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Stephen Edward McMillin

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Ironic Outing: The Power of Hate Group Designations to Reframe Political Challenges to LGBT Rights and Focus Online Advocacy Efforts

STEPHEN EDWARD McMILLIN

School of Social Work, Saint Louis University, Saint Louis, Missouri, USA

This article examines the rationale of the Southern Poverty Law Center's 2010 addition of several "traditional family values" organizations to its annual hate group list in light of research findings on how contemporary extremist groups operate. Diverse reactions to the SPLC hate list additions from representatives of the listed groups and from both ends of the ideological spectrum are reviewed. The potential strengths and weaknesses of using hate group listing to spur online activism as a new form of policy practice that reframes challenges to LGBT rights are discussed with a review of recent social and policy developments.

KEYWORDS *advocacy, cyber, gay rights, hate groups, online, social policy*

In November 2010, the nonprofit civil rights organization Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) updated its list of active hate groups to include well-known organizations such as the Family Research Council and the American Family Association. Approximately 13 of the organizations listed in the November 2010 hate list update choose to self-identify as or are primarily known as "traditional family values" organizations. Although 8 of the 13 groups had already been listed by the SPLC as hate groups on previous SPLC lists, the November 2010 update drew prominent media attention and resulted in several members of the incoming Republican House of Representatives to protest the hate group designation. In July 2011, an

Address correspondence to Stephen Edward McMillin, School of Social Work, Saint Louis University, 3550 Lindell Boulevard, Saint Louis, MO 63103. E-mail: mcmillins@slu.edu

online petition at Change.org succeeded in convincing prominent corporations such as Apple to cease doing business with groups listed on the SPLC hate list. This event stoked new debate about the concept of hate groups, hate group lists maintained by civil rights organizations, and the advocacy and community engagement efforts of interest group organizations.

This article analyzes the SPLC's continuing hate group designation strategy as a way to reframe political challenges to the rights of sexual minorities. First, this article explores the rationale of the hate group list in the light of scholarship investigating how contemporary extremist groups present themselves. Second, reaction to the hate list update is examined, ranging from the leaders of the listed groups as well as points of criticism and accordance across the ideological spectrum. Last, this article considers potential strengths and weaknesses of hate group designation as a legitimating strategy and new form of social advocacy with implications for community practice and activism. The potential of online activism in the form of "clicktivism," electronic signing of petitions to lobby businesses and public figures to take rapid action in the midst of emerging controversies such as hate group listing, is a special focus of this article as well because of its track record in successfully referencing the SPLC hate list to achieve petitioners' demands.

REFRAMING HATE: NOT JUST DIRECT VIOLENCE BUT ALSO DANGEROUS DISINFORMATION

While the stereotype of hate groups often cues images of violent mobs engaged in illegal activity, the SPLC emphasizes that its method of designating hate groups is not limited only to groups that engage in criminal acts or violence, but also includes groups that spread disinformation and falsehoods about others. In the case of the "traditional family values" organizations listed in the hate group update, because these groups do not limit themselves to exercising their free expression right to hold and express religious or theological beliefs about the "sinfulness" of being LGBT, but also make discredited claims about the behavior and mental health of minority sexual orientations, they are framed by the SPLC as spreading disinformation about a vulnerable population that results in more prejudice against these sexual minorities. As SPLC official Heidi Beirich explained, "you have to do more than oppose [same-sex] marriage . . . that alone does not rise to our criteria level [to be added to the hate list] . . . you have to step over the line into lying and demonizing" gays and lesbians (Horner, 2012). SPLC representatives have also noted that their designation of a hate group does not necessarily assume that all members of the designated hate group have a full, rational understanding of what the group does in daily practice; they emphasize that designating a Christian or Christian-influenced group as a

hate group refers only to the rhetoric of the group itself and in no way constitutes a comment on Christian churches or theology.

The SPLC's website offers several statements on what constitutes a hate group. First, they claim that "all hate groups have beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people, typically for their immutable characteristics." They suggest that "hate group activities can include criminal acts, marches, rallies, speeches, meetings, leafleting or publishing." Finally, the SPLC notes that listing a group on its hate list "does not imply a group advocates or engages in violence or other criminal activity." The SPLC's Internet information specialist in 1999, Brian Youngblood, suggested that "it's a hate group if it's biased against religion, sex, or creed. . . [b]ut it depends, there are so many different categories" (Arent, 1999).

The SPLC has honed and developed these new and expanding categories of what constitutes hate and explicitly severed the concept of hate from dependence on direct violence alongside the rapid growth of the Internet as a daily part of many people's lives. The rise and enormous expansion of the Internet has aided a new understanding of hate as something insidious and hard to apprehend. While almost from its inception the Internet has been a tool for business, education, and social interaction, it has also been a tool for hate groups (Duffy, 2003). From the mid-1990s the SPLC monitored the online presence of suspected and known hate groups, storing up online evidence for future legal cases while noting that through the Internet hate groups were able to reach new people who would never have been exposed to the group's message without the Internet (Arent, 1999). Duffy (2003) notes that historically hate groups have been technologically sophisticated, with one racist group using a telephone modem connected to a Commodore 64 computer to create an electronic bulletin board as early as 1985. Chau and Xu (2007) suggest that more recently weblogs ("blogs") offer extremist groups a way to canvass an enormous audience while reproducing the inviting characteristics of a small online community, while the rise of YouTube and other online video sites provide vivid ways for hate groups to remain hidden by using subscription and user controls to mark content private while also encouraging highly personalized interaction (Sureka, Kumaraguru, Goyal, & Chhabra, 2010).

The draw of hate groups lies not merely in their sophisticated communication, but in their ability to leverage communication into shared identity and mobilized social action. Duffy (2003) suggests that Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) can explain the coalition of hate groups, in which group members use stories and rituals to create a shared consciousness rooted in shared fantasy about the group and non-group members. McCann (2009) suggest that Authoritarian Dynamic Theory also informs the distribution of extremist groups such that more politically conservative states are likely to have more extremist groups and more liberal states are likely to have fewer such groups.

McCann (2009) also found that socioeconomic status and racial heterogeneity also interact with authoritarian beliefs; his study found fewer extremist groups in liberal states with high racial diversity than in liberal states with less racial diversity. Rhodes (2008) notes that extremist groups target their appeal to youth by combining a heavy reliance on sophisticated technology (including video and music) with a crude emphasis on denigrating out-groups and reframing historical information.

Rhodes (2008) indicates that the denigration of an out-group or groups is one focus of hate group activity. McNamee, Peterson, and Peña (2010) support that finding, summarizing four major themes of hate group activity as measured in online communication: (1) to educate group members and the wider public; (2) to call members to participate both within the group and in the public forum; (3) to invoke their sense of divine calling; and (4) to indict out-groups such as the government, the media, the entertainment industry, and other extremist groups.

While the denigration of out-groups clearly seems part of the repertoires of extremist groups, these other themes and aspects of hate group activity suggest that many extremist groups have used creativity and sophistication in recasting their public personas. McNamee and colleagues (2010) note that many extremist groups seem to consider themselves educational and/or religious organizations and certainly many present themselves as such. These findings are in line with previous studies that suggest it is perhaps too easy to overemphasize direct violence as the foremost activity or focus of hate groups. Douglas, McGarty, Bliuc, and Lala (2005) found that many groups were much more consistently focused on their marketing and public relations efforts, often in very creative ways, than on advocating violence, while Glaser, Dixit, and Green (2002) found that direct advocacy of violence was likely only when targets of hatred became immediate and personal (e.g., a member of a racist group experienced a family member entering an interracial marriage). The image of the hate group as an angry, violent mob likely captures only one dimension of many hate groups, and the manner in which the SPLC has expanded the concept of hate in its expanded hate list seems in broad and general accord with the scholarly literature on contemporary hate groups over the past 10–15 years.

REACTIONS TO THE SPLC HATE GROUP LIST

The SPLC hate group designation has generated objections not only from members and spokespersons of the designated groups but also objections from progressive writers and public intellectuals. Representatives of the listed groups have largely dismissed with sarcasm the action of the SPLC or advanced claims that the SPLC's expansion of hate group designation in itself

constitutes an assault on free speech and an attempt to censor long-standing religious, philosophical, and ideological arguments that the SPLC has been unable to win on the merits. Some progressive writers have echoed these free speech concerns, but have also noted that the SPLC's strategy of hate group designation could backfire, raising the prestige and profile of these groups and making them less fringe groups and more targets of advanced political support, as evidenced by the response of incoming Republican congressmen to the SPLC's November 2010 statement. However, reaction from the Evangelical Christian community was perhaps more muted than one might expect, with one prominent author suggesting that the SPLC's claims that listed groups engaged in campaigns to disseminate disinformation about LGBT people were often accurate.

The new groups added to the SPLC hate list responded vigorously and sarcastically to their listing, attacking the neutrality of the SPLC and mockingly congratulating one another for their "achievement" in being named to the hate list. Following the release of the 2010 SPLC hate list, Barbara Anderson of the Minnesota Family Council stated, "I think it's becoming perhaps a badge of honor to be called a hate group," while Peter LaBarbera, founder of Americans for Truth about Homosexuality, stated, "If you are not on the SPLC hate list, you are not doing enough" (Mantyla, 2010).

Conversely, progressive activists concerned about free speech have criticized the SPLC for this expansion of the hate list. Writing in *The Atlantic* in 2010, civil libertarian and 1993 Guggenheim Fellow Wendy Kaminer maintained that people have full rights of free expression, including freedom to express hatreds, and that claimed emotional rights to feel safe and secure from hate speech are simply the exercise of power plays:

. . . these assertions of emotional rights are simple political power plays aimed at silencing opponents. (The Southern Poverty Law Center demonstrated the partisan uses of hate speech doctrine last week when it labeled the anti-gay Family Research Council a hate group.) In part, the subordination of one person's freedom of speech and belief to another's emotional well-being is an ideological stance: It reflects the morally immodest assumption that right thinking people can rightly discern and should be empowered to define the legal limits of acceptable discourse for everyone else (Kaminer, 2010).

A very different perspective was taken by Warren Throckmorton, a Christian psychologist who has asserted that homosexual orientation can be changed. Throckmorton's surprising response to the 2010 SPLC hate list cautioned Christian churches and church members against a defensive reaction and made several observations:

One should be able to trust Christian groups to provide accurate information and nuanced analysis. However, on issues relating to sexual orientation, I cannot trust them. For me, this lack of trust spills over to other domains as well, creating a significant problem with credibility. I hope my fellow believers will not defend these claims simply because those making them are Christians . . .

Worries over free speech (e.g., Wendy Kaminer) are also distractions. The SPLC cannot stop these groups from misusing data or proclaiming their views. However, the SPLC can exercise free speech to criticize misleading assertions. . .

Reviewing the charges leveled against the Christian groups, I think their responses are mostly unfortunate and unhelpful. The SPLC has identified some issues which are legitimate and have damaged the credibility of the groups on the list. Going forward, I hope Christians don't rally around these groups but rather call them to accountability ([Throckmorton, 2010](#)).

Within a couple of years of the increased attention to the SPLC expanded hate list, Floyd Lee Corkins II would discover the list while Internet searching and use it to target the Family Research Council for violence, shooting a security guard in the arm on August 15, 2012, in the organization's Washington headquarters. While the majority of the "new" additions to the 2010 SPLC hate list had actually already been listed previously, media attention to the Corkins attack drove even more attention to the hate group list and suggests that careful analysis of the potential strengths and weaknesses of this strategy is needed given the many developments of the past few years.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF APPEALING TO HATE GROUP DESIGNATIONS FOR SOCIAL ADVOCACY

The recent scholarly literature on hate group self-definition is not discordant with the SPLC's hate list expansion; given the expansion of Internet access and technology, a wide variety of extremist groups have reframed themselves as civic education or religious groups with a large online presence. Another question might be framed as simply: Does hate group designation "work" for LGBT interest groups? Does it have measurable and demonstrable effects or suggest ways to engage community stakeholders and allies in new ways? More research is needed in this area, but recent evidence suggests that being listed as a hate group can drive community engagement and activism among opposing activist groups that alters the social behavior of large corporations. In July of 2011, Ben Crowther of Seattle, Washington, started an online petition at Change.org requesting that Apple drop the "Christian Values Network" (CVN) from iTunes unless CVN was willing to drop five affiliates who were

listed on SPLC's list of hate groups. CVN refused to do so, and Apple dropped CVN from iTunes, while other businesses such as Microsoft, Macy's, REI, Delta Airlines, BBC America, and Wells Fargo dropped out of CVN's sales network as well (Peckham, 2011).

Was this a victory for LGBT rights? One could argue that it was, on both a symbolic and pragmatic level; while the magnitude of the displacement of antigay vendors from iTunes may be relatively small, it has an incremental and iterative possibility of calling forth new, similar activist petitions (as evidenced by so many other businesses also dropping the CVN without being petitioned to do so). However, the success of the Change.org petition raises several questions as to whether online activism which appeals to the SPLC hate list as a standard will help drive new forms of community engagement and activism. Several potential strengths and weaknesses of this approach can be identified.

Strengths of Appealing to Hate Group Designation for Social Advocacy

Strengths of appeals to hate group designation for social advocacy in online activism include its ease and affordability—Crowther's petition held no economic cost to post and enjoyed rapid dissemination across the large and active Change.org online community. Licoppe and Smoreda (2005) suggest technology is changing communication styles and social network interactions; the technological convenience of intermittently reaching someone separated by distance has been superseded by ongoing "mutual reachability" and "connected presence" (p. 317). In this sense the ease of appeals to online petitions using the SPLC hate list align well with contemporary Internet usage by young members of the community of gay rights allies who seem easily engage-able via technology and social networking.

Appeals to the SPLC hate list also seem to enjoy significant political legitimacy. The SPLC is a venerable organization known for its civil rights history and, based on its publicly available IRS Form 990 filings, has doubled in assets over the past decade despite frequent recession and economic decline to become a quarter-billion dollar organization. Despite rather flippant dismissals of the SPLC as partisan, it seems to enjoy significant legitimacy and acceptance as a civil rights organization. Tracking antigay disinformation on the updated hate list is a small part of the SPLC's work; the bulk of the SPLC's work on violent and/or criminal hate groups lends it an air of gravitas and public service. As Arent (1999) points out, part of the SPLC's work includes defending religious people against anti-religious discrimination, so it is much more difficult to claim credibly that the SPLC is an anti-religious group or biased against religion.

Hate group designation of antigay disinformation groups via online activism also offers an ideologically satisfying outlet for gay rights activists

and allies opposed to the status quo of sparse LGBT legal and social protections. This strategy can be framed as a type of ironic outing, in which groups claiming to be family service organizations are “outed” as hate groups that share characteristics in common with other much more reviled groups. This strategy offers the possibility of “flipping the script” in order to presuppose and legitimize gay rights as normal and inevitable, and develop strategies that reinforce the presupposition of gay normality and inevitability of equality. This new arena creates new possibilities for mobilizing social action that flips the old in-group, now revealed as an extremist hate group, into the new out-group which is publicly repudiated. Activists are motivated by an increasing sense of the legitimacy of their cause as well as by incremental successes and growing social acceptance.

Finally, on a political level, online petitions as a form of community engagement of LGBT allies serve to keep open a political arena that is not dependent on litigation or legislative action; there is no impending court decision or vote to decide the LGBT rights issue under contention, but simply a political mobilization battle to win supporters one click and one dollar at a time. The Christian Values Network is as welcome to lobby major corporations with online petitions as Ben Crowther of Seattle, Washington, or any other individual is, and no actor in this scenario is seeking judicial or legislative relief or compulsion to force corporations to comply with one appeal or another. Given the popularity of appeals to the free market in U.S. politics, this strategy seems especially well aligned to public policy preferences favoring free expression, without facing the natural or logical end of other policy processes which result in a final decision with clear winners and losers.

Weaknesses of Appealing to Hate Group Designation for Social Advocacy

However, progressive scholars and activists have sounded an alarm on several aspects of “clicktivism” and relatively passive online activism in which all an individual is asked to do is electronically sign a petition (often by pointing and clicking a computer mouse), or at most to donate money electronically at the same time as signing a petition. [Shulman \(2009\)](#) refers to Mancur [Olson's seminal \(1965\)](#) analysis of the logic of collective action to argue that this practice gives rise to perverse incentives that conspire to limit the amount and power of political mobilization possible. Olson argued that political mobilization is easier in small groups, but that as groups grow in size they must navigate a free rider problem in which less active members of the group can enjoy the same political successes of the group despite making less of a contribution. As groups discipline the free rider problem and require work from members, there are fewer incentives to be a member of a large group unless incentives are specific and particular to individual interests, and thus large groups become less able to act in their common interest than small and

specialized groups. The ease of clicking in an electronic petition increases group size quickly, as Change.org petitions demonstrate, but [Shulman \(2009\)](#) argues that thousands of generic petitions result in low-quality appeals which actually diminish the power of a smaller group of thoughtful petitioners to be heard and make the petition's argument in a powerful, well-reasoned way. [Emery and Emery \(2005\)](#) similarly argue that masses of online petitions may soon be considered electronic junk mail, which is no longer considered to be linked to meaningful or thoughtful content at all, and may easily precipitate an "arms race" (p. 8) to send amassed, ever unread petitions and crowd out meaningful debate on the nuances of an issue.

White (2010) has argued even more strongly that online activism may serve to trumpet apparent successes that might only be short-term in nature and may work to displace more valuable, personal activism by creating new online "clicktivist" habits that to the newly mobilized seem like true activism. White argues further that progressive nonprofit organizations that espouse online activist endeavors fall unthinkingly into the "ideology of marketing" and the logic of the marketplace, treating those partially mobilized as consumers rather than as citizens.

Finally, several writers have highlighted the corporate and for-profit structure of the Internet and the lack of an online form of public service media on the lines of National Public Radio or the Public Broadcasting System to be a looming danger to community engagement through online activism. [Moe \(2008\)](#) suggests that the lack of public service online media that could protect public and minority interests means it is difficult to avoid corporate "enclosure" (p. 321), where commercial interests are able to control and restrict what online content is available, such as by removing online petitions or redirecting links so that they privilege content also owned or controlled by that firm or conglomerate. [Dahlberg \(2005\)](#) similarly has highlighted the danger of "corporate colonization" (p. 160) of the Internet and limitation of what ideas and debates are possible. [Dahlberg \(2007\)](#) echoes White's concerns in noting that while activists may gravitate toward online social action, "the Internet [also] facilitates administrative power, flows of capital, liberal-consumer logics, and the extension of all sorts of conservative and reactionary elements" (p. 59).

Finally, the Corkins attack on the Family Research Council suggests the potential for serious problems alongside rapid online media consumption and advocacy. [Michael \(2013\)](#) suggests that "the new media have the potential to rapidly polarize segments of society and create a charged atmosphere conducive to violence" (p. 58). He emphasizes that Corkins' attack rapidly followed statements opposing same-sex marriage made by Chick-Fil-A president Dan Cathy, which occurred in a magazine interview in July 2012; Corkins left 15 Chick-Fil-A sandwiches at the attack site ([Martin, 2012](#)). In the space of a month of intense online and media discussion on a controversial topic, an individual insurgency of violent activity emerged offline

that could not be predicted or contained. The ease of online advocacy and the responsiveness of corporations to online petitions exist alongside less orderly and less respectful forms of social media that easily descend into vitriol and potentially influence offline violence.

In addition to the possible risks of Internet-fueled, idiosyncratic violence, it is possible that flare-ups of intense, online media debate such as the hate group update or the Chick-Fil-A controversy become more trouble than they are worth and reduce the overall efficiency of online advocacy. Being added to something like the hate group list could actually be a “win-win” for both parties. The listed “hate group” receives recognition and can gain more support from its base even as the “hated group” can “out” them and also gain further support. This was perhaps evident in the Chick-Fil-A controversy of the summer of 2012, when “Chick-Fil-A Appreciation Day” drew record crowds and record sales for the restaurant chain (Hunter & Thomas, 2012). Rapid polarization, even when it avoids violence, simply might not be effective or useful if it drives a windfall of support to opponents and legitimizes opponents’ messaging.

Moreover, the glare of sharpened media attention may ultimately water down the strength of what victories activists are able to achieve. For example, while the SPLC ultimately won a legal settlement in 2011 against the Anoka-Hennepin school district in Minnesota after “alleging that the school’s policies regarding sexual orientation led to an epidemic of anti-gay and gender-based harassment” (Orel, 2013, p. 579), this settlement only affects that solitary school district. Furthermore, in meeting the terms of the settlement consent decree to establish an anti-bullying task force, the Anoka Hennepin school district in 2012 appointed a member of the Parents Action League, a group on the SPLC hate list, to that task force. Orel (2013, p. 602) suggests this casts “serious doubt on [the school’s district’s] ability to self-monitor” compliance with the consent decree in ways satisfactory to the advocates who sued in the first place.

DISCUSSION

Online activism may be relatively similar to existing advocacy strategies. Karpf (2010) has argued that online e-mails have often simply replaced the masses of paper petitions once assiduously gathered by activists on street corners, and so the difference in such passive activism is really one of degree rather than of kind (i.e., stopping on a sidewalk to sign a proffered petition versus clicking a petition on one’s home computer). Karpf further suggests that these online appeals are far from single-minded campaigns but simply one tactic among many, and that the egalitarianism of the Internet may actually be a method to counteract the dearth of activism across social class divides that has aroused significant concern (Skocpol, 2003). Chattopadhyay

(2011) has suggested that such online activity is really a type of intentional “surrogate activism” (p. 65) rather than a thoughtless decline in or withdrawal from more interpersonal efforts. In short, [Karpf \(2010\)](#) and [Chattopadhyay \(2011\)](#) suggest that “clicktivism” may be a way for allies to accompany and echo the concerned of more deeply involved activists rather than replacing these deeper efforts.

Recent research supports other aspects of online activism. A recent survey of nonprofits such as the American Civil Liberties Union and the National Association of Social Workers found that these organizations reported using social media on a daily basis to communicate with and alert supporters to important issues quickly ([Obar, Zube, & Lampe, 2012](#)). [Lee and Hsieh \(2013\)](#) found that online petition signers were more likely to donate money to similar causes while those who declined to sign online petitions donated money to dissimilar causes, suggesting that “clicktivists” may not engage in more interpersonal efforts but do not withdraw from further civic action. [Lim and Ting \(2011\)](#) emphasize that the sheer speed of cyber activism rapidly affects the ability for social marketing campaigns to achieve their goals.

This article has argued that in controversially adding new organizations to its annual hate list, the SPLC has reframed challenges to LGBT rights by reframing the concept of hatred to align with how contemporary technological capabilities expand the reach of politically mobilized groups. The reframing of hatred beyond physical aggression to include dangerous disinformation and verbal violence has broadened the field of contestation for advocates of LGBT rights, while the updates of the SPLC hate group list have challenged the abilities of discriminatory groups to maintain their typical public image as religious or educational associations in an information-driven society. Groups that have claimed the family as their special concern are going through what might be considered a process of ironic outing, in which they become targets for social action by civil rights advocates who use hate list designation to “out” these groups as extreme and lobby these groups’ organizational partners to disavow them. New forms of social advocacy utilizing hate group designation and convenient technologies are flipping the script so that groups that focus their ire on out-groups such as LGBT people are now being successfully labeled as out-groups themselves.

There is an inevitable tension between pluralist political processes which mobilize large numbers of activists and the desire for consensus on the social contract and basic societal values acceptable to all. [Dryzek and Niemeyer \(2006\)](#) emphasize the importance of normative meta-consensus, that when unable to achieve consensus or negotiated agreement on the type of values that should predominate in a society, there is at least recognition of the legitimacy of disputing values, but they note that this is especially difficult to achieve in adversarial processes such as Anglo-American politics where a normal tactic is to disparage the legitimacy of opponents. [Dryzek and Niemeyer \(2006\)](#) also suggest that politically active Evangelical Christians

may experience “a visceral clash of identities that often find[s] validation in denial of the identity of others . . . their identity in particular required validation through denial of gay identity” (p. 640). They note that normative meta-consensus may not be out of reach between Evangelical Christian and LGBT activists when rhetoric can be broken through to show the underlying assumptions both LGBT activists and Evangelicals hold in common and make them explicit.

In the case of the SPLC and the groups on the hate list, the underlying consensus may well be limited to the implied legitimacy of the rhetoric itself. Each side implicitly recognizes the right of the other to mobilize the marketplace of potential supporters; the broad appeals for public support and the lack of emphasis on lawsuits and countersuits suggest that legal or judicial recourse has been mostly ruled out or at least tabled in favor of continued public jousting to win tangible pieces of support in the form of influencing corporate social action. The game is played one piece at a time, and mobilizing LGBT allies to sign online petitions serve as one new piece with which to win incremental victories.

However, the tragedy of the Floyd Lee Corkins attack on the Family Research Council may in fact highlight an important meta-consensus against violence. While LGBT advocacy groups such as the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force were once one of the relatively few groups aside from the SPLC that monitored anti-gay violence (Lawrence, 1999), recent research culls data from public sources, advocacy groups, and extremist groups to monitor anti-LGBT violence (Gruenewald, 2012). Furthermore, as Human Rights Campaign president Chad Griffin notes, both proponents and opponents of LGBT rights are generally united on the issue of using violence against one another: “No matter one’s political views, we can all agree that acts of violence are never justified and should always be condemned” (Griffin, 2012). At the same time, Griffin also publicly agreed with the rationale of the SPLC that disseminating dangerous disinformation about minority groups should be considered hateful: “Calling for the expulsion of gays from this country is hateful, as is arguing for making homosexuality a crime . . . claiming the mantle of ‘deeply held religious beliefs’ is no excuse for propagating lies that denigrate an entire group of people” (Griffin, 2012). The SPLC hate group list continues to influence how LGBT advocates understand their political conditions and chances for success.

Future research should consider how social justice organizations and LGBT advocacy groups can extend their advocacy efforts by using “clicktivism” and appealing to reasoned arguments of what practices constitute hate that can be lobbied against. While social work advocacy groups have sometimes provided supporters with information on how to contact political decision makers, they have rarely used easily available online technology that could directly link supporters to these political figures (Edwards &

Hoefler, 2010). Although many human service organizations report engaging in a wide variety of political advocacy strategies, their activity tends to be highly professionalized (Mosley, 2010), with large organizational size and dependence on government funding predicting increased use of insider advocacy tactics such as participating in regulation revision or serving on government committees (Mosley, 2011). Knowledge of laws governing lobbying by nonprofits actually decreased the odds of advocacy participation by nonprofit human service organizations in one recent study (Mellinger & Kolomer, 2013). Residents of communities accept community-based organizations as legitimate representatives of their communities when they see these agencies producing tangible results and engaging in extensive communication with the community (Mosley & Grogan, 2012). Online communication and activism seems a natural way for these agencies to become even more community-based and to organize their stakeholders to support shared goals in ways that produce the type of tangible results (such as Apple's iTunes decision to disavow listed hate groups) that community members expect of their agencies. As others have warned, the failure of social work advocacy groups to use online advocacy will put them at a disadvantage compared to opposing groups (McNutt & Menon, 2008).

This article has been an attempt to see the context beyond the narrative in recent attempts at community engagement via online petitions for LGBT rights. Future research should continue to track movement in online endeavors to mobilize activism for particular causes, especially monitoring the long-term durability of these advocacy strategies. Social justice and human service organizations seeking to improve their general online literacy and communication strategies with their supporters have little to lose by piloting online advocacy efforts, generating their own practice-based evidence, and evaluating the results of their work.

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