people with their tactics and rhetoric, but the hostility to their movement helps validate their behavior and strategy within the movement.

The rhetoric of BB! and WBC motivates their membership base and justifies their protests. BB! points of unity decree that it is acceptable to use any means necessary to spread their message. Within their values and ideals, BB! members advocate the use of violence and vandalism, or “glamdalizm.” BB! insists that the use of force, whether physical or rhetorical, is a serious threat not to be taken lightly (France, 2009). As an organization, several BB! chapters have vandalized churches, interrupted church services, and advocated the use of violence against those who disagree with their lifestyle choices (France). Appendixes E and F demonstrate their hard-line stance and militant rhetoric. As
one BB! member stated, “We’re not going to be nice about it—they’re not being nice about it” (France, para. 11). BB! has entrenched its values within its ranks and rhetoric.

WBC has protested homosexuality since 1991, guided by its interpretation of the Bible and the five points of Calvinism: (a) total depravity, where sin plays a part in peoples life, (b) unconditional election is that God has chosen those to make it into heaven according to his own will, (c) limited atonement argues that Jesus died for those chosen to go to heaven, (d) irresistible grace is the calling to salvation that cannot be resisted, and (e) perseverance of saints, those elected to heaven cannot lose their salvation. Appendixes H, J, K, L, and M illustrate early use of Bible verses and Calvinist ideologies in their rhetoric. WBC protest methods, based on a strict interpretation of the Bible, have increasingly become hostile since Gage Park. In the handouts in Appendixes R, S, and T, there are numerous citations of Bible verses to justify and explain why the 2009 H1N1 virus happened, how Martin Luther King is being kidnapped by the LGBT movement, and why the Veterans’ Monument is wrong. Using the Bible helps entrench the followers’ beliefs and justifies their protest rhetoric. Both BB! and WBC justify their rhetoric as a high moral stance.

Identification of an Enemy

Shock rhetoric identifies those who are obstacles to the status quo. Shock rhetoric names institutions or individuals and challenges their institutional practices. Identifying an enemy helps form their collective identity and in-group behavior. BB! and WBC protests explicitly point to the status quo as the enemy. Individuals who disagree with the rhetoric of BB! and WBC are perceived as enemies inasmuch as the audience is either in support of or opposes the message.
As agitators, BB! and WBC needs an enemy to help justify each movement’s rhetoric and actions. The enemy is anyone who supports the status quo. The obstacle that prohibits BB! from achieving its goal is the oppressive nature of the State. Appendix E shows BB! recognizing the neo-Nazis who were protesting at gay pride parade as preventing and oppressing them. The “points of unity” directly say that those in power are repressive and must be challenged (“About BB! News,” 2008). The BB!, membership actively opposes the status quo and rejects its power structure (“About BB! News”).

Just like BB!, WBC’s enemy is the status quo. WBC perceives that the state has adopted a homosexual agenda. Appendixes N, O, U, and W identify several enemies like the military, court system, the church, and the public at large. According to WBC the rejection of God’s word is an inherent barrier that prevents the rejection of LGBT lifestyle. The tone set by the language as well as the visuals is adversarial and says provocatively “you are either with us or against us.” Anyone who fails to literally interpret the Bible is viewed as an enemy. The “enemy” is the catalyst that motivates their protests. The enemy motivates the protests, rhetoric used, and the group identity.

**Achieving Attention and/ or Notoriety**

Shock rhetoric may or may not persuade the audience, but it garners attention. Shock rhetoric seeks publicity in order to expose its message to audiences. The more media attention that a message obtains, the more recognizable the movement becomes.

The rhetoric of BB! and WBC has gained the attention of the public and media. BB! do not require LGBT leaders to acquire attention (France, 2009). The protest at Mount Hope created considerable notoriety, which resulted in a lawsuit. BB! has grabbed attention and sparked debate within the LGBT community about how BB! actions and
rhetoric hurt more than helped their issues. BB! tactics and shock rhetoric helped raise the group’s profile among both the LGBT community and mainstream arenas. The more publicity BB! gains from media outlets, the more awareness they generate for the causes and issues that they support.

WBC is transparent regarding what it intends to protest. Wherever church members appear, there is media coverage and counter protests. The church operates on the premise that its message should be well known (Martin, 2009). Members are compelled to spread the message to as many people as possible even if their rhetoric falls on deaf ears. The publicity raises public awareness of WBC and its message. Not only do their protest sites attract attention, but the language and visuals help create notoriety. To WBC, it is about communicating in an honest fashion. Slogans that have grabbed headlines include “God Hates Fags,” “God Blew up the Troops,” and “Fags Eat Poop.”

*The Purpose of Shock Rhetoric*

Shock rhetoric’s purpose differs from that of traditional rhetoric. Shock rhetoric challenges a classical or traditional understanding of rhetoric. Despite this, there are many similarities between traditional rhetoric and shock rhetoric. Both use language effectively, influence the conduct of the audience, and make persuasive arguments. The comparison between traditional means diverge with respect to approach and results. There are also differences in how *pathos* (emotion), *ethos* (credibility), and *logos* (logic) operate.

Shock rhetoric does not look to create pity insofar as it offends the audience’s sense of identity. Its purpose is to make an audience aware of the group’s. Shock rhetoric requires a speaker who is willing to use any means necessary to get the audience’s
attention. Pathos makes the speaker’s point appear more emotionally appealing than those of the status quo. In traditional rhetoric, pathos is used to create sympathy by presenting the speaker as a sensible and caring person. The aggressive use and nature of the language and visuals in shock rhetoric do not create a sympathetic or gratifying message. Typically, shock rhetoric mocks the audience. No benefit accrues an audience member witnessing a WBC protest rally as its message disregards their beliefs and feelings. Emotional appeals such as “eternal damnation” offend more than embrace the audience’s. Shock rhetoric uses emotional appeals at times that are inappropriate for a particular audience.

Shock rhetoric approaches the concept of credibility differently. Traditional rhetoric relies on good character and establishing trust between an audience and speaker. Audiences are accustomed with traditional protests and rhetorical tactics. Though the audience may disagree with the movement using traditional tactics they know what to expect with regard to their protest strategies and messages. Most audiences come to expect shock rhetoric at a WBC protest site. Clearly, shock rhetoric does not establish credibility with non-believers.

Logos, used in its customary sense, appeals to reason. Shock rhetoric does not rely on inductive or deductive reasoning to justify its arguments. Rather, shock rhetoric relies on polarization. The statements and claims of shock rhetoric presented to the public strike most as worthless propositions. The messages catch the audience off guard. For example, when BB! interrupted the services at Mount Hope Church, it was not a likely way to persuade the audience. Shock rhetoric is illogical when contrasted against modes
of reasoning. Social norms and community standards are ignored because they restrain the movement’s message.

Shock rhetoric does not observe traditional or even rational means of trying to persuade an audience. The message is deemed more important than consideration of the audience. Shock rhetoric does not adapt to audiences. Rather, it challenges them.

In traditional rhetoric, the rhetor speaks in an appropriate forum. Presenting one’s message in a receptive environment is prudent. Typically, shock rhetoric does not occur in ideal forums, however. Shock rhetoric generally occurs in hostile, uninvited, and surprising places; the audience is usually unreceptive. Frequently, the message is lost due to the danger of the situation. Shock rhetoric does not create sympathy for a speaker.

Shock rhetoric captures the audience’s attention because it polarizes the message. The attention shock rhetoric receives increases the public’s awareness of the movement. The WBC message has become synonymous with protest and shock rhetoric. The “attention probably just adds to the problem, though. If the media paid them no attention for all intentions and purposes they would not be part of the public consciousness, beyond their obnoxious appearances at funerals” (Killian, 2009, para. 13). The use of shock rhetoric uniquely benefits the group. Shock rhetoric helps cement in-group behavior. The attention shock rhetoric receives helps link it to the movement.

Lawsuits and counter protests justify the movement’s claim that there is an enemy. Shock rhetoric is seen as a means to an end, as a way to get their message to the public. Also, the message is not shaped by the audience, but by movement’s cause. Users of shock rhetoric are motivated by the movement’s message. The group or individual
message is more important than the audience’s adherence to social norms. This is why shock rhetoric startles; it is inappropriate or offensive to an audience.

By refusing to follow social norms the movement is not restricted by prudent behavior or codes of conduct. This enables them to use shock rhetoric indiscriminately. The tactic facilitates audience discussion. Observing prudent behavior would limit their media coverage.

Due to the language and visuals of shock rhetoric there are also differences between it and traditional rhetorics. The goal of hate speech and shock rhetoric is to offend an audience. Hate speech adapts its message to the audience, to its ideals and cause. A user of shock rhetoric is indifferent whether or not an immediate audience endorses the message. Both use strong language, but shock rhetoric is more aggressive in its tone and attitude. Shock rhetoric expands our understanding of how the rhetorical process operates. Traditionally, rhetoric is audience-centered and seeks change; shock rhetoric seeks attention.

Comparison of Styles and Substances

Although BB! and WBC present two different viewpoints regarding homosexuality, there are similarities. Both groups present an ideological or dogmatic point of view. BB! and WBC rhetoric presents the point of view that the audience has only two choices: agree with the message or remain a part of the problem.

BB! and WBC both use rhetoric to define their protests. BB! uses slogans like “These Faggots Kill Fascists” and “Militant Queers Outta the Closet” as seen in Appendixes E and F. Sayings used by BB! help define that they are a pro-LGBT organization who are not afraid to confront those who threaten the LGBT community.
Words like “kill” and “militant” imply they are ready to use violent action. BB! rhetoric is aggressive and proactive. Their language suggests consequences for those who disagree with them.

Slogans like “God Hates Fags” and “Fags Die and God Laughs,” help define WBC as a religious oriented group. The language used by WBC also illustrates the consequences of deviant behavior. Their words are concentrated on the eternal salvation of a person’s soul and are in opposition to what WBC refers to as the acceptance of the gay agenda in America.

BB! has a militant, pro-LGBT position while WBC maintains an anti-LGBT stance: both groups’ strict messages draw attention to their causes. Their rigid positions present the audience with a choice: agree or disagree. The repercussions to disagreement or rejection of the message depend upon the groups or individuals using shock rhetoric.

Their rhetoric is abrasive. WBC uses “fag” in a derogatory fashion to describe the military, court system, churches, universities, individuals, and entire countries. Appendixes N and O are examples of WBC using “fag” to condemn groups and organizations. WBC has used similar signs at protests at Catholic churches, synagogues, the University of Nebraska, the University of Michigan, Virginia Tech, Sweden, the United States, and the United Kingdom. WBC correlates everything to homosexuality and how sinful it is in the eyes of God. They also project and portray a God that is vengeful and unmerciful. WBC uses these protest signs and slogans as warnings. BB!, just like WBC, uses signs and slogans to create an uncompromising tone. The slogan “Queers Bash Back” or words such as “kill” or “militant” suggest that violence may be
used as a form of coercion. In both cases, the signs and slogans help create identity for the group that is using them.

BB! and WBC use coarse elements of language and meaning to give emphasis to their messages. The abrasive elements of shock rhetoric comprise offensive and startling language, visuals, and select protest locations charged with meaning. Their messages are not adapted to audiences, which makes BB! and WBC unsympathetic. The offensive nature exists in the visuals and language used by BB! and WBC. The signs present a visual reminder, in WBC’s point of view, that a man having sex with another man is an unnatural act and an abomination against God. It clearly grabs an audience’s attention because sex attracts people. Appendix U uses imagery of the dead soldiers coming back from Iraq by using a military airplane with the phrase “Toe Tags.” WBC uses fallen soldiers coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan as a sign that America needs to reject homosexuality and its sinful ways. WBC also targets minority groups, stereotypical portrayals of blacks with large lips, oversized teeth, and dark skin. Similar images are used by the KKK and neo-Nazi groups. The mention of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights movement in conjunction with the images stirs up racial stereotypes and oppression of minorities.

Being abrasive draws attention to a group’s cause. BB! claimed responsibility for the November 2008 protest at Mount Hope Church, which drew attention to the movement. The protest included a couple “making out” in front of the congregation, the throwing of fliers, and shouting “Jesus was a homo.” They also vandalized churches by gluing their locks and spray painting the buildings with anarchistic slogans and symbols (“Bash Back! Olympia,” 2008). When questioned by other individuals and LGBT
organizations about BB! and their tactics, a BB! member posted the following statement on the BB! news site “you can say whatever the fuck you want. But there are consequences, and if you mess with queers, you should expect to get fucked up” (D., 2009, msg. 4).

The rhetoric of both groups espouses anti-authority attitudes. BB! asserts itself as non-hierarchical group of individuals with a common goal of fighting oppression through all available and necessary means ("A Response to," 2009). BB! claims the United States is the root of oppression for all peoples. Action needs to be taken against the status quo. The fliers in Appendixes A, B, and C were made for the summer 2009 convergence and advertise that BB! wanted to disrupt the status quo. BB! reinforces this position through imagery of BB! members brandishing weapons.

The anti-authority attitude held by WBC is shown in Appendix V with the upside down American flag. The upside-down flag represents a distress signal, and WBC uses it to show that the U.S. suffers as a result of the homosexual agenda. WBC has also stomped on the flag at protests. It uses signs that show disregard for authority at the protests with phrases such as “Fag Court,” “Fag Marines,” “Fag Navy,” “Fag Soldiers,” and “Fag Veterans” to name a few. Other signs include “Thank God” and “Pray for Dead Soldiers.” WBC produces video news on its website where they blame the court system, military, police, and politicians for the problems in America. Both groups’ rhetoric frames the state as oppressive to them and to their cause.

BB! and WBC rhetoric has generated lawsuits. In 2007, WBC was sued for invasion of privacy with the intention to cause emotional distress. The suit was filed by a
father whose son’s funeral was protested by the WBC. A lawsuit was filed against BB! in 2009 for protesting inside Mount Hope Church.

Though different in message, the rhetoric of BB! and WBC maintains several similarities. BB! and WBC protest rhetoric is provocative, inappropriate, and offensive. Both groups’ rhetoric is not only alike, but occurs in similar situations. BB! and WBC use fliers, the web, and signs to communicate their message. Both groups rationalize their means of protest and their use of the internet to spread messages, posting videos, updates stories, and present news. Signs are used to visually display their ideologies. The signs and fliers stand as shocking relief to what is considered prudent.

*Artifacts that Occur in Similar Situations*

BB! and WBC protests the acceptance of homosexuality. Their shock rhetoric tactics force audiences to make a choice either to support it or reject it. The language used by both groups challenges social norms. WBC and BB! use abrasive and startling language and images to present their message to the audience. Words like “stupid,” “fags,” “toe tags,” “kill,” “queers,” “bash,” and “hate” are used as emotional spears to gain the audience’s attention. The use of those words creates a rigid atmosphere of hostility. Examples include WBC’s use of “fag” in a derogatory manner, or BB! as “satanic trannies” at Mount Hope Church protest. The language used by both groups is startling because it is not expected. No one goes to a funeral expecting to see someone holding signs thanking God for the passing of the deceased. Similarly, when going to church, no one expects offensive language and visuals. Both groups violate social norms by disrupting events intended as moments of reflection and solace.
Characteristics Shared by the Artifacts

BB! and WBC both justify their protests. At the Mount Hope protest, BB! tossed fliers to explain to the audience that they interrupted the service as an outreach to gay individuals who might be closeted homosexuals. The fliers WBC used to help explain why and what they are protesting can be seen in Appendixes R, S, and T. The fliers draw links between the sinfulness of homosexuality, military, civil rights, and epidemics. Both groups also use computer mediated means to rationalize their protest methods. BB! uses its news site as a clearinghouse, a central point of communication and discussion for all of the BB! membership. The site is also used to rationalize. The BB! news site is updated regularly with information about upcoming events, issues, and videos. Like BB!, WBC uses its website godhatesfags.com as a place to justify its actions and protests. The website announces their protest schedule, and includes a bulletin board for news about WBC and items related to its protest mission.

BB! and WBC justify their language, images, and protests as necessary actions to fight the oppressive nature of the status quo. BB! protest against the state because it oppresses LGBT individuals. They also believe the U.S. is oppressively heterocentric, that it has ignored a gay agenda. Both groups protest the status quo’s treatment of homosexuals. WBC believes that the actions of the state justify their use of shock rhetoric.

The WBC protests and messages attract attention in every city, college, or country that it visits. WBC protests and slogans have also gained the attention of organizations like the Anti-Defamation League and the Southern Poverty Law Center. WBC is banned from entering the United Kingdom, and several states have passed laws regulating
protests at funerals. Churches, religious organizations, and the city of Topeka, KS, where WBC resides, have worked to dissociate themselves from WBC. The profile that WBC has developed through shock rhetoric has overshadowed the civil rights work Fred Phelps was known and acclaimed for in the 1960s.

Notoriety is the goal of both groups. WBC pickets at high profile events such as the funeral of Dr. George Tiller, the abortion doctor who was shot and killed during a Sunday morning church service (Hegeman, 2009). Their presence drew counter protesters and media coverage (Hegeman).
CHAPTER V

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Research Questions

What makes shock rhetoric a genre? The principal elements of behavior, discourse, images, language, and text are factors that distinguish shock rhetoric as a rhetorical genre. Classification of the aforementioned elements helps define this unique form of rhetoric. Shock rhetoric ignores the audience; it spreads its message at any expense. The genre of shock rhetoric creates a framework of outrage between the speaker and audience.

How do BB! and WBC fit into the genre of shock rhetoric? Their rhetoric is startling because of how and where they protest. Both groups have demonstrated at churches, funerals, or places of tragedy. These are places where protesting is not the norm. The language and images used in the rhetoric at these demonstrations are a nuisance. Audiences are unaccustomed to being yelled at or, referred to as “fag.”

Both groups’ rhetoric is inappropriate and offensive. BB! and WBC present the audience with rhetoric that is aggressive in its tone. Shock rhetoric challenges the status quo and standards of normality. Shock rhetoric does not adapt to audiences. The audience can either agree or disagree, and if they oppose either BB! or WBC, they are threatened with consequences. BB! uses intimidation and threats. The audience is presented with limited response options.

The BB! and WBC break implicit and explicit norms. Both groups insist that they will continue to shock audiences. Both groups take their rhetoric to atypical places. The
way BB! and WBC use shock rhetoric is counterintuitive to the norms of effective persuasion.

The goal for BB! and WBC is not to gain popularity, but to get attention and notoriety for their causes. Shock rhetoric does not consider an audience’s sensibilities. The places of protest are chosen because they present an opportunity for media coverage. If BB! marched at gay pride parades only, their message would reach a limited audience. Thus, they protest at more conventional, conservative sites. In addition, the text and visual elements used garner attention. BB! and WBC are groups who are centered on their message. Neither group has regard for popularity. Therefore, they elect to use shock rhetoric as a means of communicating.

*Implications*

The genre of shock rhetoric provides a new way to evaluate rhetorical messages. Shock rhetoric permits insight to past and current challenges to the status quo. It reconsiders the rhetoric of radical groups and individuals who employ imprudent protest tactics.

In addition, shock rhetoric brings a different perspective to traditional forms of rhetoric. Traditional rhetoric adapts a message to an audience’s needs or beliefs in order to persuade its membership. Shock rhetoric, by contrast, ignores adaptation insofar as it is not driven to persuade, but to raise awareness. Shock rhetoric is about gaining attention to a message, which challenges the traditional notion of rhetoric and persuasion.

Polarization can be achieved through the use of shock rhetoric. Polarization personalizes attitudes on issues by “fracturing opinion into two opposing views” (Liu & Latane, 1998, p. 103). Shock rhetoric entrenches the splintering of ideas. Shock rhetoric
helps cement in-group and out-group behavior within movements. The use of shock rhetoric helps agitators create a distinctive message for both members and the audience in order to identify with the movement. Shock rhetoric polarizes because of the language, images, and discourse that ignore social norms. Thus, the shock rhetoric produces polarization which is divisive by its nature.

BB! and WBC aggressively protest in order to deliver their messages to the public. Though shock rhetoric does not adapt to audiences, it needs an audience to spread its message. Success is dependent on startling behavior. Political advantages and disadvantages accompany shock rhetoric as a protest strategy. Its shortcomings include its offensive nature, inability to create sympathy for message or movement, and incapacity to attract a large membership to the movement. When a rhetor’s message offends everyone, it amplifies the possibility of opposite views. Presenting message-centered rhetoric limits the audience’s choices to either agree or disagree. It does not leave open the possibility of middle ground.

The nature of shock rhetoric surprises audiences. This is accomplished by limiting options and forcing decisions, which creates tension between the speaker and audience. Prudent rhetoric expects an audience to question a message. Shock rhetoric violently confronts an audience with dogmatic points of view. The message and its delivery are such that they turn audiences away. Shock rhetoric does not produce an atmosphere that serves as a recruitment tool for the movement. The movement gauges rhetorical success by the public’s notice of its message. Since shock rhetoric polarizes and ignores the audience, it limits access to the movement.
The advantages accrued by implementing shock rhetoric include the ability to generate publicity, create identity for the group, and entrench its membership base. The ability to attract attention to the movement means that outsiders respect or agree with their message. The group or individual is not worried if the message is popular. Shock rhetoric simply wants an audience to pay attention to the movement’s message.

Shock rhetoric’s capacity to seize the audience’s attention stems from its rejection of the social norms of behavior. Not being limited to prudent behavior gives the movement freedom to do whatever it takes to rhetorically influence the audience. In conventional forms of rhetoric, a movement is limited in what they think they need to do to get the audience’s attention. Not being constrained by rules is liberating and offers a unique chance to reach an audience in a surprising and bold manner.

Shock rhetoric is polarizing, which creates identity for the movement. Not only does the rhetoric help create and explain what the movement is about, but it also justifies members’ behavior. The rhetoric’s polarization creates a mentality that pits members of the movement against the status quo. Unity within the movement is created through shock rhetoric as it justifies their behavior of individuals or groups. The use of shock rhetoric also motivates, and cements their commitment to the cause.

In addition to shock rhetoric’s central goals of getting the audience’s attention and getting the message out to the public, it is also a way to view and examine rhetoric. It does not create agreement or sympathy for the movement. Instead, it is influential because the audience takes notice and pays attention to the movement. When witnesses respond to shock rhetoric, it has succeeded. Shock rhetoric may not produce converts, but it does generate publicity.
Groups or individuals use shock rhetoric for several reasons. Adopting shock strategies may increase the profile of a message otherwise overlooked for its lack of attention-seeking strategies. Shock rhetoric separates a movement from groups with traditional messages. Many groups and individuals have argued that gays have rights, or that homosexuality should be rejected. BB! and WBC arguments are not unusual or different from other groups, but it is the presentation and language that makes their protests unique. WBC’s shock rhetoric has raised the movement’s profile among the public. The polarization of the rhetoric clearly delineates a line between followers and the status quo. Reasons to use shock rhetoric include the need for fame, notoriety and increased awareness for the movement, frustration with traditional methods, or to “shake up” the status quo. Using shock rhetoric depends on the needs and goals of the movement.

The use of shock rhetoric has implications when using an aggressive rhetorical method. Ignoring the audience’s needs and social norms polarizes an issue. Shock rhetoric can help create a movement’s identity, but it can also stigmatize it. For example, WBC is known as a church that protests at funerals and preaches hate. Another issue is backlash and the rejection of its message. There is often a strong possibility of civil and criminal legal actions. In addition, groups open themselves up to not only verbal attacks, but to physical altercations and endangerment because of the nature of shock rhetoric. The attention that shock rhetoric creates may pose a danger for a movement’s membership. Shock rhetoric clearly expands the conversation of rhetorical theory. Shock rhetoric adds to our understanding of the “dark side” of the communication process.
Theorizing and defining shock rhetoric helps create meaning and understanding of the phenomena.

Shock rhetoric is effective in getting an audience’s attention. To maintain the audience’s attention, movements need to continually alter their shock tactics. WBC began protesting at a local park and then moved to gay pride events, funerals, and disaster areas. To keep a high profile, WBC altered their message and protest locations. Individuals or groups are only as shocking as their last event. The problem is how to keep and renew the public’s attention. WBC’s use of shock rhetoric, however, has raised the profile of a small church to worldwide recognition.

Shock rhetoric uses all available means of persuasion, but challenges traditional notions of credibility. It also raises the question of whether or not a message actually has to persuade an audience to be considered rhetorical. Although shock rhetoric does not persuade audiences in the traditional sense, it nonetheless has an effect on audiences, whether it be positive or negative.

*Future Research*

Future research on shock rhetoric has several possibilities. Historical studies of movements using shock rhetoric may reveal tactics specific to a given era. In addition, examining the role technology plays in social movements may prove beneficial or a barrier to shock rhetoric. Also, critical distinctions between successful and unsuccessful shock rhetoric could be analyzed. Research could likewise examine how shock rhetoric shapes the status quo. How do people respond to shock rhetoric? How does shock rhetoric unify an audience? Does shock rhetoric eventually lose its effect on an audience? What type of groups consistently use shock rhetoric and does it help or hurt their cause?
APPENDIX A

ADD PLACED ON CRAIGSLIST

Queer Anarchists Seeking Hot Radical Queers

Reply to: radicalqueer2009@gmail.com
Date: May 28th - 31st, 2009

Hey ya'll!

We're a gang of sexy, queer anarchists.

We are looking for other hot queer radicals to join us for a "radical queer convergence" (read: sex parties, street parties, slumber parties and dance parties) in Chicago this May.

We're seeking: queers, tranny-tags, trans girls and bois, taggots, buil dykes, faries, sluts, whores, genderqueers, androphiliacs, bears, twinks, butches, femmes, drag royalty, street queens, rioters, queer insurgents, burlesque performers, deviants, criminals, anarchists and all allies.

Join us for some sexy, raunchy, riotous queer fun!

bashbacknews.wordpress.com

Queer Anarchists Seeking Hot Radical Queers, Bash Back, personal communication, February 2, 2009
APPENDIX B

RADICAL QUEER/TRANS CONVERGENCE FLYER

Radical Queer/Trans Convergence, Bash Back, personal communication, March 12, 2009

workshops
discussion
performance
dancing
street action
caucusing
@ people of color
@ wimmin
@ trans

queer liberation
anti-racism
bdsm
sex work
self defense
DIY health
radical hirstory

radicalqueer2009@gmail.com
bashbacknews.wordpress.com
APPENDIX C
BASH BACK CONVERGENCE FLYER

BE ONE OF THOSE QUEERS YOU’VE HEARD ABOUT:
UNDERMINE THE ARMY’S ABILITY TO FIGHT!

2009 BASH BACK! NATIONAL CONVERGENCE

MAY 28-31

TO ASK OR TELL: RADICALQUEER2009@GMAIL.COM

Be one of those queers you’ve heard about, Bash Back, personal communication, March 12, 2009
WANTED:
RADICAL QUEERS

2009
NATIONAL
BASH BACK!
CONVERGENCE

MAY 28-31

FOR MORE INFO: RADICALQUEER2009@GMAIL.COM

Wanted: Radical queers, Bash Back, personal communication, March 12, 2009
APPENDIX E

KILL FASCISTS PRIDEFEST BANNER

APPENDIX G

BB! PROTEST IN FRONT OF MOUNT HOPE CHURCH

APPENDIX H

SIGN USED AT GAGE PARK PROTEST

God Hates Gays, S.P. Roper, personal communication, May 1, 2009
APPENDIX I

SIGN USED AT GAGE PARK PROTEST

Shame No Pride, S.P. Roper, personal communication, May 1, 2009
APPENDIX J

EARLY PROTEST SIGN

Sodomy is Moral Filth, S.P. Roper, personal communication, May 1, 2009
Sodomy is a Crime, S.P. Roper, personal communication, May 1, 2009
APPENDIX L

EARLY PROTEST SIGN

And God Over Threw Sodom, S.P. Roper, personal communication, May 1, 2009
APPENDIX M

EARLY PROTEST SIGN

Gay=AIDS, S.P. Roper, personal communication, May 1, 2009
APPENDIX N

CURRENT PROTEST SIGN

APPENDIX O

CURRENT PROTEST SIGN

APPENDIX P

CURRENT PROTEST SIGN

APPENDIX Q

CURRENT PROTEST SIGN

APPENDIX R

NEWS RELEASE BY WBC

Westboro Baptist Church
(Since 1955)
3701 SW 12th
Tomball, TX 77305
713-771-0328

May 30, 2001

NEWS RELEASE

WBC to picket Fag-Vet Monument, Cathedral City, Calif., July 4, in religious protest/warning: “God is not mocked!”

(Rush -- Rumsfeld's Rumpangers -- is continuing Clinton's sodomization of the Military)

This filthy Fag-Vet Monument is a testimony to this "deeply corrupt" (Hez 9:9) gay nation that is now irreversibly doomed. 2 Chron 36:11. It's illegal for fags to be in the Military, but in fag-dominated America, the rule of law is dead. Fags don't die in combat, so much as of AIDS and other fag-bowel syndrome and enteric diseases -- like the typical American soldier below. WBC will burn the flag and pour urine in symbolic contempt for this filthy fag symbol of sodomized America -- whose population now consists of fags and fag-enablers. Rom 1:32.

TUESDAY, MAY 30, 2001

Gay veterans get monument

CATHEDRAL CITY, Calif. A gay veterans group has unveiled a monument to remember gay service members killed in combat.

The activists who pushed for the monument say it is the first of its kind.

"It's a turn-of-the-century event," said Dennis Paltz, a former Air Force staff sergeant who served in Vietnam. "I had hoped for this but you could have never thought it would become a reality in the 70s, 80s or 90s. It's fabulous."
APPENDIX S

NEWS RELEASE BY WBC

Westboro Baptist Church
(WBC Chronicles – Since 1955)
3701 S.W. 12th St. Topeka, Ks. 66604 785-273-0325 www.GodHatesFags.com
Religious Opinion & Bible Commentary on Current Events

Wednesday, April 29, 2009

NEWS RELEASE


THANK GOD FOR CURSING THE WORLD WITH SWINE FLU.

Yes. Same-sex marriage may be the last straw - the trigger of God's wrath - that will vomit mankind and his filthiness, en mass, straight from this earth into Hell - as God promised; to wit: "Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things (i.e. Lev. 18:1-23); for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you; And the land is defiled; therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants...For all these abominations have the men of the land done, and the land is defiled." Lev. 18:24-27.


WBC WILL PICKET THE GOD-CURSED, SWINE FLU DEAD!

Swine Flu, S.P. Roper, personal communication, May 1, 2009
NEWS RELEASE BY WBC

Westboro Baptist Church
3701 SW 12th Street
Topeka, Kansas 66604
785-273-0325
www.godhatesfags.com
Religious Opinion and Bible Commentary on Current Events

January 15, 2002

NEWS RELEASE

WBC to picket Topeka’s Martin Luther King fag scam -- a hoax by the Topeka fag/fag-enabler community -- whereby filthy fags fraudulently liken their vile, sinful, voluntary sex crimes to being black. Listen up, fools! God Almighty never said being black was abomination!

"Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind; it is abomination. Neither shalt thou lie with any beast to defile thyself therewith." Lev. 18:22,23. Death penalty. Lev. 20:13,15; Rom. 1:32.

Moreover, Kansas law does not make being black a crime!

But fag sex and dyke sex is criminal conduct in Kansas!

Yes same-sex sodomy is a crime. KSA 21-3505: "Criminal Sodomy is sodomy between members of the same sex, or with an animal." Touting so-called "gay rights" is promoting crime!

Blacks who allow fags to hijack King offer seed to Molech!

Fags -- sterile as the Dead Sea -- must recruit and seduce!

“They profane the Name of thy God"
Lev. 18:21

“And thou shalt let no man of thy seed pass through the fire to Molech, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the Lord." Lev. 18:21

Whose Dream Is It? Coalition
The wet dream of fags!

"I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed; they are prophers of the deceit of their own heart which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams." Jer. 23:25-27.

Gullible blacks offering their seed to fags, worship Baal-peor (Priapus, god of fags)

“...And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor (Priapus, god of nakedness & phallic worship), and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.” Num. 25:3; Psa. 106:28; Hos. 9:9,10

The mendacious machiavell of mongrel muckrakers identified by The C-J fag rag 1/13/02 as sponsors of MLK hoopla, are Hell-bound fags.

Martin Luther King Fag Scam, S.P. Roper, personal communication, May 1, 2009
APPENDIX U

WESTBORO BAPTIST CHURCH PROTEST SIGN

APPENDIX V

WESTBORO BAPTIST CHURCH PROTESTING

APPENDIX W

FRED PHELPS AND WESTBORO BAPTIST CHURCH MEMBERS PROTESTING

Westboro Baptist Church
(Since 1955)
3701 SW 12th St. Topeka, Kansas 66604  785-273-0325  www.godhatesfags.com
Religious Opinion and Bible Commentary On Current Events

July 21, 2002

MEMO ON THE CHURCH

Wherever you find organized Christianity in the New Testament, you find it in the form of a local, visible church, consisting of a small group of baptized-by-immersion-only people who meet regularly with all ages in one place at one time on the first day of the week, who walk orderly and without sexual irregularities as divorce and remarriage, who keep the Lord’s Supper with wine and unleavened bread only and allowing only those who are members walking orderly to sit at the Table and partake, administering their own affairs with full local autonomy and without any higher human authority, with a pastor who preaches the five points of Calvinism as the only Gospel and who preaches against sin, reproofing, rebuking and exhorting and warning all mankind to flee the wrath to come, and which is suffering persecutions and afflictions for the cause of God and truth in the earth;

and you don’t find it in the form of a Bible college or a theological seminary, or a Sunday School of little churches meeting in different rooms for different age groups, or a super church with hierarchical rulers of archbishops, district superintendents, cardinals, popes or any such human authority above the local church, or a Billy Graham-type multi-church crusade, or a so-called universal, invisible church, or a Youth For Christ Rally, or a foreign mission board, or a Focus on the Family-type Radio ministry, or a TV ministry — or any of these legions of extra-church religious groups, all of which have no authority from God Almighty to speak for Him or even to exist, and all of which therefore are Satanic frauds preaching Arminian lies.

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