2013

"Kissing for Equality" and "Dining for Freedom": Analyzing the Ego-Function of the August 2012 Chick-fil-A Demonstrations

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Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric, Vol. 3, No.3/4, 2013, pp. 30-45.

"Kissing for Equality" and "Dining for Freedom": Analyzing the Ego-Function of the August 2012 Chick-fil-A Demonstrations

Jill M. Weber*

In August 2012, thousands of Americans traveled to their local Chick-fil-A restaurants to participate in the Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day and the National Same Sex Kiss Day, two demonstrations designed to show support and opposition, respectively, to the company's public endorsement of the "biblical definition of the family unit." This essay draws upon Richard B. Gregg's theory of the ego-function to analyze the important persuasive functions the protests served for the participants involved. An analysis of the messages shared among members in the groups' respective Facebook pages shows that the participants promoted a message of victimage, virtuousness, importance, strength, and unity. The participants in both groups disputed their opponents' claims that they were "haters" or "bigots," and instead portrayed themselves as righteous advocates for equality or freedom. The protests, then, not only functioned to show support for or anger at Dan Cathy and Chick-fil-A. They also empowered the participants and enhanced the legitimacy and importance of their respective causes.

Keywords: Culture Wars, Ego-Function, Gay Rights, Protest Rhetoric, Same-Sex Marriage

In the summer of 2012, Dan Cathy, President and Chief Operating Officer of the Chick-fil-A (CFA) fast-food chain, thrust both himself and his company into the national spotlight after making a series of public comments about the ongoing debates over the definition of marriage. In mid-June, Cathy told radio talk show host Ken Coleman that America was "inviting God's judgment on our nation when we shake our fist at Him and say, 'We know better than you as to what constitutes a marriage' and I pray God's mercy on our generation that has such a prideful, arrogant attitude to think that we have the audacity to try to redefine what marriage is about."[1] A few weeks later, Cathy told the *Baptist Press* that his company was "guilty as charged" in its support for the "traditional" nuclear family model, adding: "We are very much supportive of the family—the biblical definition of the family unit. We are a family-owned business, a family-led business, and we are married to our first wives. We give God thanks for that."[2]

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[1] "Ken Coleman on CNN," *The Ken Coleman Show*, http://www.kencolemanshow.com/ken-on-cnn. For the complete audio recording of the interview, see "Chick-fil-A President: Gay Marriage is 'Inviting God's Judgment on our Nation," *Daily Caller*, July 18, 2012, http://dailycaller.com/2012/07/18/chick-fil-a-president-gay-marriage-is-inviting-gods-judgment-on-our-nation-audio/.

[2] K. Allan Blume, "'Guilty as Charged,' Cathy Says of Chick-fil-A's Stand on Biblical and Family Values," *Baptist Press*, July 16, 2012, http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=38271.

ISSN 2161-539X (online)

Cathy's comments sparked controversy and transformed Chick-fil-A restaurants across the county into temporary battlegrounds in the nation's ongoing debate over same-sex marriage. On August 1, 2012, thousands of Americans traveled to Chick-fil-A restaurants to participate in "Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day," a "buycott" event orchestrated by former Arkansas Governor and Republican presidential contender Mike Huckabee. Heeding Huckabee's call to "affirm a business that operates on Christian principles and whose executives are willing to take a stand for the Godly values we espouse," the participants showed their support for the company by "simply showing up and eating Chick-fil-A."[3] Two days later, a smaller yet equally passionate group of gay rights advocates traveled to Chick-fil-A restaurants to participate in the "National Same-Sex Kiss Day," a demonstration organized by gay rights activist Carly McGehee to "say a big 'Thank you' to the company for their support of love, equality, and the really [*sic*] definition of marriage."[4] Across the nation, the event's participants "share[d] a kiss" to "show Chick-fil-A that EVERYONE deserves to be able to fall in love, start a family, and take their children to eat fried chicken after a soccer match."[5]

Both Huckabee and McGehee described their demonstrations as an opportunity to send an important message to Chick-fil-A and Dan Cathy. However, as Richard Gregg reminds us, protest rhetoric and demonstrations serve important rhetorical functions for the *participants* involved as well. In his 1972 article, "The Ego-Function of the Rhetoric of Protest," Gregg argued that the "primary appeal" of such rhetoric was "to the protestors themselves who feel the need for psychological refurbishing and affirmation."[6] This essay draws upon Gregg's theory of the ego-function in an effort to identify the important rhetorical functions the Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day (CFAAD) and the National Same-Sex Kiss Day (NSSKD) protest events served for the participants involved. An analysis of the messages shared among members in the respective CFAAD and the NSSKD Facebook groups reveals that the protest rhetoric reaffirmed each group's sense of victimage, virtuousness, importance, strength, and unity. The participants encouraged their fellow supporters to see themselves not as "haters" or "bigots" as their opponents had portrayed them, but rather as righteous advocates for equality or freedom. These findings suggest that, for the protestors, the events were not simply a means of voicing their support for or anger at Dan Cathy and Chick-fil-A as Huckabee and McGehee may have intended. Perhaps more importantly, the rhetoric surrounding the events and the demonstrations themselves also served as a means of empowering the participants and enhancing the legitimacy and importance of their respective causes.

In order to support these claims, I provide a brief history of the debate over same-sex marriage and the circumstances that prompted the Chick-fil-A demonstrations. I then analyze the Facebook messages the protestors shared with each other in the weeks leading up to the events and argue that these messages rhetorically functioned to empower the demonstrators and enhance the legitimacy of their cause. I conclude by discussing the effec-

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[3] Mike Huckabee, *Chick Fil-A Appreciation Day Facebook Event Page,* August, 7, 2012, https://www.facebook.com/events/266281243473841/.

[4] Carly McGehee, "About," *Nation Same Sex Kiss Day Facebook Group*, July 19, 2012, https://www.facebook.com/groups/451347938220904/members/.

[5] Carly McGehee, "About," *National Same Sex Kiss Day Facebook Page*, July 19, 2012, https://www.facebook.com/NationalSameSexKissDay/info.

[6] Richard B. Gregg, "The Ego-Function of the Rhetoric of Protest," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 4, no. 2 (1971): 74.

tiveness of these messages and argue that the Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day message was more positively received because Huckabee framed the discussion as a fight over civil liberties rather than same-sex marriage. By attending to the ego-functions of the CFAAD and NSSKD events and protest rhetoric, this analysis sheds light on the 2012 Chick-fil-A protests and their participants' shared selfhoods and the broader same-sex marriage debates in the 2010s and demonstrates the sustained role of the ego-function in contemporary protest rhetoric.

The 2012 Chick-fil-A Controversy in Context

The topic of same-sex marriage first drew national attention in the mid-1990s after the federal government passed the *Defense of Marriage of 1996* (DOMA), a bill designed to "define and protect the institution of marriage."[7] The law—which established a federal definition of marriage as being limited to one man and one woman—placed the federal government in firm opposition to same-sex marriage and laid the foundation for a series of legal, political, and social debates about the legality and morality of same-sex marriage. In 2003, Lynn D. Wardle, Mark Strasser, William C. Duncan, and David Orgon Collidge argued that future historians would "likely identify" the debates over same-sex marriage and domestic partnerships as "one of the defining domestic policy issues" at the turn of the millennium.[8] Three years later, Craig A. Rimmerman and Clyde Wilcox argued that same-sex marriage had "replaced abortion as the focal issue of cultural conflict."[9]

Most of the debates over same sex marriage have taken place in the political and legal realms. Recently, however, it has spilled over into the business world as well. Whereas some organizations have managed to avoid taking part in the contentious conflict, Chick-fil-A has repeatedly been at the center of controversy surrounding the issue. In January 2011, more than a year before Cathy's interview sparked the NSSKD and the CFAAD, the company faced accusations of being "anti-gay" after the company co-sponsored an event for a marriage organization. Reports that the group's charitable arm, the Winshape Foundation, discriminated against same-sex couples amplified complaints from the LGBTQ community. Cathy's defense that the company was "not anti-anybody" and his declaration that Chick-fil-A "would not champion any political agendas on marriage and family" temporarily stifled the controversy.[10] Nonetheless, the company remained on the watch list of several gay rights organizations including EqualityMatters.org, which issued

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[7] Congress, House, *Defense of Marriage Act*, 104th Cong., 2d sess., Pub. L. 104-199 (1996), http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-104publ199/html/PLAW-104publ199.htm.

[8] Lynn D. Wardle, Mark Strasser, William C. Duncan, and David Orgon Collidge, "Preface," in *Marriage and Same Sex Unions: A Debate*, eds. Lynn D. Wardle, Mark Strasser, William C. Duncan, and David Orgon Collidge (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), xi.

[9] Clyde Wilcox, "Preface," in *The Politics of Same-Sex Marriage*, eds. Craig A. Rimmerman and Clyde Wilcox (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007), ix.

[10] "Dan Cathy, President and COO of Chick-fil-A, Clarifies Recent News Coverage," *PR Newswire*, January 29, 2011, http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/dan-cathy-president-and-coo-of-chick-fil-a-clarifies-recent-news-coverage-114872034.html. See also, Jeremiah McWilliams, "Chick-fil-A Counters Criticism from Gay Rights Groups: 'We're Not Anti-Anybody,'" *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, January 31, 2011, http://www.ajc.com/news/business/chick-fil-a-counters-criticism-from-gay-rights-gro/nQp96/.

several subsequent reports about Chick-fil-A's continued donations and "ties to anti-gay causes."[11]

Cathy's declaration in July 2012 that he was "guilty as charged" in his support for the "biblical definition of marriage" and his claims that America was "inviting God's judgment" by trying to redefine marriage once again prompted an angry response from gay rights supporters who viewed Cathy's comments as a thinly-veiled criticism against same-sex couples. Some city officials spoke out against the fast food chain and voiced their opposition to having Chick-fil-A in their cities. In a July 20, 2012, letter to Chick-fil-A released to the public, Boston Mayor Thomas Menino denounced Cathy's "prejudiced statements" and declared that there was "no place for discrimination on Boston's Freedom Trail and no place for your company alongside it."[12] A few days later, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel told the *Chicago Tribune* that "Chick-fil-A values are not Chicago values," adding that "[t]hey disrespect our fellow neighbors and residents."[13] Some corporations also took action in response to Cathy's comments. In a July 20, 2012, statement released to the public, the Jim Henson Company, which provided toys for Chick-fil-A kid's meals, announced that it had "notified Chick-fil-A that we do not wish to partner with them on any future endeavors."[14] In addition to severing its ties to the fast food chain, the company donated the payment it received from Chick-fil-A to the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), an organization committed to promoting gay rights.

As news about Cathy's comments and reports about the organization's history of donating to what the Southern Poverty Law Center referred to as "anti-gay" organizations spread, gay rights advocates began to coordinate their protest efforts.[15] Celebrities and private citizens used social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter to urge their friends and followers to boycott the restaurant, sign petitions, and protest against the restaurant chain. The GLAAD website served as a clearinghouse of information and featured a running list of "[p]rotests planned by local advocates," including a "National Same Sex Kiss Day." The demonstration, which gay rights activist Carly McGehee created to show Chick-fil-A "our thanks for their support of love, equality, and the real definition of marriage,"[16] resonated with other gay rights advocates. By August 3, 2012, a little over

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[11] See Equality Matters, "Investigation Reveals Depth of Chick-Fil-A's Ties to Anti-Gay Causes," *Equality Matters*, March 22, 2011, http://equalitymatters.org/blog/201103220005; and Equality Matters, "Chick-Fil-A Donated Nearly $2 Million to Anti-Gay Groups in 2010," *Equality Matters*, November 1, 2012, http://equalitymatters.org/factcheck/201111010001.

[12] "Boston Mayor's Letter to Chick-Fil-A President: Anti-Gay Stance is 'Insult' to City," *Huffington Post*, July 25, 2012, updated July 26, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/25/thomas-menino-boston-mayor-chick-fil-a-letter_n_1703770.html.

[13] Hal Dardick, "Alderman to Chick-fil-A: No Deal," *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 2012, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2012-07-25/news/ct-met-chicago-chick-fil-a-20120725_1_1st-ward-gay-marriage-ward-alderman.

[14] "July 20, 2012 Note," *The Jim Henson Company Facebook Page*, July 20, 2012, https://www.facebook.com/notes/the-jim-henson-company/july-20-2012/10150928864755563#!/notes/the-jim-henson-company/july-20-2012/10150928864755563.

[15] "Family Research Council," *Southern Poverty Law Center*, http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-files/groups/family-research-council. For additional information about the issues prompting the protests, see Aaron McQuade, "More Than Just Marriage, Chick-Fil-A is Anti-Gay: Facts for Media Covering Chick-Fil-A," *GLAAD*, August 1, 2012, http://www.glaad.org/blog/more-just-marriage-chick-fil-anti-gay-facts-media-covering-chick-fil-a.

[16] *National Same Sex Kiss Day Facebook Page*.

13,000 people had responded positively to McGehee's Facebook invitation to support the demonstration.[17]

The critical response to both Cathy and Chick-fil-A sparked a backlash from some conservative individuals and groups. In response to what he described as the "vitriolic assaults on the Chick-fil-A company," former Governor of Arkansas Mike Huckabee announced plans for a "Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day."[18] "The goal is simple," Huckabee explained in his July 22, 2012, Facebook announcement. "Let's affirm a business that operates on Christian principles and whose executives are willing to take a stand for the Godly values we espouse by simply showing up and eating at Chick-fil-A on Wednesday, August 1." Conservative politicians like Rick Santorum and Sarah Palin and organizations like the Family Research Council and Concerned Women for America amplified Huckabee's call and contributed to an outpouring of support. By August 1, 2012, more than 600,000 people indicated on Huckabee's Facebook page that they planned to support the event either in person or online.[19]

As the controversy generated more and more attention, Chick-fil-A representatives twice tried to remove the company from the politically-charged conversation. In a July 19, 2012, announcement on its Facebook page, the company maintained that its "culture and service tradition is . . . to treat every person with honor, dignity and respect—regardless of their belief, race, creed, sexual orientation or gender."[20] The message continued: "Going forward, our intent is to leave the policy debate over same-sex marriage to the government and political arena." Steve Robinson, Executive Vice President of Marketing later reiterated the company's stance in a nearly identical statement published on the Chick-fil-A website, just a few days before the demonstrations were scheduled to take place.[21] The restaurant chain's message, however, failed to stem the momentum surrounding the upcoming demonstrations. On August 1, 2012, thousands of Americans traveled to their local Chick-fil-A restaurants to purchase a meal and affirm their support for Chick-fil-A's "Christian principles" and "Godly values."[22] Two days later, a group of gay rights supporters traveled to their nearby Chick-fil-A restaurants to "share a kiss" and to send a message of love and equality. The events garnered national and international media attention and sparked heated discussions about same-sex marriage, equality, freedom of speech, and the rights of private businesses.

The Ego-Function of Protest Rhetoric

The Chick-fil-A demonstrations in the summer of 2012 pose a paradox for the student of social protest. If the events were designed to send a message of support or opposition to Chick-fil-A's policy on same-sex marriage, as both Huckabee and McGehee suggested in their initial calls, then why did both groups proceed with their protests after Chick-fil-A

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[17] Abby Ohleiser, "LGBT Advocates Counter with Chick-Fil-A 'Kiss Day,'" *The Slatest*, August 3, 2012, http://slatest.slate.com/posts/2012/08/01/chick_fil_a_appreciation_day_huckabee_conservative_americans_to_support_chicken_chain_s_anti_lgbt_views_.html.

[18] Huckabee, *Chick Fil-A Appreciation Day Facebook Event Page*.

[19] Ohleiser, "LGBT Advocates Counter with Chick-Fil-A 'Kiss Day.'"

[20] Chick-fil-A, "Post," *Chick-fil-A Facebook Page*, July 19, 2012, https://www.facebook.com/ChickfilA.

[21] Steve Robinson, "Chick-fil-A Response to Recent Controversy," July 31, 2012, http://www.chick-fil-a.com/Media/PDF/LGBT-statement.pdf.

[22] Huckabee, *Chick Fil-A Appreciation Day Facebook Event Page*.

announced that it had removed itself from the contentious debates? Richard Gregg's theory of the ego-function offers one response to this question: because Chick-fil-A wasn't the target audience for the demonstrations. Gregg has argued that the "primary appeal" of protest rhetoric is "to the protestors themselves, who feel the need for psychological refurbishing and affirmation."[23] Gregg first explored the existence of the ego-function—or a self-persuasive component of protest rhetoric—in the early 1970s after he noticed a shift in protest rhetoric from other-directed messages (targeted toward individuals who possessed the power and ability to enact social change) to self-directed messages (targeted toward those making the demands). Drawing upon the work of Don Burks, Gregg identified two components of the ego-function. The first aspect focused on the "act of communication wherein one's self is his primary audience and where others identify with the rhetoric insofar as they share similar ego-concerns."[24] The second aspect dealt with the ways in which taking part in a rhetorical act "establish[ed], defin[ed], and affirm[ed] one's self-hood."[25] Protest rhetoric's most important element, Gregg suggested, was neither the demands nor of the arguments the individual made to those outside of the cause. Rather, it was the individual's or group's participation in or verbalization of the rhetorical act that fulfilled an important psychological need.

Gregg turned to the rhetoric of the women's liberation, student rights, and black power movements to identify the patterns of the ego-function. He found that protestors in the each movement repeatedly employed common terms including victim, damage, oppression, power, inferiority, superiority, morality, vice, value, importance, unity, kinship, power, strength, and weakness.[26] Gregg asserted that these terms and depictions helped protestors to create, affirm, enhance, or alter their self-perceptions and egos. In doing so, he concluded, the ego-function of protest rhetoric accorded protestors four contributions. It allowed individuals to distinguish themselves from a symbolic enemy, thereby portraying themselves in a more positive fashion. It enhanced the protestors' sense of control by allowing them to define the terms and boundaries of the situation they deemed important. It enhanced the likelihood that the protestors would generate attention and, perhaps, respect from their opposition. Finally, the protest rhetoric could provoke a counter-response from the opposition, thereby creating a symbolic victory for the protestors. In short, the ego-function of protest rhetoric offered protestors important personal gains including but not limited to psychological affirmation and enhancement.

The Ego-Function of the 2012 Chick-fil-A Demonstrations

Many scholars have built upon Gregg's work in an effort to reveal the different ways in which protest rhetoric employed the ego-function.[27] Charles Stewart's analysis of late

[23] Gregg, "Ego-Function," 74.
[24] Gregg, "Ego-Function," 74.
[25] Gregg, "Ego-Function," 74.
[26] Gregg, "Ego-Function," 76-86.
[27] See Randall A. Lake, "Enacting Red Power: The Consummatory Function in Native American Protest Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 69 (1983): 127-142; Charles J. Stewart, "The Ego Function of Protest Songs: An Application of Gregg's Theory of Protest Rhetoric," *Communication Studies* 42, no. 3 (1991): 240-253; Charles J. Stewart, "Championing the Rights of Others and Challenging Evil: The Ego Function in the Rhetoric of Other-Directed Social Movements," *Southern Communication Journal* 64, no. 2 (1999): 91-105; and Sheryl L. Lindsley, Charles Braithwaite, and Kristin L. Ahlbeg, "Mending the Sacred

nineteenth and twentieth century protest music provides a valuable model for analyzing the ego-function in a large collection of protest texts. Drawing upon Gregg's findings, Stewart identified five common contrasts that exist within protest rhetoric: innocent victim versus wicked victimizer, virtuous and moral versus sinful and immoral, important and valuable versus unimportant and worthless, powerful and brave versus weak and cowardly, and united and together versus separate and divided.[28] Stewart analyzed the presence of these contrasts in seven hundred protest songs in an effort to identify how music could help protestors enhance their own egos. He found the presence of these ego themes in each of the protest songs, with some songs emphasizing both aspects of the contrast and others emphasizing only one element.

This study draws upon Stewart's themes in an effort to analyze the ego-function of the more than 4,000 messages shared collectively among members of the NSSKD and CFAAD Facebook groups.[29] Like Stewart, I read through each of the messages and identified the explicit or implicit references to the ego-function themes. My goal was not to obtain a qualitative measure of the presence of these themes as Stewart did, but rather to assess whether and how the protestors used the themes to enhance their respective egos. I found that the protestors drew upon these elements to reaffirm their respective group's sense of victimage, righteousness, importance, strength, and unity. Additionally, the participants encouraged their fellow supporters to see themselves not as "haters" or "bigots" as their opponents had portrayed them, but rather as righteous advocates for equality or freedom. These positive portrayals both empowered the participants and enhanced the legitimacy and importance of their respective causes.

Innocent Victims Versus Wicked Victimizers

Gregg observed that protest rhetoric includes a number of "allusions to self-hood" including a "strong need to recognize and proclaim that one's ego is somehow ignored, or damaged, or disenfranchised."[30] Stewart observed that one way protestors can vocalize this need is by employing the language of victimage and oppression. These references may include explicit or implicit terms referring to the oppressed people as "victims"—often of "circumstances and forces beyond their control" –or by identifying the "responsible and conspicuously guilty forces" promoting or maintaining the oppressive conditions.[31] These messages, Stewart suggests, may contribute to a more positive identity for the oppressed individuals by helping them to "see themselves as innocent victims for the first time."[32]

Hoop: Identity Enactment and the Occupation of Wounded Knee," *Great Plains Quarterly* 22, (2002): 115-126.

[28] Stewart, "The Ego Function of Protest Songs," 241.

[29] Participants in the National Same Sex Kiss Day Facebook group shared over 2,800 messages between July 19, 2012 and September 20, 2012. Contributors to Huckabee's Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day posted more than 2,220 messages between July 22, 2012, and September 20, 2012. The majority of the messages were from the demonstrations' supporters, however, there were a noticeable number of comments from opponents in the CFAAD page and several non-protest related messages posted in the NSSKD group during the weeks following the kiss-in.

[30] Gregg, "Ego-Function," 76.

[31] Stewart, "The Ego Function of Protest Songs," 243.

[32] Stewart, "The Ego Function of Protest Songs," 244-245.

Participants in the NSSKD and CFAAD groups, few of whom could claim direct injury from actions taken by the other side, helped to craft a victim mentality by highlighting the ways in which they suffered at the hands of their oppressors. The NSSKD group argued that the LGBTQ community was a victim of Cathy and Chick-fil-A's bigotry and hatred. Individuals like Rome F. accused the company of being "anti-gay" and of "actively fund[ing] the blocking/removal of [his] rights as a human being."[33] Michael W. offered more specific details about Cathy's oppressive actions, explaining that Chick-fil-A "owns a charity organization called Winshape, and through it they give millions of dollars to anti-gay organizations that push for laws that deny gays equal rights." Many of the participants acknowledged that Cathy had the right to express his opposition toward same-sex marriage, but they argued that he had gone too far. Jessica H. directly refuted a critic's claim that Cathy was merely exercising his freedom of speech. Jessica wrote: "It's not about freedom of speech to some. It's about the fact that Chick-fil-A donates to two of the most violent anti-gay organizations. That is not okay. Saying you're against gay marriage, that's freedom of speech. Donating to violent anti-gay organizations, that's hate. Please don't get them confused."

While the LGBTQ community's ire was directed at Cathy and CFA, members of the CFAAD group also presented themselves as victims of hatred and intolerance. They maintained that Cathy—and other Christians—were being attacked by the left because of their religious beliefs and their willingness to share them. Mike Huckabee introduced the victimage theme in the opening line of his statement calling for the CFAAD. Huckabee described Chick-fil-A as being the target of the left's "vitriolic assaults" simply because Cathy "affirmed his view that the Biblical view of marriage should be upheld." Kathe R. pointed out the injustices taking place, noting that Cathy's critics were "running them into the ground for having an opinion that differs from theirs" and they were "blasting" the Cathys for "standing up for what they believe." Patricia D. defended Cathy's right to speak his mind and rebuked the left's unduly response. "Whether we agree with the view of marriage or not," she wrote, "he should be allowed to have a view without being castrated for it by the Left, including the Hollywood bunch."

Altogether, the group's victimage portrayals encouraged other LGBTQ and Christians to see themselves as fellow victims of the larger attack against their communities. This message of shared injury served as an effective rallying call for those who experienced similar discrimination because of who they loved or what they believed. Likewise, it drew attention from those who sympathized with the individuals involved. The victimage message underscored the need for their protest events. The supporters suggested that they were not simply overreacting to a few negative comments made by Cathy or the left. Instead, they were defending themselves and others like them against unwarranted hatred, discrimination, and oppression.

[33] For the purposes of clarity, I have lightly edited the grammatical and spelling errors present in the Facebook messages. I have taken great care so as not to alter the content of the message. The full comments from the NSSKD and CFAAD Facebook pages are accessible to anyone with a Facebook account. To maintain some degree of privacy, I have opted to use the contributors' first name and the first letter of the last name as listed on their Facebook profile.

Virtuous and Moral Versus Sinful and Immoral

A second way of enhancing one's ego is by portraying oneself or one's cause as being virtuous and moral and one's enemy as sinful and immoral. In his analysis of protest songs, Stewart found that song writers often described their causes positively using terms like "just," "fair," "divine," "right," and "patriotic."[34] They referred to their enemies as "underhanded," "cruel," and the "embodiment of all evil."[35] Gregg maintained that these strategies have important implications for the ego. He noted, "By painting the enemy in dark hued imagery of vice, corruption, evil, and weakness, one may more easily convince himself of his own superior virtue and thereby gain a symbolic victory of ego-enhancement."[36]

Members of the NSSKD and CFAAD groups each pursued their own ego victories by portraying their cause as a noble effort to promote American civil rights and liberties. The NSSKD members described the kiss-in as a righteous defense of equal rights and the American creed. Lindsay Y. explained that the reason for the protest was "not to allow our hard earned dollars to go to an organization that donates OUR money to hate organizations that promote anti-gay measures within our communities." "It is 2012," she declared, "everyone is created equal in 'God's' eye, therefore, we all should be treated as such. There is no place in America for bigoted views to be portrayed by corporations such as Chick-fil-A." Kent M. further added that "organizations that harm LGBT families and citizens are unacceptable, against the dream of America itself." He suggested that the cause transcended questions of sexuality and announced, "This is BIGGER than Gay, but about 'ALL of US.'" The members one again pointed to Cathy and his supporters as the clear barriers to the LGBTQ community's pursuit of equality. Natalie K. compared Cathy's views to those who promoted anti-miscegenation in the 1960s. She wrote, "blah blah sure Cathy can donate to anyone he wants and he has a right to freedom of speech but if I said that I believe that African Americans and whites marrying is destroying the biblical definition of marriage how many people would be angered? It's the same thing that Chick-fil-A is doing supporting the block of equal rights to a specific group." She concluded by imploring "all those who support gay rights but don't support the Chick-fil-A boycott" to "do some thinking."

The participants in the CFAAD group also situated their cause within the larger pursuit of Americans' rights and freedoms. They, however, argued that their demonstration was a defense of Cathy's—and all Americans'—freedom of speech. Barbara R. clearly articulated the goal of the demonstration when she declared, "Freedom of speech and the right to freely express our opinions is precious to all Americans. Let's support the Chick-fil-A CEO for giving his opinion." Rachel H. echoed these sentiments, telling Americans, "We do not have to think alike on any subject, but let's keep America Free to speak our beliefs, and respect each person for their own beliefs. This is why America is the greatest country on Earth!! KEEP THE FREEDOM OF SPEECH IN AMERICA." Anthony G. directly chastised "those on the left" for their duplicitous actions. He wrote: "you are all hypocrites. You say you are for freedom of expression unless it goes against your beliefs. You all on the left should be ashamed of yourself when you say one thing but your ac-

[34] Stewart, "The Ego Function of Protest Songs," 249.
[35] Stewart, "The Ego Function of Protest Songs," 249.
[36] Gregg, "Ego-Function," 82.

tions say something else. Shame on the left, your actions are un-American." Debra H. further condemned Cathy's critics, declaring: "I feel those who have a problem with Freedom of speech belong in Cuba or somewhere else that share their views. This is America and WE are a REPUBLIC who believes that everyone has the RIGHT to their opinion and should not be silenced with Fear and Intimidation."

The groups' message helped the participants portray themselves as being more righteous and patriotic than their opposition. They offered some of the many insinuations that they were equal rights or civil liberties advocates, a message that would be strengthened as more and more people contributed to the conversation. This theme alone heightened the broader legitimacy and importance of their respective causes. The references to America's larger quest for equal rights and civil liberties enabled the participants in the groups to challenge any assumptions that the kiss-in or the "buycott" were simply isolated responses to the circumstances surrounding the Chick-fil-A controversy. Instead, they presented the demonstrations as integral pieces of larger efforts to promote America's great virtues and strengths.

Important and Valuable Versus Unimportant and Worthless

Portraying oneself or one's cause as important and worthy and one's opposition as unimportant and worthless is a similar way of bolstering one's ego. Stewart explains that this can include explicit or implicit statements about the "inherent worth of the protestors," or the lack thereof in the case of the opposition.[37] Likewise, protesters can include "celebrations or litanies" of their "contributions American progress and greatness" or admonitions of their opposition's great barriers or failures.[38]

Many people, including self-identified equal rights advocates and Christians, questioned the value and importance of the kiss-in and "buycott." The participants in the NSSKD and CFAAD groups responded to these concerns by highlighting the importance of their displays of opposition and support. The NSSKD people argued that the kiss-in would benefit the broader gay rights movement. Michael G. acknowledged that "the LGBT community KNOWS we aren't going to change it overnight. But this display of affection is just like the sit-ins during segregation." Promoting a message of gay pride, he declared, "We're here, and we're not going anywhere! We bring awareness, and even if it's anger we stir emotion, enough where some people (not all) will stop and see that we are happy, and just want the same rights, freedoms, and happy legal contracts (i.e. marriage) that they have." Amy B., who also argued that the kiss in would result in "awareness for our cause," added: "Honestly we should thank Chick-fil-A for giving us a platform from which to get national attention.. :)." William B. elaborated on the personal benefits, explaining that, for him and his boyfriend, "standing up together for our rights is romantic. The act of a kiss-in demonstrates that the LGBT community is expressing the love we have for our partners in public and showing the world that we are not going anywhere and are happy." William maintained that this "is the opposite of a violent action. It is a positive expression of who we are-fighting hate with love." The participants encouraged others to help promote the kiss-in's message of equality and love and to ignore the "haters," "bigots," and "homophobes" that stood in their way.

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[37] Stewart, "The Ego Function of Protest Songs," 248.
[38] Stewart, "The Ego Function of Protest Songs," 248.

Individuals in the CFAAD group responded to their doubters by underscoring the significance of "taking a stand" in support of Cathy, Chick-fil-A, and Christian values. Kelly J. praised Huckabee for creating the event, adding "It is so important to support businesses that still reflect good Christian values and refuse to cave into to the social pressure of the vocal minority." Lynne B. added that it is "important to make our voices heard." In addition to highlighting their own importance, they undermined their opponents' value and worth. Tippy B. summarized the group's sentiments, writing: "The haters and bigots are the ones condemning the Christians. Talk about hypocrites!" David A. also commented on the perceived hypocrisy, pointing out that it was "interesting how those who preach tolerance the loudest don't tolerate anyone's viewpoint except their own." He concluded with a direct appeal to his opponents to "Leave Chick-Fil-A and the Boy Scouts alone," adding: "Seriously. Not everyone agrees 100% with everything on the agenda of the gay rights lobby, especially when it involves their children. It doesn't make them bigots. You can't complain about bullying while you're bullying people into saying they agree with you."

By highlighting their causes' importance and minimizing the value of their opponents' views, both groups were able to enhance their own self-perceptions. These messages, furthermore, helped them in their recruiting efforts. By blending the victimage, righteousness, and importance themes, the groups were able to make a compelling case for why other like-minded individuals needed to support the respective cause. The members asserted that the egregiousness of the offences, the righteousness of the cause, and the valuable contributions the protest events offered were so great that the LGBTQ community, Christians, and other Americans concerned by the offences being done to these groups could not afford to remain silent or inactive. The stakes, they argued, were too great to ignore.

Powerful and Brave Versus Weak and Cowardly

Gregg argues that to "know the existence of one's self-hood" or ego, one must have a "perception of being able to control at least a portion of the situations in which one finds" oneself.[39] One strategy for creating this perception is by depicting oneself or one's cause as powerful and brave and the opposition as weak and cowardly. Stewart found that these efforts can include implicit or explicit comments about one's strength or another's weakness as well as "can do" statements indicating individual or collective statements of action or intentions.[40]

The media coverage surrounding the event—and, indeed, each group's depiction of their opponents—cast doubt on the strength and power of each cause. In an effort to combat these negative images, members of both groups crafted a positive message of strength and empowerment. The NSSKD members did this by employing the gay rights movement's historical message of gay pride.[41] Carly McGehee, who organized the kiss-in, drew attention to the LGBTQ community's steadfastness. She wrote: "this is 2012. Homophobia should be a thing of the past. We're here, we're queer, and we deserve the

[39] Gregg, "Ego-Function," 79.
[40] Stewart, "The Ego Function of Protest Songs," 245.
[41] For a history of the gay liberation rhetoric, see James Darsey, "From 'Gay is Good' to the Scourge of AIDS: The Evolution of Gay Liberation Rhetoric, 1977-1990," *Communication Studies*, 42, (1991): 43-66.

right to love who we love, regardless of gender." Beth B. amplified Carly's message and offered one of the many allusions to the civil rights movement. She exclaimed that "Gays are everywhere! We are saying 'Ya know what Chick-fil-A, we are still standing and will continue to do so until things change' Consider us the Rosa Parks of the gay community :) We will have our seat on the bus and it will be wherever we choose!" William B. spoke more personally about the bravery he and other members of the LGBTQ community demonstrated. "Guess what? My boyfriend and I have the same right to show our affection to each other in public as heterosexuals do," he stated. "We plan on doing just that at the Hollywood Chick Shrill A on Friday. No self-righteous whining is going to prevent us from doing that either." McGehee and other participants in the NSSKD conversation further bolstered their sense of power by posting links to articles about people and organizations who also stood in opposition to Chick-fil-A. The growing list—which included the mayors of Boston and Chicago, the Jim Henson company, and a handful of college campuses—help to underscore the group's shared message that gays and lesbians were unapologetically "here to stay."

Whereas the NSSKD supporters emphasized their pride and power, CFAAD members shone the spotlight on their unwavering courage. The CFAAD group members applauded the bravery displayed by Cathy, Chick-fil-A, and Huckabee and pointed to them as models for all Christians. Jim P. wrote, "It's great to see a company/family/man stand up for what is moral and right, even in the face of the intolerant libs and militant gays. Keep up the good fight Cathy family, Chick-fil-A, and Mike Huckabee." Brenda B. drew upon the group's shared religious values and encouraged other Christians to "STAND by your convictions" adding that "God will bring you through." Dana M.'s reminder that "We outnumber the radical fringe exponentially" provided one of the few references to the group's size. Mike Huckabee also made strides to enhance the group's perception of power and bravery by posting messages about other conservative individuals and groups that had expressed their commitment to the cause. The list included famous political figures like Rick Santorum, religious icons like Billy Graham, and well-known think tanks like the Family Research Center all of whom, Huckabee posted, shared in the group's commitment to "stand up" for what was "right."

The messages of power and bravery helped to refute the negative comments advanced by the media and the groups' critics. They also helped to enhance the groups' sense of collective power by symbolically transforming the kiss-in and buycott into forceful statements of support for either gay rights, Christian values, or the freedom of speech. The participants suggested that, when done in the context of the demonstrations, the commonplace act of eating at Chick-fil-A or kissing their loved one, carried immense weight and authority in the fight against hatred, discrimination, and oppression.

United and Together Versus Separate and Divided

Highlighting one's unity and togetherness and the opposition's division and separateness is an additional way to enhance one's ego. Stewart found that protest songs may include overt unity references like "folks are coming together" and "together, standing side by side" as well as pleas for unity and togetherness.[42] The disproportionate amount of pleas for organization and unity—rather than references to existing unity—led Stewart to infer

[42] Stewart, "The Ego Function of Protest Songs," 246.

that "unity is a goal rather than a fact for social movements and is seen most often not as an ego-enhancing strength but as a weakness that must be overcome to achieve success."[43]

Huckabee and McGehee both used Facebook pages as the primary tool with which to overcome their group's separateness and division. The social media platform allowed individuals to declare their support for the cause and to "invite" their online "friends" to join them in their efforts. It also helped to enhance group members' perceptions of togetherness by publishing a running list of the numbers, names, and pictures of individuals who formally "accepted" or "declined" the respective invitations. The personal announcements of support in tandem with the broader list of participants provided group members—and the general public—a visual and numerical account of the anticipated support for the events.

A few group members also drew upon the Facebook tallies to enhance their message of unity. In the CFAAD group, Margit K. pointed to the number of acceptances as evidence of the cause's togetherness and strength. On July 23, the day after Huckabee created the Facebook invitation, she wrote: "bahahahah. 55,888 GOING in one day, only 25 declines and 5,327 maybes. No one is forcing anyone to support this business, but those of us who want to have the right to without being bullied by those with an agenda." In the NSSKD group, Tracey T. referenced their group's relatively low number of members as evidence of the need to rally more supporters to the cause. Her message reflected a tone of frustration and urgency and blended together several of the ego-function themes. "2466 members really? Of those 2466 we need to send this link to all our friends and they need to send to their friends and ask for support," she wrote. "We need numbers. We have been quiet for way too long. We want rights and we want them now." Tracey commented on the apparent lack of progress and the need for unity, adding: "This isn't 1912 its 2012 and the gay society has been ruled by fear since the dawn of time. Well I say no more. Stand up, be proud and band together. A family is not defined by sexuality it is defined by love. Together we can make a difference." She included a final appeal to the group, stating: "this should only be the beginning people. We need a million GLBT MARCH on Washington. We need actions not just hopes and wishes."

The group members' individual pledges helped to boost the shared perception of togetherness and enhanced their larger sense of power. The visual display of supporters provided a sense of unity unmatched by more traditional recruitment methods like verbal commitments or paper petitions. The participants, thus, could draw strength and relief knowing that they were neither alone in their viewpoints nor in their intention to support the protest events. That reassurance—coupled with their heightened sense of victimage, virtuousness, importance, and power—made both groups appear to their supporters to be a formidable force.

Assessing the Chick-fil-A Protests' Rhetoric

In their announcements calling for the NSSKD and the CFAAD, Carly McGehee and Mike Hucabkee both described their demonstrations as an opportunity to send an important message to Chick-fil-A. As the messages shared among members of the NSSKD and CFAAD Facebook groups illustrate, their protest rhetoric also sent a powerful mes-

[43] Stewart, "The Ego Function of Protest Songs," 246.

sage to the protestors themselves. In the weeks leading up to the events, members of both groups posted comments that reaffirmed their sense of victimhood, virtuousness, importance, strength, and unity. Participants in the NSSKD group portrayed themselves as righteous equal rights advocates fearlessly fighting to promote the rights and interests of the LGBTQ community. Similarly, CFAAD supporters depicted themselves as noble civil liberties advocates bravely defending the freedom of speech and expression for all Americans. These depictions helped to empower the individual participants and enhanced the importance and legitimacy of their cause. The roughly 13,000 individuals who replied positively to the NSSKD invitation and the more than 600,000 individuals who pledged their support for the CFAAD—as well as the untold number of people who supported the events but did not participate in the Facebook conversations—lend credence to this claim.[44]

The similarities between the groups' ego-affirming messages help to explain why advocates and opponents of same-sex marriage would show their support for the respective protest events. Gregg explains that a central issue of protest movements is a "personal concern, often seeking affirmation of individual identity through group unity."[45] By crafting positive identities for their respective groups, the supporters of the CFAAD and NSSKD both reaffirmed their own personal identity and invited other like-minded people to share in a larger collective identity as advocates of equal rights or freedom.

These similarities, however, fail to explain why the CFAAD event generated significantly more supporters than the NSSKD protest. Recent reports that roughly half of all Americans claim to support same-sex marriage further complicate the situation.[46] One likely factor for the disproportionate response lies with Mike Huckabee himself. Unlike NSSKD founder, Carly McGehee, Huckabee was a well-known political figure with an established network of followers and relatively easy access to the media including his own radio show, *The Huckabee Report*. As a result, he could (and did) almost singlehandedly rally other like-minded individuals behind his cause. McGehee's limited resources and leadership experience and the relatively smaller number of LGBTQ individuals simply could not compete with the more-seasoned and well-equipped politician and advocate and his fundamentalist following.

An additional explanation for Huckabee's success rests in his rhetorical framing of the CFAAD event. Those who have studied the same-sex marriage debates have found that opponents often ground their discussion using a "morality/traditional values" frame.[47] In his analysis of the public moral arguments offered in opposition to same-sex marriage between 2000 and 2005, for example, Martin Medhurst found that the narrative against same-sex marriage was grounded in the concepts of "nature, tradition, sacredness,

[44] Ohleiser, "LGBT Advocates Counter with Chick-Fil-A 'Kiss Day.'"
[45] Gregg, "Ego-Function," 85.
[46] Frank Newport, "Half of All Americans Support Legal Gay Marriage," *Gallup Politics*, May 8, 2012, http://www.gallup.com/poll/154529/Half-Americans-Support-Legal-Gay-Marriage.aspx.
[47] See Paul R. Brewer, "Values, Political Knowledge, and Public Opinion about Gay Rights: A Framing Based Account," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 67, no. 2 (2003): 173-201; Barry L. Tadlock, C. Ann Gordon, and Elizabeth Popp, "Framing the Issue of Same-Sex Marriage: Traditional Values Versus Equal Rights," in *The Politics of Same-Sex Marriage*, eds. Craig A. Rimmerman and Clyde Wilcox (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 193-214.

morality, children, family, protection, and the common good."[48] Huckabee's and the CFAAD supporters' messages invoked these "traditional values" themes and arguments. However, this theme was secondary to a more prominent "civil liberties" frame that more closely resembled the "equal rights" perspective often employed by same-sex marriage supporters.[49] This civil liberties theme included appeals to "rights," "discrimination," "freedom," and "patriotism." Huckabee's skillful employment of this frame helped him to redefine the terms of the Chick-fil-A controversy and seemingly transcend the same-sex marriage issue. Furthermore, Huckabee's characterization of the CFAAD as a defense of Cathy and other Americans' freedom of speech and expression, or what social movement scholars identify as an "other-directed" movement also helped his cause.[50] By presenting the event as an effort to protect the rights of Americans more broadly, rather than just those who felt as if their rights had been impinged, Cathy effectively generated support from a wide range of Americans including those concerned about same-sex marriage, those undecided about same-sex marriage, and even some gay rights advocates that endorsed the practice. Huckabee's civil liberties frame—which was picked up and promoted by the media—rhetorically placed the Chick-fil-A opponents on the defense and minimized the company's need to defend itself against the negative accusations. The NSSKD proponents' repeated attempts to distinguish Cathy's "hate" from his "freedom of speech" suggest that they too accepted, or at least felt compelled to respond to and refute, the civil liberties frame.

A final explanation for the disproportionate turnout rests in the NSSKD group's apparent failure to appeal to a number of same-sex marriage advocates. McGehee's initial description of the demonstration as an opportunity to show Chick-fil-A "our thanks for their support of love, equality, and the real definition of marriage" suggested that the cause was a self-directed movement limited to same-sex couples and other members of the LGBTQ community.[51] After a handful of self-identified heterosexuals posted questions in the Facebook group about whether they could participate, McGehee clarified that the event was open to all gay rights supporters. This message, however, was never fully clarified on the Facebook page or in the media coverage of the event.

McGehee's decision to promote a kiss-in rather than a general protest also likely limited the NSSKD's appeal to same-sex marriage advocates. Charles E. Morris III and John M. Sloop argue that, for many Americans, public kissing among men (and, for some audiences, women too) "constitutes a 'marked' and threatening act, a performance instantly understood as contrary to hegemonic assumptions about public behavior, and the public

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[48] Martin Medhurst, "Public Moral Argument and the Debate over Same-Sex Marriage: A Narrative Approach," in *Public Address and Moral Judgment*, ed. Shawn J. Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press), 67-75.

[49] Medhurst found that the pro-same sex marriage narrative emphasized the elements of rights, discrimination, freedom, equality, love, family, protection, and the common good. See Medhurst, "Public Moral Argument," 63-67, 70-75.

[50] Stewart explains that other-directed movements are created or led by individuals who "do not perceive themselves to be dispossessed" and who are struggling to promote the rights of other individuals rather than themselves. They stand in comparison to "self-directed" movements which are created or led by individuals who perceive themselves as oppressed and set out to obtain their own rights. Stewart, "Championing the Rights of Others," 91-92.

[51] *National Same Sex Kiss Day Facebook Page*.

good."[52] They add that this is because the act "invites certain judgments about the men's *deviant sexual behavior* and its imagined encroachments, violations and contagions, judgments that inevitably exceed the mere fact of their having a mutually affirming encounter." Self-proclaimed gay rights advocates in the NSSKD Facebook group repeatedly voiced concerns that same-sex kissing, regardless of its intention or value, would negatively affect the LGBTQ community and broader gay rights movement. Helen B., who was an active participant in the group, wrote: "I'm not saying don't take action. I just think making out in front of a Chick-fil-A is bringing Chick-fil-A more business. It's counterproductive for our image as well." Rebecca C. repeatedly appealed to the group to adopt a different approach. She remarked, "there are better ways of going about this than to act like a child sticking their tongue out at someone....which is essentially what this is...like the poster said do something else! Don't just stand there and kiss...talk to people carry a sign, educate...just don't go there, make out and then leave..cause then what have you proved?" NSSKD supporters tried to persuade their critics of the kiss-in's value and power. John L., for instance, equated it with the civil rights sit-ins of the 1960s. "I am going to take a page from the Black movement and sit at the lunch counter until they serve me or sick the dogs on me," he said. "I think that method of non-violent protest has a proven track record." Karin F. added that the "in your face" tactic was the best option because it "gets attention." In the end, the kiss-in garnered both positive and negative attention. Still, the concerns raised by the gay rights advocates in the NSSKD group, the NKKSD's relatively small turnout in comparison to the CFAAD event, and the absence of any change in Chick-fil-A's policy on same-sex marriage or its financial support of "pro-marriage" cause raises questions as to whether a kiss-in was, as its supporters suggested, the most effective means of protest at that time.

As the debate over same-sex marriage continues—especially in light of the Supreme Court's recent decision to strike down the federal *Defense of Marriage Act of 1996 (DOMA)*—Americans are likely to see even more protests and demonstrations over the issues raised in the 2012 Chick-fil-A protests.[53] As participants or observers, it is important for students of social protest to recognize that these protest messages and displays send powerful rhetorical messages to those outside of the respective causes as well as those within them.

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[52] Charles E. Morris III and John M. Sloop, "Refiguring the Politics of Queer Public Kissing, *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3, no. 1 (2006): 2.

[53] Pete Williams and Erin McClam, "Supreme Court Strikes Down Defense of Marriage Act, Paves Way for Gay Marriage to Resume in California," *NBC News*, June 26, 2013, http://nbcpolitics.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/06/26/19151971-supreme-court-strikes-down-defense-of-marriage-act-paves-way-for-gay-marriage-to-resume-in-california?lite.