

TRADITION VERSUS EQUALITY: AN IDEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE  
PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN RHETORIC OF GEORGE W. BUSH  
AND JOHN KERRY REGARDING GAY MARRIAGE

By

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

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Abstract

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During the presidential election of 2004, the issue of gay marriage rose to the forefront. Neither incumbent George W. Bush or Democratic candidate John Kerry supported the legalization of gay marriage, but the men talked about the issue in very different ways. In this study, the author performed an ideological analysis of speeches that Bush and Kerry gave regarding gay marriage. Results show that Bush had a dominant ideology of tradition, and Kerry had a dominant ideology of equality. Both Bush and Kerry frequently used ideographs, abstract value-laden terms, to talk about gay marriage. This led to the fact that often times both candidates avoided “real talk” about the issue in favor of their dominant ideology. These findings suggest that when politicians argue from such a strong ideology, they may prevent positive dialogue from taking place, creating larger divisions about issues and between voters.

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my mommy and daddy who  
never doubted my abilities, even when I did.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The 2000 presidential election was the closest presidential race in the past century (Perkins, 2000) with George W. Bush winning the office over Al Gore with only the Electoral College majority. Coming into the 2004 election Bush faced a similarly close race against Democrat John Kerry. In the weeks preceding the election, every poll indicated the race was a dead heat with the lead fluctuating only slightly between both candidates. With U. S. troops still occupying Iraq, issues of terrorism, war and homeland security were forefront in the minds of most voters. But this election was also called one of “moral values” with such issues as gay marriage, abortion and embryonic stem cell research discussed in the public forum (Purdum, 2004; Page, 2004; McFeatters, 2004; Sterngold, 2004; Seelye, 2004).

Bush won the election on November 2<sup>nd</sup> in another close race. The key to this contest was the battleground state of Ohio where Bush narrowly took the state’s electoral votes. The morning after the election, journalists and political analysts were quick to point to the moral issues, specifically gay marriage, as being a key to this election. Shapiro (2004) stated that “gay marriage was probably the issue that spelled the difference in hard-fought Ohio” (p. 6A). Verhovek and Shogren (2004) noted that “A hugely motivated Republican base, driven in part by a “marriage protection” amendment to the state constitution, proved more than equal to the task of matching heavy increase in Democratic voting strength in Ohio’s big cities” (Part A, p. 28). Although politicians were quick to point to this as being an election over moral values, most analysts now say that the initial role of values was probably overestimated (Langer, 2004; Krauthammer,

2004; Babington & Faler, 2004; Meyer, 2004). Nonetheless, the issue of gay marriage was certainly an issue of discussion.

The intense dialogue surrounding the issue began on February 24, 2004, when President Bush announced his recommendation for a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. Many believed that this was a purely political move intended to appeal to his conservative base (Roth & Reinert, 2004; Stone, 2004). In any case this announcement clearly created a passionate dialogue in the public sphere. Less than 3 months later Massachusetts gave out the first same sex marriage licenses, causing another stir in the ever-widening debate regarding gay marriage. The issue continued to be talked about by both candidates until election day. While neither candidate came out in support of gay marriage they certainly handled the issue in different ways.

This essay will analyze the language used to talk about gay marriage by both candidates in order to illuminate the dominant ideologies each campaign reinforced. Marriage in and of itself is a topic that invites talk of values and morals, the addition of “gay” makes this topic even more susceptible to being talked about in value laden terms. Sillars and Gronbeck (2001) note that ideological criticism “encourages scholars to analyze communication messages for their obvious and not-so-obvious moves to control relationships in political ways” (p. 262). By employing McGee’s (1980) notion of the ideograph I will contrast the dialogue of President Bush and presidential candidate John Kerry in order to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What ideologies are present in Bush and Kerry’s dialogue regarding gay marriage?

RQ2: What rhetorical strategies provide support for these ideologies?



RQ3: What are the social, political, and or moral implications of these ideologies and the rhetoric that sustains them?

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *Ideological criticism*

There are many different definitions and connotations surrounding ideology. Foss (2004) defines ideology as “a pattern of beliefs that determines a group’s interpretations of some aspect(s) of the world” (p. 239). van Dijk (1998) offers a similar definition but includes the notion that ideology is not independent of others or the world around us:

Ideologies are representations of who we are, what we stand for, what our values are, and what our relationships are with other groups, in particular our enemies or opponents, that is, those who oppose what we stand for, threaten our interests and prevent us from equal access to social resources and human rights (residence, citizenship, employment, housing, status and respect, and so on). In other words, an ideology is a self-serving schema for the representation of Us and Them as social groups. (p. 276).

Certainly this provides a foundation for studying ideology. If language is used to control groups, then it deserves careful consideration.

Language has long been used as a means of control or subjugation. Mumby (1989) creates a connection between language and ideology, as language is the primary means through which groups disseminate their ideas. Mumby extends this discussion to social construction, “meaning is therefore contingent not only on intersubjective understanding within a community, but also on the process by which certain dominant groups are able to frame the interests of competing groups within their own particular worldview” (p. 292-293). Here we introduce the idea of hegemony; we begin to see that

all ideologies are not equal.

The concept of hegemony is often tied to ideology in the literature (Sillars & Gronbeck, 2001; Foss, 2004; van Dijk, 1998; O'Connor & Downing, 1995). Foss (2004) readily admits that any culture may have multiple competing ideologies but often certain ideologies become dominant. Hegemony occurs when we privilege one ideology over another. O'Connor and Downing (1995) claim that understanding cultural hegemony “suggests we should study mass media, education, the arts, religion, and everyday culture not as spontaneous public expression, but as processes of persuasion in which we are invited to understand the world in certain ways but not in others” (p. 16). When we assume that there is a natural order to the world in which certain things are simply because they are, this assumes a dominant ideology. McGee (1980) illustrates this concept by stating some commonly held values, “when a claim is warranted by such terms as ‘law,’ ‘liberty,’ ‘tyranny,’ or ‘trial by jury,’ ... it is presumed that human beings will react predictably and autonomically” (p. 6). When a group or person uses these terms, they assume that we all operate under the same value umbrella. Foss (2004) states that the focus for the ideological critic is “to discover and make visible the dominant ideology or ideologies embedded in an artifact and the ideologies that are being muted in it” (p. 243).

In the discussion of gay marriage we will see this privileging of one ideology over another from both sides. Because both Kerry and Bush are presidential candidates from the two major political parties, we can assume that they will both argue from commonly held ideologies. For example, Bush might privilege the ideograph “tradition” or “moral values,” suppressing the ideologies of equality and fairness. Conversely Kerry might

argue from the standpoint of ideographs such as “equal rights” while ignoring ideologies that stem from traditionalist or religious foundations.

Ideology often plays a part in emerging social movements. In their descriptions of the stages of social movements Stewart, Smith and Denton (1994) explain the role that ideology can have during the “social unrest” stage: “the ideology identifies the social movement with ‘the people’—a great grassroots movement—and with established norms and values” (p.75). This brings about an interesting point, that even social change depends on the hegemonic “norms and values” to advance their position. In her essay on the stages of the abortion argument, Railsback (1984) noted that when the pro-abortion side shifted their ideology to focus on choice, they become much more successful in persuading the public of their position (p. 416). Tarrow (1998) also posits that groups do “framing work” in order to mold their complaints into “broader and more resonant claims” (p. 21). So again we see groups using traditionally held ideologies to make the general public more sympathetic to their cause.

McGee (1980) presents the idea of an ideograph as the link between rhetoric and ideology. McGee claims that ideographs are the “building blocks” of ideology, “they signify a unique ideological commitment” (p. 7). He specifies that “ideographs are one-term sums of an orientation, the species of “God” or “Ultimate” term that will be used to symbolize the line of argument” (p. 7). Perhaps most imperatively for this essay is McGee’s theory of the role that ideographs play:

The important fact about ideographs is that they exist in real discourse, functioning clearly and evidently as agents of political consciousness. They are not invented by the observers; they come to be as a part of the real lives of the

people whose motives they articulate. (p. 7).

When pointing to the differences between ideographs and other terms, McGee stresses the importance of the term performing a social function, being bound within a culture, and being dependent on history.

One of the difficulties McGee notes in identifying ideographs is the fact that these concepts (e.g. equality, liberty, family values) only possess the meaning that we give to them (p. 10). McGee states that although a term may pick up different associations through its use, it “retains a formal, categorical meaning, a constant reference to its history as an ideograph” (p. 10). Issues then arise when two groups use ideographs in different ways. By comparing these usages “one can therefore precisely define the difference between the two groups” (p. 8). When performing ideological criticism one of the potential outcomes can be a better understanding of the motives and ideologies behind a group or person.

Finally McGee presents a formal definition of an ideograph that will be the working definition for this essay:

An ideograph is an ordinary-language term found in political discourse. It is a high-order abstraction representing collective commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative goal. It warrants the use of power, excuses behavior and belief which might otherwise be perceived as eccentric or antisocial, and guides behavior and belief into channels easily recognized by a community as acceptable and laudable. (p. 15)

This will be the operating definition of ideographs for the remainder of this article.

Several other authors have also chosen this definition (Martin, 1983; Railsback, 1984;

Moore, 1993). So in my study, I will identify the overarching ideologies by first pointing to the ideographs that are present in the rhetoric of both candidates.

Many critics have also chosen to analyze the ideologies on both sides of politically charged issue or political race (Martin, 1983; Rushing, 1983; Railsback, 1984; Moore, 1993, 1994). Describing both sides of an issue allows us to contrast their ideologies providing a closer look and a better understanding of how the issue is defined and how it might be resolved. These critics do not necessarily condone one viewpoint over another but instead raise questions regarding the nature and ethics of both sides.

Martin (1983) looked at the 1980 election between Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan. The essay identifies the “ideographic cluster” surrounding Carter going into the election and discusses how Reagan used these ideographs against his opponent. During the campaign, Reagan’s camp attempted to persuade the public that Carter was ineffectual, unintelligent, and of poor moral character. Martin remarks on the power of using this type of language: “ideographic language, despite attacks on particular persons, has a resiliency which withstands direct assault. Who, for instance, would quarrel with a presidential ethos which advocated ‘intelligence,’ ‘good moral character,’ and ‘effectiveness’?” (p. 19). Even when the public may disagree with the claims made against a politician, they most often will not argue against the importance of the ideographs that are used. Ideographs in a sense work as the trump card, using ideographic language makes refutation difficult for an opponent. Well thought out rhetoric based on these ideographs is not only persuasive in nature it is hegemonic and carries a concentration of power. This brings us back to McGee’s (1980) theory that there are some commonly held values that most people do not argue with. When

ideographs reflecting the hegemonic culture are employed, they demand a certain level of acceptance.

Railsback (1984) looked at the stages in the abortion argument. The author specifically identified how ideologies within the two sides changed and how they functioned to move the groups forward. Railsback contends that the “anti-legalization argument remained focused on one ideograph throughout—‘life.’ Pro-life advocates stated simply that abortion was the taking of life, and hence *all* abortions had to remain illegal” (p. 412). The pro-reform group (as Railsback refers to those campaigning for legal abortions before they took the name pro-choice) also used traditionally held ideologies to talk about the issue. Reformers argued that as long as abortion was illegal, affluent women were the only ones able to get safe abortions. “The poor were being treated “unequally” and their “rights” violated. The heightened salience of the ideographs thus allowed advocates to do more than lament the sad stories of illegal abortion; the ideographs allowed the expression of a legal and social demand” (p. 414). Railsback notes that the ideograph for the pro-reform movement gradually evolved from one of discrimination to one of choice. “Choice” became the dominant ideograph of the movement in the mid-seventies, propelling the movement to where it is today (p. 416). Clearly in the case of abortion ideographs formed the basis of most arguments; the recognition of these ideographs provides great insight into the movement and its history.

While Moore (1993, 1994) focused primarily on the use of synecdoche, he also clearly presented the ideologies present on both sides of the spotted owl (1993) and handgun debates (1994). In the case of the spotted owl, Moore (1993) introduced the owl as an ideographic symbol for both environmentalists and loggers “while

environmentalists use the spotted owl to indicate the value of and threat to life in synecdochic form, the timber industry adopts the owl as a scapegoat to affirm the value of and threat to liberty (or, lifestyle)” (p. 264). Here we see two competing groups using the same symbol to stand for differing ideologies, although both sides use ideologies that are considered to be important to all Americans (life and liberty). Moore came to the conclusion that both ideologies are flawed:

One ideograph (the owl) produces two conflicting synecdoches with two different underlying value orientations: life or liberty. Both synecdoches are self-defeating... because life potentially signifies death for owls and liberty potentially conveys death for loggers, even though the environmentalists seek “life” and the loggers want “liberty.” In this way, the rhetoric of each group virtually guarantees the outcome they are trying to avoid. (p. 266).

This again illustrates the value of ideological criticism. By getting to the root of a group’s ideology, not only can the critic better understand the group, they can perhaps suggest a different way of talking about an issue that might lead to resolution.

Moore (1994) performed a similar analysis on the handgun debates surrounding the Brady Bill and reached the same conclusions regarding the conflict of ideographs:

Both groups transform the "handgun" into a one-term summation of a political orientation in synecdochic form. As a result, the different representations offered by HCI [Handgun Control Inc.] and the NRA [National Rifle Association] function in public argument as "representational ideographs" (Moore, 1993, p. 260). Although there are flaws in both synecdoches that prevent resolution of the gun control controversy, this essay reveals how representational ideographs



manage, articulate, and frame social controversy but place ultimate terms, in Burke's sense, in direct conflict. (p. 435).

In debates regarding politically charged issues, ideographs are often forced to compete against each other. Unfortunately these arguments often prove counterproductive as neither group can truly dismiss the divergent viewpoint.

### *Gay Marriage*

The issue of gay rights has received increasing attention in the last decade. Gomes (2003) notes the significance of this influx of talk in the media, “issues addressing the rights of homosexuals appear daily in the news...The fact that these issues have come to the fore and are being publicly discussed says much about current attitudes regarding homosexuals as people” (p. 18). In the later half of those years, gay marriage has dominated the dialogue as the next hurdle in achieving equal rights. Scholars have specifically noted the larger role that the homosexual community is playing in the political arena (Adam, 2003; Apuzzo, 2000; Feldman, 2001; Johnson, 1997). In reference to the 2000 presidential election, Apuzzo (2000) noted this increase, arguing “we have progressed from the status of a marginal minority that politicians shunned to that of a constituency whose votes are being aggressively pursued--at least by some candidates. In the current presidential season, the propensity to court the gay and lesbian vote splits along party lines” (p. 5). As this “minority” group becomes larger, politicians have been forced to adjust their campaigns accordingly.

Although researchers have looked at the rhetoric surrounding gay rights and gay marriage, the attention has primarily been on anti-gay rhetoric and on the movement as a whole as opposed to individual politicians. Johnson (1997) did emphasize the idea that

both political parties were attempting to appease voters surrounding the issue. Gay rights supporters are often frustrated by both parties, “Republican candidates who feel little incentive to take anything but the most hostile stance, and New Democrats who, like President Clinton, may feel so assured of gay support as to abandon us on such matters as gay marriage” (p. 6). It would seem that both parties try to tailor their language in a way that gets the most votes, even if that means taking a road that diverges from their party’s foundational beliefs.

In an essay detailing the “moral panic” in America regarding gay marriage, Adams (2003) focused primarily on the narratives that have been expressed by those arguing for Defense of Marriage Acts (DOMA). Adams makes an interesting point regarding the language used to talk about gay rights:

Studies of the United States have often noted the constrained and underdeveloped nature of social welfare benefits and the national provision of medical services in comparison with other advanced industrial countries. This, in turn, has shaped a social climate much less hospitable to claims for entitlements, benefits, or simply comparable treatment, which are vulnerable to stigmatizing as demands for "special rights" or to discrediting as "victim" talk. Thus, comparatively speaking, discourses of humanist reform are less able to call upon socialist or social democratic argumentation; the public space for communication about "the good" remains more strongly occupied by religion and competitive individualism. (p. 266).

Adams does then suggest a difference in not only the way the two sides will discuss gay rights but also the way that they are “allowed” to talk about these issues. Accordingly,

this study will examine how Democratic candidate Kerry and Republican candidate Bush talk about the issues surrounding gay marriage. The paper will seek to identify whether the suggested differences will hold true or if perhaps the lines between parties have blurred.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

In line with the ideological criticisms discussed above, the method used in this study was close, repeated readings of text. In this case the text was composed of actual quotes from Bush and Kerry specifically addressing the topic of gay marriage. These quotes were taken from speeches and newspaper, magazine, and television interviews starting on September 2, 2003, when Kerry officially declared his candidacy for president through November 1, 2004, the day before the election.

The majority of the quotes were taken from the official White House web site ([www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)) and the non-profit site [vote-smart.org](http://vote-smart.org). In addition quotes were found using repeated internet searches through several different search engines including Google, Yahoo, and Lycos. The key words “john kerry” or “george w. bush,” “quotes” and “gay marriage” were used to identify as many direct quotes as possible. In order to be part of the analyzed text, a web site must have cited where and when the comments were made. Additionally all quotes not found on the White House web site or the [vote-smart.org](http://vote-smart.org) site were found on at least two reputable web sites. For the purposes of this study, second hand narratives about either candidates’ beliefs were not included. Eleven Bush speeches and eight Kerry speeches were analyzed. After the assembly of the texts, the key ideographs that each candidate used were identified. Based on these ideographs the dominant ideologies of both candidates were also identified.

In addition to identifying the key ideographs and ideologies, this essay will also identify the rhetorical strategies that are used in Bush and Kerry’s dialogue. Foss (2004) refers to this as “style” (p.247), giving examples such as metaphors and alliterations.

Foss notes that “the form or style of an artifact is one of the most obvious means rhetors have to signal their ideological beliefs” (p. 247). These strategies seek to enhance the dominant ideologies or ideographs. Sillars and Gronbeck (2001) state that “narrative structures reinforce the positive and negative values of institutions and certain classes of public actors such as politicians, sports legends, and the like” (p. 265). Although this essay is an ideological analysis, identifying such strategies as metaphors, narratives, repetition and euphemisms can enhance the understanding of the dominant ideology.

On the issue of gay marriage George Bush and John Kerry agree; both candidates officially stand in opposition. Despite this similarity, most people view Bush as staunchly against gay marriage and gay rights, while Kerry is thought to be more sympathetic to the homosexual community. An analysis of their language regarding this issue could provide an insight into why the candidates were viewed by voters in this way. As mentioned previously by McGee, identifying these ideographs often makes the differences between two groups apparent. As Bush and Kerry function as the figureheads of their respective parties, we can assume that their speech also represents the ideology of their party. Therefore identifying the ideographs surrounding their dialogue of gay marriage may further clarify the differences between the two men or it may show that the candidates are more similar than most would assume.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

In successive readings of the speeches a dominant ideology emerged for each candidate. Bush primarily uses an ideology of tradition; he has several key ideographs but they all relate to tradition and the history of American society. Kerry's primary ideology is equality. Over and over again Kerry mentions equal rights for everyone. Several interesting contrasts between the two candidates also emerged. The first two research questions seek to identify the key ideology each candidate uses and what rhetorical strategies they use to support them. In this section I will discuss the key ideographs each candidate uses to build their ideologies, and the rhetorical methods that they use. It is important to note that this issue was a far more central part of Bush's campaign than Kerry's, therefore the amount of text available for Bush was greater.

#### *Bush*

Bush's primary ideology revolves around tradition. As defined previously by van Dijk (1998) "ideologies are representations of who we are, what we stand for, what our values are..." (p. 276). Bush relies heavily on the way things have always been done in the realm of marriage and family. By using an ideology of tradition, Bush presents himself as standing by American families and valuing their heritage and traditions. Virtually all of Bush's ideographic terms reinforce this idea that the way it has been done is the best way. While Bush occasionally mentions gay marriage by name, he more frequently mentions traditional marriage's success and the current attacks on it. Bush clearly focuses on what has worked in the past, not what may work in the future.

By far the most frequently used ideograph by Bush to support this ideology is

“definition.” Some variation of the word definition/define/redefine appears 30 times in the speeches that were analyzed. At first glance this may not seem to be an ideograph, but the idea of a definition for something plays heavily on the idea of historical reference. By so heavily emphasizing definitions, Bush guides the audience towards an understanding of marriage that is dependent on a traditional definition. How can an audience argue with definition? Definitions tell us what something is; therefore by emphasizing this aspect Bush advances his ideology of tradition. The denotative meaning of words is difficult to oppose. By using the term definition, Bush removes any connotations or emotions surrounding marriage, he simply is telling us what is. For Bush the terminology used to talk about the issue of gay marriage is very important. He states that “I believe our society is better off when marriage is defined as between a man and a woman.” He continues to reinforce this theme by bringing the other side, “the four judges redefined the definition of marriage. That’s what happened. And my worry is, is that that definition will be spread to other states, even though the people of those states do not accept that definition” (8/11/04). Bush does not leave the audience to make the connection between definition and tradition by themselves, in the following quote he clearly links the two,

I believe that marriage is a -- (applause) -- I believe marriage an important part of the future of families, the traditional definition of marriage. I think it’s -- history has shown us that marriage between men and women has served society well, and any redefinition by itself will weaken marriage. (7/9/04).

Bush not only uses “definition” as an authority, he connects it to a tradition that is foundational to society. In so doing Bush creates a powerful ideograph that harnesses

traditional values and ideals

To emphasize this further, Bush talks about the radical judges who are trying to “redefine” marriage. By using the terminology “redefine” rather than change or modify, Bush again plays to the idea that to allow gay marriage would be to challenge the way it has always been, not only in the arena of marriage, but the whole of society. Bush consistently brings up those who are trying to redefine marriage: “in recent months, however, some activist judges and local officials have made an aggressive attempt to redefine marriage” (2/24/04). In response to decisions made in San Francisco and Massachusetts, Bush pins the redefinition that is occurring to these renegade states and cities, “decisive and democratic action is needed, because attempts to redefine marriage in a single state or city could have serious consequences throughout the country” (2/24/04). Bush also appeals to the particular state he is in by referencing how this redefinition might affect them. At an “Ask President Bush” in Pennsylvania, Bush makes the following appeal, “one of the interesting issues that we’re confronted with here in the country is that if a state decides to redefine marriage, people who are then married in that state can come to a state like Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania must accept that marriage” (7/9/04). Bush also points to the fact that the definition is not being shaped by citizens. His speech portrays him as being worried about America, and he wants people to worry about “the courts” or “the judges” who are changing the way we live. In response to an audience question regarding what his plans were upon reelection, Bush states that “my worry has been that the courts will overturn that law [the Defense of Marriage Act] and that we will end up with a series of activist judges defining marriage” (8/11/04). During the presidential debates in Tempe, AZ, Bush again portrays himself as concerned about



America, “I proposed a constitutional amendment. The reason I did so was because I was worried that activist judges are actually defining the definition of marriage” (10/13/04). Over and over again Bush uses the ideograph “definition” to reinforce the importance of tradition. He makes it clear that allowing gay marriage, changing our traditional definition, will impact American society and American people in a negative way. Starting with his concern for America, Bush offers the following evaluation, “I’m concerned that that [the Defense of Marriage Act] will get overturned. And if it’s overturned, then we’ll end up with marriage being defined by courts, and I don’t think that’s in our nation’s interests” (10/13/04). By placing blame on the ambiguous judges and courts, Bush attempts to create a fear of the unknown. We do not know how changing marriage will affect us, but we can be assured that it will not be a positive change.

The religious right quickly picked up the issue of gay marriage, and it was thought by many to be a religious argument, but neither candidate’s speeches support this. Most would expect Bush to use religion as the pillar of many of his arguments, but Kerry and Bush both have the same number of overt religious references, only two. Again it is not in Bush’s best interest to make this a wholly religious argument, doing so would alienate voters who didn’t like the idea of homosexuality, but not for religious reasons. By focusing on tradition rather than religion, Bush keeps his Christian voters without offending those who are simply not in favor of gay marriage.

Although at first glance, Bush’s speeches seem to be free of religious references, one phrase does emerge, “the sanctity of marriage.” Although this isn’t an overt reference to God, sanctity by definition refers to something being blessed by God. This ideograph is a return to the definition argument with a religious background. Not only is

our current definition of marriage grounded in tradition, it is also blessed by God. So even Bush's religious references reinforce his ideology of tradition. For example in the following quotes, Bush references this aspect of marriage that must be salvaged: "I will always stand firm to protect the sanctity of marriage" (10/22/04), "our nation must defend the sanctity of marriage" (1/20/04). Bush also uses this phrase to defend his position, "but as we respect someone's rights, and as we profess tolerance, we shouldn't change -- or have to change -- our basic views on the sanctity of marriage. I believe in the sanctity of marriage" (10/13/04). Certainly the word "sanctity" is not used in most people's everyday vocabulary, but it has a history that most people relate to traditional, conservative religion. By using such a subtle reference Bush creates a tie to tradition and religion without driving away less religious voters.

Bush also uses the ideograph of "institution" to reinforce his ideology of tradition. By referring to marriage as an institution, Bush emphasizes its historical importance. In his speech calling for the constitutional amendment Bush calls on American history, "after more than two centuries of American jurisprudence, and millennia of human experience, a few judges and local authorities are presuming to change the most fundamental institution of civilization" (2/24/04). Bush also uses "institution" to justify why he proposed the amendment, "I believed that it was important to act because the institution of marriage was being changed by the courts" (2/27/04). The word institution holds permanence and a power that connects marriage with an established norm. The following quote illustrates how Bush uses the ideograph in connection with another ideograph that references history, "freedom": "The commitment of freedom, however, does not require the redefinition of one of our most basic social institutions. Our

government should respect every person, and protect the institution of marriage” (2/24/04). This quote not only refers to marriage as an institution, but as a “basic social institution.” Bush proposes that our current definition of marriage is foundational to our society, that marriage as we now know it is an integral part of sustaining American life. Although not used frequently, Bush also builds his tradition ideology with the ideograph “traditional.” When Bush uses this ideograph it always precedes the word marriage, “this is America. It’s a free society. But it doesn’t mean we have to redefine traditional marriage” (7/09/04). Bush makes it clear that what he is talking about and defending, “let me talk about marriage, traditional marriage” (8/11/04). Although obvious references to an ideology of tradition, the use of the ideograph proves that Bush does not shy away from that connection. His whole argument is based around this traditional definition of marriage.

Bush also has numerous references to history and American society that propel his ideology of tradition. An important part of Bush’s argument is how marriage has worked in the past and how it has affected society in a positive way. Bush harnesses the power of history in the following quote, “I think it’s --history has shown us that marriage between men and women has served society well, and any redefinition by itself will weaken marriage” (7/9/04). Bush connects historical marriage to children as well, “ages of experience have taught humanity that the commitment of a husband and wife to love and to serve one another promotes the welfare of children and the stability of society” (2/24/04). “Society” certainly functions as an ideograph in this sense; Bush assumes a common definition of society. Society by definition should include all people living in a country, but gay people would certainly dispute the idea that traditional marriage has

always served them well. Bush asserts that all of America would be better off with marriage strictly defined as a man and a woman. For example, in his amendment proposal speech, Bush notes that “marriage cannot be severed from its cultural, religious and natural roots without weakening the good influence of society. Government, by recognizing and protecting marriage, serves the interests of all” (2/24/04). This is also an example of an ideology that privileges one group over another. By claiming that protecting traditional marriage would “serve the interest of all,” Bush clearly excludes the homosexual population.

Another common ideograph that Bush uses is “debate.” Numerous times Bush calls people to continue to debate the issue. Again by using a word like debate instead of talk about or discuss, Bush pulls on tradition. America has a great tradition of encouraging and allowing free debate, not arguments, but debates. No one can squash or disallow legitimate debate. In the following quote, Bush urges the people to debate gay marriage.

And finally, let me encourage everybody, as we debate this issue, to do so with the utmost of respect, I mean, this is a issue that require thoughtful dialogue. It’s a serious issue. And it’s one that – I hope we can have a debate in a way that is uplifting and not tearing down people on either side of the issue. (8/11/04).

Despite the fact that the conversation might be difficult, Bush tells us that it must occur “but this is a debate that the nation must have. And the people’s voice must be heard in the debate” (2/27/04). Bush emphasizes that not only is it in our nation’s best interest to talk about the issue but we have an obligation to debate the outcome. Not only does Bush encourage debate, he encourages the debate to be conducted respectfully and without

hostility. Bush positions himself as the facilitator of a necessary discussion, “on an issue of this great significance, opinions are strong and emotions run deep. All of us have a duty to conduct this discussion with civility and decency toward one another” (7/10/04). By referencing such ideographs as dignity, honor, respect, bitterness and anger, Bush also responds to criticism of intolerance or hatred. For example, the following quote showcases Bush’s desire to appear tolerant, “and so, therefore, I call upon all sides in the debate to conduct themselves with dignity and honor and respect” (2/27/04). Bush also calls upon American ideals in encouraging debate, “we should also conduct this difficult debate in a manner worthy of our country, without bitterness or anger” (2/24/04). By calling on the great tradition of debate in America and requesting that all those involved do so decently Bush emerges as an almost impartial proponent of free speech.

Lastly Bush uses the ideograph of “the people” to support his position and his ideology of tradition. In his speeches, Bush makes over 20 references to “the people” or the “voice of the people.” By accentuating the role that people should play in the decision regarding gay marriage, Bush again calls on our historical knowledge of the role that “the people” have played in American politics. Bush states that “people need to be involved with this decision. Marriage ought to be defined by the people, not by the courts” (2/18/04). The following speech clearly references the situation occurring in Massachusetts and uses it as an example of what happens when the issue leaves the hands of the people.

This is a subject which ought not be decided by courts. This is a decision which ought to be decided -- (applause) -- this is too important a decision to have

defined by four judges in a state, say, like Massachusetts. And therefore I believe the people ought to be encouraged to participate in the process. (7/9/04).

McGee (1975) notes that the phrase “the people” has served a very important function in political rhetoric. Although the phrase is often used by politicians and social movement leaders, McGee specifies that it is an ambiguous term “about the only point of agreement is that, in politics, ‘the people’ are omnipotent; they are an idea of collective force which transcends both individuality and reason” (p. 238). By referring to “the people” throughout his speeches, Bush continues to shift the focus from the issue to personal power and freedom. Even if you are a proponent of gay marriage, Bush still extends his invitation for “the people” to take control and decide this important issue.

Perhaps the strongest rhetorical method that Bush uses is the narrative of the “activist judges” who have threatened our way of life. In almost every speech that Bush gives regarding gay marriage, he mentions the way in which this issue came about. Bush tells a very vivid story of a group of people who are breaking all the rules, positioning himself as the hero who defends the people from these renegades. This narrative took shape when the President called for a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage.

In recent months, however, some activist judges and local officials have made an aggressive attempt to redefine marriage. In Massachusetts, four judges on the highest court have indicated they will order the issuance of marriage licenses to applicants of the same gender in May of this year. In San Francisco, city officials have issued thousands of marriage licenses to people of the same gender, contrary to the California family code...And unless action is taken, we can expect more arbitrary court decisions, more litigation, more defiance of the law by local

officials, all of which adds to uncertainty. After more than two centuries of American jurisprudence, and millennia of human experience, a few judges and local authorities are presuming to change the most fundamental institution of civilization. Their actions have created confusion on an issue that requires clarity. (2/24/04).

Bush continues this narrative throughout the duration of the campaign. He reinforces the idea that the decisions of activist judges are threatening the structure of American families. Throughout this narrative the emphasis is not on the issue of gay marriage being wrong but on the way that this issue was dealt with. For example, in the following quote, Bush makes it known that he did not create this issue, “this is an issue that ought to be decided by the people, not by a few judges. And that’s what’s caused the issue. That’s what has brought this issue to a head, is because in a particular state, the four judges redefined the definition of marriage” (8/11/04). By shifting the focus to how the debate came about instead of the actual issue, Bush portrays himself as the protector as opposed to the antagonist. He espouses the belief that no matter how you feel about gay marriage you can’t allow these judges to take away your power as citizens.

Another powerful piece of this narrative is the use of the adjective “activist”. All activist really refers to is someone who vigorously supports a political belief, but Bush uses the term in a derogatory sense. For all citizens who are tired of talking about gay marriage, Bush puts the blame on these activists, “this difficult debate was forced upon our country by a few activist judges and local officials, who have taken it on themselves to change the meaning of marriage” (7/10/04). Bush places himself in opposition to the activist judges “I am troubled by activist judges who are defining marriage” (2/18/04).

Bush prefaces his reference to the narrative by talking about his worry or concern. This places Bush as the good guy looking out for the American people, “my worry has been that the courts will overturn that law and that we will end up with a series of activist judges defining marriage” (8/11/04). After clearly defining the judges as radical lawbreakers, Bush creates a nice spot to fit himself into the story. In contrast to the judges, Bush will be the hero who defends society from the assault on traditional family values.

Because the union of a man and woman deserves an honored place in society, I support the protection of marriage against activist judges. And I will continue to appoint federal judges who know the difference between personal opinion and the strict interpretation of the law. (9/2/04).

This narrative plays an integral role in Bush’s ideology of tradition. By establishing an “enemy” Bush shifts the focus from his rejection of gay marriage to others who are threatening the way society functions. Not only have these judges made rash decisions that are fundamentally irresponsible, they go against the grain of a traditional way of life.

Another rhetorical strategy used by Bush is his desire to protect or defend marriage and the American way of life. This fits into the narrative of Bush versus the “activist judges” but also suggests that the issue of gay marriage is a battle. This war metaphor highlights even further the assault that gay marriage would have on society. Bush uses these powerful verbs to cement his role on the gay marriage front. In the following quote, Bush uses this to emphasize that there is no other option, “a constitutional amendment should never be undertaken lightly—yet to defend marriage, our nation has no other choice” (7/10/04). Bush used protection as the motive for



amending the constitution, “if we are to prevent the meaning of marriage from being changed forever, our nation must enact a constitutional amendment to protect marriage in America” (2/24/04). Bush also makes it clear that he is the protector, “I have watched carefully what’s happened in San Francisco, where licenses were being issued even though the law states otherwise. I have consistently stated that if -- I’ll support law to protect marriage between a man and a woman” (2/18/04). It stands to reason that if Bush has to protect or defend marriage, there is someone attacking marriage. This reference not only shapes Bush as the hero it clearly identifies the opposing side as enemy. Throughout his rhetoric Bush does an excellent job at portraying himself as protector and defender of traditional American values. This portrayal is only heightened by his contrast of the courts and judges threatening these values.

### *Kerry*

In contrast to Bush’s multifaceted ideology of tradition, Kerry’s ideology is quite simple: equality. All of Kerry’s speeches center around the issue of providing equal rights and privileges for everyone. In fact, Kerry does not focus on the issue of gay marriage at all. While Bush consistently draws the conversation toward terminology and definition, Kerry mentions several times his desire to keep this away from being a debate over terminology. For example in the following quote Kerry tells his audience what the important part of this discussion is “I think it’s a distinction between what you believe the institution of marriage is. But what’s important...is that you give people rights. I’m for rights, not for terminology or status – rights” (2/29/04). It is in Kerry’s best interest to steer the conversation towards a discussion of equality rather than a discussion of the allowance of gay marriage. Kerry makes it clear throughout his speeches that he believes

marriage is between a man and a woman, while he doesn't believe in gay marriage he also opposes the constitutional amendment. So while Bush is free to unequivocally state his position regarding gay marriage, Kerry must keep the focus on what he is for, rights.

Kerry uses every term and every rebuttal to bring in the issue of rights and equality, and the most frequently used ideograph is "rights". Kerry uses the word "rights" over 30 times in his speeches. While debating with other Democratic candidates in New York, Kerry again puts the emphasis on rights over status.

Are we prepared to provide rights to all Americans so that they share the same rights as other people? Not the same terminology or status. I believe the right, the spousal rights, the right of inheritance, the right with respect to taxes, the right with respect to visitation in a hospital – I mean there are a whole series of rights- I'm for those rights being afforded to every single American without discrimination. (2/29/04).

Kerry cannot offer the "right" of gay marriage, so he continually emphasizes what he does believe in. No matter what the question asked, or what another candidate says, Kerry responds by underscoring his support of civil rights. The following quote also calls on Kerry's political history to reinforce his priorities.

I have always fought for the right of people to be able to be treated equally in America. Long before there was a television show, long before there was a march in Washington, in 1985, I was the sole sponsor of the Civil Rights Act to make sure we enforced that in America. (11/04/04).

Kerry's discussion of rights for homosexuals extends to all of his comments regarding gay marriage. For Kerry, "rights" serves as the most powerful and most common

ideograph supporting his dominant ideology of equality.

Kerry also uses the ideograph “discriminate” or “discrimination” to build his image of equality. Kerry takes care to let his audience know where he stands regarding inequality “I’m for civil union. I’m for partnership rights and the full measure of nondiscrimination within those laws” (2/15/04). While debating Bush in Tempe, AZ, Kerry uses the ideograph discrimination to also introduce blame “we’re a country with a great, unbelievable Constitution, with rights that we afford people, that you can’t discriminate in the workplace. You can’t discriminate in the rights that you afford people” (10/13/04). Kerry emphasizes that discrimination shouldn’t be part of American politics “about the rights, I believe that it is important in America not to discriminate with respect to rights” (2/15/04). The ideograph discrimination not only reinforces the ideology of equality it suggests that there is a discriminator. In essence, by emphasizing the importance of eliminating discrimination Kerry implies that there is someone who is threatening equality. Kerry focuses on the fact he doesn’t discriminate suggesting that Bush (his opponent) does discriminate.

Kerry uses the ideograph “equal protection” as he argues his position on gay marriage. In line with the rest of Kerry’s ideographs this clearly strengthens his ideology of equality while also bringing in the notion of having to protect people’s rights. By stating the need for protection, Kerry infers that there is someone attacking these rights. Due to the fact that these statements were being made during a presidential campaign it is not difficult to assume that Kerry is again referring to his opponent.

I have long believed that gay men and lesbians should be assured equal protection and the same benefits... While I continue to oppose gay marriage, I believe that

today's decision calls on the Massachusetts state legislature to take action to ensure equal protection for gay couples. (11/18/03).

Kerry also pulls in references to his home state of Massachusetts and his support of their changes "if the Massachusetts legislature crafts an amendment that provides for partnership and civil unions, then I would support it, and it would advance the goal of equal protection" (5/15/04). Kerry clearly states his opposition towards gay marriage but contrasts that with what he can give voters, the promise of equality.

Similar to Bush, Kerry's religious references are few, but they are clearly in line with Kerry's dominant ideology. The times that Kerry does make a religious reference is during a presidential debate with Bush. Both candidates were asked if they believed homosexuality was a choice. Bush answered the question first and made no religious references. When Kerry responds he brings God into the picture "we're all God's children...I've met wives who are supportive of their husbands or vice versa when they finally sort of broke out and allowed themselves to live who they were, who they felt God had made them" (10/13/04). This religious reference reinforces Kerry's ideology of equality. These are Kerry's only allusions to religion in his discussion of gay marriage and it is interesting to note that they occur in response to Bush who is generally thought to be the more religious candidate.

Kerry's rhetoric is simple; his entire argument focuses on his desire for equal rights. One of the most powerful rhetorical strategies that Kerry employs is his use of the phrase "I am for". Bush center his statements around his belief, Kerry on the other hand focuses on what he is for. In the following quotes, Kerry uses the repetition of this phrase to emphasis what he can offer voters.

I am for partnership rights, I am for civil union. I am for the Employment Non-discrimination Act. I am for the hate crimes legislation. (11/04/03).

That's why I am for civil union. That's why I am for partnership rights. That's why I'm for even the federal extension with respect to tax code and other rights. (2/29/04).

This powerful phrase of stating what he is for shifts people's view from the fact that he essentially holds the same position as Bush about the allowance of gay marriage. As often as Kerry draws the attention towards rights and equality he avoids talking about making gay marriage legal.

While Bush and Kerry talked about the issue in different ways, both candidates had an ideology that dominated their speech regarding gay marriage. While Bush relied heavily on an ideology of tradition, Kerry talked about gay marriage in terms of equality. By stating his view on gay marriage in terms of his worry for America's future, Bush portrayed himself as the hero who protects the people. Kerry focused not on the issue of gay marriage, but what he could offer, equal rights in other arenas. These divergent ways of talking about gay marriage created a visible difference between the candidates despite their similar ideas about legalizing gay marriage.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

My third research question deals with the implications of the ideologies Bush and Kerry use. Politically the implication of using such strong ideologies is that voters may not get an accurate conception of what the candidate stands for. This disservice to voters means that the real issue of gay marriage gets ignored. In addition to avoiding the issue, both candidates frame the debate as a battle. By framing themselves as protectors and the other as attackers, Bush and Kerry widen the divide between themselves and their supporters. In the introduction it was noted that although Bush and Kerry have the same position on gay marriage they are thought of very differently. Kerry never denies that he doesn't believe in gay marriage, at one point Kerry even points out the similarities between himself and Bush "the president and I share the belief that marriage is between a man and a woman. I believe that. I believe that marriage is between a man and a woman" (10/13/04). Despite this claim, both candidates' ideologies are so divergent and so strong that voters are easily led in two different directions by men who essentially believe the same thing. Because each man's dominant ideology is based upon different truths, they are thought to believe different truths. Therefore the political implication of such a strong ideology is that voters get a skewed view of the issue and the candidates.

Another political implication is that rhetorically Kerry fell short of Bush on this particular issue. Bush had a strong well-thought out ideology, but he left the door open several times for Kerry to rebut his statements. It was in Bush's best interest to have this debate about gay marriage continue because he could take a definitive stand that Americans could identify with. Although Kerry responded to the issue, he never

responded to Bush's rhetoric. Bush capitalized on the fact that people are desperately worried about their families. People are concerned about raising kids and avoiding divorce and Bush verbally recognized those worries. Bush often started his phrase with "I'm concerned that" or "I'm worried that," he recognized people's fears and he sympathized with them. Unfortunately Kerry never once addressed the issue of family. Kerry stuck so firmly to an ideology of rights and equality that he never attended to issues the Bush raised.

There were certainly comments that Bush made regarding the effects of traditional and gay marriage that were open to interpretation. Kerry could have even extended his equality rhetoric to include family and the future of society, but he did not. No matter how you feel about the issue or the candidates, Bush crafted a better argument. Drawing back to McGee's (1980) notion of the ideograph and how it works in political rhetoric we can also note that Bush and Kerry's terms are difficult argue. McGee states that "I am conditioned to believe that 'liberty' and 'property' have an obvious meaning, a behaviorally directive self-evidence" (p.6). Therefore, when Bush uses ideographs such as "institution", "sanctity" and "definition" he is assuming that the audience will connect a meaning of tradition that does not even have to be stated. Similarly when Kerry argues for "rights" and "equality" he never has to define what those words mean. They evoke in the listener a rich history of meaning and usage.

The social and moral implications are both centered on the fact that neither candidate actually discusses how the reality of gay marriage might affect society. The most negative consequence of the rhetoric that Bush and Kerry use is that both candidates avoid talking about the actual issue in favor of advancing their own ideology. The goal of

making themselves look good and their opponent look bad overrides the desire to talk about the real topic. During the campaign, both candidates were specifically asked how gay marriage hurts marriage as an institution and both candidates avoided the issue in favor of their ideology. An interaction with Kerry during the Democratic Presidential debates produced this very telling encounter

Q. But who does it hurt, Senator?

MR. KERRY. I think all – that’s not the issue. The issue is-

Q. But that’s the question.

(2/29/04)

Bush creates the same situation when asked how he thought same-sex marriages threatened the institution of marriage. He responds by launching into the narrative of the judges and the people. While Bush’s and Kerry’s rhetoric creates nice sounding speeches it does nothing to move the discussion forward.

In addition to ignoring the actual issue another social/moral implication is that we certainly see the concept of hegemony playing a role in both candidates rhetoric. In his tradition ideology, Bush creates an “us” and “them” mentality. Interestingly the “them” does not specifically refer to gay people, but to all people who seek to challenge the traditional way of thinking. By using verbs such as “protect” and “defend” and by referencing the history of American society, Bush defines an “other” who challenges our way of life and the stability of our families and relationships. Foss (2004) states that “a hegemonic ideology provides a sense that things are the way they have to be as it asserts that its meanings are the real, natural ones” (p. 242). Bush clearly creates a hegemonic ideology through his ideographs that reinforce the importance of tradition. By using



“definition” as such a frequent ideograph, Bush makes a connection between traditional marriage and the natural way that things are. Although equality is an ideology that most Americans subscribe to it is hidden in Bush’s rhetoric and tradition is given a higher place in the pyramid than rights.

Kerry’s rhetoric does not necessarily suggest an “other,” but he does ignore all other ideologies for his chosen theme of equality. Unfortunately this results in the hegemonic ideals that Bush suggests going uncontested. Kerry clearly puts the ideology of equality as paramount, paying no attention to the family. While equality is obviously an important issue for Americans, Kerry disregards all other concerns for this one ideology. The danger and social implication of this is that Kerry never really challenges Bush’s ideology, and the hegemonic norms continue to gain support. When both candidates stick so strongly to ideologies that are equally present in society, it prevents real dialogue from occurring. Ordinary citizens are not given the opportunity to truly debate these issues because to do so would mean to turn their back on ideas that they do value such as tradition and equality.

Clearly looking at ideologies can give insights into candidates and political issues. Most importantly they may provide insight into why voters view politicians as they do. Although both candidates opposed gay marriage the rhetoric they used clearly separated the two sides. The party line between Democrats and Republicans emerged clearly drawn as well. Traditionally Republicans have been seen as socially conservative and concerned with so-called “moral values”. Bush certainly reinforced this view with his ideology of tradition. Democrats generally are identified with being concerned about individual equality and this was also confirmed by Kerry’s rhetoric.

One of the most surprising findings to emerge from this analysis was the lack of religious references. In the aftermath of the election many people talked about how Bush ran a campaign of moral values that mobilized religious voters. Bush certainly focused his argument on tradition, but the absence of religion created an argument that appealed to a much broader audience. Despite this there was still a perception that religion played a larger role than it did. Further research should look at the role the media plays in shaping perceptions of candidates and their speeches.

These findings also suggest a practical implication for citizens. When candidates use such strong ideographs it inhibits dialogue that might contradict the dominant ideology. Ideographs are terms that are hard to argue with, and when politicians rely so heavily on these terms, it creates an environment that discourages vibrant civic debate between citizens. Rhetorical critics should be mindful of this outcome and work to create spaces for dialogue to take place among voters. Although two viewpoints are expressed in the national media, other possibilities are excluded because of how the candidate choose to discuss this issue. Together with the media, critics should support forums where people can discuss issues apart from the heavy influence of ideology driven national campaign rhetoric.

Although ideological analyses can provide valuable insights, researchers should also be aware of how individuals react to speeches and how this process leads to a vote. Further research should address what associations voters have with particular candidates and how voters interpret the dominant ideology or belief system of politicians. Research that ties together rhetorical analysis and public opinion could serve the purpose of creating better-informed voters. The real concern of researchers should be whether or not

political candidates are actually discussing issues or whether they are simply building an ideology in order to win votes.

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