

TONIGHT IT'S GOVERNMENT FUNDED:  
A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF MANUFACTURED SOCIAL CONTROVERSY  
AND GOVERNMENT FUNDING OF THE ARTS

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**Title**

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**MASTER OF ARTS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Thomas Goodnight's definition of controversy offers an initial examination of Reverend Donald Wildmon and Reverend Pat Robertson's attack of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), initiating the Culture Wars of 1989. Using their most reliable communication tactics, Wildmon and Robertson attempted to garner support for their values by manufacturing controversy related to government funding of the National Endowment for the Arts. Together, they manufacture social controversy around two inter-related themes, one of morality, in which they argued Christians were being persecuted by the art community, and the other against federal funding of objectionable art, using Andres Serrano and Robert Mapplethorpe as symbols of corruption. In addition to the initial attacks on Serrano and Mapplethorpe, my rhetorical analysis illustrates how Wildmon's and Robertson's rhetoric seemingly sanctioned the manufacturing of a social controversy regarding the Federal funding for objectionable art as a way to promote their pro-family and anti-homosexual agenda.

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## PREFACE

I was fortunate enough to be the intern selected to work with the National Endowment for the Arts Music Program in Washington D.C. the summer of 1995. The experience was extraordinary on a number of levels, most specifically because I was at the Endowment-wide meeting in which major cutbacks were announced and many staff members were laid off. I knew these actions had something to do with objectionable art by Robert Mapplethorpe and Andres Serrano, but I did not realize until I began this research how monumental this moment was in the history of art in America. Historically the arts have been under fire from numerous objectors because at times the purpose of an artwork is to be a cultural mirror to what is happening in society. This can bring understanding and acceptance to some members of society, or better yet, it is an opportunity for some to change their ways. Other times people are highly offended when an artist's perception the truth is reflected back to them. This research began as a way for me to understand what led to the NEA cutbacks of 1995 and with this knowledge of manufacturing social controversy, I hope to be understanding of similar issues in the future.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Americans have historically rallied against public funding for particular interests or organizations. Whether it is government funding for health services, welfare, environmental research, or religious activities, citizens often speak loudly against taxpayer dollars being used for purposes they find morally objectionable. One example of an organization regularly having to defend their government funding is the Planned Parenthood Federation of America.

Opponents routinely claim the money used for abortion services is immoral. Planned Parenthood counters these allegations by arguing that it provides “sexual and reproductive health care, education, and information” (Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Inc.), with a majority of their patients seeking contraceptive devices or information with a minority of patients seeking abortion services.

The Planned Parenthood example illustrates both the political and rhetorical nature of government funding. Planned Parenthood’s government funding comes from two sources, Title X and Medicaid; however, neither source allows the money to be used for abortions. According to the Department of Health and Human Services (n.d.) web site, Title X funds may not be used in programs where abortion is a method of family planning. Furthermore, Medicaid funding is restricted by the Hyde Amendment, which prohibits funding for abortions except in cases of rape, incest, or endangerment to the life of the mother (Guttmacher Institute, 2012). However, opponents to Planned Parenthood claim that the money received by the government allows the organization to reallocate funds to provide these services. During the spring of 2011, Republicans in the United States House of Representatives attempted to defund Planned Parenthood, claiming that any support to the organization provides indirect support for abortions



(Politifact.com, 2011). The defunding attempt did not pass the Senate, however, and was a key issue that nearly shut down government operations on April 8 of that year.

Another 2011 key debate regarding government spending occurred when the House of Representatives attempted to defund the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The IPCC is an international organization that reviews and assesses research submitted by leading scientists in an effort to understand climate change. The IPCC is funded by its parent organizations, the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme, in addition to voluntary contributions by member countries, including the United States (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). Led by Representative Blain Luetkemeyer (R-MI), House opponents argued that climate change scientists manipulated data and suppressed arguments “so that a small number of climate alarmists could continue to advance their environmental agenda” (Climate Science Watch, 2011). They claimed the IPCC misused funds with Luetkemeyer noting “my constituents should not have to foot the bill for an organization to keep producing corrupt findings that can be used as justification to impose a massive new energy tax on every American” (Climate Science Watch, 2011). The House passed the bill 244-179; the Senate outcome is unknown.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2009), inherently religious activities may not be funded using government money. However, government funds given to religious organizations can be used for non-religious social services, such as providing day-care or health services to congregation members or the community. This law can have unintended consequences, allowing for situations in which those who believe in a clear separation of church and state may oppose federally funded activities, inherently religious or not. Collectively known as the Blaine Amendments, these state constitutional amendments prohibit

the funding of religious activities by the state government (the 1875 proposal to bar federal funding of religious organizations did not pass the House and therefore is not in the United States Constitution. It is, however, an amendment in 36 states (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008)). In 2008 the State of Florida experienced controversy when opponents attempted to block the passage of two amendments to the state's constitution. If passed, the amendments would eliminate all obstacles preventing government funding to religious schools. Opponents felt this was a threat to the freedom of religion awarded in the United States Constitution.

These examples are situations in which parties with strong beliefs are at odds with the government's allocation of funds. State and federal governments are expectedly to wisely spend taxpayer dollars in ways that benefit the most people, be it public schools, parks, or public safety. Individuals also have strong beliefs about issues of morality (abortion), the environment (climate change), and religion (funding of religious schools). When the allocation of funds is at odds over personal beliefs, controversy occurs, as seen in these examples. Similarly, this incongruence of government funding and personal beliefs erupted in social controversy in the late 1980s between the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and Reverend Donald Wildmon of the American Family Association (AFA) and Reverend Pat Robertson of the Christian Coalition of America. The social controversy over government funding to the NEA in the 1980s opposed government funding of morally questionable art.

The NEA is a federal agency created in 1965 to preserve the many artistic traditions of the United States. At the time, the agency awarded grants to artists and organizations, allowing them the freedom to create works of art, present performances, hire guest artists, and organize exhibitions, to name a few examples. Many of the grants were awarded to organizations or artists that created non-objectionable artworks, which typically did not warrant investigation by

opponents. However, some grants were awarded to artists whose work highly offended some individuals. For various reasons, the artwork affronted their moral beliefs and opponents argued this should not be federally funded, regardless of an individual's right to expression.

The purpose of this thesis is to provide a rhetorical and critical analysis of five written and publicly disseminated texts written by Reverend Donald Wildmon and Reverend Pat Robertson, both leaders of well-known religious organizations in the late 1980s. Using Thomas Goodnight's definition of social controversy and Lloyd Bitzer's rhetorical situation, the analysis will attempt to determine how Wildmon and Robertson manufactured arguments of morality and wasteful government spending to mobilize citizens, and the United States Congress, in their attempt to defund the NEA.

While the history of the National Endowment for the Arts is replete with challenges, accusations, and controversy, this thesis will examine what is now known as the Culture Wars, a situation involving the art world, United States Congress, Wildmon, Robertson, and the two artists whose artwork sparked the debate, Andres Serrano and Robert Mapplethorpe. The controversy that erupted at this time was not so much about government funding of objectionable art, but was "a debate over competing social agendas and concepts of morality, a clash over both the present and the future condition of American society" (Bolton, 1992, p. 3). Wildmon and Robertson were leaders of the religious right, whose membership consisted mainly of conservatives, and feared that allowing government funding of objectionable art meant a progressive social agenda was being forced upon them. They considered this an immoral agenda that tolerated and encouraged "multiculturalism, gay and lesbian rights, feminism, and sexual liberation" (Bolton, 1992, p. 5). Artists, on the other hand, felt any government restrictions regarding the content of their artwork, regardless of funding source, was an attack on their First

Amendment right of free speech. The result was a campaign from Wildmon and Robertson that was an attempt to manufacture a social controversy to promote their “patriotic, pro-family, pro-church, antigay” (Bolton, 1992, p. 6) agenda.

This particular situation involving the government funding and those morally opposed to the outcomes can be applied to Goodnight’s definition of social controversy. His definition, which attempts to determine how and why controversies occur on a rhetorical level, will be applied to the Culture Wars of 1989-1990. Application of this definition to the texts will explore the tension that occurred when government funding, moral beliefs, and freedom of expression met on a national level and how opponents mobilized individuals in their attempt to defund the National Endowment for the Arts.

The Culture War social controversy is distinct from current abortion and climate change oppositions for several reasons. Initially, I have a personal and professional interest in this social controversy. I worked as an intern at the NEA the summer of 1995 and attended the meeting in which staff learned they were to be laid off, a result of the situation studied for this thesis. Additionally, my job at North Dakota State University requires me to promote art and artists not just to the campus, but the community as a whole. The Culture Wars also represent a significant “watershed” moment in the development of what is now commonly referred to by many names, including “compassionate conservatism,” the “moral majority,” and/or the political (501c4) Christian Coalition of America (CCA). The CCA’s membership consists of Christian fundamentalists, neo-evangelicals, and conservative charismatics who all share values that are consistent with those of the Christian Right.

Finally, and most significantly, the wide-spread influence of the Christian Right that initiated the NEA social controversy provides an example of how social controversies are

“manufactured.” According to Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky’s 1988 book, *Manufacturing Consent*, (based on Walter Lippmann’s “manufacture of consent”) argues the performance of the mass media in a democratic society is no longer one related to information dissemination, but rather as one primed and framed by ownership, professional (as opposed to individual) values, advertising and public relations. Lester (1992) argues that Herman and Chomsky’s model of “manufacturing” consent clarifies how political groups incorporate the “media operate to foil the democratic postulate” (p. 54). In short, this thesis attempts understand how the Culture Wars social controversy evoked the media as a vehicle in manufacturing moral opposition to art and artists.

### **The Culture Wars, 1989-1990**

What is now known as the Culture Wars began quietly in 1989 with photographer Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ*, an image in which a plastic crucifix is submerged in the artist's own urine. The point of the large scale, full color photograph was not to shock viewers due to the medium used, but to comment on "the commercialization and cheapening of religion" (Zeigler, 1994, p. 69) with the use of bodily fluid to highlight the Catholic faith's belief in transubstantiation, the changing of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Serrano's photograph was created in part due to funding awarded by the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art (SECCA) in Winston-Salem, NC, for its seventh annual Awards in the Visual Arts (AVA-7) program. The organization received funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, and Equitable Life to award sub-grants to artists participating in the exhibition. A nationwide tour displaying the fruits of the artists' labor visited museums in Los Angeles, CA, and Pittsburg, PA, before coming to the attention of Reverend Donald Wildmon during its Richmond, VA, exhibition.

Wildmon, a fundamentalist preacher and head of the American Family Association, responded to the *Piss Christ* on April 5, 1989 with a direct mail to AFA members, accusing Serrano of “anti-Christian bias and bigotry” (Bolton, 1992, p. 27). He admonished members for not standing up against such bigotry and allowing movies such as *The Last Temptation of Christ* and Madonna’s *Like A Prayer* video to become popular culture icons. While this direct mail does not come out as a declaration of war, Wildmon threatens that “physical persecution” (Bolton, 1992, p. 27) will begin and as Christians, such catastrophe can be avoided by standing up against blatant attacks on their beliefs. It is important to note that Wildmon alerted not just AFA members of *Piss Christ*, but members of United States Congress as well.

The second moment in the Culture Wars began on June 8, 1989, when over one-hundred members of the United States Senate sent a letter to the National Endowment for the Arts, criticizing the organization for funding a retrospective titled *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment*. The exhibition was organized by the Institute of Contemporary Art (Philadelphia, P.A.), which received a \$30,000 grant (15% of the total budget) from the National Endowment for the Arts to support this touring exhibition. It is important to note Mapplethorpe, the photographer, did not receive NEA funding for this exhibition as he had passed away by this time. It was the organization that received federal funding to organize and present the exhibition. The outcry against Mapplethorpe was the content of his photos, which featured graphic homoerotic sexual acts in addition to portraits, flowers, and semi-nude children. The exhibition came to the forefront of public awareness when the Corcoran Art Gallery in Washington, D.C. canceled the show, even though the exhibition previously appeared without incident in Philadelphia, P.A. and Chicago, I.L. The Corcoran received regular, substantial funding awards from the NEA in addition to the National Capital Arts and Cultural Affairs

Program and they feared the Mapplethorpe exhibition would damage their relationship with these organizations. In response, *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment* opened on July 20 at the Washington Project for the Arts in Washington, D.C.; nearly 50,000 people visited the exhibition in four weeks.

Wildmon and the AFA responded with a press release regarding NEA funding of the Serrano and Mapplethorpe exhibitions. The release, dated July 25, 1989, goes into graphic detail about a handful of Mapplethorpe's photos, such as *Mr. 10<sup>1/2</sup>*, a black and white photo prominently featuring male genitals showcased on a pedestal. The explicit text of the release was an attempt to support their argument the "American taxpayer is being forced to help fund such pornography through the NEA" (Wildmon, AFA Press Release on the NEA, 1992, p. 71). The release continued to portray artists as an elite class deserving of NEA funding, while the average American, described as "truck drivers, factory workers, carpenters, and sales clerks" (Wildmon, AFA Press Release on the NEA, 1992, p. 71) were undeserving of receiving the millions of dollars awarded through the Endowment.

The Serrano and Mapplethorpe exhibitions and Wildmon's responses via the AFA sparked the Culture Wars in the spring/summer of 1989. Reverend Pat Robertson, in response to the Congressional debate over NEA funding, founded the Christian Coalition in October 1989 with the first order of business a direct mail piece attacking the NEA. The mailing introduced the Christian Coalition as a grassroots political organization that will "force America to face the moral issues that threaten to destroy us" (Robertson, 1992, p. 124). Of the threatening moral issues, Robertson pointed out the current NEA funding of Serrano and Mapplethorpe exhibitions and enclosed a red envelope containing "graphic descriptions of homosexual erotic photographs that were funded by your tax dollars" (Robertson, 1992, p. 123). Claiming the images were too

vulgar to print, Robertson explicitly described the content of the images in his attempt to garner Christian Coalition members' support to defund the NEA.

While Congress debated the NEA appropriation through the fall of 1989, the American Family Association placed a fundraising advertisement in the *Washington Times* on February 13, 1990. The advertisement began with the Serrano and Mapplethorpe exhibitions before continuing with fabrications about other projects funded by the Endowment, going so far as to describe a performance by porn star Annie Sprinkle, including her supposed statement of "Usually I get paid a lot of money for this, but tonight it's government funded!" (Wildmon, AFA Fundraising Advertisement, 1992, p. 151). The advertisement concluded with a call for action, listing all Congressional representatives who voted to fund the NEA and encouraging supporters to voice their dissent of taxpayer money funding objectionable art.

Robertson continued the crusade against the NEA in June 1990 with a full-page advertisement, paid for by the Christian Coalition, in the *Washington Post* and *USA Today*. Addressed to the Congress of the United States, the advertisement notes the Serrano and Mapplethorpe exhibitions, incorrectly stating they were funded directly by the Endowment, in addition to other government funded projects they deemed wasteful. The advertisement continues, noting that voting for refunding the NEA will force representatives to face constituents angry for "wasting their hard-earned money to promote sodomy, child pornography, and attacks on Jesus Christ" (*USA Today*, 1990, p. 8A). The tone turns sarcastic, stating perhaps representatives will find that constituents want their money used to "teach their sons to sodomize one another" and Catholics want federal funding for "pictures of the Pope soaked in urine" (*USA Today*, 1990, p. 8A). The advertisement concludes with a threat that voting for the NEA appropriation will "make my [Robertson's] day" (*USA Today*, 1990, p. 8A).



While the Culture Wars continued for several years past 1990, the artifacts presented in this research represent the initial efforts by Wildmon and Robertson to alert the public and Congress about taxpayer funds being used to support the Serrano and Mapplethorpe exhibitions. The timing of their arguments coincided with the five-year reauthorization of the NEA.

### **American Family Association and Christian Coalition of America**

By the end of the 1980s, some members of the religious right, including Wildmon and Robertson, believed America was suffering from moral and religious perversion. They felt much of this corruption began as far back as the 1960s and 70s, with Americans growing increasingly frustrated with social and moral upheavals, the declining economy, military weakness, and loss of faith in public institutions. The result of this frustration was a middle-class that was turning towards “traditionalism, (white) ethnicity, pro-family sentiment and religious fundamentalism” (Watson, 1997, p. 19). The religious right believed a return to traditional family values could instill confidence in Americans once again. They attempted this return by entering politics as a way to bring morals back to society. If laws against family values could be prevented, the religious right believed America would return to an idealized past where they would be protected against issues such as birth control, gay rights, sexual revolution, abortion, and the economic conditions that forced mothers into the workforce. They used political movements to call for a “national repentance and a renewal of traditional morality” (Watson, 1997, p. 23) in their effort to recapture “an idealized past in an imaginary future” (Watson, 1997, p. 23).

Both the American Family Association and Christian Coalition were leaders in the attempt to protect traditional family values, particularly in the late 1980s. According to the AFA website (n.d.), their mission is to “strengthen the moral foundations of American culture” through efforts including acts to “restrain evil by exposing works of darkness; promote virtue by

upholding in culture that which is right, true and good according to Scripture...and to motivate people to take a stand on cultural and moral issues.” The main tactic to enforce their beliefs is through citizen activism, believing the more people involved at every level – local, regional, state, national – they will more quickly communicate their ideals to the general public. Boycotts against organizations that support anti-family values, such as abortion or gay rights, are often an AFA target. Believing the best way to make their voice heard is through the wallet, so to speak, of companies, the AFA has been successful against PepsiCo, Ford Motor Company, and McDonald’s, all of whom reversed their support of gay rights due to AFA boycotts.

Similarly, the Christian Coalition actively works to influence “the political agenda by bringing moral and family issues to the forefront of political discussion” (Watson, 1997, p. 26). Prior to founding the Christian Coalition, Reverend Pat Robertson ran for president on a platform to “restore the greatness of America through moral strength” (Watson, 1997, p. 37), with morality meaning self-restraint and immorality interpreted as self-indulgence. Robertson linked these notions of restraint and indulgence to religion and believed if he succeeded in restoring morality to the nation, religion would naturally be restored as well. While he did not politically survive the Super Tuesday primaries in March 1988, Robertson’s presidential endeavor was the largest activity ever attempted by the religious right and secured its place in society as a sophisticated political organization. This only helped to gain members, donations, publicity, and spread the word of their beliefs and activities.

One of the largest affronts to the values of the AFA and Christian Coalition were the rights of homosexuals in America. Both organizations firmly believed in the Scriptures in which sexual activity should only represent procreation and therefore same-sex intimacy was an attack on their attempt to restore morality to the nation. Anti-gay activist Anita Bryant, while being

interviewed by Robertson on *The 700 Club*, noted homosexuality is a “plague-like epidemic threatening the entire American body” (Long, 2005, p. 4) and believed their sinful activities will lead to the collapse of society. The National Research Council (1993), in their panel monitoring the social impact of AIDS, notes the religious right perceives homosexuals “not only as deviants but their activities as being major causes of the breakdown in America’s moral standards” (p. 132). The Council also notes how this population serves as a scapegoat for fundamentalists like Wildmon and Robertson, “so that they might blame someone for the moral decay they see all around them” (National Research Council, 1993, p. 136).

The AIDS epidemic of the 1980s did not help reverse the reputation of gays and lesbians as moral deviants, particularly in the Culture Wars where many artists, including Robert Mapplethorpe, died after contracting the disease. The religious right often referred to the Bible to support their argument that intimacy should only take place between a man and a woman, as in Romans 1:26-27,

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for the unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error. (Revised Standard Version)

They could also rely on Biblical text to connect sinful behavior with the wrath of God as divine punishment, such as Leviticus 26:21 (Revised Standard Version), “Then if you walk contrary to me [God], and will not hearken to me, I will bring more plagues upon you, sevenfold as many as your sins.” Many believed AIDS was the punishment inflicted upon society due to their tolerance of immoral (i.e. homosexual) behaviors. The religious right believed tolerance led to

AIDS and since some artists in the 1980s were gay, their art therefore encourages homosexuality and must not be available for public consumption.

### **Federal Funding of Objectionable Art Argument**

The goals of the American Family Association and Christian Coalition not only included the restoration of morality in America, but also to protect Americans from government waste, including funding art representing homosexual activity or use of bodily fluids or other “traditionally defiling substances” (Long, 2005, p. 12). The Culture Wars controversy sparked by the AFA and Christian Coalition coincided with the mandatory five-year reauthorization of the NEA, making the argument of wasteful government spending all the more timely.

The United States House of Representatives reviewed H.R. 2788 in June 1989, which was the appropriations bill for the Interior Department and Related Agencies, one of which was the National Endowment for the Arts. The bill offered four amendments relating to the NEA, all in response to the Serrano and Mapplethorpe exhibitions. Rep. Rohrabacher’s (R-CA) proposal was the most drastic, offering in H.AMDT.126 to delete all funding for the NEA; the proposal failed. Other failed proposals included attempts to reduce funding by 5% and 10%. The final bill does include an amendment sponsored by Rep. Richard Arme y (R-TX) and included a symbolic budget reduction of \$45,000 “for the controversial artworks of Andres Serrano and Robert Mapplethorpe” (Library of Congress, H.AMDT.127, 1989). The \$45,000 was the total amount of the NEA grants awarded to the Institute of Contemporary Art and Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art.

The United States Senate began their funding debate for the NEA in July 1989 with the appropriations bill passing in October 1989. The Senate debate was heated and included the Helms Amendment, sponsored by Sen. Jesse Helms (R-NC), which prohibited the use of NEA

funds to “promote, distribute, disseminate, or produce materials that depict or describe sexual or excretory activities or organs” (Library of Congress, S.AMDT.3119, 1990); the amendment was defeated. The final appropriations bill provided money to develop a commission whose sole purpose was to review NEA grant-making standards and also prohibited funding to artwork that could be considered obscene by the standards set in the 1973 Supreme Court case *Miller v. California*<sup>1</sup>. Finally, the appropriations bill gave the NEA chairperson the authority to override the agency’s funding of sexually explicit materials.

### **Social Controversy**

At the most basic level, a social controversy is a situation that occurs when two or more parties are at an impasse as to the best way to resolve a situation. Stated more eloquently by Olson and Goodnight (1994), a social controversy is defined as “an extended rhetorical engagement that critiques, resituates, and develops communication practices bridging the public and personal spheres” (p. 249). Controversy occurs at the heart of a struggle in which “arguers criticize and invent alternatives to established social conventions and sanctioned norms of communication” (Olson & Goodnight, 1994, p. 249). Controversy rarely occurs in a typical discussion, as individuals tend to follow socially acceptable rules of communication. Surprises or changes in these norms can force one party into a defensive position and a consensus is not obtained. As parties challenge the statements made by one another, their aim is to “delegitimize the grounds upon which any claim to reasonability, good faith, or trust may be justified” (Olson

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<sup>1</sup> Miller v. California set the obscenity law to determine “(a) whether “the average person, applying contemporary community standards” would find the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest, (b) whether the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law, and (c) whether the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value” (Fleishman, 1973, p. 99).

& Goodnight, 1994, p. 251). Phillips (1999) notes that argument is not the status quo, therefore it serves to “dislocate and disorient dominant systems of discourse” (p. 494). However, as parties attempt to bolster their argument, they abandon social norms and in doing so narrow the ability to find resolution, resulting in a controversy in which “neither side can release the other, as both compete in a contested social world” (Olson & Goodnight, 1994, p. 252).

As Goodnight (1991) developed his definition of controversy, he supported earlier research in Glen Mills’ *Reason in Controversy* that determined how controversy permeates society through “consumer culture, public discourse, social institutions, interest groups, and specialized disciplines” (p. 2). Controversy could essentially take place anywhere and at any time. It may be due to public institutions not meeting the expectations of citizens (social institutions) or a disagreement about the validity of scientific research (specialized disciplines). Goodnight went one step further, however, and argued that contemporary social controversy changed the social norms and consequences associated with controversy making it distinct from traditional argumentation norms. The change in social controversy is evident in four additional characteristics, including the fact that controversy was no longer an issue between individuals, such as Bush vs. Gore, but was now between agencies, such as conservatives vs. liberals. Another characteristic noted by Goodnight (1991) was controversy is “temporally pluralistic” (p. 2), meaning different groups could interpret a single controversy differently at different times. A social controversy that occurred decades earlier could resurface and be reinterpreted to fit the needs of a contemporary situation. Third, Goodnight noted controversy is rooted in discursive and non-discursive argument. It is no longer an argument that is strictly oral, but can be communicated in a number of different formats, such as writing. Finally, “controversy expands cultural, social, historical, and intellectual arguments” (Goodnight, Controversy, 1991, p. 2)

through parties having differing views of the situation and through objections raised to the reasoning offered by the opposing party. In fact, Olson and Goodnight (1994) argue that objection is more than just an opposing statement but is a speech act designed to bring about a debate or “questions the legitimacy or appropriateness of communication practices” (p. 251). In a typical controversial situation, the offended party may react to the potential debate by attempting to identify “the conditions under which it is possible to engage in argumentation” (Goodnight, *Controversy*, 1991, p. 5). One has to decide if it is worth one’s time, after all. How the offended party verbally reacts to a situation may be the impetus of a social controversy. Goodnight offers the example of Mr. N being told to move off a spot of shade near a bus stop by Mr. A. Mr. N could react in the affirmative, giving the desired space to Mr. A without argument. He could debate with Mr. A, forcing him to prove the shady spot did in fact belong to Mr. A. Or he could argue the “conditions which make such debate appropriate” (Goodnight, *Controversy*, 1991, p. 5). Mr. A may have found this request unacceptable for the time and location and the controversy may not arise because he was asked to move from a shady spot, but because the request was out of normal social parameters and it forced a controversial debate to occur. Therefore, controversy could begin due to a speech act (a request to move from a desired location) or by the conditions of the debate (appropriate time and place).

At the heart of social controversy is the fact that an agreement cannot be reached by the parties involved. Phillips (1999) notes how rhetorical controversy can be viewed as “blocking the consensus underlying discursive actions and, thereby, preventing the rational validation of argumentative claims” (p. 489). If Mr. N were to simply give up the shady stop without disagreement, a controversy would not occur at that time. However, with controversy “reason and communication are in ferment” (Goodnight, *Controversy*, 1991, p. 6), meaning they will

agitate and grow into something larger and an argument must occur. When this happens, new opportunities “to learn, to decide, to argue” (Goodnight, *Controversy*, 1991, p. 6) are formed but are rarely taken advantage of and both parties leave the controversy uneducated. Goodnight proposes extended argumentation pedagogy “to include the making of oppositional discourses mindful of a greater variety of critical and communicative responsibilities” (Goodnight, *Controversy*, 1991, p. 7). Rather than blindly refute an argument, students of argumentation should learn to become critical thinkers and attempt to view the situation as a whole rather than through the narrow lens of one’s own beliefs. Goodnight believes that “making oppositional discourses mindful of a greater variety of critical and communicative responsibilities” (Goodnight, *Controversy*, 1991, p. 7), opponents could have thoughtful discussions rather than arguments and potentially reach a cooperative conclusion. Therefore controversy has the potential to strengthen the quality of an argument with reflective thinking; however, uncooperative parties only weaken the quality of the argument and decisions made.

### **Manufacturing Consent**

In *Manufacturing Consent* (1988), Herman and Chomsky argue the American media operates using a propaganda model, a framework that explains how the media serve the interests that finance their operations. Through five filters, the propaganda model “focuses on the inequality of wealth and power and its multilevel effects on mass-media interests and choices” (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p. 2). The first filter studies the size, ownership, and profit orientation of the mass media. Herman and Chomsky note that by reviewing who owns the media corporation from which one receives news, the information shared is biased in favor of the owner’s interests. Meaning NBC, for example, will not report favorably on information that could damage the profitability of their parent company, General Electric. The second filter



argues that advertising can alter the news a media vehicle decides to share. Media corporations depend on advertising to make profits and will therefore disseminate information that advertisers respond positively to. If an advertiser feels the news shared portrays them in a negative light or they disagree with the news, they could pull advertising that could result in profit loss. These first two filters show the distinct relationship between financial necessity and exchange of interest while the third filter focuses on the source of news. Reporters cannot be everywhere all the time and therefore focus on gaining news from official sources, such as city leaders or experts in the field. They also rely on information shared by organizations themselves through media releases or press conferences. The problem, note Herman and Chomsky, is the information shared by these sources is not always accurate and reporters then unknowingly distribute biased information to the public. Flak is the fourth filter and “refers to negative responses to a media statement or program” (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p. 26). When individuals or organizations respond to news they disagree with, it can be costly for the media to defend positions and maintain advertising revenue. Anticommunism as a control mechanism is the fifth and final filter of the propaganda model. Herman and Chomsky (1988) argue communism is portrayed as the ultimate evil as it “threatens the very root of their class position and superior status” (p. 29). The first filter proves wealthy individuals by and large own media organizations and they rely on their media to portray communism as the ultimate evil, it is the proverbial man keeping society down. It is through these five filters Herman and Chomsky argue the media do not share news that is of interest to society as a whole, but to those who own media organizations.

## **Summary and Research Question**

Goodnight's definition of controversy offers an initial examination of Wildmon and Robertson's attack of the NEA, initiating the Culture Wars of 1989-1990. Using their most reliable communication tactics--direct mail, news releases, and ads placed in national publications--Wildmon and Robertson attempted to garner support for their values by sparking and manufacturing the NEA controversy. Two themes emerged in their arguments, one of morality, in which Christians were being persecuted with the anti-family agenda of the art world, and the other against federal funding of objectionable art, using Serrano and Mapplethorpe as symbols of corruption. These initial attacks of Wildmon and Robertson using Serrano and Mapplethorpe as examples of government waste and immoral activity leads to this research question: how did the religious right manufacture a social controversy regarding the Federal funding for objectionable art as a way to promote their pro-family, anti-homosexual agenda? The remainder of this project provides an accurate description, insightful rhetorical analysis, and discussion of the implications surrounding how the Christian right manufactured social controversy in opposition to government funding of the NEA.

## CHAPTER TWO: TEXT AND CONTEXT

There are numerous reasons as to why individuals create art. Throughout history art has been created as a profession, to tell stories, to express beauty or horror, to document current culture or to preserve history, to name a few examples. The techniques in which to express oneself through art are as varied as the reasons with mediums such as painting, drawing, and sculpture. Photography as a form of art began in the 1800s and has matured into a respected genre that allows the artist to mirror and capture world events and human experiences. In fact, photography is the only art form with the unique ability to immediately capture moments of unguarded emotion and the result is a snapshot of true human nature. Because a complete discussion of the cultural significance of art would detract from my analysis of the NEA social controversy, I briefly examine the philosophy of photography as an art form, beginning with Jacob Riis in the 1890s through Andres Serrano and Robert Mapplethorpe. Photography provides a relevant exemplar of the totality of all art not only because it reinforces my argument about the numerous reasons for why humans create art, but also because photography represents the art form at the heart of the NEA controversy.

Following my discussion of photography, I will profile the rhetorical constructs (Bitzer's rhetorical situation and Goodnight's spheres of argument theory) that aid my initial understanding of photography as art and also informed by formal and extended rhetorical analysis of the NEA social controversy.

### **Photography: 1890-1990**

Jacob Riis (1849-1914) used his talents as a photographer to shed light on the poverty-stricken immigrants in New York. Shocked by his own experiences as an immigrant and later as a police reporter, Riis used photography to enforce reform. His photographs are described as

“direct and penetrating, as raw as the sordid scenes which they so often represent” (Newhall, 1964, p. 140). According to Newhall (1964), the images are “interpretations and records...they contain qualities that will last as long as man is concerned with his brother” (pg. 142). Words were not enough to move the public into action and through his pictures, and publication of his photo book *How the Other Half Lives* in 1890, Riis was able to rouse the public and bring reform to the immigrant situation.

Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946) was not the first photographer to make an impact; however, his efforts through the Photo-Secession movement allowed photography to be seen as a legitimate art form for the first time in history. While others at this time considered photography an imitation of painting, due to its “soft focus, out-of-focus images, deep shadow, hand work on prints and negatives and textured papers” (Maddox, 1973, p. 77), Stieglitz saw photography as an equal to painting, treating it as “an expressive medium...and attempted to publish and discuss only what he felt met high critical standards” (Maddox, 1973, p. 74). He founded the Photo-Secession in 1902 in an effort to educate the public about the importance of photography as an art. Initially the influence of this movement was widespread as exhibitions of photography were featured both in America and in Europe. He also founded the publication *Camera Work*, which gave “wider currency to its [Photo-Secession] ideals and providing a record of what it attempted to do” (Maddox, 1973, p. 74). The Photo-Secession movement did not last past the first decade and while frequently criticized as imitation painting, the movement did bring an esthetic self-awareness to America and “divorced photographer from mundane illustrational tasks, and created an atmosphere that encouraged photographers to think of their medium as an artist thinks of his” (Maddox, 1973, p. 77). Writer Sadakichi Hartmann summed up the influence of Photo-Secession and correctly interpreted the future of photography with his critique of the

movement's final exhibition, "It is the men who have preferred the city streets, the impressionism of life and the unconventional aspects of nature to costuming and posing, who have occasionally enriched our wealth of pictorial impressions" (Maddox, 1973, p. 78).

Hartmann succinctly points to photo documentary as the next movement in photography.

Documentary photography represented to the public, through visual imagery, the hardships endured by those less fortunate. According to Rosler (1992), this movement delivered information about a "group of powerless people to another group addressed as socially powerful" (pg. 306) in an effort to affect change. Rosler argues that documentary photography has an immediate moment, "in which an image is caught...and held up as testimony, as evidence in the most legalistic of senses, arguing for or against a social practice" (pg. 317). It is this moment that allowed photographers of this time to believe images could rectify the wrongs of society.

Sociologist and photographer Lewis Hine (1874-1940) realized the power of the photograph and its social implications in 1905. He was concerned with children in the workforce and photographed them working in factories, the subject often against large machines in an effort to show a sense of scale and highlight the fact the workers were children. His images were called photo stories, giving them the same importance as the written word. Like Riis, Hine knew his photographs "were powerful and readily grasped criticisms of the impact of an economic system on the lives of underprivileged and exploited classes" (Newhall, 1964, p. 142). His images of children in American factories helped lead to the passing of child labor laws.

By the time of the Great Depression, the implications of the photo documentary were fully realized. Many knew in order to affect change, images were more powerful than words. One of these people was Dorothea Lange (1895-1965), a photographer whose desire to document the hardships of her subjects, particularly the plight of the homeless and migrant workers, led to

her position with the Farm Security Administration (FSA). The purpose of the FSA project she was involved with was to “visually document...the sociology of an America attempting to recover from economic crisis” (Davenport, 1991, p. 121). While Lange was one of many talented photographers hired to capture this era in America, her passion for her subjects made her one of the most memorable photographers in the project. One of her most well-known photographs of this period, *Migrant Mother*, epitomizes Lange’s work. She used photographs as evidence to stress the conditions of her subjects, and like *Migrant Mother*, they are often gritty and show the subjects dealing with the hardships of life with dignity.

After World War II, technological improvements such as faster shutter speeds and the overall diminished size of the camera itself introduced many changes into photography. Previously cameras were cumbersome and it was nearly impossible to capture an object without being observed; however, the smaller cameras allowed photographers to blend into the crowd. Individuals were unaware they were being observed and the photographer could capture crisp movement and unguarded expressions. This invisibility of the photographer was unprecedented and “the scenes and interactions have an authentic, unposed look to them” (Hardy & Viklunc, 2013, para. 2). Street photography, as it was known, captured scenes that are as authentic as possible.

Several street photographers, such as Gary Winogrand, Lee Friedlander, and Larry Clark, photographed what they considered to be true behavior of people in public spaces. Through observation or integrating themselves into a situation, they were able to capture photographs that created a mood of “alienation and strain, maybe even a little anomie” (Becker, 1974, p. 9). Clark, for example, was addicted to amphetamine and he used his dependence and artistic talents to document the drug subculture in his 1971 *Tulsa* series. The photographs followed a group of

young people as they began experimenting with drugs, eventually losing themselves into the culture. Clark's photographs allowed viewers to experience the drug culture without having to leave the safety of their living room or gallery.

While Diane Arbus (1923-1971) did not integrate herself into the lifestyle of her subjects, she searched for individuals that society considered invisible. She focused her camera on those living on the edges of society-such as transvestites, midgets, giants, twins-and captured them staring directly into the camera. Her photographs act "like a visual boomerang, freaks and lonely people scare us into looking first at them and then back at ourselves" (Goldman, 1974, p. 30).

By the mid-1960s black and white photography had a firm hold as a recognized member of the art world, it was seen as legitimate art. However, like photography in general earlier in the century, color photography was struggling to be seen as a genuine expression of art. According to Jeffereis (2013), color photography broke through this barrier in the 1960s-1970s. Color photography was not new, Americans were used to seeing it in advertising or personal snapshots, but photographers like William Eggleston (b. 1939) used color in art photography to provide greater detail and understanding to an image. In fact, critics argue that Eggleston's 1976 Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art exhibition titled *Guide* was the turning point for color photography, allowing it to be fully viewed as a legitimate form of art. The use of color made art photography more descriptive, the content was more complex and therefore the viewer had more to absorb. Additionally, color could change the tone of an image. Bright colors of a landscape would portray a different sense to the viewer than the same image photographed with pastels.

Art in the 1980s often focused on public issues with artists attempting to bring attention to news items ignored by the mainstream media, such as the early days of the AIDS crisis, through multimedia exhibitions or guerilla events. Art was no longer a painting displayed on a

museum wall, but was becoming more noticeable in society and difficult to avoid. This created an uncertainty for many in the American public, they were unable to grasp the new direction art was taking and this “increased visibility and the socially directed nature of its subject matter: sexuality and identity, repression and power, commodities and desire” (Eklund, 2004) helped lead to the culture wars of the late 1980s. It was also a consumer driven era as the economy was robust and collectors were continuously searching for the next sensation, ready to buy early and at exorbitant prices. Some photographers were eager to be the recipients of such attention.

Clearly, the artistic purposes of all art forms (and certainly of photography as discussed) are varied by artist motives, historical context, and cultural practices. In what follows, I present three rhetorical theories that aid my analysis of the NEA social controversies. Each theory is grounded in rhetorical criticism, an interpretive scholarly approach that critically analyzes public communication as “the art of influencing men in some concrete situation” (Wichelns, 1925, p. 183). Persuasion is often conceived as a form of identification in rhetorical criticism and that “an isomorphic relationship can be established between social orders and methods of identification” (Mouat, 1958, p. 171). Identification, according to Kenneth Burke, is primal to persuasion. “You persuade man [sic] only insofar as you can talk his [sic] language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your way with his” (Burke, 1950, p. 141, emphasis original). As such, rhetorical criticism focuses on persuasion as identification and identification as persuasion “in such a way that one’s proposals are identified with the beliefs and desires of the audience and counterproposals with their aversions...” (Mouat, 1958, p. 172).



## **Bitzer's Rhetorical Situation**

A rhetorical situation, as defined by Bitzer (1968), is a ...complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence. (p. 6)

In other words, a situation can be rhetorical if discourse befitting the situation can modify the need in some way. Bitzer lays out several ground rules as to what makes a situation rhetorical, however, and not every situation falls within his guidelines. First, Bitzer (1968) notes that “rhetorical discourse comes into existence as a response to a situation” (p. 6), meaning if there is no situation, rhetorical discourse cannot exist. Hine, for example, could not have created his discourse, images of young children working alongside adults and large machinery, if the situation of child labor did not exist. Second, the discourse receives rhetorical significance because of the situation. Child labor was a real situation in the early 1900s and the discourse created by Hine was significant only because of the situation. Had child labor not existed, Hine could have attempted to create scenes of children working in factories, but it would be fiction and therefore not rhetorically significant. Conversely, Bitzer argues the “rhetorical situation must exist as a necessary condition of rhetorical discourse” (p. 7). Without one, the other cannot occur in a true rhetorical situation. Rhetorical situation can exist without physical discourse actually occurring and photographs are an example of such. An actual photograph cannot utter a word, but the images it contains invite the viewer to create discourse and alter reality, therefore creating a rhetorical situation. Hine understood that words alone would not change reality for children in the workforce, therefore he published images that were powerful enough to ignite

action on the part of the audience. Bitzer notes a rhetorical situation invites discourse that can participate in the situation and ultimately alters reality. Hine's photographs ultimately led to significant changes in America's child labor laws, allowing children to stop working and to attend school in the hopes that education will create a better life. This leads to Bitzer's sixth requirement, the discourse is rhetorical because it is a "fitting response to a situation that needs and invites it" (p. 7). Child labor in the early 1900s invited discourse and Hine's response of publishing photographs in an attempt to enforce change was fitting to the situation. Finally, Bitzer notes the "situation controls the rhetorical response" (p. 7). The correct response to ending child labor was ultimately Hine's photographs as words alone were not enough. The situation demanded that conversations occur on a national level in order to alter reality and the situation did not demand physical action or violence, but discussion.

In addition to the requirements described, Bitzer argues there are three elements of a rhetorical situation that exist before discourse occurs: exigence, audience, and constraints. He believed there must be an urgency to a situation before an individual decides to create discourse, an audience that could alter reality must exist, and finally there are constraints the rhetor and audience must consider.

### **Exigence, Audience, Constraints**

Exigence, as defined by Bitzer (1968), is "an imperfection marked by urgency" (p. 6). In every rhetorical situation, there must be a need that is to be addressed via discourse or the situation cannot exist. The Great Depression created several lines of discourse worldwide and the Farm Security Administration decided in order for them to both document history and address a need via discourse was to photograph the plight of those suffering the economic reality of the times. They hired photographers like Lange to create the appropriate discourse that was

shared with lawmakers and the general public in an attempt to alter reality. Therefore Bitzer argues “an exigence is rhetorical when it is capable of positive modification and when positive modification requires discourse or can be assisted by discourse” (p. 7). Had the FSA deposited the photos in a vault and not shared their findings, their response would not be a rhetorical exigence, but sharing the photos made it so. Bitzer also notes the exigence defines the audience addressed and change to be affected in a rhetorical situation.

Grant-Davie (1997) examined Bitzer’s beliefs of exigence and notes the rhetor needs to determine what the discourse is really about. He argues the answer to the question could be quite simple, the FSA wanted to raise awareness to help end the Great Depression. However, if one were to examine the situation more closely, one would realize the real issue may be about banking regulation or government control of interest rates more so than documenting the migrant worker. Grant-Davie believes the rhetor must examine a situation at its most obvious level in addition to identifying the fundamental issues underlying the situation in order to determine his/her course of debate. Determining the fundamental values also makes the exigency obvious, the discourse needs to occur at the right time in order for reality to be altered. Discourse about ending the Great Depression had to happen in the 1930s in order to be effective.

The second element of a rhetorical situation is audience. A single individual cannot affect change on a large-scale and needs to encourage action on the part of others to be mediators of change. The audience also needs to be the correct group of individuals that can create change. Hine’s photographs were effective because they were shown to the correct audience, lawmakers. Had he simply shared the photographs with friends and family, reality would not be altered and child labor laws not enforced at that time. Therefore a rhetorical audience is made of individuals who can be influenced by the discourse created and be mediators of change.

Grant-Davie (1997) notes the audience in Bitzer's view is too simple and extends the definition of audience in a rhetorical situation. He believes the audience consists of the people the rhetor must negotiate with in order to achieve rhetorical objectives. Audiences are not homogeneous masses, but are constantly changing individuals. Audiences may be real or imagined, may be familiar with the rhetor and vice versa, and may be well versed in the situation or naïve. Grant-Davie believes the rhetor, in order to develop the discourse appropriate for the situation, must have an idea of the audience to be addressed. A scholar will shape a message to other scholars with more distinct language yet will deliver the same message in layman's terms when discussing with non-scholars. Similarly, audience members may find themselves in new roles through the discourse. An individual first viewing Clark's *Tulsa* series may at first have negative and stereotypical images of the subjects in his photographs, that drug addicts are a burden on society. However, by the end of the viewing, the viewer may have developed sympathy for these people and their struggle, finding their own role altered. As the rhetor and audience develop new roles in the rhetorical situation, they must change their discourse accordingly, making the roles "dynamic and interdependent" (Grant-Davie, 1997, p. 271).

Finally, Bitzer notes "every rhetorical situation contains a set of constraints made up of persons, events, objects, and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence" (p. 7). Constraints could include documents, laws, interests, or motives. The rhetor also brings his or her own constraints into a situation, such as personality or style. Bitzer believes there are two classes of constraints. First there are those constraints that can be managed by the rhetor, such as personal beliefs. A rhetor would not argue for a change that was against his or her own philosophies. Second, some

constraints are operative and out of the control of the rhetor. The rhetor that can control the constraints has more power to persuade the audience to take the desired action.

Grant-Davie (1997) believes Bitzer defines constraints too broadly as “all factors that may move the audience, including factors in the audience, the rhetor, and the rhetoric” (p. 272). He believes the constraints could be better defined if one removes the rhetor and audience, defining constraints as “all factors in the situation that may lead the audience to be either more or less sympathetic to the discourse, and that may therefore influence the rhetor’s response to the situation” (Grant-Davie, 1997, p. 273). Every situation has constraints ranging from personal experiences to the political climate to geographic areas. Grant-Davie argues the rhetor must determine which constraints are relevant to the situation and how to react. When faced with a negative constraint, the rhetor needs to decide whether to ignore it or address it directly.

Unlike Bitzer, Grant-Davie believes the rhetor plays a role in the rhetorical situation before discourse is created. He argues the rhetor must “consider who they are in a particular situation and be aware that their identity may vary from situation to situation” (Grant-Davie, 1997, p. 269). Many situations involve multiple rhetors and each must know one’s place in the circumstances as a whole. Hine was the artist, the man who photographed images portraying child labor, yet he was not the only rhetor involved. Others include the individuals who designed the layout of his photographs to the editors of newspapers that published his work, not to mention the lobbyists that helped persuade lawmakers to change policy. Each rhetor participated, but in different ways and with varying levels of desire. Additionally, a rhetor may play several roles simultaneously, depending on audiences and the message. Grant-Davie (1997) argues rhetors can develop a measure of consistency that is showcased from situation to situation

yet simultaneously they must be able to adapt to “new situations and not rigidly play the same role in every one” (p. 270).

### **Spheres of Argumentation**

According to Goodnight (2012), arguments develop in the personal, technical, or public spheres, with sphere being defined as “the grounds upon which arguments are built and authorities to which arguers appeal” (p. 200). He argues societies have collective experiences that allow them to express doubts or opinions through discourse and how they express it depends on the sphere of argumentation they chose to follow. Disagreements that do not demand formal evidence or language are considered to be in the personal sphere. The argument can exist, the rules can change, yet the argument itself is relatively informal and not requiring the rhetors to follow particular procedures. Arguments in the technical sphere, however, demand evidence and the rules of argumentation are firm. An example may be a scientist attempting to discredit a theory or showcase a new one. The rules the scientist must follow are laid out, particular language must be used, and the evidence must be solid. Arguments that take place in the public sphere provide “forums with customs, traditions, and requirements for arguers in the recognition that the consequences of dispute extend beyond the personal and technical spheres” (Goodnight, Spheres of Argument, 2012, p. 202). While the personal and technical spheres take place among certain individuals or specialized communities, arguments in the public sphere relate to the interests of the community as a whole. Zarefsky (2012) notes Goodnight’s four criteria upon which each sphere is determined. Each sphere has specific distinctions that separate them from one another, including “who is affected by the discourse, who is eligible to participate in the deliberations, what expertise and training is required, and what evaluative norms apply” (p. 212).

Goodnight (1991) argues that persuasive communication traditionally relies on an audience that has a shared knowledge and opinion of the situation at hand; therefore he believes controversy and its corresponding arguments must have a public audience in order to be effective. The public sphere surpasses the personal and technical spheres, as the argument is not as fluid as the personal sphere yet it isn't as specialized as the technical sphere. It is directed at the general public, yet "limits participation to representative spokespersons" (Goodnight, *Spheres of Argument*, 2012, p. 202). The general public will have discussions amongst themselves about the situation at hand; however, certain spokespersons will represent their views as a whole to the rest of the world. The spokespersons will "employ common language, values, and reasoning" (Goodnight, *Spheres of Argument*, 2012, p. 202) in an effort to settle the argument in a satisfactory manner. Zarefsky (2012) notes arguments in the public sphere can potentially affect individuals generally, as all are citizens of a community, geographic area, or nation as a whole. The outcome could affect a far greater number of people than those who are actually involved in the argumentation process.

Oppositional arguments disrupt society by aiming at "rendering evident and sustaining challenges to communication practices that delimits the proper expression of opinion and constrain the legitimate formation of judgment within personal and public spheres" (Olson & Goodnight, 1994, p. 250). Goodnight's view determines if a controversy does not take place in a public sphere, it does not allow for "genuine public presence and genuine public deliberation" (Phillips, 1999, p. 489). The public sphere, then, is where all people have the opportunity to come together to agree or disagree with the controversial conversations at hand. It is a "means of establishing deliberative normality to an increasingly fragmented society" (Phillips, 1999, p. 490). Additionally, Goodnight argues the "public sphere provides a sense of stability, normality,

and genuineness to the chaotic disputes of contemporary society” (Phillips, 1999, p. 491).

Arguments within the public sphere, according to Zarefsky (2012), are evaluated by the generally accepted beliefs and standards of the general public.

Arguments within the personal sphere typically exist within a small group of individuals and tend to be transient. Goodnight (2012) gives an example of two strangers arguing in an airport. The argument will most likely be short-lived between the two original rhetors; however, it could live on through others who joined the argument as it progressed. Zarefsky (2012) argues that observers may find the argument irrelevant and ignore it altogether. The argument that exists in the personal sphere requires little preparation, if any, and the disputants determine the claims and subject matter through the course of the argument. Evidence is not required to be formal and can be drawn from personal experience or from appropriate material. Additionally, the rhetors are arguing to defend personal beliefs. Something was said that struck a chord deep within another’s core system of values, enough to make him or her speak out in defense of said values, and the personal sphere of argumentation ensues. According to Zarefsky (2012), arguments in the personal sphere are evaluated by determining if position advancement could help the interpersonal relationship, if one existed in the first place. Oftentimes arguments within the private sphere stay in the private sphere; however, they can become a public sphere of argumentation when the topic is “grounded in questions of the public interest and responsibility” (Goodnight, *Spheres of Argument*, 2012, p. 204).

Disagreements within the technical sphere tend to have a very small range of permissible topics and require solid and concentrated forms of reasoning. Goodnight notes these arguments have “limited rules of evidence, presentation, and judgment” (p. 202), which can identify who is eligible to present the argument and further their beliefs or findings. Zarefsky (2012) supports



this notion, stating rhetors in the technical sphere of argumentation are often experts in a particular field due to training and experiences. Economists argue about economic issues, theologians argue about religious matters, and so on. All others are outside the bounds of argumentation, as they are not qualified to discuss the topic and leave the power to the technical experts. The outcome often affects more people than those who engage in the actual argument.

In reviewing the personal, technical, and public spheres of argumentation, one could determine that many artists (and clearly photographers as discussed) use the public sphere to effect change. To draw upon Hine yet again, he understood that he could not argue with each person on a personal level or discuss the technical aspects of the camera or his artwork. He knew he had to show his images to as many individuals as possible in order for children to have the opportunity to go to school rather than spend their youth in the workforce. He used the public sphere to create discussion and to change policy. Several decades later Arbus used the public sphere to make the invisible visible. Her images of those who were considered different by society made viewers realize that all people are alike on the inside. All people suffer from loneliness, for example, regardless of social standing, and her images helped the general public see how those they considered to be outcasts were actually very much like themselves. Serrano and Mapplethorpe used the public sphere as a commentary of the freedom to express one's beliefs. Serrano created the *Piss Christ* as a way to express his beliefs about the cheapening of religion, hoping viewers would consider their own beliefs about faith. Mapplethorpe used his images as an expression of homosexuality, making this lifestyle more acceptable to society.

### **Photography, the Rhetorical Situation, and Spheres of Argumentation**

Based on Bitzer's rhetorical situation and Goodnight's public sphere of argumentation, it is logical to conclude that photographers over the past 100 years have attempted to show that art

is public and empathetic. There is often an urgent need, from Riis' images of poverty in New York City to Lange's showcase of migrants workers facing homelessness to Clark's drug subculture in Oklahoma, the images portray the subjects and their situations as a commentary on society. Serrano felt the urgency to point out the cheapening of the Catholic faith with the *Piss Christ*, hoping viewers would examine their own faith-based actions and return to the foundations of the church if they so desired. Mapplethorpe used his artwork as a commentary on sexual freedom, both within the church that condemned this lifestyle and society as a whole. His need was to showcase that homosexuality existed, it could be violent or tender, but it is a way of life for some members of society and they do not have to be seen as outcasts.

The audiences for photographers are varied and depend on the situation. Oftentimes the only way to create change is to start at a grassroots level, using images to start discussions. Eventually, if the need is great enough, the audience will soon become the lobbyists and lawmakers, individuals who can make the change permanent. In the case of Serrano and Mapplethorpe, the original audiences were art supporters, those who could appreciate and/or purchase works of art. With the controversy started by Wildmon and Robertson, however, their audiences soon grew to be the general public and eventually the federal government.

Constraints for photographers were often technical. Originally cameras were very bulky and heavy, it was difficult to capture images easily and the speed of printing and distribution was lengthy. Any urgent news would often take several days to reach the various parts of the country. However, the belief systems of the photographers were also a constraint. In order to effectively project the situation to potential audiences, the photographer had to believe in the lifestyle, situation, or emotion. Serrano believed too many individuals were placing their beliefs on mass-produced items and forgetting the foundations of their faith. Had he not had this belief,

could he have effectively captured people's attention with *Piss Christ*? It could potentially have never been created. Similarly Mapplethorpe could conceivably had troubles capturing his images of intimate homosexual acts if he truly did not believe in that lifestyle.

Finally, artists engage the public sphere for expressing empathy. Without the public to view and discuss their work, whether it be supportive or not, the public must exist in order for their arguments for change to take place. The photographers are the representatives or spokespersons for the subjects captured by the camera and the outcome of their photographs have the potential to affect a great number of people.

To summarize, artists since the late 1800s have used photography as a form of communication to create empathy and effect change. They are aware of a social need, understand the audiences and constraints, and use the public sphere to argue for reform. The change can affect many, or just a few, but the discourse is typically within the public sphere.

## **Texts**

Three of the five artifacts selected for this research come from *Culture Wars: Documents from the Recent Controversies in the Arts*, a book edited by Richard Bolton. The fourth document is an electronic copy of a full-page ad placed in the *Washington Times* on February 13, 1990. The fifth document is the original full-page ad placed in *USA Today*, June 25, 1990.

The initial document was a letter dated April 5, 1989, from Wildmon to Congress, Christian organizations, and the media. The significance of this artifact is it is the first piece made public by Wildmon in what became known as the Culture Wars. The letter is relatively short, only four paragraphs, and describes Serrano's *Piss Christ* before discussing what he considers the bigotry created by popular media that is now in art museums. The second artifact, also found in Bolton's book, is the July 25, 1989, press release on the National Endowment for

the Arts distributed the American Family Association. This twelve-paragraph artifact is significant as it introduces the Mapplethorpe exhibition to the public and brings it into the arena of publicly funded objectionable art. The third text significant to the situation is the October 25, 1989, direct mail piece distributed by Robertson and the Christian Coalition. This is significant as it is the first direct mail piece distributed by the Christian Coalition. It introduces the organization to recipients and requests their help in blocking NEA funding. Additionally, a red envelope containing graphic descriptions of nine Mapplethorpe photographs was enclosed in the mail piece. The fourth artifact included in this research is a fundraising advertisement that appeared in the *Washington Times* on February 13, 1990. This full-page advertisement was paid for by the American Family Association and titled “Is This How You Want Your Tax Dollars Spent?” The ad is text heavy, consisting of 24 paragraphs describing not just the Serrano and Mapplethorpe pieces, but also other examples the AFA claimed were funded by the National Endowment for the Arts. This piece is significant as it is published shortly before a congressional hearing on the reauthorization of the NEA. The final artifact reviewed in this research is an original, full-page advertisement placed by the Christian Coalition in *USA Today*, June 25, 1990. Appearing on page 8A, the ad is addressed to the Congress of the United States and is text heavy with several bullet points highlighting their concerns. Created in the form of a letter, the ad states federal legislators allowed funds to be used to pay for objectionable art. Using six bullet points, the ad briefly describes works by Serrano, Mapplethorpe and others using language designed to shock or disgust the reader. The ad describes the electorate as “furious,” “disgusted,” “shocked,” and “discouraged” (*USA Today*, 1990, p. 8A) before asking legislators if they want to face constituents for voting to promote such activities. The bold face text notes they may not face any risk, perhaps their districts are populated by “homosexuals and

pedophiles” (*USA Today*, 1990, p. 8A), in which case they are allocating funds as they should. The alternative is again in bold type, alerting legislators to the fact their constituents are normal people, just like them. The only way to find out is to vote for NEA funding and eventually be voted out of office for supporting immoral activities. This ad is significant due to the timing of its placement. The spring of 1990 was rife with weekly, if not daily, activities throughout the nation surrounding arts support or rejection. Congressional subcommittees were deliberating the future of the NEA and decisions were leaning toward continued funding. The ad was distributed in hopes of changing the minds of lawmakers.

In this chapter, I have attempted to illustrate how rhetorical criticism (as exemplified by Bitzer and Goodnight) can provide general scholarly insight about photography as an art form. Albeit abbreviated and highly descriptive, my truncated rhetorical criticism concludes that the art form of photography is generally public and empathetic. I begin chapter three with this premise and then provide a detailed analysis of the NEA controversy and how the Christian right arguably manufactured controversy by requiring publicly funded art to cater to Christian morals.

## **CHAPTER THREE: DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS, RHETORICAL SITUATION, SPHERES OF ARGUMENTATION**

Building upon Goodnight's theoretical definition of social controversy, defined as "an extended rhetorical engagement that critiques, resituates, and develops communication practices bridging the public and personal spheres" (Olson & Goodnight, 1994, p. 249), I will engage rhetorical analysis in three stages. First is an initial understanding of the situation, a perspective gained by conducting a descriptive analysis. I will then build upon this analysis in stage two by incorporating Bitzer's rhetorical situation and then I will discuss the manufacturing of the Culture Wars' social controversy by focusing on Goodnight's theory. I will then return to the situation in terms of Wildmon and Robertson manufacturing this social controversy in stage three where I present the implications of my rhetorical analysis.

### **Descriptive Analysis**

A descriptive analysis is a helpful initial rhetorical tool when analyzing artifacts for rhetorical research. According to Campbell and Burkholder (1997), there are two goals for descriptive analysis. As a starting point for engaging further analysis, the first goal is to understand how the discourse relates to the rhetor's rhetorical purpose. The second goal is to determine how the discourse attempts to achieve the rhetor's purpose and examines the strategies used. There are seven elements of descriptive analysis that will be applied to the artifacts in this research: purpose, persona, audience, tone, structure, supporting materials, and other strategies. The artifacts used in this research will be examined separately and then compared and analyzed to determine if a common theme emerges.

### **Artifact One: April 5, 1989 Letter from Wildmon**

The purpose of a descriptive analysis is to determine the main thesis of the discourse and what reaction is the rhetor seeking from the audience. In the case of the AFA April 5, 1989, letter sent to Congress, Christian organizations, and the media, the purpose was implicit. Upon review of the tone and structure of the artifact, it was determined the purpose was to literally shame the reader for not publicly speaking out sooner regarding the “bias and bigotry against Christians” (Bolton, 1992, p. 27). This inaction only allowed the media to create movies, videos, and art that added to the anti-Christian bias. While the rhetor does not specifically ask the audience to take action, it is implied, as will be seen later in this discussion.

The persona of the rhetor (Wildmon) is that of moral leader. The artifact is in the form of a letter of which his title, executive director, is added in his signature. Wildmon does not assume a position of one better than the audience, however. The first sentence begins with “we” and this word is used throughout the artifact. He also refers to “most of us as Christians” (Bolton, 1992, p. 27) when he discusses the inaction of Christians in the current situation.

The audience is empirical as the letter was mailed directly to members of Congress, Christian organizations throughout the nation, and the media. While it isn’t known if the letter was viewed or reprinted, these are the individuals Wildmon had in mind while creating this discourse. He views this audience as Christians as a whole. He addresses the audience as so in his phrase “we Christians” (Bolton, 1992, p. 27) and it is implied all have felt the sting of anti-Christian rhetoric. The image of the audience he is creating is that of a humiliated Christian rather than attempting to empower the reader. He argues “most of us have refused to publically respond” (Bolton, 1992, p. 27) to bigotry and now we are paying the price with movies such as *The Last Temptation of Christ* and Madonna’s *Like a Prayer* video. Finally, by shaming his

audience, Wildmon sees them as an agent of change through grassroots efforts (Christian organizations, media) and policy changes (Congress). While nothing specific is asked of the audience, the tone implies they have been silent long enough and the time has come to act as Serrano has taken anti-Christian bigotry too far with the *Piss Christ*.

According to Campbell and Burkholder (1997), tone is the rhetor's attitude toward the audience and the subject matter. In this case of this artifact, the tone is almost scholarly and personal at the same time, like a disappointed parent reprimanding a child or a friend lamenting to another the sad state of the world. Wildmon is scholarly as he gives the audience a great deal of information regarding Serrano's photograph, the history of the media's bias, popular culture and the future of faith. The information is presented with confidence, using phrases such as "of course" and "dominated," not allowing the audience room to disagree within his discourse. However, the tone is also personal as the artifact is presented in the form of a letter. It begins with "dear" and ends with "sincerely." As noted earlier, he shares in the shame of the reader and together they should feel humiliated for allowing this to happen.

The structure in descriptive analysis examines how discourse develops and if it creates a sense of inevitability to the audience. The April 1989 AFA letter has a historical-chronological structure as it opens with the current day and a discussion of Serrano's *Piss Christ*. The body is the history of anti-Christian bigotry and bias, noting this has been happening for "the past decade or more" (Bolton, 1992, p. 27). He continues to discuss the past with "as a young child growing up" and leads to the future in the closing paragraph with "before the physical persecution of Christians begins" (Bolton, 1992, p. 27). The structure is also slightly narrative-dramatic as Wildmon assumes there is a shared knowledge of bigotry towards Christians. He notes "we should have known it would come to this" (Bolton, 1992, p. 27), implying through this shared



history of media's actions (*The Last Temptation of Christ* and *Like a Prayer*) objectionable art was sure to happen.

The supporting materials Wildmon used in his artifact are examples, not just of the artwork, but of other popular culture items such as the movie and Madonna video. He also notes twice the media is the largest contributor to these examples, and therefore the leaders of the anti-Christian bias. The other strategies used by Wildmon in this artifact are allusions to familiar materials, such as the movie and video noted.

### **Artifact Two: July 25, 1989 American Family Association Press Release**

The purpose of this artifact was to inform the audience of wasteful government spending, particularly in the case of alleged NEA funding of the Serrano and Mapplethorpe exhibitions. The AFA uses this artifact to paint the artists and the NEA as elitist and above having to answer to the government regarding monetary expenditures.

The persona used is somewhat ambiguous, as the rhetor, the AFA, is not identified until paragraph nine. Media receiving this news release may be aware the author was the AFA, as one could assume the release was printed on the organization's letterhead. However, if reprinted in a newspaper or magazine, the reader would not easily identify the rhetor or even identify it as a Christian organization. While it may not be immediately clear who the rhetor is, the persona is authoritative, that of a person or organization that is more knowledgeable about government funding and objectionable artwork than the average citizen. The rhetor mentions a NEA dollar amount (\$171 million) six times in the artifact, though it is not clear to the reader if this is the annual budget for the NEA or the amount it awards to artists. The rhetor also mentions phrases like "taxpayer's expense" or "tax funded" throughout the artifact, driving home the fact the dollars used to fund the art came out of the pockets of the American taxpayer. The rhetor

discusses four pieces of objectionable art in detail in addition to the funding source plus how the NEA describes artists as an “elite group above accountability” and “superior in talent to the working masses” (Bolton, 1992, p. 72).

The audience is that of the everyman, the average, pragmatic American taxpayer who should be upset by the fact s/he has no control of how tax dollars are spent. The artifact notes on several occasions “the American taxpayer is forced to help fund such pornography” (Bolton, 1992, p. 71), reiterating the fact the taxpayer is helpless and government spending is out of their control. However, the artifact offers a solution and asks the taxpayer to contact senators and request to stop funding the NEA.

The artifact describes artists as elite before discussing the opposite end of the spectrum, the one the audience can readily identify with – the “carpenter, truck driver, factory worker, or sales clerk” (Bolton, 1992, p. 71). The rhetor is not describing doctors, lawyers or professors, but an individual the average American can easily identify with, the blue-collar worker, and therefore whom the rhetor is imagining when creating this discourse. The rhetor doesn’t say outright who the audience is, but through phrases such as “not with the tax dollars of truck drivers, brick masons, carpenters, and factory workers” (Bolton, 1992, p. 72), it is clear who is implied. Another example of identifying the audience as blue-collar workers and not the elite appears in the phrase “other Americans, working artists” (Bolton, 1992, p. 72), which is an attempt to prove a carpenter is as much an artist as Serrano and Mapplethorpe, but because they aren’t part of the elite, they won’t receive the millions of NEA dollars given to others.

The tone the rhetor applies to the subject matter is one of indignation. Through the use of adjectives and quotations, the rhetor feels it is unjust artists should have received federal money for their artwork. The artwork is introduced as “offensive, demeaning and pornographic”

(Bolton, 1992, p. 71) in the first sentence of the artifact. From there the photographs of Serrano and Mapplethorpe aren't just called photographs, but "homosexual photographs," "homoerotic photographs, or "homosexual pornography" (Bolton, 1992, p. 71). Descriptions of the artwork are graphic and use words that illicit images of the innocent being harmed, like "violation," "exposing," and "she has a sad face and looks scared" (Bolton, 1992, p. 71). Another subject conjures images of torture, with phrases describing a man "crouched over, his penis on a block" (Bolton, 1992, p. 71). Strangely enough, the subject in the photo for "pedophile homosexuals" (Bolton, 1992, p. 71) is described as a little boy happily displaying his genitals for all to view. The artwork is always referred to in quotation marks in this artifact, such as "works of art" or "art." The quotation marks themselves delegitimize the words, implying the rhetor doesn't believe the photographs are true works of art, adding to the tone of indignation.

The tone towards the audience is direct, straightforward in descriptions of the artwork and how it was funded. Because the rhetor notes twice how the public is forced (their word) to support this artwork with taxpayer money, it is almost as if the rhetor sees them as helpless, held prisoner by a government that spends this money inappropriately.

The structure is problem-solution with some narrative-dramatic. It is narrative-dramatic in the fact the audience understands the rhetor's indignation about wasteful government spending. It is expected the government will spend money wisely and for the public good; therefore to discover this doesn't always happen goes against expectations. Through graphic descriptions of the artwork, like "a crucifix of Christ submerged in a vase filled with Serrano's urine" (Bolton, 1992, p. 71), and the repetition of the funding source, the audience becomes the everyman the rhetor is seeking and is upset about how taxpayer's money is spent.

The structure is also problem-solution. The first four paragraphs describe the problem, in this case the artwork of Serrano and Mapplethorpe. The next four paragraphs discuss the NEA, the government agency that is unwisely spending taxpayer money, and their attitude toward the average citizen. The artifact notes the NEA is elitist and “receives \$171 million in tax money and tells Congress and the taxpayers to get lost” (Bolton, 1992, p. 72). The solution is offered in the ninth paragraph when the AFA finally identifies itself and declares it will ask the Senate to stop NEA funding. The next paragraph is the call to action with “we as that other American, working artists who are not supported by tax dollars, join us in contacting their Senators” (Bolton, 1992, p. 72). As taxpayers contact senators, it is expected they will realize the public does not want their money to be used to support objectionable art and the NEA. The rhetor considers defunding the NEA an acceptable choice as the organization could still “receive millions from private grants” (Bolton, 1992, p. 72), which means the donor won’t object to how the money is awarded to artists. Artists could still receive money to create art, but “not with the tax dollars of truck drivers, brick masons, carpenters, and factory workers” (Bolton, 1992, p. 72).

This artifact uses figurative analogy, examples, and a quote as support materials. Throughout the artifact the rhetor compares the everyman to the artists. The everyman knows how to live a moral, heterosexual life while the elite, i.e. the homosexual artists, are not to be trusted. The main examples used are the four photographs described in the opening paragraphs. However, the focus of the photographs is the content and not a technical discussion of the color, lighting, camera exposure or shutter speeds. Rather it is a discussion meant to capture the attention of the reader with graphic descriptions and use of words that are out of place in day-to-day conversation, such as “genitals,” “exposed sexual organ,” “vagina,” and “penis.” These words stand out to the reader and make a definite impression. Paragraph eight contains a quote

from Hugh Southern, acting chairman of the NEA, which is used to support the AFA's argument the NEA considers artists elite and therefore above having to explain their actions. Finally, the \$171 million amount is used throughout the artifact, but, like the Southern quote, the source of the information is not noted. It is assumed the reader would be shocked or indignant enough to not question the source of the information, that by coming from the AFA it is proof enough and the evidence does not need to be supported.

Finally, other strategies used are repetition and vivid depictions of artwork. Phrases such as "taxpayer funded" and "\$171 million" are used repeatedly, reiterating the fact a large amount of money, given by taxpayers, was not spent wisely by the Endowment. Additionally, the sexual preference of the artists is used five times in the first four paragraphs. Two sentences directly tie homosexual photographs and taxpayer funding, while others relate the funding source to phrases such as "violation of this little girl" and "man standing nude with an erection" (Bolton, 1992, p. 71). Finally, the artifact vividly describes the artwork, for example:

One of Mapplethorpe's government funded photos, entitled "Honey," is that of a little girl about four years old. She has a sad face and looks scared, but the focus of the camera is on the child's genitals below her uplifted dress. The government helped fund the violation of this innocent little girl and the exposing of her private area to the public.

(Bolton, 1992, p. 71)

Descriptions like the one above create lasting impressions in the memory of the reader and helps support the rhetor's argument that federal money was not wisely spent.

### **Artifact Three: Christian Coalition Direct Mail Piece, October 25, 1989**

Robertson created the Christian Coalition in October 1989 and this direct mail piece was his introduction as founder of the organization. The purpose of this artifact was to introduce the

reader to the Christian Coalition and encourage membership. A problem is presented, in this case the funding of homoerotic photos, and the solution is the Christian Coalition.

The persona Robertson creates for this artifact is that of moral leader. He was already well known as a moral leader as the host of *The 700 Club*, a television program on the Christian Broadcasting Network, and this artifact reinforces this view as founder of the Christian Coalition. Robertson uses the artifact to explain why the Coalition was developed, stating “I founded a new organization to fight for our freedoms” (Bolton, 1992, p. 124). He personally invites individuals to join the organization and notes “as soon as I receive your membership form” (Bolton, 1992, p. 124). The discourse makes it clear he is the leader of this organization, even though his title is never directly noted.

The audience consists of those who received the direct mail piece. It is unknown who actually received the mailing; however, it could be guessed the names came from those who supported Robertson in his presidential bid one year earlier or those who contributed to the Christian Broadcast Network, of which he was the owner. Robertson begins identifying the audience as Americans who pay taxes, as the first several sentences contain phrases such as “your hard earned tax dollars” and “your tax funded material.” Once he develops them as hardworking, law abiding individuals, Robertson then allows them to see themselves as he wants them to be seen—as people concerned about the moral fiber of the nation. He notes how wearing a Christian Coalition lapel pin to political meetings, the community will see the wearer as a concerned citizen. A Christian Coalition member will “speak out on issues” and “register God-fearing Americans to vote” (Bolton, 1992, p. 124) in addition to organizing chapters in every political precinct. The discourse at this point often refers to the audience and Robertson as “we,” as if the reader is already a member of the Christian Coalition. The text is clearly creating the

image of an empowered citizen exercising his or her right to express opinions and fight for the morality of the nation. It is important to note, however, he does not create this image until after he invites the reader to become a member of the Christian Coalition. Without becoming a member, the reader is a hard working citizen that does not actively participate in creating change.

The tone is personal and this artifact is in the form of a letter with formal salutations of “dear” and “sincerely.” However, it is also very direct regarding his feelings towards government funding of homosexual artwork. As noted earlier, Robertson discusses how taxpayer dollars paid for the artwork, which he describes as “vile,” “trash,” “garbage,” “pornographic filth,” and “vulgar.” He calls the funding as a whole a “travesty” and “the tide of pornography, filth and moral decay that is attacking every level of our society” (Bolton, 1992, p. 124). These statements make it clear he does not approve of this artwork.

His tone towards the audience is created to empower the reader to become an active citizen. He does not speak down to the reader, nor does he necessarily recognize them in his discourse until he requests their membership. He sees the audience as supporters of his organization and as the membership grows, the more people his message will reach through civic, grassroots efforts.

Robertson uses a problem-solution structure in this artifact. The problem is the government money being given to fund the creation of “homosexual erotic photographs” (Bolton, 1992, p. 123). He doesn’t specifically name the artist, but the red envelope included in the mailing describes nine photos created by Robert Mapplethorpe. The second part of the problem are the “ACLU and liberal Democrats in Washington” (Bolton, 1992, p. 123) who are supporting the National Endowment for the Arts. Robertson claims they are trying to keep this situation quiet so they won’t be voted out of office. He argues they are “hiding behind ‘free

speech' and 'freedom of expression' as a reason to continue funding this pornographic filth” (Bolton, 1992, p. 124). The solution offered by Robertson is the Christian Coalition, developed to “fight for our freedoms” (Bolton, 1992, p. 124). Described as an activist organization, the activities of the membership will “force America to face the moral issues that threaten to destroy us” (Bolton, 1992, p. 124). Only through these activities as a Coalition member will the morality of America be saved.

The only supporting material used in this artifact is something not in support of the organization, but that which exemplifies the moral decay of art. The first sentence of the artifact begins with “the enclosed red envelope.” Robertson knows his audience and is counting on the fact that people are often curious about what is forbidden and they will open this envelope. The fact that it is red only entices them more as red is the color of danger, sexual impulses, war, passion, and blood. His first sentence and the enclosure of the red envelope sets the expectation that viewers will see images only available to the selected individuals who receive the mail piece. It is almost elitist in this sense. While the envelope is about photographs taken by Mapplethorpe, the images are not included, as they are considered “too vulgar to print” (Bolton, 1992, p. 124). They are intimately, albeit briefly, described. Each image begins with a number and continues with descriptions such as “a man in a suit exposing himself” or “a man urinating in another man’s mouth” (Bolton, 1992, p. 125). While Robertson is sending these descriptions to the audience, it is interesting to note he is at the same time he is telling them to immediately destroy the contents of red envelope.

Robertson is very clear in this artifact he sees a problem and his organization is the solution. He is attempting to garner membership and does so by creating an audience as they



wish to be seen, as active citizens saving the moral fiber of the country. He does not use other rhetorical strategies, with the exception of vivid descriptions of the envelope's contents.

**Artifact Four: American Family Association Advertisement, February 13, 1990**

The purpose of this artifact is not explicitly stated; however, close examination leads one to believe the purpose is to highlight the immoral activities in America funded by the NEA. A solution is not offered to the situation, nor is a clear action indicated, but the reader will reach the end of the artifact believing the NEA funds only immoral works of art.

The rhetor is relatively anonymous through the main portion of this advertisement. The top half of the full-page ad consists of the discourse while the bottom half lists House of Representative members that voted in support of NEA funding. Located at the lower right corner is a small box that identifies the rhetor as the American Family Association. It mentions the above discourse, allowing the reader to ascertain this organization supported the ad and approved of the text.

The persona is that of a scholar as the discourse presents information as facts. The organization presents itself as one knowledgeable about NEA funding, government processes, and numerous grant awards. The discourse begins with the rhetor describing the NEA as a federal arts granting agency with a budget of \$171,000,000 that uses this money to support “pornographic, anti-Christian ‘works of art’” (*The Washington Times*, 1990, p. A5). It then describes with varying degrees of detail, thirteen grant awards the rhetor finds objectionable. The scholar persona continues with the examples of these awards, stating grant amounts no less than eleven times, each time making a clear connection between the NEA, the money, and the end result. Example number four states “the NEA gave \$40,000 to the Gay Sunshine Press to publish sexually explicit homosexual stories” (*The Washington Times*, 1990, p. A5). This text

makes it obvious the NEA awarded a large amount of money to an organization to print certain materials. Each example discusses the grant award and its purpose, whether it was to publish materials, exhibit artwork, or present live performances. The examples are clearly stated, leaving little room for doubt these activities actually took place. The discourse ends with a description of the political process and how Senator Jesse Helms' amendment that would reduce NEA funding was defeated in the House by the actions of Representative Ralph Regula. The text notes how Regula used "a tactical parliamentary move" and "refused to yield the floor" (*The Washington Times*, 1990, p. A5), allowing the NEA to continue to receive government funding.

The audience consists of readers of *The Washington Times*, a daily newspaper in direct competition with the more liberal *The Washington Post*. Founded in 1982 by Reverend Sun Myung Moon, he noted in an anniversary speech the role of the *Times* was to "promote ethics and moral values in our society" and help "people understand the importance of strong moral, family values" (*The Washington Times*, 1990, p. A5). Assuming readers of the *Times* hold similar beliefs as the newspaper, the AFA was directing their message to those they felt could be agents of change. The AFA could have seen these individuals as people who, like the *Times* and AFA, felt society was moving away from strong family values and would encourage legislators to defeat NEA funding. The discourse does not directly ask the reader to contact legislators; however, it does provide the name, mailing address and phone number of the 262 congressmen that voted in support of the NEA. It is implied that a reader who disagrees with NEA funding will contact the names listed. The only course of action the AFA directly states is to join their organization to stay informed.

Like the persona, the tone of the artifact is scholarly as a great deal of information is presented as fact. However, the tone is also meant to shock the reader. The language is not

typical of an advertisement, where one expects to see “buy now” or “sale today.” Rather, the language is blunt, referring to the genitals or breasts no less than ten times, bodily fluids are mentioned five times, and homosexuality is referenced 12 times. The examples given by the AFA are descriptive, ranging from one grant that allowed two women to “casually chat about fellatio and swallowing sperm” (*The Washington Times*, 1990, p. A5) to an extended and graphic description of porn star Annie Sprinkle’s live performance. The blunt terms are as socially unacceptable as the actions of the artists themselves. The shock of the text is meant to get the reader impassioned enough to contact lawmakers and demand change.

Two structures are used in this artifact: problem-solution and topical. A majority of the artifact discusses the problem, which is two-fold. The first problem is the fact the NEA uses taxpayer money to fund “pornographic, anti-Christian ‘works of art’” (*The Washington Times*, 1990, p. A5). The artifact uses 22 paragraphs to support their argument that this practice is wrong in their eyes. The second problem is Regula’s refusal to yield the floor in debate and therefore the House could not vote to defund the National Endowment for the Arts. However, a clear solution is not offered. The contact information below the main discourse implies the reader could easily contact lawmakers to voice their displeasure.

The second structure used is topical as the artifact only refers to a handful of awards that support activities the AFA finds immoral. The artifact does not mention the millions of dollars in grant awards that support non-pornographic, morally acceptable works of art, preferring to ignore the fact that artwork they find morally robust would be at the same risk of losing funds as immoral art.

The AFA relies on detailed examples as support materials. Each example is stated to support their argument the NEA is spending federal money on immoral artistic activities. The

artifact describes three Mapplethorpe photographs, for instance, explaining “*Time* magazine said that, had this not been supported by the NEA, the exhibitor could have been charged with distributing child pornography” (*The Washington Times*, 1990, p. A5). Another detailed example describes booklets designed for lesbians while another describes a bust of Jesus in drag. The final example is extended and graphically describes an actress’s live stage performance in which she was said to have pleased herself with various items. These detailed examples support the strategy of explaining an event so vividly the audience experiences it with immediacy.

#### **Artifact Five: Christian Coalition Advertisement, June 25, 1990**

The purpose of this full-page ad featured in the *USA Today* is to shock readers into paying attention to the text and therefore forcing Congress to vote in a way Robertson finds morally acceptable. The ad is a public humiliation of Congressional leaders that support NEA funding and the rhetor points out the American public is not pleased and could potentially vote these individuals out of office.

The persona of Robertson, the rhetor, is that of moral leader. He identifies himself as such at the end of the artifact, as he signs it as “President, Christian Coalition” (*USA Today*, 1990, p. 8A). Prior to this, he discusses the Mapplethorpe and Serrano pieces in addition to other pieces he describes as “attacks on Jesus Christ” (*USA Today*, 1990, p. 8A). His text is aimed directly at the United States Congress and makes it clear he feels they have done a poor job. His persona as a moral leader shames Congressional leaders for their actions and instills a sense of fear of not being re-elected if they continue to fund the NEA.

The audience is two-fold. First, the artifact is addressed to the Congress of the United States and reads as such as he refers to the audience as “you” repeatedly. It reads as a personal letter that features not only misdeeds, such as their misguided attempts to secure a pay raise for

themselves or inability to balance the budget, but also the artwork in question. Robertson is laying out information and then asking Congress, these leaders of the nation, to act morally and not “give legitimacy to pornography and homosexuality” (*USA Today*, 1990, p. 8A). The second audience consists of readers of the *USA Today*, a daily newspaper distributed across the nation. The artifact is a full-page advertisement addressed to Congress with the full knowledge that readers across the nation will read it as well. If Congress does not act accordingly, they will do so with the knowledge that some readers of this publication may hold them accountable.

The tone is personal and direct. As said earlier, Robertson addresses Congress as though he is speaking to them personally, referring to them as “you.” He immediately notes the NEA used “funds provided by you” (*USA Today*, 1990, p. 8A) to pay for objectionable artwork. He then notes the electorate may not vote for them due to their disappointing actions in Congress. He then asks if “you want to face the voters with the charge that you are wasting their hard-earned money to promote sodomy, child pornography, and attacks on Jesus Christ?” (*USA Today*, 1990, p. 8A). He doesn’t beat around the bush, so to speak, directly stating how voters may feel due to Congressional actions. He shames Congress, telling them they are being asked to “vote like sheep” (*USA Today*, 1990, p. 8A) for NEA funding. He challenges them in a tone that turns sarcastic at this point in the artifact. He tells representatives they could vote for NEA funding only to discover their constituents are all “homosexuals and pedophiles” (*USA Today*, 1990, p. 8A), in which case support for the NEA is justified. He notes constituents may want “to teach their sons how to sodomize one another” or the church wants “pictures of the Pope soaked in urine” (*USA Today*, 1990, p. 8A). He offers a solution, which is to vote for NEA funding and ultimately lose their Congressional seats, to which he responds with “and make my day” (*USA Today*, 1990, p. 8A).

The structure of this artifact is narrative-dramatic. While Robertson uses many examples of objectionable funding and actions of Congress, he is ultimately stating that if a leader wants to be re-elected, the only appropriate course of action is to defund the National Endowment for the Arts. The point of the artifact is not the artwork that has been funded or the actions that are misguided, but the audience (Congressional leaders) risks losing their seat in government if they continue to act in such a way. Each reader understands how the political process works and because of this shared knowledge, it is understood representatives must change their ways.

Support and other materials consist solely of detailed examples with vivid descriptions. The point of the artifact is to shock the reader into paying attention. A typical ad found in a newspaper typically does not contain text such as “one man urinating in the mouth of another” or “Jesus Christ soaked in a jar of urine” (*USA Today*, 1990, p. 8A). Readers will continue reading whether they want to or not simply because the language is vivid—one cannot help but imagine what these images could look like—and socially unacceptable in this setting.

### **Summary**

Upon review of the five artifacts used in this research, descriptive analysis makes some items abundantly clear. The purpose for each artifact, while sometimes couched in another reason, is to inform the audience how the government uses taxpayer money to fund immoral art activities. Wildmon and Robertson use their rhetoric to portray a persona of a scholarly moral leader. They are men who have all the information necessary to help the average American realize the wasteful government spending that is occurring and empower them to become agents of change. Like the persona, the tone is mainly scholarly as the rhetors are presenting facts to the audience. The tone is also very direct and on two occasions personal, as if they are trying to relate to the audience. The audience varies, two artifacts are directly to supporters while another

two are addressed to Congress, but overall the audience is the average, taxpaying American. The structure is overall both problem-solution and narrative-dramatic. The problem is always the wasteful spending that supports homosexual and anti-Christian activities and the solution, when offered, is to contact representatives and request change. The narrative-dramatic approach is using American's shared history of government waste and overall view of art as elitist. Support materials are detailed examples in every artifact. The rhetor uses vivid descriptions to elaborate on the supposed activities of artists who receive NEA funding to create immoral artwork.

### **The Rhetorical Situation**

While Serrano and Mapplethorpe used their photographs as a commentary of freedom of expression, Wildmon and Robertson disagreed. They viewed this art not as empathetic, as historically perceived, but anti-Christian and immoral and therefore should not be publicly funded. They responded by creating attack campaigns against the NEA, assuming if the arts were not funded on a national level, images such as those created by Serrano and Mapplethorpe would not have the opportunity to be viewed by large numbers of people.

The rhetorical situation in 1989-1990 began when Wildmon and Robertson reacted to the artwork of Serrano and Mapplethorpe. The discourse created by Wildmon and Robertson came into existence because of a situation, in this case the artwork, and because of the artwork, the discourse was given rhetorical significance. Without the objectionable art, the discourse would not have meaning and the rhetorical situation would not exist. This particular rhetorical situation invited discourse that could alter reality. Wildmon and Robertson attempted to alter reality in a way they felt was positive, by attempting to restrict funding to the National Endowment for the Arts. The discourse they created was, they believed, a fitting response to the situation and finally, the situation controlled the response. Serrano and Mapplethorpe created artwork that

was meant to stir emotions and cause one to question values; it was their way of communicating their beliefs to the public.

The exigence Wildmon and Robertson felt was art that is anti-Christian should not be publicly funded. Wildmon, in his 1989 AFA press release, notes the Mapplethorpe photos are “nothing less than taxpayer funded homosexual pornography” (Bolton, 1992, p. 71). Robertson concurs, explaining in his 1989 direct mail piece how “your hard earned tax dollars paid for this trash” (Bolton, 1992, p. 123). The National Endowment for the Arts was nearing its mandatory five-year reallocation process and time was of the essence for Wildmon and Robertson to spread the word in an effort to defund the NEA. At a deeper level, however, the urgency felt by Wildmon and Robertson was not necessarily the federal funding of objectionable art, but also the loss of a way of life. The conservative administrations of presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush, Sr. created a decade with a strong moral majority and organizations like the American Family Association were seen as pillars of virtue. The uncertainty of the 1990s and the potential for a liberal administration frightened many conservatives. If the general public agreed it was acceptable for the government to fund art that was anti-Christian or portrayed homosexuality, Wildmon and Robertson worried their organizations would lose members, and ultimately donations, which would directly affect their careers and lifestyles. They were attempting to generate support for their cause not just to block federal funding of some art, but to maintain a strong moral majority in America and ultimately their way of life.

The audience for Wildmon and Robertson were federal legislators as these were the individuals who could determine the fate of the NEA; however, they knew they needed to generate support from the general public first. Without the support of the masses, they could not obtain the attention of Congress. They addressed members of the AFA and Christian Coalition



via direct mail, encouraging them to contact their federal representatives, asking them to block funding for the NEA. They also placed full-page advertisements in national newspapers, addressing Congress to stop federal funding of the arts and shaming them if they chose to support this funding.

There were three constraints Wildmon and Robertson faced. The first was timing. As noted earlier, the NEA was up for reallocation and the 1980s were coming to a close. Wildmon and Robertson needed to act fast to generate support not just to block NEA funding, but also to continue to serve as the guardians of American morality. They needed to maintain their membership if they were going to continue to exist in their current form. The second constraint was policy. While Wildmon and Robertson knew how they wanted to change federal funding, they did not have the authority to actually make the changes. They needed to generate support from their current members, gain the support of potential members, and ultimately the attention and support from federal lawmakers. The final constraint, however, is arguably the most important of the three. As discussed earlier, photography was historically seen as empathetic. Photographers could capture moments of social disparity to share with the public, who would respond by acting as agents of change and attempt to create equality in society. Wildmon and Robertson could not react by saying empathy was bad; rather they created the argument that photographic art is immoral. This argument allowed them to be seen as moral leaders while still obtaining their goal of defunding the NEA. This final constraint was to change the public's perception of viewing art as empathetic.

### **Manufactured Social Controversy**

Wildmon and Robertson often connected the arguments of morality and federal funding of objectionable art. They repeatedly pointed out the graphic nature of the images created by

Serrano and Mapplethorpe and connected them to phrases such as “taxpayer funded homosexual pornography” (Wildmon, AFA Press Release on the NEA, 1992, p. 71). Wildmon, in his press release distributed on July 25, 1989, attempted to strike sympathetic notes to the reader with his description of *Honey*, a Mapplethorpe photograph of a young girl with exposed genitals. He commented on her fearful expression, constructing an image of a child doing something against her will, and followed up with “the government helped fund the violation of this innocent little girl” (Wildmon, AFA Press Release on the NEA, 1992, p. 71). As the release continued, Wildmon pointed out how individuals were involuntarily paying for the creation of such artwork with statements such as “the American taxpayer is being *forced* (italics original) to help fund such pornography” (Wildmon, AFA Press Release on the NEA, 1992, p. 71) and concluding with the argument the taxpayer should “no longer be forced to support artists such as Mapplethorpe and Serrano” (Wildmon, AFA Press Release on the NEA, 1992, p. 72). His statements were aggressive, almost daring the reader to disagree.

Robertson continued with the argument against federal funding of objectionable art in his October 1989 direct mail piece, applying the notion that repetition is the key to learning. The mail piece begins with telling the recipient about the “homosexual erotic photographs that were funded by your tax dollars” (Robertson, 1992, p. 123). The second sentence continues to discuss the “vile contents of your tax funded material” and repeats the point again in the fourth sentence with “your hard earned dollars paid for this trash” (Robertson, 1992, p. 123). He emphasized this point as an attempt to not only get attention, but to dare the reader to forget how certain exhibitions may or may not have been funded.

Wildmon not only argues against the NEA in his fundraising advertisement dated February 13, 1990, but connects the federal support to anti-Christian propaganda, a.k.a. art. He

accuses the NEA of supporting “pornographic, anti-Christian ‘works of art’” (Wildmon, AFA Fundraising Advertisement, 1992, p. 150) and notes grant recipients can spend this money without being held accountable. The advertisement lists 13 situations in which Wildmon claims the NEA used taxpayer money to support not only Serrano and Mapplethorpe, but to support gay publishing, an exhibit featuring intimate acts between two females, rudimentary drawings titled *Jesus Sucks*, a gay film festival, and a photography exhibit featuring gay and lesbian couples, to name a few. Many of the examples listed the amount awarded by the NEA to support these activities and he often used “fund” or “tax-funded” to enforce his argument. The listed examples demonstrate a relationship between art and the persecution of Christian beliefs, such as a bust of Jesus in drag, an exhibition slandering Cardinal O’Connor of St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City, and a parody of *Piss Christ* featuring an image of Sen. Jesse Helms suspended in a jar of urine in addition to the examples listed above. The advertisement concluded with the names of all representatives that voted to continue NEA support and encouraged citizens to demand an end to the NEA “abuse and misuse of your tax dollars” (Wildmon, AFA Fundraising Advertisement, 1992, p. 153).

Robertson’s full page ad in the June 20, 1990, *Washington Post* directs the funding issue not at citizens, but to members of Congress. He begins with guilt, noting they are taking funds from taxpayers to fund the Endowment, the agency that supported exhibitions featuring the likes of Serrano and Mapplethorpe, to name a few. He clarifies the political left desires them to vote for NEA support to legitimize pornography and homosexuality, which is exactly what they want. He reports, in a sarcastic tone, that representatives may find their districts are full of pedophiles and homosexuals, in which case NEA support is justified. However, if the representative discovers his/her district is peopled with the average American taxpayer, support should be

discontinued immediately. His cleverly worded ad is aimed at shock and awe, but the argument that taxpayer money is going to fund these art activities is duly noted.

Wildmon and Robertson were savvy in selecting media that would publish their full-page advertisements. They selected three publications, the conservative *Washington Times*, centrist *USA Today*, and the liberal *Washington Post*. The *Times* was an obvious choice for Wildmon's February 13, 1990, advertisement. Knowing the readership consisted of conservatives that supported moral values, Wildmon knew his limits. He knew the paper would publish his borderline obscene advertisement because the owner, the Reverend Sun Myung Moon, strongly believed in bolstering moral values in America. By using a shock and awe approach, both organizations knew readers would support their objectives and demand moral values for America. Robertson's choice of publications for his full-page advertisement is intriguing. His ad was directed at Congressional leaders, yet placed in publications that are known to be centrist or more liberal in their views. He knew his ad could shame leaders in front of their supporters, especially if they voted to continue NEA funding.

The publications meet several items of Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model. First, particularly in the case of the *Times*, I believe the ad was run because the text met the personal interests of the owners and therefore the readers. There was little risk of flak or loss of profit from loss of advertising or decreased subscriptions and the publication accepted the AFA as an accurate news source. The *Times* printed an ad they felt bolstered their interest in strengthening America's moral values. The *Post* and *USA Today* are a little more challenging as their news tended to be more liberal and they could have easily rejected Robertson's ad due to its graphic content. They risked losing other advertisers as Robertson's ad was not typical of others and they risked receiving a great deal of flak from pro-art organizations. Perhaps they chose to run

the full-age ad because it was profitable or because the readership was so varied they risked very little flak from others. However, the AFA and Christian Coalition could easily target the publications if they chose not to print the ad. It is possible the fear of flak from these two organizations was enough to print the ad. Regardless, Wildmon and Robertson effectively used the print media to help manufacture a social controversy.

Finally, the arguments created by Wildmon and Robertson were generated in the personal sphere. They used private sphere techniques for argumentation, meaning they used whatever materials fit their needs for evidence and did not provide solid proof to back up their claims. They also felt their core values and way of life were being attacked by the artwork of Serrano and Mapplethorpe. It is this fear that caused them to appoint themselves as spokespersons for the argument and move the argument into the public sphere. They made the argument one of public interest by including federal funding, the money generated by individual taxpayers and paid to the government. By doing so they used private sphere techniques of argumentation within the public sphere.

## **Conclusion**

Applying Bitzer's rhetorical situation, a descriptive analysis of the artifacts, and Goodnight's spheres of argumentation to the Culture Wars, one comes to understand how rhetoric was used to manufacture social controversy. The artists were exercising their First Amendment right to express themselves, and created works of art that communicated their beliefs about faith and lifestyle choices. However, these beliefs were a direct affront to the values of Wildmon and Robertson and they began campaigns, again a First Amendment right, to attempt to stop federal funding of objectionable artwork. The exigency Wildmon and Robertson faced was two-fold; they needed to gather support to block funding to the NEA, which was up

for reallocation, in addition to maintaining and gaining support for their organizations themselves to continue their way of life, one in which they are seen as moral leaders of large religious organizations. Wildmon and Robertson knew the audience they first had to obtain was the general public, and they used grassroots efforts to gain enough support to make federal lawmakers their target audience. The main constraint for Wildmon and Robertson was how the general public viewed photographic art. Historically the art was seen empathetically as viewers could be moved to take action to create social equality; however, the rhetors could not argue against empathy. They attempted to change the public's perception of how to view art by arguing it was immoral and should not be federally funded as the government should not fund artwork that weakens America's morals. The artwork created by Serrano and Mapplethorpe was used as the embodiment of immoral art, the pieces were anti-Christian or homoerotic and therefore should not be viewed with compassion and understanding, but with disgust. Wildmon and Robertson manufactured a social controversy by telling the public how these images epitomized everything that was wrong with America. The images meant the country was losing its hold on family values and Christian beliefs, and the only way to stop this descent was to stop federal funding of artwork. Wildmon and Robertson manufactured this argument by taking morality, a relatively private topic, and presented it in the public sphere through use of the media and direct mail. They mobilized Americans into a moral force and used this support to politicize it to overturn the liberal progressives, i.e. Congressional representatives that allowed NEA funding to continue. In order to overcome the federal funding restraints, Wildmon and Robertson literally constructed an audience of morally conservative individuals that believed art should not be seen as empathetic, but moral. Art that is moral would not feature homosexuality or disrespectful images of religious figures; it would bolster family values and Christianity.

Essentially art would be censored and artists would not have the opportunity to express social injustices unless privately funded. In short, Wildmon and Robertson transitioned the private notion of art as empathetic and redefined it as immoral and extended this new definition to the public. Morality was no longer defined on a personal level, but a very public one.

## CHAPTER FOUR: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

While the NEA was not a stranger to controversy in 1989, this was the first time the controversy reached a national level of moral fervor. The result of the 1989 Culture War was a three-year reauthorization of the NEA and a budget of \$175 million dollars. The U.S. government also required the NEA to eliminate its previously required obscenity pledge for artists. Due to the social controversy manufactured by the AFA and Christian Coalition, the Culture Wars extended beyond the artifacts presented in this research and involved numerous artists, art organizations, religious leaders and Congressional representatives. By the time I interned at the NEA in 1995, it was still suffering from Congressional attacks inspired by the initial documents studied for this research. It is interesting to note the *Piss Christ* and *The Perfect Moment* exhibition had been viewed in several cities without incident. It is possible that if Wildmon had not been notified about the artwork, this controversy may not have existed.

What I found most interesting in my research is how the definition of morality is malleable enough to change what ultimately makes us human, things like empathy, understanding, or kindness. The AFA and Christian Coalition could not argue against empathy as empathy is virtuous, it is to feel compassion for another human being or situation. It is the very Christian ideal of loving one another. Since they couldn't argue against their own Christian beliefs without being hypocrites, Wildmon and Robertson molded the definition of morality to fit their needs. The AFA and Christian Coalition determined what was right and wrong about photographic art and then instructed Americans to believe the same. If art was pro-church, pro-family, pro-heterosexual love, then it was moral. If not, then it was immoral and weakened the strength of the nation. The issue was very black and white in their eyes and they discouraged discourse and encouraged blind belief.



Constructing a social controversy was not new at the time of this situation, nor will it ever stop. However, rhetorical analysis helps scholars understand how manufacturing a social controversy is vital to creating political support. Without manufacturing this controversy, putting a public relations spin on it, if you will, Wildmon and Robertson would not have been able to redefine morality in the public sphere rather than allowing it to remain in the private. They were then able to garner the political attention necessary in their attempt to defund the National Endowment for the Arts.

Similarly, manufactured social controversies exist in attempts to delegitimize the examples noted in chapter one of this writing. Planned Parenthood receives federal funding to provide reproductive education and healthcare services to women, including abortions. The federal money received is allocated for education and healthcare, not abortion services. Opponents argue that by receiving federal dollars for reproductive education, for example, they are indirectly supporting abortions. Like Wildmon and Robertson, Planned Parenthood opponents face a constraint that is historically based. The constraint against Planned Parenthood is women's rights. Women have been fighting for decades to gain the same freedom as men in America and by making abortion illegal the government would be discriminating against women. Planned Parenthood opponents cannot argue that a woman should not have the same rights as men, so they redefine the constraint to become one of morality and murder. A woman who chooses to have an abortion, regardless of the reason, is murdering another human being, which is a highly immoral activity in the eyes of some people. Leaders in the pro-life movement are manufacturing the argument of murder in their attempt to take a personal situation and move it into the public sphere. A woman who could be publicly accused of murdering an innocent, unborn child may make the decision to not terminate the pregnancy.

Opponents of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) believe environmental threats do not exist. They believe the information provided by scientists and the IPCC is fraudulent therefore the government should not fund their activities. Rather than argue that environmental threat doesn't exist, it would be very easy to prove them wrong, opponents bring this argument into the public sphere by making it about wasteful government spending. Individuals have personal thoughts about the environment; some may recycle or drive energy efficient vehicles in an attempt to save the planet. However, once the argument becomes one of wasteful spending of taxpayer dollars, the situation becomes public. Opponents also face the constraint that many Americans truly believe environmental threats exist. In an effort to redefine the situation, opponents attempt to delegitimize the IPCC by calling it "nefarious" and trying to "tinker with the data they put out" (Climate Science Watch, 2011, para. 17). They are manufacturing the argument that climate change is not a problem and therefore it is wasteful to spend taxpayer dollars to fund the IPCC.

The cultural implications of individuals unquestioningly believing in a manufactured social controversy may lead to a chilling effect against government funded projects, including the NEA. Such a chilling effect may denigrate democratic practices, replacing them with theocratic values that threaten the public good. Considering the arguments developed by Wildmon and Robertson, plus opponents of Planned Parenthood and climate change, one could argue the United States would be indirectly run by a theocracy. Wildmon and Robertson did not have difficulty finding people to support their manufactured social controversy against the NEA. They had the capital and the means to attract members nation-wide, resulting in large numbers of society ready to believe that art is immortal. They also had supporters working the government at every level, from volunteers in community politics to representation at the national level.

These two religious leaders were able to make a lasting impact on federal funding as the NEA did suffer severe budget cutbacks by the mid-1990s. If society continually gave in to the arguments developed by religious leaders with enough political clout, the government could unknowingly be passing laws dictated to them by various religions. This is a disturbing thought considering one of the basic principles of the Constitution is the separation of church and state.

Finally, as individuals, society needs this rhetorical research to understand the idea of how manufactured social controversy affects them. If manufactured social controversies are politically engaged with government, be it a local or national, we run the risk of becoming passive receptors following what we are told is moral rather than questioning authority and thinking critically for ourselves. Without the ability to think critically about situations, particularly ones concerning government policies, society could lose sight of what is important—that we are individuals capable of empathy, of creating change, and able to determine for ourselves whether accept or protest that which is told to us.

## **Conclusion**

This research attempted to discover and understand how the religious right manufactured a social controversy regarding Federal funding of objectionable art as a way to promote their pro-family, anti-homosexual agenda. What was discovered through Goodnight's theoretical definition of social controversy and Bitzer's rhetorical situation, Wildmon and Robertson attempted to redefine their constraint of art being viewed with empathy to art as immoral. Through controversy played out on a national scale through direct mail, news releases, and full-page advertisements, they transitioned the private notion of art as an empathetic activity and extended it to the public sphere by arguing these immoral activities should not receive money from the federal government.

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