

THE HYBRID PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT:  
IMPLICATIONS OF A RHETORICAL FORM

by

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B.A., James Madison University 1997

A REPORT

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

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College of Arts and Sciences

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

2009

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## *ABSTRACT*

Public Service Announcements are a fixture of both our media and cultural landscape. Their images and messages have inspired and defined movements and generations. The impact of PSAs is explored in this work to highlight the need to examine the impact of an emerging phenomenon of public service messaging: The Hybrid PSA. The Hybrid PSA is a message that blends and blurs the line between commercial and social causes. To explore the intricacies and impact of the Hybrid PSA, this work first works to define the “classical” PSA. Then, by observation and critique, the variance between the “classic” and the Hybrid is established. To contrast, the genre of Propaganda is explored and the possibility that the Hybrid PSA could be defined as propaganda is examined. Finally, the ethical implications of such a generic classification being established are discussed.

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## *Introduction*

Public service has traditionally been considered a key role of the broadcast media, and Public Service Announcements (PSAs) have been a fixture in radio and television programming since the onset of these media. Memorable characters such as Smokey the Bear, Woodsey Owl, and common phrases including, “This is your brain. This is your brain on drugs”, originated within the domain of PSAs. Historically, PSAs have sought to establish powerful national icons in pursuit of a cause. Rosie the Riveter is still recognizable as the face and message of WWII from Howard Miller’s “We Can Do It” poster, (Kimble and Olson, 2006). More recently, PSAs have become sources of controversy. An example is the debate over the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) PSA campaign and the discussion over the value of PSA’s without a strictly educational focus (Wooden, 1997). Regardless of intent, the power of a PSA is largely a function of the media in which the message is sent (PR News, 2006), providing yet another example of McLuhan’s classic dictum of 1964, “The medium is the message.”

The role of media as an agent of social learning has strong support. Morley (1986), in discussing Lull (1980), notes that media serve as a mode for establishing role models for civic behavior. Vanacker and Breslin (2006) suggest that this causal relationship between media messages and audience attitudes or behavior should encourage the media to carefully apply ethics to their field. It follows that PSAs may serve as a media-based tool to drive both individual and community actions. Recent changes in FCC requirements relating to the type, nature, and amount of PSAs required to be aired (Campbell, 2006), as well as societal forces that drive messaging schemes (such as those reflected by O’Neill in 1994 discussing the terminology shift from corporate-giving to social responsibility) and rhetorical frameworks within the PSA itself have resulted in the creation of newer forms of media messaging that may be outside of the

ethical framework intended for a PSA. Thus, it is critical to identify newer trends in this form of media messaging and discern whether or not these forms of messaging fit the model of a true PSA.

The purpose of this study is to explore a new form of PSA (named by the author as the “Hybrid PSA”) and discuss whether it represents an ethical form of media messaging. Hybrid PSAs are those messages that promote a corporate image, product or service in conjunction with an equivalent social factor. An example of a Hybrid PSA is a recent spot featuring children leaving what we are to assume is a Children’s Miracle Network (CMN) hospital, then standing in a Wal-Mart entrance looking happy. The CMN logo is then featured and the spot closes with a family at a Wal-Mart check-out stand holding a CMN fundraising balloon. The ad encourages viewers to support both Wal-Mart *and* CMN, suggesting that by buying at Wal-Mart and supporting CMN through purchases at the store, children’s lives are improved. In essence, one message allows both entities to profit off the image of each other.

Hybrid PSAs are becoming more common as a form of media messaging as producers of traditional commercial advertisements and PSAs recognize that they seek similar goals. Both strive to build emotional attachments, brand loyalty, and financial support for a product or cause. They do so using comparable techniques such as image or advocacy campaigns for brand awareness, debut campaigns promoting new products or events, plea campaigns expressing a timeline or urgent need, or the more straight-forward sales pitch. Ultimately, the goal of these efforts translates into a form of revenue.

In the corporate sector, the promoted items are often tangible goods or personal services. In the non-profit world, goods are often in the form of intrinsic rewards and the provision of pro-social services. Because of this difference, the form by which we identify each in its aim to

make money is also different. In business, it is called sales. In charitable arenas, it is called fundraising. Nonetheless, both utilize the mass media and advertising to forward their message and goals in a similar fashion.

Despite these clear similarities of intent, advertising for the corporate and non-profit sectors has long been considered by convention to be mutually exclusive based on the presence or absence of the profit motive. This convention is forwarded by modern advice, for instance the book The Nonprofit Leadership Team warns, "...Nonprofit organizations exist to provide public services and products – whether paid for or free – because there is no way business and the marketplace can sustain them...For [non-profits] however – asking people to give, not buy, in support of public services – there is little or no place for marketing." (pg. 24) As a result, the ads stemming from these two fields have traditionally been seen as two separate genres in and of themselves; the commercial vs. the public service announcement. This is changing in the wake of recent scandals that have rocked the corporate and non-profit world that undermine the credibility of formerly established perceived reputations. The viewing public is now looking for *evidence* that businesses are community partners, not merely profiteers; and that non-profit organizations can be run responsibly using a traditional business model.

In light of this change, corporations are making a turn towards being viewed as more socially responsible, and therefore worthy of an individual's patronage. Paul Bloom explains that "What's happening now is they are being forced to compete on the basis of price or on heartstrings and affiliations. ...The style of marketing has become just as important as the product in securing a competitive advantage (Andresen, 2006)" Conversely, charitable organizations want to be perceived as stronger, more focused groups using a business management model that can be relied on to provide a social return on investment. As advertising

is key to making the connections between producers and audiences, publicity campaigns needed to change in order to express an understanding of the public's desires. The corporate and social worlds have found a way to work together to promote their new image priorities, leading to the emergence of a new form of advertising that in this work will be referred to as the Hybrid PSA.

With the Hybrid PSA being used more frequently in media messaging, it is important to be able to both describe its characteristics and to determine if its use represents an ethical communication practice. The author will attempt to answer the following questions through research and analysis:

1. What qualities characterize the Hybrid PSA? What qualities distinguish it from the "classical" PSA?
2. Is the Hybrid PSA an ethical communication practice?
3. To which communication genre does the Hybrid PSA belong?

#### *Characteristics of the PSA*

**Public Service Announcements (PSAs)** are those advertisements carried free of charge by the mass media to publicize a message in the public interest (BusinessDictionary.com, 2008). When referring specifically to broadcast media, this general definition has been refined by the Federal Communications Commission to note that a PSA is an announcement for which 1) no charge is made and 2) which promotes programs, activities, or services of governments or non-profit organizations, and other announcements that promote the community interest" (Dessart, 2008). Outside of the broadcast media we can see PSAs throughout history, (Suffrage pamphlets, morale posters, moderated Burma-Shave signs) and throughout our modern cultural landscape, (billboards, magazine ads, and websites.), so while not regulated by the FCC, these mediums also follow the above two-part form. They can be used to promote either attitude or

action. The ideal PSA is persuasive, entertaining, fact-based, concise, and has a clear and reality-based message (atschool.org, 2008).

It is important to note that a standard PSA represents a public-private relationship bound by obligation. The Telecommunication Act of 1996 saw media outlets presented with PIOs by the FCC: Public Interest Obligations. The Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2004 carried with it a theme of transparency for American non-profits. While both vague, we observe a requirement on the part of the broadcast outlets to offer PSA time, and a requirement of charities to be open regarding the transaction. (Jackson & Fogarty, 2005)

This definition needs further clarification in order to evaluate the Hybrid PSA against the “classical standard.” Pragmatically, there are features of the “standard” public service announcement that not only act as identifying qualities but also suggest a context for the emergence of the Hybrid presented in this work. For instance, inherent within this criterion is that the PSA itself, not just its transmission, is transparency, with all relationships between issue, actions, and effects being readily apparent. (Jackson & Fogarty, 2005) They are also fact-based, being persuasive without being deliberately misleading, with the facts behind the PSA being readily available for review for any who care to investigate further. Finally, traditional PSAs use hierarchical language to indicate who are the givers, supporters, and/or receivers of the message broadcast or its intended attitude or action. The idea of hierarchical placement being part of the established message is a given in the most successful and ethical illustrations and instructions regarding the creation of public service announcements. For example; “The 30-second message can tell about a free service, health risk, or how to join. It concludes with ‘this message brought to you by the name of the organization and this station as a public service.’” (Burnett, 2007)



The traditional PSA is focused on promoting positive social behaviors. While the valence of any specific behaviors (changes in attitude or actions) as positive or negative is established by the socio-cultural context in which the messages are sent and received, it has been noted earlier in this work that the media provides significant models for civic behavior. Participating in these behaviors drives people to emulate even more of these behaviors, resulting in a continual cycle of reinforcement for the individual and increasing good to society. For example, it has been noted that fundraisers give people needed opportunities and incentives to practice generous acts, and these acts help people to become generous and make good giving decisions (O'Neill, 1994). Of note however, this work contends that traditional commercial advertisements and classic PSAs both created an "either/or" dyad; either you purchased the advertised item or you did not; either you gave time, money, or support to an organization or did not.

Finally, the traditional PSA is subtly, but intimately, linked to power-shifting within society. Fundraising is largely a function of power in society, which in turn is a function of money. Those holding relatively higher levels of power, as defined by placement along the twin spectrums of autonomy and influence on others, generally have more money, and are therefore most often the targets of fundraisers. Funds given are most often used to benefit the poor, aged, ill, or handicapped populations that traditionally fare less well economically and therefore hold relatively less societal power. As these populations benefit, their levels of autonomy (and influence, to a lesser degree) rise, and there is a slight but real shift in power to those who were in need. This also holds true with PSAs that promote attitude change, not only financial giving. Thinking better of a minority group may lead one to treat them with more respect or offer new opportunities to members of that group; perceiving the benefits of a community organization

may lead to one's lending his or her time and influence to the group effort; improving a personal attitude towards drug use may improve an individual's health and enhance their ability to be autonomous.

### *Characteristics of the Hybrid PSA*

Hybrid PSAs can be characterized by three main descriptors. These criteria were derived by the author from observation of recent PSAs, including messages promoting the Microsoft Windows Live messenger "I'm Making a Difference" campaign, the GEICO "Aquarium" campaign, the Wal-Mart "Children's Miracle Network" campaign, and the previously mentioned "Citizen Soldier" artifact, noting both their similarities and differences from more traditional forms of PSAs.

First, Hybrid PSAs are not limited to an individual or specific medium. They have been found on TV, radio, and even more frequently on the Internet as banner ads. This allows for a Hybrid PSA campaign to be multi-media.

Second, they are marked most significantly by equal time and/or presence devoted to both a corporate entity and a social entity. This presence can be represented by the respective organization's logo, product, or verbal mission statement. In a radio spot, this could be translated into equal counts of copy per involved organization. In a banner ad, this translates into both logos being of equal size and placement.

The media time shared by two or more entities is expressed toward the end of a (seemingly) singular message. This message is dominated by an assimilation of the corporate mission into the charitable goal. Wal-Mart, Target, or Exxon is suddenly transformed from a corporate goliath into a group that wants to save puppies, cure cancer, or teach children to ride bicycles as its primary goal. Equally, groups like the United Way, CMN, the American Red

Cross, or the National Multiple Sclerosis Society are seen as part of the infrastructure of a successful business.

The third key aspect of a Hybrid PSA is specific word choices in message framing. Hybrids avoid the concepts of benefit and sponsorship as those terms belie a hierarchy, dominance, or dependence which would further the images the two entities are seeking to change; irresponsible and ineffective, respectively. The Hybrid is characterized *either* by the use of key words such as *joining* or *partnership* or by the absence of such identifying language. This choice frames the concept of equality and promotes the idea of a relationship between the two entities where otherwise there would only be an exchange of money. Further, these language choices are invitations to the audience to believe this new collaborative experience can include them.

The carefully focused use of language within a Hybrid PSA sets a path towards compassionate consumerism, promoting the concept that through satisfaction of personal wants through purchases of goods and services, one can also satisfy an altruistic urge (or offset a selfish one) by helping others in need. Pratkanis and Aronson (1991) note that, when individuals feel guilty, thoughts and actions become focused on doing something to remove the guilt. The Hybrid PSA appears to appeal directly towards to the sense of guilt of the conspicuous consumer.

This use of language to avoid demonstration of any asymmetry in the partnership between a commercial and non-profit entity, however, appears to represent a clear anti-epistemic<sup>1</sup> quality which represents the most significant difference between a classical and a

*1. As stated, the author relies upon the classical Greek definitions of Epistemology. The concepts and research of Foucault and Scott regarding "Rhetoric as Epistemic" serve as inspiration for the authors interpretations of epistemic rhetoric or epistemic communication.*

Hybrid PSA. As previously described, the traditional PSA is inherently epistemic, with an assumed level of transparency. The receiver of the message is being asked to directly support a non-profit agency with time or money, or to change a personal attitude through the direct appeal of the message. The Hybrid PSA, however, introduces a “cloud of unknowing” into the relationship between the donor and the receiver through equal billing and use of non-specific terminology. To put it bluntly, the concern becomes one of “Who’s running the show? Is it the non-profit or the commercial entity? Who determines the content of the advertisement? Who determines the final destination of the funds? How much of the spending really goes to support the charity, and how much to bolster corporate profits? How exactly do my actions help?” The risk for deception is readily apparent; in review of joint corporate and charitable relationships, it’s been noted that there is virtually no fashion in which the venture can be considered to be purely philanthropic, and that almost any marketing of such a venture is based, at least in part, on some degree of deception (Fischer, 2000). This contention is supported by recognizing that as part of the Microsoft “I’m Making a Difference” campaign, the use of Microsoft Windows Live Messenger increased over 25% in the first few months of the campaign while only \$35,000 was raised for the affiliated charities (cybernetnews.com, 2007). By April of 2008, the total had reached over 1.3 million dollars, which indicates that many more people have joined the live messenger service (and are paying the attendant fees with profits to Microsoft) (cybernetnews.com, 2008).

Through shared and balanced spaced, joint mission, and careful message framing, companies both for and non-profit have developed a type of advertising that could be the new era of fundraising. With a mass merchandising partner like Wal-Mart, the Children’s Miracle Network can be seen as an organization of national scope and impact. The hard-edged, negative

public perception of Microsoft can be tempered with the “big brown puppy dog eyes” of partnership with the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA). The larger question is not if these practices will continue or widen in scope. Unless American society becomes less focused on satisfying personal needs while minimizing personal guilt, it is this author’s opinion that this form of advertising will become more prominent over time. The larger question for those who study communication is if this is an ethical form of messaging.

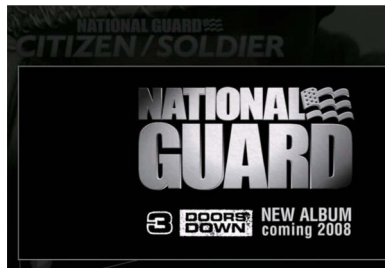
#### *An Example of a Hybrid PSA*

While the author has reviewed many artifacts she categorized as a Hybrid PSA, one example has been selected for detailed evaluation within this work. The artifact is a Music Video entitled, “Citizen Soldier” by the band, 3 Doors Down. First seen as a prequel to feature presentations in movie theaters in December 2007, it is now available in both cinematic and electronic formats. The song itself, without accompanying video, is available on the band’s most recent compact disc release. The circulation of the video and the popularity of the band make it an ideal artifact for review. Further, the artifact not only blurs the line between commercial and social organizations as required, but also blurs the line between advertisement and entertainment, emphasizing the impact of a lack of transparency.

The video features the band 3 Doors Down in a typical format for popular music videos, including stereotypical motifs such as a preponderance of dark visual tones, the group standing on the crest of a hill, and the presence of lightning on the background. The music is readily identifiable as being of the band, as the melody is similar to other hits by the group, including “When I’m Gone” and “Kryptonite.” The song in the video is identified in the initial titles as “Citizen Soldier,” and the “National Guard” is given a credit under these titles, but the exact nature of the credit – writer, producer, performer, or funding source – is not known.

While the rhyming scheme is somewhat erratic, and the lyrics never specifically mention the National Guard, the words of the song evoke mental and emotional responses of martial pride, duty, and a sense of honor. The words are reinforced by images of Americans in military conflicts over two centuries, with three intermingled storylines reflecting the American Revolution, the invasion of Normandy (D-Day), and the current Iraq War, as well as a fourth intermeshed storyline regarding the military response to natural disasters. In each case, the storyline involves coming to the aid of a comrade in arms or a child in need. The video also features textual overlays of terms positively associated with military service, such as “pride” and “honor.” The end screen of the artifact confirms the identity of the video as a joint effort of the National Guard and 3 Doors Down, or (more accurately) of the National Guard and the corporate

entities behind the band.



Using this critique, it is confirmed that the 3 Doors Down “Citizen Soldier” artifact reviewed in detail previously in this work meets the criteria for a Hybrid PSA. The method used is deductive, comparing the artifact with the preconceived model.

1) *Hybrid PSAs are not limited to a specific medium.* The music video is available in multiple formats (film, music, and on-line media).

2) *They are marked by equal time and/or presence by both a corporate and a social entity, and the time shared by the two entities is used to express a seemingly singular message.*

Equal billing is noted in the title and end credits, and while the music is uniformly that of the band 3 Doors Down, the imagery and lyrics are clearly martial in focus.

3) *Message framing is characterized either by words of equality (partnership, joining,) or the lack of hierarchical terminology (sponsorship, donations, support).* While the specific use of words of equality is not seen, there is certainly no implication within the PSA of any hierarchy between the two parties.

Now that the parameters of a Hybrid PSA have been defined and examined in practice, its distinction from the classical PSA has been established. This distinction presents an opportunity to examine another genre, specifically Propaganda, of which the Hybrid PSA may be a part, for enhanced insight into its form and function.

#### *Characteristics of Propaganda*

Propaganda is a strategy of persuasive communication used for as many purposes and disseminated through all forms of media, including print, broadcast, visual (art, film, theater) and electronic (on-line) media outlets. Historically, the word originated with the Congregation de Propaganda Fide, founded by Pope Gregory XV in 1622, to spread Catholicism throughout the world, the saving of souls being the ultimate social goal (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2007).

Ross (2002) sets a definitional model for assessing whether an artifact can be considered as propaganda. She contends her “epistemic merit model” can be used as a vehicle for understanding propaganda without placing an inherent value on the rhetorical form. She notes that propaganda must be considered within a three-fold model of the Sender, the Receiver, and the Message. To be considered as propaganda, the Message must have the intent to persuade; be

sent on behalf of an organization, institution, or cause; be received by a “socially significant” group of people; and be intended as an epistemological challenge to other thoughts (or messages). The key role of the sender in the propaganda message is allowing the receiver to avoid responsibility for investigating the claim of truth, as well as the obligation of the sender to favor truth and transparency in order to enhance the ability of the receiver to understand, has been noted by both Cunningham (2002) and Code (1987). Ross also notes that propaganda works best when the epistemological knowledge base of the intended Receiver is “weak or defective.”

This rather neutral definition does not convey the full negative tenor of the term. In common usage, the word propaganda is associated with the exploitation of populations living under authoritarian regimes such as Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The word carries with it an inherent negative value, and this negative quality even carries over into the terms used to define it. Jowett and O’Donnell (2006) offer perhaps a more accurate, operational, and emotional definition when they consider that “Propaganda is the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.” Adelman (1987) places propaganda within a larger context of time, emotion, and action when he considers propaganda as a “constant public repetition of assertions about key elements in a drama of persuasion...of sufficient duration... sufficiently diffused, provoking the participation of key target audiences.” Ross (2002) further describes propaganda as resulting in inappropriate emotional responses in the receiver of the message.

While a definition may help us to identify propaganda, it does not provide a theoretical characterization of the genre, and tells us little about the underlying processes used in this



rhetorical form. If the goal of this discussion is to learn if and how propaganda can be identified, we must first understand how it works. Several descriptive models of propaganda were considered, including those of Cunningham (2002), Herman and Chomsky (1988), and Jowett and O'Donnell (2006). Each features its own area of focus in establishing the core characteristics of the genre.

Cunningham (2002) sets out an eleven-point guide for describing the characteristics of propaganda. Four of his points are critical to this report:

- 1) Propaganda is characterized by epistemic deficits.
- 2) Propaganda is an agent of transmitting and receiving defective (fallacious) information.
- 3) Propaganda is a cultural phenomenon that manifests itself in illusion and symbolic inducement.
- 4) Propaganda is primarily a mass-mediated environmental phenomenon.

Within Cunningham's description of propaganda, some points refer to content, some refer to the means of transmission, and others key in on the respective roles of the sender and receiver.

As described above, the key characteristic of propaganda is not the content of the message, but in the intention of the sender and the social status of the receiver. Cunningham is in concordance with Ross agrees that propaganda messages are epistemologically defective with reference to facts and argument. She expands upon this, however, by noting propaganda is also epistemologically defective when placed within the context of conceptual schemes and moral precepts. (Ross, 2002).

Herman and Chomsky (1988) propose another “propaganda model” as a means to explain biases in the mass media. This model views the media selling a product (readers and viewers) to advertisers businesses. The model itself is really more of a map of an economic exchange than a description of a rhetorical form, but one could easily see where the techniques of propaganda could be used to bring viewers and readers to media outlets, and be exploited by advertisers to sell to those who are “captured” by the media outlet.

A final model by Jowett and O’Donnell (2006) classifies propaganda on the basis of its origin and character. White propaganda, as it has been termed, comes from an openly acknowledged and identified source, and is considered to be truthful in factual content. Most WWII Posters fell under this category. Because it is open, it is the easiest to combat, but the hardest to discredit. Black propaganda is untruthful, and its origin is either falsified (attributed to another) or covert (hidden). Both sides of the conflict utilized this category for some posters in WWII, creating images that appeared to be sponsored by the “enemy”. Attempts to reveal the source or to combat the information may result in harm to those who ask the necessary questions. Grey propaganda has no easily identifiable source or a source attributed to an ally, and the information presented is of uncertain veracity. Modern usage of grey propaganda includes political advertising by a candidate that is written to read or sound as though sponsored by an outside, unaffiliated group, even if said group was approached by the candidate.

While not clearly stated (but certainly implied), these definitions of propaganda hold the underlying assumption that epistemic communication, or communication that is epistemic in nature and enhances the knowledge base of the receiver, is a primary goal of all messaging activities. Epistemic communications enhance the knowledge base of the receiver and aid in the search for truth found through learning new material and receiving new information, hence the

traditional PSA is considered to be fully epistemic in nature and methods. The Western academic tradition (what Ross might term a “context” of a “conceptual scheme”) holds that the Socratic method of knowledge acquisition through questioning and reason are the tools used in the search for truth, which is perceived as the ultimate goal of human activity. The corollary to this is that statement is that communications which are non-epistemic in character do not fit within the conceptual and moral context held to be correct in learned circles, and would necessarily be considered as propaganda. If the search for truth is accepted as the goal of an individual or societal ethical system, then epistemic communications such as the traditional PSA can be considered ethical, while the Hybrid PSA, with its’ deliberate blurring of relationships, would be considered to represent a form of propaganda and be inherently unethical.

When looking at these propaganda techniques, it would be reasonable to ask if their effect is different in an open, democratic society than in a more closed, authoritarian one. Kinder (2007) considers that when the media provides useful frames for messaging, people are more likely to establish connections between issues and themselves and more likely to form “real” opinions. However, Adelman (1987) relates that people in democratic societies exposed to a wider range of opinions in varying media forms and sources, while claiming greater objectivity, is actually exposed to more propaganda of many different types. This exposure is more “hidden” to the reader because of his or her own insistence of objectivity.

### *Is the Hybrid PSA Propaganda?*

Campbell and Jamieson (1978) consider a genre to be “groups of discourses which share substantive, stylistic, and situational characteristics” or “a group of (communicative) acts unified by a constellation of forms that recurs in each of its members. Black (1965) pioneered the work of “generic criticism,” in contrast to previous schools of criticism (Neo-Aristotelians) that

focused on the elements within a discourse in isolation of historical or social context, with only an emphasis on logic, effects, and classifications (Campbell and Jamieson, 1978).

Black recognized that the occasions where rhetoric is deployed and the means by which the rhetor interacts with the situation are not infinite, and that there are affinities between recurrent rhetorical forms that can lend these artifacts to criticism as a group (Black, 1965). Therefore, once a group of artifacts have been established as a genre, they can be classified and critiqued as a group. Genres may be established through deductive means, or comparing texts against a pre-existing model (Zyskind, 1950) or inductive by looking at a variety of artifacts to discern common patterns (Hart, 1971).

Pratkanis and Aronson (1991) distinguish propaganda from persuasion in that the former genre appeals to the receiver of a given message not through the interchange or argumentation and debate, but through the manipulation of symbols and the appeal to emotion. Cunningham (2002) considers propaganda as a form of rhetoric that strives to impede effective communication by avoiding an active discussion of ideas and failing to promote the epistemic accumulation of knowledge. As a result, propaganda can not be considered neutral in the context of western academic discourse.

It is this epistemic deficit that requires the classification of the Hybrid PSA as a form of propaganda. As previously discussed, one of the characteristics of the traditional PSA is epistemological merit fostered by transparency. The use of deliberately non-hierarchical language obscures the relationships between the joint parties in a Hybrid PSA, and opens the door to distortions of intent and action. As a result, the non-epistemic nature of the Hybrid PSA becomes its defining characteristic with respect to both the traditional PSA and genre classification

Within the context of Ross' model, the artifact would meet her criteria for propaganda. There is clearly an intent to persuade; while there is no specific request made of the viewer, it seems plain that there is an emotional appeal to feelings of unity, community, security, and history, all of which are focused on building support for the National Guard within the social context of seminal events in American history and the moral imperative to help those in need, especially wounded colleagues and children. (The video also implies that purchasing the music is a portion of that support). The message is sent on behalf of two causes, the National Guard and the music company; and the choice of music and imagery indicates that it is intended for those in the population demographic most likely to choose service in the National Guard (young adults), which would qualify as a "socially significant" group. The message does pose a challenge to current thoughts, though one likely designed to reinforce feelings of support for the National Guard rather than to impart any new truths or change minds. There is the same epistemological deficit present in the definition between the partnering agencies as might be found in any Hybrid PSA, which shows lack of transparency and hence implies intent to deceive the receiver of the message.

As previously discussed, Cunningham (2002) outlines eleven characteristics of propaganda, which were summarized by the author in 4 key points. The epistemic deficits in his first point can be thought of as the intent of propaganda to decrease or eliminate true and open discourse in the subject area, preventing the full transmission of knowledge and the ability to gain complete understanding. In the 3 Doors Down artifact, one is prevented from understanding the full relationship between the group 3 Doors Down and the National Guard; the imagery and music sets one into a "circular loop" where the music is about the Guard and the military

imagery supports the music, but allows no exit point to ask further questions about the relationships between the entities.

The other points which follow also fall in line within the artifact under discussion. The use of symbolism is rampant within the film clip itself, and intangible symbols such as “patriotism” are used to represent tangible purchases of records; being a “rock star” appears symbolic of enlisting in the National Guard. Humans have made the choice to engage in the creation, production, and dissemination of the artifact and the group production activity is intended to provoke personal action. The film clip meets the time criterion regarding mass-mediation, and the fact that the message is transmitted by film, music, and electronic media certainly suggest that its transmission is facilitated by the mass media.

Herman and Chomsky’s (1988) propaganda model views the media as selling their readers and viewers to advertisers’ businesses. The artifact of the 3 Doors Down video could be viewed as a form of propaganda to entice readers and viewers to join the National Guard (a form of “self-selling” themselves.) Before they join, they could also stop at a local music store and buy the 3 Doors Down CD so they have the song “Citizen Soldier” at their fingertips. The techniques of propaganda could be used to bring viewers and readers to both enlistment centers and media outlets, and be exploited by advertisers to sell to those who are “captured” by the media outlet.

Finally, Jowett and O’Donnell’s (2006) model classified propaganda on the basis of its origin and character. By O’Donnell’s definitions, the 3 Doors Down artifact would be considered white propaganda. It comes from an openly acknowledged source, the National Guard, is easily identifiable, and the content of the video themselves is essentially factual in nature. However, this model does not help to classify an artifact as propaganda, but instead

designates a subclass of the form once propaganda has been identified. If we assume the 3 Doors Down artifact is, in fact, an example of propaganda, then we can apply this model for further classification.

It is of interest to note is that all of these referenced models of propaganda assume there is a single sponsor of the message. It would be logical to assume that the same rules within these model hold for newer forms such as Hybrid PSAs in which two more sponsors share equal time and share a single explicit (but likely more than one implicit) messages, and this tenet has been followed in this analysis. However, further work in this area may better tailor these models to this new genre. Nonetheless, the artifact in question allows us to draw the conclusion that the artifact and its fellow members of the class Hybrid PSA *are* propaganda.

#### *Ethical Implications of the Hybrid PSA*

The ethical status of those communications (such as the Hybrid PSA) considered to be propaganda may well vary depending upon whom you ask. While definitions and descriptions of propaganda may use pejorative language that reflects the cultural context in which the writers use the term, there is in fact no inherent ethical value on the rhetorical form. It is undoubtedly true that propaganda is non-epistemic, but whether this quality makes the communication form ethical or not depends upon if the accumulation of knowledge in the pursuit of truth is the goal of your ethical system. Propaganda simply is what it is, a communicative form used to persuade and manipulate others into adopting our point of view. If we conclude that it is inherently unethical to communicate in a manner which betrays any hint of bias or which is part of an attempt to drive the opinions and behavior of others, it is uncertain what exactly humans would ever have to talk about.

When we consider propaganda techniques themselves, all of them involve the use of fallacy or illogical and unsound reasoning. It makes inherent sense within our Western academic tradition to say that argument based on fallacy is unacceptable by any standard. (As previously described, the underlying assumption to this statement and the ethical context in which this argument is made is that the pursuit of truth is a universal good, and that those practices which obscure the truth are bad.) Therefore, if we remove the intent of the sender and any resultant action from the mix, we might say that the techniques of propaganda themselves as they are applied in communication forms such as the Hybrid PSA are likely unethical, as they may obscure truths and hamper the search for new information.

If we speak of the ethics of propaganda in the context of a model (that is to say, as an entity defined only by its characteristics) within the ethical framework of the Western academic tradition, the answer to the question of the ethical status of the Hybrid PSA depends on which propaganda model best reflects your thinking. Cunningham (2002) clearly implies in his exploration of the characteristics of propaganda that ethical communications must contribute in some way to the epistemological knowledge base of the receiver. As he considers that propaganda does not do so, his conclusion would be that propaganda is an unethical form of communication.

Ross (2002), however, might disagree. Her model takes care not to establish a presumed negative value to propaganda, especially when it was not designed nor intended to mislead. Ross understands that propaganda features epistemological deficits, but also adds the intent of the sender as a key component in assessing the ethical status of the message. While a purist might argue that here is an inherent intent to deceive within a Hybrid PSA due to the use of vague and non-hierarchical language, a more reasoned view of her model might require each Hybrid PSA to



be evaluated individually for the intent and magnitude of any deception in order to label the message as propaganda and thus unethical.

Herman and Chomsky's (1988) propaganda model focuses on the media exploiting readers and viewers to advertisers so they can market their respective businesses. Within this model, they would consider forms of propaganda where the elite are using power, influence, and money to get a message across unethical. A Hybrid PSA such as the 3 Doors Down artifact would fit this description. As the video is sponsored by the National Guard, its reach and target is vast, allowing the media to promote this message in various formats and venues. As such, the dual message of purchasing the band's CDs and joining the National Guard will be heard by diverse audiences. To see this message promoted by 3 Doors Down will encourage fans of the band to join the Army under the guise of not only supporting the country, but supporting the beliefs of their favorite group. As such, the artifact would be considered unethical.

Jowett and O'Donnell's (2006) model would classify this artifact as white propaganda, and as such would be considered ethical. Jowett and O'Donnell would argue that there is no hidden agenda and the intent of the video is clear, allowing viewers to make their own decisions. Information is simply being provided and jointly supported by two different venues, with no ill intent to deceive or entice viewers. If viewers happen to feel moved by the emotion of the video and choose to join the National Guard, that is the individual's prerogative and not a result of the propaganda by 3 Doors Down.

A final view of the issue using a variant definition of epistemic merit: Frisina (2002) lyrically contends that something that is "epistemic" involves a harmonious paring, or unity, of knowledge and action. An epistemic message means nothing if the knowledge results in no action, be it physical (writing a check to a favored organization) or mental (experiencing a

change in attitude or belief). In this model, corporate and charitable activities share the potential to be in harmony with one another if both the knowledge and action for within a specific ethical framework (Frisina, 2002).

It remains unclear whether the Hybrid PSA in particular, or propaganda as a whole, is inherently ethical or unethical. Each individual piece of propaganda would have to be examined on a case-by-case basis to determine the intent of the sender, the message as interpreted by the receiver, and the actions or consequences that followed as a result of that propaganda.

In determining the value of the practice of propaganda within a human ethical system, it is important to consider both the role of the Sender and the content of the Message on the ability of the Receiver to achieve the good life (the end result of ethical behavior). Each philosopher discussed above has his own definition and method for determining whether an action is or is not ethical. This can cause challenges in general situations where ethics are questioned, as the definition and parameters defining ethics can be viewed in different ways. What does this mean in terms of propaganda and the Hybrid PSA?

As with the ethical valence of the Hybrid PSA within propaganda models, the answer again depends on whom you ask. The ethical implications for propaganda within the Socratic model, and its Aristotelian successors, seem clear on the surface. If one accepts the Cunningham (2002) hypothesis that propaganda does not add to the epistemological knowledge base of an individual or group used to divine the truth, then one would need to conclude that propaganda provides no additional knowledge of the self, that it will not lead to enhanced self-awareness nor to correct patterns of behavior. However, the argument begins to weaken if we consider the full spectrum of self-knowledge as not merely a set of learned facts, but as a complex mix of

observations and impressions. Propaganda can create emotional feelings within the individual, which in turn can lead to increased self-awareness.

The ethical picture for the Epicurean, however, is quite different. As long as the exercise in propaganda provides any degree of pleasure which is not offset by the risk of long-term pain, there seems to be no real issue with the use of propaganda whether the information it contains is correct or not. One could reasonably be expected to live an entire life holding specific beliefs which, while incorrect, do not exert any significant impact upon life and which, if corrected, might cause significant emotional distress. Similarly, for the stoic, the extent to which a propaganda message helps an individual with self-mastery can be viewed as a positive.

The ethical qualities of propaganda can also be evaluated through more modern lenses. The utilitarian thinker might have little issue with propaganda as long as its intent was to drive actions providing the greatest good for the greatest number of people. By way of contrast, Kant and the intuitionists would likely object to the practice of propaganda, as the techniques used would violate the universal law of honesty, as identified by the rational good free will.

The pessimist might have no issue with propaganda. In a life of disillusionment and unmet wants, it would make sense that disinformation might be part of the picture. To the extent that propaganda efforts would help increase compassion, the root of ethical behavior in a bleak and suffering world, the efforts might be welcomed regardless of their truthfulness. Ethical realists might contend that as long as propaganda results in the positive outcomes, the ethical quality of the propaganda effort itself is of no concern whatsoever. The work of Levinas would suggest that due to a lack of truth-telling and the inability (intentional or otherwise) or propaganda to speak to all “others” in an ethical fashion, that propaganda is never ethical within this scheme of thought.

Finally, this discussion has often referenced the Western academic tradition's pursuit of truth as the goal of academic exercise. However, post-modernism has even challenged this traditional tenet. Zinsmeister (1999) paraphrases Foucault in suggesting that in a post-modern intellectual world, "truths" are merely claims made up by the powerful to continue their power. He is especially critical of "intellectuals" in both academia and the media, who are charged to be objective but are nonetheless willing to subsume fact for ideology, even when the facts are demonstrated to be in error. These parties justify their actions on the basis that, "Rather than believe in the absolute truth of what we are writing...we must believe in the moral or political position we are taking with it." If his contentions are correct, and the dissemination of truth is not the goal of the message but the advancement of an ideology is, then virtually any kind of propaganda becomes unacceptable from an ethical standpoint regardless of intent or epistemological content.

#### *Conclusions and Areas for Further Study*

A **genre** is a "group of discourses which share substantive, stylistic, and situational characteristics" or "a group of (communicative) acts unified by a constellation of forms that recurs in each of its members" (Campbell and Jamieson, 1978). A genre can also be defined as a loose set of criteria for classifying a category; the term is often used to categorize literature and speech. Genres are often vague categories with no fixed boundaries, formed by sets of conventions, and many categories cross into multiple genres when redefining and recombining these conventions (Winterown, 1986).

This work has described the advent of a new genre. Designated the Hybrid PSA, this form is characterized by its use in all forms of media, the use of shared time, and the use of non-hierarchical language. It is this third point that prevents transparency within the Hybrid PSA,

implying that the new form is inherently non-epistemic. While this feature in turn suggests that the Hybrid PSA is essentially unethical, a more careful review of propaganda models and of ethical systems poses a wide range of questions and answers to the question of the ethical status of the Hybrid PSA.

This brief acknowledgement of generic participation does not preclude further questioning of the individual components. For instance, while the message can be sent in different formats, it may be reconstructed or reinterpreted differently when transmitted via those formats. Additionally, it is difficult to determine whether three minutes of National Guard imagery and three minutes of music by 3 Doors Down equate to one another. Moreover, the receiver may not be able to determine if there is a single or double message presented here: one featuring the importance of the National Guard and the other promoting the band 3 Doors Down. It is also unclear whether the message needs to be uniquely singular to meet inclusion in this genre. It may be sufficient that the messages within the artifact are not mutually exclusive or contradictory in any way, but this remains uncertain. All of these areas are topics for future research.

Ethics and rhetoric have been linked since the days of Ancient Greece over concerns that techniques of persuasion could be so powerful they could be used to make “wrong” seem “right”, allowing people to heedlessly violate moral standards (Honderich, 1995). In this sense, a definition of ethics and ethical thought as codes and principles of moral behavior might easily be adapted and applied to rhetorical forms. A rhetorical genre that permits or promotes those behaviors which are considered as “ethical” and within the bounds of accepted moral behavior may be in and of itself ethical as well.

Hybrid PSAs are hastening of a decrease in the importance of ethics in our national discourse. It is not that people and corporations necessarily behave unethically, but that as strict ethical norms become less and less a part of our code of conduct in favor of an increasingly subjective relativism, we emotionally recognize the lack of moral stability and find ways to compensate. The Hybrid PSA becomes one way to do so, as it implies a certain level of ethical behavior on the part of both the corporate and social worlds while glossing over the leverage that one party holds over the other, acting as a smokescreen or as an illusory ethical yardstick, eliminating the need to critique the motives and methods of the corporate sponsors and social partners, and distracting the public from the moral relevance of actual behaviors.

While this work discussed in detail a single artifact representative of the proposed genre, further efforts in this area may provide for examination and evaluation of multiple additional artifacts to more completely document the existence and characteristics of the newly-proposed genre. Additionally, continued research on ethics within propaganda would assist in clearly determining which instances propaganda is ethical or unethical and the standards needed to make that determination. As new forms of propaganda such as the Hybrid PSA are created, it is important that the rhetoric community be clear on its standards and definitions in order to ensure the sanctity of communications and messaging and the trust of the audiences.

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