

**Sticks and Stones V. Words:  
Examining The Possibility That They Are One And The Same**  
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Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me? Bullocks. The simple existence of this playground comeback is evidence against itself. If the harsh words of elementary school bullies honestly did not hurt, then why would we have to develop a snappy saying to reinforce the idea? Furthermore, if words do not hurt, why would this phrase have any impact on the bullies' behavior? After all, they are just words. An increase in anti-bullying programs in schools illustrates that, in fact, words do hurt and there are repercussions for those who are targeted. Just because we can see the cuts and bruises from sticks and stones quickly, does not mean the more latent harm from words is nonexistent. So why is it that we promote programs to stop bullying but then encourage children dealing with bullies to act like they are not hurt? This attempt to empower the victims of bullying comes from a good place I am sure; however, in the process it masks the internal harm caused by these antics. By creating this confusion, are we not just silencing the voices of those who need to be heard most while simultaneously producing an atmosphere of mixed messages for those who do pick on their peers?

Whether one views children as a product of their environment or just as little adults, it should not be too hard to see how this paradigm relates to the adult world today. While children are out on the playground either bullying, being bullied, standing by, or standing up, the "grown-up" behavior they are exposed to does not look all that different. Remarks ranging from innocent jokes between lifelong pals to direct discrimination of others have become common in our society. Just like the kids on the playground, these words can hurt as well; especially when individuals with strong attitudes decide to take action against their victims. This rhetoric can often be referred to as hate speech and with the influential power to significantly impact one's attitude towards whatever is being commented on, it can help promote a culture in which harassment is socially acceptable (Rozina & Karapetjana, 2009). Individuals who deliberately choose to act in such a way as to evoke hate in others should be held to higher degrees of accountability as they mature, with the expectation that they have gained a deeper understanding of the impact their behaviors may have. Adults who publicly engage in such behaviors provide children with numerous opportunities to learn stereotypes and discriminatory behavior, even if they are not exposed to them in their home.

As infants we learn to engage in social referencing, the action of relying on the expressions and behaviors of others to gain knowledge about unfamiliar situations (Dehart, Sroufe, & Cooper, 2004). We continue this behavior as adults by searching for and applying more information to determine our own attitudes. Unfortunately, adults often face just as many, if not more, contradictory influences as children do regarding acceptable behavior and speech. With the general public drawing a line for inappropriate and harmful comments at various points on a continuum and diversity becoming a prominent issue in today's globalized world, who is supposed to determine our common ground? Who should we look to for help? It seems that the individuals who are involved in the gathering and dissemination of this information would be valuable resources. However, when we are bombarded with conflicting opinions and arguments daily the decision making process becomes a bit more complicated.

The nightly news anchor may bring you a story of a local minority family destroyed by a hate crime that will forever remain a significant event in the children's lives, only to follow it with the latest story of how school officials are infringing on students' freedom of speech. The next morning, turning on the radio while driving to work, Rush Limbaugh is using openly hostile language directed towards minorities, women, liberals, or anyone he feels is responsible for running his country into the ground. Picking up the newspaper at lunch to catch up on some current events, you come across Paul Krugman's latest op-ed, in which he decided to make a 3-page list of the most recent illogical arguments coming from right-wing commentators. Attempting to find some sanity, you decide to check what politicians are saying. No luck there, you actually find them contradicting themselves before they even finish their sentence. Finally, you decide to take it to the courts to examine current legislation regarding the issue. Yet here you discover that even judges cannot agree on what constitutes hate speech, let alone whether or not it is harmful. Stuck between the First Amendment's promise of freedom of speech and the Fourteenth Amendment's promise of equal protection for all, the American courts must find a way to satisfy these seemingly conflicting values if hate speech legislation is to be implemented.

Since it appears that relying on others will not suffice, we must inform ourselves about these issues to make a decision. First, by examining the currently unprotected classes of speech we can discern the criterion that has led to their regulation. With this in mind, we can evaluate current hate speech legislation in order to establish a working definition and identify the common characteristics and consequences of this rhetoric. To illustrate how hate speech is impacting American society, I will discuss theoretical aspects of the transmission of hate as well as the contexts in which we can observe individuals employing hateful rhetoric. This will provide a deeper explanation of the consequences of hate speech and allow us to determine how this rhetoric may compare to those classes of speech which we find to be outside the realm of constitutional protection.

### **U.S. Historical Perspectives on Speech**

Reaching an agreement concerning what exactly our forefathers meant when they wrote that we could not make laws "abridging the freedom of speech" has been an extremely difficult journey over the last 200 years. Scholars have debated the meaning behind these words and the implications of their various interpretations for centuries. Some free speech defenders maintain that this right should be interpreted to include all speech and they support this notion with the claim that our ability to freely express our opinions without fear of punishment is beneficial to society (Downs & Cowan, 2012). Waldman (2001) posits that the benefits of deliberation involve its incorporation of democratic ideals, promotion of citizenship behaviors, and production of better policies. J. S. Mill also acknowledged the value of this freedom in his assertion that man does not deserve to have confidence in his opinion unless it has faced the criticism of others (Miles, 2011). Throughout the course of deliberation, one must be able defend their position against counterarguments to gain confidence in their opinion (Drew, Lyons, & Svehla, 2010). Restricting deliberation does not allow these opinions to be fully tested, leading speakers to lack justification for their belief.

While noting that this interpretation has the potential to allow for undesirable consequences, defenders propose that restricting the ability to speak freely limits the opportunities for oppressed groups to put forth their own views (Cowan, Resendez, Marshall, & Quist, 2002; Downs & Cowan, 2012). Nevertheless, we can observe that the freedom to express and promote one's opinion is vulnerable to misuse and has been employed in the past and present as a means to cause harm to individuals as well as entire groups. Without an environment of protected speech, individuals and groups must overcome the obstacles of broken discourse in order to voice their dissatisfaction and promote changes to the current social structure (Walker, 1994). Along with these precautions for regulating or not regulating speech, it is important to consider why other classes of speech are regulated since even historical "free speech advocates like Mill do not seek to protect 'speech' in whatever form but rather a certain class that is labeled 'free speech'" (Miles, 2011, p. 1). These arguments demonstrate the difficulties of regulating speech, since we must preserve the ability to deliberate and simultaneously ensure respect to those who need protection.

How can we continue to allow the necessary democratic practice of civic deliberation while also protecting groups that are vulnerable to oppression? Downs and Cowan (2012) suggest that an imbalance of power places vulnerable groups at an unfair disadvantage in such deliberations, which violates the Fourteenth Amendment's promise of equal protection. This imbalance is rooted in a deep history of unequal opportunities for minority groups and seems to undermine the great strides towards equality that have been made in recent years (Cortese, 2006). Scholars have also suggested that due to the way absolute freedom of speech has been misused to support this inequality, we should regulate speech that serves this purpose in respect of the Fourteenth Amendment (Downs & Cowan, 2012). One noteworthy counterargument to the regulation of speech addresses the concern that if hate speech was to be unprotected only when directed towards specified groups, the speaker's right to equal protection would then be violated (Becker, Byers, & Jipson, 2000). This case illustrates the complicated nature of designing laws that must meet the requirements of both freedom and equality. The United States has faced such situations previously and the classes of speech that are currently under regulation will provide us with some insight as to how the general public may feel about the meaning and reach of the First Amendment.

### **Currently Regulated Speech**

U.S. society has generally accepted the notion that while we are guaranteed certain freedoms, no law is absolute. Most free speech advocates will agree that even our freedom of expression is conditional, as we must account for the dangers of situations such as one yelling "fire!" in a crowded theater where no fire exists (Miles, 2011). This understanding of conditional free speech is common among other modern democracies and although the U.S. has implemented regulations on numerous classes of speech, hate speech is still protected by the First Amendment (Miles, 2011; Waldron, 2012). Currently the classes of unprotected speech include obscenity, breach of the peace, fighting words, and defamation.

Laws pertaining to obscenity include the regulation of both speech acts and written materials that are found to promote unwholesome ideals according to contemporary standards (Lenz, 2013). Legislation involving obscenity has often been challenged due to the broad

conceptions of what may be obscene and as we will see, many restrictions on free speech have faced similar difficulties (Lenz, 2013). Disorderly conduct laws may include a common example of regulated speech, breach of the peace. In this case, it may be deemed unlawful for one to incite anger and violence in a crowd (O'Neil, 1966). O'Neil (1966) discusses the applicability of a set of legal principles that attempt to define a breach of the peace as a speech act that is prohibitable when "the speaker intends to create disorder...[and] knows of the danger of riot" (p. 41). In his attempt to resolve the problems that arise from different understandings of the terms "intent" and "disorder", O'Neil (1966) suggests that we consider three elements of the speech act when determining the actual or potential danger present; these include the location, the character of the audience, and the nature of the disorder. A speaker in a public setting with a hostile audience that is geared towards creating danger in the community is more likely to be considered at fault for disturbing the peace than one speaking privately to an audience that may direct their aggression at the speaker.

Disturbing the peace leads us to the class of regulated speech known as "fighting words". Included in this exception are statements considered "to have so little social utility that they are not deserving of constitutional protection" (O'Neil, 1966, p. 44). Becker, Byers, and Jipson (2000) also acknowledge that speech failing to contain any "intellectual, philosophical, or scientific merit" (p. 36) is open to regulation since it does not serve society in a beneficial manner. The "fighting words" doctrine was set by *Chaplinsky v. New Hampshire* (1942). In this case the Supreme Court unanimously agreed that "fighting words", defined as words "which by their very utterance inflict injury or tend to incite an immediate breach of the peace", are harmful enough to be included with other classes of regulated speech. This definition allows for a range of interpretations, as "injury" was not defined as physical and can therefore be taken to include psychological harm as well as injury to reputation (Walker, 1994). Injury to reputation has the power to impact numerous areas of one's life whether it is directed specifically at the individual or a group they may belong to. Waldron (2012) proposes that it is this fundamental aspect of dignity that is challenged and undermined by hate speech today.

The regulation of defamatory statements illustrates another attempt at protecting one's reputation. Defamation laws aim to hold individuals accountable for any untrue and harmful statements made to a third party regarding another person (O'Neil, 1966). Similar to the injury that may be caused by "fighting words," defamation can be at the individual or group level (Waldron, 2012). This class of unprotected speech encompasses both the spoken word (slander) and the written word (libel) (O'Neil, 1966). Ability to prove that one suffered as a result of a slanderous or libelous comment is essential for pressing charges, but once again the nature of this suffering is not well defined. When a libelous comment is directed towards an entire group of individuals, as in the case of *Beauharnais v. Illinois*, it may be nearly impossible to fully recover from the damages. The Supreme Court recognized the criminality of distributing leaflets meant to characterize African Americans as dangerous, drug abusing rapists and upheld the decision that this act was beyond protection (Waldron, 2012). These instances of group libel foster the continuation of racism and stereotypes and raise suggestions that hate speech may fall into this category of unprotected speech (Waldron, 2012). Addressing this suggestion requires that we understand what the First Amendment is trying to protect and why various classes of speech are considered to be beyond that protection.

## The Spirit of the First Amendment

The ability to freely express one's concerns and ideas about society and its continued advancement is a prominent feature in our understanding of the First Amendment. Often conjuring up thoughts of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. or an idyllic American debate, there is an impression that this right should be respected with a sense of civility and honesty. Understanding that we must have a safe outlet for citizens to address and deliberate the social and political issues that concern them, the First Amendment permits an environment in which we are able to discuss such topics. This invaluable aspect of the First Amendment is crucial to the democratic process (Waldman, 2001). However, in order to ensure deliberation has a positive impact on society we must hold each other to certain expected levels of respect and open-mindedness. The language and rhetorical devices utilized in deliberation should explain one's point and critically analyze others' arguments, yet refrain from treating an opponent as if they are not worthy of the same consideration. This essence of civic responsibility and respect for others that accompanies the right to an unabridged freedom of speech will be referred to as the spirit of the First Amendment.

Our understanding of freedom includes "freedom from degradation, humiliation, battering, and other forms of violence to a person that denies one's full humanity" (Cortese, 2006, p. 139). Since it does not seem reasonable for a freedom that is regarded as a common source of American pride to be inclusive of a freedom to incite hate and harm towards others, language that does this will be considered to break the spirit of the First Amendment. Those who engage in such actions are often seen as unruly, disruptive, or rude by large portions of society. Analyzing these reactions of individuals who hear such remarks allows us to determine which statements are considered offensive and uncalled for. Waldron (2012) suggests that hate speech falls into this category due to the way it discredits one's dignity. As cultural norms of respecting diversity and promoting equality gain momentum in our increasingly globalized world, the individuals yelling from their soapboxes about the positive aspects of slavery or why a woman's place is in the home are more often seen as inappropriate and antiquated.

These reactions may be especially true when such an individual is expressing an opinion contrary to the laws and amendments that distinguish defining moments in American history, such as the changes brought about by the Civil Rights Movement. Through observations we are able to recognize that many Americans are proud of the changes that have been made to ensure their freedom and equal protection. However, the language used in speech acts that break the spirit of the First Amendment seem to violate the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Through efforts to provide protection from the harmful effects of speech that does not serve society in a beneficial manner, multiple classes of speech have been declared unprotected and subject to regulation. One of the largest problems with these regulations however, has been the difficulty of explaining the identifying features of each class. To help define and focus on what is meant by hate speech, I will present a variety of ways to identify hate speech in our environment.

## Identifying Hate Speech

By regulating speech that is considered obscene, threatening, or defamatory, the U.S. courts appear to agree with J.S. Mill's proposal that while you should be free to express your opinion, it is also expected that you respect certain limitations (Miles, 2011). Understanding these commonalities among classes of unprotected speech provides us with some of the knowledge necessary to further examine and discuss the legal status of hate speech. The current regulation of speech acts that evoke or advocate violence towards others indicates that limitations on free speech are partially dependent on their ability to harm others, physically or psychologically. It also appears that the social utility of a speech act must be taken into account when setting limitations. Before evaluating whether or not hate speech meets these criteria, we must define what is meant by the term "hate speech," decipher the common characteristics and consequences of such rhetoric, and determine which rhetorical devices qualify as hate speech.

## Defining Hate Speech

Defining hate speech has been a challenging obstacle for scholars across multiple disciplines. While this lack of agreement may create difficulties when comparing their works, we are provided with a broad range of conceptualizations from which to form a complete definition. Becker et al. (2000) address this issue at length in a discussion regarding the troubles with previous definitions and the weight that such a definition would carry if legislation were to be implemented. After careful consideration, hate speech is defined as "speech that inflicts emotional damage and contains inflammatory comments meant to arouse other individuals to cause severe social dislocation and damage" (Becker et al., 2000, p. 36). Though helpful in the context of their work, the wording of this definition can be understandably hazy for the majority of citizens that would need to abide by it.

In recent years, numerous modern democracies have had to face this challenge as they recognize and regulate the use of hate speech. Despite expected differences in the way each nation words what is being regulated, there are common underlying themes present in each definition (Patz, 2009; Waldron, 2012). As noted previously, any definition of hate speech used in this legally binding context must be carefully construed. Patz (2009) presents a comparison of multiple European and Australian regulations of hate speech, which when taken together support the view that insulting and hateful speech should be included with the classes of speech already considered unacceptable in society. A key feature in these regulations is the speaker's intent (Patz, 2009). Including the speaker's intended purpose as criteria for criminal behavior suggests that a sense of responsibility, not just for one's chosen action but also for their motive, is expected of citizens. Waldron (2012) also addresses the many definitions of European regulations and finds that the underlying feature uniting each definition is that the action must be deliberately meant to evoke hatred against a group of people in society through insulting, threatening, abusive, or demeaning rhetoric. This conceptualization of hate speech serves us best in the legal context; however, for the theoretical purpose of this paper hate speech will be inclusive of any speech act that denigrates an individual or group through the use of rhetorical devices that maintain or promote an unfounded negative view of the target.

This definition does not address the intent of the speaker since such speech acts can influence hate and harm towards others regardless of one's motivation. For this reason, it is important that we include even seemingly innocent remarks in our investigation of this rhetoric. The stage-developmental model of hate speech severity, put forth by Cortese (2006), supports this decision by its inclusion of unintentional discrimination. This acknowledgment of being able to offend someone without recognizing the impact of the remark is central to the definition presented here. These comments represent the roots of hate speech and illustrate how this rhetoric has become so ingrained in our culture that many do not even recognize the weight it carries (Niewart, 2009; Whillock, 2000).

In addition to this theoretical support, the exclusion of intent from the definition employed here serves a practical purpose. By examining hate speech on a continuum, we are able to analyze how both the comments that appear harmless and those that are justified by the claim that they were just jokes have a noticeable affect on our society. This justification may have worked as an escape clause in the past, but increasingly we are seeing that people are less willing to accept the idea that a speaker is not responsible for the harmful repercussions of their behavior (Niewart, 2009; O'Neil, 1966). We must recognize that there are many individuals who *will* interpret these comments seriously, especially when they come from individuals who hold influential positions in society (Niewart, 2009; O'Neil, 1966). The authority and power of these individuals presents a growing concern for many citizens, as the overwhelming presence of entertainers in news media outlets shifts the primary interest of journalism away from the public good (Denton, 2000; Drew et al., 2010). By increasingly blurring the line between entertainment and news some public figures have been able to escape the consequences of accepting responsibility for what they say by utilizing the claim that they were not being serious. Excluding malicious intent as a necessary requirement for hate speech renders this excuse useless and permits further analysis of these individuals and the influence of their public opinions. Before we begin examining the impact of hate speech however, we must first determine the identifying characteristics of speech that meet this definition.

### **The Characteristics of Hate Speech**

In response to our need to understand how certain rhetorical devices “maintain or promote a negative view of the target,” I suggest that these remarks are characterized by their ability to politicize social differences, inflame emotions, and create a breakdown in discourse (Waltman & Haas, 2011; Whillock, 1995; Whillock, 2000). The first characteristic of hate speech, politicizing social differences, is the most easily identifiable of the three. This characteristic can be seen frequently in the political rhetoric of many societies, particularly when leaders are motivated to “rally the troops” against a common enemy (Billig, 2003). Referencing social differences in discussions regarding political and social issues often promotes a view of an undesirable out-group, which can then be blamed for problems that the in-group faces (Waltman & Haas, 2011).

The creation and promotion of group identities both supports and relies upon the next characteristic of hate speech, the ability to inflame emotions. When faced with a threatening situation it is common for people to seek comfort in the knowledge that others are having similar experiences (Whillock, 1995). This is an important human tendency for the continuation of in-

groups and out-groups, as the energy and ability of a group is more powerful than that of the individual alone (Whillock, 2000). Through this empowerment, connecting similar individuals with one another facilitates the stimulation and arousal of emotions. Because individuals feel an increased desire to assert their own values when their validity is threatened, politicizing social differences and promoting a style of “us” versus “them” thinking may indirectly increase the use of hate speech (De Luca & Buell, 2005).

Politicized social differences and inflamed emotions work together to create the breakdown in discourse that serves as the third characteristic of hate speech. This breakdown can occur in two ways. First, when intense emotions such as anger and fear are felt by a group of individuals and directed towards another, the chances of engaging in open and effective discourse lessen (Whillock, 2000). Whillock (1995) describes how the cognitive pattern of “they harmed us, we blame them, they continue to threaten us, we must respond” (p. 38) does not allow for healthy discourse because the in-group is not receptive to differing opinions. Additionally, by accepting that the out-group is to blame, individuals continue to construct and promote the social differences forming the distinction between “us” and “them” in their daily discourse. This reinforcement marginalizes the out-group to the point that their voices are silenced (Cortese, 2006). Excluding these opinions leads to the second breakdown in discourse by creating a hole in effective deliberation.

These characteristics demonstrate how hate speech lacks the social utility O’Neil (1966) proposes as a necessary feature for constitutional protection. The ability to politicize social differences and inflame emotions acts as a catalyst for the use of speech that creates a breakdown in discourse. When a speech act impacts discourse in this way its social utility is lost, as it undermines the importance of deliberation among citizens. In addition to this harmful impact on our discussions of social and political issues, hate speech also parallels currently regulated speech in the way it harms individuals and groups.

### **The Consequences of Hate Speech**

Outside of deliberation, hate speech can influence the beliefs and behaviors of individuals and society at large. We first saw evidence of this in politicized social differences’ ability to influence in-group/out-group thinking and the arousal of emotions. These effects are less likely to be noticed in society since their more subtle nature indirectly influences the more prominent outcomes of hate speech. Here I will present four main consequences of hate speech that are observable in numerous social contexts: reinforcement of stereotypes, stimulation of hate, establishment of dominance, and production of fear. This collection of social repercussions is far from exhaustive, however I propose that they operate as underlying conditions for more aggressive and direct reactions to hate speech.

**Reinforcing stereotypes.** As one of the more apparent consequences of hate speech, individuals today encounter an outrageous number of stereotypes on a daily basis. These misguided assumptions concerning entire groups of people can result from negative constructions of an out-group and centuries of bigoted attitudes (Waltman & Haas, 2011). The continual use of stereotypes and labels in social discourse further promotes the internalization of such beliefs, which can isolate the group from society (Cortese, 2006; Waltman & Haas, 2011;



Whillock, 1995). Isolating an out-group is helpful for maintaining stereotypes but it also prevents the target from participating in deliberation, leading to the undesirable effect of a breakdown in discourse (Whillock, 1995; Whillock, 2000). Hateful messages and images are able to maintain negative stereotypes by endorsing a belief that the target group is dangerous, worthless, or guilty (Cortese, 2006; Goldhagen, 2009; Waldron, 2012).

**Stimulating hate.** Suggesting and encouraging the idea that there is a group of individuals who are directly responsible for a threatening situation, or are at least capable of producing one, can provoke individuals to direct their anger towards those held accountable (Whillock, 1995). This consequence of hate speech is related to the characteristic of inflaming emotions, which, as stated previously, can produce quite powerful effects. Acting upon one's frustration and anger through the use of hate speech can spread denigrating messages among citizens, as demonstrated by the continual growth of hate groups (Ajinkya, 2012; Becker et al., 2000). We will see later that hate groups have been utilizing the abundance of modern communication channels and that doing so has increased their ability to reach potential members and to advance hateful messages (Becker et al., 2000). This stimulation of hate in others adds to the difficulty of opposing hate speech. Considering "that the vast majority of hate crimes are accompanied by hate-group rhetoric" (Holland, 2009, p. 6), it is important that we recognize that hate speech has the power to instigate violence in some individuals. Waldron (2012) addresses this consequence in his analysis of hate speech legislation by acknowledging that most of the definitions employed in the legal context are concerned with hate as an effect of the speech act, not as a motive.

**Establishing dominance.** One consequence of hate speech that can also be understood as a motive for the speech act is the establishment of dominance over the target group. Speakers that spread hate messages often "use language as a means to socially control members of subordinate groups" (Cortese, 2006, p. 141). Whether this is the intended purpose or not, those who are targeted suffer from both sociological and psychological consequences (Becker et al., 2000). Attempts to establish dominance over a group of individuals assist in the breakdown of discourse (Whillock, 2000). By using rhetoric that belittles and undermines one's sense of security in society, those who use hate speech influence many targeted individuals to retreat from public discourse voluntarily (Waldron, 2012; Waltman & Haas, 2011; Whillock, 1995; Whillock, 2000). This self-imposed segregation fuels further politicization of social differences and social isolation, along with the harmful psychological consequences of internalizing a negative stereotype of oneself (Waltman & Haas, 2011; Whillock, 1995; Whillock, 2000). These effects can be seen across a lifetime, as in the case of stereotype threat, having even been observed in young children attempting to scrub their dark complexion off of their skin (Cortese, 2006; Kassin, Fein, & Markus, 2010).

**Producing fear.** One of the many emotions aroused by hate speech is fear. This psychological consequence is somewhat unique in that it occurs to individuals in both the in-group and the out-group. By repeatedly encouraging in-group members to view the out-group as threatening, hate speech not only elicits feelings of anger and hate but also a fear that the out-group may cause further disruptions to social life (Waltman & Haas, 2011). This consequence interacts with the reinforcement of stereotypes and stimulation of hate by creating an environment of distrust between groups (Whillock, 2000). Out-group members may develop a

sense of distrust and a fear of their attackers when hate speech is intimated and used for terrorizing and humiliating the target (Downs & Cowan, 2012; Waldron, 2012). Forming a fear of the attackers is especially understandable when the symbols and language of hateful messages reference historical incidents of violence and oppression against one's group (Whillock, 2000). This tactic has the power to remind groups of the harm they have faced previously, which is then compounded by the strong connection between hate speech and hate crime today (Cortese, 2006; Waldron, 2012). However, conjuring up memories of the past is only one of many approaches to spreading hate messages. Now that we have explored the characteristics and subtle consequences of hate speech, we can examine the multiple rhetorical devices that may be used in hate speech.

### **The Rhetoric of Hate Speech**

Determining the impact of hate speech requires us to identify specific comments and understand how they can produce harmful effects. We can easily recognize the face value of speech acts such as "Can you hand me that fork?" but what about the underlying assumption that one has the influential power to make another person behave in a desired way (Rozina & Karapetjana, 2009)? This 'linguistic manipulation' used to influence and control the actions of others is a common characteristic of political rhetoric (Rozina & Karapetjana, 2009). In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle identifies three types of speech that serve this purpose: deliberative rhetoric, forensic rhetoric, and epideictic rhetoric (Auerbach, 2011). Deliberative rhetoric is used to articulate dangerous situations that should be avoided, forensic rhetoric assigns guilt to a target, and epideictic rhetoric is a more formal declaration of praise or blame (Auerbach, 2011). These manipulations of language are employed in hate speech to allow for the harmful characteristics and consequences that spread and intensify hate. Here we will examine the rhetorical devices that often meet our definition of hate speech.

**Nicknaming.** We learn early on that calling people names is not nice because it can hurt their feelings, but what happens when adults continue this behavior? Adults, especially those in the media, are consistently in charge of assigning names to objects, events, places, and even other people. Nevertheless, while we take the time to pick a suitable meaning for a child's name, we rarely analyze the meaning and impact of the name of an activist group. The names selected as referents for the in-group and out-group assist in forming their public identity, as well as the identity of the members, by strengthening the connections among in-group members and establishing a common enemy (Muir, 1995). When choosing a name for the in-group it is important that the name frame the members and goals in a desirable way. As Muir (1995) demonstrates, contrasting the "rescue movement" with the "child-killing movement" illustrates how anti-abortion, or pro-life, groups have used names to influence the perception of their group's motive and their underlying beliefs. Nicknames also appear frequently in hate speech as a way to describe the target as evil, dangerous, or subhuman (Goldhagen, 2009). Linking the target group to something detestable, such as using "*inyenzi*" (cockroaches) when speaking of Tutsis in Rwanda, associates the target with the idea that it is something to avoid, something to exterminate (Cortese, 2006).

**Metonymy and metaphor.** Similar to nicknaming, metonyms and metaphors also rely on mental associations to influence attitudes and opinions. In the process of nicknaming, metonymy may be used as a rhetorical device by employing a connection between two related

concepts to suggest a specific association (Rozina & Karapetjana, 2009). We can observe this strategy at work when the suffix –gate is used in the name assigned to an event. By calling the alleged affairs of Prince Charles and Bill Clinton “Camillgate” and “Monicagate” respectively, the public’s perception of their behavior is tied to a historical political scandal (Rozina & Karapetjana, 2009). These metonyms indicate to society that there is a concerning issue at hand, much like how the use of war as a metaphor indicates that there is something we must fight against.

Metaphors influence our perception by creating a structured framework for our understanding of the situation (De Luca & Buell, 2005). When we speak of a “war on drugs” it is expected that the public understands the “war” is a figurative reference to our attempts to stop illegal drug use (Rozina & Karapetjana, 2009). However, as De Luca and Buell (2005) point out, citizens still form a literal interpretation of the expression. Continuing with the example of the “war on drugs”, the use of this metaphor associates drugs and drug users with dangerous enemies that we must take military action against. This constructed relationship supports the division between “us” and “them” while also encouraging citizens to develop a fear of such an “enemy”.

**Analogy.** The analogy is another rhetorical device that is often used to encourage fear and hate. This is also a common strategy of anti-abortion groups, as they frequently compare the actions of abortion clinic doctors to those tried at Nuremberg (De Luca & Buell, 2005). By proposing this comparison, speakers attempt to suggest that the meaning of one event is equivalent to the other (De Luca & Buell, 2005). These comparisons can also be used to associate the in-group’s identity with something positive. We can see how pro-life groups have also used this strategy to further separate their own behaviors from those of pro-choice groups in De Luca and Buell’s (2005) example of Randall Terry, founder of pro-life activist group Operation Rescue, presenting himself and his followers as analogous with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement. In this case, the speech act is not working directly as hate speech but rather as a way to frame the group in an attractive light.

**Demonization and dehumanization.** Rhetorical devices that suggest the members of a target group are less than human or inherently evil serve a dual purpose in hate speech as well. By lowering the target’s perceived worth, demonization and dehumanization simultaneously spread hate messages and desensitize the public to the harm that is being done. Demonization is a rhetorical device that spreads the belief that the target possesses inherently evil qualities and should therefore be avoided, feared, and hated (De Luca & Buell, 2005; Goldhagen, 2009). These messages can be directed towards groups, individuals, or policies and often has the effect of identifying the target as the source of a common problem (De Luca & Buell, 2005). The act of associating a target with dangerous qualities supports the construction of hatred and fear throughout society (Goldhagen, 2009).

Dehumanization also has this ability although its purpose is to produce a belief that the target is in fact subhuman, or rather that they lack the essential human qualities needed to deserve respect, rights, and protection (Goldhagen, 2009; Waltman & Haas, 2011). One form of dehumanizing a target relies on speaking of them through the use of labels, often referring to them as non-humans. This act of objectifying the target allows the dominant group to distance itself from the subordinate group by cognitively assigning the hate to a thing rather than a person

(Muir, 1995). The effects of dehumanization have even been found to impact our neurological conceptualizations, as research participants who were shown pictures of extreme out-groups processed the images in the same way they processed images of inanimate objects (Houghton, 2009). We can also see examples of this device in the nicknames that have been used to reference oppressed groups in the past. Goldhagen (2009) presents numerous instances of dehumanizing nicknames including Jews being called rats and Tutsis referred to as cockroaches. Dehumanizing the target is an important step in producing violent reactions, as demonstrated by its key role in Mugesera's genocidal plan for Rwanda (Cortese, 2006; Houghton, 2009).

**Eliminationism.** The last rhetorical device we will discuss concerns the communication of eliminationist beliefs. Remarks that fall into this category call for the elimination of entire groups of individuals (Holland, 2009). The belief behind these messages is often loud and clear: the target is the cause of our problems and we must destroy them or their ability to inflict further harm on society (Goldhagen, 2009; Niewart, 2009). Not only are these comments suggesting an extreme reaction in contrast to pursuing a democratic solution, they also have a notably violent nature (Niewart, 2009). It is important to keep in mind that the transmission of eliminationist beliefs does not always lead to the extermination of groups; however, it does create a cultural acceptance of violent attitudes and when it is not opposed, permission for individuals to act upon these attitudes (Goldhagen, 2009; Niewart, 2009). Environments that support behaviors that direct hate and violence towards groups of individuals begin with the dehumanization and objectification of the target (Niewart, 2009).

Eliminationist rhetoric has had a consistent presence in American history as our society has shifted blame from one group to another over the course of hundreds of years (Niewart, 2009). Though the target group may change over time, we can observe the power of these messages in the hateful beliefs of younger generations. The continued existence of racist and sexist attitudes in today's young adults demonstrates that equality efforts alone are not sufficient to neutralize the hate in our society. If the answer to a peaceful coexistence has not been found in our promises of equality or our movements towards acceptance, how should we direct our future actions?

### **Theoretical Explanations for the Transmission of Hate**

As I have discussed previously, hate has the ability to sneak into our everyday lives and influence even the most unintentional of hateful behaviors (Cortese, 2006; Niewart, 2009). Since hate speech has such a pervasive presence in our culture, just telling people about its harmful effects is unlikely to successfully reverse deeply held beliefs. Therefore, it seems that the most effective route is to prevent the next generation from forming these attitudes in the first place. By analyzing how hate speech and hateful beliefs develop and influence individuals, I will demonstrate that the innate and subtle aspects of human social behavior allow for the continuation of hate; that in order to avoid the extreme effects of hate, we must recognize and challenge the features of our society that support and promote its survival. Our social needs as humans drive our desire to engage and form connections with others by identifying with a group (Cortese, 2006). The groups we belong to, along with those we do not, impact the norms and beliefs we adhere to through the process of cultural transmission (Duckitt, 2003). These two features of social behavior are essential for the characteristics of hate speech to produce the

consequences I have outlined above; however, they are also essential for a number of other survival behaviors. We cannot rid our society of these tendencies, but we can attempt to understand how they could allow for undesirable effects.

### **Group Identification**

Regardless of choice, from the moment we are born we belong to a great number of groups, including those based on our gender, race, ethnicity, generation, and so on. In most cases, the demographical characteristics ascribed to us at birth will contribute to our identity for the rest of our lives. These features have often been used to distinguish in-groups from out-groups and are easy for children to learn early in life (Cortese, 2006). As we grow and learn about the meaning of being a member of such a group, our inclination to view our own group in a better light than that of others becomes more apparent (Cortese, 2006). This tendency is known as ethnocentrism and it is influential in the development of our worldview (Cortese, 2006). As the culture of the group to which we belong becomes our own, the beliefs held by members impact how we view other groups. Our early introduction to in-group favoritism could very well affect our group identification later on in life.

Group identification is the subjective understanding of membership to a group (Huddy, 2003). We can analyze group identification from two perspectives: social identity and interdependence (Huddy, 2003). When we recognize that we have common interests with a group but do not personally identify as a member, we view membership simply as a source of our interdependence with others (Huddy, 2003). Those who also accept the beliefs and attitudes held by other members of the group view the group as a part of their social identity and as membership to the group gains value, members are more likely to internalize these opinions (Huddy, 2003). The value we place in such membership is motivated, in part, by the desire to enhance our self-esteem (Houghton, 2009). This desire, along with the shared interests that define the group, influences the in-group favoritism and out-group hostility that fuels much of the hate speech in society today (Cortese, 2006; Houghton, 2009; Huddy, 2003). As members look to gain a source of positive self-esteem, the out-group is viewed as and then spoken of as though they are inferior (Cortese, 2006; Houghton, 2009). Groups that share a strong desire to feel dominant, or a social dominance orientation, may be even more likely to exhibit this behavior considering the relationship between hate speech and establishing dominance. However, all groups are not equal in their social dominance orientation and by looking into how individual attitudes and opinions develop we may better understand these differences (Houghton, 2009).

### **Cultural Transmission**

If the endless nature-nurture debate has taught us anything, it is that both our innate human behavior and our surrounding environment influence most aspects of who we are. What we believe and how we think about the world is no exception. Through exposure to others' attitudes and behavior, we form and modify the opinions we hold (Duckitt, 2003). We may actively search for information to help form opinions on a regular basis but we are frequently unaware of our environment's influence (Taber, 2003; Skitka, 2002). In childhood especially, the groups to which we belong transmit a particular culture that is accepted as normal (Cortese,

2009). When various stereotypes and degrees of social distance between groups are a part of this socialization, we pass on a culture of prejudice and hate to the next generation (Cortese, 2009; Goldhagen, 2009). Three-year-old Carla provides a worrisome example of this when she “moves her nap-time cot away from a Black classmate and casually states, ‘I can’t sleep next to a nigger...niggers are stinky’” (Cortese, 2009, p. 146).

Goldhagen (2009) suggests that instilling an ideology in a society involves educating citizens, particularly children, about the specific beliefs and norms that should be followed. By following this process for a number of years, the group in power creates a new cohort of adults that share the desired mindset (Goldhagen, 2009). Through the use of elaborate discourse, dominant group members are able to promote their perspective and gain members (Goldhagen, 2009; Rozina & Karapetjana, 2009). The use of discourse and language as a means of cultural transmission is common; however, recently the contexts in which we are seeing this linguistic manipulation have become a growing concern for many.

### **The Bullies and Their Playgrounds**

With a constant stream of new technology and communication channels, individuals have seemingly unlimited opportunities to put forth any opinion they may form (Neiwart, 2009). In 2001, Jones wrote about an interesting new development in society that involved the blending of political and social issues into entertainment. In his analysis of the show *Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher* he examined how the public reacted to the “televised cocktail party with an odd mixture of guests” (Jones, 2001, p. 198) and how this new style of delivering news may impact citizens’ involvement in their society. Though over a decade old, Jones’ (2001) concern is certainly relevant today. As we witness a growing number of comedians and pundits promote their opinions from their considerably powerful seats, should we not be taking into consideration how their reach and influence may be affecting the culture that is transmitted as well as the impact this may have on the socialization of future generations?

### **Hate in the Home**

Since socialization begins at such an early age, it is important that we take a moment to examine one’s exposure to hate speech in their immediate environment. This exposure is likely to come from the groups we interact with on a regular basis (Duckitt, 2003). Through our connections with others various attitudes and beliefs are reinforced consistently, allowing for the internalization of the group norms (Duckitt, 2003; Skitka, 2002). The pervasive nature of internalized beliefs suggests that the ideas reinforced early on will influence one’s bias as an adult. Assuming most adults are not reinforcing eliminationist beliefs in their children, we can expect that most exposure to hate speech in one’s immediate environment will be unintentional (Cortese, 2009). These behaviors, though not intended to be offensive, illustrate how hateful messages have become so deeply incorporated into our everyday rhetoric that we often do not even notice them. Alas, the opinions of our friends and families do not exist in a vacuum; our larger social environment is heavily influenced by the voices of the media.

## Radio

Every week 90% of Americans listen to the radio (Noriega & Iribarren, 2009). Fifteen million will listen to a talk show every day (Cortese, 2009). Out of the talk shows available in 2009, 91% were considered conservative talk radio programs (Noriega & Iribarren, 2009). The repeal of the Fairness Doctrine in 1987 removed the need to provide equal broadcasting time to opposing viewpoints and allowed for this substantial increase in biased radio journalism (Cortese, 2009; O’Neil, 1966; Voxxi, 2012). Radio personalities that partake in cringe radio, defined as “a broadcasting program devoted to using hate speech and other negative information and attitudes about targeted social categories” (Cortese, 2009, p. 96), are now provided with unprecedented freedom to say anything they desire, as long as their funding comes through. These “shock jocks” are reaching an outstanding number of Americans and using their airtime to promote messages that were considered unacceptable for nearly 40 years. Given that the Fairness Doctrine mandated that equal opportunities be provided for opposing positions to present their argument, it seems that this piece of legislation fits nicely with our need to deliberate. Rather than preventing a certain position from contributing their point of view, it allows those who are being negatively targeted a chance to provide a rebuttal. Yet, during a 1993 attempt to reinstate the Fairness Doctrine, the “King of Talk Radio” Rush Limbaugh presented the topic to his listeners as the “Hush Rush” bill (Cortese, 2009).

Why might Mr. Limbaugh be so defensive about such a possibility? Is it perhaps that his show, broadcast from 600 stations 5 days a week for 3 hours a day to a listening audience of approximately 20 million people (Cortese, 2009), would have to schedule in time for...liberals? Previous to its elimination, shock jocks such as Limbaugh did not have nearly the presence they do today (Cortese, 2009); nor did they have the power to support such a drastic breakdown in discourse. The hate speech employed on these talk radio shows has garnered enough interest from the public that the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center (CSRC) has had ongoing research projects examining the prevalence and influence of hate speech on commercial talk radio since 2009 (Noriega & Iribarren, 2009; Voxxi, 2012). One of the findings from a pilot study conducted at CSRC measured 334 instances of hate speech in just 80 minutes of conservative talk radio (Noriega & Iribarren, 2009). Though these shows are a far cry from Rwanda’s *Radio Machete*, which promoted hatred and elimination of Tutsis, there does seem to be reason for concern regarding shows such as *Word Warriors*, which broadcasted Milwaukee’s Alderman McGee calling for militant action from the city’s Black Panther members (Cortese, 2009; Goldzwig & Sullivan, 2000). In addition to these worries about radio programs, today’s televised talk shows are also fueling concerns in citizens and scholars alike.

## Television

Young adults today are more likely to report late night talk shows such as *The Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show* as their news source over *NPR* or their local news station (Pew Research Center, 2012). The regular audience for these two shows is overwhelmingly young. 43% of *The Colbert Report* and 39% of *The Daily Show* audience is between the ages of 18 and 29 (Pew Research Center, 2012). Jones (2001) and Denton (2000) noted this shift towards entertainment-based news programs in 2001 and 2000, respectively, and called into question the possible impact of such a change. How do we maintain a distinction between entertainment and

news when an increasing portion of the voting public is turning to Comedy Central rather than a local news source for their political updates? How do the business interests of large networks such as CNN and Fox influence the reporting of political and social issues?

News and entertainment programs have been blending together more often in recent years leading to the creation of “celebrity journalists” (Denton, 2000). These comedian-pundit-news-anchor-talk-show-host amalgams present a confusing display of current world events along with current tabloid gossip within the same program. This presentation style may be “more personal, colorful, and conflict oriented” (Denton, 2000, p. 109), but the public perception is that the press is “too powerful, too negative, and too biased” (p. 105). We know that mass media has the power to influence what we think about and how we think about it (Denton, 2000; Kinder, 2003), so why do we feel that it is so unreliable? One possibility is that these programs allow for less deliberation and more extreme rhetoric.

Drew, Lyons, and Svehla (2010) addressed this concern in their analysis of “sound-bite sabotage” – messages that are portrayed as “disinterested public information” (p. 1) though they have been carefully constructed by the private corporations that present them. These messages may not always fit our definition of hate speech but their use makes citizens more vulnerable to interpreting hateful messages as fact (Drew et al., 2010). The satirical presentation of news by Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert has often been criticized as fueling political cynicism among their viewers (Drew et al., 2010). This charge has the serious implication of increasing “public dropout and alienation” (Denton, 2000, p. 107) from the political process. In an indirect way, their mockery and comedic take on news creates a breakdown in discourse when their viewers decide to remove themselves from deliberation. Whether or not their audience has reacted in such a way, these men support a form of mass communication in which hate speech is frequently employed.

An important distinction about Stewart and Colbert however, is that their programs are aired on a channel with the word “comedy” in the title, not “news”. Their shows are open about their bias and satirical nature and the men present themselves as comedians and actors. For these two, using the escape clause that they were just joking seems a bit more reasonable than when Ann Coulter or Bill O’Reilly, who are publicly considered political commentators, employ it. Coulter and O’Reilly often appear on Fox News, along with a long list of other news networks, to discuss current political events and social issues. While Stewart and Colbert face criticism for creating cynics out of young Americans, Coulter and O’Reilly have become well known for their extreme language and hateful messages (Neiwart, 2009). The rhetoric of Coulter in particular has often been eliminationist in nature, as she has publicly recommended killing the leaders of Muslim communities, equated former President Bill Clinton to Adolf Hitler, and regretted that Timothy McVeigh did not bomb the New York Times building (Neiwart, 2009). O’Reilly seems to favor a somewhat less direct form of hate speech than Coulter, but his powerfully suggested extremist conspiracy theories, backed by his twisted logic, catch the attention of not just his viewers but the general public as well when he receives backlash from other media outlets.

The media personalities discussed here are far from alone in their choice to encourage such discrimination. Michael Savage has suggested we hang all liberals (Neiwart, 2009). Pat Robertson tried to cover up his call for the assassination of President Hugo Chavez (Drew et al,



2010). Lou Dobbs, Glenn Beck, and Sean Hannity also fall in with this crowd on a regular basis (Cortese, 2006; Neiwart, 2009). These men have all been guilty of using hate speech to disseminate their opinions at one point or another, frequently with the assistance of their guests. Many of these guests share concerns with our celebrity journalists and together they have developed a social network for spreading hate messages (Fox News Latino, 2012; Voxxi, 2012). Much of this communication occurs online through the use of hate sites and social media.

## **Internet**

The internet has had a revolutionary impact on communication since gaining widespread accessibility. Within a few clicks people are able to converse with friends and family across the globe, learn just about anything they could dream up, and discover individuals that would have otherwise been strangers. In an idyllic world these capabilities would be used “to connect citizens and to promote democratic processes” (Goldzwig & Sullivan, 2000, p. 54), not to provide easy access to “intolerant ideologies to millions across the globe” (Ajinka, 2012, These loners have friends section, para. 3). Since the United States sticks out like a sore thumb in regards to our lack of internet hate speech legislation, groups from all over the world have taken advantage of their ability to set up websites dedicated to promoting hate through U.S. hosts (Becker et al., 2000; Cortese, 2006; Henry, 2009). Internationally hosted websites have proven to be problematic when setting regulations due to varying stipulations among countries concerning the provisions on unprotected speech (Becker et al., 2000).

Additional difficulties with regulating online hate speech include the indirect nature of the harm it can produce and the anonymity provided to users who post such messages (Henry, 2000; Waltman & Haas, 2011). According to deindividuation theorists, high levels of anonymity paired with low levels of accountability can produce a reduction in self-regulation along with an increase in aggression (Abrams & de Moura, 2002). The ability to remain fairly anonymous allows users to express and promote hate in such an open and direct manner that individuals have faced prosecution for “clear intent to commit or threaten harm” (Becker et al., 2000, p. 39) due to the rhetoric they have used online. Lone wolf terrorists who act upon this hate and aggression are often involved in hate group websites (Waltman & Haas, 2011).

An estimated 4,000 hate sites were available online in 2011 (Waltman & Haas, 2011). Hate groups may develop websites to present or substantiate their ideology (Waltman & Haas, 2011). Individuals often search for these identity sites, pages dedicated to a shared perspective, to find a group with which they can identify (Whillock, 2000). Whillock (2000) notes that this use of the internet is particularly anti-dialectic since the opinions discussed by users are not subjected to criticism. By limiting their internet exposure to sites such as these, many lone wolf terrorists deliberately engage in behavior that reinforces their attitudes (Waltman & Haas, 2011). The hate speech frequently posted on these sites serves to empower the visitors and further inflame their emotions (Waltman & Haas, 2011; Whillock, 2000).

Since Don Black’s presentation of Stormfront.org, which is considered to be the first hate group website, in 1995, hate groups have utilized the internet as a means to promote their point of view, increase membership, and gain publicity (Becker et al., 2000; Waltman & Haas, 2011). Both Cortese (2006) and Waltman and Haas (2011) have drawn attention to the appearance of

online games supported by these websites. Games such as *Border Patrol*, *Look Out Behind You Hunter*, *Bin Laden Liquors*, and *Ethnic Cleansing* are all readily available for play (Cortese, 2006; Waltman & Haas, 2011). Though you may have to click a button to prove you are of an appropriate age to play, children have an all-access pass to their very own sections on many hate sites (Cortese, 2006).

Most recently, hate groups and celebrity journalists have taken to social media to promote their opinions and beliefs. Voxxi (2012) and Fox News Latino (2012) both reported on a finding from CSRC that the conservative talk show host social network regularly attacks vulnerable groups through social media. Hate groups have a vested interest in utilizing these new communication channels as a way to attract younger members (Colarossi, 2010). Though research in this area is considerably limited, I am led to believe that those who engage in hate speech are more likely to phrase their comment in extreme language to catch the attention of their followers. Some social media sites do provide users with the option to report obscene language; however, I suspect that those following the individuals who post hateful remarks are not very inclined to prevent the behavior. With the growing reach of those who transmit hateful beliefs, it is imperative that we understand how hate speech is affecting our society and how individuals and groups are responding.

### **Societal Responses to Hate Speech**

Hate speech has become a common style of rhetoric in today's society. It can be found in our everyday conversations, on the radio, on television, and online. With so much exposure to messages that influence the psychological factors of hate and eliminationism, our society has come to accept hate speech as normative and not very shocking (Ajinka, 2012). By continuing to allow hate speech in such public contexts, we are not only transmitting a culture of hate and fear, we are creating a culture in which individuals and groups hear extremist ideologies in the mainstream media. This culture suggests acceptance and permission for extreme responses (Neiwart, 2009). I propose that the mass communication of hate speech has influenced both violent and political responses due to the way it politicizes social differences, inflames emotions, and creates a breakdown in discourse.

### **Violent Responses**

As we continue to witness violent attacks on minority groups it is critical that we decipher the influential aspects of society that support and promote such behavior. The societal and psychological factors that originally influence individuals to adopt hateful attitudes can also prompt violent behavior. Staub and Bar-Tal (2003) suggest that undesirable social conditions, threats to basic needs, intergroup conflicts, and self-interests produce underlying frustrating circumstances in societies. When these features of society are prominent and citizens identify with a group whose ideology and beliefs include blaming devalued out-groups for the current social problems, violence is more likely to occur (Houghton, 2009; Staub & Bar-Tal, 2003). The frustration-aggression theory provides support for this relationship. On a psychological level, when individuals feel frustrated by their upsetting circumstances the heightened emotions are likely to result in various forms of aggression (Abrams & de Moura, 2002; Houghton, 2009).

What has become more concerning however, is what happens when these high levels of frustration are felt by large groups of people.

Many scholars have recognized that psychological factors alone are unlikely to produce the extreme violence we have seen in society lately (Goldhagen, 2009; Houghton, 2009; Muir, 1995; Neiwart, 2009; Staub & Bar-Tal, 2003). Houghton (2009) posits that ideology is “arguably the most powerful terrorist motivation” (p. 206). Ideologies provide targets and justification for violence (Goldhagen, 2009; Houghton, 2009; Whillock, 1995). When one’s group supports these beliefs we can expect that emotions such as fear and hate will be further inflamed (Waltman & Haas, 2011; Whillock, 1995). As we have seen, hate speech is often employed as a means to achieve these responses. Furthermore, when the rhetoric used by these groups is eliminationist in nature it can provide motivation and permission for members to react violently (Neiwart, 2009). Goldhagen (2009) suggests that this form of discourse is used to prepare individuals for mass violence. Hate speech serves this purpose by promoting eliminationist ideologies, activating prejudices based on stereotypes, and dehumanizing the target to the point that individuals are willing to kill them (Goldhagen, 2009; Houghton, 2009).

Discourse can also be used to manipulate the way violence is understood. Of the terrorists interviewed by Taylor and Qualye, all of them justified their actions with claims of self-defense (as cited in Houghton, 2009, p. 208). This discovery suggests that those who commit hate crimes and acts of terrorism accept and internalize the belief that their victims are legitimate enemies. We saw a similar response from pro-life activist Randall Terry when a member of his activist group, Rescue America, shot and killed Dr. David Gunn (Muir, 1995). Though Terry was not held responsible for the death, he and fellow activist Don Treshman publicly justified the murder of Dr. Gunn by highlighting the number of children saved from the abortions he performed (Muir, 1995). Dr. Gunn had been the subject of numerous “Wanted” posters previous to his death, members of Rescue America harassed Dr. Snyder and his entire family, and celebrity journalist Bill O’Reilly singled out Dr. Tiller frequently before he was also shot and killed (Holland, 2009; Muir, 1995).

Abortion clinic doctors are not the only targets of hate-fueled violence. In August of 2012, a gunman entered a Sikh temple in Wisconsin and killed six members (Ajinka, 2012). Representative Gabrielle Giffords and Judge John Roll were shot in Arizona in 2011 after an acknowledged increase in threats made on the lives of Congressmen (Krugman, 2011). Timothy McVeigh, the infamous Oklahoma City Bomber, killed and injured over a thousand civilians in 1995 (Goldhagen, 2009). These instances and many more have called attention to the violent behavior of right-wing extremists. Though the media tends to portray these individuals as “lone wolf” attackers, all of them have been connected to an identified hate group at some point. This realization and the seemingly constant acts of violence have led many to question why our government has not acted to protect vulnerable targets.

## **Legal Responses**

An interesting reaction from government officials came in 2009 when the Department of Homeland Security retracted their report concerning the rise of right-wing extremism and their violent behavior (Ajinka, 2012; Krugman, 2011). Also in 2009 however, the Matthew Shepard

and James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act was enacted to provide additional protection for hate crime victims (Leahy, 2012). Following the shooting at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin, the Senate Judiciary subcommittee held a hearing on September 19, 2012 regarding hate crimes from domestic terrorists (Ajinka, 2012; Samuel, 2012). Over 400 people travelled to Capitol Hill for the event in support of the Sikh community's efforts to strengthen hate crime legislation and protection (Samuel, 2012).

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also sought the attention of the U.S. government in regards to internet hate speech. Both the Communications Decency Act of 1996 (CDA) and the Child Online Prevention Act (COPA) were attempts to regulate the information available to minors (Henry, 2009). Within a year of the enactment of the CDA the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), agreeing that the CDA violated the First Amendment (Henry, 2009). After ACLU challenged that COPA also violated the First Amendment, federal courts once again agreed and COPA met a similar fate as the CDA (Henry, 2009). These cases help illustrate how the conflicting values of freedom and protection continue to produce problematic legislation for government officials. Cortese (2009) argues that "when a law conflicts with a basic human principle, the Constitution calls for us to maintain the higher principle and eliminate or change the law" (p. 140); however if we take a closer look at political attitudes and behavior today, we can see that reaching an agreement regarding whether or not a law does conflict with a higher principle is going to be harder than it sounds.

### **Political Responses**

Considering how values influence political opinions, we can expect that individuals who hold extremist ideologies also hold extreme political views. We see this relationship at the group level, as politicized groups may derive meaning from their shared values (Huddy, 2003). At the individual level, we see how one's political behavior is influenced by the political content and meaning of their identity (Huddy, 2003). When individuals form a politicized identity with a group, rather than a more distant attachment, they are more likely to become politically involved (Huddy, 2003). Situational factors, such as our social networks, media exposure, and government, also influence the political opinions we form (Taber, 2003).

Citizens without strong opinions are particularly susceptible to these features and can be persuaded to sway one direction or the other (Kinder, 2003). Hate speech has an especially strong effect on these individuals. Kinder (2003) noted that the use of negative campaigning tends to turn undecided voters away. John McCain felt the impact of this effect in his 2008 Presidential run, but not before his strong supporters used threatening and hateful language that scared off the undecided voters (Neiwart, 2009). This rhetoric can also have the effect of "encouraging passive and more cynical forms of citizenship" (Drew et al., 2010, p. 17-18). Taber (2003) even suggests that this form of citizen apathy may actually be a reasonable response to such a political climate.

However, cynicism and passivity are not the only reactions we are witnessing in political culture. For decades we have seen the independent middle dwindle in size as partisanship on each side deepens (De Luca & Buell, 2005). Neiwart (2009) identifies September 11, 2001 as a significant moment for the polarization of right-wing parties due to the overwhelming presence

of conspiracy theories that received attention from the media. He also points to right-wing commentators' tendency to present extreme viewpoints as if they were supported by mainstream Republicans (Neiwart, 2009). By employing a variety of rhetorical devices and promoting extremists ideologies through hate speech, these transmitters create and promote a culture in which hate and violence are acceptable.

### **Conclusions**

As demonstrated throughout this work, hate speech and its many negative consequences can be observed in nearly every aspect of our culture today. Through politicizing social differences, inflaming emotions, and breaking down discourse, hate speech can subtly reinforce stereotypes, stimulate hate, establish dominance, and produce fear. Rhetorical devices that may often seem harmless, such as nicknames, metaphors, and analogies, may be manipulated in such a way that they fit many definitions of hate speech and could lead to employing the more extreme devices of dehumanization, demonization, and eliminationism. This language is effective in producing the consequences mentioned above due to the group identification and cultural transmission theories of social behavior. Although it may not seem that hate speech is a problem in our society, it becomes concerning when we notice that it can be observed in our homes, on the radio, on the television, and on the internet. The wide reach of hate speech, combined with the range of devices used to transmit hateful messages, has resulted in a number of negative effects in society. We have witnessed violent responses, never-ending court cases, and frustrating political circumstances at the hands of hate speech and we have seen it influence even worse conditions in the past and abroad. Now we must ask ourselves: Does hate speech meet the requirements of prohibitable speech acts set by the currently unprotected classes? Should we be accepting of such extreme rhetoric from influential and powerful individuals? How should we respond to and oppose hate speech?

### **Regulating Hate Speech**

The regulation of hate speech is an understandably difficult matter since individuals' right to express their dissatisfaction with society should not be infringed upon. However, the U.S. legal system has provided some guidelines regarding speech acts that are subject to regulation. Speech that is considered obscene or defamatory as well as speech acts that incite violence or inflict injury are beyond the protection of the First Amendment and are prohibitable by law. Hate speech is certainly in line with these restrictions; however, some acts of hate speech seem to already fall under these categories. Eliminationism, by definition, calls for violence. Demonizing an individual or an entire group of people is likely to injure their reputation. These instances lead to my suggestion that we revisit the current classes of regulated speech. Rather than attempt to define and classify hate speech in its own legislation, I believe it may be more beneficial to examine how these speech acts correspond with our current regulations. Many of the hateful messages spread today by hate groups, celebrity journalists, and even politicians could be considered slander, libel, or fighting words. If we were to pursue prosecution in these situations the message being transmitted changes from permission to use hate speech to intolerance for it. Considering the pervasive nature of the media today and the significant impact our environment has on the beliefs and opinions we form, I believe that it is important we put special consideration into the acceptability of hate speech on the radio, television, and internet.

## Hate Speech in Journalism

As I discussed previously, citizens and scholars alike have expressed their concerns about the growing power and negativity of the media today. Many citizens are fairly unaware of how the business interests of a network can influence not just the stories that are covered but also how they are presented. Drew et al., (2010) focused their book, *Sound-Bite Saboteurs*, on the implications of interested messages in the media, frequently describing the harm they cause to the democratic practice. Denton (2000) also questions the conflicting values of journalistic and democratic concerns in his argument regarding how television undermines three essential characteristics of democratic discussion: accountability, information, and a free marketplace of ideas. I believe it is time that we once again hold our journalists and news shows accountable for providing the public with honest and open stories presented without the extreme rhetoric used today. The extreme rhetoric employed by many celebrity journalists today takes away from the information of the story and dramatizes issues that need to be properly deliberated. Given that we are influenced by the attitudes and opinions we are exposed to, these individuals sit in incredibly powerful seats. Reaching millions of viewers and listeners every day, the influential power of what they say has a resonating impact on society. Without requiring these hosts to mention their sources or present numerous sides to an issue, audiences are left with an impression that the extreme attitudes are actually a part of the mainstream ideology. This is often not the case and our society deserves to know that. Ensuring that citizens receive reliable information and that they are not consistently exposed to messages that promote hate and violence is an important step towards providing equal protection for all.

## Challenging Hate Speech

On a positive note, some significant efforts to oppose hate speech have already begun. Even celebrity journalists Jon Stewart and Stephan Colbert have hosted an even dedicated to stopping this extremism and named it *Rally to Restore Sanity*. Within the media, NBC has run the public service campaign, *The More You Know*, since 1989 (Cortese, 2006). These commercial-style segments present informational messages concerning a wide range of social issues, including prejudice, violence, and internet safety (Cortese, 2006). In his book, *Opposing Hate Speech*, Cortese (2006) discusses various approaches to preventing the expansion of hate speech, particularly highlighting the importance of education and exposure to programs such as *The More You Know*. Teaching not only children, but adults as well, about the harmful effects of saying hateful messages is a critical aspect of opposing hate speech (Cortese, 2006). In addition to Cortese's (2006) work, the overall academic interest in hate speech and the effects of hate has continued to grow over the past few decades. Of particular interest to this work, scholars at UCLA recently developed a method to quantify hate speech and have been working to apply this measure to various media outlets since 2008 (Noriega & Iribarren, 2009). Outside of the university setting, organizations such as the Southern Poverty Law Center have been working to improve the discriminatory conditions in the United States for decades.

These endeavors mark significant progress towards developing a solution that satisfies the spirit of the First Amendment by respecting the value of both freedom and equality. As we continue to learn how hate speech produces its harmful effects and how individuals are influenced to form hateful ideologies, it is important to remember that we must actively challenge hate speech in our everyday environment. Education has been a key feature in the fight for equality for many vulnerable groups and we continue to see its use today. Even in elementary schools, education is an important component in anti-bullying programs. We have witnessed the power of words in the past and acknowledged that we must accept responsibility for our actions. Our speech acts should be treated no differently than our physical acts, as the damaging effects of words are equal to those of sticks and stones.

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