CULTURE WARS REVISITED:

SOCIAL MEDIA'S EFFECT

ON THE CULTURE WAR

IN AMERICA

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HONORS THESIS

Presented to the Honors Committee of
Texas State University- San Marcos
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements

for Graduation in the Honors College

by

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San Marcos, Texas

May 2015

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DEDICATION

This research study is dedicated to the late Kevin Steve Thompson, an advocate for social equality and a fellow social media aficionado. His memory lives on forever through this research and in our hearts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

America is attempting to define itself in so many words, but yet cannot decide on how to define them or the order to put them in. America, once known as a melting pot of ideology and culture, is now much more similar to a pit of molten lava. Tensions are high, as the public culture of America is divided, and lines are deeply drawn between two moral outlooks that cross the barriers of religion and ethnicity. By using James Davison Hunter's model of the American culture war, this study re-examines his culture war by looking at the introduction of social media as a major contributing factor to its ability to thrive nearly a quarter of a century.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

America is attempting to define itself in so many words, but yet cannot decide on how to define these words or what order to put them in. America, once known as a melting pot of ideology and culture, is now much more similar to a pit of molten lava. Tensions are high, as the public culture of America is divided, and lines are deeply drawn between two outlooks on moral authority that cross the barriers of religion and ethnicity. By using James Davison Hunter's model of the American culture war, this study re-examines his culture war model by looking at the introduction of social media as a major contributing factor to its ability to thrive nearly a quarter of a century.

With all of this new social media, you might expect that political debate would be able to flourish, however, social media has driven people more apart because they are using social media to reinforce their own pre-established worldview, rather than trying to expand their own outlook on the world.

Social media did not create the underlying problem of the ideological division in America. In James Davidson Hunter's book *Culture Wars*, we see that America has been experiencing fragmentation since the early 1990's, and a common American consensus had been fading even prior to that point in time.

Social media has furthered this problem of ideological cultural gridlock because of the increased isolation it provides to both sides of the debate. Through three case studies done on the social media websites Facebook and Twitter, Americans have been using these forms of social

media to further isolate themselves and their own viewpoint. This cognitive dissonance, in which a person starts to feel uncomfortable when two or more ideas that do not align to their own personal beliefs are presented to them, causes American social media users to purposely move away from looking at the causes opposite to their viewpoint.

Through three case studies over abortion, same-sex marriage, and gun control, it can be seen that cognitive dissonance causes the resulting social media isolation, which has in turn led to a thriving culture war.

To fully understand Hunter's Culture War model, we must examine the events in America that have enabled a Culture War to begin. When we enter the period between 1963 and 2000, the existing tri-faith American religious landscape becomes broken apart into what George Marsden, author of *Religion in America*, refers to as 'Fragmented America', causing the first signs of a lack of common consensus.

Public culture provides a set of shared morals that are embodied in the laws of the nation. Hunter describes the understanding of public culture to be "shared notions of civic virtue" (Hunter, 1991, p. 55) and "the common ideals of the public good" (Hunter, 1991, p. 55). He describes public culture as collection of myths stemming from a nation's history and outlook to the future. He gives an example of how "some may stress historical events that show America as a "secular democratic experiment"; others see America as a "Christian commonwealth, a city on a hill" (Hunter, 1991, p. 55). Hunter goes on to further describe public culture as a way for citizens to "advocate their particular interests" (Hunter, 1991, p. 56) in the format of public discourse, as it is supposed to be in a democracy. Public culture is how a nation understands itself, and in this case, the understanding is nearly non-existent.

George Marsden, author of *Religion in American Public Culture,* puts it best by opening his book with, "The United States is both remarkably religious and remarkably secular" (Marsden, 2001, p. 1). In fact, the foundation for America's national identity was a religious one.

America was originally founded as a predominately Protestant public culture, and therefore held the commonalities of their religiosity as their public culture. However, starting in the early 19th century, America was starting to move away from being an exclusively Protestant nation, due to heightened immigration to the United States from various European countries. The two religions that rose up to the same par as Protestantism was Catholicism and Judaism, creating a three-sided religious model in early America. Marsden observes that through this immigration, the public consensus in America on their public culture was ultimately obtained through a broader agreement which he calls "Judeo-Christian America".

American Protestants, American Catholics, and American Jews were not immediately existing peacefully as "Judeo-Christian America". However, as we move into the post-World War II time period, Americans had paid witness to the ultimately form of religious prejudice: the Holocaust. This brutal mass killing of roughly about six million Jews in Nazi Germany and the surrounding areas alerted Americans to the dangers of strong religious prejudices. Therefore, these three religious groups were finally able to put aside their differences and evolve into a period where there was a broader agreement on public culture. This was the case until about 1963, when America became much more fragmented in its religious identity.

Fragmented America can be best described as "a nation in search of a soul" (Marsden, 2001, p. 247). This fragmentation is a result of the increased conflict between American ideals, continued secularization, and other religions joining the mix. At the heart of the fragmentation in America's religious ideals is the overwhelming focus on cultural issues, or as Marsden describes,

"Differences regarding basic values between conservatives and liberals gained in prominence" (Marsden, 2001, p. 247).

In this phase, the conflict between religious groups is beginning to decline, however, in lieu of that conflict a movement of cultural conflict emerges. Marsden notes, "Two groups formed according to ideology; these groups were the liberals, whom of which "placed their strongest emphasis on the values of openness, pluralism, diversity, and mutual tolerance of differences" (Marsden, 2001, p. 248), and on the opposite side of the fence were the conservatives, whom "tended to talk more of finding ethical absolutes, which reflected long-standing Christian and Jewish teachings concerning family, sexuality, discipline, and the importance of moral law" (Marsden, 2001, p. 248). Both of these groups seek to be the main influence of "the nature of an American consensus" (Marsden, 2001, p. 247), and ultimately, shape American public culture.

It was starting to align orthodox sects of tri-faith America together, as they found that they had more in common with each other than they did of the progressive sects of their own religions. For the first time, America was starting to realize that there was a large ideological disagreement, creating a gap between two sides that were once one in the same.

This division between ideologies had existed throughout American political history, however, Marsden states that these ideologies were relevant to this conflict because the religious liberal and religious conservative divisions were starker, and more deeply rooted than in previous eras. Essentially, this is the first division that put aside their religious differences and brought to light ideological differences in American public culture.

Fragmented America makes way for a lengthy and heated cultural battle in America, as described by James Davison Hunter, author of *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America.*

Hunter is an American sociologist whose book explains in great depth the cultural battle and the struggle to find a common consensus in America. In his book, he describes the ongoing culture war in America as being caused by a lack of substantive agreement in public culture, and ultimately furthered by the deeply divided opinions, and a lack of compromise.

This fight to influence America's public culture has evolved into what he calls a "culture war" in America, and Hunter states, "What is ultimately at issue are deeply rooted and fundamentally different understandings of being and purpose" (Hunter, 1991, p. 131). Hunter gives a brief overview of how the term "Culture War" should be interpreted, because the term is often used to describe the bloody cultural battles in countries such as "the suppression of the Kurds in Iraq" (Hunter, 1991, p. 34). However, the idea of culture war in America as described by Hunter is a "story about the struggle for power" (Hunter, 1991, p. 35), just as other culture wars around the world are.

One of the problems with American public culture is that it "has always been a nation given to public idealism" (Hunter, 1991, p. 61). Hunter starts to discuss the beginning of American public life as compensating "for this lack of long national history through the construction of great myths about its origins and even loftier visions of its calling in the future" (Hunter, 1991, p. 61). American identity, in religious and even secular views, has "long been portrayed in the most moralistic of terms" (Hunter, 1991, p. 61). He makes the point that every war that America has participated in has been framed as a "moral crusade" (Hunter, 1991, p. 61), whether it was to provide safe places for democracy, eliminate slavery, or remove evil dictators from command. America has always wanted to be the moral authority in the world, or the "leader in "a new world order"" (Hunter, 1991, p. 61). It is an ideal of American exceptionalism that

rings true even today, and it holds America to a standard of having a defined moral outlook on what in the world is good, and what is evil.

Understandings of individual issues to include abortion, same-sex marriage, and gun rights, are to be categorized into common understandings of public culture. Hunter lays claim in his book, *Culture Wars*, that these cultural issues seem to be connected, and therefore should not be seen as individual fights. Simply put, if someone takes a stand on a certain issue, it is possible that they hold similar positions on other issues, as groups of these issues begin to create their own identity. Hunter does amend his observation by stating that all of these cultural conflicts are different fronts in a broader war; with the outcome being to influence the American public culture (Hunter, 1991, p. 46). Therefore, the struggle to define America, as Hunter describes in his book's title, is essentially a struggle to define America's public culture, which provides the framework for a common consensus in the nation.

The involvement in this debate over public culture, as described by Hunter, for many Americans is "born out of a deep concern for the character of life" (Hunter, 1991, p. 32). These citizens are attempting to shape their own local culture with the ideals that shape their own lives. Every group has a different angle, and in prologue to Culture Wars, Hunter introduces six Americans with differing worldviews and experiences, all with different ideas of how their America should be. Six people, all passionate in their own beliefs, describe their commitments to the religious and moral beliefs that shape their lives. When dealing with this sort of pluralism, Hunter states that what is "at stake is how we as Americans will order our lives together" (Hunter, 1991, p. 34).

When delving into the characters in this scene, Hunter describes a stark division between two sides, which he refers to as the progressive thought and the orthodox thought. Each side is

deeply vested in their own interests, and "each side operates from within its own constellation of values, interests, and assumptions. At the center of each are two distinct conceptions of moral authority..." (Hunter, 1991, p. 128). This concept of a division between orthodox and progressive thought is supportive of Marsden's theory of 'fragmented America', as both discuss the liberal and conservative division that crossed ethnic and religious lines. The two sides in this division disagree about the nature of moral authority in America, and are unable to come to any kind of compromise toward common consensus.

Hunter specifies how he defines the two categories specifically; describing them as "formal properties of a belief system or a world view" (Hunter, 1991, p. 44). He describes orthodoxy as having the underlying "commitment on the part of adherents to an external, definable, and transcendent authority" (Hunter, 1991, p. 44). When defining his idea of cultural progressivism in juxtaposition to the orthodox, he states that "moral authority tends to be defined by the spirit of the modern age, a spirit of rationalism and subjectivism" (Hunter, 1991, p. 44). Progressivism's common world view however, "is the tendency to re-symbolize historic faiths according to the prevailing assumptions of contemporary life" (Hunter, 1991, p. 44-45).

To the orthodox side, "the meaning of freedom… is the freedom enjoyed by a society when it does not live under despotism; the freedom of a society to govern itself" (Hunter, 1991, p. 110). The orthodox world view holds civic freedom highly, to include the economic freedom of free enterprise. The orthodox world view also values the concept of justice very highly, as "generally defined in terms of the Judeo-Christian standards of moral righteousness" (Hunter, 1991, p. 112). In this case, a just society "is a morally conscientious and lawful society" (Hunter, 1991, p. 112). Although both sides use the word 'freedom', each side has a different way of defining it.

Hunter explains that these views of freedom and justice stem from the orthodox interpretations of the biblical scriptures, specifically the Old Testament, in which ideas of capitalism and righteousness are embedded into these biblical scriptures. The orthodox side of this battle has a vision of how America has been, and should be in the future; and in this case, "the moral fiber of American life is built upon standards of biblical morality" (Hunter, 1991, p. 112).

The purpose of the orthodoxy in the culture war is to impose standards of biblical morality onto the public culture of America. They believe in upholding standards of decency, morality, and justice to every situation. They are our god-fearing, church-going, traditionalist side that believes that all of the answers to life and how to live is in between the pages of the bible.

These progressivists prefer to resort to arguments of 'human rationality', rather than having the bible or god telling them how to live their lives. They believe that laws change and evolve, and ultimately, feel as though things are situational and should be closely examined rather than put to a long-standing set of standards. To progressivists, there is no absolute moral truth. They use 'the spirit of the age' to determine how the public culture should look, as public culture should reflect the current situation rather than any absolute moral truth. Through their arguments of 'human rationality', Progressivists believe that moral truth, and in turn public culture, should be constantly evolving to keep up with the times.

This differs from the orthodox view completely; as once again, progressivist thought is not based in tradition, but based on the current situation of society. Justice, as defined by progressivists, is understood "in terms of equality and the end of oppression in the social world" (Hunter, 1991, p. 114). Hunter gives an example of how the word 'justice' is defined to a

progressivist, stating that "the progressive journal *Christianity and Crisis* described "minimum wage" as a "minimum justice"" (Hunter, 1991, p. 115). The word 'justice', as defined by progressivists, follows the 'social justice' model in which justice and empathy are held above wealth and world power.

Progressivists "rarely, if ever, attribute America's origins to the actions of a Supreme Being" (Hunter, 1991, p. 113). The progressive ideal describes that the constitution is not to be seen as an absolute law, and as it was written during a time of pre-industrialization, it needs to be a set to laws that changes and grows with how society changes. This fluidity of thought is key when trying to understand progressivism as described by Hunter; as "law in a democratic society is one of the highest expressions of human rationality and must evolve as society evolves and matures" (Hunter, 1991, p. 114). Freedom as described by progressivist, is "defined largely in terms of the social and political rights of individuals" (Hunter, 1991, p. 114). Freedom is also defined differently by progressivists than members of the orthodoxy. Similar to the progressivist's definition of justice, freedom is defined in a social context, placing emphasis on the social and political rights of Americans as individuals.

An example of the starkness in the divide between orthodox and progressive sides in the culture war can be seen in Hunter's explanation of the debates regarding homosexuality. He uses Jerry Falwell's dramatic interpretation of homosexuality as an example of the orthodox debate, with a passage from his book *Listen America!* This passage explains that for the orthodox communities, homosexuality is "the zenith of human indecency" (Falwell, 1980, p. 102) a sin "so grievous, so abominable in the sight of God that he destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of it" (Falwell, 1980, p. 131). On the progressive point of view, Hunter interviewed James Anderson, the executive secretary of the Presbyterians for Lesbian and Gay Concerns.

Anderson told Hunter that "people can develop good, loving relationships with other people regardless of sexual orientation" (Hunter, 1991, p. 350). Hunter goes on to say that "as a consequence, any mutually agreeable resolution of policy, much less cultural consensus, is almost unimaginable" (Hunter, 1991, p. 130). Both sides are polar opposites, and therefore, consensus seems unimaginable to Hunter. There is not enough common ground between the two sides to create a bridge, therefore, they both stay on their own islands of ideology.

When comparing the two ideals in the context of religion, Hunter draws on his case study by giving an example of a progressivism point-of-view that says that people should interpret the scriptures for themselves. In Hunter's case study, the people with the orthodox world view disagreed, using the example of the debate over homosexuality, saying that the religious progressives ideal of self-interpretation of scripture is just to "reinterpret Scripture to justify homosexuality, while others recognize what the biblical texts say about the immorality of homosexuality" (Hunter, 1991, p. 45). Progressivists believe that scripture is not God's revelation, therefore, there is no absolute authority in scripture. The orthodoxy believes that absolute moral truth can be found in scripture, as it is God's will directly bestowed upon them. Both sides could be reading the same biblical text, and yet still interpret them in completely opposite ways.

As per usual, there are always those who sit in the middle of the divide. Since these two sides are divided mostly based upon their biblical preferences, the secularists tend to get pushed aside when studying the roots of the debate over public culture. However, the secularists in this debate are not to be discredited at all; and in fact, are also divided. Hunter explains that "a decided majority of secularists are drawn toward the progressivist impulse in American culture" (Hunter, 1991, p. 45). As religious tradition is not a factor in their decision making. However, it

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should be noted that secularists who align with conservatives "are drawn to the orthodox impulse" (Hunter, 1991, p. 45) as "a commitment to natural law or to a high view of nature serves as the functional equivalent of the external and transcendent moral authority revered by their religiously orthodox counterparts" (Hunter, 1991, p. 45). Essentially, secularists could go to either side depending on what their pre-dispositions are to both sides.

Although religion seems to be the firm roots of this disagreement on public culture, the lines draw past religion in this contemporary culture war. As we saw earlier, Religious divisions are less of an issue when breaking down the divisions between progressive and orthodox thought, as "progressively oriented Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and secularists share more in common with each other culturally and politically than they do with the orthodox members of their own faith tradition" (Hunter, 1991, p. 132). Hunter describes that orthodox sects of Protestantism, Judaism, and Catholicism are becoming allied against the progressivist sects of these religions, and vice versa. Marsden's previous note on the deeply-rooted split between religious liberals and religious conservatives is echoed in this theory by Hunter, both explaining that the separation does in fact supersede the bounds of religion.

The foundation to the division in the culture war has been explained, however, what about the current debate that is ensuing? The struggle to define America, as Hunter puts it, is "a struggle over national identity- over the meaning of America" (Hunter, 1991, p. 50). The salience of this is that it is a debate on what we "will aspire to become in the new millennium" (Hunter, 1991, p. 50). America is attempting to define itself in so many words, but yet cannot decide on the actual definitions of those words. Both sides appear to be speaking two different languages, with words like freedom and justice having opposite meanings to both sides.

Hunter identifies two basic strategies in this struggle, a positive one, and a negative one. Essentially, "the positive face of moral conflict is expressed through constructive moral reasoning and debate, as opposing factions articulate their ideals for "the way things should be." By grounding the "rightness: or legitimacy of their claims in logic, science, and humanitarian concerns, or in an appeal to tradition or god" (Hunter, 1991, p. 136). Each side uses this positivity strategy because it appeals to moral sensibility for both sides; however, in the same way, it is ineffective, as described by Hunter, because both sides of such differing moral conceptions. Therefore, the positive strategy works for engaging your own side, but does not persuade the other "of the superiority of its own claims" (Hunter, 1991, p. 136).

Ultimately, "the struggle to gain legitimation" (Hunter, 1991, p. 136) drives both sides to the negative strategy, which is to discredit the opposition. This "deliberate, systematic effort to discredit the opposition" (Hunter, 1991, p. 136), is in fact just as important as making credible claims, as public discourse has "largely been replaced by name calling, denunciation, and even outright intolerance" (Hunter, 1991, p. 136). Mudslinging is an effective way to expose flaws in either side's agenda, and in this case, is a fundamental effort of both sides to defame the other. The importance of strategy in the culture war is extremely clear; as Hunter states it, "a completely different approach to public life is at stake, as is a fundamentally different structure of moral logic" (Hunter, 1991, p. 143).

As technology evolves, Hunter implies that media such as television commercials, magazine advertisements, and direct mailers are now easier and more accessible to both sides of the cultural battle. This study will specifically examine how the social media of today fits into Hunter's culture war model, as well as the potential implications on the struggle for consensus on moral authority in America.

Hunter starts to describe the role of media as a place for public discourse; and although the public discourse in Hunter's context was through less advanced media formats such as television commercials and newspapers, it still had a plentiful role in the public debate over culture. People were finally able to effectively distribute information regarding their cause and convert the people that are on the ideological fence.

He goes through examples of these grassroots campaigns using media, such as Catholics for Free Choice sponsoring a full-page ad in the New York Times, "calling for "a dialogue within the church on the issue of abortion""(Hunter, 1991, p. 162). Television commercials were also popular in sparking public debate, and Hunter gives an example of a group, the People for the American way, airing over 2,000 commercials in just one year (Hunter, 1991, p. 163).

This pre-millennial time period was also infamous for utilizing the power of direct mail; sending out solicitations to private resentences in order to get more people involved, whether through direct actions, or through donations. Essentially, both sides of the culture war utilized publicity to spark public debate on the issues that define the morality of America. As a note, the media discourse was mostly between organizations, and there was no specific realm for conversation between individuals, or the 'average joe', on the debate over public culture.

Hunter points out an important truth noting that "the implications of these media for the contemporary culture war are tremendous. They define a historically unique "environment" within which public discourse takes place; an environment that establishes novel, perhaps unprecedented rules for the conduct of public discussion" (Hunter, 1991, p. 163). This is profound in the sense that this limited realm for public discourse, the media of a pre-millennial America, was a "historically unique environment" (Hunter, 1991, p. 163) for public discourse at this time. The culture war being fought directly in front of the eyes of the American people was a

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new concept at this time, making it uncharitable and nearly without rule. The lack of rules for conduct, paired with the limitations of the media in the context of public discourse, encourages the negative strategy of defamation on both sides, and does not allow citizens to be educated about the root of the entire issue, in order to make an informed decision.

Even in Hunter's time, polarization brought on by the media is apparent. Each side is able to use media to find its own niche, such as advertising in journals with readers that preemptively share the same viewpoints, and it does not inhibit healthy debate in any sense. The two sides use media to reinforce their own worldviews rather than reach across the aisle and offer concessions. The two sides are able to use media to distance themselves further away from each other, once again operating in their own "constellation of values, interests, and assumptions" (Hunter, 1991, p. 128)

He goes on to also note that discourse in the media may not help those more moderate in their world view either, saying that "it is virtually impossible to translate substantive moral reasoning into a sixty-second commercial, a "sound bite" on the evening news, a full-page political advertisement, a syndicated opinion-editorial piece, or a direct mail letter. The more temperate voices on both sides of the cultural divide are either drowned out by the louder extremes" (Hunter, 1991, p. 170). This media discourse does not allow for people that are in the middle of the two extremes to explain themselves, therefore excluding people from the debate over public culture. This could be another reason as to why the playing field is so divided; as the infrastructure of the debate does not allow for a middle opinion. Ultimately, the person with the loudest voice and shortest soundbite seems to win, therefore drowning out the nuanced voices in this debate. This is a continual trend moving into the new millennium, and it keeps the divisions stark moving forward.

Overall, the media discourse of this pre-millennial time period may not have been as helpful to the culture war as many would have anticipated, as "by their very nature, these media can only give superficial coverage; they are incapable of delving into or rising above the personalities and events of the moment" (Hunter, 1991, p. 33).

Throughout history, heated battles have ended in triumph as well as defeat, one side being empowered and chosen, and the other hanging their heads in shame, turning back and surrendering their fight. Some fights have ended in compromises, allowing both sides to make concessions to achieve common ground. However, the contemporary culture war is, and was, unlike these kinds of war. Just as it was in Hunter's day, there are no winners. These groups are opposite sides of the political spectrum, the conflict is too deeply rooted and too widespread for either side to come to an agreement. In this fight, everyone loses, because there is no common ground, or common language, to build a consensus on public culture.

When moving forward and attempting to search for a solution or a compromise, Hunter is justified in pointing out that there cannot be any concessions because of the "mutual moral estrangement" (Hunter, 1991, p. 129). In this debate, "within each of these opposing public philosophies" (Hunter, 1991, p. 115) the words justice and freedom carry a large burden in the broader vision of public order. Ultimately Hunter puts it best, as "where cultural conservatives tend to define freedom economically… and justice socially… progressives tend to define freedom socially… and justice economically" (Hunter, 1991, p. 115).

When Hunter wrote *Culture Wars*, he described the voices of the average people as not being heard in these debates over public culture, because when observing the debates on public culture, the elites of America have an upper hand in the arguments, as the 'average joe' may "have little access to the tools of public culture that elites have" (Hunter, 1991, p. 59). This idea

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of elites only having the power to express their views on a public stage is something that is slated to change through the invention of social media outlets, which this study will specifically be looking at.

After 1990's *Culture Wars*, Hunter's culture war has continued to evolve, and the social problems of the original culture war are still being debated. Branching off of Hunter's model for the contemporary culture war, this study will re-examine the culture war during the new millennium, from 2000 to the present day.

CHAPTER II

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE CULTURE WAR

The face of participatory politics has changed drastically since James Davison Hunter wrote *Culture Wars*, and the way it has changed has not ended the culture war, but furthered it. Social media has provided a new public forum for the culture war, therefore, enabling it to continue, and proving to propel the issues of the 1990's, well into present day. The culture war, as previously discussed, is a deeply rooted conflict on issues of morality in America. The lack of moral consensus has caused a separation that bypasses religions boundaries, as members of various orthodox religious sects have more in common with other orthodox religious sects than progressive members of their own religion (Hunter, 1991, p. 96).

As of late, more and more Americans are using social media more frequently in their everyday lives, and it is beginning to become rooted in our popular culture. In *Tweeting to America: The Social Media Revolution in American Politics*, Jason Gainous and Kevin M. Wagner delve into why social media is becoming the newest arena for discussions of political and moral issues. The first reason they cite as a cause for this phenomenon is that "the number of

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adult Internet users actively using online networking websites, such as the hugely popular social

portal Facebook, more than quadrupled between 2005 and the end of 2009" (Gainous and

Wagner, 2014, p. 1). They continue to solidify this observation, by pulling from a 2010 Nielsen

study that showed that "global consumers spent nearly six hours per month on social networking

sites, an 82% increase from the previous year" (Gainous and Wagner, 2014, p. 1).

The newest aspect of Hunter's culture war is the public forum known as social media.

The arguments that once lived in the hearts of communities, as Hunter described in his case

studies, now are on public display on various social media outlets such as Facebook or Twitter.

These two forms of social media specifically encourage self-expression, which enable groups on

both sides of the moral debate to showcase their various causes, all while encouraging their

supporters to take action through political activism such as signing online petitions, writing

letters to their representatives, or voting for candidates whose voting records align with their

ideological outlook.

In *Tweeting to America*, Ganious and Wagner describe several key foundational concepts

and phenomena that depict the current relationship between American voters and social media

usage. They discovered that "sixteen percent or 17 million Americans claimed to have

discovered the voting preferences of their friends and acquaintances on a SNS [social network

site]" (Gainous & Wagner, 2014, p. 27). They also state that:

> "Ten percent, or 11 million Americans signed up on an SNS [social network site] as a
>
> "friend" of a candidate, or a group involved in the campaign such as a political party or
>
> interest group. Twelve percent or 12 million posted content related to politics or the
>
> campaign. Nine percent or roughly 9 million joined a political group, or a group
>
> supporting a political cause on an SNS [social network site]. These numbers are sizable

given that there were only approximately 91 million Americans who voted in the 2010

elections" (Gainous & Wagner, 2014, p. 27).

The proportion of voters that actively participate in political engagement on social media, as

shown through these numbers, is large enough to make an unmistakable impact on the face of

political and moral issues in America, and specifically in this case, on the search for cultural

consensus in America.

A 19-year-old Harvard Sophomore named Mark Zuckerberg revolutionized the social

media arena with Facebook; otherwise known as one of the "biggest web sites in the world,

visited by 400 million people a month" (Carlson, 2010, para. 2). Facebook is intended to be a

way of connecting people, a way for people to share their individual stories with whomever they

choose to. The website is set up simply; you have a timeline, which chronologically organizes

whatever information you choose to share, whether it be a picture of yourself, a funny YouTube

video, or a status that answers the quintessential question of Facebook, "What's on your mind?"

Facebook has been asking that same question for the past six years, and throughout this

time, people have been answering it in various ways. Although many use Facebook to keep up

with friends and family, the following case studies reveal that Facebook has also largely been

used as a public forum for conversation on the issues that seem to still have America deeply

divided.

Facebook allows groups to create their own Facebook pages, which are able to be 'liked'

by Facebooks patrons. These pages allow other members of Facebook to interact with the

various groups through their pages, by commenting on the page's statuses, writing them a private

message, or writing on their public wall. The amount of direct communication between

individuals and groups that utilize Facebook pages is excellent because it is user-friendly, and elicits a very quick response no matter how far supporters are from the location of the activism group. As seen through the following case studies, activist groups have taken full advantage of this forum for public conversation, as it is free to create a page. Facebook also offers advertising to creators of pages, which is not free, but not nearly as expensive as other previously used forms of advertising, such as direct mailers. However, do not expect to view pages and interact with them without a Facebook account; you will have to become a member of the Facebook community in order to participate, therefore, forcing people to embed themselves into a network of the people around them if they want to have any say in what is going on in this virtual community.

For example, the "Government and Politics" page on Facebook is a Facebook-run page that (according to their own biography on their Facebook page) "highlights the use of Facebook by politicians, elected officials, and political campaigns around the world" ("Government and Politics", n.d.) Their mission statement is simple: "Facebook's mission is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. Millions of people use Facebook every day to keep up with friends, upload an unlimited number of photos, share links and videos, and learn more about the people they meet" ("Government and Politics", n.d.). This page is a hodgepodge of various political happenings, to include election updates, presidential addresses, news from government departments, and other various political posts that allow users to educate themselves quickly and leave a response about what they think about the subject matter in the comments. The news has never been this interactive, therefore, millions of people are finding their political voice on Facebook.

No longer are the days of waiting for an outcome to be announced on the news; word travels at the speed of light thanks to instant alerts on social media such as Twitter, a 140-character-or-less forum for conversation. Through observing and using twitter, it seems as though Twitter sends alerts of the accounts you subscribe to directly to your phone, allowing you to stay updated at virtually all hours of the day. Seemingly, Twitter has revolutionized fast information; bringing sound bites to an entirely new level. Tweets, or these short 140-character messages, are easily updated from your smartphone or laptop, and are saved on your twitter timeline. When people decide to follow you, your tweets show up in their daily news feed, which is a compilation of tweets from all of the accounts they follow.

When using Twitter, the hashtag symbol is a way of connecting people through specific topics; an appropriate hashtag has something to do with whatever the user is talking about, and when hashtags become popular enough, they make the trending topic list. This is a list of the most popular talked about things on twitter, and unsurprisingly have gotten political. The speed of twitter is the largest obvious advantage, paired with the social media websites' successful smartphone application, twitter is a one-stop-shop for fast political activism.

A large majority of politicians are using twitter today, to include current president Barack Obama. Politicians use twitter to update constituents on happenings in Washington, but also about their own personal causes. For example, President Obama is actively involved in a pro-women campaign that uses the hashtag "#womensucceed", and the goal is to motivate women to participate in fields of study that are typically overrun by men, and also encourage employers to pay equal wages to working women. The hashtag, when searched on twitter, brings up what seems like endless pages of responses in support of the President's declaration for gender

equality. Twitter allows people to be politically active, just by using the hashtag of whatever the cause they intend to support.

These two social media outlets are all different in the way they allow their users to share information, but ultimately, all serve as public forums for discussion, and are a unique window into public opinion at the very heart of what it is. Although both websites utilize completely different ways of communicating, they all have a common thread: easily accessible public discourse.

Social media has done an excellent job of allowing these nuanced voices to have a turn to state their opinions and be included in the political discourses of the day. These people include America's youth, minorities, and Americans that hold beliefs that are less main-stream than the progressivists or orthodoxy ideals. These groups were traditionally isolated from America's mainstream political discourses, but now are able to be included in the debate in a major way. Social media allows anyone to participate, which creates a much larger playing field when it comes to debate over what America's public culture should really be (Yun, 2013, chap. 11)

CHAPTER III

PRO-CHOICE VS PRO-LIFE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

As discussed earlier, America's continual battle in the cultural arena is especially fueled by Facebook. Facebook has an easy to use interface, allowing its patrons to search by keyword for other people to befriend, but also pages to 'like', or follow on their own Facebook news feeds. For example, when typing in the search bar at the top a simple command like "politics", more than 1,000 pages came up as matches. Filtering through them all would be difficult, but if someone is looking for something specific, it is fairly easy. For example, if an orthodox, right-

wing, pro-life activist is looking for a like-minded forum of conversation to participate in, searching "Pro-Life", will bring up the National Pro-Life Alliance's Facebook page, which has over 400,000 likes. The top comments on this page make passionate arguments such as "Real women keep their children and don't abort their children. The little girls who abort their babies show how weak they really are and irresponsible" ("National Pro-Life Alliance", n.d.). The language used by the page's contributors is harsh, and it does not seem to be conducive to any healthy debate over the issue.

The members of this group voice their shared opinions through comments, posts, and to an extent, what they like on the page. As of November 1st, 2014, the over 400,000 people that have liked the National Pro-Life Alliance's Facebook page have chosen their side in the culture war, and when looking at the things they say via the comments section, it does not seem like they have any interest in coming to a compromise on the issue of abortion.

A post made on October 31st, 2014 the National Pro-Life Alliance asks its Facebook fans to "CLICK THE LINK BELOW to view Senator Paul's special message, then sign your petition to bypass Roe v. Wade today!"[9]. At the time of this analysis (November 1st, 2014), over 2,000 people have liked this post, over 400 people have shared this link to their own Facebook pages, and over 70 people have commented on the link, some of which are openly disagreeing with the National Pro-Life Alliance's cause. The debate in the comments began to get heated, with comments that say things like "An embryo or fetus is not a person. Fact, supported by law"[9]. These opposition comments are few and far between, and resembles something like school children yelling opinions at each other on the playground. There is no real debate taking place here: instead, we see a hodgepodge of like opinions with a few interjections of opposition demonstrations.

When continuing to look at The National Pro-Life Alliance's Facebook page, there appear to be very few opportunities for healthy debate on the issue of abortion. If anyone dares to disagree, the page's supporters make sure to come back with response that mocks their criticism. Some are even offended when a non-supporter comments back and forth with supporters. It almost seems pointless to interject if you are not in support, as this is not so much of a forum for conversation as it is a forum for supporting your own worldview.

Progressively oriented members of the Facebook community also utilize this public political forum to demonstrate their ideas and wage war on opposing views. The NARAL Pro-Choice America Facebook page is the largest pro-choice Facebook page, and as of November 1st 2014, they boasted over 130,000 likes. This number is drastically lower than the National Pro-Life Facebook groups', which seems to be an anomaly when looking at recent research, specifically, the 2012 Pew Research Center survey that cites that more liberals utilize social media websites than conservatives (Rainie & Smith, 2012, para. 3).

This progressively oriented organization had a similar tendency in common with the National Pro-Life Alliance in using their Facebook page to continue to stay entrenched in their own ideas about the debate on abortion. On October 31st, 2014, they shared an article warning of GOP takeover in the senate from RH Reality Check, a website dedicated to reproductive and sexual health and justice, with the caption "This is no Halloween trick - if Republicans seize control of the Senate, we could see anti-choice politicians making even more of our personal medical decisions" ("NARAL Pro-Choice America", n.d.). With the November 4th 2014 midterm election so close, this progressive organization is directly referencing the connection between 'voting for the correct side' and gaining leverage in the culture war. The importance of this reference to the 2014 midterm elections is that these groups are gathering people with their own

worldviews and attempting to convince them to participate in the democratic process in order to further their cause.

The NARAL Pro-Choice Facebook page is a large way that pro-choice interest groups are able to join together with a common objective. Although the main purpose of this Facebook page is for the pro-choice groups to gain steam with the public and voters, there were a lot of comments shaming the pro-choice cause, using choice words such as "we see how the self-righteous act and so does Jesus" ("NARAL Pro-Choice America", n.d.). Shaming the opposition is not a way to move toward common consensus, and as observed by Hunter in *Culture Wars*, each side is more focused on defaming the opposition than creating a compromise.

The language used in both public forums clearly indicate that there is still a fire that burns very hot between the two sides of this cultural issue in America. Although it has been four decades since Roe V. Wade, America is still struggling to find its consensus on abortion rights; and if these two opposing Facebook pages tell us anything, it is that the lines on abortion are drawn and compromise is not on the horizon

Twitter's hashtag usage provides an easy and effective way of filtering out things you want to hear about, and in the case of the pro-life and pro-choice debate, both sides are utilizing this form of outreach. When searching for Pro-Life orientated causes, the largest twitter page in this arena is @LifeNewsHQ, proclaiming in their biography that "http://www.LifeNews.com is the #1 pro-life web site battling abortion, euthanasia, & celebrating life"("LifeNews HQ", n.d.). They boast an impressive 121,000 followers, and have posted over 100,000 tweets since their account was created in June 2009. They post nearly every hour; mostly with links to news-like articles written by either their group, or other related groups, regarding current pro-life issues.

Life News is not a major news outlet, but instead of a form of news reporting that sensationalizes issues, and is more closely related to propaganda than actual unbiased news.

Life News on Twitter is just a part of the pro-life force on twitter, as the National Right to Life organization also has a twitter that is updated frequently with information about the fight for abortion restrictions. The National right to life twitter is also updated nearly hourly, and has gained 20,000 followers since its creation in February of 2009. They boast about 10,000 tweets in total. Both pro-life accounts display pictures of tiny babies, mothers with children, and ultra-sounds; images that are clearly meant to provoke sympathy for their anti-abortion cause.

When looking at these prominent pro-life twitter accounts, both use twitter to provide information to their followers about what the current situation is in the pro-life/pro-choice debate. They both use professionally written articles to present information that is relevant to their pro-life cause, such as an article that the NRLC tweeted from their own website on October 28th, entitled "3 year old sister of aborted baby: "Mom, why didn't you kill me too?" http://nrlc.cc/1wzcXR8 #prolife" ("National Right to Life [NRLC]", 2014). These articles do not come from the major news outlets, although they are meant to appear as though they are professionally written in order to persuade people into thinking they are accurate in their claims. This is an example of the type of propaganda used to encourage, and sometimes even scare, people into siding with the anti-abortion, or pro-life, cause.

Twitter is a great way to spread propaganda on either side, because it reaches the target audience instantly. The target audience will follow accounts on twitter that align with their outlook on morality, and therefore, those who follow these pro-life groups are instantly connected to them, and are continuously informed of why the issue of abortion in America is so important. Twitter is not an ideal forum for conversation, and it could be comparable to the direct

mailer of Hunter's day. Twitter keeps topics relevant, like a constant humming in their

supporter's ears.

Ultimately, Facebook and Twitter have affected the culture war because these social

media services have enabled it to continue to thrive. These two Facebook and Twitter pages are

an excellent example of this because both sides have deeply vested interests in this debate over

abortion. Although they now have a place to gather, in this case virtually, it can be observed that

they are becoming more entrenched and isolated in their own worldview. The previous examples

could lead us to believe that these Facebook and Twitter pages have isolated these groups even

further than they may have been in Hunter's day. These social media outlets have enabled the

culture war to continue to thrive by providing the easiest, fastest, and most efficient forum to

validate your own worldview, without having to even bother looking at what the opposition has

to say.

CHAPTER IV

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE DEBATE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

When Hunter discusses the issue of same-sex marriage and homosexuality in Culture

Wars, he states that "few issues in the contemporary culture war generate more raw emotion than

the issue of homosexuality. The reason is plain: few other issues challenge the traditional

assumptions of what nature will allow, the boundaries of moral order, and finally the ideals of

middle-class family life more radically" (Hunter, 1991, p. 189). The idea that same-sex marriage

could change the dynamic of family life in America is the fuel that fed the fire for entirety of this

struggle. Overall, this debate over same-sex marriage has been already determined by the thirty-

seven states that have opted to legalize same-sex marriage in their states. However, in the

remaining thirteen states, the opposition continues to keep their stronghold states intact. These states are currently Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, Missouri, South Dakota, North Dakota, Nebraska, Minnesota, Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Georgia (Park, 2015).

When looking at this issue, it seems that the majority of the states have reached a common consensus (Park, 2015). Hunter predicted that this would not be the case in the near future, and as much as supporters would like to believe that valiant efforts of activism furthered their cause, research shows that the reason that public opinion has changed on this front is because of the opposition literally dying away. Although there is still a portion of public opinion that does not agree with anything beyond 'traditional marriage' between a man and a woman, more states than not have decided to move forward with redefining the idea of marriage and the family.

The older generation are primarily the group that is the opposition to gay marriage, and at this point, many of them are dying. Although Social media campaigns were extremely vibrant and moving, they were not to blame for the majority agreeing that same-sex couples should have marriage rights. This older group hardly even used social media, and therefore, there was little to no conversions being made through those channels. It has been profoundly suggested that these older people that are opposed to same-sex marriage are not being swayed, but in fact are just dying off (Hickey, 2012).

With the opposition to same-sex marriage literally dying, social media might not have pulled its weight after all in this struggle for consensus over same-sex marriage. The audience that inhabits social media is primarily young people, and going back to the 2012 Pew Research study mentioned earlier, a majority of the people using social media are progressively orientated.

Therefore, was there truly a battle to be fought on social media, or was this majority consensus an inevitability?

When examining the two sides of the same sex marriage argument on Facebook specifically, it appears that the two organizations that are leading their sides are Freedom to Marry, a pro-same-sex marriage group, and National Organization for Marriage, an anti-same-sex marriage group. When comparing the Facebook 'likes' statistics, as of November 1st, 2014, Freedom to Marry has 487,041 more likes on Facebook than the National Organization for Marriage. The number of people on Facebook that 'like' Freedom to Marry versus the National Organization for Marriage is so substantial that it appears that a balanced debate on this issue could not occur on Facebook. The fact that Freedom to Marry (as of November 1st, 2014) has almost 500,000 more Facebook supporters than the National Organization for Marriage shows that the amount of supporters on both sides is incredibly imbalanced and therefore, social media such as Facebook would not be a reliable forum for such a debate.

When looking at the Gallup poll data for support of same sex marriage, it appears that only 55% of Americans polled agreed that same-sex marriage should be legal, while the opposition was at a close 42% (McCarthy, 2014). If 42% of Americans oppose same-sex marriage, why is support of same-sex marriage on Facebook infinitely higher than the opposition, when in the public arena it is much more evenly matched? With the 2012 Pew Research citing that more progressively oriented people are on social media than conservatively oriented people, and with George Will's hypothesis stating that the opposition to same-sex marriage may be literally dying away, it can be inferred that social media might not have played such a pivotal role in securing more supporters after all. The supporters of same-sex marriage

just so happened to be on social media already, allowing their insane numbers of support to make the opposition look negligible.

Same-sex marriage activists tend to attribute their overwhelming success to using social media to garner support, although, the supporters of same-sex marriage did not have to go far to validate their own viewpoint on this issue. Facebook is a safe haven for same-sex marriage supporters, with LGBT groups such as NOH8 garnering over one million likes on their Facebook page. The Facebook audience, being primarily liberal in their political alignment, did not have to be won over to the pro-same-sex marriage cause. Essentially, these 'facebookers' just further validated their own viewpoint by participating in the various pro-same-sex marriage activism occurring on Facebook. Therefore, when looking at Facebook as a forum for conversation and debate on the issue of same-sex marriage, do not rely on a balanced view of the actual issue itself due to the overwhelmingly similar biases of the Facebook audience.

CHAPTER V

PRO-GUN RIGHTS VS ANTI-GUN RIGHTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

One of the biggest debates in the last two decades have been over whether or not Americans should have the right to own, carry, and use a firearm. The second amendment in the Constitution of the United States specifically states that "the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." Although the wording of the second amendment is fairly direct, it seems to be vague enough to spark debate on how regulated the right to keep and bear arms should be.

The heavy hitters in the debate over gun rights on Facebook are the National Association for Gun Rights (NRA) and the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence. While well over four million

people 'like' the NRA, as of April 20th, 2015, only a mere 123,308 people 'like' the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence. Unlike the previous imbalance we saw in the same-sex marriage debate toward the liberal ideology, this imbalance seems to be toward the conservative side. However, when putting this into perspective, Gallup reports that overall "less than half of Americans support stricter gun laws" (Swift, 2014). The historically liberal Facebook crowd appears to favor the more conservative pro-gun agenda, therefore, this issue seems to cut across ideological lines.

The Coalition to Stop Gun Violence posted a video clip to their Facebook page with a caption which stated, "How deranged and aggressive are modern-day pro-gun activists? Watch this video clip of testimony from convicted felon William Brown in Texas and you'll get a good idea. Our hearty thanks to the Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America members who withstood his anger and gave testimony that should make us all proud" ("Coalition to Stop Gun Violence", n.d.). This blatant shaming of the opposition ties back into what Hunter previously said in Culture Wars about the opposition using negative strategies in order to gain legitimation in their cause. The Coalition to Stop Gun Violence has posted on video clip of one person who is a gun rights advocate, which obviously does not represent the entire pro-gun rights community. They act on the fears of Americans by posting various articles about extreme situations, something that can also be heavily observed in the NRA's Facebook page as well.

It seems that overall, the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence is using a more direct tactic to try to demine their opponents, mostly by name calling and gun-shaming. At a glance, the NRA does not appear as direct with their posts. They tend to focus on posting about the perks of gun ownership, such as the protection it offers the owner. The Coalition to Stop Gun Violence seems to be the major mud-slinger in this debate, as they do not have a strong enough following not to.

This goes back to Hunter's theory of each side needing to legitimize their own argument. Since the National Association for Gun Rights has a strong following, they do not need to undermine the opposition as much as their weaker opponent does. Since the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence has only a fraction of the Facebook supporters that the NRA has, they are seen using strategies such as name-calling and denunciation to attempt to weaken their opposition, rather than being able to focus on preaching their beliefs.

Social media, in this case Facebook, has not furthered the debate over gun rights in the least bit, and it seems like the weaker side is reaching to gain legitimatization by using negative strategies, as previously observed by Hunter in other debates in the culture war. The observations that Hunter had back in the 1990's seem to still be applicable in a similar way, which shows that little to no progress has been made toward consensus. It seems as though the debate and strategies for debate are the same, but the media has just changed to keep up with the times.

As previously stated, In *Culture Wars,* Hunter says that "the struggle to gain legitimation" (Hunter, 1991, p. 136) drives both sides to use a negative strategy to discredit the opposition. This "deliberate, systematic effort to discredit the opposition" (Hunter, 1991, p. 136) is in fact just as important as making credible claims, as public discourse has "largely been replaced by name calling, denunciation, and even outright intolerance" (Hunter, 1991, p. 136). Social media has followed suit, and the discourse has reverted to being intolerant and unproductive.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Throughout these case studies, the largest factor of social media allowing the culture war to thrive is increased isolation of the two sides. Social media has made way for each side to effectively isolate themselves through strategic tools such as advertising based on what the user's internet browsing history looks like.

An example of increased isolation as caused by social media can be observed by looking closely at the social media outlet known as Twitter. Twitter allows users to customize what they see on their news feeds, by allowing them to follow specific accounts that they would like to keep up with. Therefore, the user is able to tailor the news they receive through Twitter by following accounts that share their own political and moral ideologies. This allows supporters of causes to be actively and instantly updated on their causes, without having to do anything strenuous. Twitter's largely customizable interface enables a person's bias, therefore, causing the divide to become even greater in America's growing cultural and moral dissonance.

In *Tweeting to Power*, Gainous and Wagner have similar observations regarding the downfall of social media personalization and politics, citing "cognitive dissonance", in which a person starts to feel uncomfortable when two or more ideas that do not align to their own personal beliefs are presented to them. They state that "There are an increasingly large number of apparatuses within social media that are intended to provide the user with only the information they would want to see" (Gainous & Wagner, 2014, p. 32). Social media websites are naturally inclined to create settings that prevent cognitive dissonance in their patrons, as it makes their users feel more comfortable, which encourages them to keep using their websites. Therefore, although indirectly, the social media websites themselves are creating a problem of isolation of information for their users.

Ultimately, we do not know how it is going to end, or if it will ever end. However, factors like increased participation, isolation of sides, and cultural gridlock among Americans encourage the culture war to continue to thrive. Social media are filled with varying voices and public consensus is not easily attainable, however, social media has further broadened the gap between the two sides of the culture war, driving Americans further away from a public consensus.

Hunter ended culture wars by saying that he was unsure as to whether the culture war in America would ever cease to exist, and after examining the newest factor in the culture war, social media participation, it is clear that his conclusion still stands. As explained by Hunter, both sides live in different universes, therefore, it makes it difficult to resolve problems in the first place. When social media is introduced, the isolation of both sides through media exists in an even greater context today than it did in Hunter's day. Therefore, although many years have passed since James Davison Hunter wrote *Culture Wars*, the difficulties in the search for a consensus on a common moral authority in America still exist in the new age of social media.

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