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This research examines the response from the National Rifle Association (NRA) to the tragic shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 14, 2012. Specifically, the research seeks to conclude whether the NRA engaged in propaganda, and if so, what the ethical implications of such use are. Using literature from Jacques Ellul, this research outlined identifiable and objective characteristics of propaganda. The research used this propaganda lens to analyze nineteen articles from the NRA website, released in the months after the shooting. The results of the propaganda analysis indicated high levels of propaganda use throughout all nineteen articles. These findings, based on literature from scholars in the field, indicate the NRA is engaged in a highly unethical practice with regards to calling their membership into action. This research provides valuable understanding into how the nation's premier gun lobby can activate millions of members into action which can potentially affect gun legislation.

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Tragedy at Sandy Hook and the National Rifle Association's Propaganda Response

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Andrew Gundlach, Author

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What's time to a hog?

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

For those at Sandy Hook Elementary School, December 14, 2012 started as it does for most students and teachers. One could assume anticipation for the day's end and the arrival of the weekend. Students and teachers alike, undoubtedly tired from the previous weeks, likely had great plans in the future for the holiday season. The Christmas break was only one week away. However, early in the morning on that fateful day, all plans would be ripped apart. 20-year-old Adam Lanza, carrying a loaded Bushmaster assault rifle, had just entered the school.

As students and teachers listened to the morning announcements over the intercom, the dialogue was violently interrupted by the sound of gun shots across the speakers. Teachers sprang into action and began ushering children into various hiding places. As gunshots continued to reverberate throughout the building, children began running and children began dying. Desperate to protect the children, teachers barricaded the doors with their bodies. While this worked for some groups of students and teachers, not all were as lucky.

When Lanza reached the school, he first shot his way through the glass entry way. Next, Lanza began firing at administrative staff who he met upon entering the building. After this engagement, he began seeking out classrooms. Lanza first entered a kindergarten classroom. Once inside, he killed all except one child who pretended to be dead. Lanza next entered another kindergarten classroom and killed 6 children and the teacher. It was reported that six students were able to escape while the gunmen either had problems reloading or his gun jammed (Altimari et al., 2013). The last piece of carnage was Lanza's fatal self-inflicted gunshot wound. The total death toll was 20 children, 6 adults, Lanza's mother (who he had shot prior to going to Sandy Hook) and the killer himself. The nation was wounded.

The response from this tragedy was one of undeniable horror and outrage. How does something like this happen? How could someone be driven to such madness? Were there signs and symptoms that had been missed? These questions and more began whirling around the country with hurricane force. As is always the case when tragic gun violence occurs, people began calling for gun regulation (Cooper, 2012). As talks of regulation increased, so too did the rhetoric of gun rights and personal liberty.

According to the Pew Research Center, this tragedy only slightly changed the nation's views on gun control. In the week following the shooting, 49% of people said it is more important to control gun ownership verse 42% of participants who said it is more important to protect the rights of citizens to own guns (2012). After the earlier Aurora, Colorado shooting, the numbers were 47% and 46%, respectively. More importantly is the fact that protecting gun ownership was only favored by 37% of respondents prior to President Obama taking office in 2008, showing an increase in public opinion about protecting gun rights over the past four years leading up to this tragedy (Pew Research Center, 2012).

There can be no conversation pertaining to gun regulation without including the National Rifle Association (NRA). Whether they want to be involved or not, the moment a tragic act of gun violence occurs, the organization is pulled directly into the line of fire. As the nation's preeminent firearm rights lobbying front, the organization has been the one to point fingers at with each mass shooting. From Columbine High School to Sandy Hook Elementary, and everything in between, gun control proponents argue the NRA has played an integral role in allowing such easy access to firearms for these murderers. In the years preceding the shooting at Sandy Hook, dozens of innocent people had been killed at Virginia Tech, Aurora, Tucson, the

Sikh Temple, and many more (Follman, 2012). All of these tragedies have compelled the NRA to step forward and engage the public through rhetoric.

While there have been numerous shootings before, none have been as difficult to deal with as the tragedy at Sandy Hook. 20 children, ages 6-7, all dead at the hands of an armed assailant. The tragic loss of such young life is without comparison. Public opinion was united in the desire to not have such a tragedy happen again, but the means to prevent such a tragedy have been a hotly contested issue. Whether Lanza would have been unable to commit these crimes if harder gun regulation had been in place will forever remain unknown. As the primary force against gun regulation, the NRA has a tough position to defend in the face of such sorrow and hurt. This is the scene which the NRA currently finds itself.

History of the National Rifle Association

Founded in November 1871 by William Conant Church and George Wood Wingate, two Union veterans, the NRA was an association “to promote and encourage rifle shooting on a scientific basis” (Sugarmann, 1992, pp. 25-26). The end to the American Civil War left tens of thousands of soldiers without work and fighting for decent wages. Davidson (1993) writes that it was no coincidence that the NRA was founded during a time of great social discontent. The push for practicing marksmanship was met with hostility as military experts of the time believed it was counterproductive for the soldiers. Experts argued such practice would encourage individualism, an undesirable trait for enlisted soldiers (Davidson). While the organization was independent from any governmental body, the United States government played an essential role in starting and maintaining the organization. In 1872, New York State Assemblymen David Judd help push legislation through which allocated the NRA \$25,000 to acquire land for target practice (Davidson).

The economic downturn in the 1890's led New York to withdraw its support, which caused the NRA to collapse and close its doors. The land purchased for target practice was sold to the state and the organization went into a hiatus in 1892 (Sugarmann, 1992). Increased interest in target practice grew in subsequent years, however, and in 1901 the NRA was reborn. In 1903, Congress created the National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice (NBPRP). Over one third of those serving on the board of the NBPRP were trustees of the NRA (Davidson, 1993). The NRA's ability to enroll governmental aid for its agenda was again displayed by the passage of United States Public Law 149, which granted the rights of certain rifle clubs to purchase surplus firearms and ammunition from the government at cost. One of the stipulations to be eligible for this offer was that the club needed to be sponsored by the NRA (Davidson). The ability to purchase firearms at cost, coupled with the necessity of being an NRA sponsored club, allowed the NRA to flourish during these times.

The first written criticism of gun control was released in 1911 in response to the passage of New York's Sullivan Law. The NRA was skeptical:

A warning should be sounded to legislators against passing laws which...seem to make it impossible for a criminal to get a pistol, if the same laws would make it very difficult for an honest man and a good citizen to obtain them. Such laws have the effect of arming the bad man and disarming the good one to the injury of the community. (Leddy, 1987, p.83)

The article was written by the president of the organization and reflected the underlying agenda of the NRA. The NRA did not have an official lobbying organization for over 100 years, yet they maintained an active presence in all gun control talks. Not until 1975 would the NRA incorporate a lobbying organization, the National Rifle Association-Institute for Legislative Action (ILA). Even with the ILA, the National Rifle Association would not become an expressly political organization until 1977.

Prior to the 1970's, the organization maintained influence through press releases and with their own magazine, the *American Rifleman*. In 1934, due to heightened levels of violence, the government was looking to implement new reforms on gun control. The *American Rifleman* responded to the proposal by saying "its viciousness lies in the opportunity for disarmament by subterfuge" (As cited in Sugarmann, 1992, p.31). The article encouraged members to send telegrams and special deliveries to their respective legislators and communicate their displeasure at the gun bill. What resulted was a watered down measure which failed to regulate handguns.

Following the assassination of President Kennedy by Lee Harvey Oswald, who ordered his gun through a mail-order ad in the *American Rifleman*, talks of gun control once again appeared. On the surface, the NRA looked to be in support of the measures which would regulate interstate gun commerce and mail order guns, but something else was occurring behind the scenes of this national debate. Initially, congressional mail was favoring gun control actions eight to one, but slowly the tides changed (Sugarmann, 1992). While the NRA was talking about supporting certain measures, they also spent \$144,000 in 1963 to keep its members up to date on all national gun talks so that they could respond quickly and efficient when needed (Sugarmann). The NRA managed to hold off these regulations until 1968 when both Martin Luther King, Jr. and Senator Robert Kennedy were gunned down. These murders swept the national audience into a furry of gun control. What resulted was a ban on certain importation of firearms, but nothing regulating the domestically manufactured firearms was included (Anderson, 1996).

In 1975, the NRA realized the need to be overtly involved in the national gun control debates. The organization created the Institute for Legislative Action and placed Harlon Carter as its head. Deciding what and how much should be lobbied was a contentious issue within the NRA organization itself. What developed amongst the ranks of the NRA was a division between

the hard-lined members, who later became known as the Federation for NRA, and those of the Old Guard (Davidson, 1993; Sugarmann, 1992). The Old Guard represented the current executive leadership and their supporters and was led by Executive Vice-President Maxwell Rich. While the Old Guard maintained a defense of firearms, their primary purpose was recreational. The Federation of NRA, led by Harlon Carter, saw stopping gun control as paramount (Sugarmann). The two groups argued over where to allocate resources and the contentious nature of their relationship greatly polarized the organization. In what became known as “The Weekend Massacre,” roughly 75 members of the organization, most of them hard-liners, were either fired or forced into retirement (Sugarmann; Davidson). Rich thought this action would end the conflict and at their next public meeting in Cincinnati he sought to reconcile the group. Waiting for the Old Guard was something that no one but the Federation of NRA could have expected.

Armed with walkie-talkies, bull horns, and parliamentary procedure knowledge, the Federation systematically usurped the current leadership. Over 2,000 members met in a meeting that lasted until almost 4 a.m. (Davidson, 1993). Bylaws were changed which gave more power to the membership to elect officials, defense of the second amendment was set at priority number one, and one by one, each individual in the current leadership position was voted out of office (Anderson, 1996; Sugarmann, 1992). Carter was elevated to Executive Vice-President and co-conspirator Neal Knox was later appointed head of the ILA. The Cincinnati Revolt, as it was later coined, gave sole leadership of the organization to those of the Federation. No longer were gun shows, firearms trainings, and target practice the focus of the organization. The rifle club had transitioned into a full force lobbying front with a unilateral agenda. Anderson writes that “What had once been essentially an association of gun enthusiasts and sportsmen became an

ugly, fanatic band, far to the right of right” (p.25). From this moment, the NRA moved forward with an agenda aimed solely at the preservation of the Second Amendment, the same agenda the NRA currently holds to.

The New NRA began proving its worth with the fight against federal gun registry. In the summer of 1977, President Jimmy Carter approved a Justice Department bill that would have set up a national database of all handgun owners in the United States (Rodengen & Maysonet, 2002). The NRA fought back with all available means. The NRA commissioned a national survey to examine public opinion on crime and gun laws, initiated legislative alerts, and pushed a massive grassroots campaign against the bill (Rodengen & Maysonet). The result of the NRA’s campaign pitted the Carter administration against Congress in a battle which the president was not prepared for. Still determined, the president sought to push the registry through a back-door means without the approval of Congress.

Using the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (BATF), the administration attempted to use surplus funds to implement a computerized registry system using bureaucratic methods (Rodengen & Maysonet, 2002). The White House was convinced their plan could work without congressional approval and was immune from lobbying pressures. The NRA responded by swarming Capitol Hill and successfully persuaded congressional leaders to pass budgetary regulations which cut the BATF budget by \$4.2 million, the surplus amount intended for the computer registry (Rodengen & Maysonet, 2002). With its budget slashed, the BATF was forced to forfeit its attempt at gun registry. The NRA had again proven why they were a force to be reckoned with on all things gun related.

While not one hundred percent successful, the NRA continued to fight back against gun regulation throughout the 20th century. In the early 1980s, the organization successfully aligned

itself with President Reagan and further restricted the BATF through budget and staff reductions (Davidson, 1993). The NRA then refocused on the Gun Control Act of 1968 (GCA), an ongoing thorn in the side of the organization. Over the course of several years, and culminating in 1986, the NRA sought to pass major provisions in the GCA. While the final version of the bill's passage was not exactly what the NRA sought after, it was undeniably a victory for gun rights. Within one week of the vote, the *Washington Post* ran two articles detailing its accusations of the NRA's "paid army of House members" (Davidson). However, Senator Aide, Dennis Burke argues that it is not campaign contributions influencing Congressional leaders, but the fear of loads of mail, nasty phone calls, or picketing outside their offices (Davidson). The NRA may be quite capable of making large campaign contributions, but they are first and foremost an enormous grassroots organization capable of calling into action millions of members.

In 1994, the NRA suffered one of its biggest losses. A ban on particular semi-automatic guns, deemed "assault rifles," and high-capacity magazines narrowly passed through Congress (Rodengen & Maysonet, 2002). NRA Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre predicted a huge response from the gun rights constituency. His prediction proved true when the following elections saw the Democratic Party lose both houses of Congress (Rodengen & Maysonet). Such an accomplishment proved the NRA was not an organization that politicians wanted to battle against.

As the turn of the century came about, new media allowed the organization to reach more people. The NRA is aware that the internet has now become the most efficient method of delivering information. The current use of online media is a testament to the NRA's adaptability to the times. Given the extreme success and power of this organization, being able to better understand their use of rhetoric is self-evident. More importantly, one should understand how

the NRA calls its membership into action. Specifically, in response to the Sandy Hook shooting, does the NRA engage in propaganda when they attempt to activate their audience and call them into action? Also, what are the ethical implications if propaganda use can be shown to exist? This thesis will provide answers to these questions.

Based on the history of the NRA, one can begin to understand the effectiveness of the NRA in calling its membership into action. For over a century now, the NRA has systematically promoted itself to the forefront of single-issue lobbying groups. Their rhetoric is effective in not only persuading politicians directly, but also instigating massive grassroots campaigns. To understand the effectiveness of the NRA means understanding how the NRA delivers information to its membership and prompts them into action. This thesis seeks to provide understanding on how the NRA shapes the ongoing debate and compels their audience to fight for change.

Artifacts of Study

The artifacts to be researched for this propaganda analysis came directly from the NRA website. The website has many online publications, blogs, and printed magazines. The focus of this research is on the material from their online journals and reports. There are six categories at the NRA website in the section of Official Journals and Reports: *NRA Board Spotlight*, *Armed Citizen*, *Standing Guard*, *President's Column*, *Regional Report*, and *Political Report*. The thesis focuses on three of them, namely *Standing Guard*, *President's Column*, and *Political Report*. Each of these three sections has a monthly newsletter. In addition, each presents archived records of newsletters for prior months. The research focuses on newsletters released since February 2013, which is when the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School was first addressed. *Standing Guard* is the monthly periodical for Wayne LaPierre, Executive Vice

President of the NRA. *The President's Column* is handled by David A. Keene, the President of the NRA. Lastly, the *Political Report* is a section that details what is occurring within the political arena including voting measures, laws, and elections. The section is written by Chris W. Cox, the NRA-ILA Executive Director.

These articles were chosen because they enable the audience to receive a broader overview of the NRA's position based on information coming from three different sources within the organization. While one could certainly pursue and justify a rhetorical analysis of just one key leader, focusing on more than one individual within the organization allows for claims in the thesis to be grounded in a wider view of the organization. As already outlined, the focus of the rhetorical analysis of the NRA is on literature released after the tragedy at Newtown Connecticut. In April, 2013, the US Senate voted against legislation to increase background checks and ban assault weapons and high-capacity magazines. Information was gathered for two months after this date to gain an understanding of how the NRA dealt with the shifting rhetorical situation. All three sources provided two articles for June and the *Political Report* released two in May. Combined, there are 19 articles making up the collection of artifacts.

Biographical Information on NRA Leaders

Standing Guard is written by Wayne LaPierre. Lobbyist LaPierre joined the NRA in 1978, was promoted to Director of state and local affairs in 1979, and promoted again to Director of federal affairs the following year (Carter, 2012). This quick rise in the organization reflects the pace he has maintained throughout his career with the NRA. Divorced with no children, LaPierre acknowledges that his career prevents any semblance of a personal life (Davidson, 1993). LaPierre takes a hard-lined approach to gun control. He is a fierce advocate for all things gun related and hesitant to show support for any gun regulation. LaPierre even fought against

the ban on armor piercing bullets (Davidson). With such strict adherence to the principles of gun rights, LaPierre continued to climb the rankings. Eight years after his arrival, LaPierre was again promoted, this time to Director of the NRA-ILA (Carter). In 1991, LaPierre assumed the position he has today, Executive Vice President. The Executive Vice President represents the face of the organization. The Executive Vice President oversees and implements the organization's nationwide policies as well as supervises the administrative aspect (Carter). In twelve years, LaPierre propelled himself from mere lobbyist to the forefront of the nation's largest gun lobbying organization.

LaPierre entered his new position with membership of 2.5 million. Ten years later the organization had grown to 4 million members (Carter, 2012). In 1996-1997, his position was challenged by long time NRA member, Neal Knox. Knox, once Director of the NRA-ILA, had been around since the Cincinnati Revolt, but had suffered several defeats through internal fighting and alliance building (Davidson, 1993). After Knox's failed attempt to attain the Executive Vice Presidency, LaPierre acquired more centralized control of the organization through adding board members favorable to him and successfully purging the board of members favorable to Knox (Spitzer, 2012). Such unquestionable ferocity and determination are what make LaPierre successful.

LaPierre's career has been riddled with controversy which continues to this day. In 1995, LaPierre wrote that agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives were like Nazi Soldiers, referring to them as "jack-booted thugs" (Carter, 2012). In response to such rhetoric, lifetime member President H.W. Bush resigned his membership from the NRA. In 1999, LaPierre said that President Clinton accepted a certain level of violence in order to further his political agenda. LaPierre alleged that Clinton opposed certain legislation which the NRA

avored, instead choosing to pursue more extreme regulations (Carter). Such harsh rhetoric is a stark contrast to the LaPierre whom people meet face to face. People who interact with him actually describe him as mild-mannered (Anderson, 1996). While his temperament may be cordial face to face, these examples show he is no stranger to harsh personal attacks.

From simple lobbyist, to maintaining the helm of the entire NRA organization, LaPierre has demonstrated the tenacity and fierceness needed to be successful. He has maintained executive leadership for over 22 years in an organization with a history of infighting and internal subterfuge. Through his carefully thought out and executed agenda, he has “brought his organization to the pinnacle of American political power” (Carter, 2012, p.347). Perhaps the best way to summarize LaPierre was done by Osha Davidson (1993) when he wrote:

Neither a hunter nor a target shooter, LaPierre possesses no particular affinity for firearms. Seated in his comfortable new office on the top floor of the NRA headquarters, everything about LaPierre—from his highly polished black wing tips to his hand-tailored Oxxford [*sic*] Clothes suit and red-stripped power tie—testifies to the fact that he is, first and last, a political animal. (p. 241).

The President of the organization is responsible for the monthly *Presidents Column*. The final writing from the President’s column collected for this research marks the final column entries produced by Keene. Keene’s term of presidency is now over, but he has left his mark upon the organization in many ways, one being his monthly newsletters. While the position does not grant any real powers within the organization, being President provides a platform from which to voice the rhetoric of the office holder.

Keene has spent a great deal of his life working for the conservative movement. From 1984 until 2011 when he became NRA President, Keene was chairman of the American Conservative Union (Gizza, 2011). Keene also served as an assistant for the presidential campaign of Barry Goldwater, Ronald Reagan, Bob Dole, and George H.W. Bush (Keene, 2013;

Gizza, 2011). Having served in the political sphere since the early 60's, Keene is exceptionally versed on how things work in Washington.

Keene credits LaPierre for getting him into the role of President (Bedard, 2011). Because Keene had spent so many decades fighting for conservative values, becoming the NRA president made sense. Always desiring to increase the momentum of conservative ideology, Keene takes great pleasure in his job. One can almost feel the excitement in the words of Keene when he speaks of "NRA plans to mobilize its troops with the hopes of taking away three to five states Obama won in 2008" (Bedard, 2011, p.2). Such passion is found throughout the rhetoric released by Keene.

The last section of artifacts comes from the *Political Report*. Written by NRA-ILA Director Chris Cox, these pieces of rhetoric discuss the political arena, such as measures, laws, and elections. The Director of the NRA-ILA is responsible for overseeing eight ILA divisions: Federal Affairs, State and Local Affairs, Public Relations, Grassroots, Finance and Administration, Research & Information, Wildlife & Natural Resources, and the Office of Legislative Counsel (Campaigns & Elections, 2003 (CE)). Cox is also the chairman of the NRA's Political Action Committee.

Cox was raised in Tennessee and graduated with a Bachelor's in History and Business from Rhodes College in Memphis (CE, 2003). Unlike LaPierre, Cox is an avid hunter, fisher, and outdoorsman. Cox was a legislative assistant to U.S. Rep. John Tanner where he served until joining the NRA in 1995 (CE, 2003; Congress Daily, 2002). Similar to LaPierre, Cox was successful and moved through the ranks quickly. While LaPierre became the Director of NRA-ILA in eight years, Cox acquired it in seven. Cox even leapfrogged his own boss for the position. Cox brings to the job something few have, a young look. At 32 years old, the new

Director was able to bring youth and vigor to the organization. An individual close to Cox describes him as “a very clever and seasoned political operative” (Zeller, 2002, p. 1398).

While not as inflammatory as LaPierre’s, Cox’s rhetoric has still been provocative. In 2013 Cox accused President Obama and his administration of refusing to defend the United States Constitution on the international stage (Wolverton II, 2013). The statement was a response to President Obama agreeing with the International Arms Treaty, which Cox sees as in direct contradiction to the U.S. Constitution. Cox’s writings shed light on specific details pertaining to the ongoing political and social movements surrounding gun rights. As chief lobbyist, Cox has a unique and qualified perspective to produce artifacts rich in rhetorical significance. Having provided information on the authors of the articles, the thesis will next explain the rhetorical situation.

CHAPTER TWO: RHETORICAL SITUATION, LITERATURE REVIEW & METHODOLOGY

To better understand the NRA's response to Sandy Hook, the chapter will first introduce the rhetorical situation. Next, the literature review will discuss additional contextual and historical information about the organization. While not as relevant as literature pertaining to the NRA's explicit use of rhetoric, it is still important to note the literature that informs on the organization. There are recurring themes about the NRA's rhetoric that seem to appear throughout the literature. The literature dealing with the rhetoric of the NRA usually focuses on the NRA's response to undesirable circumstances. The review will focus on a couple situations the NRA has been placed in and then provide information on how the NRA reached out to and engaged the audience in order to maintain its position within the rhetorical arena.

Rhetorical Situation

The Sandy Hook massacre provided the opportunity for a rhetorical situation to develop. The primary understanding of the rhetorical situation has been developed by Lloyd Bitzer (1968). In addition, Gerard Hauser (2002) provides a modification to Bitzer's work, which will aid in understanding the rhetorical situation faced by the NRA. Bitzer defines a rhetorical situation as:

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

Bitzer's definition for a rhetorical situation is based on three components: exigence, audience, and constraints. Exigence is defined as "an imperfection marked by urgency" (p. 6). This imperfection must be something that can be changed by the use of discourse and if discourse

cannot be used to modify the exigence then the situation is not rhetorical. The status of being “marked by urgency” means the situation requires immediate action in order to alleviate this imperfection. Bitzer writes that while there may be multiple exigencies within a particular rhetorical situational, there will be one which serves as the primary.

The most salient exigence in this rhetorical situation is gun violence taking the lives of innocent people during mass shootings, especially young children. As discussed earlier, there have been a large number of mass shootings that have taken innocent lives. The literature review will show that, without ever advocating gun regulation, the NRA has used several methods to respond to unfavorable situations such as these. The hard-lined, unyielding approach has made the NRA the center of concern over what can be done about these tragic occurrences. Arguably all proponents of stricter gun control see the NRA as a hurdle to such regulation. This results in a clash of perspectives on what, if anything, can be done about it.

The urgency is inherent within this imperfection. No legitimate group within the United States wants to witness another tragedy similar to that grisly December morning. With the frequency and intensity of these tragedies increasing every year, there exists a marked urgency to confront this situation head on and figure out how to deal with it. The nation has continuously suffered at the hands of deranged gunmen and the nation needs to be informed on how to deal with these situations. With such grief from this event, convincing the audience about the existence of the exigence is not difficult.

As a rhetor, the NRA has a role in this situation unlike other participants. Specifically, the NRA is seen by some groups as the cause or at least partial facilitator of such tragedies. Due to the NRA’s conservative policies concerning gun regulation, many argue that the NRA is promoting an environment where gun violence is being unchecked. Even in the immediate wake

of the Newtown tragedy, the NRA argued that the number one solution to a bad person with a gun is a good person with a gun (Montopoli, 2011). The NRA is promoting an agenda that says putting and keeping more guns in the hands of law-abiding citizens, while simultaneously strengthening current federal gun laws will result in a reduced occurrence of tragic firearm-related incidents. The NRA-promoted policy is in conflict with those who advocate that certain firearms need to be outlawed completely, or that guns need to be harder to purchase, or that certain magazine sizes need to be banned. Such rhetoric has created hostility within the pursuit of finding a solution to this horrific violence.

The second component of the rhetorical situation is the audience. Bitzer (1968) defines the audience as the group of hearers who are capable of effecting change within the rhetorical situation. Bitzer argues an audience who only hears the discourse yet cannot effect change is not the rhetorical audience. Hauser (2002) argues that the discourse of the rhetor will be the determining factor that identifies the audience. Hauser writes that it is the rhetor's job to place the audience in relation to factual world events and also to place the audience in relation to particular interpretations of the relevance of those events. This strategic identification and placement of the audience aims at creating a sense of urgency and compelling the audience into action.

Bitzer (1968) argues a piece of rhetorical discourse has an audience most fitting to receive it. Regardless of the speaker's intentions, the actual discourse is inclined toward a particular audience which is best suited to receive it and enact a particular change within the situation. Such an audience would be found in the realm of *the public*, which Hauser (2002) defines as that "portion of the populace engaged in evolving shared opinion on a particular issue, with the intent of influencing its resolution" (p. 85). The public sphere is a discursive space

made up of the conversations, both formal and informal, that take place amongst the members who can enact change (Hauser).

With Hauser's view in mind, the rhetor is given more responsibility than simply presenting information at a predetermined audience. Through the rhetor's discourse, the audience members develop and assess the situation's meanings. How the audience is addressed and how the audience deals with the discourse will determine how an audience understands a rhetorical situation (Hauser, 2002). This understanding will identify those who are capable of enacting change, thereby identifying the rhetorical audience.

When LaPierre, Keene, and Cox release discourse on the internet, the potential rhetorical audience is huge. In the 6 months following the Sandy Hook shooting, the NRA website recorded between 272,000-781,000 unique visitors each month, with January receiving the highest number (Compete, 2013). The unique nature of websites is that the viewership has self-selected his or her exposure to the rhetoric. Those reading these monthly periodicals are actively seeking out and engaging this rhetoric. Websites are different than commercials and newsletters because the latter can flood televisions and mailboxes without the viewer needing to do anything.

While the potential audience is large, Bitzer (1968) argues that discourse will produce the audience who is capable of mediating change. That is, the discourse pre-inclines itself to a particular audience. The rhetorical audience produced by the NRA articles is developed through shared ideology. The discourse promotes an ideology that says individual citizens become empowered to enact change through uniting with one another. What mediating change looks like will be different for each rhetorical situation. In this case, mediating change means promoting the supremacy of the NRA agenda. The NRA is promoting a particular proposal that it says will foster the greatest safety for American citizens. The organization argues that by adherence to its

plan, the imperfection marked by urgency (the acts of violence against innocent civilians) will come to an end, or at least be reduced. Thus, to enact a change which alleviates the exigence requires enacting the agenda of the NRA.

Arguing that citizens have the power, through public opinion, to sway elected officials caters to a much larger rhetorical audience. The exigence is not alleviated by those in public offices, but by those at the grass roots level who can actively unite. This is especially important because (as it has already been pointed out) the NRA is highly efficient at agitating its membership into action. The audience members who are capable of enacting change at this stage of the rhetorical situation are those who are willing to take a stand. The discourse's encouragement not to be an idle bystander develops the audience through identification with the ability to enact change.

The last component of the rhetorical situation is constraints. The constraints are "made up of persons, events, objects, and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence" (Bitzer, 1968, p. 8). Constraints can be divided into two separate classes. Bitzer defines the first class of constraints as actions managed and controlled by the rhetor, constraints which Aristotle would call artistic proofs. The second class of constraints is defined by the situation and reflects what Aristotle called inartistic proofs. These constraints work to shape the rhetorical situation and define what options are available for those involved. Constraints influence the available decisions because they have the ability to "shape what an audience is ready to believe and the actions it is prepared to take" (Hauser, p. 50).

The first class of constraints facing these rhetors is the artistic proofs. The artistic proofs are logos, pathos, and ethos. Each of these proofs will constrain decision for both the rhetor and

the audience. Constraints help or hinder the rhetor's ability to influence how the audience perceives and judges the situation (Hauser, 2002). The *logos*, or logical proofs, are the statements made that appeal to reason and sound judgment. The use of statistics and figures would fall into this category. The NRA uses such appeals when they use statistics to argue that gun-control will not only fail to reduce crime, but would cause crime rates to increase. Such information determines what arguments are available for the rhetor to make to define the exigence and the audience's perception of it. Logical arguments also work to construct meaning in the minds of the audience in determining the validity of the proposed solution and whether to act on such discourse.

Pathos is the emotional appeal made to the audiences. Emotional appeals are an important factor in this situation because they are one of the most salient constraints. Emotions are powerful devices of motivation and the loss of twenty children's lives at Sandy Hook invokes a strong emotional response. Through proper utilization of emotional appeals, rhetor(s) can influence an audience to fully recognize the exigence.

Who the rhetors are and how the audience thinks of them has a tremendous impact on the success on the rhetors. The *ethos*, or credibility, of the rhetor is defined by the audience perception of his or her "intelligence, competence, and goodwill" (Aristotle, Trans. 1909). The way these three individuals are perceived will greatly influence how they address the audience in their discourse. Even more important, the *ethos* of the rhetors will influence how the audience will handle the rhetors' statements, such as whether audience members believe the statements to be true.

The second class of constraints deals with those things that are outside of the rhetor's control. These constraints are seen most clearly by examining the "material conditions of the

environment” (Hauser, 2002, p. 50). Hauser continues by illustrating several examples such as the medium in which the message is transferred, the place where the message is delivered, time of day, etc. Other examples would be gun laws currently in effect and the frequency with which these acts of gun violence occur.

Such constraints are relevant to the dissemination of the NRA artifacts because the artifacts have been presented at the NRA website. The internet has a constraint on the people who will be exposed to them. Not everyone will venture onto the NRA website and read the monthly periodicals from these individuals. These artifacts are arguably written for those who already support the cause and the rhetor is looking to motivate them into action. Additionally, time is a salient constraint because the NRA was compelled to release this discourse. As the frontrunner for gun rights, the NRA had no choice but to engage the public sphere after the shooting at Sandy Hook. While these examples of constraints do not represent the totality of constraints within this situation, they provide a foundational understanding of what circumstances are shaping the discourse of the NRA and how that discourse is being perceived by the rhetorical audience.

Additionally, the rhetorical situation is an event that is located within time and space and as such, it presents itself during different stages of life. Using the concepts developed by Bitzer, Hauser explains that there are four life stages of a rhetorical situation. First is the origin stage. Here, the rhetor works to define and make salient the rhetorical situation to those he or she wishes to be “mediators of change” (p. 54). The next stage is maturity and deals with the exigence becoming fully known and prompting the rhetorical audience into action. Also, the constraints within the situation become developed and clear. Next is the deterioration stage. Having not resolved the exigence during the maturity stage, this stage sees the exigence as much

more difficult to fix. Potential reasons for this difficulty are a lack in interest, hardened attitudes and beliefs, or attention drawn elsewhere. Last is the disintegration stage where the exigence is no longer believed to be adjustable by the use of discourse. Those who were the rhetorical audience by way of their ability to enact change are no longer such an audience.

The current situation of the NRA and the ongoing gun control debate is in the maturity stage. The situation's exigence has been defined and accepted. Additionally, the rhetors have engaged the audience (and continue to do so) in an attempt to motivate them into an action that would modify the exigence. Due to the existence of hardened beliefs and attitudes, the argument can be made that this situation has developed into the state of deterioration. However, given the ability for discourse to still enact change, such an assumption may be premature. There are still high levels of national interest regarding where gun control laws are going and how those laws will affect audience members.

Literature Review

The bulk of the literature written on the NRA contains material focusing on the history and actions of the organization. The focus tends to be on examining what the NRA does and how it functions, rather than focusing on the actual rhetoric of the organization. Even when literature writes about the rhetoric of the NRA, it rarely provides an analysis of the rhetoric itself. The primary literature provides biographical and contextual information about the NRA, its leadership, and methods of operation. Since this literature does not deal with the rhetoric of the NRA specifically, they are not the focus of this review. However, failing to account for them would leave a literature review lacking.

Through extensive interviews with those on the inside, Brown and Abel (2003) provide pertinent information about the NRA's influence within the gun control conflict. While Brown

and Abel write an exhaustive text detailing the battle over gun control, most of the contextual literature deals with transitions that the organization has undergone. For example, Leddy (1987) provides a detailed account on the transition of the organization into a gun lobby. The study focuses on gun control issues and provides insight into the history of the NRA. The text also provides additional demographic information about gun owners. Leddy's (1986) previous work focuses on examining the NRA as an ongoing social movement within the country. Leddy (1986) argues that the NRA's major shift between sporting group and lobbying group occurred as a response to a social movement. Going even further, Lefave (1970) identifies the NRA as both a lobbying group and "an agency for the militarization of the nation" (vi). Lefave argues that despite the growing amount of literature surrounding militarism in the United States, the NRA's influence on linking together civilian and military has not been widely researched. By constructing more influential connections between civilians and the military, argues Lefave, the NRA has promoted martial values in American society. Lastly, Beauchamp (1990) writes that the NRA has been "transformed into a sophisticated, mass membership-based, single issue lobby that dominated federal gun control politics" (ii). Beauchamp (1990) further alleges that the political effectiveness and influence of the organization is a result of five things: 1) organizational factors, 2) a unique firearms subculture that fosters grass roots actions, 3) organizational status in certain parts of American society, 4) a weak gun control force, and 5) a political system opposed to altering the status-quo.

While there is a benefit to the literature which describes the NRA as an organization, the focus of this review must be on literature dealing with the actual rhetoric of the NRA. The available literature provides insight into the NRA's responses to various rhetorical situations. The literature demonstrates that the NRA has multiple methods of responding to unfavorable

circumstances. In an attempt to maintain control of these situations, the NRA has engaged in scapegoating, creating fear, promoting American ideals, and alienating individuals.

One of the unfavorable circumstances the NRA was in occurred during the late 1980s and into the 1990s. After the NRA failed to prevent Maryland from banning cheap, concealable handguns, known as “Saturday Night Specials,” many people began speaking of the NRA as losing influence (Seltzer, 1995). Additionally, membership had dropped significantly during this time and as a result, so did revenue intake (Seltzer, 1995). The result was a situation warranting action by the NRA. The NRA launched a campaign to reinforce its strength and renew its conception of influence.

Another situation that compelled the NRA to act was the school shooting at Columbine. Kirkland (2000) provides intriguing insight into the NRA’s response to accusations that it shares responsibility for the tragedy at Columbine High School. Based on the theories of apologia, scapegoating, and crisis management, Kirkland (2000) argues that when an organization is seen as a contributing factor in a crisis, it must refute the scapegoat identity. The organization must also provide a more appropriate answer which will help the audience make sense of the tragedy and alleviate uncertainty and grief. The present day NRA remains in this conflict because people still view them as contributing to the ongoing crisis of gun violence.

When circumstances like these arise, the NRA must attempt to control the rhetorical situation as best as they can. As will be discussed later, the pivotal part of propaganda is the ability to activate an audience into action (Ellul, 1973). Melzer (2009) argues that the NRA was quite aware that when an individual’s group or status becomes threatened, large numbers of people will look to take action. From this knowledge the NRA began shifting its rhetoric. Attacks on gun rights became liberal culture wars and threats to individual rights and freedoms

(Melzer, 2009). Melzer continues by arguing that the rhetoric of the NRA began alienating the opposition not as gun control proponents, but rather framed the opposition as “freedom-haters and terrorists” (p. 76).

An important aspect of the NRA is the relationship it has with the public. As the leading gun lobby, the NRA relies significantly on the ability to engage the public. Through discourse, an organization must engage in framing and perspective-taking to construct meaning and create relationships with their publics (Toth & Heath, 1992). After the Columbine tragedy, the organization alienated itself from the public by refusing to negotiate or make concessions (Kirkland, 2000). Given the NRA’s tendency to maintain its course of action with no concessions, the current situation with Sandy Hook provides grounds for a repeat of this mistake.

The literature has also provided background information regarding how the NRA attempted to control these rhetorical situations. Kirkland (2000) suggests that during an act of scapegoating, the NRA would benefit from an approach which explained why scapegoating was not an appropriate response and how the NRA did not fit the role the public was trying to assign to them. After the Columbine High School tragedy, the NRA attempted to name other scapegoats. By doing this, the NRA approved the use of scapegoating, which was problematic due to the NRA being a scapegoat themselves (Kirkland, 2000). The NRA’s use of scapegoating is especially noteworthy as the events of Sandy Hook again stirred resentment and hostility towards the NRA.

Another way that the NRA has attempted to engage the public is through fear tactics. In examining published material from the NRA, namely advertisements, pamphlets, and columns, all of which appeared during 1988 and 1994, Seltzer (1995) argued that “at the heart of this campaign was...the ‘master’ metaphor of *Defenseless in a Brutal World* which depended on

society's fear of violent crime for success" (Seltzer, 1995, p. 12). The study does not examine specific uses of metaphors by the NRA, but instead, focuses on the overall campaign as a long-term method to carefully craft and develop an overarching master metaphor.

Seltzer understands the NRA's master metaphor as two, interwoven themes: "1) crime has turned contemporary America into a brutal world and 2) citizens are potentially defenseless within that world" (Seltzer, 1995, p. 12). Through strategic use of rhetoric, the NRA successfully adopted this metaphor as reality. A crucial piece of insight from this study is that there is a positive correlation between the extent to which an individual accepts this metaphor and the persuasive force the organization has on that particular individual.

In the response to the earlier problems raised about Saturday Night Specials, the NRA had to reach out to the public in order to try and control the opinions regarding the organization. To demonstrate that the NRA was still a powerhouse, Seltzer (1995) argues that the NRA successfully displayed brutal reality through images of thugs, rapists, and robbers. The success of the NRA was dependent on making these dangers not a societal problem, but a personal one. The rhetoric focused the dangers on the individual person and their family. The ability for the NRA to portray citizens as defenseless is shown by Seltzer to be based on two things: 1) an inept criminal justice system and 2) anti-gun politics. When people accept the notion that they are living in a brutal world, the notion of being potentially helpless is a frightening thought. When audience members accept these notions, they are likely to "help re-establish the organization as the powerful and influential lobby it used to be" (Seltzer, p. 77). This response by the NRA demonstrates an attempt by the organization to use rhetoric to control and shape public opinion.

Another method of reaching out to the public was through the promotion of American "ideals." Anderson (2008) argues that the organization uses their website as a means to create

identification with potential members. The rhetoric used by the NRA on its member website not only says that people should join, but that they should *want* to join (Anderson). The NRA creates this desire to join by how they define the term “member.” The NRA uses terms such as “patriot,” “defender,” and “protector” to create a member identity (Anderson).

Another aspect of engaging the public is shaping and controlling how one defines the rhetorical situation. Ferguson (1973) maintains that “public address as artifact becomes critical material available to identify a group’s definition of the situation” (p. 8). This means through examination of the NRA’s public address, one can interpret how the NRA viewed its relation to the rhetorical situation. Ferguson concludes that public address communication has made a difference in the successful operation of the NRA (Ferguson).

The last type of NRA response identified was the act of alienation. Ferguson (1973) provides insight into the feelings of powerlessness often felt by individuals. According to Ferguson, alienation theory says the individuals within mass society are unable to effect the necessary change they want to see in their life. The result of this estrangement from society compels individuals to join the NRA so a larger entity can speak on their behalf (Ferguson). While Ferguson provides this insight, his focus of the NRA during 1965-1969 does not account for recent situations affecting the NRA in the internet age.

Researchers have done extensive studies on the history of the NRA as an organization. However, while there is some literature regarding the rhetoric of the NRA, current research seems to be lacking. More specifically, there is little explicit attempt to analyze the rhetoric of the NRA in terms of potential propagandistic technique. While Kirkland (2000) brings novel insight into the NRA’s use of rhetoric, her research examines the rhetoric specifically in response to accusations that the organization should be held partially liable for the gun tragedies. With all

this research, there is not yet a thorough understanding of whether or not the NRA uses propaganda. More specifically, there is no research that attempts to identify the existence of propaganda used to maintain and control the rhetorical arena during the aftermath of Sandy Hook. This research attempts to fill that void by providing an evaluation of NRA literature using a set of propaganda characteristics. Based on the findings, this thesis will also provide an ethical evaluation of the NRA's literature.

Methodology:

An interdisciplinary approach is appropriate for understanding the NRA's response to Sandy Hook. Taylor (2008) provides a threefold justification for interdisciplinary approach which applies here. The first is that the need for an interdisciplinary approach stems from the complexity of the question being posed. The second justification is when essential parts of the research are examined by more than one discipline. Last, an interdisciplinary approach is justified when the problem compels the researcher to utilize more than one field of study. Taylor's three justifications apply to this study. To understand and justify the ethics of the NRA's literature, this research needs organizational communication and philosophy. In the interpretation chapter, the research uses discourse ethics to evaluate the communication methods of the NRA as an organization. Additionally, the research incorporates literature from Immanuel Kant to provide justification for the ethical nature of the NRA's actions. Last, the research uses rhetoric, with a special focus on propaganda theory, to analyze the artifacts. With these justifications for an interdisciplinary approach in mind, I will turn to explaining and justifying propaganda as my method for analyzing NRA documents.

Deciphering the difference between propaganda and persuasion/rhetoric has proven difficult (Kimble, 2005). The line between persuasion and propaganda is often blurred as

organizations push rhetorical limits in their attempts at persuasive tactics. Cunningham (2002) writes that rhetoric and propaganda are “widely viewed as interchangeable forms of communication” (p. 62). The battle to effectively isolate and identify propaganda has been going on for decades with no end in sight¹. The difficulty in identifying propaganda has also been argued by one of the most prominent figures in propaganda analysis, Jacques Ellul. On multiple occasions, Ellul (1957; 1973) has claimed that information and propaganda are virtually indistinguishable. However, characteristics of propaganda can be objectively outlined and described, which would allow assessment of artifacts to determine whether they fit characteristics of propagandistic technique.

Ellul writes that “propaganda is scientific in that it tends to establish a set of rules, rigorous, precise, and tested, that are not merely recipes but impose themselves on every propagandist, who is less and less free to follow his [*sic*] own impulses” (1973, p. 4). This means that for something to be propagandistic, it must adhere to and execute such rules and procedures. This requirement provides an ability to assess documentation for characteristics of propagandistic technique. To begin, this research uses the definition of propaganda made famous by Ellul (1973):

Propaganda is a set of methods employed by an organized group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals, psychologically unified through psychological manipulations and incorporated in an organization. (p. 61)

More clearly, propaganda aims at moving a mass to a predetermined outcome, using psychological and organizational technique. In addition to this definition, this research employs

¹ Diggs-Brown (2012) writes that propaganda was originally a term coined by the Roman Catholic Church in regards to *propagating* the faith. Since the early 1900’s, the definition of propaganda has been relatively volatile, constantly changing and shifting. Vallance (1951) provides a detailed description of several scholars’ definitions and understandings of propaganda during the mid-20th century. Feder (2003), Cunningham (2002), and Jowett & O’Donnell (2011) also provide detail on the struggle to identify propaganda from other forms of communication.

several characteristics of propaganda outlined by Ellul. The characteristics were selected because Ellul's internal and external characteristics of propaganda provide a comprehensive framework for seeing and identifying propagandistic technique.

While Ellul's text is decades old, the insight he provides is as relevant now as it was then, maybe more so now with mass online media. Karim (2001) reinforces this point in his treatment of Ellul's work: "The views of Jacques Ellul on propaganda and myth have significant potential for understanding the ideological promotion of information society in the present" (p. 113). This is because critical arguments in Ellul's framework deal with the individuals who desire to be informed. Ellul argues that this desire to be informed does not make one safer from propaganda; to the contrary this desire makes them more vulnerable to propaganda. Describing the problem of information overload, Ellul (1973) writes:

[I]t is a fact that excessive data do not enlighten the reader or the listener; they drown him. He cannot remember them all, or coordinate them, or understand them; if he does not want to risk losing his mind, he will merely draw a general picture from them [*sic*]. (p. 87)

The United States has developed into the epitome of what Ellul is alluding to. This is a nation where information is streaming at citizens from countless sources. People are exposed to media on computers, cell phones, televisions, radios, newspapers, and magazines. The sheer amount of information available is overwhelming, which gives individuals a need to pursue loads of information in order to "stay on top" of things. The result of this information overload is a nation that is heavily susceptible to propagandistic technique.

Information overload and the subsequent *drowning* of the individual results from several factors, most of which the propagandist can exploit if he or she is clever enough. Ellul (1973) writes that this exploitation can be done through different categories of propaganda, such as

sociological, rational, and irrational, and these three are intricately intertwined. In order to further justify the use of this framework, it would be worthwhile to show how these three categories affect western society.

Sociological propaganda is the utilization of the sociological context in order to spread an ideology (Ellul, 1973). This is evidenced not by catchwords or campaigns to spread ideas; rather, this kind of propaganda is particularly drawn out and long term. It attacks the person with the very custom and way of life he or she holds dear. In the United States, this would be done by utilizing cultural ideals such as education, work ethic, life, and liberty to push a mass toward belief and action. These cultural values encourage individuals to seek out information, to try research, to attempt to control and influence the world around them. The very nature of the U.S. sociological context—freedom, the need to be informed, the push to be the wisest—becomes the standard by which we measure good and bad. The increase of information must be good and the lack of information becomes bad. Based on the cultural values that have been held to such high esteem, this society has created its own susceptibility to propaganda.

Just as the current sociological context justifies Ellul's framework, so too does the risk of irrational and rational categories of propaganda. Ellul (1973) writes that the "Modern man needs a relation to facts, a self-justification to convince himself that by acting in a certain way he is obeying reason and proved experience" [*sic*] (p. 85). What this means is people have a desire to be informed. There is an innate calling that compels the reasonable individual to seek out and accept information. However, when the individual is presented with rational information, he or she cannot retain all the statistics and other factual mechanisms of what has been read. Instead, the individual draws an over-all impression of what was presented. The result of this acceptance

of rational information “is a perfectly irrational picture, a purely emotional feeling, a myth. The facts, the data, the reasoning—all are forgotten, and only the impression remains” (p. 86).

This is why Ellul’s framework is unrivaled with regards to propaganda analyses of western society. Humankind has an innate characteristic—fueled further by western society’s sociological context—that compels individuals to seek out information. This compulsion does not render a wiser individual who makes rational choices based on rational information. Rather the individuals are paralyzed by the information presented before them. The facts they are given trap them and prevent them from ever going anywhere else (Ellul, 1973). It is for these reasons that Ellul’s framework has great utility as a methodology to assess the rhetoric of the NRA. This methodology is timely, accurate, relevant, and effective. Having now justified the framework, I will turn to explaining the characteristics of propaganda which will serve as the objective criterion for evaluating the NRA’s artifacts. These characteristics are broken into two categories, internal and external and will be cited in-text using a particular letter as an identifier.

Internal Characteristics: These are the traits and characteristics of propaganda which will be shaped and created based on the understanding of the individual.

A The propagandist will know and use the psychological terrain of the individual.

Propaganda cannot argue anything contrary to what the public holds to be true. It will not create public opinion, but rather it will utilize the truth of public opinion as a means to motivate the individual into action. Propaganda will bind itself to a foundation already present within the individual.

B Similarly to understanding the psychological terrain of the individual, the propagandist will be familiar with, and utilize knowledge of, the current trends in society. The propaganda must adhere to the “fundamental psycho-sociological bases on which a whole society rests,

the presuppositions and myths not just of individuals or of particular groups but those shared by all individuals in a society” (Ellul, 1973, p. 39). Ellul continues by providing four sociological presuppositions:

- Humanity is basically good
- Humanity’s aim in life is happiness
- History develops in endless progress
- Everything is matter

C The last internal characteristics are the issues of timeliness and factuality. In order to be propaganda, the information must relate to what is timely. Only contemporary events can entice and challenge the individual. Claims must pertain to crises in the present or immediate future. Whether such crises exist will be developed through the propagandist’s use of truth and factuality. Propaganda does not require the use of truth, but truth is always preferred over deceit. If the use of false facts is to be used, it must be done in such a way that the information cannot be challenged or easily found out. Cunningham (1992) supports this when he writes that truth is used not because it holds inherent supremacy, but rather because of its utility.

External Characteristics: These are characteristics of propaganda that exist outside of the psychological and sociological framework of the individual.

D Propaganda will simultaneously address itself to both the individual and the mass. Ellul (1973) writes that “To be effective, [propaganda] must give the impression of being personal, for we must never forget that the mass is composed of individuals, and is in fact nothing but assembled individuals” (p. 8). To win over the individual one by one is too time consuming, and the individual will put up too much resistance. Instead, the

propagandist aims at persuading the mass as an accumulation of individuals. He or she must appeal to the law of averages. One must never consider a person to be alone; they are all part of the mass, which the propagandist is attempting to call into action.

- E Any source of media which is not utilized with the propaganda agenda opens doors for contrary opinions, which true propaganda will not allow. Ellul writes that “Propaganda cannot be satisfied with partial successes, for it does not tolerate discussion, by its very nature, it excludes contradiction and discussion” (p. 11). Propaganda must be complete and fully encompassing. All sources of media must be utilized. The individual must never be able to escape the steady injection of propaganda from all possible angles.
- F Just as propaganda will completely encircle the individual, within the mass, so too the propaganda must be unceasing and lasting. “The individual must not be allowed to recover, to collect himself, [*sic*] to remain untouched by propaganda during any relatively long period, for propaganda is not the touch of the magic wand. It is based on slow, constant impregnation” (Ellul, 1973, p. 17). Propaganda will demonstrate a constant pressure on the individual.
- G Effective propaganda will be rooted and attached to physical action. While beliefs and values—the psychological mind of the individual—should fall to the control of propaganda, it is more important for behavior and action to be controlled. The propagandist will be first and foremost concerned with calling his or her audience into physical action. While thoughts and feelings can fluctuate, it is behavior that will remain stable with proper propaganda. This is because action makes propaganda irreversible. In order to justify their previous actions, individuals are required to continue on. This is the ultimate aim of the propagandist.

H Last, propaganda will be marked by a systematic use of organizational technique. The propagandist must utilize an organization from which to make all the previous characteristics possible. A proper organization will accomplish several things. First it will effectively promote its psychological influences based on reality. Second, it will couple the effects of psychological propaganda to physical action. There can be no propaganda where there is no physical action. Last, organization creates a divide between the propagandist and the propagandee. This last trait will prevent the propagandist from falling victim to his or her own trap.

Through the use of these characteristics, this research examines the nineteen artifacts from the NRA and assesses whether the NRA participated in propagandistic technique. Assessment is done by first reading through all of the articles. This provides a broad overview of the material. This research then proceeds by reexamining the material several times and highlighting and noting instances of rhetoric which may fall into these characteristics. As items of interest are discovered, they are set apart. The application of this methodology will provide verifiable insight into the rhetorical activities of the NRA.

CHAPTER THREE: RESULTS

The results of this research show a high level of propagandistic technique exists within the literature of the NRA. This level is high with regards to the quantity as well as the quality. The research has concluded that the NRA engaged in propaganda by the partial or total fulfillment of all characteristics of propaganda, as outline by Ellul. Propaganda must be tied to physical action. Compelling the audience into action is the end goal of the propagandist and the propagandist will concern him or herself with nothing else except for what will motivate the audience into action.

As was shown in the preceding chapter, once an individual engages in action, they will proceed with further action, so as to always justify what was done previously. To compel the audience into action, the NRA had to utilize effective organizational technique. Organizational technique will unite the psychological symbol manipulation into physical action. For organizational technique to be successful, the audience must first be furnished with reasons to enter the framework. Once they enter the framework, they develop allegiance. When audiences develop allegiance, they will participate in action.

The analysis progresses in three sections. The first section deals with the issues of timeliness, disallowing contrary opinion, and the necessity of propaganda to be unceasing. The second section first discusses the significance of symbol manipulation. Next, the second section includes the evaluation of the specific characteristics of symbol manipulation used by the NRA. Last, the third section details the organizational technique which the NRA deployed to couple the symbol manipulation into physical action.

Section One: Timeliness, Totality, and Duration of Propaganda

First, the artifacts presented a timely and relevant engagement with the audience. Ellul (1973) writes that humans are only challenged by contemporary events. If the propagandist seeks to motivate his or her audience, he or she must challenge the listener. The NRA's references to contemporary events were the most easily identifiable aspect of timeliness. Such references helped create a sense of immediacy for the reader. Because these artifacts are being released every month, sometimes twice a month, they furnish the reader with real time insight into current events. The NRA focused on several timely issues. The three main issues the NRA dealt with are Sandy Hook and other school shootings, the fight against guns and the NRA, and the response of gun rights proponents.

First, in regards to the shooting at Sandy Hook, the NRA argued that “[N]o one—nobody—has addressed the most important, pressing and immediate question we face: How do we protect our children right now, starting today, in a way that we know works?” (C1)². This statement brings the immediacy of the situation into perspective. It encourages the idea that there is no time for discussion and the reader must take the NRA's solution immediately or risk continuing to put children in harm's way. Referring to the Aurora and Tucson shootings, the NRA commented that Lanza was not in a class of his own when it came to being criminally insane. The NRA writes that the Tucson incident was “the work of an insane, deeply disturbed individual, Jared Lee Loughner, whose parents feared his behavior” and the Aurora shooter was “under psychiatric care at the college he attended” (C2). The reminder of these events works to create a sense of urgency and unrest within the reader.

² The in-text citations are first organized by the letter previously assigned in the Methodology section and then given a numerical reference. The full listing of citations is provided in the Appendix section.

Beginning in March, the NRA began making responses to timely events which they perceived as contrary to their agenda. They argued that spiteful rhetoric was being sent towards the NRA and commented that “creating hatred for NRA members” is part of the national conversation (D15). Much of the early writings had similar remarks, all dealing with how the NRA was being targeted. The NRA quoted journalist Jason Whitlock who wrote that “the NRA is the new KKK” (C4). They quoted Scott Blakeman as saying “The National Rifle Association essentially harbors terrorists...” (C5). The Boston Globe was also cited as saying “The National Rifle Association has been heartened by the chance to isolate Loughner and Lanza from the rest of the gun owning universe” (C3). These quotes provide evidence that the NRA worked to create a sense that they were being demonized. Given that these comments were reported within weeks of them occurring, it strengthened the NRA’s pursuit of establishing urgency within the situation.

The NRA also focused a great deal on the timely events surrounding gun regulation. As they did with Sandy Hook, the NRA used several examples regarding regulation to validate the urgency of the problem. For example, the NRA writes that President Obama has requested specific proposals that he desires to push through without delay (C9). The NRA also reported on specific Supreme Court cases involving gun issues. They noted that their organization is funding the new case *Hall v. City of Chicago* in an attempt to get Chicago’s concealed carry program legalized (C10). Additionally, the NRA used language such as “*this war*” [emphasis added] which encourages perceiving the issue as immediate (C7). The NRA used the phrase, “by the time you read this...,” in order to make it very clear to the reader that particular events are unfolding in rapid succession and the time to activate is now (C11).

The last issue the NRA appealed to in a timely manner was the various responses from gun rights proponents. The immediacy of the battle is demonstrated by the NRA's references to standing against regulation. By reporting real time examples of individuals standing up for gun rights, the NRA is refreshing the desire to battle and reminding its membership of the proximity of the war. The NRA writes a substantial amount regarding the closure of the Eastern Sports and Outdoor show, which would have had revenue of around \$80 million (B39; C6; G4). The closure resulted when organizers decided to ban particular semi-automatic rifles from the show. This decision compelled a large number of vendors to withdraw support and within several days, the entire show collapsed. When referring to this issue, the NRA prided itself and its members with effectively standing together as a community of outdoorsmen and women. The NRA claimed this closure as a victory for gun rights and argued that it evidenced the ideological trend of our society—that the U.S. will stand up when gun rights are threatened.

The NRA also immediately lauded its membership when they took action and got involved. One example was Congress being swamped with “hundreds of thousands of calls” from people who were fighting against what they perceived to be a threat against their freedom (C8). They also write of membership growing, which enabled the NRA to argue that they are developing a stronger following (H12).

Moving on from the fulfillment of timely responses, the NRA also engaged in action which did not allow any contrary opinion. To effectively promote a particular ideology, the propagandist must deploy total propaganda and not allow any dissenting opinions to enter the framework (Ellul, 1973). The propaganda must refute any contrary opinion. The primary method used to refute contrary opinions was the NRA's attempt to discredit the opposition. The

NRA repeatedly sought to instill doubt in the credibility and trustworthiness of those pushing gun restrictions.

The attacks on the credibility of the opposition appeared rather frequently and took various forms. One form was presenting the way gun control proponents treated the gun owning community. The NRA claimed that the Obama Administration and its supporters were attempting to divide Americans (E5). The NRA claimed that those pushing for gun regulation were attempting to fool people until they could get their agenda passed (E8). NRA officials also argued that gun control advocates were pushing false narratives by lying about NRA members and the organization (E4; E6). These examples provide two pieces of support to the propagandistic technique used by the NRA. First and foremost, they fulfill the requirement of not allowing any opinion that is contrary. When the opposition would say something negative about the membership or the organization as a whole, the NRA would launch counter rhetoric arguing that the opposition was not trustworthy. Second, these examples begin to demonstrate the NRA's creation of the common enemy, which will be discussed later.

Another method of discrediting the opposition was by providing examples that attempted to display ignorance on the part of gun control proponents. The NRA attempted to portray stupidity emanating from the gun control proponents by displaying examples of their lack of knowledge on issues. For example, with regard to the proposed ban on high-volume magazines, Rep. Diana DeGette was quoted as saying "...if you ban them in the future, the number of these high-capacity magazines is going to decrease dramatically over time because the bullets will have been shot and there won't be any more available" (E15). The NRA also reported on Rep. Schakowsky who attempted to argue that she could pass legislation which the NRA claimed would be unconstitutional (E14). Furthermore, the NRA made reports of Sen. Feinstein's

potentially unconstitutional mandatory gun buy-back program, Gov. Andrew Cuomo passing “massively flawed legislation with only a few hours’ notice,” and many other state legislatures who were rushing to judgment (E11; E12; E13).

The last method of discrediting the opposition was the argument that the current federal gun laws work to reduce crime when they are actually enforced. The NRA claims the federal government is too lax on current regulation which is why gun crimes occur (E7). All of these examples demonstrate the NRA’s pursuit to relieve the opposition of credibility and trustworthiness, which would ultimately work to remove any dissenting opinion. These examples show that time and again, on various gun-related issues, the NRA casts doubt upon any ideology other than their own.

The last point of this section deals with the continuity and duration of propaganda. As explained previously, propaganda must maintain its grip on the individual. In order for propaganda to be effective, the individual must never be allowed to recover him or herself. This is the only characteristic that cannot be confirmed through individual written examples. To understand the fulfillment of this characteristic of propaganda technique, one must step back and observe the situation in its entirety. From February to June, the NRA engaged its audience a total of 19 times. These 19 artifacts presented continuous themes from start to finish. These articles were used to promote the ideology that personal liberty is at stake in the gun war and that anything that threatens gun rights is a direct attack on one’s freedom. Anyone engaging in the push for such regulation was thereby cast in an unfavorable light. The unrelenting nature of these themes grabs hold of the readers and does not allow them to escape from the steady and continuous drip of propaganda technique.

Section Two: Symbol Manipulation

Manipulating symbols is essential to total propaganda. Symbol manipulation is the utilization of language, images, and nonverbal communication in such a way as to promote a particular thought pattern in the recipient. Typical communication tends to progress in a bilateral exchange amongst participants. That is, participants work together to create the flow of information and discussion. Individuals engage one another with communication while simultaneously responding with feedback. While there are disagreements about the specific ways people engage in interpersonal communication, an interaction such as this is how communication is commonly understood. Even the individual who is exposed to advertisements maintains an ability to provide a reasoned response to claims.

However, propaganda seeks to engage in symbol manipulation in such a way as to create unilateral communication (Hauser, 2002). In describing this type of communication, Hauser argues:

When the mode of presentation uses devices of language and techniques of appeal that condense the reasoning implicit in the appeal, it disengages rhetor and audience from the mediating exercise of reflection. It fuses speaker, speech, and audience into a composite whole, often inviting acceptance on the basis of the speaker's or writer's authority. (p. 68)

The recipient no longer has a role in providing feedback or negotiating the understanding of the information. Instead, the information is supplied in such a way that it removes any negotiation on the part of the recipient. Worth noting however, is that the individual engaged by propaganda will oftentimes feel like he or she has the capacity to engage in bilateral communication, yet they cannot. This is proven when Ellul (1973) writes that when someone "recites his propaganda lesson and says that he is thinking for himself...then he really demonstrates that he no longer things at all, ever, and that he does not exist as a person [*sic*] (p. 171). Such a mind state is in fact

a desirable outcome to create amongst the recipients of propaganda because it creates an impression of self-control, when the propaganda has limited perspective, thus constraining the outcomes for supposed “self-control” (Ellul).

Before the research begins analyzing the examples of text as evidence of symbol manipulation, it is important to understand the importance of symbol manipulation. Ellul (1973) writes that symbol manipulation is important for three reasons:

First of all, it persuades the individual to enter the framework of an organization. Second, it furnishes him with reasons, justifications, motivations for actions. Third, it obtains his total allegiance [*sic*]. (p. 23)

These three reasons are applicable and necessary if the NRA is to engage its audience with propagandistic technique. Notice the progression of the reasons for symbol manipulation. The first thing of importance is to compel the individual to enter the framework. In fact, the typical reader of this material, an NRA member, does not have to be persuaded to enter the framework because they are already in it. And being in the framework would incline the reader to certain beliefs. A poll of NRA members concluded that 92% opposed mandatory buyback programs, 89% opposed banning semi-automatic firearms, and 93% opposed gun registration with the federal government (On Message, Inc., 2013). The home page for the NRA-ILA webpage claims that its purpose is to “defeat restrictive gun control legislation, to pass pro-gun reform legislation, and to educate the public about the facts concerning gun ownership (NRA-ILA, 2014). These facts make it clear that those who are within the membership of the NRA already possess particular motives and beliefs which place them within the framework from the start.

Maintaining the audience in the framework is done by reinforcing the belief that something is wrong. The individuals who perceive that nothing is amiss are not the ideal candidates for the NRA’s propaganda. They must first be reminded of a particular issue which is

negatively affecting them. As the results will show, the NRA used its discourse to effectively construct and intensify problems that would already be assumed to exist by the typical adherent to the NRA's ideology.

The second topic of importance is to provide the propagandee with reasons for doing things which the propagandist will undoubtedly ask the individual to do. At this point, the individuals who are receiving the discourse are well aware of the problems affecting them. The propagandist must demonstrate how particular actions will alleviate the symptoms of the problem in order to justify the actions. In this way, the recipients of propagandistic symbol manipulation will begin to perceive an ability to lessen the problem.

Last, symbol manipulation will obtain total allegiance from the propagandee. Total allegiance is the state where individuals readily perceive the propagandist as having their best interest in mind. At this point, the individuals subjected to propaganda have adopted the views held by the discourse itself. When the discourse identifies a problem within a situation, the propagandee will also identify it as a problem. When the discourse develops a solution, the propagandee will accept that solution as the reasonable response.

What is important to establish in the listener, is true and heartfelt commitment to the cause. Ellul (1973) argues that invoking effective action from the listener is best accomplished when the individual has genuine compliance. He continues by saying "[t]he worker, the soldier, and the partisan must believe in what they are doing, must put all their heart and their good will into it; they must also find their equilibrium, their satisfactions, in their actions (p. 23). Here lies the culmination of symbol manipulation: the individual finds true and honest satisfaction in the actions he or she is committing. Maintaining this mind state in the recipients will ensure they move in accordance with the will of the propagandist.

The utilization of symbol manipulation is without question, a necessary part of propagandistic technique. For the reasons just stated, the NRA was effective in their use of symbol manipulation. The analysis will move through these symbol manipulations one by one by providing detailed examples of their use. To preview, the first characteristic is that the artifacts will bind themselves to an already accepted public opinion. The NRA had four major areas of public opinion that they promoted. Second, propaganda will observe the psychological presuppositions and myths already present within the audience. Specifically, the NRA focused on fueling the presuppositions that life's aim is happiness and history develops in endless progress, and exploiting the myth of the hero. Third, the artifacts utilized language management to target both the individual and the mass. This was accomplished through the construction of the common enemy and appealing to the law of averages. Fourth, through the utilization of American ideals and values, the artifacts exploited the need to gain information and compelled the reader to draw an irrational picture from the rational information.

In order for propaganda to be effective, it must affix itself to information that is already known within the audience. While the NRA pursued several trends, there are four currents which are most salient. First, they utilized a universal truth about the need to protect children. Second, they exploited the psychological terrain with regards to the pain of Sandy Hook. Third, they promoted issues of mental health. Last, the NRA utilized the psychological mindset of its audience regarding the way Americans view liberties and freedom.

To show that it was aligned with public opinion, the NRA oftentimes advocated positions that would hold true for all people. This is most easily seen in the constant references to protecting America's children. The NRA promoted their agenda through the shared hope of a safer world for children. The sanctity and innocence of children is an innate truth that runs

strong within each individual, and actions that seem to be motivated by a desire to promote that vein would be received readily. The NRA used examples such as, “most beloved, innocent and vulnerable members of the American family,” providing on-the-scene school security to confront immediate threats to our nation’s kids,” and “we have an obligation...to youngsters who need future protection” (A1; A7; A8). These writings frame the battle in light of protecting children. The NRA avoids going against the prior held beliefs of its audience by advocating for the protection of children. Even more so, the NRA stirs up the beliefs already present in the audience in such a way that the audience is pulled towards the NRA out of agreement in the innate truth.

The NRA also uses absolutes to advocate for their cause. They write, “If we truly cherish our kids...we must give them the greatest level of protection possible,” which is the NRA’s National School Shield (NSS) (A3). This line of reasoning implies that if people are not using the “greatest” type of protection (the NSS), then they do not love their children. Such wording makes it impossible for individuals to love their children if they are not willing to go along with the agenda of the NRA. In sum, throughout the articles the NRA attaches itself to the psychological currents present within the readership by aligning itself with child welfare.

In connecting with the public opinion pertaining to the actions at Newtown, the NRA used phrases like “unforgettable, horrible tragedy,” and “The National Rifle Association’s 4 million mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters joins the nation in horror, outrage, grief and earnest prayer” (A2; A12). While these appear to be benign condolences, they are examples of the NRA creating an atmosphere of moving along with the trends of public opinion. Obviously the writers could not have said much else, but these phrases work to move the public alongside the agenda of the NRA. These examples frame the NRA as one who is equally sorrowful over the situation.

Next, the NRA appealed to the common opinion regarding the problem with the mental health system. The connection with mental health issues and the propensity to commit acts of violence has been discussed for many years (Swanson, et al., 1990; Mullen, 1997). To affix itself to the opinion on these issues, the NRA criticized the lack of a national database which could identify potential threats to safety and pushed for the inclusion of mental health as part of the regulation to purchase firearms (D2; H9). Such recommendations carry an inherent risk of criticism from those who are on the “cusp” of mental illness, such as depression, anxiety, etc. so the NRA was also quick to note that mental health should not be used frivolously to deny the right to purchase firearms. In this way, they seem to appeal to the idea that mentally unfit persons should not acquire firearms, yet still promoting the idea that freedoms should not be restricted.

The NRA also writes that they had been urging the government since the 1960s to force mentally unfit persons to undergo treatment or to get them off the streets (A15). They write that violent schizophrenics and other mentally unfit persons who refuse to medicate themselves must be kept from purchasing firearms (A16). Such reasoning is widely accepted by the majority of people who would read this. The language allows the NRA to join together with its audience through commonly held beliefs. Additionally, the NRA places itself in a positive light through decades of advocating an ideology that is shared by the readers.

Last, the NRA framed their agenda in terms of defending individual liberties. Several examples are provided by the NRA which argued that law-abiding citizens are enduring undue hardships on their freedoms. From Vice President Biden who was “demanding all sorts of concessions of personal liberty,” to Obama who claimed the gun regulation not being passed was a “shameful day for Washington,” the NRA attempts to promote an ideology that they are

protecting individual rights (A6; A9). They argued that the money they spent is in “the cause of defending the Second Amendment” and that the presidential election “was a loss for the Second Amendment” (A10; A11). They also promote a protection of individual rights that have been “handed down by the framers of the constitution,” arguing that the NRA and its membership will not remain idle while individual rights are being stripped from citizens (A17; A18).

These examples enable the propaganda to effectively attach itself to the psychological currents in the same fashion as the protection of children and the grieving of Sandy Hook. The NRA furnishes language that is specifically shaped to promote a connection between the readership and the NRA. It is important for propaganda to consider that not all individuals will agree or disagree with the position of a political party. While the viewership of these online NRA documents is primarily NRA members, who tend to favor particular views on gun regulation, effective propaganda will reach beyond that to a wider individual acceptance. In this case, the NRA appealed to individuals by the concept of liberty and freedom. Such values are favored not just on the individual opinion level, but these are ideas that hold a powerful influence on the nation as a whole. Being able to appeal to not only the psychological terrain of the individual, but also the fundamental currents within society as whole are crucial to effective propaganda, which brings up the next characteristic.

Effective propaganda will adhere to and encourage the presuppositions and myths that are shared throughout the entire culture. Ellul (1973) writes that presuppositions are the “collection of feelings, beliefs, and images by which one unconsciously judges events and things without questioning them” (p. 39). Through appeals to the presuppositions that life’s aim is happiness and history develops in endless progress, the NRA is able to effectively utilize the essential currents within society. The NRA also makes itself out to be a problem solver and attempts to

move into the position of hero. The writings from this section can each be further broken down into two categories. One shows how the NRA advocates its adherence to these social currents, while the other category shows how the NRA attempts to promote that the opposition is hindering these currents.

The presupposition that life's ultimate aim is happiness is fairly self-defining. It is the understanding that the actions and beliefs that societies hold should lead towards maximized happiness. Agendas that promote this aim will be favorably received, argues Ellul (1973), whereas agendas that hinder this aim will be rejected and vilified by an audience. Happiness is primarily advocated by the extensive use of the terms freedom, rights, and liberty. When companies refused to support an outdoor show after certain automatic rifles were banned, these companies were "exercising freedom" (B12). When the opposition promoted new gun policies, the NRA claimed they were engaging a "war on guns and against our rights," "new attacks on our liberty," and "senseless restrictions on our freedoms (B36, B22, B48). Proponents of gun control were labeled "anti-rights ringleaders" (B43).

The ability to tie together freedom, liberty, and rights to happiness is an effective use of propagandistic technique. These three ideas are an integral component of happiness. To have one's rights stripped away or be forced to forfeit liberties carries with it a most certain implication for loss of happiness. As the NRA advocates for these principles, they are advocating a cause which, from the perspective of the ideal reader, would increase society's happiness. Thus, the numerous examples of gun control proponents presented in the articles, who are trying to limit these rights, are really trying to limit the total happiness of society.

The second presupposition that the NRA utilizes is the idea that history develops in endless progress. Essentially, this is the idea that society should become better. As cultures

develop and move forward, there should be an accompanying betterment of that society. This is evidenced in the United States' by things like the abolishment of slavery and the implementing of women's voting rights. As the U.S. became further developed, so too did the values, ethics, and moral standards. According to Ellul's conception of sociological propaganda, the successful propagandist will utilize language that attempts to portray an agenda as being in line with such progression. The propagandist will also benefit from attempting to frame the opposition as hindering progress. The NRA follows this approach. The NRA promotes the idea that their agenda is for the betterment of society, while maintaining that the opposition is trying to hinder progress.

The push for progress is most apparent under the guise of defending the Constitution. Whether the NRA used the terms Bill of Rights, Second Amendment, or the Constitution, the point is always the same, they are protecting it. The Constitution and its amendments, represent the continual betterment of the United States. The U.S. was built by this document and its preservation and application is a fundamental part of our progress. For the NRA to promote itself as defender of progress, they first have to try and portray the opposition as hindering that progress. These accusations were levied by the NRA on several occasions. They write of the gun control proponents who wanted to confiscate constitutionally protected items, that Obama was erasing the culture of gun ownership, and that the national conversation was about "destroying the Second Amendment" (B6; B14; B20; C11). This is language that attempts to portray gun control proponents as attacking the very essence of our Constitution and culture.

There are several more examples that paint a similar picture. The NRA writes that the White House wants to "destroy the Second Amendment" and avoid the Constitution, that President Obama has been a long standing agent against the Second Amendment, and that his

reelection would undoubtedly “lead to an attack” on the Second Amendment (B28; B29; B30; B31; C8; D40). Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel was cited as attempting “an evil campaign to disarm the innocent” (B17). These examples are very specific in their attempts at framing a situation in a particular light. These examples try to show the audience how the opposition is hindering the betterment of society. To reduce or circumvent the Constitution’s power is to alter the forward course this nation has fought long to preserve. When people see that someone is participating in actions which hinder progress, they will tend to respond to that individual or organization with an unfavorable disposition. In this case, President Obama and his administration are the targets of that unfavorable view.

While the preceding examples do not provide an exhaustive analysis of these particular examples, they certainly shed some light on the agenda of the NRA. Alongside these numerous attacks on the opposition, the NRA simultaneously speaks to their own intents at moving along this nation’s progress. When the NRA writes that gun owners are standing up to demonstrate that the Second Amendment is still important and that lawmakers are under a sworn oath to defend the Constitution, they are attempting to demonstrate that those who are standing against gun laws are standing against an attack against our progress (B35; B38; B52). The NRA again speaks of the companies that withdrew support from the national outdoor show. They write that those companies lost millions of dollars in the fight to preserve America’s Second Amendment (B13). When these companies stood up to a rule that prevented certain weapons, the NRA frames the move as if these companies stood up for the betterment of society.

Discussing issues of gun rights, the NRA said they were on the side of the Constitution. The NRA said that “the facts, the law, and the Constitution are clearly on our side” (B9). They write that while the battle may never come to an end, the facts were on their side (B10).

Additional examples are the claims that Americans will overcome the attempts at gutting the Second Amendment and that common sense prevailed when “Obama’s nonsense” failed to pass the Senate (B37; B41). These are clear examples of the NRA’s attempts to foster a favorable response by the audience. By appealing to the psychological presuppositions, the NRA ensured that their message would be received readily.

In addition to the utilization of the Constitution as a measure of progress, the NRA also discussed the murder rate and the implications for not enforcing the current firearm regulation. The NRA writes that Chicago Mayor Emanuel refused to enforce the federal gun regulations now in place (B16). The NRA argues that the reason gun violence occurs is not because of a need for new laws, but because government agencies are failing to enforce the laws already on the books. The NRA asked the question, “How many of the 506 murders involving firearms in Chicago last year would never have happened had Obama’s Justice Department taken criminals off the streets?” (B19). This language is used to try and create the image that the NRA is trying to protect the American people. Obviously the high murder rate is seen as something of a hindrance to the overall progress of society. In order to utilize that fact, the NRA must appeal to the audience in such a way that they reduce that hindrance. In this case, it means encouraging the enforcement of current federal gun regulations in order to save lives. This situation not only appeals to the presupposition of history as progress, but it actually fulfills a role as hero, which brings this analysis to the next point, the myth of the hero.

An important aspect of engaging the audience with propaganda is the development of the myth of the hero. The premise is that an individual or organization who is acting in the role of hero is ultimately doing what is right for the propagandee. Ellul (1973) writes that the “hero becomes model and father, power and mythical realization of all that the individual cannot be”

(p. 172). The hero represents the savior that each person desires to be. Additionally Ellul writes that the propagandee:

feels, thinks, and acts through the hero. He is under the guardianship and protection of his living god; he accepts being a child; he ceases to defend his own interests, for he knows his hero loves him and everything his hero decides is for the propagandee's own good... [*sic*] (p. 173)

This is an important role to assume for the propagandist. Using propaganda to establish the NRA as a hero enables the leadership to assume a higher level of trust within the membership. Society has a trust in individuals who they think are acting in a humanitarian role to provide rescue and safety for those in need. Utilizing this societal myth, the NRA attempts to portray itself as the hero in various situations.

In reference to the search for solutions to these horrific shootings, the NRA steps in to solve the issue. They write that they are uniquely qualified and willing to train and initiate a nationwide school safety program (B2; B3; B4). They even offer to supply the funds of such a program. Their program, the NSS, would be a free service funded by the NRA to train individuals who will maintain an armed presence at every school in the nation (H6). The extent that the NRA is willing to go to offer up a solution displays an attempt to be viewed as a hero. With so many villainous accusations being hurled at the NRA, they utilize a strategy that will present them in a light of being a hero. The success of this pursuit at heroics will ultimately be tested by how the nation accepts or rejects the NRA's actions as a valid attempt to provide rescue.

The NRA also writes that the response towards their organization was unwarranted. The NRA said they want to have a national discussion about how to protect innocent people. However, instead of having the opportunity to have a productive discussion, they have received

death threats and hate mail from people. Such hostility, the NRA argues, hinders the NRA's attempts at discussing solutions (B32). Another example is the NRA's language advocating the need to provide protection for our children instead of "putting them at risk in a 'gun-free' shooting preserve" (B33). The NRA uses language to attempt to demonstrate that their goals and subsequent actions are all aimed at one purpose, trying to protect the innocent. However, those who disagree with the agenda of the NRA are seen as prohibiting the necessary rescue of this nation.

The NRA tends to claim ownership for gun rights court battles that have been waged. In referring to proposed gun legislation, the NRA writes that the years of effort it took for gun law precedents to reach the Supreme Court and get secured for citizens will now be put to the test, "protecting the rights of gun owners from attack by their own state governments" (B49). Since the NRA claims ownership for the battles to protect gun rights, they claim responsibility for rescuing citizens from the attack of state governments. Once again, the NRA has positioned itself to be seen as a hero.

Two last examples of the NRA's attempts at fulfilling the role of hero are seen in their use of exposing the lies of the Obama Administration and the rescue of an outdoor gun show. The NRA writes that "the truth was far different from what Obama wanted the public to believe" (B51). The NRA is attempting to expose a deceitful president who is trying to fool this country's citizens. If the NRA could prove that the president was in fact lying to the American people, such exposure would be a welcomed relief and would give the NRA a heroic status for rescuing the people from the grips of deceit. Last is the outdoor show. It was discussed earlier how show promoters banned certain weapons from the event. This ban caused vendors to withdraw support and the multimillion dollar show collapsed. The show was reinstated thanks to the

collaboration of the NRA and the state of Pennsylvania (B40). This is a much smaller heroic role, but it serves its purpose nonetheless because members recognize the NRA's ability to get things done which will benefit the organization.

The third type of symbol manipulation that the NRA engages in is targeting the individual within the mass. To effectively propagandize a society, the propagandist must direct his or her efforts towards moving the mass, which is composed of individuals. This concept is important because the propagandist does not have the time or the ability to win over individuals one by one. The propaganda must reach the target audience in such a way that it appeals to individuals on a personal level, yet never seeking the individual, but rather the mass. The NRA seeks to fulfill this characteristic through two primary methods. The first is their attempts at creating a common enemy and the second is by appealing to law of averages.

To target the largest group of individuals on a personal level, the NRA attempts to create and reinforce a common enemy amongst the readers. An efficient method of appealing to a large audience is to target an individual, organization, or concept which is contrary to the generally accepted psychological currents. Ellul (1973) confirms the preceding claim when he writes, "Propaganda of agitation succeeds each time it designates someone as the source of all misery, provided that he is not too powerful" (p. 73). This is why the NRA writes of particular people who were trying to go against the cultural presuppositions of the audience. Not only does it work to show how the opposition was hindering progress and happiness, but by identifying those who desired to go counter to the ingrained beliefs of society, the NRA potentially creates unification and identification within their target audience.

The creation of the common enemy is perhaps the most utilized characteristic of the NRA. The NRA targeted President Obama, Mayor Bloomberg, the media, and general gun

control proponents. They write of the “ugly media campaign” that is attempting to demonize law abiding citizens while exploiting Sandy Hook (D4; D40; E2; H3). The NRA says the media conversation was primarily aimed at creating hatred for those who support gun rights (D12). By identifying the media’s negative qualities, the NRA appeals to its target audience. This is because people do not want to be identified with these bad qualities. By contrasting the media’s distasteful exploitation of Sandy Hook and demonization of gun owners, the NRA isolates the media and unites its supporters in opposing the media. The creation of this common enemy effectively appeals to the individual within the mass.

Additionally, the NRA focuses a great deal on addressing the negative qualities of gun control proponents. The NRA writes that gun control proponents are misinformed, unintelligent, and “consumed by fear and hatred of the NRA and America’s gun owners” (D5; D8). Articles speak of new gun controls as “civil disarmament” and an attempt “to criminalize—then prosecute—everything that we do as law-abiding citizens who own and use firearms” (D21; D22; D23). The NRA’s use of language to create this enemy enables a particular audience to be formed and identified. The people who do not represent these qualities, e.g. being misinformed, fueled by hatred, and criminalizing the innocent, represent a specific mass that is being reached.

The NRA’s primary target is President Obama. The NRA writes that President Obama cut funding to school emergency plans and that he was lying and trying to sell a mythical narrative to the public (D9; D48; D62). The NRA says that in order for the President to achieve his ultimate goal, he would pursue taking down gun rights proponents with a vengeance (D51). The overall creation of this enemy is most evident when the NRA writes, “If Obama wins, we lose” (D38). These examples continue this isolation of a constructed enemy. The more that particular groups or people are identified as negative or problematic, the more the remaining

people are constructed into a targeted mass. The language of “us,” “we,” and “our,” all work to further this audience identification. The explanation of who “we” are not reinforces who “we” represents. In this case, the “we” represents the targeted mass of individuals.

The use of us/them terminology is used extensively throughout the artifacts. The NRA writes, “we are awake now,” “we will win this war,” “they came after gun owners,” and “they didn’t count on the basic common sense of the American people” (D42; D43; D47; D50). These examples create a dichotomy of us and them. Once the audience has an understanding of who they *are not*, they simultaneously become a unified audience by virtue of knowing who they *are*. Such an impact is exactly what the propagandist desires. Through the alienation of a particular subgroup or person, those who are left become a unified audience.

In addition to the creation of common enemies, the NRA appeals to the law of averages in order to speak to the individual within the mass. This strategy is seen with the NRA’s use of language that appeals to the “normal” U.S. citizen. This is why it is so vital that propaganda does not go against the material currents and psychological presuppositions of a society. The propagandist must speak to the largest audience possible so the propagandist targets the average person. The majority of these examples deal with the NRA appealing to issues of feeling safe. Safety is something that all people desire and an item that will impact nearly every reader.

An example of the NRA’s appeal to safety is when they write of the need to speak up regarding the safety of the nation’s children (D1). Another example is when the NRA discusses the unknown number of copycat killers who are waiting in the wings to conduct another atrocity (D2). The NRA writes, “As parents, we do everything we can to keep our children safe” (D7). All three of these examples attempt to furnish the reader with the idea that the NRA’s actions are aimed at protecting innocent people, notably children. As previously discussed during the

section on psychological presuppositions, the protection of the innocent is something that holds true for all law-abiding members of our society. When the NRA uses language that speaks to this cause, they enable themselves to speak to the widest possible audience. The readership becomes aligned with the agenda of the NRA because the NRA seems to be speaking directly to the individual.

Writing to motivate their audience into coming alongside the NRA's agenda, the NRA uses the phrase, "if we truly cherish our kids more than our money or our celebrities..." (D11). This is language which compels the reader to decide whether they cherish their kids. The individuals who cherish their children will take upon themselves the actions laid out by the NRA, while those who do not follow the recommended actions are left to feel as though they don't cherish their kids. The truth is, nearly every single parent loves his or her child. This language is aimed directly at the typical, average parent.

In addition to promoting safety, the NRA speaks to the average person by appealing to the unity and solidarity found within this nation. They write of the tens of thousands who were showing up to rallies, the millions who were standing up for the Second Amendment and weren't going to be fooled by the "divide and conquer" strategy (D44; D46; D49; D52). All these examples are aimed at the common reader. When the NRA speaks of people in the millions, it works to promote the idea that this is an agenda that everyone is in favor of. If people recognize that society sees an idea as favorable, then those people will be more likely to align themselves with that idea. Showing that the majority of people are unified on this issue creates a desire to join the fight alongside the NRA.

The last section of symbol manipulation is the NRA's use of exploiting the readership's need to gain information. As discussed in the methodology section, U.S. society has created an

environment which compels individuals to seek out information. There is an intrinsic desire to be informed that has been crafted over centuries of cultural development. The desire to seek out information gives rise to the opportunity for an individual to end up with an irrational picture from the onslaught of rational information.

Many of the writings already provided are examples of rational information. Not readily apparent however, is the relative proximity of these examples to one another. For example, in May the NRA wrote about federal gun regulation. In just one page of text, they included nearly a dozen facts about Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel and the crime rate in Chicago. In advocating for tougher enforcement of current federal gun laws, on the next page the NRA listed eight specific crimes and their corresponding prison sentences. In just two pages the NRA flooded the reader with facts and statistics that no one can readily retain. This is an example of providing an overwhelming, drowning effect on the reader. This inundation of information leaves the reader with the most basic picture—Mayor Emanuel isn't doing his job and the U.S. has enough gun laws already which would work if they were simply enforced. This situation is problematic for individuals because, unless they are an expert in the field, they will not understand how the mayoral office functions or how gun laws are implemented and carried out. The average individuals cannot remember the specific facts so they cannot justify why they actually believe this basic image. The people exposed to this propaganda will therefore have an irrational response to this rational information.

Another example of factual overload to present a general picture, addressed earlier, is President Obama not enforcing federal gun laws as well as reducing funding for emergency response programs. The steady supply of facts regarding where Obama was allocating resources and where his efforts were aimed, work to create the image that President Obama does not have

the best interest of this nation's children at heart. If an individual accepts the various facts about Obama cutting spending in emergency programs and failing to enforce current gun regulations that would have saved lives, the individual may irrationally conclude that President Obama does not care about the welfare and safety of the nation's children. This conclusion of course seems so very unrealistic, yet that is the nature of irrationality. Readers are pushed to form this generalized picture from the heavy flow of information directed at them.

A third example of this taking place is the numerous references pertaining to the defense of the Constitution. With the abundance of facts regarding the NRA's attempts at preserving the Constitution, coupled with just as many facts about gun control proponents trying to limit the Constitution, there is an undeniable attempt to compel the reader to form an irrational picture (A17; B6; B9; B21; B22; B25; B28; B29; B37; C8; D14; D50; E12; E13). Again, the amount of information that pertains to defending or attacking the Constitution can never be retained by the reader. The issue is simply too broad and deep for the reader to grasp, instead the reader will walk away with a generalized image. The generalized image from this information will be that those who support the Constitution will join the NRA, while those who do not want to support the Constitution can stand with President Obama, Mayor Bloomberg, and other gun control proponents.

The ability to produce within an individual a compulsion to create an irrational picture is potentially the most dangerous ability of the propagandist. This is because individuals come to these conclusions themselves, which means that the individuals own these conclusions. The irrational conclusions are not suggestions provided by an outside source, but rather the individual who created them clings to them as creations of his or her own making. Each person has convinced themselves that his or her own thoughts and actions are completely reasonable and

rational when they are in fact, completely irrational. The ability to get people to act falls to organizational technique, which will be discussed next.

Section Three: Organizational Technique and Administrative Action

The ultimate goal of propaganda is moving an audience to physical action. However, without the proper situation, the propagandist cannot simply ask the audience to do something. The stage must be set, the props put into place, and only then can the actors be called to action. Ellul writes, “Propaganda, then, is no longer mere words; it incites an enormous demonstration by the masses and thus becomes fact—which gives strength to the words outside the frontiers” (p. 23). To move propaganda beyond the “mere words” of symbol manipulation and towards physical action, organizational technique must be utilized.

Ellul (1964) writes that the technical phenomenon is the “quest of the one best means in every field” (21). To reach the best available means to some desired end, Ellul argues that two things are necessary, namely reason and consciousness. Reason “creates new operational methods and new tools,” thereby allowing for the discovery of the most efficient means (Ellul, p. 20). Ellul continues by saying, “Consciousness shows clearly, and to everybody, the advantages of technique and what it can accomplish” (p.21). Applied to organizations, technique refers to “the great masses and applies not only to commercial or industrial affairs...but also to states and to administration and police power” (Ellul, p. 22). Combined, these definitions allow for an understanding of the use of organizational technique by the NRA: the NRA uses the most efficient means (symbol manipulation) to reach a desired end (physical action) of the target masses (their members).

The NRA uses organizational technique to call its membership into action through a four stage process. In the first stage the NRA creates a sense of urgency within the readership. It

creates an exigence within the individual which compels them to search out a solution to alleviate the discomfort. Second, the NRA provides a feasible solution. The NRA provides a course of action that is desirable for the hearer, yet does so for the purpose of subsequent exploitation of that satisfaction. Third, the NRA provides easy and reasonable ways that the membership can begin implementing the solutions. Having convinced the readership that their solution is the right one, the NRA instructs their membership into action. Last, the organization reminds the readers of the sacrifice already made, so as to guarantee their continued allegiance.

The first step to motivating an audience into action is to provide the audience with reasons why action is needed. An audience that does not see anything wrong has no need to become involved. It is the responsibility of the organizational administrator, what Ellul would call a "Technician of Influence," to agitate the audience (1973, p. 20). Calling an audience to enter the propaganda framework is much like opening a soda bottle. If the bottle has not been shaken, then the opener cannot cause the soda to move with force. However, that same bottle, when shaken, will explode with great energy when an individual decides to open it. This is the first step in the process. The audience must be agitated and furnished with reasons to react. An audience who is not agitated cannot be called to action. The NRA uses two main threats to stir emotion, which agitates the audience. The first is the threat against personal liberty and freedoms. The second threat is the risk of harm coming to innocent adults and children at the hands of a crazed gunperson.

Ellul (1973) writes of the efficiency of agitating an audience based on emotional appeal.

He writes,

A sure expedient is the call to liberty among an oppressed, conquered, invaded, or colonized people....The same is true for the promise of bread to the hungry, the promise of land to the plundered, and the call to truth among the religious. (p. 73)

The call to liberty is important because the NRA uses such language often. The appeal to land and bread represent the primary needs of all humans, which the NRA can exploit with emotional appeals. Additionally, Ellul writes that hatred is one of the most powerful emotions to create agitation. Ellul says that hatred “consists of attributing one’s misfortunes and sins to ‘another...’” (p. 73). Thus, the propagandist who can furnish his or her audience with reasons to hate a particular group or person will be able to create the necessary agitation.

The threat to personal liberty, freedom, rights, or any of the numerous other terms used by the NRA, is the constant vein throughout the rhetoric of the NRA. When discussing psychological presuppositions and addressing the individual within the mass, there are several examples provided that evidence such tactics used by the NRA. The NRA writes of the “well-founded fear” regarding President Obama, Senator Feinstein, Mayor Bloomberg, and Governor Cuomo (D20). This language presents the reality that there is something to be fearful of and will likely create hostility towards these individuals. The creation of fear and hatred for these individuals will likely provide the necessary level of agitation to call the readers into action. Fear is undoubtedly a great motivator. This is confirmed when Ellul (1973) writes that “Man is disarmed in the face of the perils threatening him, and is increasingly alarmed by these perils because he keeps reading about them [*sic*]” (p. 153). Fear is an emotion that most any person would go to great lengths to avoid and/or reduce.

The nineteen artifacts have no less than 50 references that speak about threats to the sanctity and preservation of freedom, liberty, rights, and the Second Amendment. The sheer number of these threatening warnings is staggering. These are soft warnings like the risk of restricting freedoms and rights also more severe threats, like the destruction of the Second

Amendment (B28; D58; D61). When it comes to developing a real threat, the NRA focuses a great deal of their time and effort into the threat of these items. These examples give strong evidence for the attempt of the NRA to use the fear of losing personal liberty as a primary motivation to agitate their audience.

The second main threat is the idea that failing to respond in accordance to the agenda of the NRA will result in further tragedies. When advocating for their cause, the NRA writes that society has left children utterly defenseless (A1). The NRA writes of “immediate threats to our nation’s kids” (A7). Speaking of gun free zones around schools, the NRA writes of kids being at risk in a “‘gun-free’ shooting preserve” (B33). These uses of language make the threat to America’s children very real. The language gives immediacy to the problem at hand. There is no time for discussion or arguing. The only reasonable response is to take the suggestions of the NRA and put them into practice.

Through the exploitation of the threat against personal liberties and the threat against innocent civilians, the NRA effectively uses their literature to create a feeling of discomfort within the audience. As this problem continues to be developed, it compels the audience to search out methods to alleviate the situation. Here the NRA engages its audience with the second part of their four stage process, providing a feasible solution. The goal in this stage is to provide a desirable course of action, which can subsequently be exploited. Examples were provided earlier that discussed the NRA’s concern to protect citizens from not only dangerous people, but also a dangerous government. Much of this information was addressed in the section of the NRA’s role as hero, but it is also important that this information is connected to alleviating the problem.

To alleviate the threat of physical harm against innocent people, the NRA needs to provide feasible methods of defense. To this end, the NRA introduces their National School Shield Program. The NRA writes that the NSS is “the best program in the world for protecting our children” and that the program will use the only line of defense proven to work. (B4, G1). Specifically, the program will place armed guards at every school in the United States. As already discussed, the NRA offers to provide all the necessary funding to train individuals and implement this system across the country. The NRA shifts the point of blame onto Congress when they write that they are calling upon Congress to help make this plan a possibility and to make sure a “blanket of safety is in place” (H5). This allows the NRA to defend itself against attacks because they are providing the best solution, but it is someone else’s responsibility to get the ball rolling.

If the immediate threat to our nation’s children is armed attackers at school, then a reasonable response could be to protect the school with armed security. The NRA argues that the country provides armed guards in airports, sports stadiums, and court houses, yet the U.S. fails to provide the same level of security to the most vulnerable group—children (A1; D11; H7). The NRA frames the NSS as an obligation and duty to those who have lost their lives or the lives of loved ones through gun violence (G7). The NRA’s offer of implementing this program could be an important tool, but the solution must be framed in such a way that the audience sees the solution as reasonable. Once the audience is on board with the solution, the propagandist can exploit the situation by adjusting the solution and implementing different methods.

The potential problem with this solution, however, is that people may not find it feasible or reasonable. Placing armed security at every school would require massive overhaul of regulation regarding gun laws in schools and emergency procedures, not to mention the sheer

number of individuals that would be needed to protect every school. Arguably, this could be the weak link during the process of effectively calling its membership into action. To counteract any negative opinion about how to move this solution forward, the NRA writes that the media is responsible for delaying action. The NRA argues that this delay will nearly guarantee that the next tragedy is a mere news cycle away (H3). This language enables a more favorable light to shine on the NRA, while dismissing media criticisms as hindering meaningful action.

The NRA also provides solutions to alleviate the fear of governmental overreach. Given the long list of criticisms that the NRA levies against the government, the audience would be eager for a reprieve of this governmental threat. The NRA argues that the key to preventing the government from extending its reach is action from citizens. While the NRA provides numerous solutions, the primary argument is that each citizen must stand and fight. The solution of fighting back is the height of organizational technique because it is this point where symbol manipulation transitions into a call to action. The NRA says they need every gun owner to stand tall and fight for the second amendment (H10). They write that in order to prevent the government from taking away Constitutional rights, every member must do his or her part to fight (C6; G2). While this solution may be vague and ambiguous, such a characteristic actually helps the NRA in their push to get members into action. This ambiguity is beneficial because it allows the NRA to appeal to a broader audience without them having to commit to anything specific, just yet.

When calling the audience into action, the propagandist must empower the audience and make them feel as though they can do something about the problem. The language of standing and fighting does just that. The NRA's writing promotes the idea that every individual can prevent the government from systematically removing the rights of citizens. It is through this

feeling of empowerment that an audience can be called into action. From the audience being furnished with reasons to enter the framework to being presented with solutions from the NRA, the audience is ready to activate. The solutions not only give the NRA credibility, but also create a feeling within the audience that primes them for action.

With the audience now presented with solutions, the NRA smoothly transitions into providing specific ways they want their membership to get involved. The NRA calls upon every teacher, mother, father, and school official to join in the National School Shield Program (G1). They call upon people to contact school administrators to let them know about the School Shield Program. The NRA even provides a web address that people can provide to school officials to direct them to additional information (G7). These are very simple, yet effective calls to action regarding the protection of the innocent. The NRA's ability to mobilize and make an actual difference is seen in the sheer numbers of people who respond to the calling. One member of Congress even implored the NRA to "turn it off," but the NRA argues that their actions are simply a response to Obama turning it on (B14).

In directing their membership how to stand and fight, the NRA provides numerous ways for the audience to get involved. The first of which is the call to support the organization. The audience is instructed to renew membership, upgrade membership, and recruit new members (G10). Membership is certainly the most important aspect for the NRA. As an organization built by membership, if people never signed up, it would fall apart rapidly. The NRA writes of how the leaders of the organization were meeting with hundreds of members and supporters who understand the vital role that each member plays in the eventual outcome (G15). There are also calls to help support the NRA in making sure that elected officials think twice before voting against any gun legislation (G18). Last, the NRA writes of their determination to continue

advancing the nation's rights with the help and support of its membership (G17; G20). All of these examples display the NRA's attempt to use loyalty and support as a method of calling their audience into action. An important component to this stage is the NRA's ability to make its membership feel needed. These calls to action work to create a feeling of importance for every member which increases loyalty.

In addition to calling the audience into action through an appeal to support, the NRA petitions its audience to contact local political officials. One of these appeals appears as a specific feature on the website: the NRA supplies its web address for the "Write Your Reps" feature (G19). This feature provides supporters with the contact information for individuals of Congress. Additionally, members are encouraged to copy newsletters from LaPierre and provide them to politicians (G6). The NRA also supplies the number to the Capital switchboard so that people can call in and let officials know that destroying the Constitution will not prevent other tragedies (G19). The NRA argues that each member needs to do his or her part to let elected officials know that their tenure is on the line (G5). These actions are small and inconsequential on the individual scale, but since the NRA has called an entire mass into action, the effects are great. These examples display how the literature encourages actions that members can take in order to implement the solutions. The simplicity of these actions ensures that membership will be more inclined to follow through on the commands presented. The NRA does not need one person to do something massive, but rather the NRA needs a large number of people to do something very small. Having this strategy is why the NRA is effective in accomplishing their goals.

After the NRA successfully prompts its audience into action, the fourth stage of organizational technique immediately begins to unfold. This last stage deals with reminding

individuals of the previous actions taken by members of the organization. When people take action for a cause, it inherently necessitates that further action be advanced. The reason this occurs is because the subsequent actions validate and justify the previous actions. Once the propagandee gets on board with the agenda, he or she must maintain that loyalty or else admit that the cause was not worth following. Even outside the grips of propaganda, the only reason people would abandon a fight is because they perceive the cause to no longer be worthwhile or true. If people come to this realization, they must also realize they took action for an ill-fated cause. The inability for people to hold themselves to that level of accountability is why action begets more action. The previous actions procure the individual's belief in the propaganda.

To maintain this remembrance of actions, the NRA spends a great deal of time discussing the things that NRA members have already done. Several of these examples are rather vague and indirect such as the report that gun owners are continuing to step up and demonstrate that their rights matter (H10). The NRA also writes that members are coming out in droves to join together in response to President Obama's anti-gun policies and that members have earned the admiration of the NRA leadership (H12; H15). The use of these broad examples validates the everyday member. Whether they have done any action besides joining is irrelevant because the language speaks to all members via their membership. Since every member who reads the document has joined the organization, they are participating in "standing and fighting."

In addition to the broad appeals made by the organization, there are also appeals made on a more specific level. These include the reminder that members have given hours of testimony, been involved in rallies, flooded state houses with their presence, and went to the voting booths to support particular candidates and ballot measures (H13; H14). These more specific examples give an added strength to the remembrance call because they remind members of real things that

have been done. Obviously not all members will have participated in these actions, but when individuals read of these acts, the reminders work to solidify one's allegiance to the organization. The more people see exactly what the organization is doing, the more connected each member will feel to the organization. With the audience engaged in physical action, and then being reminded of such actions, the audience becomes enveloped in the grips of organizational technique.

In sum, organizational technique is used by the NRA to couple together the symbol manipulation with physical action. Through the pursuit of the best available means to reach a desired end, the NRA uses its psychological influence on its membership in order to motivate them to physical action. The organizational technique is structured and executed through a four stage process. The NRA identifies problems that work to agitate its audience. After the audience is aroused based on these problems, the NRA furnishes its membership with solutions to alleviate the discomfort. Once the audience is familiarized with the solutions, the NRA gives specific instruction of how the membership can begin to take action. To solidify the entire process of organizational technique, the NRA finally reminds its membership of the previous actions, thereby cementing their loyalty to the organization. Whether the NRA is speaking in broad generalizations or referring to very specific actions taken by its membership, the reminders of previous actions validate and justify every previous step.

CHAPTER FOUR: INTERPRETATION

Based on results which argue that the NRA has used propaganda, it is now important to discuss the moral implications of such propaganda use. The morality of propaganda has not been discussed until this point for a reason. Specifically, Ellul (1973) writes that “to study anything properly, one must put aside ethical judgments” (p. x). Only after an individual objectively studies propaganda, can he or she perhaps return to classify ethical implications on the status of propaganda. As the preceding section argues, the NRA has engaged heavily in all seven characteristics of propaganda as outlined by Ellul. Due to the NRA engaging in propaganda, it is relevant to now move to an ethical assessment of these results. The realization that the NRA has introduced propagandistic technique into its communication style has decisive implications for the ethics and morality of the organization.

While the preceding seven characteristics of propaganda supply objective criteria for identifying propaganda, they do not shed light on the morality of their use. It is therefore necessary to include additional resources to help reach a judgment on the ethical nature of the NRA’s use of propaganda. These additional resources will enable a broader grasp on the ethics of propaganda use. The ethical implications will first be grounded in *Discourse Ethics*, as applied to organizational communication. From there the evaluation will align itself with Immanuel Kant’s, *Categorical Imperative*. The assessment will conclude with insight from propaganda scholars Stanley B. Cunningham and Ellul.

As an organization, the NRA’s communication tactics ought to be bound to the ethics and moral imperatives within the domain of organizational communication. While there may be disagreement about certain absolutes within the field of organizational communication, there are still compelling developments into assessing ethics. One area that has given insight into how to

develop an ethical assessment to organizational communication is through the application of discourse ethics. Discourse ethics was originally developed by Jürgen Habermas (Meisenbach, 2006). Discourse ethics “describes an intersubjective procedure for developing norms of behavior through reasoned public communication” (Meisenbach, p. 40). Simply put, discourse ethics allows for an open field of communication where individuals are welcome to discuss the validity of proposed norms. This means that the ethical nature of any given situation can be found out through open and honest communication and deliberation. Discourse ethics was chosen as a framework for assessing morality because of its universality. Habermas (1983/1990) writes that his universal principle is implied in all forms of argumentation. Even attempting to refute this principle would compel the individual to engage in the very principle itself, and in so doing, they have proven the principle correct. Such reasoning argues for the application of this principle in all discourse situations.

Rebecca Meisenbach (2006) uses Habermas’ discourse ethics in order to conclude how to provide an ethical evaluation within organizational communication. Meisenbach outlines a five step process to using discourse ethics. These steps are as follows:

- Step 1: Generate an utterance or potential norm.
- Step 2: Determine who is potentially affected by the enactment of the utterance.
- Step 3: Articulate the utterance to all parties identified in Step 2.
- Step 4: All parties discursively debate the consequences and their acceptability.
- Step 5: Make a judgment about the validity and acceptability of the proposed utterance or norm. (p. 46)

Step three “requires that articulation of the utterance be offered dialogically in a manner, such as in a face-to-face interaction, conference call, or internet chat that invites the discussion outlined in the remaining steps” (Meisenbach, 2006, p. 47). As has already been discussed, the NRA’s

use of propaganda is made possible through the use of unilateral communication. The individual who receives propaganda has no capabilities of effectively deciphering the overload of information and can therefore not engage in the necessary discussion of discourse ethics.

This process is extremely relevant to the moral evaluation of propaganda because the required steps to deploying discourse ethics are hindered by the actions of propaganda. First, the very nature of propaganda does not allow for discussion. When ideas get disseminated by the propagandist, there is an expectation that these ideas will not be discussed and evaluated. This is in direct contradiction to the expectations of one who is utilizing discourse ethics. Before the steps can even begin to be used, the nature of propaganda is warring against the process of discourse ethics. A principle component to executing propaganda is the use of organizational technique. In this case, the NRA is utilizing the website as a device of technique. The website has become a medium by which they can couple symbol manipulation with physical action without presenting the audience with a voice.

Central to dialogical communication is the ability for all audience members to have a voice. Hauser (2002) writes that unilateral communication “disengages rhetor and audience from the mediating exercise of reflection” (p. 68). The only avenue for a response to the NRA’s literature is the use of the website’s feedback function. Here, visitors can send messages to the organization and fill out a survey about how they use the website and what functions the site serves for the individual. The feedback option asks specific questions about what parts of the NRA website are being used. The survey asks about which section of the site an individual visits most frequently, how many videos that individual watched, and whether he or she watched any NRA shows. The questions often provide a list of potential options, thereby informing every participant of the full range of resources available on the site. There are also some basic

questions about how often the individual visits, what kind of electronic device is used, and asking for an overall rating. While a feedback option seems to promote dialogue, it can be demonstrated that this feedback option is highly deficient in terms of propagating bilateral communication.

The website does not provide means for discussion among members, so dialogical communication about NRA messages is impossible on the site itself. The website's inability to promote dialogical communication is most easily recognized by the NRA's prevention of discussion amongst members. The ability to submit messages on a feedback form does not allow discussion because there is no public record of suggestions. The information an individual submits is sent to the NRA and there is no way for other individuals to engage with this information. An individual could never know if someone else has the same thoughts or opinions regarding particular actions of the NRA. In defining the audience who is capable of enacting change, Hauser (2002) describes the group as people who are *engaged* in sharing views and ideas of the exigence with the hope of influencing a resolution. Due to the NRA's website not keeping an open dialogue between itself and the membership, as well as between individual members, the NRA does not allow for developing this type of engagement. Instead, the website fosters the environment where the only public opinions shared are the ones presented by the organization itself.

The result of NRA leadership presenting claims in a manner that is not dialogical means the membership cannot take part in Meisenbach's fourth and fifth steps. At no time does the individual under the sway of propaganda have the ability to discuss with the propagandist the validity of the claims being made. Because the propagandee can only receive unilateral communication from the propagandist, there is no ability, through the process of discourse

ethics, to discuss the ethical nature of the proposed norms and discover if the NRA's goals and intentions are in-line with theirs. The information is supplied to the individual without him or her ever having the opportunity to actually engage it on an intellectual level in open discussion at the site. Through the use of the website as a site of organizational technique, the NRA does not allow feedback on decisions and actions. In doing this, the NRA has prevented any ideas from being discussed that are not their own. Each member is provided only one action from the NRA, to accept the instructions being disseminated.

The inability to engage in discourse is why discourse ethics can be used to argue that propaganda is unethical. The website's failure to promote an environment where opinions are shared is on display for any person who arrives at their site. No visitor to the website, whether NRA member or first time visitor, will discover any opinions apart from the self-serving literature released by the NRA. To actually determine the morality of the claims being made by the NRA leadership, the organization would have to facilitate open, bilateral communication with its membership. Such dialogical communication would be able to arrive at a consensus on whether the norms being raised by the organization are in line with the ethics and morality of society. The problem is that this is not possible because the NRA has not allowed for any public forum to engage their ideas.

Moreover, when the individual is under the sway of propaganda, they may not even notice the inability to engage in bilateral communication. The propagandee becomes an individual who cannot question, but can only receive. Propaganda is the only thing which satisfies an individual's "need to belief and obey" (Ellul, 1973, p. 148). The individual does not want anything else, but what propaganda alone can provide. For this reason, the individual will not, and cannot, engage the propagandist with a discussion on the validity of the claims.

There are many scholars capable of providing insight into assessing the morality of a particular situation, but this research has chosen Kant (1785/1895) and his categorical imperative. The justification for this choice is the ability for Kant's categorical imperative to withstand nearly two centuries of scrutiny and still be highly acclaimed (Paton, 1947; Kupperman, 2002; Satkunanandan, 2011). As Kupperman writes, "a typical reaction-even of non-Kantians-to the categorical imperative includes a sense that, whatever the difficulties and objections, there is something to it" (p. 485). The Kantian approach is further justified by the later use of propaganda critic Cunningham. Cunningham, who has previously engaged with the literature of Ellul, uses an approach similar to Kant's concept of end/means in his dealings with the value of truth. Last, philosopher Henry Johnstone justified Kant by adapting a similar imperative specifically to rhetoric. In treating Johnstone's imperative, Richard Johannesen (2001) argues that individuals should always use persuasion so as to maximize the capacity for future persuasion, thereby encouraging all rhetoric to be self-perpetuating rhetoric. Overall, the concepts developed by Kant in the eighteenth century regarding this imperative have struck a significant chord within the academic community.

While designed for interpersonal relations, Kant's categorical imperative is still appropriate to the NRA's rhetoric. The justification is that Keene, Cox, and LaPierre represent the voice of the organization. While there are millions of members, these three individuals have been elected by a board of directors (who were themselves voted onto the board by membership) to the highest offices of the organization. The articles are written by these three individuals as authoritative voices for a corporate entity. Thus, in the writings appearing at the official NRA website, the "NRA," rather than those individuals, is engaging in communication practices, directed at others. It is thus reasonable to evaluate those practices according to the categorical

imperative. The NRA should be acting in such a way as to uphold the formulations that make up the imperative.

Kant's (1785/1895) categorical imperative is developed through four formulations, with this research focusing on the first two as they are the most relevant to the actions of the NRA. Formulation one argues that an individual should "act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (p. 37). Essentially this claim argues that every action an individual takes must be an action that that individual would want to be a universal law. The argument makes individuals consider the effects of their actions and decide whether they would want everyone else doing these same actions. It is implied that as a universal law, such actions could also be done to them. Therefore, if people act in a particular way, they should do so with the full confidence that these actions will happen to them.

The NRA's use of propaganda fails to meet this qualification on two different levels. One is the way they treat their membership and the other is how they treat those who argue for a contrary agenda. The NRA engages its membership in a systematic way through the careful execution of organizational technique. Through a well-defined and executed strategy, the NRA treats its membership like components of a system. When examining the results collected, the preservation and promotion of the NRA's ideology is demonstrated to be the primary concern.

It was discussed previously that the NRA silences its audience by not allowing any community feedback for the literature being produced. However, the unilateral control goes even further as the NRA uses calls to action in order to provide the audience with a false sense of having a voice. These calls to action are a utilization of members as instruments that serve the organization's ideology. The organizational technique of the website creates a situation where the only response that can be given is one where members obey instructions. Failing to follow

these instructions would only confirm that they have no say in the conversation—which they actually don't. However, following through on leadership directives provides a false sense of participation which the propagandee craves. The NRA encourages its membership to act by instructing them to use the “Write Your Reps” feature on the website, and to “put [politicians] on notice that their feigned ignorance of the law...cannot be tolerated” (G6; G19). The NRA carried these sentiments throughout many articles following Sandy Hook (H10; C6; G2; G3; G10; G13; G16; G18).

The result of these calls to action is that the membership is only exposed to one method of having a voice. The website provides convenient means for taking action, all of which are aligned with the ideology of the organization. The NRA does not encourage any action that does not foster the ideals and values of the organization. Regardless of whether an individual may have differing opinions, the only voice they are encouraged to have is one that is aligned with the ideology of the organization. Discourse ethics demonstrates that the membership does not have a true voice because the communication is all unilateral. Therefore, anything that encourages action is only encouraging an action favorable to the organization regardless of the individual's personal inclinations.

Another method of technique used at the website is the numerous self-serving examples. These examples only reinforce ideology and do not stimulate critical thought. To promote how great the recommended solutions are, the NRA fills its website with stories about how brave men and woman have saved themselves or a loved one through firearm use. At no time does the NRA ever discuss instances of a child accidentally killing his or her sibling because a gun was available. Nor are there any stories about parents who accidentally shoot their child because of firearm misuse. The NRA is not in the market for providing details and examples of anything

that might raise discussion. They have a particular ideology and the solutions, actions, and measures required to implement that ideology are the only thing discussed. Every declaration on the website and every comment made throughout these nineteen articles are self-serving declarations that promote the unilateral ideology of the organization.

In sum, the utilization of organizational technique within the website hinders expressing the voice of the audience at the website. Additionally, organizational technique promotes NRA ideology over the individual by creating an environment where the only available action is following the instructions from the leadership. Time and again, the NRA writes commands such as, “Each of us needs to do our part. We need to let Congress know, repeatedly, that our freedom, and their tenure, is on the line” and “we have an obligation...to make sure that our schools consider all that is offered in The National School Shield Program” (G5; G7). When the leadership prompts the audience into action in this manner, it removes the ability for the individual to have a reasoned, autonomous thought process. This is no doubt an undesirable thing to have happen to one’s self. It is highly reasonable that the NRA leadership would not want this to happen to them. Thus, they are engaging in actions that they would not want to be a universal law.

Second, the NRA speaks of its perceived enemy in a manner that they should not want to be universal law. As outlined in detail earlier, the NRA has no shortage of examples when it comes to deriding those who have a different view point. Throughout the articles, the NRA spends great energy to construct the image that gun control proponents are the enemy (e.g. D6; D20; D21; D26; D40; E2; H3). They write that gun control proponents “exploited the Newtown murders to push all these ideas and more” and that there is evidence “that proves the lie regarding our opponent’s fraudulent claims...” (B45; D53). Additionally, the NRA proclaimed

that Without giving one positive acknowledgment to someone who advocated for gun control, the NRA systematically paints the picture that those who are in favor of gun regulation are against the Constitution and against the individual right to liberty.

Even more so, the NRA is relentless in its attempt to display ignorance of anyone who objects to the agenda of the NRA. Each time a public official said something that was, from the NRA's perspective, questionable or incorrect, the NRA uses that opportunity to ridicule the opposition. This is demonstrated in the NRA's response to Diana DeGette's comments on high capacity magazines. The NRA provides quotes from Rep. DeGette claiming that gun magazines cannot be reloaded and that after these magazines use up bullets, "there won't be any more available" (E15). The NRA even said a spokesperson for Rep. DeGette just dug the whole deeper by saying "she simply misspoke in referring to 'magazines' when she should have referred to 'clips,' which cannot be reused..." (E16). The only response the NRA gives after this is, "Enough said." This language by the NRA shows that the organization doesn't even feel the need to respond because DeGette's own words work against her. The NRA also attempts to portray ignorance on the part of Rep. Schakowsky by arguing against her interpretation of the Constitution. In response to Schakowsky's claim that she could pass a handgun ban in her city, the NRA argues that she is unaware of the implications of the McDonald decision, where the "Supreme Court stated clearly that no city can violate the Second Amendment's guarantee of a fundamental, individual right to own a handgun or other 'arms' for self-defense" (E14). Specifically, the NRA points out that not only is Rep. Schakowsky unaware of this decision, but she was on a legal brief that the court rejected. In pointing this out, the NRA is attempting to demonstrate that the representative cannot keep her facts straight and does not understand the Supreme Court's interpretation of the Second Amendment. While it is not inappropriate or

unreasonable to refute areas where the opposition is making weak arguments, the NRA seeks to belittle and ridicule the opposition.

Ironically, the NRA also criticizes the opposition for using the same communication tactics that the NRA uses. In condemning the opposition, the NRA writes “[a]re the press and political class here in Washington so consumed by fear and hatred of the NRA and America’s gun owners that you're willing to accept a world where real resistance to evil monsters is a lone, unarmed school principal?” (D8). Such rhetoric is interesting because in a single line the NRA has accused gun control proponents of being fueled by fear while simultaneously encouraging fear by discussing the lone principle against an “evil monster.” Promoting fear within their membership while criticizing the opposition for being “consumed by fear” presents a contradiction in the language use of the NRA.

The way the NRA engages its membership and opposition is obviously undesirable. Because of the undesirability of these actions, the NRA is taking part in actions they do not want to have happen to them. It is a reasonable assumption that the NRA does not want to be ridiculed or belittled. In fact, the NRA criticized gun control proponents for flooding NRA mailboxes with hate mail, arguing that it makes rational discussions nearly impossible (B32). This of course is also ironic considering the numerous instructions of the NRA to “write your reps.” Kant (1785/1895) argues that adhering to this formulation constitutes a moral imperative (p. 52). Since the NRA has failed to uphold this necessary component of morality, the use of propaganda by the NRA has been deemed immoral. To recap, discourse ethics demonstrates the existence of unethical unilateral communication and formulation one demonstrates the NRA’s unethical application of laws which they do not want to be universal

The second formulation in Kant’s categorical imperative states:

[A]ny rational being exists as an end in himself, not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will, but in all his actions, whether they concern himself or other rational beings, must be always regarded at the same time as an end.” (Kant, 1785/1895, p. 44)

Every person, therefore, is to treat others with respect to their inherent value. Individuals are not to use other people as a vehicle for achieving some other aim. As will be shown next, the NRA violates this formulation several times throughout the articles. The violation results from the NRA engaging in actions which utilize humanity as a means to an end. Both NRA members and those in favor of gun regulation become tools for the promotion of NRA ideology.

In an attempt to promote and elevate the ideology and power of the organization, NRA leaders utilize their own membership as tools. This utilization is demonstrated on several occasions. One is the NRA’s instructions to copy and paste an article from LaPierre and distribute it to politicians and people in the media (G6). How much more of a tool could an individual be when their effective action is to copy and paste? Another example is providing the switchboard number for Capital Hill and instructing their members to call in and tell legislators “that destroying the Second Amendment is not the answer to preventing future tragedies” (G19). The NRA explicitly says to do this because “now is the time to make your voice heard (G19). The membership is presented with an opportunity to have a voice, yet just as explained earlier, there is only exposure to one method of having a voice. The NRA leadership also encourages its membership to support all senators that defeated Obama’s plan, saying, “If they are up for reelection, help in any way you can” (G8). Last, in instructing their membership, the NRA writes that “Every gun owner you know should be an NRA member” (G10). The NRA is urging participation in a specific action without ever inquiring into the opinions of its membership.

Each of these actions by the NRA reflects their use of membership as tools to promote the ideology of the organization.

The NRA does not engage in a discussion about solutions to problems, but only states predetermined positions and encourages members to repeat them. Throughout the entirety of the nineteen articles, not once does the NRA ask for an opinion from its membership on what solutions to pursue. The NRA is not asking any questions, nor are they seeking any input. The only solutions being discussed are the ones that are constructed at the organizational level, without any input from membership. Instead, the NRA calls its membership to “stand and fight,” disseminate NRA literature, support pro-gun candidates in any way possible, renew memberships, “recruit new members,” and not to “let up” (G2; G5; G6; G8; G10; G12; G16).

The most important call, however, was the call to support the NSS. At no time did the NRA ever ask its membership what the best way of handling the school shootings was. They never sought opinions from its membership about what steps should be taken, what laws need to be reevaluated, or anything of that fashion. Instead, they presented a fully developed plan and then:

call[ed] on every parent, every teacher, every school administrator and every law enforcement officer in this country to join us in the National School Shield Program and protect our children with the only line of positive defense that’s tested and proven to work. (G1)

While some members, maybe even most, may possess the same ideology as the organization, there is no way that the individual members’ opinions could have been reflected in the development of this solution and the actions called for because the organization did not seek input before determining that the NSS was the only acceptable solution. This much is clear from the organization’s use of members to advocate the NSS without any help from the

membership in formulating the NSS: The NRA used its members as vehicles rather than respecting them for their inherent value.

The NRA is primarily concerned with defeating gun legislation and their members are the tools to get the job done. Rather than promoting the overall worth and merit of each individual, the NRA propaganda focuses instead on promoting the belief system of the NRA. While individual sentences of the NRA literature seem to make the argument that the NRA is advocating and fighting to provide for their membership, the overall results argue that the NRA is first and foremost concerned with preserving its ideology.

The NRA also uses individual people as a platform from which to build their agenda. They use President Obama, Vice President Biden, and several congress people as a means to construct the problem within the audience. The NRA's *use* of these individuals (rather than just arguing against what they are saying) is demonstrated in the way the NRA provides information. The NRA does not provide the full context of situations when they quote individuals, nor do they use fair characterizations. For example, the NRA wrote extensively on President Obama's use of the word revenge. Obama was quoted as saying "voting is the best kind of revenge" (B24). The NRA used the single word and wrote attacks based on it (B15; A4). There is no other context provided which explains why Obama would use this line. The audience is provided with only this line and then subsequent claims about incoming revenge from President Obama. The NRA also characterized Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel as one who won't miss "an opportunity to blame peaceable, law abiding gun owners for the daily bloodletting by violent Chicago thugs" (A5). Additionally, Biden was accused of "demanding all sorts of concessions of personal liberty from millions of peaceable Americans" (A6). Both of these statements are unfounded assertions. The NRA does not provide any evidence that verifies that Mayor Emanuel blames his

law-abiding citizens for the violence in the town. The NRA also makes a hasty generalization when they take the fact that Biden is advocating for gun rights and equate it to “demanding all sorts of concessions of personal liberty.”

Regardless of political views, these characterizations are unfair. The NRA even goes so far as to make the extreme generalization that the difference between gun control proponents and the NRA is insanity versus sanity (B20). This ad hominem attack does little to provide any real evidence, but instead attempts to provide a false generalization in order to achieve the organization’s predetermined ends. As was shown previously, the NRA needs to create a heightened sense of alarm and these individuals are the means to that end. To reach the individual within the mass, the NRA used specific strategies and one of these strategies is the creation of the common enemy out of Obama, Biden, Emanuel, and other persons. This displays the NRA’s use of individual people as a means to an end, rather than respecting that all individuals are an end to themselves.

Between the actions taken against its own membership and actions taken against those who are seen as threatening the overall agenda of the organization, the NRA does not uphold the moral requirements outlined by the Kantian categorical imperative. The NRA participated in actions that have been proven to be unfit for universal law. Additionally, the leadership of the NRA is engaging in the utilization of people as a means to an end. Based on these findings, the NRA’s use of propaganda is unethical.

The last insight into the ethics of propaganda comes from two propaganda scholars, Cunningham and Ellul. Cunningham has produced several works on propaganda and has a history of examining Ellul’s literature (1992; 2002; 2011). As the architect of the methodology of this research, Ellul has unique and relevant insight into the morality of propaganda use. To

begin with, Cunningham (1992) writes that truth “is the indispensable condition of knowledge and understanding...it has always been cherished both as the supreme value of the human intellect and as a premier moral value” (p. 237). He continues to argue that based on this supreme value, falsity is condemned. Based on this understanding of truth, Cunningham reaches particular conclusions about the ethics of propaganda.

Cunningham’s primary reason for assessing the ethical nature of propaganda is very similar to formulation two of the Kantian categorical imperative. Cunningham (1992) argues that truth, which should be esteemed for its inherent merit and worth, gets relegated to a means for an end. This is most clearly seen in the NRA’s claims asserted as true, which have no factual validity. These claims may be true, but they may also be false. The problem is that the NRA uses these examples as “true,” when they cannot actually be verified as such. For example, the NRA claims that “we as a society leave [children] utterly defenseless” (A1). There is nothing in this statement that hints at any sort of hesitation or uncertainty. The NRA is making this claim a statement of fact for furthering their agenda without verifying it as true. Another example is the line, “if we truly cherish our kids...we must give them the greatest level of protection possible” (A3). This statement was made as reinforcement for the implementation of the NSS. Again, consider the line already given that said the NSS is “the only line of positive defense that’s tested and proven to work” (G1). These statements are handled and delivered to the audience as statements of fact and truth, yet there are no supporting details provided showing these to be true. Last, consider the line, “...the result of the presidential election was a loss for the Second Amendment” (A11). The NRA does not offer an argument or provide evidence to prove the assertion, yet the NRA dispenses it as if it were a proven universal law of physics. The

practice of using claims as truth without providing any sort of verification was widespread within the literature of the NRA (A9; A13; B7; B17; B28; B43; D13; D21; D24; D37; D58).

Rather than pursuing truth as the end to itself, the propagandist uses “truths” however they will benefit the situation, regardless of the claims’ ontological status as true. In this way, the propagandist is indifferent to the value of truth. For Cunningham, the unseating of truth from its inherent worth represents “an epistemological inversion” (p. 238). Cunningham argues that propaganda’s use of truth remains unethical because this inversion “confounds the very structures that make possible both moral experience and valid moral reasoning (p. 238). Cunningham’s view on the usurpation of truth by propaganda is directly applicable to the NRA. The previous three examples show that the NRA is using statements of unknown truth in order to create false illusions within their membership. As Cunningham’s (1992) argument points out, this mishandling of truth represents an unethical inversion of end/means. The NRA has not used verifiably true claims, but instead has settled for unverifiable claims as a means to promote a particular ideology. For this reason, based on the understanding of ethics by Cunningham, the NRA’s engagement in propaganda is unethical.

The last input on the implications of the NRA’s use of propaganda comes from Ellul. Ellul (1981/2006) himself has noted the difficulty in affixing an ethical judgment on propaganda. However, Ellul (1973) draws some interesting conclusions based on the result of propaganda. One particular result of propaganda is alienation. Speaking of alienation, Ellul (1973) writes:

[I]t means to be deprived of one’s self, to be subjected to, or even identified with, someone else. That is definitely the effect of propaganda. Propaganda strips the individual, robs him of part of himself, and makes him live an alien and artificial life, to such an extent that he becomes another person and obeys impulses foreign to him. [*sic*] (p. 169)

The effect that propaganda has on the individual is destructive. Robbing one of individual identity means that the inherent worth of the individual is sacrificed at the expense of promoting an agenda and ideology. The individual suffers an ultimate loss of several key aspects of humanity. Namely, freedom of thought, the ability to exercise the faculty of intelligent appraisal, and the ability to be one's self. The infringement on these characteristics results in the conclusion that propaganda has no moral value.

Additionally, Ellul (1981/2006) argues that propaganda is not a neutral tool whose morality is based upon its use. Rather, "propaganda cannot be anything other than what it is: an instrument of manipulation to obtain an objectively conforming behavior..." (p. 4). Ellul further argues that the end cannot ever justify the means because the end is the exact result of the means. A person cannot use an ethical device and come to unethical ends. Nor can an individual use an unethical means and come to an ethical ends. The two are one in the same. Ellul argues "there is no differentiation in nature between the two, but, on the contrary, a continuity" (p. 4). Based on Ellul's argument, one can never justify propaganda, regardless of the potential or actual outcomes.

In sum, propaganda robs individuals of themselves and strips them of their identity. According to Kant's categorical imperative, such action represents an unethical result because people have been used as a means to an end, rather than as an end to themselves. Additionally, the use of truth as a means to an end represents an epistemic inversion which unseats the inherent value of truth. Last, based on discourse ethics, propaganda prevents an open communication about the validity of claims being made, thereby suppressing opinions and judgment. It has been shown that these results are conclusively unethical. These conclusions, coupled with Ellul's argument, provide strong evidence for determining propaganda to be unethical. Based on the

unethical results of propaganda, it is therefore justifiable to deem the NRA's propaganda, in its totality, unethical and morally reprehensible.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

My study examined NRA documents through the lens of a propaganda analysis and answered the question, “Does the NRA engage in propaganda when they attempt to activate their audience and call them into action?” Based on the results, my secondary purpose was to answer the question, “What ethical implications can be drawn from the use of propaganda?” This thesis first utilized previous literature as a means of locating an area of research not yet explored. Next, having identified a void in the academic field, I identified and justified the articles to be examined and the methodology used. While my thesis was able to answer these questions, there were limitations in the study. Based on these limitations I will provide additional areas which would benefit from scholarly exploration.

As the literature review demonstrates, there is an unacceptably low level of rhetorical criticism pertaining to language of the NRA. While there is substantial information on the historical, socio-economic status, and traditions of the organization, academia has not yet delved deep enough into examining the NRA’s rhetoric explicitly. Even more problematic is the failure to effectively examining the NRA’s rhetoric in light of potential propagandistic technique. With this void in the academic field, my research provides a contribution to an otherwise desolate area of academia. Being able to conclude whether or not the NRA is actively engaged in promoting a propaganda operation has decisive implications for how we understand the gun lobby. Given the significance of these findings, the results may also provide motivation for undertaking future studies. The societal impact of Sandy Hook warrants a better understanding of how the NRA responds and maintains influence after gun tragedies.

As the premier lobbying organization for gun rights, understanding how the organization is capable of calling into action millions of members is of extreme importance. In

the introduction, it was demonstrated that the NRA has developed an ability to call its membership into action in such a way as to potentially affect gun legislation. This conclusion, coupled with the importance of Sandy Hook and other school shootings, demands a thoughtful and thorough examination into how the NRA leadership is maintaining its membership. The ability of the NRA leadership to activate its membership provides a motivating factor to examine literature produced by the leaders. The rhetorical situation created by the tragedy at Sandy Hook then provided a perfect opportunity to evaluate how the organization called its membership into action.

With the rhetorical situation explained, LaPierre, Keene, and Cox, were identified as the sources of literature for this study. Examining literature from the top three leaders enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the organization. In addition, a time frame was opened based on the NRA's first response to Sandy Hook and terminated two months after federal gun legislation failed to pass Congress in April. This provided nineteen articles from the NRA leadership. A propaganda analysis was then applied to the NRA literature using characteristics identified by Jacques Ellul.

Applying a propaganda analysis to assess NRA documents has yielded great insight into understanding the operations of the organization. This insight challenges us to examining our views of lobbying and special interest groups. I was able to conclude that the NRA has engaged in a comprehensive propaganda campaign in its attempt to control the rhetorical arena. The NRA has demonstrated that it will attempt to maintain a rhetorical situation through the slow, steady process of propagandizing its membership. Enticing the audience to engage in physical action is the most crucial aspect of the NRA's campaign. The results are conclusive that

compelling their audience into an action which can affect gun legislation is the primary purpose of the NRA's propaganda.

Given the characteristics that have been outlined by Ellul and then applied to the NRA documents, it has been shown that the NRA used propaganda. In the drive to accomplish the tasks set before the organization, the leadership has utilized organizational technique to couple symbol manipulation with physical action. While the organization stressed particular belief systems, the organization was ultimately concerned with getting members activated. It has been demonstrated that the leadership of this organization is manipulating its membership. The group of people the NRA leadership earnestly claims to defend is the very group that has become a means to an end. The most interesting conclusion is that the NRA claims to fight to preserve liberty, freedom, and autonomy, yet these are the things that NRA members are stripped of by propaganda use. The NRA has promoted the spread of ideology and physical action to the demise of individual rights and liberty.

The end result of propaganda robs the individual of him or herself, and because of this, has been determined to be unethical. The unethical nature of propaganda has decisive implications for examining the NRA as a special interest group. With millions of people being led by a systematic implementation of organizational technique, understanding the results of these members' actions is extraordinarily important. After each gun tragedy, blame begins to be aimed at the NRA. In turn, the NRA attempts to manage the rhetorical arena through dissemination of information and strategic calls to action. An important question to ask is, does this last stage influence the opportunity to have the cycle start again? The search for that answer leads to the next part of this conclusion, limitations and future research.

The primary limitation was not being able to fully understand the impact of the action of NRA members. It has been demonstrated in the introduction that the NRA has the ability to compel their audience into an action which can affect gun legislation. However, we cannot fully understand the implications of these actions without a better understanding of how gun laws impact our society. A second limitation is that this research used material released from the NRA on the organization website. Such material is arguably intended for their own membership. This focused collection of material prevents an understanding of how the NRA would engage with a non-membership audience. Both of these limitations present potential areas for future research.

The first area of future research would be examining the potential correlation between actions of the NRA leadership and gun violence. Moving from the actions of NRA members to gun violence involves two major components. The first part has already been demonstrated through the NRA's ability to manipulate gun regulation. The second component is much more complicated and will require much research to develop. This would be the link between gun laws and gun violence. Gun control proponents argue that gun regulation will reduce crime while the NRA argues that more gun ownership will ward off crime. It will be of great academic and societal merit to be able to conclude what, if any, connection exists between the NRA and the propensity for gun violence. The use of propaganda alone has already placed a label of malpractice on the NRA. However, if evidence is found that there is a connection between the activation of NRA members and gun violence, there is no doubt an even greater culpability which must be assigned to the organization.

A second area of future research deals with expanding the collection of articles. With this research focusing on how the NRA engages an audience from its website, it would be

beneficial to examine the NRA as they reach out to the more general public. Discussed earlier was the idea that the propaganda did not have to work hard, if at all, to cause the audience to enter the framework. As the likely reader of this material was an NRA member, he or she already shared similar views on particular political issues. Worth researching would be how the NRA is capable of compelling non-members to enter the propaganda framework. According to the NRA, membership has steadily been climbing so figuring how the NRA engages these “could-be” members, would be a worthwhile pursuit.

The information provided enables the reader to have a much more complete grasp on the operations of the largest gun lobby in the United States. Individuals no longer have to question if the NRA is using propaganda, or even question how to define and objectify propaganda. This thesis has utilized a valid methodology to assess NRA documents and used verifiable proof to answer those questions. Unfortunately, the stark reality of the situation must still be addressed. As Ellul (1973) says, “Propaganda is the inevitable result...of the technological society, and plays so central a role in the life of that society that no economic or political development can take place without the influence of its great power” (p. 160). The inevitable nature of propaganda means that every individual will be exposed to it and potentially fall under its influence. However, those who examine propaganda tactics and inoculate themselves can reduce the risk of becoming under the influence of propaganda. While this research will not solve the misuse of power by the NRA, nor prevent another tragedy like that witnessed in Newtown, it is my hope that the research will compel the reader to always be alert and mindful of how they know what they know.

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APPENDIX

Direct Quotations Referenced in Thesis

SG=Standing Guard, PR=Political Report, PC=President's Column

All are direct quotes from Wayne LaPierre, Chris Cox, or David Keene, unless otherwise stated

A:

SG

1. ...when it comes to the most beloved, innocent and vulnerable members of the American family—our children—we as a society leave them utterly defenseless.
2. The National Rifle Association's 4 million mothers, fathers, sons and daughters join the nation in horror, outrage, grief and earnest prayer for the families of Newtown, Connecticut...
3. If we truly cherish our kids...we must give them the greatest level of protection possible.
4. And Barack Obama is the worst. His administration promised 'revenge' and he is delivering it—for starters in the form of 23 'executive' sneak attacks on our freedom.
5. ...it's Mayor Rahm Emanuel, who never misses an opportunity to blame peaceable, law-abiding gun owners for the daily bloodletting by violent Chicago thugs.
6. Vice President Biden...is demanding all sorts of concessions of personal liberty from millions of peaceable Americans when it comes to the Second Amendment.
7. But I'll tell you what is sane: providing on-the-scene school security to confront immediate threats to our nation's kids.
8. As NRA members, we have an obligation to Mr. Mattioli, and to his son and others who have lost their lives in school violence and to youngsters who need future protection...
9. "All in all, this was a pretty shameful day for Washington." [Quote from President Obama]

-But what is “shameful” in Obama’s vision for America was a great day for the Bill of Rights and for the nation’s peaceable gun owners, who are not a part of crime statistics, who have nothing to do with mass murder or terrorism and who refuse to pay the price for violence with the loss of their liberty.

PR

10. Spending our money any other way would have been an insult to our members, a poor strategic use of our members’ generous donations and would not have served the cause of defending the Second Amendment.
11. ...no one is disputing that the result of the presidential contest was a loss for the Second Amendment.
12. In December, on the day of the unforgettable, horrible tragedy in Newtown, Conn....
13. You know you’re on the right side of an issue when those on the other side want their extreme proposals rushed into law before the American people and their elected representatives have had a chance to give them careful thought.
14. He served four years with the Marine Corps, where he received extensive firearm training and earned “expert” rating in marksmanship. And yet it remains illegal for him to even possess a handgun on his own driveway.

PC

15. Since the mid-1960s, the NRA has been urging that government, at all levels, take steps to force the dangerously mentally ill to get treatment or to get them off the street.
16. But violent schizophrenics and others who often refuse to take the medications that allow them to function as part of a civilized society should be monitored and kept away from potentially dangerous weapons.

17. ...the tenacity of those of us dedicated to preserving the rights handed down by the framers of our constitution and the good common sense of most Americans who believe the best way to prevent future tragedies is to do what we've suggested from the beginning...
18. None of us are going to roll over, go away or stand by as our rights are taken from us.

B

SG

1. And it's not just our duty to protect [children], it's our right to protect them.
2. We can immediately make America's schools safer—relying on the brave men and women of America's police force.
3. And the National Rifle Association, as America's preeminent trainer of law enforcement and security personnel for the past 50 years, is ready, willing and uniquely qualified to help.
4. ...our team of security experts will make this the best program in the world for protecting our children at school, and we will make that program available to every school in America free of charge.
5. We mustn't allow politics or personal prejudice to divide us.
6. Forcible government taking of constitutionally protected private property is now just part of the "conversation."
7. Ask yourself, what is there to talk about? Power for them, and the total, ultimate loss of our liberty for us.
8. But in the context of "gun control," [conversation] will only mean one thing: **THEY TAKE, AND WE ARE SUPPOSED TO GIVE.**
9. After all, the facts, the law, and the Constitution are clearly on our side.
10. The conversation will never end, but the facts are on our side.

11. In all my years fighting the battle to preserve the Second Amendment...
12. The men and women exercising freedom in the consumer-driven protest...
13. [Companies] lost millions—and they did it for the principle of the Second Amendment.
14. It was a spontaneous combustion reaction to Barack Obama's obsession with erasing our very culture of peaceable gun ownership.
15. A member of Congress recently implored me to "turn it off." I told him, "NRA didn't turn it on. Barack Obama turned it on." His "revenge" turned it on.
16. [Chicago Mayor] Emanuel steadfastly refuses to demand application of tough federal laws that would surgically rid the streets of criminals who currently terrorize many Chicago neighborhoods.
17. If Chicago citizens knew the extent of existing harsh criminal sanctions and that those laws could readily be applied to prosecute real criminals, Emanuel's endless call for new "gun control" would be seen for what it is: an evil campaign to disarm the innocent.
18. If "low-level" prosecutions of the most violent armed criminals in Chicago were the norm, that city...would see scores of the worst violent gang members and armed drug dealers sent to prison in sure, swift prosecution.
19. How many of the 506 murders involving firearms in Chicago last year would never have happened had Obama's Justice Department taken criminals off the streets?
20. To understand the current state of the gun-ban crowd's conversation about destroying the Second Amendment, it boils down to this: insanity versus sanity.
21. All of this comes with the Sandy Hook school massacre cynically used as rationale to chip away at American's liberty.
22. Obama has vowed to launch new attacks on our liberty.

23. Above all, we must thank those who stood with us and voted to protect the rights of the citizens they serve.

(PC)

24. [Obama] said, "Voting is the best kind of revenge."...Revenge? It is an ugly, divisive word that has no part in the democratic process of our republic.

25. That nightmare vision of government action against the Second Amendment.

26. When it comes to erasing or eclipsing the Second Amendment, the gun-ban crowd always says the same thing.

27. We are the freedom lobby and that's what we will fight ever harder to preserve!

28. ..White House-driven assault to destroy or weaken the NRA, so they can destroy the Second Amendment.

29. Causes they care about? Try gun control. Try destruction of the NRA, Try avoiding the U.S. Constitution.

30. Gun owners knew that a Barack Obama second term would lead to an attack on Second Amendment rights.

31. Obama was an anti-Second Amendment activist before he ever ran for public office.

32. Others called for the government to label the NRA and its members as "terrorists" and, as one writer put it, "hunt down NRA leaders." Within days the RNA's mailboxes were flooded with hate mail and death threats, making any rational discussion of how the nation might better protect the innocent almost impossible.

33. Fix the health system and provide security for our kids rather than putting them at risk in a "gun-free" shooting preserve.

34. What the president and his allies didn't count on was your deep belief in freedom and the Constitution...
35. ...the narrative they and the president concocted about you and the NRA has been undermined by gun owners, who are demonstrating once again that the Second Amendment matters.
36. ...war on guns and against our rights.
37. [Americans] will trump the efforts of an ideologically driven president, a bombastic vice president and Michael Bloomberg's billions to gut the Second Amendment.
38. ...who work tirelessly by our side to protect and extend the rights of all Americans under the Second Amendment and the entire Bill of Rights.
39. Within days, more than 320 exhibitors announced they were abandoning the show and it was over. The unity of the outdoor community shocked everyone.
40. The NRA has reached an agreement with the state of Pennsylvania to operate the show.
41. In the end, common sense prevailed over Obama's nonsense and the president's agenda failed to pass the senate.

(PR)

42. Election Day was not the Second Amendment disaster that gun-ban groups desperately want the public to believe it was.
43. The anti-rights ringleaders have waited four long years for an opportunity to advance their agenda.
44. In Cuomo's words, "Confiscation could be an option. Mandatory sale to the state could be an option. Permitting could be an option—keep your gun, but permit it."

45. Yet gun-ban activists have already exploited the Newtown murders to push all these ideas and more.
46. Meanwhile, what does the [New York] law do about school safety? Not only does it not require armed security, but a literal reading of the law would prohibit an armed police officer from entering a school without prior written permission from the school.
47. ...many of [the sheriffs] suggesting they will refuse to enforce laws that abridge the constitutional rights of their citizens.
48. ...senseless restrictions upon our freedoms.
49. So the years of effort that went into reaching the Supreme Court and securing these precedents will now be put to work, protecting the rights of gun owners from attack by their own state governments.
50. The NRA has always maintained that any international treaty that covers firearms must respect the Second Amendment right of individual self-defense.
51. But then, as now, the truth was far different from what Obama wanted the public to believe.
52. Honestly, it shouldn't matter to lawmakers who have taken an oath to protect the Constitution.

C

(SG)

1. Because of all the noise and anger directed at use over the past week, no one—nobody—has addressed the most important, pressing and immediate question we face: How do we protect our children right now, starting today, in a way that we know works?

2. –The July 20, 2012 murder of 12 and wounding of 70 midnight movie patrons in Aurora, Colo., was committed by a person who was under the psychiatric care at the college he attended.

–The Tucson Ariz., murder of six people...was the work of an insane, deeply disturbed individual, Jared Lee Loughner, whose parents feared his behavior.
3. “The National Rifle Association has been heartened by the chance to isolate Loughner and Lanza from the rest of the gun owning universe; reports of their bizarre behavior seem to put them in a class by themselves.” [Quote from the Boston Globe]
4. ...Jason Whitlock, who wrote: “I believe the NRA is the new KKK.”
5. How about this one from Scott Blakeman... ‘The National Rifle Association essentially harbors terrorists, by resisting any attempt to apply sensible regulations on gun use.’

(PC)
6. The collapse of the \$80 million Eastern Sports and Outdoor Show in Harrisburg, Pa., over its organizers’ refusal to allow exhibition of semi-auto rifles that are under legislative attack, the tens of thousands of new members joining the NRA and the continuing flood of calls to Congress are making it very clear that we will Stand and Fight when our rights are threatened.
7. *This* war on guns...[emphasis added]
8. At the same time, Congress was deluged with hundreds of thousands of calls from gun owners and Second Amendment supporters protesting this latest assault on our constitutional rights.

(PR)

9. Three days later, President Obama announced that gun control would be a “central issue” of his final term in office, and that he had appointed Vice President Joe Biden to head a task force with a single mandate: to produce a list of “concrete proposals” which, Obama said, “I intend to push, without delay.”
10. But [Shepard v. Madigan] won’t eliminate the ban on concealed carry that’s in effect in Chicago. That’s why NRA-ILA has now funded a new case, Hall v. City of Chicago...
11. The avalanche of anti-Second Amendment legislation on Capitol Hill started on the very first day of this congressional session, and by the time you read this column, the U.S. Senate may already have acted on some of these bills.

D

(SG)

1. Now, we must speak...for the safety of our nation’s children.
2. How can we possibly even guess how many [copycat killers], given our nation’s refusal to create an active national database of the mentally ill?
3. Then there’s [sic] the blood-soaked slasher films...and a thousand music videos that portray life as a joke and murder as a way of life. And then they have the nerve to call it entertainment.
4. Rather than face their own moral failings, the media demonize lawful gun owners...
5. They don’t know what they are talking about!
6. Worse, they perpetuate the dangerous notion that one more law imposed on peaceful, lawful people—will protect us where 20,000 others have failed.
7. As parents, we do everything we can to keep our children safe.

8. Are the press and political class here in Washington so consumed by fear and hatred of the NRA and America's gun owners...
9. But do know this president zeroed out school emergency planning grants in last year's budget, and scrapped "Secure Out Schools" policing grants in next year's budget.
10. ...politicians have no right—no authority—denying us the right, the ability, or the moral imperative to protect ourselves and our loved ones.
11. If we truly cherish our kids more than our money or our celebrities...
12. Much of the "conversation" in the media has been a new level of hatred against gun owners, the Second Amendment and those who defend the right to keep and bear arms, especially the NRA.
13. "Conversation" means they dictate and gun owners obey.
14. Forcible government taking of constitutionally protected private property is now just part of the "conversation."
15. Creating hatred for NRA members is a major part of Gross's *[sic]* "national conversation."
16. For gun owner, especially for NRA members...there is nothing to talk about beyond what the founding fathers intended.
17. Across the nation, gun stores are virtually empty...Gun sales are higher than any time in history...first-time gun buyers are exercising their right to keep and bear arms in unprecedented numbers.
18. As Americans learn more about the threat to their rights and freedom...
19. The men and women...in this consumer-driven protest cross every personal political boundary and represent every walk of life.

20. ...they are motivated by a palpable and very well-founded fear of what President Barack Obama's government...[has]in store for free, peaceable Americans.
21. Bloomberg is bankrolling huge propaganda efforts to convince Americans that he loves the Second Amendment while disarming law-abiding citizens across the nation.
22. ...what is it that Emanuel, Bloomberg and President Obama really want? To criminalize—then prosecute—everything that we do as law-abiding citizens who own and use firearms.
23. ...this latest iteration of “gun control” is entirely directed at making the sane pay the price for unthinkable acts committed by the insane. It is the root of the civil disarmament movement in America today.
24. But for the evil acts of these and other deranged killers, all of the sane people in American are supposed to pay the price with the loss of our freedom.
25. So what on earth is all this push for massive new gun controls on innocent citizens about?
26. For any of your friends who might doubt President Barack Obama's true end-game on “gun control,” look no further than the president's whole-hearted endorsement of Connecticut's draconian new law...
27. What provisions would the president apply to law-abiding gun owners throughout the nation...
28. For any gun owner who might think about...
29. It was a great day especially for pro-Second Amendment Democratic senators who made Obama's defeat bipartisan.
30. As NRA members, you and the nation's gun owners were magnificent in your response to the Senate threats that resulted in defeating Obama's registration schemes.

(PC)

31. ...a one-word threat that has proven very ominous for the NRA and the nation's gun owners.
32. ...an unrelenting assault on the nation's gun owners, and directly on the National Rifle Association.
33. ...media cheerleaders claim the U.N.'s reach won't touch our Second Amendment freedom.
34. ...media campaign against the 4 million people they arrogantly call the "gun-lobby."
35. ...media blitz against gun owners.
36. ...mobilized against the NRA and you.
37. If you voted this election season, President Obama almost certainly has a file on you.
38. If Obama wins, we lose.
39. Had we come to grips with this problem earlier...
40. The Sandy Hook murders gave the president and his allies in Congress, the left-wing media and activists the political opportunity they had been waiting for. They could use this tragedy to stampede the public and Congress into allowing them to do what they have wanted to do all along: obliterate the Second Amendment rights that Americans have enjoyed since the days of our country's founding. They immediately blamed the Sandy Hook murders...on guns, the NRA and law-abiding gun owners.
41. The president himself alluded to the NRA and the millions of Americans who own firearms and engage in shooting sports as a "special interest" group.
42. And they didn't count on the basic common sense of the American people...

43. We are awake now. There are millions of us and we will not be cowed. The struggle to preserve our rights will get ugly, and there will be additional attempts to demonize us, divide us and limit the rights of gun owners who have never done anything wrong.
44. Millions of Second Amendment supporters are rallying...
45. ...most Americans don't share their hatred for firearms and disdain for the Bill of Rights.
46. The tens of thousands of Second Amendment supporters who have shown up at rallies...
47. We will win this war and, in its aftermath, we will join together...
48. The collapse of the show destroyed the mythical narrative the president and others are trying to sell the media and legislators.
49. ...gun owners and millions of others weren't falling for this "divide and conquer" strategy.
50. ...they came after gun owners and constitutionalists on all fronts. Their shameless exploitation of Newtown gave them what they saw as their best opportunity in decades to impose restrictions on our Second Amendment rights as they tried to push us down the slippery slope to a "gun-free America."
51. The president knew from the beginning that the millions of NRA members and those who agree with us had to be taken down to achieve his ultimate goal, and he went after us with a vengeance.
52. ...to stand with us and the American people.
53. ...data is coming to light that proves the lie regarding our opponent's fraudulent claims...
54. ...the increased willingness of law-abiding citizens to take responsibility for the defense of themselves and their loved ones [has] made just the difference that we have always believed they would.

55. Abraham Lincoln warned politicians long ago that “you can’t fool all the people all of the time.” It’s up to us to make sure that Obama-Bloomberg won’t fool enough of the people long enough to get their way.

(PR)

56. ...let’s see exactly what he wants to do to your rights.

57. ...so let’s call this what it really is: an attempt to criminalize firearm transfers.

58. Informed debate and public scrutiny are the enemies of those who want to enact senseless restrictions upon our freedoms.

59. We are using [Supreme Court rulings] to challenge longstanding laws that ban citizens from exercising their right of self-defense.

60. When lawmakers rush ahead with these attacks on our rights...

61. Just as the U.S. Senate was preparing to debate new restrictions on our rights, the Obama Whitehouse delivered the second part of its one-two punch directed at our freedoms.

E

(SG)

1. We can’t lose precious time debating legislation that won’t work.

(PC)

2. But what if the shield of the NRA were destroyed or weakened? That’s what is behind the ugly media campaign against the 4 million people they arrogantly call the “gun lobby.”

3. The Obama/Bloomberg war on guns continues...

4. ...the mythical narrative the president and others are trying to sell the media and legislators: that it would be safe to vote for their ideologically driven anti-firearm agenda this time because...“the world has changed.”

5. [The president and his supporters] had been trying desperately to divide the Americans on firearm policy; to isolate those they are going after this time and persuade others that their rights would remain intact.
6. You remember the narrative, with falsehoods like: the NRA no longer represents American sportsmen and gun owners; the NRA exists and is financed by firearm manufacturers simply to shill for their products; membership is collapsing because most of our members want what Obama, Dianne Feinstein and New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg want; Wayne LaPierre and the rest of us are delusional and paranoid; and the kicker, if the NRA would just get out of the way, Obama and Bloomberg would be able to stop the ever-escalating epidemic of “gun violence” that plagues America.
7. Thus, current laws—where they are actually enforced—seem to be working, and the empirical evidence reveals that there is no crisis that would justify further restrictions on our Second Amendment rights.
8. The president and his allies have a clear strategy: to full enough people...
(PR)
9. The study got its facts plain wrong, claiming that the NRA Political Victory Fund (NRA-PVF) financially supported certain candidates in the general election whom we simply did not. More importantly, the study used a fundamentally flawed analysis...
10. But none of their proposals would have prevented Newtown.
11. Meanwhile, Sen. Feinstein promised to introduce a new gun and magazine ban...she said, “We are also looking at a ‘buy-back’ program,” without addressing the constitutionality or enforceability of such a scheme.

12. Many state legislatures are rushing to judgment. In a race to grab headlines, governors and state lawmakers are pushing extreme and poorly drafted anti-gun legislation through the process as quickly as possible.
13. ...Andrew Cuomo goaded legislators into passing massively flawed legislation with only a few hours' notice.
14. Rep. Schakowsky seemed unaware that in the McDonald decision, the U.S. Supreme Court stated clearly that no city can violate the Second Amendment's guarantee of a fundamental, individual right to own a handgun or other "arms" for self-defense.
15. "...if you ban them in the future, the number of these high-capacity magazines is going to decrease dramatically over time because the bullets will have been shot and there won't be any more available." [Quote from Diana DeGette]

G:

(SG)

1. I call on every parent, every teacher, every school administrator and every law enforcement officer in this country to join us in the National School Shield Program and protect our children with the only line of positive defense that's tested and proven to work.
2. When it comes to the principle of losing freedom, there is nothing to talk about. We must stand and fight.
3. The next time you hear someone in the media say "sportsmen" don't care about semi-autos, tell them about Harrisburg.
4. NRA didn't empty the gun stores. NRA didn't close down the sports show gun-banners. You did it. Your friends and neighbors did it. In a time of harsh economic hardship,

millions of ordinary Americans are speaking with their pocketbooks. And they are hammering Congress as never before.

5. Each of us needs to do our part. We need to let Congress know, repeatedly, that our freedom, and their tenure, is on the line.
6. I want to ask a favor. Copy this column and give it to people in the media and to politicians. Put them on notice that their ignorance of law, feigned or real, and their unwillingness to push for prosecution of real criminals using existing federal law cannot be tolerated—EVER! Otherwise these agenda-driven politicians are complicit in criminal violence.
7. As NRA members, we have an obligation to Mr. Mattioli, and to his son and others who have lost their lives in school violence and to youngsters who need future protection, to make sure that our schools consider all that is offered in The National School Shield Program. Contact your local school officials and direct them to our website at www.nraschoolshield.com for expert guidance on how to actually make our nation's school children and America safer.
8. If your senators opposed Obama's plan, let them know how much they are appreciated and how much you depend on their principled votes in the fights that surely lie ahead. If they are up for reelection, help in any way you can. It's up to you and me, and the millions of Americans who believe in Second Amendment freedom, to spread the word and trump Obama's gun-ban agenda.

(PC)

9. When President Obama pledged his support for new gun bans in Congress during his first term, he didn't have the votes because NRA—you and I—stood in firm opposition to any new gun controls.

10. We need you to renew your membership, upgrade and recruit new members. Every gun owner you know should be an NRA member. We need every single gun owner to join and stand tall with us to fight for the Second Amendment.
 11. The mothers of the Newtown and New York killers knew something had to be done and both tried to get the authorities to act. Both failed and as a result 27 innocents never saw the New Year.
 12. If we don't let up, we will prevail.
 13. "Gun owners," [an NRA-friendly congressman] concluded, "are doing an awesome job and need to keep it up."
 14. But what really exposed that lie has been the overwhelming support for Second Amendment rights represented by the folks turning out to rallies around the country, joining the NRA and contacting elected officials to let them know just how they feel.
 15. ...we are meeting with hundreds of NRA members and Second Amendment supporters who know just how important their active involvement in this struggle will be to the eventual outcome.
 16. I'll do my part to make sure the truth gets out, even though this will be my final column as your president. I know you will, too.
- (PR)
17. But one thing was left unchanged by this election: the steely resolve of NRA members to protect our fundamental rights. We will need to call upon this inner strength often to survive the battles that lie ahead.

18. In the challenging months ahead, your NRA will need your full support in making sure that our elected officials think carefully before they cast any vote that will destroy our right to keep and bear arms.
19. If you want to protect your freedoms against a train wreck of federal restrictions like those just enacted in New York, now is the time to make your voice heard by sending a message to your senators. Visit www.NRAILA.org and click the “Write Your Reps” feature for contact info, or call the Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121. Tell them that destroying the Second Amendment is not the answer to preventing future tragedies.
20. With your support, the NRA will be there, bringing the cases that are most likely to advance our rights.
21. No matter what comes of the debate over domestic legislation to restrict our rights, we will still have more work to do in the Senate to keep our rights intact against these foreign threats.

H

(SG)

1. The truth is that our society is populated by an unknown number of genuine monsters—people so deranged, so evil, so possessed by voices and driven by demons that no sane person can possibly ever comprehend them. They walk among us every day. And does anybody really believe that the next Adam Lanza isn’t planning his attack on a school he’s already identified at this very moment?
2. So now, due to a declining willingness to prosecute dangerous criminals, violent crime is increasing!

3. [The media] amplify their cries for more laws and fill the national debate with misinformation and dishonest thinking that only delay meaningful action and all but guarantee that the next atrocity is only a news cycle away.
4. And when you hear the glass breaking in your living room at 3 a.m. and call 911, you won't be able to pray hard enough for a gun in the hands of a good guy to get there fast enough to protect you.
5. I call on Congress today to act immediately, to appropriate whatever is necessary to put armed police officers in every school—and to do it now, to make sure that blanket of safety is in place when our children return to school in January.
6. Former Congressman Asa Hutchinson will lead this effort as National Director of the National School Shield Program, with a budget provided by the NRA of whatever scope the task requires.
7. If we truly cherish our kids...we must give them the greatest level of protection possible and the security that is only available with a properly trained—armed—good guy.

(PC)

8. Dan Gross, head of the Brady Campaign is an active participant in what will be an unrelenting assault on the nation's gun owners, and directly on the National Rifle Association.
9. NRA members have argued that information on those legally adjudicated as mentally ill and potentially dangerous be included in the federal databases checked when one purchases a firearm.
10. ...gun owners, who are demonstrating once again that the Second Amendment matters and that they will, as in the past, step up to the plate to protect their rights.

11. ...most of our financial support comes as it always has, from our members.
12. Gun owners are continuing to express their true feelings by joining the NRA—in droves.

On the day the president delivered his televised anti-gun diatribe, more than 58,000

Americans picked up their phones and joined the organization. Total NRA membership is now nearing 5 million.

(PR)

13. ...we applaud every NRA member and gun owner who turned out to the polls on November 6 to support pro-gun candidates and ballot measures.
14. ...despite the fact that law-abiding gun owners in these states have turned out to rallies by the thousands, given hours and hours of testimony in opposition and swarmed states houses in such numbers that it's been difficult at times to even walk around in state capitol buildings.
15. You may have earned the president's anger—but you have my admiration, and my thanks, for the amazing outpouring of grassroots opposition that led to the rejection of the Obama gun control agenda.