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*Here is an essay I wrote for my Text and Discourse Analysis class, in which we were assigned to find an artifact and analyze it using Kenneth Burke’s theory of a pentad. I chose to write about Dr. Oz and some criticism he had been receiving from the medical community regarding his honesty and ethics. This is an example of me taking a complex theory and applying it to a real world situation.*

Oz, The Great and Powerful?

**Introduction**

Dr. Mehmet Oz is a famous TV personality, author, and cardiothoracic surgeon. Earlier this year he underwent serious criticism from multiple science associations who accused him of promoting “miracle pills” as well as other false medical advice, unsubstantiated by scientific research, all just to fool the public and create profits. What drew the most attention to the matter, though, was when ten doctors wrote a letter addressed to the Dean of the Faculties of Health Sciences and Medicine at the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons. In this letter, the doctors asked the dean to remove Oz from his position on the faculty of this prestigious institution for promoting quack advice to millions of viewers for financial gains. They claimed that it went against medical ethics and good character. This was then blown up by the media, and soon became big news nationwide. A little over a week after the letter came out, Oz addressed his critics on his program “The Dr. Oz Show.” However, his defense does little to support and validate himself, but rather focuses on slandering his opponents. This raises the question of whether Oz’s medical advice actually holds any weight, as well as asks bigger picture questions about Americans’ trust in media and those with high status titles. Moreover, it asks how much people are willing to forgive those in power or high status, even if the accused acts in a way contradictory to what is expected from them.

**Presentation of Artifact**

This paper will analyze a 6 minute 19 second video of the opening of the episode, found on the official Dr. Oz YouTube channel. After a long awaited response, Dr. Oz finally broke his silence on the rumors surrounding him and the letter written by the group of doctors in early April 2015. He waited to have an exclusive reveal-all on his own program, in which he starts by directly addressing the viewer face-on about how he was disappointed and shocked by recent events and how he’s always upheld the philosophy of providing YOU, the viewer, with the best information. He speaks in a very calm, humble tone, again reassuring the audience that he’s looking out for them and is just being bullied by others in the medical community who just do not understand the truth. He also emphasizes that he puts out a variety of opinions so that the viewer can make their own best decision for their health.

After this brief introduction, he then goes on to reveal that he has hired a private investigator to dig up information about his critics. While then stressing each word said, “she uncovered some surprising, hidden, connections” and he called it “ironic” that they named him a hypocrite (Dr. Oz 2:04.) The video then cuts to a news-like segment, with a voice-over of the private investigator, Elizabeth Leamy, and features video clips and voice recordings of some of the accused doctors. It also shows short interview inputs from critics of these doctors. However, the investigation only examines half of the ten doctors, and only two in somewhat depth. One of the doctors’ critics even goes on to admit that she “think[s] this [letter] is definitely a smear campaign against Dr. Oz” (Dr. Oz, 5:48.) Leamy wraps up her segment by asking, “Who should you believe? You be the judge” (Dr. Oz, 6:16).

**Method of Criticism**

Pentadic criticism is the critical analysis of how rhetoric can be interpreted differently based on how the rhetor is placing emphasis on specific qualities of the rhetoric over others. A rhetor does so to construct an image of what is most important. First, a critic must choose an artifact, and then afterwards analyze it using a pentad. The five elements of pentadic criticism (a “pentad”) are based on dramatism, the “analysis of human motivation through terms derived from the study of drama” (Foss 355). These are outlined by Kenneth Burke as act, agent, agency, scene, and purpose. He instructs that critics “must have some word that names the act (names what took place, in thought or deed), and another that names the scene (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also…what person or kind of person (agent) performed the act, what means or instrument he used (agency), and the purpose” (qtd. in Foss 356). The different elements are then compared to each other in what are called ratios. This is done to find a dominant element that is controlling how the reader perceives the other elements. This dominant element sets the tone of the rhetoric and what the rhetor is trying to convey as most or more significant than the other elements.

**Analysis of Artifact**

Dr. Oz opens his speech by appealing to his audience about how he is being attacked and lied about, but that they know better, because he has given them a spectrum of opinions so that they can formulate their own opinions. He tries to garner the viewers’ sympathy, as well as build up their self-esteem by acknowledging them as being intelligent enough to create their own smart health choices. In this artifact the five elements of the pentad can be identified as the following:

Act: Response to criticism from medical community on The Dr. Oz Show

Scene: Dr. Oz being called out by medical community as a fraud

Agent: Dr. Oz

Agency: Providing compromising information about his critics

Purpose: To combat his critics and the media; to keep his audience and potentially his profits

There is the dominance of AGENCY: scene, because the majority of the video is spent defaming the critics of Oz, rather than defending some of his questionable advice. The doctor has promoted in the past alternative medicine and supplements, unproven by scientific research, calling them magical, miraculous, and life-changing. However, the only defense he makes towards this is that he never advocated for any specific brand. Oz creates an image of his critics being bullies and him being the victim of their “brazen letter,” and the explosion of “sensational headlines and sound bites,” about him shortly after in the media as a result of it (Dr. Oz, 0:04; 0:46). By predominantly using the agency of condemning his critics for their faults to mask the scene of his own errors, he shifts the negative attention off of himself and onto the opposing doctors.

The rest of the video focuses on how these doctors are just as shady as they claim Oz to be, and are hypocrites for accusing him of malpractice. However, what these doctors are found guilty of—mainly working with large corporations in conjunction with promoting GMO products, and another found to be charged in a Medicaid fraud scheme. These accusations may be true, however they do not hold nearly the same amount of impact and are not the same kind of offenses as transgressed by Oz. This utilizes AGENCY: agent, as the report on the other doctors is narrated by a woman, and Oz is barely mentioned. By keeping the emphasis on the wrong-doings of the critics for the majority of the video, Oz’s failings are played down. There is a point, however, in which the investigator compares one of the doctors to Oz. She states, “Miller strongly supports genetically modified foods, or GMOs, which Dr. Oz has said should be labeled,” as if Oz’s word is the definite truth and righteous way, to which all other physicians should be compared. This is the only time Oz is mentioned in the investigation segment, and it is in a positive, uplifting manner.

It is also interesting to see that Oz quotes the *British Medical Journal*, who he calls “[his] harshest critics,” as reporting being “’disappointed that the overwhelming commentary seems to be that our study somehow proves that *Dr. Oz* or *The Doctors* [(a similar program)] are quacks or charlatans or worse. Our data in no way supports these conclusions” (Dr. Oz 1:16.) When this study is found though, it actually states that only 46% of recommendations were supported by scientific evidence, meaning over half of the advice given by Oz either is contradicted by proven evidence, or has nothing found to support it. They believe that most recommendations are made due to business deals, and because of this, they suggest the public be highly skeptical of medical television programs (Korowynk.) This can be seen as an AGENCY: purpose dominance, because Oz is ignoring other facts available to both stick it to his critics that they’re wrong, and also cover up his purpose of making money.

**Conclusion**

By downplaying the holes in his history of medical advice, and creating a dramatic, scandalous story of his opponents, Oz shifts his audience’s attention from his faults, to that of his critics. He does this so that his viewers will sympathize him and see the doctors as the flawed evil-doers, not him. He also exalts that they are knowledgeable, inquisitive people who could not be fooled by him, as he simply puts information out there, and then they can choose which opinions to consider. By flattering them like this he is bringing them over to support him, while still letting them think they are in control of making the decision of fairly supporting whichever side. Keeping his viewers is crucial for Oz’s public appearance, career, and ultimately financial gain. The significance of this rhetoric is that it highlights how people should not be so quick to trust someone just because they have a certain degree. It also exemplifies how people should not believe everything they see on television or in the media, even if it is endorsed by a seemingly honorable individual. By using the element of agency to dominate the other elements, Oz creates a drama where the main focus is off of him. This allows him to make a reasonable excuse to his viewers for what has happened and move on with the show and his career. Although the act of calling out others’ weaknesses when one is as fault is generally seen as childish and an insufficient excuse, the authority and image that Dr. Oz has aids him in effectively utilizing this method.

**Sources**

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