Public discourse has both a grammar and a rhetoric (Burke, 1945, 1950). The grammar has to do with the usage of words and the history of uses. The rhetoric is concerned with the conflict between terms. This chapter on environmental rhetoric and popular culture has its origins in a conversation among the authors about anti-environmental discourse. In this chapter, it is postulated that anti-environmental discourse ridicules environmentalists as “tree-huggers” to delegitimize and dismiss the rhetoric of environmental advocacy. Our subsequent investigation of newspaper stories reveals that the tree-hugger label is much more complex than our initial formulation.

Before revealing what we discovered in the newspaper accounts, three issues that bear on the larger question of the relationship between environmental rhetoric and popular culture are addressed. Herndl and Brown, for example, assert that environment “is the product of discourse about nature” (1996, p. 3), and that rhetorical analysis might elucidate the discourse (p. 5). We argue, first, that the relationships between words and meanings are in flux. Gary Snyder, therefore, recommends: “We have faith in ‘meaning’ the way we might believe in wolverines—putting trust in the occasional reports of others or on the authority of once seeing a pelt. But it is sometimes worth tracking these tricksters back” (1990, p. 8). This chapter tracks the grammar and the rhetoric of the tree-hugger label in popular newspaper accounts, yet the struggle over meanings and the difficulty in trying to “fix” meanings are more evident than ever before.

Laclau and Mouffe are relevant here, when they propose that “[t]he practice of articulation, therefore, consists in the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning…” (1985, p. 105). One task attempted in this study is documenting the struggle over the meanings of the tree-hugger label. At the same time, nodal points to make intelligible references to current uses and contexts have been constructed.
A second issue that cannot be fully addressed in this chapter is the relationship between words and images. In his 1999 book, *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism*, DeLuca takes on the task proposed by Szasz (1995, p. 57): “[w]e need to find a way of thinking about opinion formation that recognizes the distinctiveness of a process that relies more on the image than the word, a process that is more figural than discursive, a process that creates ‘meanings’ in which the cognitive content is under-articulated and is dominated by highly charged visual components.” DeLuca asserts that “the primary rhetorical tactic of radical environmental groups is staging image events” (1999, p. xii). If words and images cannot be separated completely, nor will words be pitted against images. The tree-hugger label is so graphic and so concrete that it almost dissolves the distinction between image and word.

A third area that requires much more analysis than can be undertaken here in this chapter is the proper understanding of culture. Cantrill argues that language, in general, or environmental discourse, in particular, speaks of the society in which people live. Our “rhetorical choices are rooted in the tacit understandings that ground human conduct and distinguish one culture from another” (1996, p. 167). Cantrill, further, admonishes us “to consider the possibility of having to reckon with *multiple* cultures in any given society” (1996, p. 168). We agree with Cantrill and suggest adopting Brummett’s phrase: “overlapping popular cultures” (1991, p. xxi, emphasis added).

This chapter also offers a brief commentary on the question: What is the relationship between the media and popular culture? If culture is what is (a) deeply felt, (b) commonly intelligible, and (c) widely accessible (Carbaugh, 1988, p. 38), then popular culture may emphasize the third component—widely accessible. In Root’s terms, popular culture is “accessible to the broadest spectrum of the society” (1987, p. 10). Brummett advances this line of analysis one step further, when he points out that popular culture is the “cutting edge of culture’s instruments” (1991, p. xxi). Popular culture, therefore, is rhetorical, by definition. Popular culture is worthy of study, because the struggle to define who we are is ongoing and may be influenced by our analyses and behavior.

Newspaper accounts were chosen for study for two reasons. First, newspaper accounts represent a large and accessible data base. Second, while television is a dominant force in popular culture, we cannot overlook the influence of “hometown” newspapers. In fact, the very notion of “hometown” dovetails nicely with the “commonly intelligible” dimension of the concept of popular culture. In addition, many engaging case studies of environmental rhetoric focus on hometown (or local region). For example, Ruud and Sprague (2000) look at the tensions between the cultural worlds of loggers and environmentalists in a community in Northern California. They report that their focus groups revealed “divergent codes” in the two groups. These divergences sometimes become public on newspaper editorial pages and in letters to the editor.

The present study is based on a Lexis-Nexis database search for uses of the label tree-hugger, along with some current materials and some historical materials dating to 1977. Three hundred uses of the term tree hugger appear during the Spring 1999 period selected for analysis. The newspapers from which citations were drawn include The Buffalo News, The Chattanooga Times, The St. Louis Post-Dispatch, The Salt Lake City Tribune, The San Francisco Chronicle, and The Washington Post.

The chapter is divided into five sections. Each of the first four sections is devoted to a different use of the tree-hugger label. The final section, offers some comments on environmental advocacy and suggestions for future research and application.

**REDUCTION TO ABSURDITY**

The first use of the tree-hugger label is *reduction to absurdity*. This mocking use of the label is an informal version of the *Reductio Ad Absurdum* (R.A.A.), a technique for reducing an argumentative position to two mutually contradictory statements. While the formal version of the R.A.A. has been useful in mathematics (Manicas & Kruger, 1968, p. 113), an informal form of the R.A.A. is evident in public discourse that discredit environmental advocacy. In short, the tree-hugger label is used to reduce environmentalists and environmental advocacy to absurdity.

The most-studied linguistic form in public discourse, arguably, is metaphor. Claims about the power of metaphor to influence daily life range from modest to sweeping (Bosman, 1987; Bosman & Hagendoorn, 1991; Graesser, Mio, & Millis, 1989; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Mio & Katz, 1996). An interesting line of research links metaphor to learning (Pugh, 1989; Pawłowski, Badeński, & Mitchell, 1998). The conclusion that metaphors play an important role in how people make sense of the world is widely accepted.

A similar claim can be made about fallacies, such as the informal R.A.A. Fallacies in public discourse are another way that people make sense of the world. A fallacy, therefore, is not simply a logical mistake. No: it is enough for environmentalists to point out the logical mistakes in the reasoning of opponents. A fallacy can be a popular culture mechanism by which arguments are advanced and perceptions are promoted (Crosswhite, 1995). What is at stake is establishing a legitimate alternative discourse in the public sphere, as well as the characteristics or quality of that discourse (Olson & Goodnight, 1994; Riley, Klumpp, & Hollihan, 1995).

The following examples document the general usage of the R.A.A. to ridicule environmentalists and environmentalism:

Ever since [1969], and especially on April 22, “Earth Day” the Earth has been portrayed as a doomed victim of human greed and carelessness—which only *hair-shirt austerity* [emphasis added] can heal. (Matt Ridley, as quoted in The Daily Telegraph (London)).

If public enthusiasm for Earth Day has waned, part of the reason is the Earth is doing pret-
by well. The Earth and its inhabitants are a lot more resourceful than the environmental groups gave them credit for. . . Environmentalists warned that we would run out of resources [emphasis added]. (Jonathan Adler, as quoted in McCain, The Washington Times).

However, unlike some of my more extreme counterparts, I don’t think that rolling back civilization a few hundred years [emphasis added] is the solution. (Brian Dipert, as quoted in Information Access/Cahners Publishing, wire release).

Ridley’s use of the phrase “hair-shirt austerity” and Dipert’s image of “rolling back civilization” are more than exaggerations. The informal R.A.A. makes environmentalists and their positions appear unrealistic and foolish. In Adler’s opinion, environmentalists are wrong in their predictions. Worse, they are so wrong as to be absurd.

The public discourse surrounding the spotted owl controversy (Agrawal, 1999, Lange, 1993) is another example of the use of the informal R.A.A. in anti-environmentalist rhetoric. The central issue for E. O. Wilson and other prominent environmentalists is the preservation of habitat. In the case of the spotted owl in the Pacific Northwest, the point is to save old-growth forests. However, the informal R.A.A. is used to characterize and undermine the position of environmentalists. Agrawal provides a useful summary: “The philosophy of environmentalism has unfortunately been characterized as privileging sequoias and R.A.A. (that spotted owls are more important than people) obscures the primary argument about habitat preservation, and facilitates the dismissal of the environmentalists’ position.

We characterize this usage as an attack discourse. Note the aggressive tone in the following three examples:

It absolutely infuriates me that those damned tree-huggers [emphasis added] would place this regulation in jeopardy (Jim Payne, as quoted in Tansey and Heredia, The San Francisco Chronicle).

Hoooooee! Will those tree-huggers be steaming [emphasis added] when they see you driving down the road! [in the new Ford Excursion, a large sport utility vehicle]. (Kevin Cowherd, writing in The Baltimore Sun).

By the end of the week, several district employees confirmed that administrators had mocked team members for months, calling them “tree huggers” and “crazed environmentalists.” (News story by Greg Gittrich in The Daily News of Los Angeles, May 17, 1999).

This attack discourse can be used to delegitimize an individual as well as a position. For example, in newspaper accounts, former Vice President Al Gore often is ridiculed as a tree-hugger. Here is one example: “[i]n accordance to what I’d read, the wacky crackpot tree huggers were really only gathering in Detroit so

that wacky crackpot tree hugger presidential candidate Al Gore could use the occasion to further his ambitions” (Lee Anderson, Chattanooga Times and Free Press, May 5, 1999). Persons who argue for the protection of the environment are targeted as tree-huggers. In protest over the rebuilding of a road in a Nevada national forest, loggers, ranchers, and miners carried signs that attacked individuals who sought to protect the national forest. These signs targeted tree huggers as “the other red meat” (Sonners, 2000, B10). David Brower, former executive director of the Sierra Club, is referred to as “the George Patton of the environmental movement,” the “Archdruid,” and the “ultimate tree hugger” (McManis, 1999, p. 1). DeLuca (1999, p. 8) cautions that the aggressive tone can spill over into violence, such as in the clashes between Earth First! and Wise Use.

The phrase tree hugger has been used as a negative epithet as well. Camilla Herlevich, a land trust director in North Carolina, compared advice from tree-huggers to more valuable advice from accountants, noting: “It’s one thing for a bunch of tree huggers to tell them (land owners) what to do; it’s another for your accountant to say it” (“Tax,” 1999, p. 6A). As mentioned above, Jim Payne, of the Paper, Allied-Industrial, Chemical and Energy Workers International Union, blamed tree-huggers for opposing a regulation favored by the union, pointing out: “It absolutely infuriates me that those damned tree-huggers would place this regulation in jeopardy” (Tansey & Heredia, 1999, p. A23). Tom Long, a columnist for The Detroit News, wrote in his column, “On Monday, I decided to wander over to Cobo Center to see what the wacky crackpot tree huggers who’d shown up for something called the National Town Meeting for a Sustainable America were doing” (1999, p. G1).

The tree-hugger label has been used to attack other social movement groups. Members of the animal rights movement, for example, who argue for protection of animal rights under the law, have been attacked as “tree hugging, fur-loathing vegetarians” (Abel, 2000, A12). Groups are often accused of being dominated by tree-huggers. For example, state Republicans argued that the Missouri Conservation Commission could “become dominated by tree huggers and Bambi lovers” who adopt the very policies that rural lawmakers are now trying to avoid” (Wagar, 1999, p. B3). The Sierra Club has been targeted by Arizona State Senator John Huppenthal as “a bunch of tree-hugging liberals” and “people who practice the fake environmental stuff” (Thomason, 1999, p. EV1). Senator Jesse Helms (Republican-North Carolina), in response to a proposal presented to him to promote global trade rules, questioned its validity by stating, “What’s this 180 pages of ‘NAFTA’ on steroids that some tree hugger’s giving me?” (Peterson, 1999, p. A1).

Whether the tone is passively aggressive or overtly aggressive, the informal reduction to absurdity public rhetoric is an obstacle to environmental advocacy. Further study of the tree hugger-label in public discourse now leads to the conclusion that the label has at least three other broad categories of uses: in self identification, in description, and in moderating positions.
The tree-hugger label originally referred to the National Park Service Rangers assigned to the Washington, D.C. area parks (Whitehead, 1977, p. 1). The term was used to distinguish the park rangers from the park police, who were known as “tree fuzz” (Whitehead, 1977). It was not until the appearance of a Heritage Foundation report in 1982 that the term was used in a negative light. The report, which evaluated the Reagan administration’s first year in office, noted that conservationists were to be referred to as “prairie fairies and tree-huggers” (“Sound,” 1982, p. D1). Another Heritage Foundation report, entitled Mandate for Leadership, argued that the Department of the Interior had been controlled by “biological types, prairie fairies, and tree-huggers” (Gilbert, 1983, p. 66).

The early years of the Reagan administration saw a movement away from the label as a rather neutral descriptor toward an increased negative connotation. The debate over the management of natural resources was characterized by a polarization of the pro-environmentalist forces and the administration officials, who were committed to breaking down the government’s environmental bureaucracy. Jay Hair, then the executive vice-president of the National Wildlife Federation, noted that right-wing groups had referred to the federation as “posy pickers and tree huggers” (Dornan, 1983, p. n). When Anne Burford, President Reagan’s appointee as Environmental Protection Agency chief, resigned under pressure, she believed that her managerial style was not supported by the Eastern press. She stated: “So whoever is the administrator of the EPA at least has to come off stylistically as a prairie fairy or a tree-hugger in order to get over that barrier that the eastern press corps demands, that you be emotive about the environment” (Hall, 1985, p. A4). An understanding of the historical uses of the label allows us to understand the self-identifier use more completely.

The use of the label as a self-identifier by environmentalists, ironically, may serve to delegitimize their own discourse. The term invites reduction to absurdity, because the term is too literal. The mental imagery is too concrete. Perry Young, a columnist for the Chapel Hill Herald, noted: “Being one of the biggest tree-huggers in three counties, I was overwhelmed with guilt when folks up and down Henderson Street began to ask me why they cut down that beautiful old oak tree at the corner of Henderson and Rosemary streets” (2000, p. 4). Gerry Rising wrote in The Buffalo News, “But we also love our environment. Especially at this time of year, this time of renewal, we don’t mind being called ‘tree huggers.’ We want to protect our wonderful surroundings. To do so we must take action now” (1999, 4B). Dorothy Coens, an advocate for the protection of National Historic Landmarks, boasted, “When I was on the County Board, they used to call me a tree-hugger, but I don’t care” (Smith, 1999, 1C). Leslie Carothers, an environmentalist in Hartford, Connecticut, described herself when she noted, “I don’t mind being called a tree-hugger. The environmental movement, by any standard, has been a success. So, as long as you get results and clout, I don’t mind” (Seremet, 1999, D1). Grace Stock, an Audubon Society spokesperson, described a reaction to a pipeline project. She said, “I thought it needed more than just us tree-huggers because it affects the whole county” (Reeder, 1999, p. 1B). C. B. Livingston, a citizen of Fayetteville, Georgia, wrote of himself, “I am a conservative tree hugger who is extremely distressed by what I see happening in Fayette County. While most of us recognize the importance of the loss of the rain forest, we seem to be oblivious to the mass destruction of the land in our own community” (Livingston, 1999, p. 6JM). Even Will Clay Ford, Jr., the chair of Ford Motor Company, is a “self-professed tree-hugger” (Incantalupo, 1999, p. D3).

It is possible that self-identified tree-huggers can deliver positive results for the environment. Henry County, Georgia, Commissioner Gary Freedman, “a self-described ‘tree hugger,’” helped pass a tree protection proposal for the county (Banks, 2000, p. 2J). Business leaders, attempting to create a positive corporate image, can also take on this positive self-identifier. Ed Boyce, CEO and founder of Innsbrook, a Warren County, Missouri, resort community, noted: “I’m kind of a tree-hugger. I was one before it became politically correct” (Sealey, 1999, p. 1). Greg Callaway, of Callaway Development Corporation, believes that his company has “got kind of a reputation as being tree huggers” (Bush, 1999, p. 1H). A group in Porter Township, Michigan, known as the “Tree Huggers” has planted a number of trees in their township with funds derived from a local electrical cooperative grant (“Porter,” 1999, p. D7).

Despite these successes, the tree-hugger label as a self-identifier is problematic. Whereas the label tree-fuzz, used by the National Park Service Rangers, is neutral and ambiguous, the label tree-hugger is not neutral or sufficiently ambiguous to transcend its literal use. Therefore, the tree-hugger label has serious defects and is not likely to create a more general, positive public discourse.

DESCRIPTOR OF OTHERS

The most literal application of the tree-hugger label in recent history is to Julia Butterfly Hill. On December 10, 1997, she took up residence in a redwood tree, which she named Luna, to prevent a logging company from cutting the tree and other trees in the area. She did not come down until December 18, 1999. Hill, who has engaged in a campaign to save California forests, has been portrayed as a tree-hugger. She once remarked: “No question the media attention has been hard on me. Some of it has hurt. But the good thing is that the scrutiny has made sure I walk my talk” (Krum, 1999, p. 6). What is interesting in this quotation is that Hill does not focus on the use of the tree hugger label as a descriptor, but as a motivator. The final section of this chapter discusses her case in more depth.

The tree-hugger label is often used to describe groups at odds with other groups. James F. Quillinan, a cofounder of a conservation club in Wisconsin, pointed out the relatively obvious proposition that “hunters and tree-huggers are at odds with each other” (Kuhns, 1999, p. 2). In a controversy over Long Island development programs, Newsday reported, “Preserving the East End is no longer a traditional battle between tree-hugging environmentalists and bulldozer-dri-
Buster is another example of an individual who "literally" (Lindblom 1999, p. B3) represents who buys land has a right to ese other people. I believe a developer "should be more sensitive to retaining trees and protecting water than he is typically" (Lindblom, 1999, p. B3). Riverside County (California) Supervisor Bob Buster is another example of an individual who had originally been perceived as an environmentalist, but who had overcome that reputation. A fundraiser described Buster as "a great combination of intelligence and integrity. Bob was perceived as a tree-hugger. He got a bad rap coming in" (O'Leary, 1999, p. B01).

The use of the label as a descriptor of others, then, sometimes is relatively uninteresting, because the label is a kind of synonym for "environmentalist." At other times, the descriptor seems more politically charged. If the struggle over meanings is historical and political, as well as grammatical, then these points of political tension are critical. What may be fascinating in this regard is to trace who applies the label to whom, when, under what circumstances, and toward what end. In such an analysis, the tree-hugger label's relationship to power will become clearer. For example, if we use Harman's (1995) "status-sensitive rhetorical theory," then we might conclude that the tree-hugger label functions not so much to describe as to marginalize and to conceal marginalization.

"TREE-HUGGER" AS A MODERATING DEVICE

The fourth use of the tree-hugger label found in the newspaper accounts included in this study is as a moderating device. The term tree-hugger has become more widely used today as an attempt to make one's position seem more moderate. Some advocates defend their position as less radical than "tree hugging." This moderating device has the possible rhetorical advantage of gaining support from individuals in favor of environmental protection, but at the same time leaving open lines of communication to other groups. Scott Hamilton, who moved to the state of Washington to live near mountains, argued that he was a "moderate tree hugger." He noted: "I believe in clean water. I'm a tree hugger. I'm nowhere near as militant as some of these other people. I believe a developer who buys land has a right to make money off it. I also believe a developer should be more sensitive to retaining trees and protecting water than he is typically" (Lindblom, 1999, p. B3). Riverside County (California) Supervisor Bob Buster is another example of an individual who had originally been perceived as an environmentalist, but who had overcome that reputation. One fundraiser described Buster as "a great combination of intelligence and integrity. Bob was perceived as a tree-hugger. He got a bad rap coming in" (O'Leary, 1999, p. B01).

In both of these cases, a moderate tree-hugger characterization is juxtaposed with a more radical variant in order to gain rhetorical advantage in the public sphere. The underlying logic seems to be that extremism is bad.

This kind of use of the tree-hugger term as a moderating device in public discourse has been a relatively recent phenomenon. According to Rail, "corporate America has retired the 'tree hugger' rhetoric in favor of quiet lobbying behind the scenes to fend off congressional attempts to reduce air pollution" (1999, p. 4D). Jean Dubail, in The Cleveland Plain Dealer, said of biomass programs, "This is not some pie-in-the-sky idea cooked up by granola-munching tree-huggers; nine states already have adopted such requirements" (1999, p. 11B). Rich Hood, the editorial page editor for The Kansas City Star, wrote, "I don't believe I qualify as the stereotypical tree-hugger because I realize that trees have many utilitarian uses, from fruit-bearing to lumber to simple shade. I'm fond of wood-working" (1999, p. K3). In an attempt to compromise between environmental interests and development, Thousand Oaks (California) Councilman Andy Fox argued, "I am not a big tree-hugger. I'm a by-the-numbers guy. I'm just doing my job trying to reach an identified goal for the city" (Griffith, 2000, p. B1). Economist David Waltz attempted to justify his advocacy for green solutions to problems, stating: "I'm not a tree-hugger, but we do have a planet of a finite size. If we don't watch our land and resources, it's going to cost us money" (Pearce, 1999, p. D1). Again, this use of the term is linked to reasonableness and good business sense.

More examples indicate how widespread this use of the label is. Justifying his support for grease-eating technology, Environmental Biotech Inc. founder Bill Hadley initially supported the technology for its environmental benefits, but noted, "I'm not a tree hugger" (Hielscher, 1999, p. 12). The group "Save Our Cumberland Mountains," a Tennessee protection group, attempted to moderate their appearance by claiming, "We're not tree-huggers. We don't say you can't cut down any trees. We are concerned because Tennessee has no regulations or registration required for timbering" (O'Neal, 1999, p. B1). A Washington County, Minnesota, project to create a green corridor along the St. Croix River gained support from members of the community through the same sort of argumentative approach. John Baird, a Stillwater, Minnesota, resident, noted "It isn't just tree-huggers that are after this. It is people who are interested in selling property" (Kaszuba, 2000, p. 1A). Andrew George, director of the Southern Appalachian Biodiversity Project, believed that "Environmental issues are received better by the public now than they ever have been. It's not just an issue of tree huggers and oxygen huggers, we all live on the planet" (Davis, 1999, B3). Dennis Phillips, the president of the Belgrade (Maine) Regional Conservation Alliance, noted in regard to a land trust program, "Without seeming like a tree-hugger, we need to set aside land for recreation and wildlife habitat. Obviously, people need a place to live, but we also need open space for recreation. There just has to be a balance" (Cooper, 1999, p. A1). Santa Susana Knolls, California, resident Holly Huff believed that "I'm not some radical tree hugger. I just love trees.
I'm just real concerned—all my life I watched trees go in the San Fernando Valley. There's no point in cutting down these trees” (Bartholomew, 1999, p. B1). In some of these cases the tree-hugger label is linked to lobbying for a certain quality of life. Moderate environmentalism is acceptable, apparently, if it ensures a green belt in one’s neighborhood.

Politicians have attempted to use the term tree-hugger as a moderating device in their discourse. Describing Woody Snell, a developer who won a seat noted: “Snell said he is neither a tree-cutter nor a tree-hugger, but an engineer that protect topsoil and water quality. He promises them a healthy profit at the argued for stricter pollution regulations, stated, “If people think I’m a flake or a own nest” (Parent, 1999, p. 1). Even real estate agents have used the term tree-hugger to describe themselves in an environmentally positive fashion. John “We’ve been known to move streets to try to save a tree. I’m as close to a tree hugger as a real estate agent can be” (Lopez, 1999, p. 4). We note in several of these examples an attempt to link the moderate form of the label to science and relegate the extreme form of the term to impracticality.

In the following examples, note how far speakers will go to distance themselves from the tree-hugger label. In a statement about his positive feelings toward the Alaskan environment, Michael Foster, a vocational rehabilitation counselor who had recently moved to Alaska, noted:

Let me preface my remarks by stating that I am not a tree hugging, granola munching, hemp wearing environmentalist. I will eat granola however, if it contains chocolate chips and marshmallows. I have not adopted a spotted owl, and don’t care to, I’ve never been involved in Greenpeace, the Sierra Club, or any environmental organization or cause. (2000, p. 8B)

Denis Hebert, Bath (Maine) city superintendent of cemetery and parks, said of the Forestry Committee’s efforts in his town, “I couldn’t do this without them. I just don’t have enough manpower. They’ve been called tree huggers, but I would take exception to that. They temper their love for trees with the knowledge that trees have to share space with humans” (Hoey, 1999, p. 1B). In an attempt to sound more moderate, Donna Lopinto, a member of an ad hoc citizens’ environmental group in New York State, characterizes the group as “not just tree huggers or sandal wearers or all of one kind” (Brenner, 1999, p. 14WC). What emerges in these examples of discourse, as well as in some of the previous examples, is Burke’s process of identifications and divisions. Note that the speakers divide vocations and avocations into two sets. Those described in a positive tone are accountants, engineers, politicians, real estate agents, and scientists. Those described in a negative tone include “flakes,” granola eaters, members of environmental organizations, and, of course, tree-huggers.

**IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

This analysis of 1999 newspaper accounts indicates that the tree-hugger label is used in at least four ways: (1) as an informal Reductio Ad Absurdum to attack and ridicule environmentalists as absurd, (2) as a self-identifier, (3) as a descriptor of others, and (4) as a moderating device to gain rhetorical advantage, often to promote a business or “scientific” perspective. While it is useful to track and report on these four competing discourses, another critical task is to explore the implications of these findings. How these discourses might influence environmental advocacy is particularly interesting.

Earlier this chapter illustrated why the tree-hugger label has serious liabilities for effective environmental advocacy. The tree-hugger label is too graphic, too concrete, to become the basis of a widespread and positive discourse. The graphic, visual nature of the tree-hugger label lends itself to reduction to absurdity. Very few persons actually hug trees. Therefore, the image seems comic. A more ambiguous, open, and flexible label has greater potential for positive, popular use in the future.

By way of contrast with the tree-hugger label, in the following case a descriptive nickname now is used with apparently minimal negative consequences. The case is that of General John J. Pershing. Early in his career as an officer in the U.S. Army, Pershing was assigned to the 10th Cavalry, the now-famous “Buffalo Soldiers.” These troops were African American, or “black” soldiers, who after the Civil War were active in service in the western United States. Following his time with the “black” 10th Cavalry, Pershing was assigned to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and reported for duty in June 1897. Pershing, a tough disciplinarian, became one of the most disliked officers on the staff at West Point. According to Vander’s account, “unpopularity won a nickname for Pershing, one born in racist contempt. The cadets knew he belonged to the 10th Cavalry and so began to call him ‘Nigger Jack.’ In time it softened to ‘Black Jack,’” but the intent remained hostile” (1977, p. 171). Because the U.S. Army, and especially the officer corps, was a small community in that era, most insiders would know the meaning of the nickname. What is of concern in the present study is that a nickname “born in racist contempt” lost its harsh meaning and was transformed into a badge of honor. In the case of Pershing, several factors explain the transformation of the “Black Jack” nickname.

First, the meaning of the word black can be ambiguous. Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary lists more than a dozen definitions. Over the course of eighty years, the ambiguity inherent in this wide range of meanings facilitates the transformation of the meaning of the nickname. Second, with the passage of time, the origins of the nickname became more and more obscure. To understand that the nickname was a racist taunt, a listener in the year 2002 would have to know Pershing's background with the 10th Cavalry or have access to sources present at West Point in 1897. Then, too, an individual would have to have spe-
specific knowledge about the Buffalo Soldiers. Finally, the context for the discourse would have to permit the public use of racist language. These conditions, taken together, constitute significant barriers for constructing a univocal or dominant meaning, something that is possible, even likely, with the tree-hugger label. Some persons might think that the nickname “Black Jack” refers to a popular Las Vegas card game. Others might take the nickname to be a commentary on Pershing’s demeanor, that he was tough or harsh. It also is perfectly plausible to believe that the nickname Black Jack is very positive, given the renewed interest in the Buffalo Soldiers and the acclaim given to them today. For all these reasons, the nickname Black Jack today is not linked to racism at West Point, whereas the tree-hugger label cannot escape its specificity.

Let us turn now to the case of the most literal of tree-huggers, Julia Butterfly Hill, whom we mentioned previously in this chapter. To what extent can Julia Butterfly Hill’s very physical example of environmental advocacy grow into a positive, popular discourse? Media coverage of Hill’s protest may qualify her as a popular culture figure (Achenbach, 1999, p. 1). She certainly is an icon among environmental advocates. DeLuca sees Hill’s significance partly in the fact that she “sees the world from the tree’s point of view and ‘becomes’ the tree” (1999, p. 56). At another point DeLuca writes: “Through inhabitation, a space that is interchangeable with many others becomes this place that is irreplaceable in its particularity” (1999, p. 161). Perhaps we now have moved from the label tree-hugger to an experience.

Brummett may be relevant here. He offers a way of understanding the relationship between the tree-hugger “text” and the individual decision maker. He suggests that we “move the site of struggle from the text, which is merely product, to the logics that create texts, and to choices among and awareness of those logics and how they position us as subjects” (1991, p. 89). Brummett uses the phrase “the ways in which culturally grounded forms could be used to order a person’s experience” (1991, p. 196). What Brummett goes on to emphasize in this passage is everyday experience. He states: “Symbolic struggle over how to order and understand experience is the dimension of everyday life where rhetoric is at work” (1991, p. 196). Here, a “chicken-and-egg” model is suggested for linking text and experience. Popular culture influences how we order our experience, but our experience also orders how we are influenced by popular culture.

It is unlikely that Hill would sit in a tree for two years without some prior experience with nature. It is just as unlikely that a young person today will copy Hill’s exploit without some prior connections to nature. Or, to be fair, a young person might emulate Hill if the emphasis were on ordering experience as exploit, because exploits are very much a part of youth popular culture today. In fact, those interested in environmental advocacy can influence young people in two ways. First, advocates for the environment can employ a public discourse that characterizes Hill’s actions and environmental advocacy, in general, as an exploit and as heroic. Second, the experience of the ages teaches us that environmental

**REFERENCES**


News production is a vulnerable process that, when scrutinized, reveals much about the larger symbolic system of news in our culture. In particular, researchers have noted the pervasiveness of framing, or "selecting and highlighting some features of reality while omitting others" (Entman, 1993, p. 53), especially as used routinely by the news media. Surely such encoding is not the product of any conspiracy, but rather is the result of central cultural assumptions and journalistic practices rooted in organizational imperatives that tend to reproduce dominant ideology. This study content analyzed frames encoded in news texts about environmental risks involving air, water, and land protection, preservation, and restoration over a fifteen year period.

This focus is of interest because environmental awareness promoted by the news media (Lowe & Morrison, 1984) and legislation designed to protect natural habitat has grown over the last two decades in the United States and worldwide (Gare, 1995). Contributing to the urgency and complexity of the environmental issue is the lack of a global environmental ethic or a coherent international legal or regulatory regime (Kasperson & Kasperson, 1991) in spite of recent multinational environmental summits. Moreover, many have analyzed the 1960s and 1970s environmental movement (Bowman & Hanaford, 1977; Catton & Dunlap, 1980; Honold, 1981; Milbrath, 1984; Hannigan, 1995), but subsequent decades have been scrutinized less.

There is much that we do not know about environmental risk issues affecting all current and future life on this planet and how we make meaning from the way these issues are represented. For example, many media-related studies of environmental issues have overlooked the cultural context by focusing exclusively on the communication process as a linear transmission (Hansen, 1991), and too many institutional risk analyses have ignored the social context of risk (Freudenburg, 1992). Also, there is a need to examine texts primarily used by