Take a moment or two to jot down a favorite (1) movie, (2) TV program, (3) song, (4) cartoon, (5) comic strip, and (6) advertisement. Beside each selection, identify in a sentence or two why it is a favorite of yours. The reasons you offer actually demonstrate the influential role that each one plays in how you interpret the world around you.

Research has shown that these and other forms of entertainment can be highly influential in both reflecting and shaping how people believe and behave. If you are reading this book, I suspect this statement does not surprise you. What you may not know, however, is how these movies, TV programs, songs, cartoons, comic strips, and advertisements actually do so. The purpose of this book, then, is to equip you with tools to analyze the underlying messages offered in them about how we “ought to” and “ought not to” believe and behave. By the time you finish this book, you will be a more critical consumer of the messages being sent through popular culture. Ultimately, you will be able to make educated choices about whether to embrace such messages as being valid in your own life.

Developing your ability to make educated choices is particularly important when it comes to entertainment media (e.g., movies, TV programs, songs, cartoons, comic strips). Why? Because influential messages couched in entertainment media can be used ethically or unethically. Ethics refers to principles about what is right and wrong, moral and immoral, fair and unfair (Johannesen, 1990; Nilsen, 1974; Wallace, 1955). Unlike legal choices that are governed by rules to which we must abide, ethical choices
are guided by our values, conscience, and sense of fairness. As such, producers of entertainment media may operate by ethical standards that differ from yours or mine. Moreover, they might at times compromise ethical standards in the quest for higher profits. Developing your ability to discern those underlying ethics-based messages couched in entertainment media affords you the ability to choose whether to be influenced by them, rather than to be an unintentional victim of their persuasion.

This chapter lays the groundwork for studying popular culture as communication by, first, defining \textit{popular culture} and \textit{mediated popular culture texts} as they relate to other definitions of culture and texts. Second, the chapter provides a clear rationale for studying popular culture as communication. Third, the chapter presents a systematic approach for examining underlying messages embedded in popular culture texts using an extended example. By the time you finish the chapter, I hope you will be eager to expand your understanding and ability to examine the many kinds of popular culture texts that pervade daily life.

\section*{WHAT IS POPULAR CULTURE?}

To fully understand what popular culture is, it is particularly helpful to begin by explaining what it is \textit{not}. Let’s begin with the concept of \textit{culture} and then move on to the concept of \textit{popular culture}.

Sometimes the word \textit{culture} is defined within an \textit{elitist} context. That is, one definition of the concept of \textit{cultured} refers to the means by which to improve one’s station in life. I must admit I encouraged my children to play in the school orchestra because I believed it was a means of self-improvement for them because musical ability has been positively correlated with intellectual capacity and leadership potential. \textit{Culture} is also often defined within a \textit{diversity} context (e.g., racial, ethnic, religious, and other demographic associations). For example, Muslim, Jewish, and Christian religions could denote different \textit{cultures}. Although these demographic characteristics often play a role in determining target audiences of various movies, songs, advertisements, and such, they are insufficient in defining popular culture.

\textit{Popular culture}, in contrast, is not associated with the elitist definition of becoming cultured to improve oneself nor is it narrowly defined by demographic characteristics of a community or group. Rather, for purposes of this book, \textit{popular culture} is comprised of the everyday objects, actions, and events that influence people to believe and behave in certain ways. (Essentially, everything we experience in our daily lives could be considered an element of popular culture.) They do so through subtle messages about what is “appropriate” and “inappropriate,” “desirable” and “undesirable,” “good” and “bad,” and so on.
Because this definition of popular culture is so broad, we focus our discussions throughout the book on mediated popular culture. Mediated popular culture can be defined as what we experience through, for example, movies, TV, songs, comic strips, and advertisements that may influence us to believe and behave in certain ways.

Mediated popular culture pervades our daily lives. For example, I recall one morning when I watched some of the Today Show, I read our daily newspaper, and I talked with my spouse about what to wear to work given the kinds of meetings and classes each of us would be attending. In these 2 hours alone, I was influenced greatly by mediated popular culture. From the Today Show, for example, I was influenced that it is desirable and good to donate to the famine relief efforts in Africa as I watched young children and teens speak of what they are doing to help. I was also influenced to believe there are, in fact, good children and teens in this country. Good people, I surmised, are those who help others who are in need. In the daily paper, I was influenced to believe that I ought to help local homeless shelters as I learned about the rising numbers of people in our community who are losing their homes in the face of the current economic situation. Again, good people help those in need. Albeit more subtly, I was also influenced by mediated popular culture to suggest that my spouse wear a polo shirt and khaki dress pants to work today, rather than the jeans and sweatshirt he had selected. I believed the shirt and slacks would be more appropriate for the image of professionalism he ought to convey at the meetings he would be attending.

Mediated popular culture messages also shape my beliefs regarding how I ought not to behave. For instance, when perusing Us Weekly, my belief that women in our country shouldn’t be starving themselves to be thin was reinforced when I read that 3rd Rock from the Sun’s Kristen Johnston admits her anorexic body is too skinny. My opinion that extramarital affairs are wrong was confirmed when I read about Madonna and A-Rod caught in a scandal, as well as when Hulk Hogan’s daughter talked about her mom’s affair with a teenage boy. As I continued to page through the magazine, I saw that Will and Jada Pinkett Smith credit their 10 happy years together on remaining true to themselves and to each other. These kinds of images and stories influence us by confirming a belief we already hold or by convincing us to believe a certain way.

**Applying What You’ve Learned . . .**

Identify messages that have been sent to you so far today via media, friends, or observations. What beliefs or behaviors did they reinforce for you about what is “appropriate” or “inappropriate,” “desirable” or “undesirable,” “good” or “bad,” and why?

**Questioning Your Ethics . . .**

Do you think it is “appropriate” or “inappropriate” to consume alcohol during a business lunch meeting? Consider now the Samuel Adams beer commercials where several businessmen order water until one fellow orders a Samuel Adams beer. At that time, the others quickly change their orders to Samuel Adams beer as well. What is this commercial arguing about whether it is okay to consume alcohol during a business lunch meeting?
WHAT ARE POPULAR CULTURE TEXTS?

Popular culture communicates to us and for us through signs and artifacts. A sign is simply something that makes you think of something else. For example, when I look at the ring on the third finger of my left hand, I think of what that means in terms of the bond of marriage. I also reminisce about purchasing the ring with my spouse more than 25 years ago. I think of the summer when we replaced our first wedding rings with new rings we purchased in a favorite vacation spot (Medora, North Dakota). An artifact is a sign or series of signs that is socially grounded. That is, its meaning is widely shared by some identifiable community or cultural group. The ring I just described can be considered an artifact for the dominant American culture in terms of symbolizing the bond of marriage, but not in terms of the personal meanings I described. Those personal meanings are valid signs, but only for my spouse and me. When analyzing the communicative potential of popular culture, then, one looks for signs that function as artifacts.

Each of us is a member of (or identifies with) more than one popular culture group simultaneously. The various groups with which we identify often share characteristics, beliefs, or value systems. For example, I am a parent of teenagers, a college professor, a Christian, and a middle-class American, among other things. Each of these groups is distinct, yet I identify myself with each of them. Moreover, some beliefs are held by all of them and others are not.

Each community or cultural group is also identifiable because it embraces an ideology. An ideology is a cultural group’s perceptions about the way things are and assumptions about the way they ought to be. It is crucial to understand that an ideology is not a factual description of objects and events, but rather a perception shared by a particular group about “the way things are.” For example, as a parent of teenagers, I embrace a perception that raising teenagers is often difficult. This is not a factual statement, but rather a perception I share with others who identify with one popular culture group. A factual statement, in contrast, might be that raising some teenagers may be difficult, but that does not mean that all teenagers are difficult to raise.

So how are these groups and ideologies formed, reinforced, and sometimes re-formed? One answer is through popular culture texts. A popular culture text is something that is comprised of an interrelated set of signs and artifacts that all contribute to the same rhetorical argument. Recall that in this book, we focus on mediated popular culture. A mediated popular culture text might be, for example, a song, movie, TV program, or advertisement, or a series of songs, advertisements, or TV episodes. As you can see, a text in this context is not limited to written matter. Rhetoric is defined as the ways in which signs influence people. A rhetorical argument, then, is a message sent through a text that either reinforces or challenges a taken-for-granted belief or behavior about what is appropriate or inappropriate, desirable or undesirable, good or bad.

Texts argue rhetorically by confirming or disconfirming an ideology of a cultural group. For example, the United States is currently struggling with our ideology about marriage. Can marriage be conceived of in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships? Some groups within our population hold firm to the ideology that the rite of marriage is only appropriate for heterosexual partners, and other groups oppose
that ideology and believe that marriage can be appropriate for both heterosexual and homosexual relationships. Note also that an ideology is difficult to change because it is so embedded in the beliefs and structural systems of a culture. To illustrate further, an ideology held in the dominant American culture during the 1950s was that a family consisted of a husband who worked outside the home and a wife who stayed home and raised the 2.3 children. Today, the dominant American ideology of family has expanded to wives who work inside and/or outside the home and husbands who work inside and/or outside the home, as well as single-parent families, blended families, extended families, and so on.

Because the range of popular culture texts is so broad, this book focuses primarily on mediated popular culture texts. A mediated popular culture text is a subset of the broad range of popular culture texts limited to mediated popular culture forms such as movies, music, TV programs, advertisements, comic strips, and so forth. The examples focus primarily on mediated texts for a number of reasons. First, we can usually demarcate a beginning and an end to something like a film or a piece of music, at least for analytical purposes. Second, mediated texts—particularly those couched as mere entertainment (e.g., popular music, blockbuster movies, sitcoms)—are particularly influential because consumers often fail to realize their persuasive potential. Limiting my examples in this way does not in any way mean that these are the only examples of popular culture texts, but rather they provide a focus for this book.

WHY STUDY POPULAR CULTURE?

Because popular culture consists of everyday objects, actions, and events, people sometimes fail to see the rationale for studying it. Yet the fact that popular culture communicates and persuades in these subtle and covert, or hidden, ways actually points to the need for such study. As noted earlier, ultimately, popular culture persuades by empowering and disempowering certain people and groups by conveying messages about desirable and undesirable, appropriate and inappropriate, and normal and abnormal beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors.

Thus, popular culture is significant because it has the persuasive power to shape beliefs and behaviors. For example, according to the standards set by the American Dietetic Association, most female TV actresses are notably underweight. These images of what the “ideal” woman ought to look like have been shown to influence women’s perceptions of their own bodies (Harrison, 2000; Murray, Touyz, & Beumont, 1996). To help clarify this point, a study was conducted a few years ago on the remote island of Fiji. Before the introduction of satellite TV, about 3% of the island’s adolescent girls reported to have dieted. Two years later—after the introduction of satellite TV—that figure rose to 66%. Moreover, 15% of these girls admitted they had vomited to control their weight (Becker, Grinspoon, Klibanski, & Herzog, 1999).

This example demonstrates the negative consequences that popular culture texts can have on communities and groups. However, popular culture can also shape beliefs and behaviors in ways that promote positive consequences. Consider, for example, a film such as As Good as It Gets. In it, Jack Nicholson portrays a man with an obsessive-compulsive disorder. At the beginning of the film, viewers are led to see
him as anything but normal and certainly not desirable. By the end of the movie, however, viewers are rooting for him to win the affection of the female lead (played by Helen Hunt) because they now see him as a man, a human being with a heart, a human being who happens to struggle with a disorder, rather than as something less than human, something to be ignored or even feared. In this way, the film challenges an ideology about what is desirable and appropriate.

It is also important to study popular culture because of its persuasive power to reinforce taken-for-granted beliefs and behaviors. If we fail to study popular culture, we are left vulnerable to remaining fixed in our beliefs and behaviors, rather than examining them. Consider for a moment the concept of family we discussed earlier. Programs such as Leave It to Beaver in the 1950s reinforced a taken-for-granted belief of the dominant American culture that a normal family was one where the father worked outside the home and the mother did not. In the 1960s and 1970s, programs such as I Love Lucy and The Brady Bunch, while challenging other taken-for-granted beliefs, continued to reinforce this perception. Although the 1980s brought programs such as The Cosby Show, where the mother who worked outside the home was portrayed as normal, such shows continued to be the exception, not the rule. Even today, although there are more exceptions to this rule than in the past, many of the most popular TV shows that portray families with children, such as Everybody Loves Raymond and According to Jim, show mothers who do not work outside the home. Even shows such as Two and a Half Men and Full House, which depict men raising...
children, often focus on their inability to do it well, which also reinforces the notion that the *normal* role for men is not raising children and caring for the home.

The previous examples point to another reason to study popular culture. Not only do popular culture texts shape and reinforce beliefs and behaviors, they do so *in covert ways* and *on multiple levels*. For example, among other things, *The Brady Bunch* argued that “normal” middle-class family homes are always neat and tidy. Contrast this with *Roseanne* or *Malcolm in the Middle* and you will see what I mean. In those programs, the home was rarely so neat and tidy. So, popular culture is important to study because it offers multiple messages simultaneously and covertly about how we *ought to* believe and behave.

Popular culture is also significant because it is *so pervasive*. Popular culture is everywhere. It is in our homes, our communities, our workplaces, and our social clubs. In fact, research conducted by the A. C. Neilsen Company reports that the average American home has more TV sets than people, and our TV sets are turned on an average of nearly 7 hours per day and we see about 20,000 TV commercials per year (Herr, 2007). Because it is impossible to avoid popular culture, we must become educated consumers of it.

**Applying What You’ve Learned . . .**

Identify as many popular culture signs, artifacts, and texts as you can that you have encountered in the past 24 hours. Now identify what belief or behavior each one played a role in reinforcing or shaping. Finally, describe at least two meanings being reinforced or shaped in each of them.

**Conducting a Rhetorical Analysis of Popular Culture Texts**

Examining a popular culture text to effectively reveal covert messages about taken-for-granted beliefs and behaviors is essentially a three-step process of (1) selecting a text and formulating a research question, (2) selecting a rhetorical perspective, and (3) examining the text via description, interpretation, and evaluation.

**Step 1. Selecting a Text and Formulating a Research Question**

The first step in the process of unpacking the underlying messages in popular culture texts is to select a text and formulate a research question. You can do so in one of two ways. You might start with a text. By that I mean you might watch a program or see an advertisement that piques your curiosity somehow. You may have a hunch that something more is going on than what the surface message is communicating. For example, maybe you enjoy watching a show like *Arrested Development*. On the surface, you like the program because it’s funny. It makes you laugh. But maybe you wonder why it’s funny. That is, what is it saying about what is *normal* and *abnormal* behavior?
Who are viewers led to laugh at and why? This is an example of starting with a mediated popular culture text.

In contrast, you might start with a question. Perhaps you wonder what messages popular sitcoms such as *Arrested Development* send about what are appropriate and inappropriate behaviors for men and women in society. When viewers laugh at something a character does or does not do, they do so because it reinforces that behavior as inappropriate or undesirable. So you might decide to examine what beliefs and behaviors the program is actually reinforcing about appropriate and inappropriate roles and rules for men and women. This is an example of starting with a question.

It doesn’t matter whether you start with a text or with a question. Ultimately, the goal is the same: to form the research question you will seek to answer in your analysis.

**Applying What You’ve Learned . . .**

Consider a TV program you enjoy watching. Which characters are portrayed as “normal” and which ones are depicted as different in some way? Now identify the characteristics and behaviors of each as they serve to reinforce an ideology about how one “ought to” and “ought not to” believe or behave if one wants to be perceived by others as “normal.”

### Step 2. Selecting a Rhetorical Perspective

Once you have identified a text and formulated a research question, you need to select a rhetorical perspective through which to examine it. A **rhetorical perspective** is simply a lens through which you look to magnify the underlying messages that have to do with the question you are asking. I like to compare a rhetorical perspective to a spotlight that has different colored filters on it. If you put the red filter on, everything on the stage has a certain hue. If you put the blue filter on, everything on the stage looks quite different than it did through the red filter. Because each popular culture text sends multiple messages simultaneously, the rhetorical perspective you select helps bring to the forefront the messages you are trying to understand to answer your particular research question.

In the chapters that follow, we look at eight different rhetorical perspectives and how you use them to systematically analyze texts. This chapter provides a brief overview of the main ideas of each perspective. The first perspective, the neo-Aristotelian approach, was actually designed to analyze public speeches according to the five classical canons of rhetoric originally conceived by Aristotle more than 2,000 years ago. The next four perspectives were developed in the 20th century in response to perceived limitations of the neo-Aristotelian approach. These perspectives are narrative, dramatistic, Marxist, and feminist. The final three perspectives were created in response to perceived limitations in existing rhetorical perspectives regarding the unique but important role that various media play in communicating persuasive messages. Although many perspectives exist for examining mediated texts, we focus
in this book on one music-centered (illusion of life) and one visual-centered (visual pleasure) perspective, as well as elements of several media-centered perspectives (media logic, social learning theory, parasocial relationship theory, and cultivation theory) that are often used to inform popular culture criticisms.

As an overview for what is to come in the remaining chapters, let us discuss briefly how each perspective helps identify underlying messages in a given mediated popular culture text. We do so by applying each of them to the familiar Christmas cartoon, *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. If you have not seen this animated classic, it might prove helpful to do so before reading the rest of this chapter.

**Neo-Aristotelian Perspective**

A neo-Aristotelian perspective helps us discover persuasive strategies used by orators by reconstructing the context where the speech occurred and audience expectations, and then examining the message according to the five classical canons (categories) of rhetoric. These canons are invention (content), arrangement (organizational structure), style (language choices), delivery (speaker’s use of voice and body), and memory (perceived confidence and fluency of the speaker). In *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, a critic might examine the speech, “That’s What Christmas Is All About, Charlie Brown,” delivered by Linus. In terms of context, the speech comes toward the end of the program, at a point when Charlie Brown is ready to give up on the commercialism of Christmas. Context is important because the speech serves as a turning point regarding the meaning of Christmas. Considering the canons, the credibility of the speech and of Linus are enhanced when he delivers his speech confidently from memory and verbatim from the Christmas story chapter in the Holy Bible (Luke). As such, a critic might conclude that Linus’ speech was effective in communicating an alternative message (from commercialism) regarding “what Christmas is all about.”

**Narrative Perspective**

A narrative perspective helps us discover the underlying moral of the story. That is, it shows us how we ought to and ought not to believe or behave. Throughout the text, actions and consequences are offered as good reasons to accept the moral as being valid. In *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, whereas the overt or surface message is the answer Linus provides regarding “what Christmas is really about,” the covert or underlying moral is that everything and everyone is beautiful and ought to be treated with respect. In the end, even Charlie Brown is treated kindly, the tree is treated kindly, and so forth.

**Dramatistic Perspective**

A dramatistic perspective helps us determine the underlying motives that justify breaking various rules for living—rules regarding how we ought to or ought not to behave. In *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, Charlie Brown breaks a number of rules.
Perhaps most significant is when he is asked to buy a fancy pink aluminum Christmas tree, but instead brings back a puny real tree. The other children initially reprimand Charlie Brown because he did not follow the rules of commercialism that tend to be associated with the holiday. In the end, viewers accept that he is justified in breaking these rules of commercialism because he was transcending them and following a higher order. Ultimately, he is accepted as being okay because he broke the rules for a justifiable reason. Therefore, through the dramatistic perspective, viewers learn that it is acceptable to break the rules if one is following a higher calling.

**Marxist Perspective**

A Marxist perspective helps reveal who is empowered and who is disempowered in a popular culture text. In the purest sense, it has to do with socioeconomic status. That is, those with more money and material possessions *ought to* be empowered and those who do not have money *ought not to* be empowered. The perspective has become broader than that today, however, to include groups associated with race, religion, ethnicity, ability/disability, age, and so on. In *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, the ultimate message communicated tends to reinforce the status quo that the more money and stuff you can buy at Christmas, the better. Consider, for example, that Lucy wants real estate; Sally wants her “fair share,” preferably in the form of $10 and $20 bills; that Snoopy wins the contest for the best decorated house; and even the real Christmas tree ends up being decorated with lots of “stuff” before it is perceived as beautiful. Unfortunately, from a Marxist perspective, the primary message conveyed in *A Charlie Brown Christmas* remains one of materialism equaling happiness.

**Feminist Perspective**

A feminist perspective focuses on what are conveyed as *appropriate* and *desirable*, as well as *inappropriate* and *undesirable* roles and rules for men and women. When viewed through a feminist perspective, *A Charlie Brown Christmas* reinforces many negative stereotypes about women. Lucy is aggressive and outspoken. Viewers are led to believe that these are behaviors women should not embrace because the other characters don’t particularly like Lucy, although they may tolerate her. Snoopy even makes fun of her during the rehearsal. Sally just wants lots of money for Christmas. The girl with the naturally curly hair is only worried that someone might hurt her beautiful “naturally curly hair.” Interestingly, Peppermint Patty, the one girl who is typically nice to Charlie Brown, does not appear in this episode at all.

**Illusion of Life Perspective**

The rhetorical nature of music as communication has interested scholars, particularly in sociology, since the 1960s. In the 1970s and 1980s, the rhetorical nature of music gained momentum in the field of communication as well. Since then, a number of theories have been proposed to help us understand how music communicates to and for individuals and groups. One such theory is the illusion of life. The *illusion of*
life theory focuses specifically on how lyrics and music function together to persuade (e.g., Sellnow & Sellnow, 2001). The ultimate goal is to determine whether the lyrics (cognitive content) and music (emotional content) are congruent or incongruent and how that relationship shapes the argument. For example, the slow and mellow music of a lullaby combined with lyrics about falling asleep peacefully are congruent. Likewise, the upbeat, fast-paced sounds of a school fight song combined with lyrics about going and fighting and winning are congruent. If the lyrics to the lullaby were combined with the music of the school fight song or the lyrics of the fight song were combined with the music of the lullaby, however, they would be incongruent.

Three songs play important roles in A Charlie Brown Christmas. The first is the song that the children dance to while rehearsing their Christmas play. The fact that it is not a familiar Christmas tune and that it has no words reinforces the idea that people seem to have forgotten the meaning of Christmas. Essentially, the song is incongruent with the message of the Christmas story, which actually contributes to the argument that the meaning of Christmas seems to have been lost. The second song is “Jingle Bells” as played by Schroeder. The gradual dumbing down of the tune until it is a one-finger melody to which Lucy exclaims “That’s it!” also reinforces the lack of substance to Christmas celebrations today. Finally, the program ends with all the children singing “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” while forming a circle around Charlie Brown’s Christmas tree. As such, this final song is congruent—that is, the lyrics and music reinforce each other, as well as the narrative message being argued regarding the true meaning of Christmas.

Visual Pleasure Theory Perspective

Since the mid-1980s, concern has been growing steadily about the influential nature of visual rhetoric on individuals and groups. As a result, a number of visual communication theories have been proposed. One visual-centered perspective that has been used to examine the rhetorical messages in mediated popular culture texts is visual pleasure theory. Visual pleasure theory focuses on the messages communicated through visual images (e.g., Mulvey, 1989). More specifically, it focuses on messages of narcissism (i.e., which characters are portrayed as models whom viewers ought to be like and anti-models whom viewers ought not to be like), fetishism (spectacles to be gazed at with either desire or reproach), and voyeurism (the pleasure of looking at someone without him or her being aware of being looked at).

In A Charlie Brown Christmas, Linus constantly carries around a blanket. At the outset, the blanket-carrying boy might be perceived as a spectacle (fetishism) in a negative sense (i.e., as an anti-model whom viewers ought not to be like [narcissism]). By the end of the program, however, his blanket warms the spindly Christmas tree and helps make it “beautiful,” thereby becoming transformed into a spectacle in a positive sense. Because Linus is portrayed as wise beyond his years, he appears to be the role model viewers ought to be like (narcissism). As for the girls, with regard to fetishism, they ought to wear dresses and ought to be perceived as pretty. Because they are portrayed as shallow and catty, narcissistically the message is only about what girls ought not to be like. Although little occurs in terms of voyeurism, viewers
do see Snoopy make fun of Lucy behind her back and laugh. Hence, the message sent seems to be that it is *appropriate* to make fun of a girl like Lucy behind her back.

**Media-Centered Perspectives**

A good number of media-centered theories have been developed over the years. These perspectives were developed primarily to study *media effects* (causal and correlation effects of watching a particular TV program, viewing an advertisement or series of advertisements, etc.). Elements of many of them are often used to enhance rhetorical analyses of popular culture texts. In Chapter 9, we discuss media logic, social learning theory, cultivation theory, and parasocial relationship theory. Here, we consider how parasocial relationship theory can inform our analyses of *A Charlie Brown Christmas* (e.g., Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994; Horton & Wohl, 1956; Rubin & Perse, 1987; Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985). Essentially, a parasocial relationship is a perception by a viewer of knowing a character as in a face-to-face relationship. This relationship develops primarily through rhetorical illusions of realism (depicting a version of “everyday life”) and intimacy (characters are real people with real feelings, norms, and values).

With regard to realism, although no adults ever supervise the children in *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, viewers are led to think that is *normal*. Even when Charlie Brown and Linus get the Christmas tree, they do so alone and at night. In terms of intimacy, although this is an animated program, viewers see the characters as real folks. That is, they say and do things that real kids often say and do (e.g., writing letters to Santa and enjoying seasonal songs such as “Jingle Bells”). Moreover, viewers get to know Linus as a deep thinker and Charlie Brown as someone whose heart is in the right place. We want the other kids to like Charlie Brown and to be nice to him. Even in an animated feature like *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, rhetorical strategies of realism and intimacy encourage the development of parasocial relationships.

**Step 3. Examining the Text (Describe and Interpret)**

Once you have selected a popular culture text, formulated a research question, and decided on a rhetorical perspective through which to analyze it, you need to systematically examine it for the underlying messages that it sends. Doing so involves a three-step process of description, interpretation, and evaluation.

First, you must *describe* the messages being sent. That is, what taken-for-granted belief, behavior, or social issue does the text address? In *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, you might want to focus on the underlying arguments it is presenting about men and women in society or about what society ought to value as important, or about racism, among other things. These issues, beliefs, and behaviors are essentially the ways in which the text operates as a site of struggle. That is, the text reinforces or calls into question some of our culture’s taken-for-granted ideologies about “the way things are.” The particular focus you take helps determine the rhetorical perspective you choose. During this step, then, you describe what the text seems to be saying about the issue, belief, or behavior.

Second, you *interpret* how the messages are being conveyed by applying the tools of the rhetorical perspective you chose. In this step, you consider who is portrayed as
normal, desirable, and appropriate and who is not. Then you explain what they look like, what they do and say, how they are treated by others, and so on as each contributes to the argument portrayed regarding the issue you identified as a site of struggle. Here, you essentially make a case for your argument with evidence from the text.

**Step 4. Evaluating Potential Implications of the Text**

Finally, you must evaluate the significance of the argument you make about the text’s messages. You do so by considering the various audiences who might view it and how it might influence them to believe and behave as a result. What impact might it have on individuals and groups? Consider the adolescent girls from Fiji mentioned earlier. The evaluation component of the visual images they received about how women ought to look (visual pleasure theory) appeared to have affected their eating habits to the point of a significant increase in disordered eating behaviors.

Some people argue that exposing children to repeated violence on TV makes it appear normal and may, in fact, increase violent behaviors in them. Based on a narrative perspective of *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, we might speculate that people ought to engage in more acts of kindness and charity during the holidays than mere consumerism. From a dramatistic perspective, we might argue that people ought to have more empathy for those who choose to celebrate the season in different ways. From a Marxist perspective, we might conclude that parents become aware of the persuasive messages about consumerism their children are exposed to in programs like this one. From a feminist perspective, we might raise the issue that children need to see programs that portray girls in positive ways to counter the messages in programs that portray them only as shallow, self-centered, and sassy. From an illusion of life perspective, we might argue that children ought to be exposed to Christmas music that reinforces a sense of charity and goodwill, rather than just meaningless music that offers only emotional messages comprised of musical dance sounds. From a visual pleasure perspective, we might argue that children’s programs ought to offer positive messages of narcissism for girls as well as boys. Finally, from a parasocial relationship perspective, we might point out potential implications of children’s programs that portray no adult characters, particularly when children are depicted walking on city sidewalks alone at night.

This cursory look at how one examines the messages embedded in popular culture texts is intended to give you a sense of the big picture. The remaining chapters offer more in-depth explanations of each one and how it works.

**Sample Student Essay**

What follows is a student essay that offers a cursory analysis of the critically acclaimed Stephen Sondheim musical, *Into the Woods*. Although the paper is not perfect (if there even is such a thing), Carol Mikkelson offers a nice example of how one text—in this case, *Into the Woods*—often conveys underlying messages regarding how we “ought to” believe or behave. Her analysis reveals arguments being made from narrative, dramatistic, Marxist, and feminist perspectives. Notice that Carol begins by piquing
the reader’s curiosity about what fairy tales “teach” us. She then offers a rationale for examining the musical she selected for analysis. These are important introductory elements in any popular culture criticism one writes.

As you read, consider what Carol offers as (1) the “moral” of the story from a narrative perspective, (2) justification for breaking society’s “rules for living” from a dramatistic perspective, (3) a rationale for who ought to be empowered and why from a Marxist perspective, and (4) the appropriate roles and rules for men and women from a feminist perspective. Based on the evidence she draws from the text to support her arguments, do you agree or disagree and why?

Into the Woods

Carol Mikkelson

Fairy tales become a part of life’s “education” beginning at a very young age. People are exposed to fairy tales in almost every culture. In addition to “Cinderella,” some version of which can be found in many cultures, are “Goldilocks and the Three Bears,” “Little Red Riding Hood,” “Sleeping Beauty,” “Jack and the Beanstalk” and “Snow White,” which are probably among the most common. These stories provide entertainment for children and parents alike as the stories are told, embellished, and retold. Indeed, Bruno Bettelheim (1976), author of Uses of Enchantment, explains that the experience of literature through the use of fairy tales is important in enriching a child’s cultural heritage (p. 4).

Many of these stories have found their way onto the stage in the form of ballet, opera, and musical theatre. In the process, lessons are being taught and learned by both children and adults. Western society, especially, has a fascination with the “happily-ever-after” ending and is often disappointed when modern stories don’t come to such a resolution. Because traditional male/female roles are reinforced in those fairy tales, they have become recognizable symbols of expected and approved behavior for the idealized man and woman or prince and princess. The female is portrayed as the beauty, and anything beautiful surely cannot be bad. To be beautiful and well dressed must certainly mean life is good. By contrast, anything or anyone that is ugly must therefore be evil or at least bad and therefore should and sometimes must be destroyed. Beauty is good and ugly is evil. In addition, the male is always “in charge,” and the female is always subservient to the male. She may “allow” him to be victorious, but never lets him know it. It is only relatively recently that these traditional roles have begun to change. Modern versions of these tales “tweak” the stories just a bit, but many of the old characteristics remain.

Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine have written an immensely popular newer musical version of four such fairy tales, three of which are familiar to most Americans. Into the Woods opened on Broadway in 1987 to critical acclaim and lasting appeal to popular culture (Artsedge, 2002). To justify such a statement, it is important to step back and analyze this work from the perspective of four rhetorical theories: narrative, dramatistic, Marxist, and feminist. It is these “lenses” that will sharpen the focus...
of the critical viewer. Before those views are explored as they pertain to this work, however, it is important to elucidate the background of the authors and the work itself.

Stephen Sondheim has been a writer/composer of merit since he began working in the theatre in 1957 with *West Side Story*. His success continued with such shows as *Gypsy* (1959), *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1962), and *Company* (1970) (Anonymous, 2002). He worked for many years with the famous Hal Prince and then began working with James Lapine on *Sunday in the Park With George* (1984), for which they received a Pulitzer Prize in 1984 (Sondheim, cover). Numerous other shows complete his continuing list of credits. “Stephen Sondheim’s work can be taken as a metaphor for something bigger than musical theatre” (Artsedge, 2002). In an interview with Edwin H. Newman, Sondheim himself does not claim he set out to educate his audiences with this musical, although he does say, “All art is a form of education.” It is this “metaphor” that becomes apparent in *Into The Woods*, however.

Although Sondheim contests the assertion by drama critics of his frequent use of metaphor in his texts, there can be no doubt of his use of metaphor in *Into the Woods*. The woods actually become the metaphor for the age-old quest for knowledge and experience. As drama critic Ash De Lorenzo (1988) insists, “Those who expect just one message from Sondheim are expecting too little” (p. 112). Indeed, the text portrays the three stages of pubescence to adolescence in the characters from Red Riding Hood to Jack and then to Cinderella, who gain their knowledge by going “into the woods.” Red Riding Hood begins the trek in Act I when she sings:

> Into the woods,
> It’s time to go,
> I hate to leave,
> I have to, though.
> [And]
> Into the woods,
> And who can tell,
> What’s waiting on the journey?

(Sondheim, 1987, p. 9)

Drama critic Gerald Weales (1988) explains the show as a “standard maturation play in which preoccupation with self gives way to sharing” (p. 19). Life’s experiences are often daunting at best, and it is within the woods, where knowledge and those experiences are found, that so many of the darker moments of the text occur.

The story of this musical revolves around four fairy tales that are interwoven: “Cinderella,” “Jack and the Beanstalk,” “Little Red Riding Hood,” and “The Baker and His Wife,” which also includes a bit of “Rapunzel” and her mother, the Witch. Typical of Sondheim, the presentation is much like an operetta in that most lines are sung and few are spoken. The stories, which initially are overlapped in the telling, soon become blended into each other, using slapstick humor and witty lyrics to frequently poke fun at society. The music often has odd syncopations and is frequently in varying styles such as “rap.” Actually, the rap allows for greater portions of exposition to be shared with the audience, which wouldn’t have the
patience to listen to it had it been spoken. A prime, although shortened, example can be found in Act I when the witch explains:

He said, "All right,"
But it wasn't, quite,
'Cause I caught him in the autumn
In my garden one night! (Sondheim, p. 12)

Act I concludes the way most audience members expect the stories to end: "... and happy ever after" (p. 78)! Act II, however, is another story that brings upheaval. Having it all, it turns out, isn't so easy or so much fun. Because it is much darker, we move out of the arena of "light" children's theatre and into that "metaphor" for which Sondheim is known. In this case, it is the woods where some of the characters' wishes are fulfilled.

It would seem that every character has all one could wish for, but such is not the case. Each one wishes for something more. What they wanted so badly in Act I isn't quite what they expected. Then, a new character the audience doesn't actually see, the Giant's Wife, makes her presence known. In her process of looking for Jack, who had stolen from her and caused the death of her husband, she destroys homes, gardens, etc., and more people die: Jack's mother, the Baker's wife, the narrator, Red Riding Hood's Granny, Rapunzel, and the giant herself. All of a sudden, life drastically changes, and people must work together. Now sadder and wiser, the witch directly admonishes the audience to be

Careful the things you say,
Children will listen.

Careful the things you do,
Children will see.
And learn. (Sondheim, p. 136)

The characters plan to live and work together one day at a time, being careful, and not necessarily "happily ever after," because life really isn't like that. The argument of this paper is that it is Act II that speaks more to popular culture and makes the musical itself interventionist to a society willing to listen.

In 1988, Into the Woods received nine Tony Award nominations resulting in three awards and a Grammy Award for Original Cast Album (Sondheim, cover). It was also "named best musical by both the Drama Desk and the New York Drama Critics Circle" (Artsedge, 2002). It is interesting to note that two of the Tony awards were for Best Book and Best Score, which are the subject for this discussion (Sondheim, cover). The show continues to be presented by community and high school theatre groups throughout the country. Although its message is not one of total escapism, its appeal to popular culture continues nonetheless. This musical, this text, is already enjoyable, but for a critical viewer, it becomes even more so. The music itself is "catchy," but it is the award-winning book that provides the foundation for the following analysis.

Because so much of this text has characteristics of the four criticisms already previewed, any thorough analysis of Into the Woods needs to contain elements of each. It is important to begin with the narrative criticism to establish the genre of this text. In Rhetoric in Popular Culture, Brummett (1994) states: “The characteristics of stories and dramas underlie all symbolic behavior. All texts of popular
culture can be viewed in this way, by placing them within a genre" (p. 132). The genre of this text is a dramatic story that contains a moral: Be careful what you wish for. Beginning with the music in the Prologue, each character "wishes" for many things. Cinderella wishes to go to the festival, Jack wishes his cow would give milk, the Baker and his wife wish they had a child, and Jack’s mother wishes for a lot of things (Sondheim, p. 4). Those don’t seem to be too much to ask for. We almost expect life to turn out like those fairy tales. We often "wish" our life was like a fairy tale: “If only….” Act I ends predictably, but it is Act II that supports the moral as valid. No one is happy. Cinderella has married the Prince, Jack and his mother are rich, the Baker and his wife have a child, and the witch is beautiful once again, but no one is happy. Each one wants more. By the end of the Act, when seven lives have been lost, each of the characters has reassessed his or her life.

It is the darker side of Act II that has dissatisfied some critics, but Sondheim dismisses “criticisms of the second act, maintaining that audiences do not like to be surprised when watching musicals” (Artsedge, 2002). Although such a statement may be considered as harsh, it could also be argued that audiences do not like to think when attending musical theatre. Indeed, the first act fulfills all expectations of the genre, but the second act tends to catch the audience off guard. Remember society’s preference for the “happily ever after” ending. The second act and its ending actually hold up a mirror through which we may see ourselves, painful though it may be.

Secondly, this text can be viewed from a Marxist perspective simply because of all the allusions to happiness being equated with economic status, which, as a result, play right into the standards of capitalism. “Marxism is an approach that is concerned with ideology, with class, and with the distribution of power in society” (Brummett, 1994, p. 111). It is that economic base that guides a culture. While Act I of Into the Woods begins as a prime example of the subtle lessons taught and reinforced in fairy tales, namely, that beauty, wealth, and position equal happiness, it is Act II that provides the true message: “Things” gained through conquest may not be what is best. The text appears to begin with a blatant preferred message reinforcing the desire for beauty, youth, and wealth; however, by Act II, the message becomes oppositional subverted as the audience is told point blank: “Careful what you wish for” (Sondheim, p. 136).

From Cinderella’s first line in Act I, “I wish….” to the very last line of Act II, also “I wish,” the audience sees and hears each character continually fixated on wanting more. These drives follow the characters as they do in most fairy tales and are presented in obvious economic metaphors: Cinderella needs to be married to the handsome, wealthy Prince to be happy, Jack and his mother need gold to be happy, the Witch needs youth and beauty to be happy, the Princes need beautiful, desirable women to be happy, Red Riding Hood needs to satisfy her appetite to be happy. The implication is that those with beauty, youth, and wealth are logically the ones who are empowered, and everyone should strive to be just like them. Those who are disempowered, like Cinderella and Jack and his mother, seek the empowerment that wealth will guarantee. Act I shows the gullible in the audience that “things”
enable one to live happily ever after, but Act II slaps reality back into place.

Almost immediately in Act II, the characters are shown to be “wishing” for more or different things. The “things” or “positions” sure to give each one the kind of power they had wanted so desperately now don’t quite “cut it.” Cinderella is bored and wishes to sponsor a festival. The Baker’s Wife wishes they had more room. Prince Charming, also bored, “dallies” with a variety of ladies, including the Baker’s Wife, who is deluded by thinking he is worth it. Add a giant to the scene and life becomes a struggle, but it is exciting once again. By the end of show, seven characters die and the Marxist lesson slaps the remaining characters in the face: Be careful what you wish for; you may get it.

Although it might appear to be a stretch, there is also validity in examining this text in terms of dramatistic criticism. Burke explains that when people try to explain their reasons for their actions, they often do so by basing them on what he calls a “pentad” of five terms: act, agent, agency, scene, and purpose. The audience of Into the Woods is presented with such justifications by the characters as they try to rationalize why so many people are dying. Whose “fault” is it? The act is plural because several people have been killed, although not all by the Giant’s wife. The primary agent is the Giant’s wife; the agency is her strength, the scene is the woods, and the purpose is to avenge her husband’s death. She exhibits no guilt, but the characters do as they blame each other for being the reason that the giant is killing so many. They each attempt to resolve their guilt through victimage by pointing the finger of blame at everyone but themselves.

Because the use of victimage has become so commonplace in today’s popular culture, the tendency might be to dismiss this text as merely adding to the list; however, it is the Witch, oddly enough, who sets everyone straight. She shows them that none of them is blameless:

Told a little lie,
Stole a little gold,
Broke a little vow,
Did you?
Had to get your Prince,
Had to get your cow,
Have to get your wish,
Doesn’t matter how—
Anyway, it doesn’t matter now (script p. 120) [And]
No, of course what really matters
Is the blame,
Someone you can blame (script p. 12)

The audience members should feel some discomfort if they see a tendency in themselves to behave similarly and transfer any of this chiding to themselves, but they probably won’t. Remember, it is the tendency of modern society to use victimage when resolving guilt and blame others.

Finally, Into the Woods can be viewed from a feminist perspective. Examining the text from a feminist perspective allows one to understand what are “appropriate” and “inappropriate” roles and rules for women and men. As long as fairy tales have been told, male and female roles have been stereotypically fixed, and children have
been raised accordingly. Girls are emotional, they cry and are sweet, but are weak and need a male to help them. Males, on the other hand, are not to be emotional and should never cry, but always be strong and able to solve whatever difficulty manifests itself. Such characteristics place unfair expectations on both genders in that the lines are so definite. Thankfully, present society now more often encourages females to be strong and males to show emotion, but not too much for either one, of course. The characters in this text attempt to fit the new, more liberal view of present-day society; however, traces of the traditional masculine hegemony still shine through.

In Act I, the male/female roles exhibit traditional fairy tale characteristics. Cinderella is on her hands and knees in the kitchen, wishing to "go to the festival" to meet Prince Charming, of course. Rapunzel is stranded in her tower, waiting for someone to rescue her. The Baker's Wife assists her husband in their business, but wishes for a child. Even the Witch needs help to become young and beautiful again, but when she does, her magical powers vanish. These women are allowed to show strength, but not too much. Each "pulls back" in the face of preexisting male dominance, even though each male is weaker by comparison. Only Red Riding Hood becomes a stronger female, but her strength, by implication, is seen as a negative because she is "too strong." After all, she wears the skin of the wolf and carries a knife. Logic might dictate that if the female characters are presented traditionally, with only modest enhancement, such would be true for the males, but such is not the case.

Although most of the principal male characters are attractive to the eye, each one displays a weakness. Poor Jack is dull witted and has his "head in a sack," according to his mother (Sondheim, p. 15). True, he is tall and strong, but he has a really light grasp of reality. Because they display almost identical characteristics, the Princes can be characterized together. Each is tall, handsome, and physically fit; however, that is where their "perfection" ends. Also not very bright, each one is incredibly egotistical and only lives for the moment without concern for anyone but himself. As Cinderella's Prince says, "I was raised to be charming, not sincere" (p. 127). The Baker is not very brave, but tries to be by asserting himself. By the end of the musical, he is the only male character who realizes his weaknesses and his wife's strengths, although this happens primarily after her death. Most fairy tales show the male as strong, handsome, fearless, and victorious. The authors of this text have attempted to reflect the change in society's attitude toward the hierarchy of traditional gender roles, yet they have merely reinforced it.

The females are allowed to show strength, but not too much. The males fit the traditional fairy tale image of their characters; although they all display obvious weakness, they still maintain a position of power. The females continue to be seen as subservient to the males. In the end, the truly strong females who are still alive, the Witch and Red Riding Hood, are not "rewarded" with some kind of relationship. It is worth noting that other strong, independent females, like the Baker's Wife, the Giant's Wife, Jack's Mother, and Granny, are dead. Perhaps their strength was too much for
them? It is doubtful that Sondheim or Lapine intended such debate.

Why, then, should anyone debate this text? What does any of this matter? Because this text is a reflection of popular culture, it matters. Brummett (1994) defines popular culture as "systems or artifacts that most people share and that most people know about" (p. 21). Of course, this text isn't widely known by American culture, but the fairy tales are, and the new twist of their presentation reflects this popular culture, thus becoming of interest. Because of their upbringing, which often involves the telling of fairy tales, Americans generally love stories and enjoy seeing and hearing the old ones retold. Act I, therefore, satisfies that desire. The audience usually laughs at the clever lyrics and can spot the obvious lessons in the moral of the story. Truth be told, there are usually some serious lessons taught in fairy tales, even if it is in reference to what not to do: Stay out of other people's homes. Don't take what doesn't belong to you. Don't be greedy. Don't trust strangers. Don't try to be something you are not. Be careful what you wish for. These kinds of lessons are not hard to find, and audiences don't mind using them indexically as a base for lessons to the young.

When the authors throw in something else, however, the audience becomes impatient, even dissatisfied. Audiences want fairy tales to be happy and end happily ever after. Anything else is regarded as too "grown up" and more within the realm of adults, not children, who are to be protected. At a certain age, however, children need more than the seemingly light "fluff" of fairy tales. Michiko Kakutani, Sondheim biographer, explains that Sondheim and Lapine have created "a vehicle by which to examine some of their own preoccupations: the hold of time past over time present, the responsibilities of adulthood, the necessity of forming connections, the tensions between individual and community" (1988). Children need to know that life isn't a fairy tale. A text such as Into the Woods may therefore challenge parents to do some deeper explaining to children.

Some parents can handle those deeper lessons, but many can't. Consider the ethics of some of the characters; a few are not very admirable. Jack steals from the Giant. Red Riding Hood and her Granny kill the Wolf. Cinderella misrepresents herself as a Princess. Cinderella's Prince "fools around." The Baker's Father abandons his family. The Baker's Wife "fools around" with Cinderella's Prince. The Witch keeps Rapunzel in a tower and falsely tells her she is her mother. If a person stops to think about it, these are some pretty disreputable people. Of course, each has a plausible excuse. Yet these particular fairy tales are among the favorites of audiences. With giants and spells, are the stories realistic? No. Even children know these are only stories, but these stories continue to be a part of popular culture in the telling and retelling of them through the ages. If they are so popular and so accepted, can this particular text, especially Act II, be interventionist and serve as a learning tool for audiences? Perhaps, but only if audiences are alert and attentive to the messages.

Be "careful what you wish for" is the most obvious message, but consider the ethics of the characters. Then, consider the excuses each makes for his or her part in all the deaths. Notice who has power and who doesn’t. Finally, examine how males and females are portrayed. Maybe this text
is more realistic than first thought. With all these aspects to contemplate, the message becomes darker and heavier, and the alert audience member squirms. Unfortunately, the majority of audience members aren’t going to notice all these angles. Only an analysis such as this paper can then be interventionist.

Now this paper isn’t going to have more than extremely limited readership. The only way audiences are going to sit up and take notice of the broader implications is by telling them personally. Will it make a difference? Slowly but surely, like the tortoise and the hare. Fairy tales will continue to be told, acted out, sung about, written about, and illustrated in books. Children of all ages will delight in their part of all of it. It is to be hoped, however, that each popular culture of the age will tweak those stories just a bit to make audiences more aware of the broader implications of each.

References


Summary

In this chapter, we defined *popular culture,* discussed why popular culture is important to study, and described briefly how one goes about doing so. Popular culture is pervasive, and its messages about how we *ought to* and *ought not to* believe and behave are often covert. By learning how to examine these underlying messages embedded beneath the surface, we can become educated consumers with the ability to choose whether to agree with them. Moreover, as we learn to see these underlying messages, we can begin to educate others to understand them as well. Ultimately, we can begin to reduce the persuasive impact of such messages because we will no longer be unaware consumers of them.
Challenge

Now that you have a sense of what popular culture texts are and how they communicate, I challenge you to apply what you have learned to a TV program or commercial. Because it is often easier for beginning critics to see the underlying messages in texts from earlier decades, I encourage you to select either a rerun of a 1950s or 1960s TV sitcom or TV commercial. Cable networks such as TV Land and Nick at Nite are good places to find them, as is YouTube. These stations often rebroadcast programs such as The Mary Tyler Moore Show, The Brady Bunch, I Love Lucy, and so on. Very often, they show retro-commercials along with the programs. Then answer the following questions:

1. If a *speech* is delivered during the program, what is it communicating via a neo-Aristotelian perspective? Be sure to consider context and audience expectations, as well as the five classical canons of rhetoric. What implications might such a message have on viewers?

2. What is the program or commercial communicating via a narrative perspective? Be sure to provide some examples as “good reasons” to support the moral you identify. What implications might such a message have on viewers?

3. What is the program or commercial communicating via a dramatistic perspective? Be sure to identify what “rule for living” is being broken and what is offered to justify breaking it. What implications might such a message have on viewers?

4. What is the program or commercial communicating via a Marxist perspective? Be sure to identify the people who are portrayed as being empowered and disempowered, and why. What things happen to reinforce that such empowerment and disempowerment is *normal* or “how it ought to be”? What implications might such a message have on viewers?

5. What is the program or commercial communicating via a feminist perspective? What are identified as *appropriate* and *inappropriate*, *desirable* and *undesirable*, and *normal* and *abnormal* roles and rules for men and women? What implications might such a message have on viewers?

6. If music is used, from an illusion of life perspective, are the lyrics and music congruent or incongruent, and how does that affect the message? What implications might such a message have on viewers?

7. What is the program or commercial communicating via a visual pleasure theory perspective? Consider narcissism, fetishism, and voyeurism as you seek to find an answer. What implications might such a message have on viewers?

8. What is the program or commercial communicating via a parasocial relationship theory perspective? Consider how realism and intimacy enhance the message being communicated. What implications might such a message have on viewers?
References


