

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION ARTS AND SCIENCES

THE RHETORICAL SITUATION AND PENN STATE: APOLOGIES, EMOTIONS,
AND THE CALL FOR UNITY

REBECCA ANNE ALT
SPRING 2013

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for a baccalaureate degree
in Communication Arts and Sciences
with honors in Communication Arts and Sciences

Reviewed and approved* by the following:

Jeremy Engels
Associate Professor of Communication Arts and Sciences
Thesis Supervisor

Lori Bedell
Senior Lecturer in Communication Arts and Sciences
Honors Adviser

* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.

ABSTRACT

This thesis serves to critically examine the Rhetorical Situation at The Pennsylvania State University in the wake of what has been named “The Jerry Sandusky Scandal.”

Specifically, the functions of this project are, (1) to dissect, identify, and explain the unique parts of the Rhetorical Situation (exigence, audience, and constraints) at Penn State in the initial two weeks after the news broke nationally (Nov 5-20), (2) examine and criticize the many texts from several particular audiences that make up the “Fitting Response” part of the rhetorical situation, and (3) apply several rhetorical constructs derived from existing literature and theory to the situation as to better understand the specific chain of events and their rhetorical significance. This essay utilizes ancient and contemporary rhetorical theory to provide a thorough rhetorical criticism of the textual evidence provided by the audiences of Penn State Administrators, Penn State students, and Penn State faculty, specifically the Academic College Deans. While the focus of the criticism is on a short-two week timeline of events and texts, that specific period of time serves as a microcosm to understanding the rhetorical action at Penn State as a whole in the aftermath of shock and disaster. Research questions include (1) does the rhetoric of this scandal fit into a pre-existing rhetorical category or genre, and (2) how has this rhetoric impacted Penn State University—both the institution and its people?

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	iii
Introduction An Exigence for Understanding.....	1
Chapter 1 Background: The Rhetorical Situation and the Sandusky Scandal	9
Chapter 2 The Fitting Response: Crisis, <i>Apologia</i> and the Penn State Administration	15
Chapter 3 The Fitting Response: Rhetorical Penn State Students: Visual Rhetorics of Emotion.....	33
Chapter 4 Rhetorical Deans and the Call for Unity	49
Conclusion A New Exigence	60
Appendix A Fitting Response Timeline.....	65
BIBLIOGRAPHY	66

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the support of my thesis adviser, Jeremy Engels, and my honors adviser, Lori Bedell. When news of the Sandusky Case went viral last November, I saw an opportunity to observe and make sense of the reactions of administrators, students, and faculty through the theories that informed my undergraduate education and study of rhetoric. I saw an opportunity to contribute to both the public and academic conversations. I also saw an opportunity to reflect on the events that I witnessed here on the University Park campus, the feelings of pride I possess for this university, and the very serious issues of sexual assault and sexual violence. Jeremy and Lori enthusiastically encouraged me to pursue the project, and when I had my doubts about it, they reminded me of my purpose and my potential.

The Department of Communication Arts and Sciences provided an excellent education in communication theory and specifically in rhetorical theory. This foundation significantly helped me to succeed with this project. Each course I have taken in the department has contributed to this thesis in important ways. The brilliant faculty members instilled in me a rich understanding of rhetoric and its many societal and cultural effects.

I would be remiss to not acknowledge the resources of the Penn State Libraries, and especially the wonderful and resourceful Emily Rimland, CAS Librarian. Emily helped me to succeed in finding primary sources to analyze (such as President Erickson's speeches) as well as research literature. When my project was at a standstill, the resources of the University Libraries helped me to turn my wheels again.

Although no one affiliated with Penn State is happy for the negative impacts the Sandusky Case has had on this university, I am grateful for the amazing and rich pool of rhetorical action that inspired this thesis.

Introduction

An Exigence for Understanding

To fully process and understand the scope and implications of the Jerry Sandusky Sex Abuse Scandal at the Pennsylvania State University is a daunting undertaking.¹ The remarkable catastrophe affected the university at every possible level, both on institutional and personal levels, and consequently, the disaster can be and has been studied from a variety of scholarly perspectives: crime and punishment, political, educational, legal, psychological, philosophical, and, perhaps most profoundly, the perspective of communication. Scholars have examined and written on Penn State's "culture of silence," and "football worship"; through the lenses of athletic scandals; media and public relations; institutional corruption; the legal intricacies of the horrendous crimes committed by former assistant coach Jerry Sandusky and the subsequent institutional handling of the knowledge of those crimes; the public relations disaster the university suffered; and the serious connections this phenomenon reflects in the larger

¹ Former Penn State assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky was charged and found guilty of 45 of 48 counts of sexual assault spanning over 15 years. Former Penn State President Graham Spanier, former Athletic Director Tim Curley, and former vice president Gary Shultz were charged with perjury during the investigation of the former coach. All parties involved constitute the "Penn State" or "Jerry Sandusky Scandal," and the public release of that information occurred on November 5, 2011. This scandal ended the 46-year tenure of former hero and head football coach Joe Paterno, crippling the Penn State football program known for excellence on and off the field, and damaging the reputation of Penn State—the institution and the body of people associated with it—forever.

American society and issues of child abuse, rape, and corruption of universities that hide despicable truths to preserve their label.²

It has been precisely the magnitude and personal relevance of the Sandusky/Penn State Scandal that provided exigence for this project. As a current undergraduate student at Penn State experiencing the initial “disaster” throughout the first weeks, months, and year of its prevalence as a hot-button issue, the experience has prompted a motivation in me to *understand* it. As I mentioned in the first sentence of this introduction, I, nor anyone, will ever *fully* understand the true nature and consequences—or the fundamental truths that will be questioned for a long time—of the scandal that rocked the foundation of Penn State irrevocably; however, with the applicable knowledge I have gained as a student and critic of rhetoric, the scandal became a significant rhetorical phenomenon to explore and analyze. Thoughtfully dissected in other disciplines, as previously mentioned, at this time (to my knowledge), there is not much—if any—rhetorical analysis regarding the Jerry Sandusky Scandal within the context of the Pennsylvania State University.

This project is a rhetorical criticism. The purpose of a rhetorical criticism is to examine a text—in truly any form, speech, writing, visual, mediated—and to explain what is there, rhetorically. A criticism not only displays the rhetorical nature of texts, but also interprets and judges their arguments in regards to a range of current theory.

First and foremost, the focus of my rhetorical criticism is at the stasis of definition.³ My purpose is not simply to explain and detail the events that happened, but

² See Aaron Levin, "Penn State Scandal Draws Attention to Child Sexual Abuse." *Psychiatric News*, 46, no. 24 (2011): p. 14; and Danielle Drolet, "Scandal Continues to Test Penn State Comms." *PRweek* 14, no. 12 (2011): 6-6, for just two examples of many.

to give those events a name: a rhetorical definition. Then, by applying a range of theory and scholarship to the Sandusky Scandal at Penn State, I hope to provide a deeper rhetorical understanding of precisely the scope and magnitude of the situation and to analyze the texts with rhetorical theory. Further, because the scandal has not been studied through a rhetorical lens, a subsequent aim is to enter the academic conversation on what will be a hot-button topic and mysterious phenomenon for years to come by offering an unexplored perspective.

The “rhetorical perspective” is that of examining symbolic action—textual analysis—and the consequences and implications of that symbolic action. The rhetorical lens displays not just the “what happened,” but also explores the exigence, the audience, and the constraints. The rhetorical lens helps to understand what happened through theory and criticism. I hope to provide insight into “the Penn State bubble” and to what truly happened here at Penn State—rhetorically. The rhetorical perspective is unique because it examines events and discourse from the interpretive angles of fact, definition, cause, consequence, and proposal. The rhetorical perspective allows for more than one interpretation; what follows in the rest of this essay is my own.

With those true aims in mind, I would like to explain the non-purposes of this project. First and foremost, my aim is not to absolve Penn State University (as an institution) and its leaders of guilt or shame. Secondly, I am no apologist: nowhere in this essay will you find claims to justify the actions that happened at every level of the university—including the student level, which will be discussed in chapter 3. Further, this

³ The body of Hellenistic rhetorical constructs birthed Stasis Theory, specifically Hermagoras, but Cicero expanded upon the system in *De Inventione*. Stasis theory is a four-step process (fact, definition, quality, procedure) used as tool for analyses. When it was conceptualized, it was used as a tool for analyzing court cases.

project is not an autobiography, a memoir, or a series of personal anecdotes. Although my personal experience naturally appear in the process of explaining rhetorical action I witnessed and researched at Penn State, that personal experience is only meant to add a dimension of ethos to my research and analysis, and not to be read as a story of how I felt or how the aforementioned events have affected me as a human being.⁴ Finally, this examination will not focus stases of fact, value, cause, or procedure, although the stasis of fact will surely appear as a contextual element to the analysis I perform.⁵

What rhetorical action occurred on the part of the students, faculty and staff, administration, alumni, and community members, and what should it be called? Those were the driving questions of this project, and the questions I have spent over a year gathering and analyzing evidence to answer. In addition to the discovery of that rhetorical action, I have scrupulously analyzed those examples through a variety of rhetorical constructs both classical and contemporary, such as Aristotelian, Bitzeran, and Burkean schematics, to name only a few, to define the rhetorical action in appropriate terms. Again, the ultimate question is not what happened, rhetorically, at Penn State, but rather, what do we call it, in rhetorical understanding? This question has challenged me and served as the impetus to this project. My aim is to define and classify the rhetorical phenomena resulting from the Penn State/Jerry Sandusky Scandal.⁶

⁴ As a current undergraduate student at Penn State, the Scandal has indeed affected me in ways that are hard to explain, yet very simple. However, I have used my proximity—both literal and figurative—to the situation to examine it from a different perspective than the other scholarly work that I mentioned.

⁵ The body of Hellenistic rhetorical constructs birthed Stasis Theory, specifically Hermagoras, but Cicero expanded upon the system in *De Inventione*.

⁶ While the naming of this rhetorical event is a controversial debate, for the purposes of simplicity and brevity, I will refer to this sometimes as “The Scandal.”

Methodologically speaking, my research was primarily ethnographical and conducted critically.⁷ As the scandal continues to proliferate the news and public conversation, the focused time frame is very specific and relatively short. This rhetorical analysis examines rhetorical events that occurred within the initial two weeks following November 5, 2011: the day news of the scandal went public and viral.⁸ Throughout those two weeks, texts were gathered for this project, such as those from administrators, faculty, and students.

This thesis builds from the Lloyd Bitzer’s theory of “the rhetorical situation” broadly and narrows its scope to specific rhetorical situation audiences. Chapter one defines the rhetorical situation at Penn State, and the subsequent chapters detail the “fitting responses” from every relevant audience of the situation.

Chapter one provides a detailed, yet brief background of the rhetorical situation at Penn State during the two-week time frame in question. With the framework of Lloyd Bitzer as a guide to understanding November 5, 2011 and the two weeks following, I describe the exigence at Penn State: the underlying urgencies for Penn State “people” (the audience) to *say* or *do* something—anything—to a community, nation, and world questioning who Penn State is— “what does ‘WE ARE’ mean now?”⁹ Several constraints

⁷ I classify my research as “ethnography” because I was examining the situation from an internal perspective—as a current student. My unique perspective allowed me to participate in the culture while simultaneously studying it from a critical perspective. By “critical,” I mean scrutinizing; I was not simply journaling events and collecting texts, my purpose was to analyze and to classify what I found. With that said, this project is very much a rhetorical criticism.

⁸ For a summarized timeline of events, see Appendix A.

⁹ “We Are!” is Penn State’s notable and unifying chant. For years it has been shouted during football games and symbolized athletic prowess and school pride. The scandal caused those associated with Penn State to question the meaning.

inhibited the many acting rhetors from addressing the urgency properly, such as absolute shock, media smothering, the magnitude of the problem, and an utter lack of answers and unified truth about what happened. A detailed timeline of events can be found in the appendix. Near the end of chapter one, I introduce the topics of the following chapters, all which describe the “fitting responses” to the rhetorical situation at Penn State.¹⁰ These responses were discovered within administration, staff, faculty, alumni, community members (“fans” of the university or local residents), and perhaps most importantly and resonantly, the current (undergraduate) students and student-leaders.

Chapter two focuses on the fitting response and rhetorical artifacts of the administration and staff of the university. Items such as emails, public statements/address, letters, and speeches from then-interim University President Rodney Erikson, the Board of Trustees, and other prominent university administrators are published and analyzed. Theoretical lenses of analysis include the leadership and presidential rhetorical theories such as *apologia*, atonement, and “commander in chief” theories, all with significant Aristotelian slants. This particular part of the rhetorical analysis draws parallels with political and war discourse as well as organizational crisis communication and management.

Chapter three contains a thorough account and description of the rhetorical Penn State students—undergraduate students, specifically. As a student during this time, my connection and identification with this chapter is significant and personal. Texts for analysis include visual displays: the student riot of November 9th, the Candlelight Vigil of

¹⁰ L. Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 1. (1968). “The Fitting Response” is the answer to the rhetorical problem, but only the audience with the power to make an impact create the fitting response.

November 11, rallies on the steps of Old Main, the “Blue Out” football game, signage, art, and multi-media rhetorics such as videos posted on the internet. Student speech(es) by former student body-president TJ Bard and other students will also be considered for analysis; however access to the primary texts was unfortunately limited and one of many challenges in this project. This chapter is reified with emotional analysis, and aims to illustrate the ways in which Penn State students rhetorically expressed their feelings of shock, hysteria, confusion, and disappointment. Aristotle, David Konstan, and visual rhetorical theories such as Lawrence Prelli’s drive this chapter.¹¹

Chapter four investigates rhetorical activity of the Penn State faculty, specifically the discourse of the Academic College Deans. The deans from the various academic colleges across campus (i.e. the College of the Liberal Arts, the College of Communications, etc.) each addressed their students via email, and a compilation of their messages and accompanying analysis is included in chapter four’s analysis.

The final section concludes by classifying this rhetorical event as a whole and synthesizes the preceding chapters, ultimately asserting that Penn State’s rhetoric was and is rhetoric of emotion and crisis. How can this rhetoric be classified into a greater rhetorical genre or tradition (or sub-genre)? I argue that this qualifies as a subgenre of crisis rhetoric, fitting into the broader epideictic setting.

Additionally, I draw larger conclusions driven by my analysis. Rhetoric is a powerful force in human nature, and I argue that what happened at Penn State—not just the events, but the resulting rhetorical action—had significant impacts not only on the

¹¹ Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* Book III discusses emotions significantly; David Konstan provides thorough explanation and interpretation of Aristotle’s discussion in *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks*; Lawrence Prelli provides a holistic discussion of Visual Rhetorics in his volume *Rhetorics of Display*.

university but on a national if not global scale. The impacts on the university are not small; in fact, those impacts changed the former powerhouse institution forever.

I would be remiss if I ignored the rhetorical happenings following the specific dates of the project and didn't mention the rhetorical action that did not make the cut for whatever reason in this analysis. I include, in the conclusion, commentary on those rhetorical happenings that I did not mention in the subsequent chapters and outline some major rhetorical events that happened during the 2012-2013 year(s), thus bringing the analysis (somewhat) to the present and asserting a more retrospective and reflective argument on the impact of the rhetoric of those two weeks in November 2011.

Chapter 1

Background: The Rhetorical Situation and the Sandusky Scandal

The Pennsylvania State University has been recognized as one of the premier institutions of higher education in the United States.¹² Known for its competitive academics and high-achieving students and alumni, Penn State has also exuded a culture of football worship since former head coach and “legend” Joe Paterno’s early days at the university. Annual “white-outs,” alcohol consumption at tailgates, sports bars—the list goes on—contributed to the reputation of Penn State being “the greatest show in college football.”¹³ Penn State seemed to have it all: challenging and nationally ranking academics, a football program with a clean NCAA record, a quaint, yet lively community blending both students and residents of State College—or, “Happy Valley,” and most importantly, a shared sense of identity. People from all walks of life, cultures, and geographic locations are forever linked to each other through their university pride and a

¹² See “World University Rankings 2012-2013,” TimesHigherEd.co.uk., last modified 2012, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2012-13/world-ranking>; Maddy Pryor, “Penn State Ranks in top 50 World Universities,” *OnwardState.com* (blog), August 17, 2012 (6:00 a.m.), <http://onwardstate.com/2012/08/17/penn-state-ranks-in-the-top-50-universities-in-the-world/>; “Top 200 World Universities: THE Rankings,” telegraph.co.uk, last modified October 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/universityeducation/9584034/Top-200-world-universities-THE-rankings.html>.

¹³ See Keith Tofte, “Football Culture is Diseased,” *The Daily Collegian*, 11 November 2011, Opinion. http://www.collegian.psu.edu/archive/2011/11/11/football_culture_is_diseased.aspx.

shared sense of commitment to the university, and more specifically, the ideal of excellence that Penn State has been esteemed for throughout many generations.¹⁴

Penn State's culture and identity have generally remained a mystery to those who try to understand Penn State in the context of the Jerry Sandusky scandal. It is not my aim to discover the answer to that mystery in this essay; rather, my aim is to analyze the Jerry Sandusky scandal through a rhetorical lens in order to illustrate the impact the scandal has had on Penn State's self-identity, national identity, and the significant larger conversations that became commonplace around kitchen and coffee tables in the days and weeks after the initial news; these conversations will likely remain prominent for years to come.

November 4, 2011 was the last of "normal" days at Penn State. On November 4, the campus bustled with students on their way to classes, to get coffee or lunch, or enjoying the beautiful fall weather in Central Pennsylvania. All was well in the "Penn State Bubble," as it has been known as, and the bubble's inhabitants were content.¹⁵

That contentment would change to confusion, anger, resentment, disappointment, and sadness just a mere day later. On November 5, the very world of Penn State was turned on its head as the community learned of the horrendous (then alleged) crimes of

¹⁴The phrase "Success With Honor" has been one of the most used mantras of the Penn State community. This mantra was developed by Joe Paterno and his "Grand Experiment," deriving from the quote "Success without honor is an unseasoned dish; it will satisfy your hunger, but it won't taste good." For an early reporting of this mantra, see Ralph Bernstein, "'Grand Experiment' Paying Off For Joe Paterno and Unbeaten Team," *Gettysburg Times*, 20 Nov 1968, Sports.

¹⁵The "Penn State Bubble" is oftentimes how members of the Penn State community describe their perceived isolation from reality. State College and Penn State are collectively referred to as "Happy Valley," insinuating that Penn State is a place with very few problems and very much to be happy about. Those outside of this "bubble" have acknowledged the "bubble" attitude as being disconnected from the realities that other universities live in—and to some extent, isolation from national and world realities, too.

sexual assault committed by former—and formerly revered—assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky. Due to Penn State’s national image and brand, this was not a local scandal, and its consequences were magnificent.¹⁶ The very essence of Penn State’s “grand experiment” and highly exceptional reputation were rocked to the core.¹⁷

The chain of events immediately following that day—and including that day itself—constitute the Rhetorical Situation at Penn State. To describe this Rhetorical Situation, I must begin with an explanation of Lloyd Bitzer’s theory—the driving impetus of this project—and apply the constructs I introduce to the situation of the Sandusky Scandal at Penn State.

The Rhetorical Situation Examined

Lloyd Bitzer claimed that what makes discourse rhetorical is the situation that contextualizes it:

To say that rhetoric is situational means: (1) rhetorical discourse comes into existence as a response to situation, in the same sense that an answer comes into existence in response to a question, or a solution in response to a problem; (2) a speech is given rhetorical significance by the situation, just as a unit of discourse is given significance as answer or as solution by the question or problem; (3) a rhetorical situation must exist as a necessary condition of rhetorical discourse, just as a question must exist as a necessary condition of an answer; (4) many questions go unanswered and many problems remain unsolved; similarly, many rhetorical situations mature and decay without giving birth to rhetorical utterance; (5) a situation is rhetorical insofar as it needs and invites discourse capable of participating with situation and thereby altering its reality; (6) discourse is rhetorical insofar as it functions (or seeks to function) as a fitting response to a

¹⁶ For further reading on the branding of Penn State, see J. Proffit and T. Corrigan, Penn State’s “Success With Honor”: How Institutional Structure and Brand Logic Disincentivized Disclosure, *Cultural Studies & Critical Methodologies* 12 (2012): 322, <http://csc.sagepub.com/content/12/4/322>.

¹⁷ “The Grand Experiment” refers to Joe Paterno’s coaching philosophy of melding athletics with superior academics; he prioritized student-athletes academic successes above their success on the field. For further reading on the idea of Joe Paterno’s “Grand Experiment,” see Jonathan Mahler, “Grand Experiment Meets Inglorious End,” *New York Times* (New York), November 8, 2011.

situation which needs and invites it. (7) Finally, the situation controls the rhetorical response in the same sense that the question controls the answer and the problem controls the solution. Not the rhetor and not persuasive intent, but the situation is the source and ground of rhetorical activity — and, I should add, of rhetorical criticism.¹⁸

Exigence

Any exigence is an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be. In almost any sort of context, there will be numerous exigencies, but not all are elements of a rhetorical situation — not all are rhetorical exigencies. An exigence which cannot be modified is not rhetorical; thus, whatever comes about of necessity and cannot be changed — death, winter, and some natural disasters, for instance — are exigencies to be sure, but they are not rhetorical (6).

With the initial public release of the scandal—the alleged acts of Jerry Sandusky and the subsequent administrative cover-up and perjury—Penn State University’s situation was quite precarious. The exigence remained clear, yet complicated. There was an urgent need for discourse, for leadership, and for *answers*, and the increasing negative media attention and coverage exacerbated that exigence. Penn State was experiencing a serious crisis situation, and the disaster created a significant need for rhetorical action.

Audience

This exigence warranted rhetorical action from several particular audiences within the Penn State community sphere. Bitzer describes the “rhetorical audience” as “distinguished from, a body of mere hearers or readers: properly speaking, a rhetorical audience consists only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change” (8). First, innumerable questions were asked of those in power—Graham Spanier, Tim Curley, Gary Shultz, Joe Paterno, and the Board of Trustees. Answers and action were demanded. Rhetorical analyses of their particular

¹⁸ L. Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” pp. 5-6.

reactions will be examined further in chapter two. Second, the student reaction played an integral and interesting role as a reaction to the urgency of the situation. With a student body of 45,000 at the University Park campus alone, remarkable rhetorical phenomena were observed and are the subject of chapter three. The Penn State faculty and other staff members, the subject of chapter four, also contributed significantly to the rhetorical conversation surrounding the scandal, especially during the initial two weeks of panic following November 5. Members of the Penn State community with lesser proximity (literally, not figuratively)—alumni, community members, and general “fans” of the university, added interesting artifacts to the rhetorical exhibit that now remains a permanent piece of the university’s storied history. Those contributions are mentioned in the conclusion.

The focus of the sections on audience reactions remains, quite biasedly, as the Penn State audiences. Although discourse spanned a wider public, given the true meaning of Bitzer’s conception of “The Fitting Response,” only those audiences who could truly affect change are discussed in my project. This is not to discount broader public discourse, and I invite further exploration into those dimensions.

Constraints and The Fitting Response

Every rhetorical situation contains a set of constraints consisting of persons, events, objects, and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence. Standard sources of constraint include beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, motives and the like; and when the orator enters the situation, his discourse not only harnesses constraints given by situation but provides additional important constraints — for example his personal character, his logical proofs, and his style (8).

Several constraints come into play for each of the particular audiences such as the ambiguity of true facts, strong beliefs in the Penn State brand and in Joe Paterno's "near perfect record," Penn State's tradition of excellence, the varying emotions experienced and acted upon by the students especially, and the shock of the situation. These constraints are only few of many. While I will include analysis of constraints in the chapters that follow, the focus is truly on "the fitting response" piece of the rhetorical situation. Bitzer said in his essay, "One might say metaphorically that every situation prescribes its fitting response; the rhetor may or may not read the prescription accurately" (11). I have just explained the basic components of the exigence and audience, but in the coming pages, the fascinating rhetorical *responses* from each particular audience will be exposed and explored in this criticism.

In the section regarding administrative/staff rhetoric, speeches, emails, and statements provide the bulk of rhetorical artifacts. Faculty, on the other hand, used the rhetorical situation as a springboard into teachable moments and opportunities for public discourse and reflection. The larger community assumed a more activist-social-responsibility role by creating campaigns, fundraisers, and other initiatives to preserve positive identity and pride. Finally, and perhaps most interestingly, the current students attending Penn State, whose emotional and powerful actions in the wake of tragedy and crisis, expressed the raw and human rhetorical experience.

Chapter 2

The Fitting Response: Crisis, *Apologia* and the Penn State Administration

I have attempted to wholly define the particular parts of the rhetorical situation at Penn State in the previous chapter. The following sections aim to analyze the fitting response to that situation from a variety of perspectives. The first is the Penn State Administration. I argue that their rhetorical responses during and immediately following the exigent disaster matches up with current literature and theory on crisis rhetoric, specifically tactics of *apologia* and atonement, which falls under the epideictic rhetorical umbrella.

This chapter tackles the Penn State Administration during and after the crisis event, which may be defined as the public awareness of Jerry Sandusky's criminal charges and the twist of university cover up. The specific time-line for *during* the time of crisis, as with the rest of this project, is framed by the initial two weeks following November 5, 2011. The *after* crisis piece will be discussed briefly, but not in much detail, as the post-crisis rhetoric is considered long term and still presently evolves and will probably continue to do so for many years.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Before I perform a crisis-rhetorical analysis of the Penn State administration's "fitting response" to the exigence at hand, I will review current literature surrounding rhetoric of crises in hopes of framing my analysis by those constructs.

In Millar and Heath (2004), crisis is first defined objectively as “simply a sudden, unexpected event that poses an institutional threat suggesting the need for rapid, high level decision-making.”¹⁹ Noted in the same section, crisis often prompts *an emotional response* by key stakeholders; “a crisis evokes emotion because interests are damaged—or at least appear to be.”²⁰ Millar and Heath offer many more examples of “definitional crisis,” but go on to assert that definitions ignore the communication functions, options, and devices that crises require during and after the “unexpected event.” Organizational crises involve characteristics such as sudden occurrence, demand for quick response, creation of uncertainty and stress, threatening of the reputation of the organization, escalation of intensity, causes outsider scrutiny, and a permanent altering of the organization’s image.²¹ With these characteristics defined, the rhetorical situation—the exigence, specifically—at Penn State clearly falls within the criteria of crisis and can be defined as such.

A rhetorical definition of crisis, however:

explicitly acknowledges that the responsibility for the crisis, its magnitude, and its duration are contestable. It stresses the message development and presentation part of the crisis response. It underscores the role that information, framing, and interpretation play in the organization’s preparation for a crisis, response to it, and post crisis comments and actions. It features discourse, one or more statements made over time (5).

¹⁹ Robert L. Heath and Dan P. Millar. “A Rhetorical Approach to Crisis Communication: Management, Communication Processes, and Strategic Responses” in *Responding to Crisis: A Rhetorical Approach to Crisis Communication*, Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2004, pp. 1-17.

²⁰ Cited as Mitroff & Pearson, 1993; Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992. Emphasis added. Stakeholders, in this case study, are defined as any and all persons affiliated with the Pennsylvania State University.

²¹ Dan P. Millar. “Exposing the Errors: An Examination of the Nature of Organizational Crises,” in *Responding to Crises: A Rhetorical Approach to Crisis Communication*, pp. 19.

Millar and Heath acknowledge the role crisis rhetoric plays as a reaction to a rhetorical problem, or a rhetorical exigence, and the rhetorical situation: “Earlier, we stressed that a crisis constitutes a rhetorical problem. Bitzer (1968) argued that rhetorical problem results when an exigency demands a rhetorical statement that addresses the problem and seeks to provide a rational, justifiable response to the exigency” (10). They also make the distinction that to be a rhetorical crisis, the circumstances and reaction to said circumstances are contingent upon contextual factors and situational changes.²² This reflects the sophistic ideal of *kairos*, or the opportune moment, and crises are rhetorical because of the fluctuating attitudes of the audience and the constraints of the situation.

During the rhetorical crisis, the response type is typically blame placing (regardless of just blame) and blame accepting, or *apologia*. Aristotle was first to theorize speeches of defense in Book I, chapter 3 of *On Rhetoric*.²³ Aristotle conceptualizes that this rhetorical genre encompasses speech dedicated to praise and blame as well as speeches to reinforce values and beliefs. Ware and Linkugel’s contemporary theory of *apologia* proposes four rhetorical strategies constituting apologia or “rhetorical self-defense.” The first, denial, “consists of the simple disavowal by the speaker of any participation in, relationship to, or positive sentiment toward whatever it is that repels the audience.”²⁴ Secondly, “any rhetorical strategy which reinforces the existence of a fact,

²² See the discussion in L. Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation” regarding what makes a situation rhetorical which supports this very claim.

²³ Aristotle. *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*. Trans. George A. Kennedy, Second Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 49.

²⁴ Benoit, William L. *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: A Theory of Image Restoration Strategies*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1995, pp 11 (Cited Ware and Linkugel (1973)).

object, or relationship.” Benoit explains that this strategy is not aimed directly at the cause of the speaker’s attempt to save face, rather, it is an attempt to counterbalance or offset the audience’s displeasure by associating the speaker (or in this case, Penn State) with a different object or action that carries more positive feelings and reactions (12). The hope is that the positive images or reasoning conveyed will outweigh whatever terribly heinous accusations lie on the table—especially if they are true. The third strategy of this “self-defense” rhetoric is differentiation, or an attempt to separate facts, objects, or relationships from some larger context in which “the audience currently views that attribute” (12). In contrast, transcendence, the fourth factor in Linkugel and Ware’s theory of apologia, aims to “join some fact, sentiment, object, or relationship with some larger context within which the audience does not presently view that attribute” (12).

It is worth mentioning a work of scholarship that dissects the *apologia* genre even further. In “The Rhetoric of Atonement,” Koesten and Rowland argue that the focus of public apologies has shifted from the emphasis of self-defense toward a theme of *atonement* for one’s past sins.²⁵ In contrast to strategies of image restoration, as in Benoit, atonement rhetoric “does not ‘restore’ the image directly, but admits that sinful behavior has occurred in an attempt to gain forgiveness and long-term image restoration. Its goal is both forgiveness for a sinful act and restoration of the relationship once the sin has been expiated” (69). Image restoration, atonement, apology—all of these and the various sub-

²⁵ Joy Koesten and Robert C. Rowland, “The Rhetoric of Atonement,” *Communication Studies* 55, no. 1 (2004): 68.

strategies feed into what Kenneth Burke deemed the guilt-redemption cycle, in which an individual can rhetorically purge him or herself of guilt.²⁶

Atonement, for Koesten and Rowland, can be classified as a sub-genre of apologia but with its distinct characteristics; where traditional apologia is used to defend one's character (either individual or organizational character), atonement rhetoric functions as that purgative-redemptive device for an individual or an entire organization. Through purgation, redemption is produced and the relationship between the person or organization and the wronged party is healed (69).

As Benoit mentions in *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: A Theory of Image Restoration Strategies*, Linkugel and Ware's theory of apologia has been widely popular in the approaches of analyzing image restoration discourse—after a *rhetorical problem*, an institutional *crisis*. I assert that the rhetorical response of the Penn State administration—the leaders of the university—used the rhetorical construct and style of *apologia*; accepting blame where blame was due, while also aiming to exonerate the innocent from blame.²⁷ After the crisis event, however, involves providing information [to the audience] that demonstrates “how, why, and when the organization has put things right as well as what it plans to do to prevent the recurrence of similar crises.”²⁸ Koesten and Rowland, however, argue that applying this theory only works in situations where

²⁶ Burke, Kenneth. *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose* (1935, 1954, and 1984), *Attitudes Toward History* (1937, 1959, & 1984), *The Philosophy of Literary Forms* (1941, 1967, & 1973), and *The Rhetoric of Religion* (1970), among other works, the idea that language as symbolic action can have a purgative-redemptive function was developed.

²⁷ Kenneth Burke. *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in logology*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970. Print.

²⁸Heath and Millar, 8.

wrongdoing can be denied, or to reduce or transcend that wrongdoing. Rhetorical atonement, on the other hand, is much more appropriate for situations in which the image cannot be restored via denial, deflection, or transcendence because guilt is essentially undeniable. “In such a case, the rhetoric of atonement offers a person, organizational leader, or a nation a means of accepting guilt in order to create a new image as a redeemed individual or nation” (70).

For Kenneth Burke, “guilt” is an undesirable state of affairs that occurs when expectations concerning behavior are violated.²⁹ There are two ways of expunging guilt; the first, victimage, involves scapegoating or shifting the blame, whereas the second, mortification, is a straightforward admission of wrongdoing and a request for forgiveness.³⁰ These approaches to expunging or redeeming guilt fall into categories of image restoration for Millar and Heath. These strategies, along with the other constructs of apologia, atonement, and epideictic rhetoric, will drive the analysis and interpretation of the following rhetorical analysis of the Penn State Administration's responses to the Penn State crisis-rhetorical situation.

Although the temporal focus of this analysis falls within a brief two week period following the “unexpected event” or rhetorical exigence, I will explain the rhetorical action in both “during” and “post”-crisis modes, analyzing through theoretical lenses of apologia, atonement, and image restoration rhetoric of the Penn State administration.

Rhetorical Analysis: Administrative Rhetoric

²⁹Kenneth Burke. *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose* Third Edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954. Print.

³⁰ Jeremy Engels, “The Politics of Resentment and the Tyranny of the Minority: Rethinking Victimage for Resentful Times,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (2010): 303-325, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02773941003785652>.

As I tease out the central claim of this chapter, that the administrative response to the Penn State crisis falls under an apologetic and epideictic umbrella, I look to specific texts as evidence for textual and rhetorical analysis. This section views the Penn State community as a political institution and concludes that the epideictic and apologetic administrative rhetoric mirrors the rhetoric of war/crisis Presidents of the United States.

Interim President Rodney Erickson and other administrators released a series of statements early on in the weeks following November 5, providing commentary on the Jerry Sandusky scandal and the subsequent effects on the university community and on the victims of Jerry Sandusky. Statements were released both internally to members of the Penn State community (students, staff, and faculty), as well as statements and messages released to the public in the form of “commercials” and other digital media. Full statements can be found in the index, along with a detailed timeline of events. For the purpose of concise analysis, the following excerpts will be used to support my claim of epideictic and apologetic rhetoric, analysis following each except.

* * *

November 8, 2011: Statement by the Penn State Board of Trustees³¹

The Board of Trustees of The Pennsylvania State University is outraged by the horrifying details contained in the Grand Jury Report. As parents, alumni and members of the Penn State Community, our hearts go out to all of those impacted by these terrible events, especially the tragedies involving children and their families. We cannot begin to express the combination of sorrow and anger that we feel about the allegations surrounding Jerry Sandusky. We hear those of you who feel betrayed and we want to assure all of you that the Board will take swift, decisive action...

³¹ Penn State Board of Trustees, email message to the Penn State Mass ListServ, November 8, 2011.

While the Penn State Board of Trustees clearly does not take the blame, their words express their acceptance that blame is warranted. This email seems to aim to convey feelings of shock and horror, and acknowledges feeling pity for the victims and their families. This impersonal email makes a promise to take “swift, decisive action” thus reinforcing their acceptance of guilt and their promise to act, even if retrospectively.³² Possibly, because of their inaction when investigations were launched in the early 00s, the Board of Trustees is signaling their own guilt.

...At its regular meeting on Friday, November 11, 2011, the Board will appoint a Special Committee, members of which are currently being identified, to undertake a full and complete investigation of the circumstances that gave rise to the Grand Jury Report. This Special Committee will be commissioned to determine what failures occurred, who is responsible and what measures are necessary to insure that this never happens at our University again and that those responsible are held fully accountable. The Special Committee will have whatever resources are necessary to thoroughly fulfill its charge, including independent counsel and investigative teams, and there will be no restrictions placed on its scope or activities. Upon the completion of this investigation, a complete report will be presented at a future public session of the Board of Trustees.

Penn State has always strived for honesty, integrity and the highest moral standards in all of its programs. We will not tolerate any violation of these principles. We educate over 95,000 students every year and we take this responsibility very seriously. We are dedicated to protecting those who are placed in our care. We promise you that we are committed to restoring public trust in the University.

The final part of this email to the Penn State students, faculty, and staff appeals to the audience's sense of pride and aims to transcend the acts of wrongdoing by claiming that “Penn State has always strived for honesty, integrity and the highest moral standards in all of its programs. We will not tolerate any violation of these principles.” This claim, however, since directed at an audience that did view Penn State positively however

32. I define this as an “impersonal” statement because as a member of the audience, there is no way to understand whose words these are. This message is on behalf of the entire Board of Trustees, but who strung these sentences together? This is, admittedly, a limitation to several of the artifacts I have collected for analysis.

questioning the integrity, aims to reinforce the Penn State “brand” or identity, and while this phrasing in no way denies wrongdoing, it certainly implies that Jerry Sandusky does not represent the ideals of Penn State. The phrase “we promise to restore trust” implies the corrective action elaborated on in the next message.

November 10, 2011: A message from President Rodney Erickson³³

This is one of the saddest weeks in the history of Penn State. It has been difficult to comprehend the horrific nature of the allegations that were revealed in the attorney general's presentment last week. As a member of the Penn State community for 34 years, as a parent, and as a grandfather, I find the charges as they have been described to be devastating, and my heart goes out to those who have been victimized and their families. This is a terrible tragedy for everyone involved, and it will take some time to bring a measure of understanding and resolution to the community. In addition to the legal process under way, Penn State's Board of Trustees has authorized a full investigation "...to determine what failures occurred, who is responsible, and what measures are necessary to insure that this never happens at our University again and that those responsible are held fully accountable." As those involved pursue their cases, I also urge you, as Penn Staters, to be patient, to avoid speculation, and to refrain from passing judgment until the facts are known...

Like the message from the Board of Trustees, President Erickson begins with strong emotional appeals and expression of grief, confusion, shock, and disgust, and accepts that there is blame to be placed. However, he does not do the blame-placing, and he urges the intended audience of this email to similarly remain patient and refrain from pointing fingers; he discloses the details of the full investigation authorized (by the Board of Trustees). The decision to launch the investigation illustrates the strategy of *corrective action*, in which the audience is made aware that there is a plan in place to address the disastrous state of the university and its leadership.³⁴ Erickson also

³³ Rodney Erickson, email message to the student body, November 10, 2011.

³⁴ *Corrective Action* is described by Benoit as a strategy of image restoration in which the key characteristic is verbalizing a plan to solve the problem or prevent a recurrence (“Image Restoration Discourse and Crisis Communication” in *Responding to Crisis: A Rhetorical Approach to Crisis Communication*, 2004, pp.

successfully addresses the raw disgust and shock he feels, humanizing his ethos via pathos, and expressing a heartfelt and indirect *apology* to not only those directly affected, but all those indirectly affected also.³⁵ What can be gathered from this email is a long-winded “we are so sorry.”

...Penn State has a long and storied tradition that has endured for more than 150 years. Our roots are deep, our constitution is resilient, and the importance of our work is as vital today as it was last week - perhaps even more so now in the face of such adversity. We are 96,000 students, 46,000 employees, and more than a half a million alumni. We are 24 campuses across the Commonwealth and a World Campus. We are a university that is committed to its core values of honesty, integrity, and community. We are a university that will rebuild the trust and confidence that so many people have had in us for so many years...

Here, Erickson uses the strategy of bolstering, aiming to reinforce the existence of the “fact” that Penn State has a long tradition of ethical integrity. Also, in a way, he is differentiating the university from Jerry Sandusky's crimes, and also from the corrupt leadership that covered the early investigations up and allowed Jerry Sandusky to roam Penn State's campus freely.

*...I share your anger and sadness in this time, but this is the only responsible course to take in the coming months. I ask for the full support of our faculty, students, staff, and alumni, and in return I will do my best to lead this institution through the challenges ahead.
Thank you for being a part of Penn State.*

266).

³⁵Erickson’s words demonstrate the essence of the exigence, in that the crisis is truly a public problem not affecting a small number of people, but also has serious indirect consequences.

November 14, 2011: “Our Community: A message from President Rodney Erickson”³⁶

This past week has tested the character and resilience of the Penn State community in ways we never could have imagined. Many of you shared my shock and surprise as the reports unfolded. Yet, after this past weekend, I just want to take a moment to tell all of you how proud I am. Our students and athletes, in particular, demonstrated the best of what it means to be a Penn Stater. [Bolstering]

On Friday night, our students organized a candlelight vigil for the victims of abuse, and thousands came to express their concern and resolve. It was a meaningful and deeply moving way to show support.

At the Penn State-Nebraska football game on Saturday, tens of thousands of fans supported the Blue Out, a solemn moment of silence, as well as many other efforts to raise awareness and money for this very serious issue.

The technique of transcendence is clearly visible. Erickson makes the claim that the bigger issue is sexual abuse and violence and its prevalence in our society. Mentions of all of the efforts by students and alumni to raise money for various charities, including the “Blue Out for Sexual Abuse,” which will be further discussed in the next chapter, illustrate transcendence beyond Penn State’s and Jerry Sandusky’s transgressions.

On the field, the football players demonstrated a level of maturity and determination that was an inspiration. The athletes from both teams came together at midfield in unity, respect and prayer for the victims. Then they played their hearts out. It was remarkable in so many ways. [Bolstering]

Thank you for coming together as a community...

...If you have not yet seen the five promises, I will share them below...

My Promise to the Penn State Community

1. I will reinforce to the entire Penn State community the moral imperative of doing the right thing – the first time, every time. We will revisit all standards, policies, and programs to ensure they meet not only the law, but Penn State’s standard. To oversee this effort, I will appoint an Ethics Officer who will report directly to me. I ask for the support of the entire Penn State community to work together to reorient our culture.

³⁶ Rodney Erickson, email message to the student body, November 14, 2011.

Never again should anyone at Penn State feel scared to do the right thing. My door will always be open.

2. As I lead by example, I will expect no less of others. I will ensure proper governance and oversight exists across the entire University, including Intercollegiate Athletics.

3. Penn State is committed to transparency to the fullest extent possible given the ongoing investigations. I encourage dialogue with students, faculty, alumni, and other members of the Penn State community.

4. We will be respectful and sensitive to the victims and their families. We will seek appropriate ways to foster healing and raise broader awareness of the issue of sexual abuse.

5. My administration will provide whatever resources, access, and information are needed to support the Special Committee's investigation. I pledge to take immediate action based on its findings.

President Erickson's "Five Promises" discourse illustrates the strategy of Corrective Action in image restoration discourse.³⁷ While Erickson and the university cannot do anything to undo mistakes made, he had pledged to insure that nothing like this would ever happen ever again.

November 15, 2011: A message from the administration³⁸

"Dear Students—

We all have been changed by events in the past week and a half. In distinct ways, each of us is different than we were before. Yet no one has been more profoundly affected by these events than the victims themselves. We can only imagine their pain and promise to do all we can to support them and prevent such acts from occurring again...

...Yet for all the change and pain that have surrounded us, our University remains true to its core values in pursuit of its fundamental purposes. At the very center of those values and purposes resides you—the students of Penn State...

...We all are saddened and perplexed by the incongruity between our University's core values and purposes and the excruciating details of the alleged crimes. We are frustrated by others' misperceptions of us, which are based on the actions of a few. The actions of students who took to the streets and did damage in State College last Wednesday, for

³⁷ Benoit (1997b).

³⁸ Rob Pangborn, Damon Sims, Madlyn Hanes, and Craig Weidemann, email message to the mass ListServ, November 15, 2011.

instance, contrast starkly with the spirit and character displayed by thousands of students on the Old Main lawn for the candlelight vigil last Friday... [praise and blame]

...all of us—students, faculty, staff, and alumni—must be unified in our determination to remain true to the guiding principles that bind our learning community. There can be no wavering from respect for individual dignity. There can be no shortcut around integrity. In all we do, we must demonstrate responsibility for ourselves and others. And we must honor society's expectations for us as expressed through laws or University policy. Never have these things been more true.

Investigations into these matters, both internal and external, will go on. The news media will hover, slip away, and return occasionally through the coming weeks and months. The deeply disturbing and sad details that comprise both fact and fiction in this instance will continue to emerge. They will slowly drip into the public realm. We cannot escape that outcome.

Even so, we must return to the business at-hand. We must ensure that the University continues to teach, conduct research, and serve our communities. And you must invest yourselves in the wonderful process of learning and engaging in student life beyond the classroom.

Our University will find its new path toward even greater success than it has known one step at a time—one class, one lab, one concert, one service project, one day at a time. In the coming weeks, we promise to share useful insights with you related to these matters as they come to us. Until then, know that abundant support services exist to offer any help that you need. The links below provide access to those resources.

Together, we will pass through these difficult days and move forward as one University geographically distributed, but together in spirit and purpose. You are at the very center of that spirit and purpose, giving our University its fundamental resolve. We are very grateful that you are.”

This message has a slightly different ring to it, both in purpose and in content. As the disaster continued to unfold and escalate as each day passed, the essence of Penn State as a unified community struggled alongside the legal and public relations disaster. There are no strategies of purification, guilt-redemption, or apologia present in this email. No promises are made to address the Jerry Sandusky situation. This message is to the students, and there is no better lens to view it through than Aristotle’s *epideictic* occasion

for rhetoric.³⁹ There is both praise *and* blame of the students; praise for the heartfelt efforts of the vigil and blame for the students rioting on the night of November 9th. This humbling text, authored by Pangborn, Sims, Hanes, and Weidemann, several prominent university leaders, focuses on the present state of Penn State’s “heartbeat”—the students; there is little discussion of past mistakes or future promises. What these administrators try to do here—bring attention to the honor and the shame intertwined within one body—is moving. Here was the first instance of a different rhetorical message from the administration, and it was heartfelt and sincere.

November 21, 2011: “Moving Forward: A message from President Rodney Erickson”⁴⁰

In the last two painful weeks, Penn State has been shaken to our foundation. But we are moving forward, and with every decision we're committed to doing the right thing for the victims, their families, and the Penn State community. You have all played a role in helping us define a path for the future. You have inspired us with your resilience, generosity, and hope. You have given me your confidence and encouragement.

In the spirit of giving thanks, I wish to share a few observations about our community...

...Penn Staters care. I've been profoundly moved by the Penn Staters who have pulled together to offer support for the victims and each other. From the moving candlelight vigil to charitable efforts to awareness building programs for this very serious issue, Penn Staters have demonstrated a deep commitment to caring...

...Our work has just begun. It will be some time before we are able to bring a measure of understanding and resolution to the recent terrible events, even as we refocus our energies on our students, research and service activities. When we return from Thanksgiving break, we'll need to dedicate ourselves to bringing closure to this semester and celebrating the accomplishments of the Fall 2011 graduating class.

Thank you for your support. It gives me confidence that Penn State is moving in the right direction.

³⁹ Aristotle. *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*. Trans George A. Kennedy, Second Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

⁴⁰ Rodney Erickson, email message to the mass ListServ, November 21, 2011.

At this point in President Rodney Erickson's rhetorical career, it is quite evident that his aims are to differentiate Penn State from Jerry Sandusky and bolster the university's best qualities. His purpose, probably, is to ease the fears, worries, and doubts of the Penn State community. This is the embodiment of Gorgias' notion that "Speech is a powerful Lord," and I argue that his specific messages' primary goal lies within the idea of easing the worry and being a leader.⁴¹ Erickson is using his rhetorical action to soothe the worries of his audience, to remind them that Penn State would move on.

It is not a stretch to compare President Erickson's rhetorical strategies with political-rhetorical strategies of the U.S. Presidency. Some associated with Penn State have described the scandal and disaster as "Penn State's 9/11."⁴² The magnitude of consequences resulting from institutional failures affected the university from corner to corner and excited national publicity. Penn State's leaders failed, its identity was challenged. Similarities exist between these two drastically different rhetorical situations, such as emotions triggered and the rhetorical responses to them.⁴³

John Murphy's essay on George W. Bush's "Our Mission and Our Moment" speech regarding the attacks on September 11 highlights Bush's use of genre. Murphy points out something that other scholars I have mentioned also identify as a challenge to

⁴¹ Gorgias. "Encomium of Helen." Gorgias claimed that rhetoric had the power to "can stop fear and banish grief and create joy and nurture pity."

⁴² Specifically, Ben Novak, former member of the Board of Trustees, said "This is like 9/11 for Happy Valley. It will affect the community's consciousness for years" to *The Daily Beast* (November 14, 2011): <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/11/14/faithful-struggle-with-scandal-at-penn-state-where-football-is-religion.html>.

⁴³ Emotions such as shock, sadness, and confusion are the parallels seen with the attacks of September 11. The rhetoric of George W. Bush in the aftermath of that horrific event is of epideictic oratory, much like the discourse of Erickson. I realize that the comparison seems rather crude, but to many in the "Penn State Bubble," it very much did feel like a miniature September 11.

defining this kind of rhetorical action. These speeches are hybrids. Like Bush, Penn State's administrator's rhetoric utilize both epideictic *and* deliberative rhetorical strategies in that they address the present but also advocate for future policy changes. If the scandal and resulting attacks on the integrity and character of Penn State as an institution is viewed as a political attack, or, a hypothetically, war, my analogy to Bush's 9/11 rhetoric holds.

An institution such as the presidency must accomplish recurrent rhetorical tasks, including committing the nation to military action. War or crisis rhetoric, in fact, infuses the U.S Presidency. Despite our professed desire for peace, this nation has risen to greatness through war, about one each generation.

Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson have detailed five appeals common to presidential war rhetoric, Robert L. Ivie has explored the *topos* of savagery that runs through this discourse, and Richard A. Cherwitz, Kenneth S. Zagacki, Bonnie J. Dow, and others have examined crisis rhetoric—that discourse which stops short of a full-fledged war. Through the research runs a common thread: war rhetoric is a rhetorical hybrid, combining the qualities of what Aristotle termed *deliberative discourse*, arguments to justify the expediency or practicality of an action, and *epideictic rhetoric*, appeals that unify the community and amplify its virtues.⁴⁴

**December 5, 2011: “Message to the Penn State Community: The Days Ahead,”
President Rodney Erickson**

With all we have shared in the last month, I feel it's also important to offer you an update on our institutional well-being. As a university and a community, we have endured a great deal, but our core mission and values remain intact. Penn State is an outstanding

⁴⁴ John M. Murphy. “‘Our Mission and Our Moment’: George W. Bush and September 11,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* Vol 6, No. 4, 2003, 608-609.

academic institution, and we demonstrate this every day. We are defined by our commitment to exceptional teaching. We are defined by our \$805 million research enterprise that addresses complex and pressing issues such as food production, energy, health and well-being, national security and economic development. We are defined by our leadership and contributions in the arts and humanities. And we are defined by our service work that has improved countless lives around the globe. Penn Staters are defined by our hard work and accomplishments, and there's still great demand to be part of our community....

...Finally, I urge you to take a moment to reflect on the important work that happens every day at Penn State. I believe wholeheartedly in the value of this undertaking, and I hope you'll share my confidence in our future.

CONCLUSION

The rhetorical evolution that occurred over a two-week span within the Penn State administration is worthy of highlighting. Upon initial shock and horror of the news of Jerry Sandusky's alleged crimes taking place over many years on Penn State's campus, rhetorical strategies aimed at apologizing for those actions and inactions of the University's most influential leaders. There was a clear admission of wrongdoing on the part of the university, and deep sympathies were continually expressed for the victims and their families. Promises for action were made, from the launch of a widespread investigation to the quick implementation of policies (like the ethics advisor's role) and action to prevent something from ever happening ever again. This earliest and most vulnerable stage aimed at mitigating panic and handling the exigent crisis Penn State was facing.

The rhetorical focus then shifted to a goal of protecting the unity of Penn State's head and its heart—the administrators and the students, respectively. President Erickson's messages reinforced the values of Penn State, bolstering its wonderful and honorable qualities. These messages feature virtually zero mentions of the crimes of Jerry

Sandusky, probably to differentiate the negative piece of Penn State from the otherwise positive image the university had maintained until that point. Not only was image restoration a goal, but the epideictic nature of Erickson's rhetoric cannot be overstated. He rose to the occasion of the institution of his presidency, and sought to unify the community around a common belief: the Penn State identify of *good, honorable, important*.

In the coming chapters of this research project, the focus shifts to the other audiences of the rhetorical situation and their fitting responses—next, I examine the fantastically wide array of rhetorical action on created by the Penn State undergraduate students.

Chapter 3

The Fitting Response: Rhetorical Penn State Students: Visual Rhetorics of Emotion



The goal of this chapter is to identify and analyze the ways in which the Penn State students responded to the rhetorical situation of the scandal and crisis. In the last chapter, I illustrated the politically structured rhetoric of the administration and their overt tactics of apologia, atonement, and victimage in their communication to students and staff. In contrast, the students of Penn State hold a unique position within the university in that they are the true “citizens” in this cultural microcosm of society; the students were those that brunted most of the criticisms, but held the least power over the situation, and expressed their varying emotions most diversely. Their rhetorical response is the subject of this chapter.

As soon as news of the scandal went viral, many commentators in the media claimed that the scandal would forever affect the reputation of Penn State and possibly prevent Penn State graduates from receiving job offers, admission to other institutions, etc.⁴⁵ Many questioned the integrity of the entire institution, students included. Once these kind of media pronouncements found their way into media coverage in addition to the shock and disappointment of the sex scandal itself, panic ensued—and rightfully so. Along with panic, students felt shocked, confused, disappointed, angry, shameful, and disgusted. In the events that transpired within the two-week framework of this project, those emotions were expressed in a variety of ways, and the order is important for a full understanding of the rhetorical Penn State students.

Many emotions were triggered in the Penn State students in the aftermath of the university crisis. These emotions turned into symbolic and rhetorical responses. The role of emotion in the art of rhetoric is twofold; not only does knowledge of the emotions help rhetors persuade their audiences, but the existence of emotional arousal brings about a response that, aside from psychological and physiological, is very much rhetorical. That rhetorical response is my focus for analysis. However, in order for a fuller understanding of emotions, I turn to Aristotle and the classical conception of emotions and rhetoric.

The only possible fitting response to the exigence of crisis by students was rhetoric of emotional expression. This emotional expression manifested itself in visual rhetorics, and rhetorics of display, although traditional forms did exist for some student leaders. I argue that this emotional expression, channeled through visual rhetoric,

⁴⁵ See Jacques Steinberg, “What Should Penn State Applicants Think?” *New York Times*, Education. November 10, 2011.

ultimately helped to reinforce belief in the identity of Penn State, and prompted mourning and healing. The rhetoric of Penn State students was heavily charged with emotion, and for several weeks following November 5, 2011, there was not a unified message from the students—the analysis of this chapter will highlight that throughout.

Before I perform a criticism of the Penn State student-created rhetoric, I will first review literature on emotions, specifically the role of emotion in rhetoric, to highlight the ways in which emotion is triggered by and a response to the rhetorical situation at Penn State. I will also briefly review literature on visual rhetoric, since it is the main form that student-created rhetorical action manifested.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Classical Concepts of Emotion

In Aristotle's treatment, emotions are moods or temporary states of mind—not attributes of character or natural desires. These temporary states of mind arise in large part from perception of what is publicly due to or from oneself at a given time, and they affect judgments.⁴⁶ While Aristotle's treatment appears purely psychological (in the sense of understanding the *thymos* or soul of the audience), in actuality it demonstrates a connection between a cognitive approach to the pathos and a cultural tendency (in classical times) to regard emotion as “a reaction rather than an inner state to be disclosed.”⁴⁷ Aristotle does not relate emotion to its outer cause or stimulus; rather,

⁴⁶ Aristotle. *On Rhetoric* Transl. George Kennedy, Second Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

⁴⁷ David Konstan. *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p. 31.

relates emotion to its effect on judgment—and action.⁴⁸ Further, according to Konstan, no other theorist since Aristotle and Spinoza assigns so massive a significance to the *effect* of emotion on belief (35).

The reason classical theories of emotion are relevant to this project is not simply because Aristotle describes them in *On Rhetoric*; rather, the Greek habit of thought understood emotions as responses to actions, or *situations resulting from actions*, that entail consequences for one's own or others' relative social standing, which explains why some sentiments fall outside of Aristotle's scope of emotion that count as emotions today. Emotions are a response to action or a situation—rhetorical situations count—and in of themselves create action—the fitting response to the rhetorical situation.

For the Penn State students, their fitting response—as I have briefly mentioned in the beginning of this chapter—consisted of emotions manifest in visual rhetoric. Now that I have explained relevant literature on emotions and their role in rhetoric, I will explain literature on visual rhetoric. After this portion of the literature review, I will synthesize this literature into a criticism of specific student-created rhetorical artifacts.

Visual Rhetoric: The Rhetoric of Display

As I explained in the previous section, the Ancient Greeks held that emotions were powerful not for their individual effects on the psyche, but for the responses they were capable of producing. In the context of the Rhetorical Situation at Penn State, students felt emotions—specific emotions to be described in the rhetorical analysis section—and expressed those emotions through visual rhetoric: the response to emotion.

⁴⁸ Konstan, 33. Action is implied.

Scholars wrestling with the notion of “visual rhetoric” have diverse opinions on what can be considered “visual” and also what can be considered “rhetoric.” Helmers and Hill (2004) highlight the various interpretations ranging from photographs, film, and art to “visual typography, even the somatic experience of holding the book or touching the paper.”⁴⁹ For the purpose of this project, visual rhetoric is defined as any symbolic action that is not strictly textual—emails and statements in newspapers will no count here. Displays—gatherings, banners, signs, rallies, and artwork—are the primary means of student-created visual rhetoric.

Charles Hill describes the persuasiveness of rhetorical images through a psychological perspective, stating that “representational images tend to prompt emotional reactions and that, once the viewer’s emotions are excited, they tend to prompt emotional reactions and that, once the viewer’s emotions are excited, they tend to override his or her rational faculties, resulting in a response that is unreflective and irrational.”⁵⁰ While Hill describes the effect of images on audience as eliciting emotional and irrational responses, J. Anthony Blair explains the argumentative nature of visuality. Blair emphasizes that argumentation need not be restricted to verbal text and speech; he makes the case the using visuals as a method of persuasion is actually a demonstration—and demonstration’s instrument is the enthymeme.⁵¹ In Aristotelian nature, the enthymeme invites the audience to participate in its own persuasion by filling in that unexpressed premise: “this

⁴⁹ Charles A. Hill and Marguerite Helmers. *Defining Visual Rhetorics*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Erlbaum, 2004, p. 3.

⁵⁰ Charles A. Hill “The Psychology of Rhetorical Images” in Hill and Helmers *Defining Visual Rhetorics*, p. 27.

⁵¹ J. Anthony Blair, “The Rhetoric of Visual Arguments” in Hill and Helmers *Defining Visual Rhetorics*, p. 41.

connecting of the audience to the argument is what makes the enthymeme a rhetorical form of argument” (41). By these standards, visual expression is rhetorical and argumentative because it argues by enthymeme, inviting its audience to fill in the unstated premise. The enthymematic arguments by the rhetorical Penn State students will be assessed in detail at the end of this chapter.

For Blair, visual argumentation is far more evocative than verbal argumentation. “First, visual communication can be more efficient than verbal communication. In order to convey and evoke emotions or attitudes, the verbal arguer must rely on his or her oratorical powers to cause the audience to exercise its sympathetic imagination” (53). While there are opportunities for visual failure—just like there are opportunities for verbal messages to fail—when visual messages are successful, then the audience “cannot help but become involved, and in just the way the arguer intends. In this respect, then, visual argument is likely to be more efficient than its verbal counterpart” (53-54).

In the next portion of this chapter, I return to emotions to explain and assess the student-created visual rhetoric that resulted from them. I bring my focus to the following emotions: anger, shame, pity, and grief. I synthesize the literature I have already discussed with primary rhetorical artifacts of the Penn State students. After the explanation of their rhetorical expressions of emotion, I will conclude with what that rhetoric achieved, namely reinforcement of community and the Penn State Identity.

Anger

“Let anger be [defined as] desire, accompanied by [mental and physical] distress, for apparent retaliation because of an apparent slight that was directed, without justification, against oneself or those near to one.”⁵²



For David Konstan, anger is not only accompanied by pain but also pleasure, deriving from the desire to avenge the slight that has been suffered: for this desire is accompanied by the expectation of its fulfillment, which we regard as possible (42).

Pride and dishonor are at the forefront of reasons people feel anger. In *On Rhetoric*: “And [people become angry] at those who speak badly of, and scorn, things they themselves take most seriously” (119). The social situations in which anger is triggered are informed by an acute sense of honor, “with its intense regard for status, protocols of conduct, and the opinion of others”—Aristotle specifies, for example, that

⁵² Aristotle. *On Rhetoric* Transl. George Kennedy, Second Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 116

we are more disposed to anger when a slight is delivered in the presence of those with whom we compete, those whom we admire or wish to be admired by, or those before whom we feel shame or who feel shame before us.⁵³ The Penn State students felt anger towards several groups of people such as their own university leaders (Graham Spanier, Joe Paterno, coaches) for not doing enough over a decade ago, the media, especially, and its skewed portrayal of the scandal in news segments and articles, outsiders who publicly bashed the university, and even one another. To illustrate their expressions of anger, I turn to a variety of primary texts.

The first and most emotionally charged example of students' anger is found in the "riot" that ensued after former head football coach Joe Paterno was fired on the night of November 9th. The following fragments were transcribed from raw video footage, available on YouTube.⁵⁴

"We need to stay united..."

"Please go downtown and try to tame this madness"

"Joe Paterno is being a scapegoat"

"Yeah!"

"Rioting is not us, guys. Rioting is not us!"

"Do you want to see our State College Borough destroyed tomorrow morning?"

"WE'RE GOING TO BEAVER!"

⁵³ David Konstan, pp. 41-44.

⁵⁴ "'Rioting Is Not US!' PENN STATE: TJ Bard Speaks to Prevent Riot 11/9/11," YouTube Video, 1:15, posted by "Mazz12992," November 10, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rust68dS6PQ>.

The news of Joe Paterno's (as well as Graham Spanier's) firing came the night of November 9, 2011. Outcries began on social media sites Facebook and Twitter over the perceived hasty and unfair decision to remove



Paterno from his thrown of 61 years. Students began contemplating rioting in downtown State College, and although it's not clear who had the most significant hand in organizing those efforts, students stormed Beaver Avenue—a section deemed “Beaver Canyon”—to



begin destruction while another group of students gathered on the lawn of Old Main—the home of the Penn State administrative offices.

The then Student Body President Tracey “TJ” Bard and fellow student government executive Travis Salters tried to prevent students from rioting. Video footage, which is hard to decipher due to many voices shouting simultaneously, captures the anger of students toward the administration as well as anger towards students that were prepared to riot and those already doing so.

Bard and Salters shouted to the crowd, “we need to stay united,” “please go downtown and try to tame this madness,” “rioting is not us!” and “do you want to see our

State College Borough destroyed tomorrow morning?” to an unreceptive crowd that shouted things like “Joe Paterno is being a scapegoat,” and “this is an institutional failure!” The crowd cheered along with those sentiments to Bard and Salters’ dismay. Despite their efforts, those students gathered on the lawn and, after a student shouted “We’re going to Beaver,” joined the few thousand students that were already destroying the Beaver Canyon area.

Whether or not this event can be considered a “riot” by definitional standards is debatable, but not germane to my analysis. What happened that night was a demonstration of raw emotion and a false sense of unity. Students were outraged by the news they perceived to be unfair, and held signs among the chaos that expressed those sentiments, while other students, disgusted at those students supporting Paterno, held signs that said “Paterno is not the victim.” Students who participated—or simply showed up to experience it—did so under the assumption that they were a unified student body expressing a single message—and in some cases, simply out of curiosity. The reality, however, was much different. About 4,000 students participated in some way, and even among those 4,000, there was no single message. It was chaos. What can be gleaned from the event is that in some way, this public display was an act of emotional expression, albeit divided. Those students who were not at the riot were simultaneously contributing to the discourse surrounding the issue, through media such as Twitter and Facebook, as the media did what the media do and covered the event live. One of the media vans was turned over and destroyed, most definitely showing students’ disapproval toward the media and their coverage.

Shame

“Let shame [*aiskhyn*] be [defined as] a sort of pain and agitation concerning the class of evils, whether present or past or future, that seem to bring a person into disrespect. Such are those actions that result from vice, for example, throwing away a shield or fleeing in battle; for these come from cowardice. And [such is] refusing to pay back a deposit; for this comes from injustice.” [2; 6; 2-4]

Aristotle suggests that shame is an emotion felt when a person’s character is defamed. While some theologians consider shame to be a precursor to guilt (which was discussed in chapter two), shame responds to the judgment of others and is indifferent to ethical principles in themselves, whereas guilt is an inner sensibility that corresponds to the morally autonomous self of modern man.⁵⁵ For Konstan, shame “arises not at the contemplation of loss of honour in the abstract, but from specific acts or events that bring about disgrace” (101). Loss of reputation remains a key theme for Aristotle’s concept of the emotion of shame.

Anger was a significant emotion displayed by the students of Penn State, however, possibly more significantly was the display of collective shame. I now turn to the specific primary texts to support my case.

November 10, 2011: TJ Bard Addresses Crowd Gathered at Old Main⁵⁶

The day following the November 9th riot, student body president President TJ Bard made a formal speech on the steps of Old Main to address the events of the previous night and a crowd gathered to listen. Below is a transcription of the speech:

⁵⁵ David Konstan, 91. Footnote, explained on page 292.

⁵⁶ Transcribed from “TJ Bard’s Address to Students Regarding Joe Paterno Being Fired (via Onward State),” YouTube Video, 2:38, posted by “MellyV,” November 10, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=mhGltuTzKIo.

My name is TJ Bard and I am here to address the students of Penn State. This address is on behalf of myself and everyone standing here on the steps today. Anger, frustration, shame, sadness, and confusion: we are experiencing a whirlwind of emotions and this pain has undoubtedly swept over our entire Penn State community. We are full of questions. We are eager for answers. And we will not stop until we get them. But we cannot allow our anger to dominate. Last night, we watched students crowd the lawn of this very building and charge the streets in which we live. We watched as mayhem built a false sense of community. WE must support each other, believe in each other, and stand united in this trying time. WE will be strong in numbers, but we must remember that we always represent Penn State. We must stand behind those who have the best interests of this university in mind. We have each other, the students, to trust in. To believe in. WE are what makes this university thrive. And we are the ones who must restore glory to Penn State. On Saturday, wear blue to support the victims. Support our student-athletes by standing until kickoff until the victory bell is rung. Sing our alma mater for respect for our founders and the principles this university was founded upon. Remember that you are Penn State. You and your actions reflect directly on all that we stand for. We still are, and always will be, Penn State. Let's show the world what that means. Thank you.

After the riot, many students started publicly voicing or displaying their feelings of shame toward the institution of Penn State for allowing the acts of Jerry Sandusky to happen for so long without action, and toward each other for the riots. At this point in the timeline, students were still extremely divided. There were the Paterno apologists who wanted the heads of the Board of Trustees on the table; there were the Paterno blamers who called for Penn Staters' dismissal of the former coach from his "hero" position; some students dedicated their voices to calling for focus on the victims; some students simply cried for answers and comfort; some clung to their football worship. The cultural divide among a student body of 44,000 was incredibly obvious and painful.

Some other examples of the expression of shame can be seen below:



Grief

David Konstan acknowledges that Aristotle himself gave no formal treatment to “grief” as an emotion, and he speculates why that may have been the case. One potential reason is that Aristotle’s inventory of emotions in *Rhetoric* was governed by their relevance to or “usefulness in persuasion, and it may not have seemed to Aristotle and his contemporaries that grief was as salient in this context as, say, anger, pity, gratitude, fear, shame, and hatred, which are regularly appealed to in forensic and deliberative speeches.”⁵⁷ However, Konstan goes on,

Surely grief too could influence the opinion of a juror or member of the assembly, whether over private or public losses. If the purpose of exciting the emotions is to alter people’s judgments – and the emotions are, according to Aristotle, precisely ‘all those things on account of which people change and differ in regard to their judgments,’ with the proviso that they are attended by pain and pleasure – then grief would on the surface seem to be as eligible an emotion as any of the rest in Aristotle’s catalogue (245).

⁵⁷ David Konstan, 245.

Even though Aristotle does not explicitly mention grief as an emotion that influences persuasion, Konstan makes a compelling argument to include it in the list of classical emotions, and it is a significant emotion expressed by the rhetorical Penn State students.

November 11: Candlelight Vigil in Support of the Victims

“I’d first just let to start by thanking you all for coming tonight. I mean I understand it is a Friday night and we could easily be doing something else. But yet we’re not! We’re all right here uniting as the family that we are to show our support, our respect for the people who have been overshadowed by the craziness of his whole situation. The ones who need it the most. The victims of sexual abuse. So I’d like to ask you all that if you could just forgot about everything that’s going on out there and at least during this vigil just focus on these individuals. Let us bring them a light to lead them out of the darkness giving them hope that there is a better future to come. Because trust me, there is. So at the 10:00 when the bell strikes, please [take] a moment [of] silence in honoring the nine victims of the scandal. Until then listen to some stories of people just like you and me who wished to say something to all of you. So to start...”⁵⁸

After Jess Sever’s opening speech at the Candlelight Vigil, several musical groups performed, such as the Blue Band, Blue in the Face, and NOTA.⁵⁹ These groups performed solemn songs like “Fix You” by the band Coldplay, to illustrate the solidarity felt on campus for the victims and for the hurt that the institution of Penn State was feeling. Anonymous stories from victims of child abuse were read, and notable Penn State figures—students, alumni, and faculty—delivered speeches. Transcripts of these speeches were inaccessible, making full criticism impossible; however, decisions to include the victims’ stories, Student Body President TJ Bard, and “last minute guest, former Penn State All-American linebacker LaVar Arrington” promoted the artistic proof of ethos for the event. The resounding theme of their messages, in Bard’s words: “We

⁵⁸ Jess Sever and Kyle Harris. “Penn State Candlelight Vigil: A Case Study.” December 2011.

⁵⁹ Blue in the Face and NOTA (None of the Above) are two a capella groups on University Park’s campus.

cannot let the actions of a few define us," Bard said. "All of you here tonight are what Penn State represents."⁶⁰

After Bard's speech, there was a moment of silence, followed by a very solemn singing of the Penn State Alma Mater. Students sang quietly—most of them moved to tears by what they saw and heard that night at the Candlelight Vigil—until the phrase "May No Act of Ours Bring Shame:" this phrase was sung loudly and with conviction. The way in which the students used their voices to exclaim the simple phrase "may no act of ours bring shame" resonated powerfully throughout the following days, weeks, and months.

November 12: Blue Out in Support of the Victims

Visually speaking, the "Blue Out" in support of the Victims during the home football game on November 12 had the most grandeur in the sense of magnitude and symbolism. The task was simple, and the message clear: wear blue, the color that represents support for victims of child abuse (like yellow ribbons represent support for military troops). Penn State football games are famous for "White-Out" spectacles, especially in the student section, for all the big games, with the sheer purpose of grandeur. The almost 100,000 attendees wearing blue darkened the normally light spectacle that any other Penn State home football game was. Not only was the atmosphere literally darker, but so was the tone. The "Blue Out" was first and foremost for the victims, but the new tradition also fostered a sense of unity that was missing over the initial two weeks of shock and horror. The "Blue Out" not only created a visual

⁶⁰ Danae Blasso, "Thousands Unite for Candlelight Vigil," *Daily Collegian* (University Park, PA), November 12, 2011.
http://www.collegian.psu.edu/archive/2011/11/12/thousands_unite_for_candlelight_vigil.aspx

argument in support of the victims, but it also generated significant monetary contributions to charities, primarily RAINN, the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network.

CONCLUSION

After the “Blue Out,” there were a few other notable instances of the visual expression of student emotions felt in response to the Jerry Sandusky Sex Abuse Scandal and the crisis situation they and their university found themselves immersed in. Several student-leaders on campus, like those students involved in UPUA (University Park Undergraduate Association—student government) and “Nittanyville,”⁶¹ produced widely viewed videos on YouTube.⁶² The theme of these videos was the simple phrase “We Still Are.” This became the new mantra of Penn State.

In the face of controversy and negative press, the rhetorical action created by the Penn State students had a profound effect on how the community began to heal—at least the student community. The first few days after the news hit, the student body was divided and angry. As the days went by and leaders stepped up to plan the Candlelight Vigil, the Blue Out, and produced the several videos, t-shirts, and posters exuding Penn State pride, the community began to unite and commence the process of healing after a traumatic week.

⁶¹ Formerly known as “Paternoville,” this student organization organizes a “tent city” before each home football game in order to get excited for games.

⁶²“We Are Penn State,” YouTube Video, 2:00, posted by Alex Cohen, November 15, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t9rn0kPIMiY>.

Chapter 4

Rhetorical Deans and the Call for Unity

The chapters preceding this one detail the rhetorical responses from the Penn State Administration and students. There is one final audience of this Rhetorical Situation that deserves attention, even if the “artifacts” do not seem as evident or diverse. This audience is the Penn State Faculty, and more specifically, the Academic College Deans. In this chapter, I will highlight the ways in which faculty members used the rhetorical situation of the Sandusky Scandal as an instructional device—not only encouraging discussion inside the classroom, but also bringing attention to the ways in which the crisis at Penn State served as an important lesson to the ways in which Penn Staters live their lives. Penn State Faculty members took the opportunity to incorporate the historic event into their classroom discussions. The College Deans took the opportunity to encourage this practice and invite the students in their Colleges to be united—and further, to continue to deliberate with one another.⁶³

The Deans’ Letters were sent at the most pivotal point within the timeframe of my analysis. Following the week that shook Penn State to its very core—a week that saw riots and destruction, displays of pain and frustration, and leaders trying to right their wrongs—the unifying message that the College Deans provided was much needed.

⁶³Faculty involved with Penn State’s “Center for Democratic Deliberation” turned the call for reflection into an active call for deliberation. See <http://cdd.la.psu.edu/outreach/deliberating-in-crisis/deliberation-in-the-midst-of-crisis>.

Onward State, a popular student-run blog at Penn State, compiled every single email from the Deans into a blog post.⁶⁴ Excerpts of those messages and analysis of them follow.

Arts & Architecture

*Dear College of Arts and Architecture Student,
While the entire Penn State community is still coming to grips with the sad and shocking events of the past week, I wanted to reach out to you and re-emphasize the sentiments in the statement made yesterday by the university's president, Dr. Rodney Erickson (online at <http://live.psu.edu/story/56307>). His message is one of resolve, reassurance and confidence in our future. He asks for our support and help in restoring the public's trust and reaffirming the university's commitment to its core values.*

Penn State is, first and foremost, an academic institution. The university rests on a solid foundation of educating future generations of students who will always be leaders in their fields and who will serve with integrity as they build their careers on the knowledge and networks formed here. While we are deeply troubled by the news of recent days, we also know that adversity and crisis require us to tap into our deepest reserves of integrity, energy and creativity.

Students in our college are demonstrating their leadership and compassion by planning to provide music in conjunction with tonight's candlelight vigil for abuse victims and leading the "Blue Out" movement for tomorrow's football game. You are proving that the soul and reputation of Penn State rests on thousands of people who are making the right choices every single day. Please continue to support each other and to focus on our common commitment to creativity, scholarship and leadership that represents Penn State at its very best, now and in the future.

Dickinson School of Law

In the wake of the allegations concerning Penn State employees released in the grand jury presentment last week, The Dickinson School of Law community has been struggling along with the rest of the University community and public to come to terms with the horrific details as they emerge. We feel deep sadness for the children involved, outrage at their alleged treatment, and shame over allegations that members of the University's administration may have missed opportunities to expose and stop the alleged abuse...

...In our Children's Advocacy Clinic, Law School students under the direction of Clinical Professor Lucy Johnston-Walsh '97, an expert in the issues pertaining to child sex abuse, team with medical students from Penn State Hershey and social work students from Shippensburg University to evaluate the health, educational and placement needs of

⁶⁴ Davis Shaver, "Update: Penn State Leaders Contact Staffs and Students," *Onward State* (Blog), November 14, 2011 (8:00 a.m.), <http://onwardstate.com/2011/11/14/penn-state-administrators-notes-sent-to-staff-and-students/>.

abused and neglected children and then advocate on behalf of the children before local courts and agencies. We are proud that our Children's Advocacy Clinic partnered with Penn State Hershey's Children's Hospital to establish the nationally acclaimed child abuse reporting hotline and informational web site, <http://lookoutforchildabuse.org/>. The Clinic and Penn State Hershey also jointly conduct child abuse training programs for hospital personnel...

...We also remain proud at this time of the scholarly and prosecutorial expertise pertaining to sexual abuse/sex crimes possessed by our faculty colleague, Dermot Groome, who now serves as lead prosecutor of crimes against humanity at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia at The Hague, The Netherlands, where he also supervises the Law School's semester-long International Justice Externship program.

It won't surprise you to learn that our students also have responded proactively to the grand jury presentment. They are distributing blue ribbons promoting child abuse prevention and awareness, and raising donations for local non-profit organizations that combat child abuse. Many law students will be participating in the candlelight vigil being held at the University this evening as an expression of support for the victims of this case...

Earth and Mineral Sciences

I, probably like most of you, am in an angry state of shock in the wake of the events of the past few days. I don't really have any dramatic new news or insights about the situation to share with you now, but I do feel compelled to reach out to you to let you know that you, your welfare and future are top-most on my mind. The dismissal of President Spanier last night marked the end of an era and the beginning of a major transition that will take a long time to complete. The task is daunting: leaders to be hired, cultures to be retrained, trust to be regained, and reputations to be rebuilt...

...The academic side of Penn State, while surely damaged by the ugliness of what has come to light, is and always was detached from the alleged crimes and subsequent handling of them. There is too much good about the institution to accept that the damage is irreversible.

In a week or so, the television trucks and reporters will tire of this story and go elsewhere. Shortly thereafter, cocktail conversations will turn to other topics, except when the periodic milestones of trials and hires arise. Gradually, the university will return to its normal business and rhythms, albeit changed by this experience in nearly every respect.

Lessons learned from this awful moment will be instilled into our everyday lives, and that is how the healing starts. I promise you that I am trying to learn from this experience and will bring what I learn to bear on the leadership of this great college. I know that many

of you are very disturbed by these unwanted events. Talking about them is healthy. I will be as open and transparent about what I am told while we are going through this transition as I can be. And I will seek your views at every step of the way.

Education

Dear College of Education Students –

As educators and future educators, the allegations that began to emerge in the past week are particularly and profoundly disturbing to us all. The University's trustees have responded decisively and are demonstrating their commitment to learning from the past and moving the University in positive directions. We look forward to working with Dr. Erickson in his new role, and Penn State is very fortunate to be able to turn to a leader of Dr. Erickson's caliber and stature during this challenging period...

The College and University will move forward in the days and weeks ahead. We have much to be proud of in this College, particularly among our students, and it is vitally important for this good work to continue.

Penn State Hershey Medical Center/College of Medicine

As Penn State's interim President Rodney Erickson communicated to everyone earlier today, this has been one of the saddest weeks in the history of Penn State. As we all struggle to comprehend the unimaginable events of this week I want to take a moment to reach out to you—our faculty, students and staff—to share a few thoughts and ask for your support as we recover and move forward.

First and foremost, I know that each of us has intense feelings about the events of the past week. As a community focused on health care, each of us feels tremendous sympathy for the children and families at the center of the alleged acts of abuse. We also share intense feelings of sadness and anger. After all, we are not only an integral part of Penn State, we are an institution that counts among its fundamental responsibilities the care and protection of children. That any child could be violated in the manner described earlier this week is unthinkable.

Through it all we must remember that our patients, students and colleagues continue to depend on us in many ways. Our response at this critical time must be to lead by example, live our Penn State Hershey values and strive to serve our communities to the best of our ability.

No institution, be it a university or its medical center campus, is defined by a single individual or a single act. Collectively, we make a difference every day—in affecting the lives of families who are facing illness and injury, improving health, making life-changing discoveries or preparing a new generation of caregivers and scientists.

As we begin the healing process, I ask all of you to stay focused on these significant and meaningful contributions. Our continued focus on excellence, trust and compassion is important not only for all those whom we serve but also for our university so that it may heal and honor our proud tradition. Thank you.

Engineering

This has been a challenging week for all of us here at Penn State, and I want to thank you for your dedication to the College at this difficult time. The events described are terrible, and it is important that we keep the children and their families in our thoughts as they work to recover...

...We are committed to working with Dr. Erickson to help rebuild the trust and confidence that so many people have had in our University and our College for so many years. It is with your assistance that we will succeed.

I am heartened by the messages of support we have been receiving from our alumni, supporters and friends. They are looking to all of us to continue our good work in support of our students.

IST

In light of the recent events taking place here at Penn State, I would ask first and foremost that each of you keep the victims and their families of this recently uncovered tragedy in your thoughts and prayers. The pain these families are enduring is unimaginable. While these recent revelations have stirred up a number of highly charged emotions within each of us, I ask that you do everything in your power to temper those feelings while the legal process unfolds and authorities have time to sift through the mountain of evidence presented to them.

As Penn State faculty and staff members, you have always shown your Penn State pride in the quality of work that you do each and every day on behalf of the students we serve. That should and must continue. I would also respectfully ask that you show reasonable restraint before getting caught up in the vitriolic rhetoric that is filling social media sites. This kind of inflammatory language solves nothing...

...If fielding calls of this nature, I would ask that you be respectful and honest in your responses by letting folks know that at this time we simply do not have all of the answers and that we must wait, just like everyone else, for clarification and direction from the Board of Trustees and from our interim president, Dr. Rodney Erickson. Until then, we must ask folks to be patient.

Thank you in advance for your assistance in helping our students, our college and our institution get through this difficult and most unfortunate situation.

Liberal Arts

Liberal arts faculty and staff colleagues,

These have been a tough few days for Penn State with abrupt changes and a firestorm of publicity. All of us are grieving for the victims of these despicable deeds. We are grieving too for our institution, and our feelings range from anger, sadness, and disbelief to hurt and embarrassment about what has happened. We don't know what lies in front of the people involved in these sad events. As we express foremost our concern for the children and their families, and then deal with our own feelings, please don't forget that our faculty, staff, and students continue to do their important work. In the College of the Liberal Arts, we are trying to stay focused, to keep doing those things that have made Penn State an outstanding academic institution, and to identify how we can make a positive difference in these difficult times. Remember our students need us now more than ever.

The College has intellectual resources that we believe can help our institution and community in the aftermath of this crisis. The Rock Ethics Institute, our organizational psychologists, and the Child Studies Center are just some of the entities that will be involved in helping Penn State through this period of change. This is also a time of self reflection and evaluation and we are committed to seeing that lessons are learned from this tragedy.

I know that you are all doing your job to ensure that Penn State remains the great academic institution that it is. Let us all give our support to interim president Rod Erickson as he works to meet the difficult challenges that lie ahead...

...Let me close with a quote that Chris Long brought to my attention: "Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer." — Rainer Maria Rilke, 1903 in Letters to a Young Poet.

Please feel free to contact me if you have questions and concerns.

With regards,

Susan

Dear Liberal Arts Student Colleagues:

As we process the events of the past week, it is difficult to grapple with what we and others are thinking and feeling. Each of us responds to these events from where we live, from our perspectives as individuals and as members of an educational community to which we have dedicated our time, our energy, our lives.

As students in the liberal arts, you have many resources to bring to bear on these difficult experiences. As humanists, you know something of the finite nature of human existence, of the complex and often tragic nature of human relationships, and of the healing power of words well placed; as social scientists, you know something about the role power plays in social interactions, the nature of psychological and physical trauma, and the intricacies of healthy human communities. I ask you to bring to bear on this difficult situation the wisdom of your disciplines, the power of your learning and the depth of your commitment to your friends, your teachers and your institution.

As we try to come to some terms with this experience in all its complexity, I hope we find ways to notice the beautiful and good things that are done at Penn State everyday even as we face the things we must as we learn more about what happened. Your good academic work, your integrity as students and your well placed energy contribute to what is valuable about Penn State.

Thank you.

Once, in the course of my own education in the liberal arts, I came across a passage from Rilke. My wife reminded me of it last night and it seems to be helping me at the moment; perhaps it might be of some help to you today:

“Don’t search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.”

– Rainer Maria Rilke, 1903 in Letters to a Young Poet

School of Nursing

Dear Faculty, Staff and Students,

I am writing to you in the wake of a serious crisis in Penn State’s history. I know you all share my concern for the children and families who have been at the center of this situation. This has been difficult for everyone involved.

While I know we have been distracted by the activities of the last few days, I encourage you to remember the important work that happens at the School of Nursing. We cannot, and will not, be derailed from our mission to improve health care for all people. The good work of our faculty in teaching and research has to remain our focus. The support of our staff in those activities is essential.

I am asking all students to remember why you came to Penn State...to get the best education as a professional in nursing. That has not changed. Remain focused on your studies and your development as a nurse, practitioner or scholar. As always, we stand

ready to help you achieve that goal. Consider your role as a professional as you go through these difficult times.

I know the School of Nursing will continue to be strong because of the incredible work each of you does to contribute to its mission. Let's help each other get through this difficult time.

Schreyer Honors College

I am writing this on Monday, a new day of beginning following a most tumultuous week here at Penn State. So much has happened in such a short period of time – horrific allegations of abuse and cover-up, leadership upheaval, raucous protests, a media siege, vigils, and a game that came to represent so much more than football. On this day, the confusion, anger, disillusionment, and hurt remain but raw emotion has been blunted a bit and, thanks to the sure guidance of our new president, Dr. Rod Erickson, our equilibrium has begun to be restored.

If you were at the vigil on Friday night or in Beaver Stadium Saturday or watched what transpired on that field before and after such hard-fought play, you witnessed a deep resolve to push through these dark days and show that all that is good and great about this University will shine once more. Perhaps what makes me most proud and confident of our future is that you, our students, led all these efforts.

We have a long, difficult road ahead of us. We have strong leaders committed to being moral leaders and maintaining transparency. (See President Erickson's "Promise to the Penn State Community," <http://live.psu.edu/story/56329>) We have faculty and staff who are equally committed to maintaining the integrity and quality of our Academic Mission. And we have students who lead by example. We have every reason, therefore, to be "bullish" on the future of Penn State.

This is journey that we must take together and I look forward to talking and working with you all. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. I will also be at the Student Council meeting tomorrow night, November 15, and we will have a series of round table discussions after Thanksgiving. Be sure to check the listserv for times and places.

Smeal College of Business

As you continue to process the disturbing news from the weekend and the chaotic past few hours, it's natural to question what it means to be a Penn Stater and to be part of the Smeal College of Business community. And, of course, what it all means for Penn State.

We all struggle to explain recent events to our students, our friends, and to our children. We debate, discuss, and are in shock by every aspect of this and it will continue for some time. Our prayers for the victims and their families are strong and many.

I have spoken to many members of our community over the last few days, from students and alumni to faculty and staff. Each has been affected by the report from the grand jury, the resulting news coverage, the steps being taken at the University, and reactions to those steps last night. I am still coming to terms with all the twists and turns of this ... and all the implications for us at Smeal...

...The bottom-line for the college and me is that we remain focused on our core objective—providing a world-class business education to our more than 5,000 students. While the University finds its balance, conducts its internal reviews, and the legal system does its job, the business of business education at Smeal must, and does, go on...

...We have one of the most-respected business faculties in the world, a passionate and professional staff, and our students are No. 1 among recruiters. Our family is strong. We will be working harder than ever to ensure that this remains the case—that we continue to act and be regarded as a “Top 5.”

I am here for any questions, problems, referrals, or just to talk. Refer problems to me if you need; let me know where things go well or where we need to react.

Student Affairs/Undergraduate Education

Dear Faculty and Staff Colleagues,

Many of us are asking how we can help and make a difference, as together we work to rebuild after what President Rodney Erickson has described as “one of the saddest weeks in the history of Penn State.” We ask everyone on the faculty and staff to continue to reach out to our students: Listen to them and acknowledge their ideas and feelings of disappointment, anxiety and anger. Let students know that the media attention besieging the University is not an attack on the integrity of Penn State students, faculty and staff. Help our students understand that we still have the same distinguished faculty, dedicated staff, great academic programs and wealth of opportunities and educational activities.

Setting aside time in class for these conversations is an important way to help our community heal and move forward. When appropriate, connect the discussion to course content. Be prepared for students who may find themselves in crisis because of their personal experiences or circumstances. Encourage students to use resources such as Counseling & Psychological Services, the Center for Women Students and the LGBTQA Student Resource Center. Point students to information and assistance from the Center for Ethics & Religious Affairs, Multicultural Resource Center, Paul Robeson Cultural Center and Residence Life. The Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence can provide useful strategies and guidance for faculty.

Finally, recognize that this will be a long process, and the important ongoing efforts of faculty and staff will make a difference over the months to come. Your continuing support of our students is deeply appreciated.

Each of these letters contains unique messages that relate specifically to their audiences in the various academic colleges. For example, The Hershey Medical School reminds its students that there are patients that still depend on them for the work that they do. The College of the Liberal Arts reminds its students of the Rock Ethics Institute and other unique programs that students could utilize in the healing process. The letter from The Smeal College of Business is slightly different than that from the College of Education, and so on. While these letters are distinctive, there are common themes. These common thematic messages speak to any audience, which is why they are all so relevant to my analysis.

Perhaps the most salient message that can be derived from this collection of letters is the call for reflection. The various deans and faculty members call on students to think of the victims, to “think through the questions,” realize that we do not have all of the answers, but remember that there are sad lessons to be learned from the crisis that rocked the very foundation of Penn State. With those lessons forever in mind, only then can Penn State move forward. Almost every one of the letters implied that Penn State would heal and move forward, learn from this experience, and be a better institution in the future.

These deans and faculty members did not claim that Penn State would become better without a great amount of hard work and dedication. Within their confidence in Penn State was simultaneously a call for the students to be the reason that Penn State evolves into a better institution. Many of the Deans mentioned the longtime successes of their students; students must continue to work hard and succeed, because they are truly the reflection of Penn State.

Further, these successes cannot be segmented, and they cannot be without a unified belief in Penn State—including the administration. These letters implored the students to believe in Penn State—not just the idea, but the institution and all of its components. Rebuilding Penn State could not work without the support and unity of its largest population, the students.

In the words of Earth and Mineral Sciences Dean William Easterling, “there is too much good about the institution to accept that the damage is irreversible.” This statement, in my view, summarizes the whole message of the dean’s letters. In a truly Aristotelian and epideictic sense, the rhetors bring attention to praise and blame, the honorable and dishonorable, and most importantly—the present.

These letters were produced and disseminated after “the most tumultuous week at Penn State.”⁶⁵ The timing is significant. First, the administration tried its best to manage the crisis situation via apologia tactics and their swift actions alongside that rhetorical process. The students, then, dissatisfied with their response to the rhetorical situation, expressed their emotions, and embodied the divide in the Penn State community. As the students destroyed the town of State College in anger, grieved for the victims at a candlelight vigil, and showed unity for Penn State AND the victims at the Blue Out Football Game, the community had all but fallen to pieces. The Dean’s Letters fully and eloquently put the rhetorical situation into perspective. These letters may have not single-handedly steered Penn State in the right direction, but their messages were clear. In many ways, the messages presented by the Deans suggest a reassurance that although this “out of the blue” crisis shook the grounds of Penn State as an institution—a body of students, professors, staff members, and governing officials—the foundation remained solid. Their letters harnessed and validated the emotional responses of the students and the swift reactions of the administration. The body of discourse stemming from the several Penn State Deans that I have examined offers words that helped their audience make sense of the “most tumultuous week in Penn State’s history,” and gain perspective.

⁶⁵ Dean Brady’s letter.

Conclusion

A New Exigence

This thesis serves to explain the Rhetorical Situation at Penn State following the news of the Jerry Sandusky Scandal. As I explained in chapter one, the Rhetorical Situation consists of an exigence, audience, and constraints. The exigence is a problem that requires communication or discourse. The proper audience must be able to do something about the problem, and constraints inhibit the rhetor's ability to convey the message. The "Fitting Response" aims to solve the problem or address the exigence, and the "Fitting Response" was primarily the focus of this thesis. I wanted to explain the situation rhetorically for a few significant reasons. First, rhetoric, as I have come to understand it during my studies, is an important lens through which to view historic events. Rhetoric is responsive, addresses contingent issues, and builds community. The practice serves a powerful role in any given circumstance. I hope I have showed readers the ways in which the rhetorical action of Penn State Administrators, Students, and College Deans have achieved those functions.

Secondly, as the Sophist Gorgias proclaimed around 400 BCE, "Speech is a powerful lord, which by means of the finest and most invisible body effects the divinest works: it can stop fear and banish grief and create joy and nurture pity." As most rhetoricians know and believe, speech—and more broad and contemporary conceptions of rhetoric falling outside the classical notion of "speaking"—can change things. Rhetoric

makes things happen. The emails, the speeches, the displays of empathy, sympathy, shame, and grief, all contributed to the next era of the Pennsylvania State University. All of the discourse I described and critiqued in this thesis served a purpose in the healing of Penn State as an institution, as a collection of people. The changes Penn State made in response to the situation itself and the discourse surrounding it rippled out to a larger public context. Discourse on sexual violence became more common. Significant cultural and societal issues gained more attention. These are all consequences of the rhetorical action that occurred within the boundaries of Penn State. These consequences are known, but their causes had not yet been explored.

To some readers, it may seem as though I have ignored many aspects of the Jerry Sandusky Scandal and the ways in which it affected the Penn State Community in my analysis. For example, there are *other* audiences that contributed versions of the “Fitting Response,” such as the Alumni Association (which is an audience of half a million) and those that identify themselves as “fans” of the university—whether that means fans of football or fans of the institution as a whole. Those audiences did contribute meaningful rhetorical artifacts to the “fitting response” repertoire, such as the WeStillAre.com, Proud PSU for RAINN, and various other op-ed commentaries, blog posts, and activist or Facebook groups. The amount of primary texts during the two-week time frame of this project was overwhelmingly explosive, and the collection only continues to grow as time progresses. I admit these shortcomings to my analysis, but with the qualifier that my purpose was to scrutinize the rhetoric of the most pertinent audiences of the rhetorical situation. Because of my status as an undergraduate student at Penn State as this situation

unfolded, the audiences that I felt were most pertinent to my analysis were the administration, the students, and the faculty/Deans.

In the analysis of the rhetoric of the Penn State Administration, I drew parallels with political rhetorical strategies such as *apologia* and crisis rhetoric. Along with these contemporary theoretical constructs, classical theories helped for interpretation and understanding their response. Aristotle's theory of the epideictic rhetorical setting helped frame their rhetorical action, as well as this whole thesis. I conclude that the Penn State Administrators' purpose was to reassure those connected to Penn State that action was being taken, and to continue to believe in the Penn State identity.

The Penn State students provided the sources of the most elevated emotional rhetoric for this analysis. Their rhetorical action spanned a variety of media, including student speeches, signs, posters, and other visual displays, as well as gatherings, rallies, and the Blue Out football game against Nebraska on November 12. The goal of that chapter was to illustrate how emotions felt in response to the crisis situation manifested in visual rhetoric created by the students.

Penn State Faculty, specifically the Academic College Deans, expressed unified messages calling for patience, reflection, unity, support, belief in Penn State, and open communication and deliberation. While different sections of the student body received different emails, the juxtaposition of the messages proved an interesting point in my conclusions on their rhetoric.

These audiences share a common rhetorical theme. The theme is one of present-ness. The exigence of this rhetorical situation was the crisis of the Jerry Sandusky Case and its subsequent negative effects on the university. Emails from the administration

were particularly straightforward about focusing on the present. Messages like “let’s not jump to conclusions” weaved through their discourse, as they called upon students and faculty to be patient. While later messages focused on issues concerning Penn State’s future, their initial communication called for patience in the present. That message was also reflected in the emails from the College Deans, specifically Assistant Dean Long’s emphasis on “let’s live the answers to our questions.” The rhetorical Penn State students displayed through mainly visual rhetoric one of the most powerful forces of the present, emotions. While the Aristotelian epideictic genre can contemporarily be conceived as a large umbrella, the rhetorical action I analyzed in this thesis can be considered epideictic in nature.

I began this thesis with the purpose of examining the “fitting responses” and subsequently defining the rhetorical action within Penn State—a focus on the stasis of definition. I hope to have done that. Where I have traveled to, as a result of completing this project, is at the stasis of cause and consequence. The rhetorical action, which I have concluded to classify as the umbrella of epideictic rhetoric, has caused many things. This rhetorical action impacted The Pennsylvania State University and consequently, the larger American public. While no one could ever wish for heinous acts like those committed by Jerry Sandusky to affect innocent children, we can come to an understanding of how our discourse can affect change. We can understand that voices—whether literal or figurative—are powerful. We can understand that rhetoric is the art of social change.

It is important for me to acknowledge that while my focus of study was on the initial two weeks following the news of the Sandusky Case, the rhetorical action did not

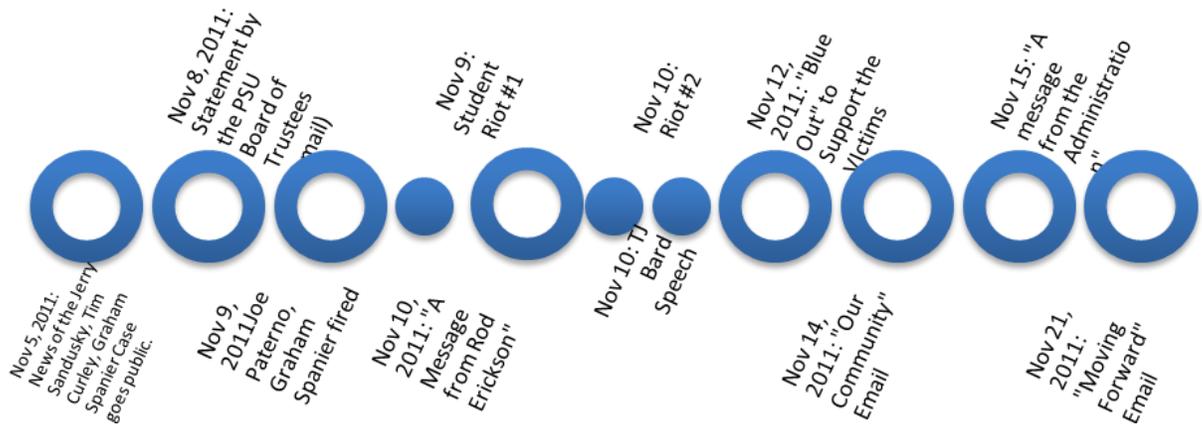
end there; in fact, it is still ongoing. “The Scandal” will live on in public memory for a long time, and rhetorical discourse surrounding it will continue to pervade. As the wounds begin to heal at Penn State, the rhetoric will change. The name “Sandusky Scandal” might change to something else. Some other phrases will fade away. I cannot predict what exactly these changes will be, but based on my study of a short two week time frame, I can predict many.

As much as I hope I have achieved my purpose in discovering, providing, explaining, and analyzing the “fitting responses” to this rhetorical situation, I also hope I have discovered a new exigence: an exigence for awareness. I hope members of the Penn State Community have the opportunity to read my thesis and engage with it. I hope they can think about those two weeks in a new, more rhetorical way. And I hope that they will keep the rhetorical memories in close reach, knowing that it wasn’t just the heinous actions of Jerry Sandusky that forever changed Penn State—it was also Penn State’s reaction to them.

Appendix A

Fitting Response Timeline

EXIGENCE



The "Fitting Responses" to the Exigence of the Rhetorical Situation as created by the audiences.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Texts

“‘Rioting Is Not US!’ PENN STATE: TJ Bard Speaks to Prevent Riot 11/9/11,” YouTube Video, 1:15, posted by “Mazz12992,” November 10, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rust68dS6PQ>.

“TJ Bard's Address to Students Regarding Joe Paterno Being Fired (via Onward State),” YouTube Video, 2:38, posted by “MellyV,” November 10, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=mhGltuTzKIo.

Erickson, Rodney. *Email message to the mass ListServ, November 21, 2011.*

Erickson, Rodney. Email message to the student body, November 10, 2011.

Erickson, Rodney. Email message to the student body, November 14, 2011.

Pangborn, Rob, Sims, Damon, Hanes, Madlyn, and Craig Weidemann. *Email message to the mass ListServ, November 15, 2011.*

Sever, Jessica and Kyle Harris. “Penn State Candlelight Vigil: A Case Study.” December 2011.

“We Are Penn State,” YouTube Video, 2:00, posted by Alex Cohen, November 15, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t9rn0kPIMiY>.

Literature

Aristotle. *On Rhetoric*. Trans George A. Kennedy. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Benoit, William L. *Accounts, excuses, and apologies: A theory of image restoration strategies*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.

Berger, Bruce K. *Crisis communications: Lessons from september 11/Responding to crisis: A rhetorical approach to crisis communication*. Vol. 81. Columbia: Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, 2004.

Bitzer, Lloyd L. “The Rhetorical Situation.” *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 1, 1968, pp. 1-14.

Blair, Anthony J. “The Rhetoric of Visual Arguments” in Hill and Helmers *Defining Visual Rhetorics*, 41.

- Burke, Kenneth. *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose* (1935, 1954, and 1984), *Attitudes Toward History* (1937, 1959, & 1984), *The Philosophy of Literary Forms* (1941, 1967, & 1973), and *The Rhetoric of Religion* (1970).
- Burke, Kenneth. *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose* Third Edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954. Print.
- Burke, Kenneth. *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970. Print.
- Butterworth, Michael L. "Ritual in the 'Church of Baseball': Suppressing Discourse of Democracy after 9/11." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*. Vol 2, No. 2 (2005): 107-129.
- Charles A. Hill "The Psychology of Rhetorical Images" in Hill and Helmers *Defining Visual Rhetorics*, 27.
- Charles A. Hill and Marguerite Helmers. *Defining Visual Rhetorics*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Erlbaum, 2004, p. 3.
- Cherwitz, Richard and Kenneth S. Zagacki. "Consummatory versus Justificatory Crisis Rhetoric." *The Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 1986. 307-324.
- Cicero. *De Inventione*.
- Conley, Donovan and William Saas. "Occultatio: The Bush Administration's Rhetorical War." *Western Journal of Communication* Vol 74, No. 4 (2010): 329-350. Web Oct. 2011.
- Conley, Donovan S. "The Joys of Victimage in George W. Bush's War of Totality." *Cultural Studies Critical Methodologies: Vol 10, Iss. 4*. (2010): pag. 347-356. Web. Oct. 2011.
- Coobs, Timothy W. "Crisis Communication." *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*. 2008. Web. 17 Jan 2013.
- Drolet, Danielle. "Scandal Continues to Test Penn State Comms." *PRweek* 14, no. 12 (2011): 6-6.
- Engels, Jeremy. "The Politics of Resentment and the Tyranny of the Minority: Rethinking Victimage for Resentful Times," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (2010): 303-325, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02773941003785652>.

Gorgias. "Encomium of Helen."

Herrick, James A. *The History and Theory of Rhetoric: Fourth Edition*. Boston: Pearson, 2009. Print.

Hill, Charles A. *Defining Visual Rhetorics*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Erlbaum, 2004.

Ivie, Robert L. "Images of Savagery in American Justifications for War." *Communication Monographs*. Vol 47 (1980): 279-290. Print.

J. Proffitt and T. Corrigan, Penn State's "Success With Honor": How Institutional Structure and Brand Logic Disincentivized Disclosure, *Cultural Studies <=> Critical Methodologies* 12 (2012): 322, <http://csc.sagepub.com/content/12/4/322>

Jamieson, Harry. *Visual Communication: More than Meets the Eye*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Koesten, Joy and Robert Rowland. "The Rhetoric of Atonement." *Communication Studies*. 2004.

Levin, Aaron. "Penn State Scandal Draws Attention to Child Sexual Abuse." *Psychiatric News*, 46, no. 24 (2011): p. 14

Marsh, Charles. 2006. The syllogism of apologia: Rhetorical stasis theory and crisis communication. *Public Relations Review* 32 (1): 41-6.

Millar, D, P. & Heath, R,L, (Eds). (2003). *Responding to crisis: a rhetorical approach to crisis communication*.

Millar, Dan P. "Exposing the Errors: An Examination of the Nature of Organizational Crises," in *Responding to Crises: A Rhetorical Approach to Crisis Communication*, pp. 19.

Millar, Dan Pyle and Robert L. Heath. *Responding to crisis: A rhetorical approach to crisis communication*. Mahwah, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004.

Miller, Arthur B. "Rhetorical Exigence." *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, Vol 5, No. 2 (Spring 1972). Pp. 111-118.

Murphy, John M. "'Our Mission and Our Moment': George W. Bush and September 11th." *Rhetoric and Public Affairs: Vol 6, No. 4*. (2003): pag. 607-632. Web. Oct. 2011.

Prelli, Lawrence J. *Rhetorics of Display*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2006.

Photos

Little, Pat. "Joe Paterno, Legendary Penn State Coach, Fired in the Wake of Jerry Sandusky Scandal," photo *Gossiponthis.com*, November 10, 2011, <http://gossiponthis.com/2011/11/10/joe-paterno-legendary-penn-state-coach-fired-jerry-sandusky-scandal/>.

Little, Pat. Photo. "Penn State Scandal: Christian Leaders Say Everyone Must Protect Children," *CP Church and Ministries*, November 11, 2011. <http://www.christianpost.com/news/penn-state-scandal-christian-leaders-say-everyone-must-protect-children-61423/#0CddqIEXIfiP7lck.99>.

Newberry, Paul. "Penn State Football Deserves the NCAA 'Death Penalty.'" Photo. *The Associated Press*, November 18, 2011, http://www.masslive.com/sports/index.ssf/2011/11/penn_state_football_deserves_n.html.

O'Donnell, Wes. "Penn State Riots: Incredible Images from Student Outrage," Photo. *BleacherReport.com* (blog), November 10, 2011, <http://bleacherreport.com/articles/934116-penn-state-riots-incredible-images-from-student-outrage>.

Rudnansky, Ryan. "Penn State Riots: Student Demonstrations Show University Has Cultural Issues," *BleacherReport.com* (blog), November 9, 2011, <http://bleacherreport.com/articles/933730-penn-state-riots-student-demonstrations-show-university-has-cultural-issues>.

Ryan, Rusty. "Penn State, Paterno, and Student Riots," photo, *Searching for Alkili Smith* (blog), November 10, 2011, <http://searchingforakilismith.com/football/penn-state-paterno-and-student-riots/>.

Streb, Joseph. "Thousands unite for Candlelight Vigil," photo, *The Daily Collegian*, November 12, 2011.

News and Non-Academic Online Sources:

"Top 200 World Universities: THE Rankings," telegraph.co.uk, last modified October 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/universityeducation/9584034/Top-200-world-universities-THE-rankings.html>.

- “World University Rankings 2012-2013,” TimesHigherEd.co.uk., last modified 2012, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2012-13/world-ranking>
- Bernstein, Ralph. “‘Grand Experiment’ Paying Off For Joe Paterno and Unbeaten Team,” *Gettysburg Times*, 20 Nov 1968, Sports.
- Blasso, Danae. “Thousands Unite for Candlelight Vigil,” *Daily Collegian* (University Park, PA), November 12, 2011. http://www.collegian.psu.edu/archive/2011/11/12/thousands_unite_for_candlelight_vigil.aspx
- Cirilli, Kevin. “Faithful Struggle With Scandal at Penn State, Where Football Is Religion.” *The Daily Beast*, November 14, 2011, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/11/14/faithful-struggle-with-scandal-at-penn-state-where-football-is-religion.html>.
- Mahler, Jonathan. “Grand Experiment Meets Inglorious End,” *New York Times* (New York), November 8, 2011.
- Pryor, Maddy. “Penn State Ranks in top 50 World Universities,” *OnwardState.com* (blog), August 17, 2012 (6:00 a.m.), <http://onwardstate.com/2012/08/17/penn-state-ranks-in-the-top-50-universities-in-the-world/>.
- Shaver, Davis. “Update: Penn State Leaders Contact Staffs and Students,” *Onward State* (Blog), November 14, 2011 (8:00 a.m.), <http://onwardstate.com/2011/11/14/penn-state-administrators-notes-sent-to-staff-and-students/>.
- Steinberg, Jacques. “What Should Penn State Applicants Think?” *New York Times*, Education. November 10, 2011.
- The Center for Democratic Deliberation. “Deliberation in the Midst of Crisis.” Last modified November 14, 2012. Accessed 26 March 2013. <http://cdd.la.psu.edu/outreach/deliberating-in-crisis/deliberation-in-the-midst-of-crisis>.
- Tofte, Keith. “Football Culture is Diseased,” *The Daily Collegian* (University Park, PA), 11 November 2011, Opinion. http://www.collegian.psu.edu/archive/2011/11/11/football_culture_is_diseased.aspx.

ACADEMIC VITA

Rebecca Alt
501 Beaver Hall
University Park, PA 16802
RXA5038@PSU.EDU

Education

B.A., Communication Arts and Sciences, 2013, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

Honors and Awards

- Richard B. Gregg Award for Scholarly Excellence in Communication Arts and Sciences, The Pennsylvania State University, March 2013
- Communication Arts and Sciences Community Leadership Award, The Pennsylvania State University, March 2013
- Bob and Mindy Cohen Scholarship in the Liberal Arts, The Pennsylvania State University, August 2012
- Phillips Trustee Scholarship in the Liberal Arts, The Pennsylvania State University, August 2012
- Penn State Student Leader Scholarship, The Pennsylvania State University, December 2011
- Pechter Family Scholarship in the Department of Communication Arts and Sciences, Penn State, August 2011
- Catherine Rein Shultz Scholarship in the Liberal Arts, Penn state, May 2011 and May 2010

Association Memberships/Activities

- Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society
- Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society
- Lambda Pi Eta Honor Society

Research Interests

I have broad interests in rhetorical theory and criticism. More specifically, I am interested in political rhetoric; within political rhetoric, I am interested in social movements and the Presidency.